

Summer Semester in the Rockies

Equipment List

Welcome to NOLS!

Learning to choose the right equipment for your adventure is an essential part of the NOLS curriculum. We fundamentally believe you don't need to own a lot of expensive gear to live and travel comfortably in the outdoors. We recognize the process of getting ready for a course can be an intimidating experience, especially if you have never done anything like it before. This list is designed to help you make decisions about what gear you bring and hopefully help you feel confident about entering your course.

When you arrive, your instructors will first look through all the equipment you've brought and help you decide what to take into the field. You'll then go into our Outfitting Department to rent or purchase any remaining items. The list below is comprehensive; however, the actual equipment needed for your course will vary depending on location, season, and instructor judgment. For this reason, we do not recommend that you go out and purchase a lot of expensive, specialized gear for your course.

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you pack:

- **First, use gear you already own!** You'll be comfortable in tried-and-true clothing. Bring more layers than you think you'll need; your instructors will help you choose your best options. If an item is suitable for your particular course, you can take it into the field; if not, you can leave it in storage. If in doubt, bring it!
- **Second, rent key items from NOLS.** When it comes to gear, everyone has their own preferences. In the field, you'll have the opportunity to hone your preferred system. We recommend that you rent, rather than purchase, several "big ticket" items, such as a sleeping bag and backpack. While you are not obligated to rent gear from us, there are several reasons why we suggest it. Our rental gear is high quality and chosen specifically for the heavy use it receives on courses. Rental prices are reasonable (based on wear/tear and duration of use), so you can try out gear and make informed decisions on future adventures.
- **Third, purchase specific items from our Outfitting Department.** To make shopping simple, we offer basic camping essentials and personal care items. The items we sell in our Outfitting Department are tailored to what works well on our courses. Approximate price ranges for the items we sell are listed below - you can use these price ranges to help you decide whether to purchase items ahead of time.
- **Fourth, go shopping before your course.** A few options:
 - **REI or a local outdoor store**
 - Pro: Employees often have some sense of what you will need
 - Con: Gear at these locations is often expensive

- **Department stores**
 - Pro: The active wear and camping sections can have inexpensive options
 - Con: Employees are unlikely to be able to offer suggestions
- **Thrift stores**
 - Pro: Likely the least expensive option
 - Con: Can take a lot of time to find what you need
- **Online**
 - Pro: Can find a wide variety of options
 - Con: The variety of options can be overwhelming to sort through

Equipment Fees

In addition to your course tuition, you will pay an equipment deposit. This deposit will be applied directly to the charges you incur for gear rentals, purchases, or any loss or damage to our equipment. Total charges will vary depending on the amount of equipment you rent or purchase from us; the prices listed below will help you estimate your costs. At the end of your course, you will be billed for any amount that exceeds the equipment deposit, or refunded any balance.

How to Use This List

Items under the **Required** heading are items that you **must** either bring yourself or rent or purchase from NOLS as available. Items under the **Optional** heading are not required, and you may bring them from home, buy, or rent from NOLS as available. If you see an **X** in the price column, that means that an item is not available for rent or for purchase as indicated.

Feedback?

NOLS is trying to update this list to be more welcoming and effective. If you are willing to provide some feedback to help our effort please take this [survey](#).

Questions?

Contact your Admission Officer if you have any questions or would like further information about the equipment list.

Upper Body Clothing

Your clothing will form a layering system of base layers, mid-layers, and shell layers. The base layers are designed to wear close to your skin and provide moisture management, light insulation, and sun protection. Warmer mid-layers are for insulation and need to fit well together to give you options as conditions change. On the outside, wind and rainproof jackets prevent heat loss by cutting wind, rain, and snow. Look for synthetic materials that dry quickly and retain their warmth when wet, which cotton does not do.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$70	Mid-weight long underwear top, wool or synthetic (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Body Zone)
Middle layer (fleece jacket)	X	\$50-160	Fleece jacket (e.g. Patagonia R-1, Mountain Hardwear Microchill, etc.) or a wool sweater
Insulated Jacket (1-2)	\$60	\$95-220	A warm, synthetic or down “puffy” jacket that fits over your other layers and under your rain jacket. A hood is recommended. For courses that start in May/June, you may want 2 puffy jackets: a lighter one and a heavier one.
Wind shirt	\$32	\$70-110	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell.
Rain jacket	X	\$100-150	Durable, waterproof, non-insulated jacket with hood. Waterproof-breathable fabrics (e.g., Gore-Tex, H2No, etc.) are both acceptable. It is important that your rain jacket fits well over all your base and insulating layers
Sports bra (1-2)	X	\$40	Lightweight bras that offer adequate support. Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) that dry quickly are preferable.
Binder (1-2)	X	X	If you usually wear a binder or are planning to wear one during your NOLS course, make sure it allows you to breathe freely and doesn't cause pain or limit athletic activity.
Optional Items			
T-shirt	X	\$25-50	A lightweight synthetic or wool t-shirt
Sun Hoody	X	\$60-70	A lightweight synthetic or natural fiber (non-cotton) hoody that provides both sun protection and works well as a base layer.
Our advice? Bring the non-cotton sweaters, fleece jackets, athletic clothes, and synthetic layers you think might work. We'll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on conditions.			

Lower Body Clothing

You will need 1–2 synthetic insulating layers (usually a base layer and, in early summer, a pair of warm pants). All must fit comfortably over each other so they can be worn simultaneously. If you tend to get cold easily, add a middle layer of mid-weight bottoms to the base layer and fleece or puffy pants.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$70	Mid-weight synthetic or wool bottoms (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Bodyfit Zone).
Middle layer (fleece pants)	\$32	\$60-150	Mid- or heavy-weight bottoms that fit comfortably over the base-layer bottoms. Fleece pants or insulated (puffy) pants are both acceptable. These are highly recommended on courses that start in May/June, but they may not be needed on later summer courses.
Wind pants/hiking pants	\$32	\$75	Nylon or synthetic pants. These should fit comfortably over lower-body base layers. Soft-shell fabrics are acceptable, but lightweight “running pants” are not durable enough.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	X	\$20-35	Clean underwear is essential for backcountry hygiene and you will likely have opportunities for laundry on your course. Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) are great options.

Optional Items

Nylon shorts	X	X	Quick dry, loose-fitting athletic shorts.
Rain pants	X	\$80-110	Although not required, some people like to use rain pants in conjunction with a rain jacket. Recommended for May/June courses.

Our advice? Bring the synthetic base layers, rain gear, and exercise clothing you think might work. We'll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on conditions.

Head, Neck, and Hand Layers

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Baseball cap or wide-brim sun hat	X	\$16-30	Lightweight headwear for sun protection. We sell a variety of visors, trucker hats, and running hats.
Warm Hat	X	\$20-35	Warm, thick hat for cold nights. Should cover your ears. Wool or fleece are ideal.

Mosquito head net	X	\$5	A light, nylon head net. Can also double as a hair net.
Liner gloves	X	\$10	Lightweight, synthetic glove that can be layered under heavier-weight gloves for added warmth.
Optional Items			
Neck Gaiter/ Buff	X	\$22	Neck gaiters are synthetic pieces of multi-functional headwear (hat, bandana, neck warmer, etc.). Buff is a common brand.
Religious Headwear	X	X	Headwear associated with religious custom (Hijab, Pagri, Chunni, Yarmulke, etc.)
Hair Care Headwear	X	\$5-10	Wave cap, hair wrap, or bonnet whatever you are used to. Cotton, satin, or synthetics are all good.
Warmer gloves/ mittens	X	\$18-65	Fleece or wool, can be combined with a thin liner glove and/or mitten shell. Recommended for courses that start in May/June.
Mitten shells	\$12	\$38-45	Lightweight, waterproof nylon shells that fit over mittens or gloves. Recommended for May/June courses.

Our advice? As long as they're not cotton, bring your gloves, mittens, and shells. We'll check them and see if they'll work. Depending on the weather, you may need one or two pairs.

Packs and Bags

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Backpack	\$120	\$250	Our packs are large expedition models with a volume of 80 –100 liters. We recommend you rent one of our packs. If you bring a backpack, your instructors will examine it to determine its suitability for your course and route. It must have a volume of 80 –100 liters.
Plastic trash bag (2-3)	X	\$1	2–3 heavy-duty lawn-and-garden/contractor bags (33 gallon, 3mm thick) for waterproofing
Small stuff sack (2-3)	\$2	\$10-20	Small nylon sacks for organizing items in your pack

Our advice? An expedition backpack is a major purchase. If you don't already own one, we think you should rent ours, gain some experience, then make an informed decision after your course.

Sleeping Gear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			

Sleeping bag	\$80	\$220-350	Synthetic-fill bags (e.g. Thermolite, Thermal.Q, APEX, etc.) perform well in the variety of conditions we encounter on courses. A bag rated to 5°-15°F.
Compression sack	\$8	\$55	Stuff sack that packs sleeping bag or clothing layers into a smaller size than a regular stuff sack would.
Sleeping pad	\$12	\$30-105	Used for padding and insulation between sleeping bag and ground. Foam pads (which we rent) should be closed-cell and have at least an R-Value of 2.0. Inflatable pads (which we don't rent) can provide more comfort, but are less durable.

Our advice? A sleeping bag is another major purchase. If you don't already own one, we think you should rent ours, gain some experience, and then make an informed decision after your course.

Rock Climbing Section

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Climbing shoes	\$45	\$85-100	We rent Black Diamond, Scarpa, La Sportiva and Butora shoes. If you bring your own, make sure they are comfortable enough to spend all day in.
Harness	No charge	X	We have harnesses to rent, free of charge, but if you own one, bring it along.
Helmet	No charge	X	We have helmets to rent, free of charge, but if you own one, bring it along.
Optional Items			
Crag Pack	\$40	\$50-100	A medium-sized daypack with approximately 50L capacity
Climbing pants/shorts	X	\$60-100	Comfortable pants to wear while climbing, either cotton or synthetic. Short shorts are not optimal for climbing with a harness.
T-shirts (1-2)	X	\$25	An extra t-shirt or two is always nice to have at climb camp. These can be cotton.
Chalk Bag	\$6	\$20	Some people like to rock climb with a chalk bag to keep their hands and fingers dry. It is not necessary.

Our advice? If you own a harness, helmet, chalk bag, or climbing shoes, bring them along. If your instructors approve, you can use them. We will use NOLS' protection, belay devices, slings, carabiners, and ropes.

River Section

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			

River shoes	X	X	A simple solid sneaker or river shoe with full foot coverage and sturdy soles. (Keens or other semi-coverage shoes are not appropriate for the conditions). Consider shoes big enough to fit multiple pairs of socks in cold weather.
Long-sleeved UV-protective shirt	X	\$60-\$75	Light-colored, long-sleeved nylon shirt for sun protection. Hoods encouraged. A sun hoody is a popular option.
Lightweight cotton pants and shirt	X	X	Convenient sun protection around camp
Base Layer (long underwear) (2)	x	\$15 - \$50	On the river, it's essential to designate long underwear sets as "wet" on the river and "dry" in camp. Plan to bring 2 full sets to the river section (can be the same from other sections--no cotton or cotton blends).
Swimsuit	X	X	Most students prefer wearing nylon shorts. A sports bra-type top with nylon shorts can work as well. Lycra swimsuits are also an option.
Large dry bag	\$27	\$90-125	3-cubic-foot dry bag made of heavy-duty waterproof material. Used to carry all personal clothing.
Small dry bag	\$7	\$35	600-cubic-inch dry bag made of heavy-duty waterproof material. Used to carry all personal items needed during the day.
Water-insulating, breathable, long-sleeved top	\$17	\$60-85	A top mid-layer; water-insulating, breathable fabric (e.g. Neoprene or Hydroskin). Used in place of a 3mm wetsuit.
Water-insulating, breathable bottom	\$17	\$60-85	A bottom mid-layer; water-insulating, breathable fabric (e.g. Neoprene or NRS Hydroskin) used in place of a 3mm wetsuit.
Paddle jacket	\$15	\$50-85	A top outer layer, long-sleeve, water resistant jacket with closures at the bottom, wrist, and neck. To be worn over other layers when kayaking or rafting (separate from a rain coat for camp).
Optional Items			
Wetsuit	\$25	X	This is an expensive item; please do not go out and purchase it if you do not already have one. We suggest a full-body wetsuit of 3mm thickness. Alternatively, pants and a long-sleeve top made of 3mm neoprene are acceptable.

Neoprene booties	\$10	\$20-40	River or diving booties that stay on the foot securely while swimming. Must have a hard sole capable of walking on rocks. Used primarily for cold weather and in kayaks.
Neoprene Socks	\$6	\$20-30	Neoprene or hydroskin socks meant to be worn inside river shoes to help insulate feet (2mm). Essential for spring courses (March-May) and late fall courses (October-November). Can be paired with wool socks for comfort.

Our advice? Rental of whitewater-specific gear (PFD, helmet, etc.) is included in your tuition. Feel free to bring any personal whitewater gear you already have (e.g. paddling jacket, dry top, river booties, helmet, etc.) and your instructors will check it to make sure it is appropriate for your trip. When planning for the river section, know that there is room for many of the luxuries you might bring to climb camp or even base camping (camp chair, sandals, extra hat, etc).

Footwear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Boots	X	\$175-250	Sturdy, expedition backpacking footwear with adequate support for extended wilderness courses. See information at the end of the equipment list for more ideas about boots.
Wool Socks (4-5 pairs)	X	\$13-30	Similar to gloves, a variety of light-heavyweight wool socks (eg. Smartwool, FITS, Darn Tough)
Gaiters	\$20	\$45-55	Lightweight, ankle or shin-high gaiters to prevent debris from entering your boots while hiking.
Camp Shoes	X	\$40-50	Lightweight, packable running/athletic shoes. Closed-toe required. Many students use Crocs, which we do not currently sell.
Optional Items			
Approach Shoe	X	\$140	Some students appreciate having a low-top hiker or approach shoe to wear during their climb section. (eg. La Sportiva Boulder X or TX4, Scarpa Crux)
Sandals	X	X	Open-toed “river” or “mountain” sandals (e.g., Chacos) can be brought <i>in addition</i> to camp shoes.

Our advice? Your boots will be a critical piece of gear. If they’re not sturdy, don’t provide enough support, or don’t fit properly with wool socks, we won’t let you use them. If you have any doubts about boots, feel free to give us a call.

Toiletries

Self-care in the outdoors is an essential component of any expedition. Whatever systems you use to take care of yourself in your daily life can often be modified to the appropriate size/quantity for your course. Any starred (*) item is something that we sell at NOLS.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Lip balm	X	\$3-5	Stick, cream, or tube-type moisturizing balm, SPF 15 or greater. Products with zinc provide superior protection.
Sunscreen	X	\$5-10	At least 3-6 oz., SPF 30 or greater. Products with zinc provide superior protection.
Dental Care	X	\$3-6	Whatever your oral hygiene system is (toothpaste*, toothbrush*, floss*, retainer, etc.), you can likely adapt it to your course using trial or travel size versions.
Skin Care	X	\$7	You may want to consider lotion* (preferably unscented) or Vaseline in 3-5 oz travel-sized bottle, wash cloth-sized pack towel for backcountry bathing, and ointment for scrapes if you are prone to scarring.
Hair Care	X	X	You may want to consider a comb* or brush*, bands*, chopsticks, headwrap, ties, or whatever your system is.
Menstrual products	X	\$5-35	Required if you menstruate. Bring the products which work well for you, and bring slightly more supplies than you think you might need. This might mean tampons*, pads*, a menstrual cup*, or some combo thereof.
Personal Medications	X	X	Any prescriptions/supplements that are part of your system should be brought in sufficient quantities.

Our advice? Bring what you think will support your health on course, minimizing bulk and extra quantity where possible. Travel-size containers can be helpful in this process.

Miscellaneous Items

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Bowl	X	\$7	A plastic bowl with a screw- or snap-on lid is handy.
Spoon	X	\$1-\$10	Lexan spoons are light and durable. We also sell plastic and titanium sporks
Water bottle (1-2)	X	\$14-16	Wide-mouth, hard sided Nalgene work well. We recommend that everyone have 2 liters of capacity.

Bandana (1-2)	X	\$2	Useful for a variety of purposes from wiping post-pee to sneezing, from a cooling neck tie to wiping your bowl.
Headlamp	X	\$30	Durable and lightweight. Bring spare batteries.
Batteries	X	\$1	AA/AAA are available for sale. We recommend 2 full sets for your headlamp.
Lighter	X	\$1.50	For lighting your camp stove
Watch	X	\$25	A watch with an alarm is a nice feature.
Pen/pencil	X	\$0.75	For journaling and taking notes during classes
Notepad	X	\$10	A small, lightweight pad is fine.
Sunglasses	X	\$30-80	Sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark. If you wear prescription lenses and have limited vision without them, bring your own prescription sunglasses, clip-ons, or over glasses. We sell Suncloud and Optic Nerve.
Prescription glasses/contacts (2-3)	X	X	Bring a spare pair of glasses or lenses. Contact-lens wearers should also bring a pair of glasses as backup.
Optional Items			
Book or e-reader	X	\$140	A lightweight paperback book or e-reader. Tablet-style e-readers (e.g. Kindle Fire) are not acceptable. We recommend bringing a padded case as well.
Trekking poles	\$12	X	Sturdy, telescoping poles that can be used for increased stability while walking and minimize impact on your legs. Rental price is for an individual pole.
Camera	X	X	GoPros and lightweight digital or 35mm cameras are acceptable; bring a protective case. Avoid elaborate lenses and heavy SLRs. (Please note: you may not bring your smartphone or tablet into the field to use as a digital camera.)
Camp chair	X	\$35	Bonus for camp life, we sell Crazy Creek chairs.
Hydration system	X	X	An alternative hydration system to bottles, whether a Camelbak, Platypus, etc.
Stand-to-pee device	X	\$12	If you plan to use a stand-to-pee device on your NOLS course, make sure it is one you have practiced with and are confident it works well for you.
Sunglasses retainer	X	\$8	Chums or Croakies for keeping track of your glasses or sunglasses.

Pocket knife	X	\$25-35	One small knife is sufficient; simple folding knives are popular.
Our advice? Keep the toiletries, pocketknife, camera, optional items and other gear to small sizes. We work to keep our pack weight as low as possible. Saving every ounce is essential!			

Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply

Expedition members share both the use of and the responsibility for the group gear that NOLS issues. NOLS charges only for group equipment lost or damaged. Keep in mind that NOLS evaluates gear from a number of perspectives beyond those that an individual user might consider. Performance, durability and simplicity are all contributing factors towards our gear selection.

Tents and shelters
 Trowel or shovel
 Stoves, fuel bottles and fuel
 Pots and pans
 Maps and compasses
 Bear-resistant food containers
 Fishing gear
 Equipment repair kits
 Reference books
 Binoculars
 First aid kits
 Climbing protection*
 Climbing ropes*
 Helmets and harnesses*
 Ice axes*
 Snowshoes*

**if applicable to course type*

Rocky Mountain Hiking Shoe/Boot Recommendations

Medium-weight, off-trail backpacking shoes or lightweight boots work best. They provide good support for off-trail hiking with heavy packs. Here are some features to look for:

- Durable outer material, such as leather or thick nylon, that will withstand hiking among sharp boulders and dense vegetation. Full mesh is not appropriate.
- A waterproof Gore-Tex liner can be beneficial, but is not required. Your feet will get wet if water comes in over the top of your boot. A Gore-Tex liner can also slow drying time once the boot is wet.
- A sole that provides a stable footbed and protection from sharp rocks and other surfaces, like Vibram®. Typical running shoes are not supportive enough for a NOLS expedition.
- Mid-top or high-top ankle coverage can be helpful in snowy or wet conditions (June 1 - July 1). High-top ankle coverage can also be helpful if you have a tendency to roll your ankles. Below-the-ankle hiking shoes work well in drier conditions (later summer courses and the canyon courses)
- Comfortable fit with your preferred hiking socks. Shoes that are too small commonly cause blisters.

The following list of acceptable boots is not exhaustive and is to be used for suggestions only. It is fine to substitute a similar boot for one of those listed here.

These are the two brands we sell in our outfitting store:

- La Sportiva: TX4, TXS GTX
- Salomon: X Ultra 3 Mid, X Ultra 4 Mid, Quest 4D GTX

These are other good options:

- Asolo: FINDER, FUGITIVE
- Keen: Targhee II/III Mid
- Altra: Lone Peak Hiker
- HOKA ONE: Anacapa Mid, Kaha
- Lowa: Camino, Ranger, Trekker, Mauria, Explorer, Lady Light
- Oboz: Sawtooth
- Scarpa: Kailash, Mescalito, Trek
- Vasque: Talus

Note that manufacturers often rename their product lines. Visit the manufacturer's website or contact us if you have questions.