NWANA ACADEMY

Nordic Walking Instructor Beginner Level Certification

Foundations of Nordic Walking

Study materials for Lesson 1.1, Foundations of Nordic Walking

North American Nordic Walking Association (NWANA)

Lesson 1.1

Foundations of Nordic Walking

Defining the discipline, technique, and instructor mindset.



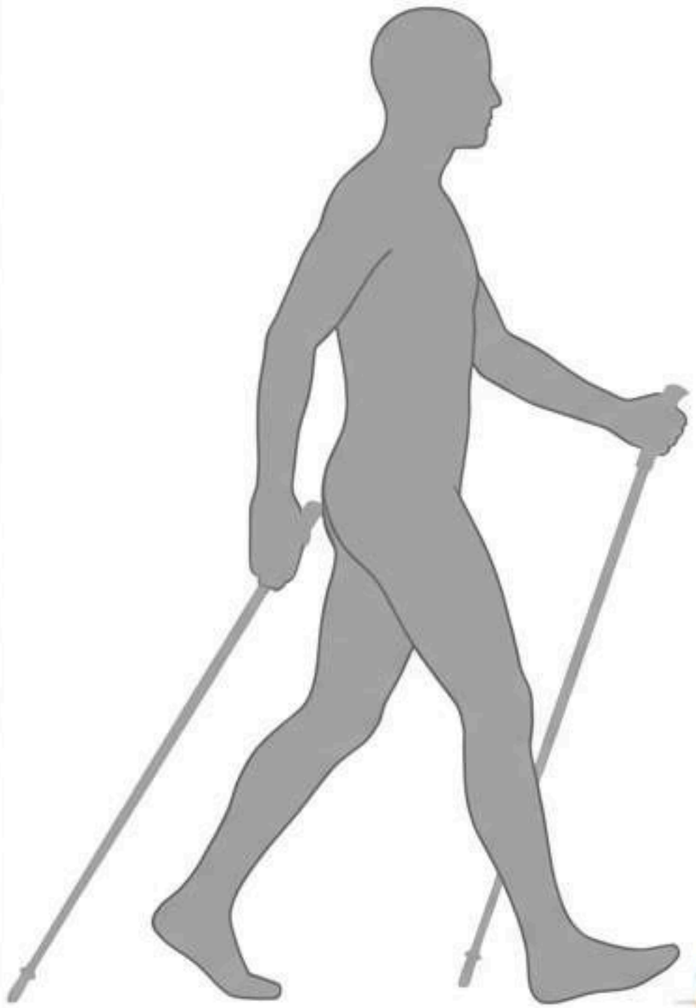
Course: Nordic Walking Instructor Certification

Structured training disguised as simple movement.

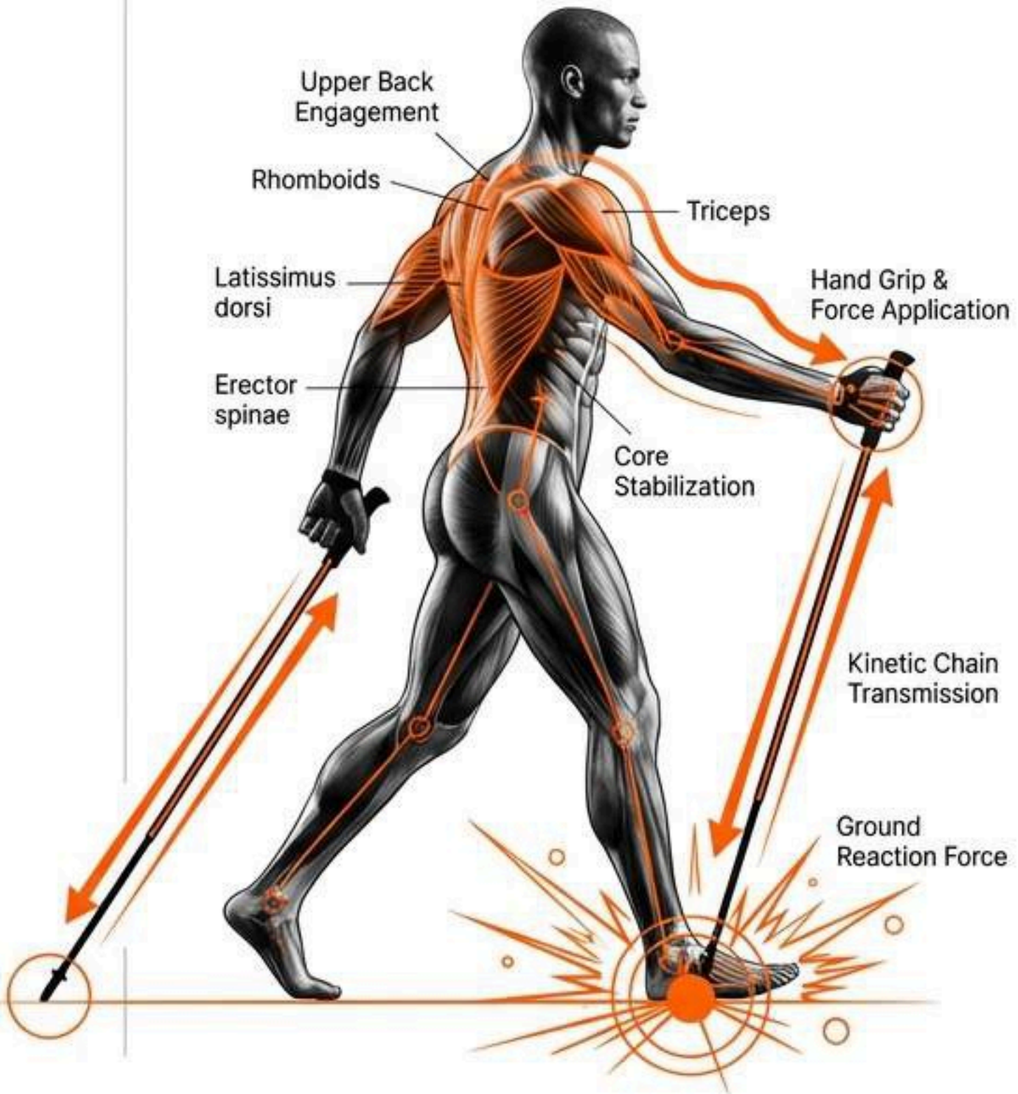
Nordic Walking is often perceived as merely “walking with sticks.” This is a visual illusion. While it looks simple from the outside, correct execution transforms it into a structured training method for health, sport, and performance.

Key Insight: It is a full-body technique requiring the engagement of both the upper and lower body in a coordinated, efficient pattern.

Perception: Walking with sticks



Reality: Structured Training



The Working Definition

> **Nordic Walking is a dynamic walking technique that combines natural gait with active use of poles to improve posture, joint loading, cardiovascular conditioning, and whole-body coordination.**

Dynamic Technique

Not passive movement.

Natural Gait

Built on normal walking patterns.

Active Pole Use

The defining mechanical difference.

Deconstructing the Movement

Nordic Walking is defined by five distinct technical elements.
If one is missing, it is no longer Nordic Walking.

01



Active Pole Use

Pushing the body forward, not just supporting balance.

02



Full-Body Engagement

Legs, hips, core, shoulders, and arms working in unison.

03



Natural Gait

Built on the contralateral (opposite arm and leg) pattern.

04



Rhythm and Flow

Consistent cadence adjustable for conditioning levels.

05



Posture and Alignment

Upright, slightly forward-oriented stance.

Mechanics I: The engine of propulsion.

Active Pole Use

Explicit distinction: Poles are used to PUSH the body forward, creating propulsion. This is distinct from using poles for balance support.



Full-Body Engagement

A kinetic chain involving legs, hips, core, shoulders, and arms. The movement requires coordination to transfer force from the upper body into the ground.

Mechanics II: Rhythm and alignment

Natural Gait

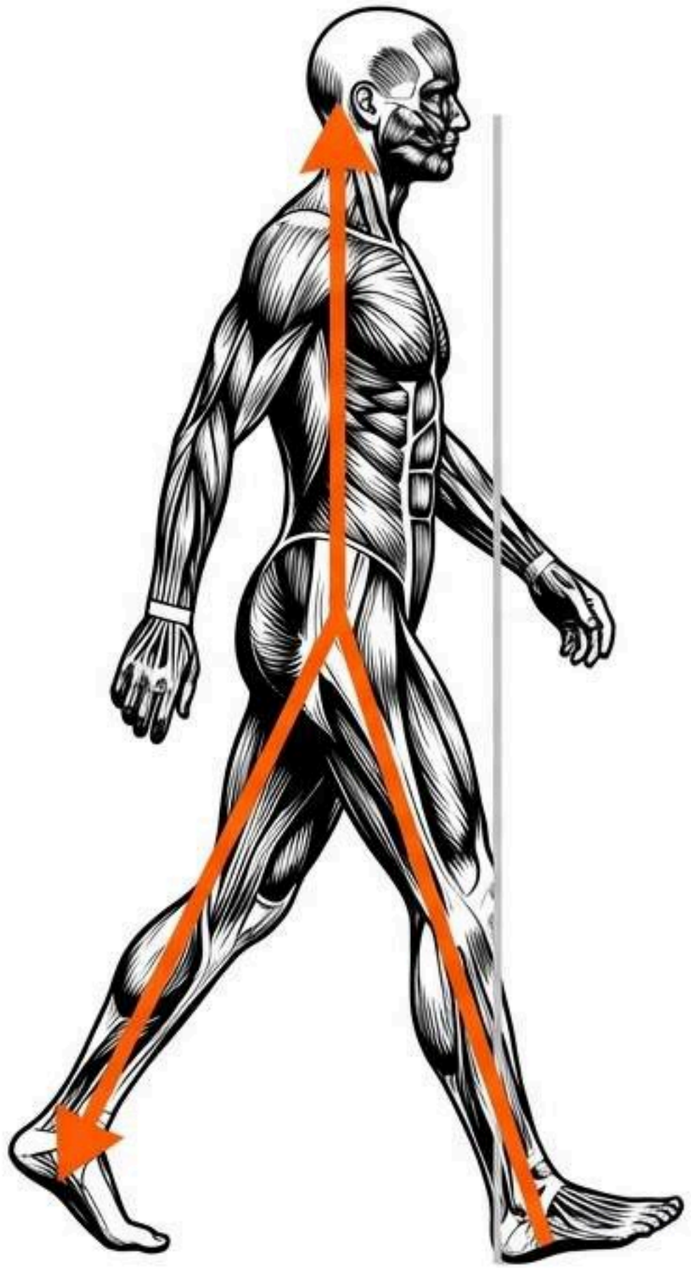
Foundation is a normal walking pattern with contralateral (opposite arm swing) movement.

Rhythm & Flow

Steps and pole plants must follow a clear, adjustable rhythm. This rhythm creates the training effect.

Posture

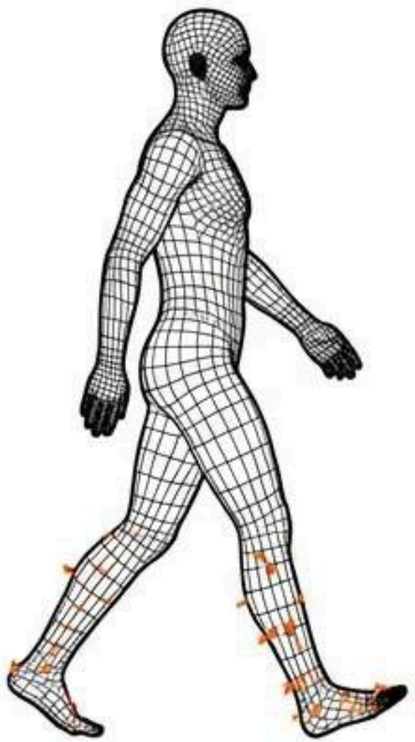
Technique demands an upright, slightly forward-oriented posture (see diagram).



Analysis: Nordic Walking vs. Regular Walking

Higher output, same perceived effort.

Regular Walking



Nordic Walking



- **Muscle Activation:** Increases activation of the upper body and core muscles tailored to the movement.
- **Joint Health:** Load is distributed more evenly across the body, with part of the load transferred to the poles, easing the knees and hips.
- **Visual Structure:** Offers a specific technique that can be taught, corrected, and evaluated.

Analysis: Nordic Walking vs. Hiking

Nordic Walking

Hiking/Trekking



Equipment

Nordic: Lighter poles, propulsion straps.

Hiking: Heavier poles, stability straps.

Terrain

Nordic: Continuous forward movement on stable terrain.

Hiking: Navigating technical, unstable, or steep terrain.

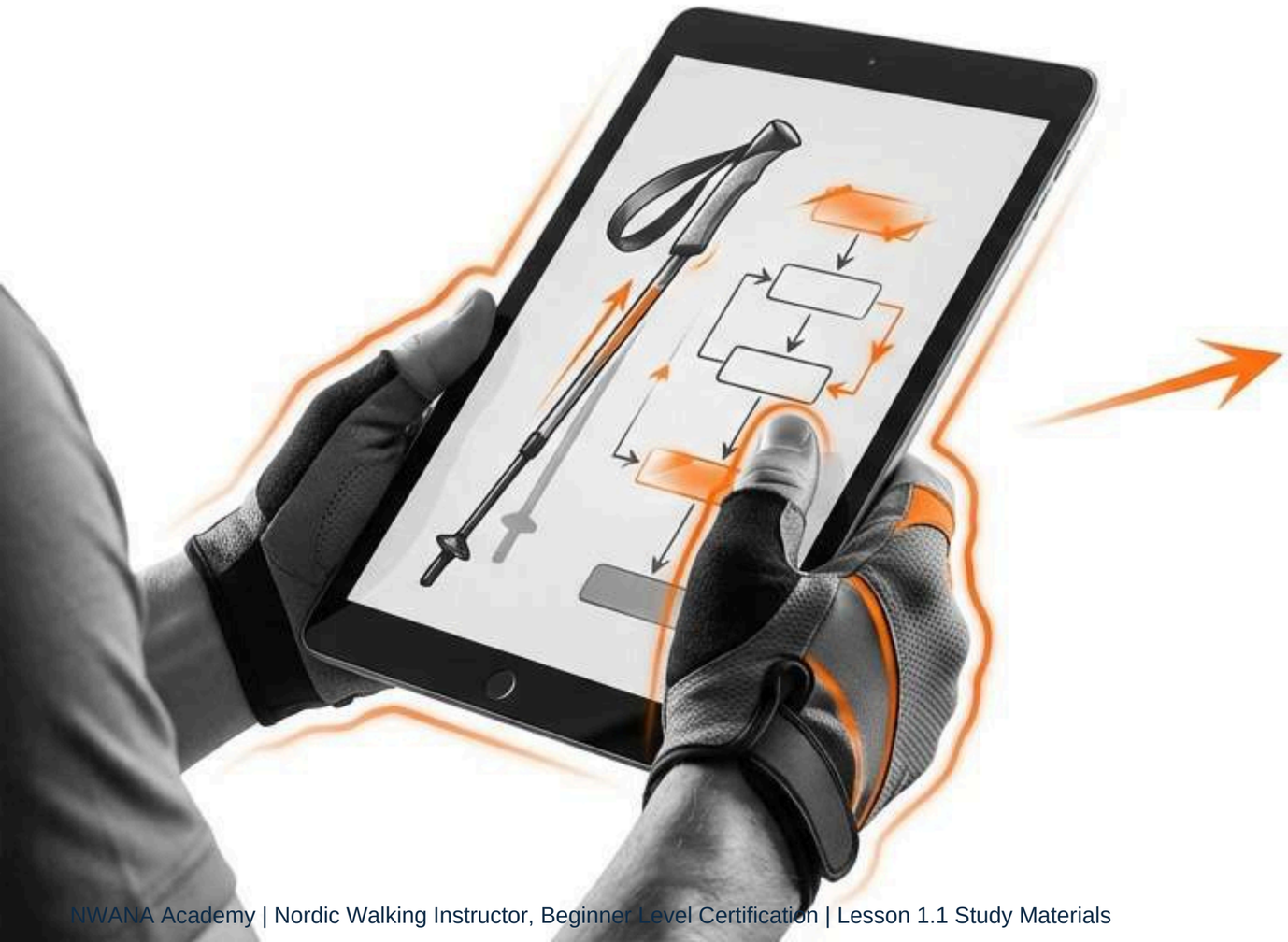
Goal

Nordic: Specific technique rules.

Hiking: Traversing a landscape safely.

Your Mandate as an Instructor

As a beginner-level instructor, your value lies in your ability to articulate the method.

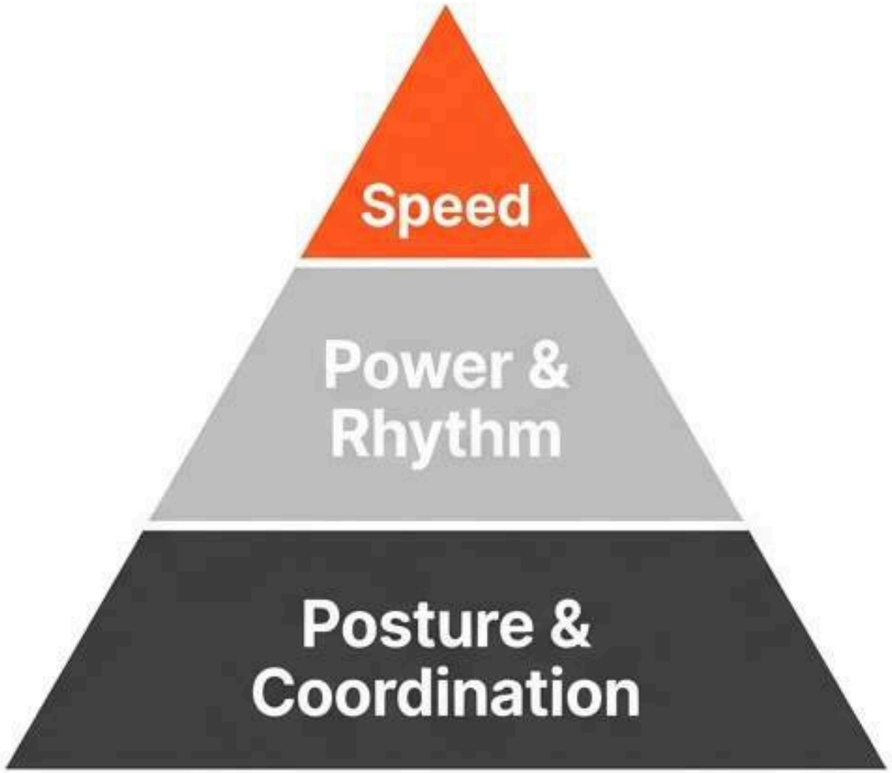


1. **EXPLAIN:**
   Define Nordic Walking in simple, confident language.
2. **DISTINGUISH:**
   Clearly separate it from casual walking or trekking.
3. **FRAME:**
   Present it as a structured training method, not just leisure.
4. **PRIORITIZE:**
   Emphasize technique quality over speed or distance.

The Philosophy of Technique

Technique Quality > Speed and Distance





Technique Hierarchy

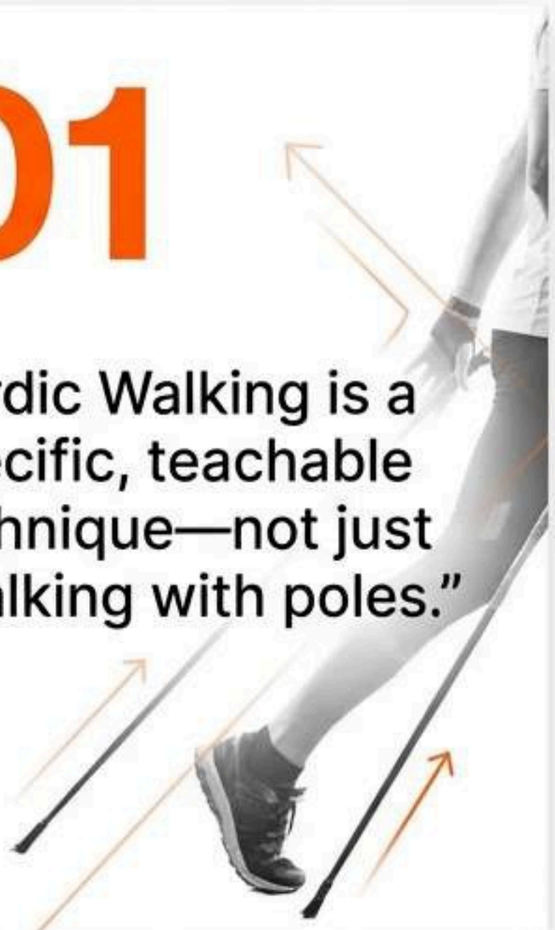
The instructor's role is to ensure the Key Characteristics are met first.

Speed is a byproduct of good technique, not the primary goal.

Summary of Lesson 1.1

01

Nordic Walking is a specific, teachable technique—not just “walking with poles.”



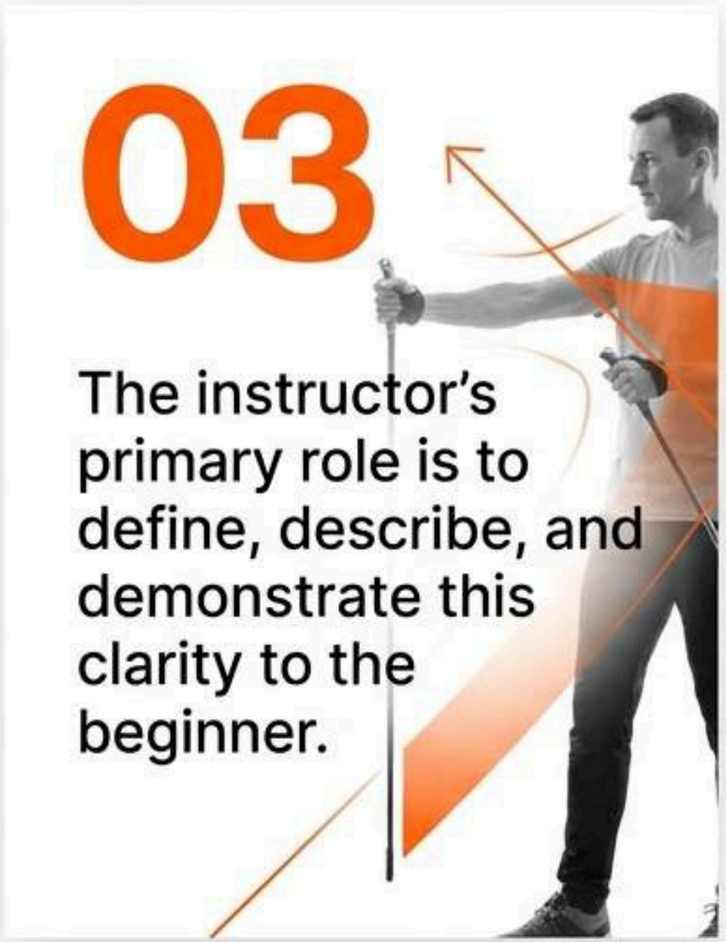
02

The movement is a synthesis of natural gait and active, coordinated pole use for propulsion.



03

The instructor’s primary role is to define, describe, and demonstrate this clarity to the beginner.



From Theory to Practice



You now understand the WHAT and the WHY. The next modules will focus on the HOW—mastering the specific biomechanics of the alpha technique.