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# Surviving in the cold.

Your plane has crashed in the snow. You have 12 items. Rank them as a group, then see what the survival experts said. A team game about deciding under pressure.

# Surviving in the cold.

You and your companions have just survived the crash of a small plane in northern Canada. The pilot and co-pilot were killed. It's 25 below zero during the day and 40 below at night.

There is snow on the ground, and the countryside is wooded, with several creeks criss-crossing the area. The nearest town is 20 kilometres away. You are all dressed for a business meeting. Between you, you managed to save these 12 items from the wreck.

A ball of steel wool

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A small axe

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A loaded .45-calibre pistol

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A can of vegetable shortening

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Newspapers (one per person)

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A cigarette lighter (without fluid)

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An extra shirt and pants for each survivor

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A 20 by 20 foot piece of heavy canvas

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A sectional air map made of plastic

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A litre of 100-proof whiskey

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A compass

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Family-size chocolate bars (one per person)

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# Your task.

1

On your own, rank the 12 items from most to least important for your survival.

2

As a group, agree on one ranking and list the uses for each item.

3

You must reach agreement. No voting, no averaging: talk it through until everyone can accept the answer.

| Item                  | My rank | Group rank | Expert rank |
|-----------------------|---------|------------|-------------|
| Steel wool            |         |            |             |
| Axe                   |         |            |             |
| Pistol                |         |            |             |
| Vegetable shortening  |         |            |             |
| Newspapers            |         |            |             |
| Cigarette lighter     |         |            |             |
| Extra shirt and pants |         |            |             |
| Canvas                |         |            |             |
| Air map               |         |            |             |
| Whiskey               |         |            |             |
| Compass               |         |            |             |
| Chocolate bars        |         |            |             |

Finish your rankings before you turn the page.

# What the experts said.

The greatest danger is the cold. The greatest needs are warmth first and a way to signal for help second. So the first job is a fire, and the best plan is to stay put: rescuers look for the wreck, and walking 20 kilometres through snow in business clothes is far more likely to kill you than waiting.

## 1 Cigarette lighter

With no matches, you need something that makes sparks. Even without fluid, a lighter will do it.

## 2 Steel wool

The best material there is for catching a spark and holding a flame, even when it's a little wet.

## 3 Extra shirt and pants

Warmth first, but clothes can also become shelter, bedding, bandages, string when unravelled, a signal and fuel for the fire.

## 4 Vegetable shortening

The lid, polished with the steel wool, makes a signal mirror bright enough to be seen beyond the horizon. Someone can climb a tree to flash it at search planes. The shortening protects exposed skin from the cold, burns as fuel, and makes a candle when soaked into a piece of cloth. The empty can melts snow into drinking water, which is much safer than eating snow, because warm water helps keep your body heat up and dehydration clouds your judgement.

## 5 Canvas

Shelter from the wind and snow. Spread over a frame of branches, it becomes a tent or a windbreak. It can also keep you dry on the ground, and its shape against the snow helps searchers see you.

## **6 Small axe**

For a steady supply of firewood, clearing a sheltered camp, cutting branches to insulate the ground and building the frame for the canvas.

## **7 Chocolate bars**

Quick food energy. Chocolate is mostly carbohydrate, so it gives you energy without making heavy demands on your digestion.

## **8 Newspapers**

Good for starting a fire. Rolled around the arms and legs under your clothes, they insulate. Rolled into a cone, they make a megaphone. And they're something to read while you wait.

## **9 Pistol**

A sound signal: the international distress signal is three shots in quick succession, and many survivors have gone unnoticed because they were too weak to make enough noise. The gunpowder can help start a fire. But a loaded weapon is a real danger in a group under strain, as anger, frustration and poor judgement grow while you wait. And it would take an expert to hunt with it.

## **10 Whiskey**

Useful only to help light a fire or soak a rag for a torch, and the bottle can hold water. The danger is that someone drinks it to warm up. Alcohol at that temperature can freeze the throat, and it opens the blood vessels in the skin, so the body loses heat faster. A drunk person gets hypothermia sooner than a sober one.

## **11 Compass**

Dangerous, because it might tempt someone to walk to town. Its only real use is its glass, as a reflector for signalling.

## **12 Air map**

Also dangerous, for the same reason. At best it's a small ground sheet to keep someone dry.

## How did you go?

For each item, find the difference between your rank and the experts' rank, ignoring plus and minus signs. Add up the 12 differences. Then do the same for the group's ranking. The lower the score, the better.

**In most groups, the group's score beats the average of the individual scores, and often beats the best individual.**

The answers matter less than the conversation. Who spoke up? Who was listened to? Did the group find the best idea in the room, or just the loudest one?

Adapted from the Winter Survival Exercise, a team-building game first published in the 1970s by the social psychologists David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson.

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**Don't seek to be a person of  
Importance.**  
**Seek to be a person of Value.**

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