The Aerial Silks Manual
Volume I
~PREVIEW ~

A step-by-step reference guide for teachers
and students of aerial fabric

Rebekah Leach

Edited by Julianna Hane

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Rebekah Leach.

This book may be purchased with bulk discounts. For information, send an e-mail to: info@aerialdancing.com.
Corresponding video content is available on AerialDancing.com.
Information about this curriculum can be found at www.BorntoFlyCurriculum.com.

When practicing aerial fabric, always perform warm-up exercises before attempting any individual exercises. Practice in the presence of a trained professional, with load-tested aerial equipment hanging from load-tested rigging, which has been set-up and inspected frequently by rigging professionals, along with crash pads underneath. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise program, especially one as rigorous as aerial work. Also, inverted movements can be dangerous to people with certain health issues. This is another reason to check with your healthcare provider before commencing aerial work!

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this material, there is a real chance of injury in execution of the movements described in this book. The Publisher and all persons involved in the making of this manual will not accept responsibility for injury to any degree, including death, to any person as a result of participation in the activities described in this manual. Purchase or use of this document constitutes agreement to this effect. Furthermore, rigging of aerial equipment is not discussed in this manual. Consult a professional rigger when it comes to using any hanging equipment.

Published by Rebekah Leach

United States of America

10th Anniversary Edition

Copyright © 2009, 2011, 2014, 2019 Rebekah Leach

This aerial dance manual series is dedicated to my students in San Luis Obispo and Ojai, CA. You patiently allowed me to experiment all my teaching methods on you as I found my wings as an aerial teacher. Thank you for helping my teaching career get off the ground.

Table of Contents

Preface vii
Introduction viii

1 Grip & Shoulders 1
Warm-Ups and Home Conditioning 2
Shoulder and Arm Positioning 4
Grips 6
Grip Strengthening 8
Injury Prevention 10
Nerve Care 12
Soft Tissue Mobilization 14
Shoulder Stretching 16
Stretching with Props 18
Hanging Drills 20

2 Climbs & Descents 23
Slipknot Introduction 24
Basic Stand 26
Basic Climb 28
Retrograde Descent 30
Sliding Descents 31
Transitional Drills 32
Russian Climb 34
Big Russian 36

3 Standing Skills 37
Figure 8 Foot Lock (Over Toes) 38
Stirrup Foot Lock (Under Heels) 40
Standing Cupid & Ice Skater 42
Cocoon & Variations 43
Susan & Clothesline 44
Front & Back Leans 46
Basic Leg Roll-Up 48
Backward Leg Roll-Up 50
Sitting Hip Leans 52
Standing Hip Leans 53

4 Shoulder & Hip Blocks 55
Lady-Like 56
Lotus 57
Butterfly Hang with Double Leg Wraps 58
Lotus Droplet 59
Pirate 60
Peter Pan 61
Airplane 62
Iron T on the ground 63



5 Flamingo & 'Round the Back Series 65
Flamingo Arabesque 66
Starfish 68
Candlestick 69
Gazelle Knee Hang 70
Scorpion Droplet 71
Basket with Footlocks 72
Seahorse (aka Gazelle Roll-Up) 73
Double 'Round the Back 74
Corset Wrap 75
Arabesque Between the Silks 76
'Round the Back Mermaid from the Ground 78
'Round the Back Mermaid in the Air 80

6 Double Foot Locks 83
Double Figure 8 Footlocks (Over Toes) 84
Double Stirrup Footlocks (Under Heels) 86
Splits and Splits Roll Up 88
Crossback (the X) 90
Arabesque Entry to Crossback 92
Crossback Shenanigans 93

7 Hip Key 95
Hip Key on the Knot 96
Hip Key from the Ground & in the Air 98
Knee Pinch Method into Hip Key 100
Secretary Series 102
Hip Key Gazelle 104
Hip Hitch Seat 106

8 Inversion Progressions 109
Core Integration Introduction 110
Core Connection and Development 112
The Pelvic Tilt 114
Ground Rolls Exercises 116
Straddle Knot Inversion #1 117
Straddle Knot Inversions #2 118
Straddle Knot Inversions #3 119
Wrist Hitch and Wrist Lock 120
Ball/Tuck Inversion 122
Pike Inversion 124
Vertical Hang 126
Straddle Inversion, Symmetrical 128
Straddle Inversion, Asymmetrical 130
Prep Work for Knee Hooking 132
Same Side Wrap Prep 134
Crochet Legs, Lever Legs 136

Fabric Art -- Improvisation 138
Index 139
Move Dependency Chart 140
Curriculum Poster 143
Acknowledgments 144
About the Author 145

DISCLAIMER

This book is intended for teachers of aerial arts, or students who have taken aerial classes who would like to review or extend their skills in the presence of a trained professional. This manual is not intended to act as a substitute for live instruction. You should always perform these movements under the guidance of a qualified instructor, with mats underneath you, and on a rig that has been set up by a qualified rigger.

Any activity that involves height and/or motion can cause serious injury including death.

Please train responsibly.

Preface

Welcome to the 10th Anniversary edition to this book! If you have ever seen an earlier edition, you will quickly notice that it's a whole new book. Every picture has been re-done, all new material has been added, intermediate moves have been deleted, and even the title is different. The only thing that has stayed the same is the picture on the front cover and the author. I'm still me, but a whole lot different! So much has happened in the past 10 years since I first published *The Beginning Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual* in December 2009.

In 2009, I was a laid-off high school math teacher. I took the opportunity to jump into aerial full-time, teaching at a small aerial studio I had recently opened in Southern California. I did short-term tours, performing at shows around America. It was a fun time, but a hard time. My husband also got laid off during the recession, and we couldn't make ends meet. We closed down the studio and became travelers. My students wanted me to write the moves down for them so that they could practice until another teacher moved into the city to teach them. Hence, the birth of the original aerial silks manual. I decided to make it pretty and sell it, in case others were interested in seeing what we did. I never thought it would take off like it did. It took a while for it to do so.

My husband and I were wondering around, looking for work and struggling. The only door we saw open was the military, so I entered the Navy and spent 8 years in service. During that time, we moved a lot and had two children, a boy and a girl. On the side, I still did aerial, but always longed for the days of once again having an aerial space of my own. When I left the Navy, we were excited to settle with our two kids in beautiful Colorado and open an aerial space. It's called AerialWorks Castle Rock, and we love it! Everyone who has ever bought a manual from us has helped to make this dream come true for us.

Now, I use my training in education to help train teachers in the fine art of teaching. Classroom management, skill-progression, breaking-down whole to parts, and building parts to whole are all elements that are important to teaching aerial. Those are the kinds of things we focus on in the Born to Fly Teacher Trainings, which is a network of master teachers. This manual focuses solely on the skills, but there is so much more to teaching than just explaining skills. If you are a teacher reading this, I hope that you are hungry to master the art of teaching just as much as you hunger to perfect each skill. If you are a student reading this, I hope that you have a good teacher leading you through these skills, and this manual serves can serve as an excellent reminder of all the things you learn. There is a lot to learn for everyone. All of us are students of something.

As always, happy flying!
Rebekah :)

Introduction

Welcome to a grand adventure! I am excited that this book has made its way into your hands. I am especially glad that it is this revision. This is the 10th Anniversary edition of this book and it just keeps getting better! When I first wrote this manual, it was as a curriculum for my students. As this project has grown far beyond that initial purpose into a teacher training manual, much has been added to make it a common denominator for all aerial programs rather than designed for any one school. That has led to huge structural changes, and I hope you find the layout of this manual makes sense for your program, as well as the aerial arts as a whole.

Selection of Skills

If you are a teacher of the circus arts, you may be surprised to find a "basic" wrap such as the same side knee hook wrap is not included in this book. That is because I have spread out the study of aerial arts to reflect how recreational gyms are approaching aerial just as much as how professional circus schools approach aerial. At the recreational level, more general-public students are starting at a more basic level and staying there longer than what you would ever see at a professional circus school.

In my experience, the average person coming in off the street struggles to climb and invert. Those things come very naturally to some people who have spent more of their lives being athletic. Those people will fly through the skills in this beginning course, and may want to dive right in to the intermediate books! The skills in this manual are all of the moves that a beginning student can work on *before* they have strength to invert, and perhaps before they can even climb. Nowadays, I work more with sling than I ever did a decade ago. It's a great apparatus to use while students build strength for harder things. Once they have the strength to climb and invert *well* (notice I added the word well—there is a difference between doing it and doing it well, which I will come back to), then they are ready for the intermediate books—which is really a continuation of the beginning phase of aerial work. The first intermediate book is an introduction to inverted movement. It also covers more wraps and locks which require more control of the body.

While I have listed the straddle inversion in the air in this manual, it serves as a goal that students are spending their entire beginning course building towards rather than something that is expected to be mastered from the start. (Note: even when a student is able to do a straddle back from the ground, doing it in the air may not come immediately). Occasionally, a student comes into class with the strength to execute this dividing line move. If that is the case, provide a fast track so that they can get to Level 2 faster than those who come in without this strength. It's important to have a curriculum that allows for everyone to participate, but it's equally important to recognize the different paces that will be taken through the curriculum.

Strength and Coordination

As previously noted, this beginning course is designed very carefully to help students gain strength while simultaneously starting work on the fabric. The majority of moves in this course can be executed just a foot off the ground, allowing a student who is exhausted to be able to step down. Also, the moves wrap you up so much that minimal grip strength is required. This is perfect for students coming in who have very little strength in this area. One of the best qualities of this beginning curriculum is the complex nature of many of the wraps. Even something as

"basic" as the footlock is quite confusing at first. Nearly every student will begin the wrap in the wrong direction. Students can also get completely lost at the end of the leg roll-up, not understanding how to come back to where they started. New students often step down to the ground (since they are practicing very low) and realize they can't take off the footlock because they did not completely reverse all their rotations. That moment of confusion is a classic learning moment. A student looks at their foot thinking, "What just happened? I thought I would be able to take this off like I normally do."

The teacher steps in and explains that they stopped one rotation short. Without elaboration, the student realizes its important to pay closer attention to their wraps so that they can undo them to exit. Then, when they learn the next new movement, they better understand the wraps. They will exit with better success with each new wrap, being able to follow what they did and adapt the mental skill set to reverse it.

Another benefit is that a student is so busy moving around in the fabric and trying to figure out how to wrap that they don't even notice how much they are holding on to the fabric and building up their grip strength. Having a course filled with intricate wraps that are low to ground and require minimal grip strength is the secret to a successful first course that is adaptable to a wide range of ability levels and movement backgrounds.

Sequencing the Curriculum

Always begin by teaching proper shoulder positioning. No matter what the students learn next, this is of utmost importance. When teaching the basic hangs, an instructor can get a good feel for how the coming weeks will go. Some students will be able to easily lift their legs as they take weight into their hands. Others will struggle for weeks with this foundational skill.

You can see how the ability level of the students drives the curriculum, but at the same time, there are necessary landmark (aka milestone) moves that must be taught for those students who will be moving on to the intermediate course. It is important that the student learns all of the moves in the fundamentals chapter, as well as the conditioning chapter. For some students, learning the hip key will be a day's work. For others, it may take an entire beginning course to conquer. It's important to have an entire course to help guide their practice. If there are students who cannot yet hold their weight in their hands, they can keep working on the hip key from the ground while the other students work on the hip key in the air. The same thing applies to performing a footlock in the air, as well as iron T, etc. While everyone will get to climbing at different rates, it's important to expose them to these various shapes, grips and wraps by the end of the course.

A big change in this recent edition of this manual is that we have moved crossback straddle into the intermediate level (Level 2). While most students can invert in crossback straddle with a spotter's help, they may not be able to get there on their own for quite some time. We have found that this strongly correlates to inversion strength, which is the marker of Level 2. The good news is there is so much exciting and challenging material in the beginner course, we don't need to rush there. Once we do get to this classic move, it will be more approachable because the students will be more prepared for it.

How to Use This Manual

Each page in this manual follows a particular outline including prerequisites, background of each skill, a block for teacher's notes, and boxes highlighting variations. Not every page will have every category, but they will appear when applicable.

This manual does NOT explain how to learn these skills on your own. This manual serves as a reminder for skills you have already learned from a live instructor, and is a resource for teachers. (For example, I used them immensely for myself. When I took breaks from aerial to build my family, I used the books to remind me of everything as I returned to aerial, after having my kids. It was very helpful, especially when you suffer from mommy-brain!)

About This Move Blocks

This section gives background information on each skill. This may include where the skill comes from (if the lineage is known), what the benefits are either for training or choreographic purposes, and other interesting notes.

New to this version of the manual is the muscle focus outlined for each skill. This will help teachers determine what muscles are primarily being used and what joint actions are happening. If students have challenges with a particular skill, this section offers more cues to try, or gives you some additional information so you can explore ground exercises that either stabilize or open the necessary parts of the body.

Exit Strategy

Most exits in this manual are retrograde exits, meaning the student will reverse each step they used to get into the pose initially. This is a great teaching tool because it means that by the end of a beginning course, students know each skill forwards and backwards!

Teachers, remind your students to save enough energy for the exit. Sometimes, students will become exhausted from working on a new move and they will be tempted to try a short-cut to come down. In doing so, they risk injury. You could have students pretend that they are high up in the air, and they must come back to the basic stand or relaxed descent and slide down even if it is simply one foot off the ground. Encourage beginners to complete movements in the air to help build stamina.

A body is more at risk for injury when the muscles are tired. If a student is stuck, have them take a moment with a nice deep breath before continuing. This will help bring oxygen to the muscles and reduce frustration.

Variations

All movement is meant to be morphed to one's own individual style once you learn the parameters in which you can safely move. It is unreasonable to list every variation possible for every movement. (Besides, that is part of the fun of exploration!) Every movement can be changed to be done a little differently. That is what makes aerial fabric interesting, and writing an instruction manual challenging. Wherever I thought that there was an obvious variation, I took a picture and included it, but please know that I did not exhaust all possible variations for any movement. Note: The one exception to the above is that this course covers many variations that stem from the flamingo in order to teach how to take a base move and expand upon it. This idea can

then be applied to any other base movements. (You'll learn more about base movements at the intermediate level.)

Teaching Notes

This section identifies common student mistakes and how to avoid them, as well as progression notes that help the instructor deliver a well-informed class or program.

It is common for students to wrap themselves incorrectly and get caught or pinched uncomfortably without knowing how to exit safely. There's a panic moment here, and the confident teacher knows how to get the student out of this bind quickly and carefully.

Developing confidence as a teacher involves knowing each skill both forwards and backwards (i.e. personal practice), knowing the most common mistakes students make in each skill (which are highlighted in this manual), and having the verbal and spotting skills to walk a student out of any wrap.

The emphasis in this manual is on visual spotting and verbal cueing, because it's easier to document these ideas through photos and text. Physical spotting is addressed in live trainings through the Born to Fly™ Aerial Teacher Training Program.

Verbal cueing works especially well with adult students. The instructor must be an active observer throughout the progression of each wrap to know how to get a student out at any time. This helps avoid situations where a student gets wrapped so tightly that they start losing circulation, and no one can help them because no one was paying attention to how they got there.

At higher levels, visual spotting prevents students from wrapping for drops incorrectly and having a major fall. Even professional aerialists use knowledgeable observers to make sure that their wraps are correct. It always pays to have a knowledgeable observer in the room during training sessions, no matter the level of experience of the practicing aerialist.

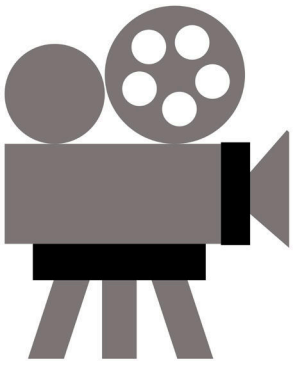
About the Born to Fly Levels

The Born to Fly Curriculum includes all the major apparatuses and breaks each one into four levels. The only apparatus that has a Level 0 is sling because it overlaps with the knot for fabric, and can be used as a base to build strength to start any apparatus. That exception aside, Level 1 is the beginning level. Level 2 requires inversion strength. Level 3 requires more strength and coordination. Level 4 is advanced.

Eventually, our goal is to have materials that clearly lay out the entire curriculum from Level 1 to Level 4 on each apparatus. It's a lifelong project, and a fun one! Feel free to connect with us via social media and our monthly newsletters to find out about more materials as they get released. We appreciate your support and input along the way. This is not a one-person project! It's been a huge community effort.

Videos

Corresponding video content is available on AerialDancing.com. If you have the download version of this manual, there are live links to take you directly to the video. Note: You must be logged in to your account for the correct video to display.



Warm-Ups and Home Conditioning

Prerequisite(s):
Some grip strength

About this move: As a student progresses, the basics of warm-ups are often taken for granted. In advanced classes, often times students are asked to warm-up themselves, as warm-up needs vary from individual to individual. At the beginning level, it is best to spend all the time you can getting to know your body and your warm-up needs so that you can maintain a long and healthy aerial journey.

Muscle Focus: Aerial is a whole body exercise, with an emphasis on the upper body. Many new students find the largest hurdle to starting aerial is the amount of upper body strength (including grip strength) required. It is helpful to start attacking these areas from the very beginning. Your method of attack will set up lifelong habits of training. Proper attention and progression is vital to future success.

Importance of Warm-Ups and Personalizing Your Training

Warm-Up Before Any Aerial Practice

Before any exercise regime, a warm-up is an important tool to prevent injury and help you perform better. Warm-ups can vary in length and purpose. Aerialists put the most demand on the shoulder joint, so it is always an important focus of a generic aerial warm-up. Often, there is only time to do a condensed warm-up at the beginning of an aerial class, so it is important to understand the warm-up needs of your body and take responsibility for performing them prior to the start of each class. This is true for both the teacher as well as the student. For most general warm-ups, the most efficient use of time is to perform 2-3 songs of cardio movement so that the breathing and heart rate change. Then, slow it down but still move with some dynamic stretching. Dynamic movement such as arm circles help to stimulate synovial fluid in the joint, which acts as a lubricant and cushions the joint.

Personal Practice

If you have more time, I personally find that 45-60 minutes of yoga is a phenomenal warm-up. By doing your own practice, you can personalize to your body's needs. For example, I had a shoulder injury about 10 years ago, so I am always trying to bring strength and mobility back into my right shoulder. If I am having trouble getting into a particular yoga pose, I will stop and do some additional shoulder rehabilitation exercises (some of which you can find later in this chapter), as well as some soft tissue rolling on a lacrosse ball. This significantly opens up my shoulder and then I return to the yoga practice, getting deeper into poses that strength and strengthen my body. After a good yoga session, the mobility of all my joints is higher and I can perform much better on whatever apparatus I am on for the day. Even if I don't practice aerial until late in the evening time, a morning yoga practice helps me to be more limber and movement-ready for the entire day. I highly recommend it to all my students and teachers. Teachers often need warm-ups on their own time before class so that they can focus on leading their students during class. Neglecting personal practice warm-ups can be a contributing factor to overuse injury in teachers.



pull-down for pull-up training

Progressive Loading

One very important concept of a warm-up for strength training is the idea of progressive loading. This is a concept that works both for the short term and for the long-term. It is the idea that we are all going to progressing from easy to hard. Your warm-up should consist of movements that are relatively easy for you. For example, if you are going to be doing a lot of overhead pulling movements (as we do in aerial), perhaps you could start with pulling down on a resistance band to warm-up your pulling muscles. If you are not strong at all with your pull-ups yet, this could be your workout if this is hard for you. If it's easy for you, then it is your warm-up. Next, you move on to the next hard thing, whether that's within one workout or next week as you get stronger.

Progressively Loading the Upper Body

Using a Resistance Band and a Pull-Up Bar

This is the number one thing that a new aerial student can do at home to immediately improve their aerial practice. Get a pull-up bar and a pull-up assist band (a really thick resistance band). Alternatively, you can head to the nearest gym and use the machine that assists you from under your knees or feet as you pull-up. All these are working with the same principle: The goal is to lift only part of your body weight, not all of your body weight. If you start by lifting all of your body weight, and your body isn't ready, then the result could be bad form, improper habits and potential injury. By easing your way into how much weight you are lifting, you are going to send the right messages to your muscles, take time to learn proper form, and then you will grow strength properly and powerfully! This is important both in the short term (a warm-up before a practice) and in the long term (train at a low weight now and increase the loading as you get stronger).

Progressive loading is an important concept to help prevent tendinitis in the arm. Often times, beginning aerial students jump in too far too fast. When I get a new student, the first thing I do is tell them to get a pull-up bar at home, and start working with a resistance band. This at-home training program will help a new student to grow their strength gradually and be able to focus on proper form from the very beginning.

Exercise 1: Pull-Downs

With the resistance band choked over the pull-up bar (or trapeze bar, etc), pull down. Vary the speed, and, if available, work your way up to a higher resistance. Keep your inner eye on your shoulders, paying attention to how they are moving. The shoulders should not be in any extreme position, neither up or down excessively.



Exercise 2: Pull-Ups with Resistance Band Helping

With the resistance band choked on the pull-up bar, step your foot into the loop. Start hanging. Keep the rib cage knitted into the core, in "hollow body" position as you proceed to pull up until your shoulders are at the same height as your hands. Repeat with the hands in underhand as well.



Exercise 3: Decreasing Resistance

From a pull-up position with the resistance band under your foot, tuck your knees towards your chest. Lift up as high as you can without changing the good form you started with in the shoulders. If that starts to slip in the slightest way, back-off. Only hold perfect form. Except nothing less when you are doing these exercises.



Summary

Take responsibility for your own training. Realize that not every warm-up or training regime can be tailored made just for you (unless you are taking private training with an incredible coach, which is awesome!). It is important that you seek out and understand what your own personal needs are in terms of a training regime that will move you forward in a safe and effective way. Take charge over performing your own personal warm-ups and home exercises to support your work in the air.

Nerve Care

Equipment Required:
Some exercises may require a chair

About this move: Nerve flossing (aka nerve mobilization) is a specialized way of easing neutral tension. As aerialists, overuse often causes nerves to get locked up (known as nerve entrapment) and nerve flossing helps these nerves to unlock. Symptoms of neural tension may include numbness or tingling. It can also weaken muscles, as well as inhibit flexibility. Unlocking stuck nerves can awake you to strength, stamina and flexibility that's hiding beneath the surface. It's just one more tool that's one part of a complete training package that will help you become stronger, more flexible, and reduce risk of long-term injury.

Nerve Focus: Nerve flossing for the arm are recommended for three major nerves of the arm known as ulnar, median and radial nerve. Nerve flossing for the leg are recommend for the sciatic nerve and femoral nerve. There are many other nerve mobilizations that are beyond the scope of this book. This is meant to serve as an introduction and whet your appetite to go learn more!

What nerve is this?

Arm Nerve Flossing
Straighten your arms as you extend your wrists, opening your fingers behind now. Now move around, either in small circles, or perhaps up and down. The extended wrists will cause this stretch to be a little nervy. As with all nerve flossing, if your hands start to tingle or becoming numb, stop the exercise. Don't hold the stretch if it feels nervy. Instead, move around. In doing so, you are helping to unlock those stuck nerves. We want to encourage them to lengthen out, making their way around our big aerial muscles.



Median Nerve Glide

Median Nerve Floss
Start by looking at your hand, palm up. Then, turn your head away as you straighten your arm, keeping your wrist extended. Shoulder blades down and back the whole time!

Need more of a stretch? Lift your elbow. Need less of a stretch? Lower your elbow or move your wrist into less flexion and extension.

Exercise Contributed by Dr. Jen Crane of Cirque Physio



Ulnar Nerve Glide

Ulnar Nerve Floss
Bend your elbow and bring your palm to your ear, side-bending your neck. Then, straighten your elbow while you bring your palm to the floor. Keep your shoulder blade down and back the whole time. Need more of a stretch? Lift your elbow. Need less of a stretch? Lower your elbow or tilt your head slightly less.

Exercise Contributed by Dr. Jen Crane of Cirque Physio



Hanging Drills

Prerequisite(s):
climbing techniques from Chapter 1

About this move: The aerial exercises here are designed to be done after you have completed and mastered the climbing techniques found in Chapter 2 because you have to be able to climb up in order to hang without your feet touching the ground. This may be the first opportunity to discuss making the transition from climbing with silks together (as Chapter 2 demonstrates) to silks apart. (Hint: Climb with one hand on each silk.)

Muscle Focus: These momentum exercises are perfect for building grip strength. It's a great time to revisit shoulder positioning and proper core connection while hanging. We tossed in a cross-training exercise on blocks that does two things: (1) pushes rather than pulls, which is great balance for the shoulders, and (2) gives a student an alternative position for working on core engagement needed to lift the legs in a proper tuck or pike in the air. Start with modifications and work your way up to the full version (not easy).

Shoulder Packing

Finding Your Proper Shoulder Placement
This is a great exercise to do on the ground to allow your brain to connect with your shoulders and check in. You should always be aware of how you are holding your shoulders. Too much engagement and they become locked up, putting too much pressure on the joint. Too little engagement and the muscles hand off the job of engagement to tendons and ligaments which can easily tear. Much of aerial is devoted to finding the right shoulder placement to prevent injury. Other sports use the term "shoulder packing" to describe this process of properly placing and engaging the shoulders in the right amount to maximize efficient movement while minimizing shoulder injury. Keep questioning. Keep learning. Keep studying. There's too much to cover in this book alone.



Mid-range shoulder placement is important when hanging in the air. The trapezius muscle does most of the work here.

Conditioning Drill -- Great to do at Home!

Block Holds -- Ball & Pike
With your hands on blocks, push down so that your feet can lift up. This takes a tremendous amount of core strength. This very same core strength will be what will carry you into the very same ball hold in the air in the next exercise. The idea is the same that the shoulders are taking a huge amount of force into them as they are the gateway to the rest of the body working as it should here. In this case, the shoulders are pressing down to fight gravity. However, the hip flexor work is the same in this exercise as what you need to do this shape in the air. This is great cross-conditioning for the shoulders and directly conditioning for the rest of your body.



Negative Pull-Ups (aka Lower-Slower-Downs)

Negative Pull-Ups
A negative is when you start at the peak position—in this case the top of the pull-up—and slowly lower down. The more you can slow this down, the closer you are to easily pulling upwards. Keep your legs in a tuck position, making sure that the pelvis is posteriorally tucked. If it becomes anteriorally tucked, this puts strain on your low back. Keep your knees as high as you can. If your knees cannot tuck above your hips, then do more ground conditioning before re-attempting this exercise at a later date.



Basic Stand

Prerequisite(s):
shoulder positioning

About this move: The basic stand may seem too basic to be a skill all by itself, but of course, it's not! This skill can be a beast because it requires trust in the feet (most people overgrip with their hands). The basic stand prepares a student to learn to climb efficiently.

Muscle Focus: The back must be engaged to keep the shoulders in neutral during the transitional moment from ground to air. The inner thighs, legs, and feet will then do most of the work to maintain the shape in the air. The core must be engaged to prevent sliding. In fact, it's a good learning exercise to push the belly forward and try to hold on the feet. Now, pull the belly back, engage the legs, glutes, inner thigh, and hamstrings. Notice what a difference it makes!

Entry

Hold onto the fabric with one arm for balance. Wrap one leg around the fabric *en dedans* (from the outside to the inside). Hold the fabric with two straight arms overhead, and sink all your weight into your hands while keeping the shoulders and ribs neutral. Use everything you just learned about proper shoulder positioning. Flex the wrapped foot strongly.







Place the free leg on top of the wrapped foot, internally rotating the top leg, bending the knee, and sickling the foot. The bottom leg should remain straight with the foot flexed to create the perfect platform. The bottom foot should never sickle, and the pinkie toe should lift toward the ceiling to keep a firm flex. The knee of the top leg is the only leg that should be bent in the final standing pose.





Common Mistakes:

- Try not to elevate the shoulders or hunch forward.
- Avoid disengaging the core/arching the low back.
- Pointing the base foot can cause sliding.
- Straightening both legs misaligns the hips and makes it harder to stand. Keep the top leg bent (unless going for a different aesthetic and a different climb altogether).
- Over-gripping with the hands will cause fatigue. Try to relax and use the feet more.
- Always climb on both sides equally to avoid developing muscle imbalances.

Arrival

It's possible to stand on the fabric without using a tight hand grip. Squeeze the legs together and cinch the fabric between your feet (pulling up with the bottom foot and pushing down with the top foot). Keep the hands in contact with the fabric for balance, but try open palms or perhaps an elbow hook.







Spotting Methods

The first two pictures to the right demonstrate the "fist" method. The spotter is holding the tail in a fist under the student's foot. The student steps onto the spotters hand. To allow for a more varying degree of spotting, you can utilize another method I like to call a "tail rail" by holding the tail up next to the foot *(pictured far right)*. As the student gets their foot grip, the spotter can release the tail. One hand on the student's back helps to stabilize the student during the process.







Teaching Notes

Strength and technique are two different things. Just because a student is strong does not mean they will automatically get the technique. If a strong student cannot perform a move at first, it might be because they have not yet learned how to properly place the feet together to get a good squeeze (technique).

Use wisdom when correcting. Students can suffer from information overload at this stage of the game. However, this is when habits are forming, so make sure they are good ones.

Be sure to have students stand on both sides, switching both the lead foot and the lead hand. This will help develop a balanced body. Standing on only the strong side will develop imbalances in the body, which can eventually lead to injury. Work that "silly side" in every class!

The basic stand is an excellent test to see whether or not a student is ready for climbing. This is a fairly quick move to perform and can be done to assess class placement. While there is much a student can do before they climb, a studio may choose to put newbies who aren't ready-climbers into a class such as a sling class that allows them to build strength in all areas before entering a silks course.

Double Stirrup Footlocks (Under Heels)

Prerequisite(s):
tying the knot, lock-off (bent arm hang), single stirrup footlock

About this move: Stirrups are also known as aerial dance locks. This method allows you to enter both footlocks simultaneously, which means there's a greater chance of getting the locks to be even. This is especially important on non-stretch fabric for skills such as crossback straddle. If you prefer to use stretchy fabric, the footlocks can be uneven and you can generally get by with the choreography unhindered.

Muscle Focus: This is a whole body movement that requires a solid pull-up, which may be best saved for late beginners and early intermediate students. The back must be engaged to keep the shoulders engaged; the core, quadriceps, and hamstrings must work to elevate and control the stand of the legs; the biceps work to pull; and forearms work to grip.

Egg Beater to Double Leg Wrap on the Knot

Begin in backpack on the knot. Hold the tails in your hands. (Note that sometimes students find simply holding this position is a core workout in and of itself!)





Wrap one leg and then the other around the tails. Drive the foot underneath you to get the tail up your calf and then keep it there as you draw a big circle, bringing your foot back to the front for another round.

It's a good conditioning exercise to see how many times you can wrap your ankles, but in general, you will only need 2-3 wraps.





Optional Add-On: Once your legs are wrapped, invert into a straddle. Keep the legs super straight to help mimic the pathway for crossback straddle that is covered in Level 2. If you can get this version super smooth, you are one step closer to Level 2. Good work!

The last detail to landing in a comfortable straddle is to push the hips upwards and then forwards, allowing them to pass through the sling. This places the wrap on the bone of your pelvis, which is a more comfortable placement. It also tests to see if you have the core strength to lift your pelvis up.





Simultaneous Leg Circles to Double Footlocks

Begin with a straight or bent arm hang. Straddle the legs behind the silks.

Simultaneously wrap the legs en dedans (outside to inside—one leg around each silk). Catch the tails in both knee pits as you go. The hips will be in extension and the knees in flexion (like an upright knee hang on trapeze). Repeat the straddle and the leg wrapping a second time, then squeeze both legs together to prevent sliding.





From the legs together position, pull up and pinch the fabric between the feet as you bend the knees to the chest. Send the feet backwards, stepping on the loop. Then stand up.

Even though tying footlocks at the same time is challenging in terms of strength, the chances of getting the footlocks to be tied evenly are much greater.

To exit, lift the feet off the loops, point the feet, and send the toes forward and down, like a dance!

Rest Position: Relaxed Sit (aka Beaman Sit)

From double footlocks, there's a lovely rest position: turn to face one of the fabrics. Hook the back leg on the fabric you are facing (your front fabric). Make sure that the back fabric stays between the sits bones.



Straddle Inversion, Asymmetrical

Prerequisite(s):
ball, pike, arrow/vertical hang

About this move: This particular straddle inversion leads to a whole other world of knee hooks, keys, hitches, and eventually to drops. It's important to train both sides of this inversion equally since imbalances can develop (and don't forget to switch which hand is on top). Also, aim for exquisite technique since this skill is the basis of so many other skills.

Muscle focus: In addition to the inversion muscles mentioned in previous exercises, the straddle inversion adds the challenge of hip abduction and external rotation. Since the hands are stacked asymmetrically, the obliques will get an extra workout stabilizing the ribs and pelvis on one side of the body.

Ground Version

Begin seated in a frog position (knees apart) holding both silks of the fabric together to one side of the torso.

Nod the chin and scoop the abdominals to roll back, extending the legs into a straddle position on the way. Arrive balanced on the shoulder blades in a level straddle.

To exit, retrograde through frog OR for an extra challenge, roll down through the spine in pancake as shown.



Teaching Notes

Progressing students through variations of straddle inversions takes careful observation and planning. In strength training, it's generally best to begin working the "negative" pull-up or lower into gravity before trying to lift the body away from the ground.

Once students have conquered the straddle inversion with bent legs both on the "up" and "down" phases as shown on previous pages, progress to using straight legs on the down phase. Then, keep the legs straight for both the "up" and "down" phases of the inversion.

For the arms, the progression from bent to straight arms is as follows: First, enter and exit with bent arms. Then, enter with bent arms and exit with straight arms to work the negative. When ready, enter and exit with straight arms.

The most advanced version of this skill involves using both straight arms and straight legs in the air without pushing off the ground. It takes time to achieve this, but progressions can help students get there step-by-step.

Aerial Version



Hold the fabric with both hands right next to each other. Put the tail to one side of the body. Make sure to swing your legs around the fabric so that the fabric doesn't go between the legs. Pick up your knees, placing them as wide apart as you can. This can be done with either bent or straight arms (bent arms are shown in the photos).

Once your knees have arrived as high as they can (and not a moment sooner) tilt back keeping your elbows tight in to your sides, keeping the abdominals engaged to support the lifting of the pelvis.

Lengthen the legs and point your toes as you invert. Because your hands are stacked on top of each other, the top arm may be straight while the bottom arm is bent. However, it is good technique to have both arms straight. Engage the legs up towards the horizontal.

Retrograde to exit, taking the time to develop good habits and developing strength, rather than plopping down. Control the descent.

Spinal Positions



The round back position (left) and the straight back position (right) are important foundational positions to note when learning inversions. The rounded back position is mostly used for transitions to knee hooks, and the straight back position is a standard set-up for skills like meat hooks. Try alternating between these two positions and you have a fantastic back strengthening workout!

Teaching Notes

As talked about a moment ago, a common tendency is to micro-bend the knees so that they are not fully straight. This may be due to insufficient hip flexor or quadriceps strength, or lack of flexibility in the hamstrings.

Test this strength by performing a leg raise from lying on the ground or a leg raise (battment) from standing. Does the knee bend slightly? Does the pelvis tuck under in an effort to lift the leg higher? The deep hip flexors should be working, not the superficial ones. Allow the femur to sink deep into the pelvis and extend through the backs of the knees to achieve a straight line. Practicing these movements on the ground (or even taking ballet class) can dramatically improve leg lines for aerial work.

Acknowledgments

First of all, thank you to Fred Deb, who is my teacher of aerial fabric. I would not be the aerial fabric dancer I am today had I not seen her perform with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra in 2005. I'm grateful for the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, CO for bringing her and other amazing teachers into one place.

Two women were major catalysts in my career as an aerial dance teacher: Laurie Hobbs of Fluid Luminescence and Linda Camplese of Echo Artspace in Grover Beach, CA. These are two women I am always inspired to be around. David Running also helped in every way imaginable to get everything going. I appreciate the community of aerialists in San Luis Obispo who continue to be supportive of my journey. Thank you for letting me experiment all my teaching methods on you. I am honored that there is a studio there today because of what I started back in 2006. I get to be an aerial grandmother now, as all my students have students. :)

I want to recognize my students in Ojai who have done so much to inspire me to be the best teacher I can be. You have really brought out a creative spirit in me and in yourselves. I would like to thank Gianna Bortoli for showing me the starfish and many other moves. Thanks to Suzanne Richardson for showing me the ½ Scorpion, which is generally referred to as "The Suzanne" in my classes. Thank you to all of the following students for always being on the edge of discovery and creativity: More than anything, I appreciate your hearts, your attitude, your love for learning and for being an integral part of such a strong community (physically and in other ways).

In the hot summer of 2009, my husband took thousands of pictures of me in my grandparent's garage in front of a white sheet. We were both dripping sweat, and living off of unemployment as we had both been laid-off of our jobs during the recession. Here we are, 10 years later, where none of those original pictures remained. We really re-did the entire book! The current batch of pictures were mostly taken by Julianna Hane. She stole the cake for the 10th Anniversary Edition. She helped me take pictures as well as reformat and rewrite the whole book! It's a much more professional and polished product thanks to her. I couldn't continue doing this by my myself. She came along at just the right time in my life, and I am so grateful to find a kindred spirit and business partner in her.

Many thanks to those who have put out web lists of vocabulary to help the community along in knowing what other aerial groups call things, etc. Among this group is Beverly Sobelman of Versatile Arts, David Covin of Silkworms, Jerusha Horlick of The Aerial Lab and other generous members of the aerial community. Thank you for contributing and taking the time to share your skills. Every aerialist I have ever met has always taught me something new, whether it be a new move altogether, a new way to stylize, or a new perspective. Thank you all. :)

About the Author



Rebekah Jean Leach has been dancing for over three decades now. Dancing led to aerial while Rebekah was studying Mathematics at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. She was discovered through MySpace (I know, times have changed, right?!) by Aerial Experience to perform in numerous shows, including a memorable collaboration with a symphony orchestra and other collaborations with Grammy winners, benefits for the American Cancer Society and more. Her aerial adventures took her all over the country and even as far as Russia. She also worked with Daughter of Zion Aerial Dance Theater, where she enjoyed the blend of modern dance and aerial. Her experiences led her to teaching, which led to the opening of her first studio in Ojai, California in 2008. It was a small studio out of her home; it was a place to grow, learn and explore the new world of aerial (before the rise of YouTube, Instagram, Life as We Know It, etc).

Rebekah's life took twists and turns, including service in the United States Navy from 2010-2018, where she was a Master Training Specialist in the area of Nuclear Physics. Now, Rebekah continues her love of puzzles and brain workouts through the study of aerial theory and documenting the findings of her research. She opened AerialWorks in Castle Rock, CO, in 2016. Funds from previous books helped make this dream a reality and continue to fund the studio. So, thank you for your purchase!

Rebekah currently resides in Castle Rock, Colorado with husband and two beautiful children. She teaches weekly aerial classes and private lessons at AerialWorks.



Titles in the
Aerial Dance Manual Series
by Rebekah Leach

The Aerial Silks Manual Volume 1

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual Part 1

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual Part 2

The Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 1

Also available in German & Hebrew

The Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 2

The Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 1 & Volume 2

The Aerial Rope Manual Volume 1 & Volume 2

An Aerialist's Guide to Surviving Pregnancy

The Aerial Sling Manual Volume 1

Many More in Development

Corresponding video content
for all manuals plus other
awesome aerial resources are
available online at:

www.AerialDancing.com