

Foundations of Flight

Taking Grips

Brought to you by Niklas Daniel and Brianne Thompson of AXIS Flight School at Skydive Arizona in Eloy. Photos by Paul Youcupicio.

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Purpose

Once a jumper can command his body fairly well in freefall, his next step is to learn how to fly with another person. Docking properly is an important element of formation flying, whether it's a 2-way belly jump, a competition 4-way or a 138-way head-down world record. Being able to take a "quiet" dock (one that does not disrupt the formation) is fundamental for weekend fun jumpers, competitors and AFF instructors alike.

Execution

Eye Contact

The first rule regarding taking good grips is eye contact, eye contact, eye contact. But no matter how many times you hear it, you will occasionally find yourself staring at the other person's hands and grippers before establishing good visual communication. Remind yourself that eye contact is vital to good performance and should not be overlooked.

Level, Slot, Dock (LSD)

Level: It's crucial to match your partner's fall rate when attempting to dock. How well you do this will depend on your individual body flight skills. By taking mental snapshots of what a good position looks like when you are in it, you will be able to recreate it. You'll also know if you're off. For example, you'll know you're too high on a belly jump if you see your partner's reserve tray or too low if you can see your partner's leg straps.

Slot: When you are in your slot, you will be able to comfortably make contact with the other jumper without severely contorting your body position. If you have to reach, twist or bend in an awkward way, you are probably not in the position to take a good grip.

Dock: Making physical contact with another person is the icing on the cake. If the level and slot are correct, the dock will come with ease. When taking a grip, make sure that it is firm yet flexible enough not to compromise your or your partner's stability.

Helpful Hints

Belly: It is important to establish a good, stable, neutral position and then move on to the more advanced body positions. In other words, you don't need to force yourself into the mantis position to take grips—in fact, this can cause instability if you haven't learned how to properly use your legs and torso when flying this way.

Back: In this body position, you'll want to take grips above torso level. Most jumpers try to take grips at face level, which causes them to become unstable or pop up because their upper bodies are producing too much lift. Instead, you'll want to maintain a "proud chest" and keep your elbows close together and above torso level.

Sit-fly: Try to take grips at or above shoulder level. If your hands fall below your shoulders, your upper body will lose lift and cause you to fall on your back.

Head-down: Pick up grips somewhere between the level of your chest strap and leg straps. Don't try to take grips at face level—this will cause you to lose stability. Make sure you're on level with the other jumper, since the common mistake of coming in too high will cause you to fly on your forehead. ♦



To view the instructional video, use the QR code to the left or visit the Foundations of Flight page at parachutistonline.com.