



MORE Than Just a Sign-Off

TRAINING FOR WATER LANDINGS

by Niklas Daniel and Brianne Thompson
photos by Samantha Schwann

Training for intentional and unintentional water landings is an important part of a skydiver's learning progression and is required to receive the USPA B license. Unfortunately, most jumpers rarely give it much thought after their instructors sign them off for this skill, and few take the time to carefully consider the dangers involved.

Unless you've landed in water, you probably can't truly appreciate how difficult it is. However, whether you are landing in water intentionally or unintentionally or are just training in a controlled environment, the methods of dealing with your equipment will be very similar. So, it's a good idea to review your water training occasionally—regardless of your experience level—just in case you need to use it.



Skydiver's Information Manual Sections 5-1 and 6-5 contain lots of valuable information about water landings and how water training should be conducted. Here are some additional hints, reminders and suggestions gleaned from both practical experience and experimentation in a swimming pool:

COMMON PRECURSORS TO UNINTENTIONAL WATER LANDINGS

- ▶ Jumping in a new location.
- ▶ Exiting over solid cloud cover.
- ▶ Strong winds.
- ▶ Bad spot.
- ▶ Cutaway (since you'll be open at a lower altitude than intended).
- ▶ Emergency exit from aircraft.

ELEMENTS OF WATER LANDINGS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FATAL INJURIES

- ▶ Impaired depth perception.
 - ▶ Hard impact due to cutting away before water entry.
 - ▶ Improper flare height.
- ▶ Underwater hazards.
- ▶ Drowning due to fatigue.
- ▶ Hypothermia.
- ▶ Heavy or cumbersome gear (e.g., weight belt, wingsuit, cameras).
- ▶ Lack of a flotation device.

VARIABLES WHEN IN WATER

- ▶ Poor Visibility.
- ▶ Temperature.
- ▶ Currents.
- ▶ Distance to safety (can include land, boats, buoys, etc.).

PREPARATION FOR ENTRY

- ▶ Perform canopy controllability check.
- ▶ Disengage reserve static line and undo chest strap below your decision altitude but before touching down.
- ▶ Fly predictably and avoid erratic turns.
- ▶ Remain in your harness until landing.
- ▶ Engage flotation device before touchdown.
- ▶ Open visor if you are jumping a full-face helmet.
- ▶ Land in half brakes (protect your throat and torso by keeping your forearms close).
- ▶ Land into the wind if possible.
- ▶ Perform a parachute landing fall with feet and knees together.
- ▶ Fill your lungs with air before entering water.



CLEARING EQUIPMENT IN THE WATER

- ▶ Let go of your toggles and bring your hands to your ribcage.
- ▶ Shrug off your rig using a breast-stroke motion.
- ▶ Swim down, then away to help you free yourself from the leg straps and clear the suspension lines.
- ▶ Keep movement to a minimum to avoid entanglement with the gear.
- ▶ If stuck under your canopy, punch up to create an air pocket (like a tent), then follow a seam to the edge of the canopy.
- ▶ Get out of the water ASAP.





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To view the instructional video, use the QR code to the left or visit parachutistonline.com.

STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS

- ▶ Lakes: Hazards (boats, docks, pylons, etc.) are most likely to be situated directly next to the bank. Land several meters away from the bank.
- ▶ Rivers: Aim for the deepest part (usually the center) and against the current, if possible. This facilitates escaping your equipment.
- ▶ Ocean: Avoid the area where the waves break. Land in deeper and less turbulent water.

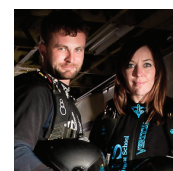
OTHER STRATEGIES

- ▶ Land together if you are in a group.
- ▶ Stay near your equipment, especially if your canopy is brightly colored, to make it easier for a rescue crew to find you.

- ▶ If you're jumping at a location such as a beach or lake, where the possibility of landing in the water is stronger than usual, jump with your cellphone secured in a zippered plastic bag.
- ▶ If you are jumping near the water, wear a flotation device (required for those jumping round mains or reserves and for students within one mile of water, but it's a good idea for anyone).
- ▶ Cut away your canopy only once you have entered the water and as a last resort. (Keep in mind that you cannot cut away your reserve.)
- ▶ When retrieving a canopy from the water, grab the warning label and pull the canopy out of the water tail-first so the water will drain out of the nose of the canopy.

Water training can be a fun and educational experience, so don't just think of it as something you need to get out of the way to get your B license; enjoy the learning process. And don't forget to review your procedures occasionally: You'll be a completely different jumper at different stages in your career, and you may also be using additional equipment like a wingsuit or camera helmet that you'll need to contend with.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Brianne Thompson, D-30035, and Niklas Daniel, D-28906, own and run AXIS Flight School, which offers coaching in a variety of disciplines to licensed skydivers of any skill level. AXIS is headquartered at Skydive Arizona in Eloy and can be reached via email at info@axisflightschool.com.