

The Aerial Fabric Manual

Volume 2

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

PREVIEW

Rebekah Leach

DISCLAIMER

This manual is not intended for laypersons to pick up and start learning on their own. All use (and misuse) of this manual is done so AT YOUR OWN RISK.

Check with your healthcare professional before beginning any exercise program, especially one involving inverting and going into positions that cause pressure to certain places on the body. For example, those with certain heart conditions should not invert, as it is a dangerous situation that can cause stroke, heart attack, dizzy spells, or further injury, including death. As with any exercise program, there is always a risk of injury. Also, working at any given height adds an increased risk of injury, including paralysis or death.

BE SAFE

The top 10 safety precautions to heed:

1. Start by taking live lessons from a professional aerialist. Use this book for reference only.
2. Have rigging installed and inspected by a rigging professional. Each time before you practice, visually check your rigging and equipment. Perform thorough periodic inspections.
3. Always practice over a mat appropriate to the height level you are working at.
4. Never practice alone. Always have a spotter.
5. Always perform a solid warm-up prior to mounting an aerial apparatus.
6. Practice safe progressions. (If you do not have the required strength, do not attempt the skill.)
7. Don't make guesses. If you are not sure if something is going to "work," don't try it!
8. Focus on injury prevention exercises & proper shoulder placement early in your training.
9. Always practice new moves low to the ground.
10. Listen to your body. Take care of it, and it will take care of you.

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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.
The skills in this book are part of the Born to Fly Curriculum.
More information at www.BorntoFlyCurriculum.com.

When practicing aerial, always perform warm-up exercises before attempting any individual exercises. Also, when practicing aerial, always do so 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 the apparatus. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise program, especially one as rigorous as aerial.

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.

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Introduction

It will be assumed that reader has possession of Volume 1 of this fabric book series and that all major terminology and skills from Level 1 (the contents of Volume 1) have been mastered. *For your reference, I have listed most of the major milestone skills on the right for Levels 1 and 2.*

Level 2 starts when a student has their inversion strength. Now, when I say this, I don't mean the Level 4 kind (straight arms, straight legs into a straddle from a dead hang 10 times in a row). I mean that they can perform one climb, move their body around the fabric and get themselves upside-down. They must be able to do this 3 times in one minute, but it may not be at superhuman strength yet. It might have bent arms. It might have bent legs. But it must have proper form at the arrival. If they can do that plus have all the milestone skills of Level 1, then they are ready for Level 2.

Level 2 starts with a heavy emphasis on inversions. The goal is to grow and refine inversion strength into solid technique that can be repeated over and over during the course of a training session without defaulting back to bad habits such as jumping or hooking a foot on the pole to get the last couple inches.

The carrots dangling at the end of Level 2 are drops. Drops should be earned by putting in a solid year or more of Level 2 training. Students first must master the milestone skills of Level 2 and demonstrate stronger inversion strength as well as stamina.

As a sidenote/reminder, there are videos of all the skills in this manual available online. These can be helpful to reference. Check it out at: AerialDancing.com (via paid membership).

Level 1 Milestone Skills

This is not a complete list of Level 1 skills. Please reference Volume 1 for more detail.

- Footlocks (both under-the-heel kind, and over-the-toes kind)
- Basic Climbing Methods (basic stand, and Russian)
- Double Footlocks
- S-Wrap Trap (aka Flamingo Series)
- Hip Key
- Hip Hitch
- The X (crossing behind the back, just prior to crossback straddle)

Level 2 Milestone Skills

This is not a complete list of Level 2 skills. Please reference this manual for more detail.

- Crossback Straddle
- Double Catcher's (DC)
- Rotating Climbs
- Bicycle Climb
- Inverted Climbs (knee climbs)
- Thigh Lock Development
- Knee Lock Development
- Vertical Splits
- Catcher's Wrap
- S-Wrap
- Belay
- Introductory Drops

About This Book

Chapter 0 starts off with covering the inversion training that should remain ongoing throughout a student's journey at Level 2.

The first chapter that covers skills (**Chapter 1**) begins with the crossback straddle. This is a skill that a student started working on in Level 1, but may not have had the inversion strength to take it upside-down, but now they do! We discuss various entry methods.

Chapter 2 brings us to climbs. Practicing these climbs will help build stamina, which is something that must be purposefully trained in order to see improvement. I recommend interspersing climbs with the rest of training (a reminder that this book is not designed to be taught straight through even though each chapter progresses from easiest to hardest or most complex).

Chapter 3 leads us to double catcher's, which is entered by inverting, crossing the silks behind your back and then wrapping the tails around each thigh. This is a base wrap for many drops and sequences of choreography.

Chapter 4 feels a little hodge-podge as we jump into various topics such as ankle hangs, vertical splits, and skills such as the knee tangle. Skills in this chapter get students a bit more upside-down which will be helpful as we prepare for inverted asymmetrical wrappings.

In **Chapter 5** we revisit some of the hip key skills presented in Level 1, adding some additional complexities. Possibilities for play and choreography start to expand at this point, making a great time to explore more artistically.

Chapter 6 covers open catcher's (aka same-side wrap or open thigh wrap), closed catcher's (aka

opposite-side wrap or closed thigh wrap), and s-wrap. These three are all part of one big concept of inverted thigh wrapping. All the inversion strength that you've been gaining during your drills in Level 2 will set you up for success at this point. Take time to develop these skills so they are executed well. They will serve as a starting point of many future skills, and bad habits are hard to break.

Chapter 7 focuses on the belay wrap. As you will soon find out, belay-land has this never-ending overwhelming feel. There are endless possibilities into a wrap that is not always the most cooperative wrap. (I don't know if you can read between the lines there, but I have a love-hate relationship with belay myself. It's ok if you do too.)

Chapter 8 includes an introduction to drops. I am so grateful to have had enough students to teach over the years to have finally found an order of introducing drops that helps students progress in a way that makes the most sense for their long-term aerial journey. In my research for this book, it was interesting to find that most people are scared of the first drop they learned because it was too much too soon or too fast!

Teachers – I beg you – please do not allow students to skip ahead to drops or go out of order. Make sure that students earn their right to be taught drops. Students need strength, body awareness, and a respect of this art form to get to this point safely.

Finally, **Chapter 9** revisits conditioning drills, from a more advanced perspective. This will get you ready for Level 3!

Hip Block Ball Droplet

Prerequisite(s): Crossback Straddle, Lotus Ball Droplet (Vol. 1)

Starting Point: Crossback Straddle

Skill Family: Crossback Straddle

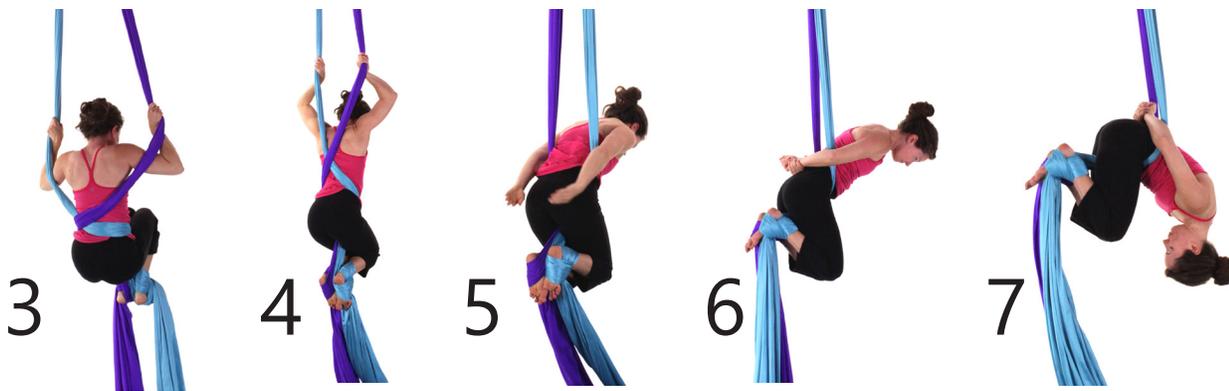
Featured Action(s): Fall to Ball

About this skill: This is a mini-drop from crossback straddle. It can be broken into steps, and then sped up from the starting point. As with all drops, use a great deal of caution as you hurl yourself through space head-first toward the ground.

Double Hip Block Ball Droplet

Steps 1-2: From a crossback straddle, bend your knees, ensuring the knees are on the outside of the silks.

Steps 3-7: Turn right-side-up. For this slowed-down version, use your hands on the silks overhead to slow down the uncrossing process. Release the silks overhead and curl into a ball. For added safety, place your hands behind the silks at your sacrum.



Progression: Notes for Teachers

A good prep for this ball drop is to perform a front balance on the knot and quickly tuck into a ball. This helps to teach the reflex of tucking into a ball with control of the momentum. The key thing is to NOT roll out in a forwards somersault, which ultimately is the risk that we face in this drop. Once a student is ready for the full-out drop, go from an arched position and tuck forwards into the ball with controlled momentum.



*Pictured left: front balance tuck to ball
Pictured above: full ball drop - hands do not touch the silks*

Crossback Straddle Skin the Cat

Prerequisite(s): Crossback Straddle, Skin the Cat (Sling Variation)

Starting Point: Crossback Straddle

Skill Family: Crossback Straddle

Featured Action(s): Skin the Cat

About this skill: I learned this move from Debbie Park of Aerial Experience Productions back in 2007. At the time, Debbie was an accomplished ice skater who often performed on fabric flying high above the ice, among many other venues. While this skill looks best with a full straddle, you can perform this wrap with various angles of the legs.

Cross-Reference Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, we will cover a skin the cat drop that is similar in nature to this wrap. To prepare, we walk down a similar pathway on the knot. This is a great way to break-down the skin the cat motion while being in a wrap. Practice the walk-down several times on the knot with straight legs before you proceed into the advanced variation from crossback straddle described on this page.



Crossback Straddle Skin the Cat

Step 1-3: From a crossback straddle, sit up so that your spine is close to horizontal. Pull up and close your feet towards each other. Walk your hands under the tails and on the outside of your legs. Reach up to the poles. Crunch your body in so that you can place your hands as high as possible.

Steps 4-5: Invert back in a skin-the-cat fashion, opening your legs into your widest straddle as you go. Continue inverting until the weight of your pelvis has settled into the fabric.



Exit Strategies

One Hand at a Time

Steps 6-9: From the skin the cat position, release one hand. Bring this hand around as you rotate a bit sideways. Release the second hand and exit from the crossback.



See the chapter on drops for a more advanced exit.

Split Silks Vertical Splits

Prerequisites: Crossback Straddle, Arabesque between silks on footlock (Volume 1)

Skill Family: Footlock

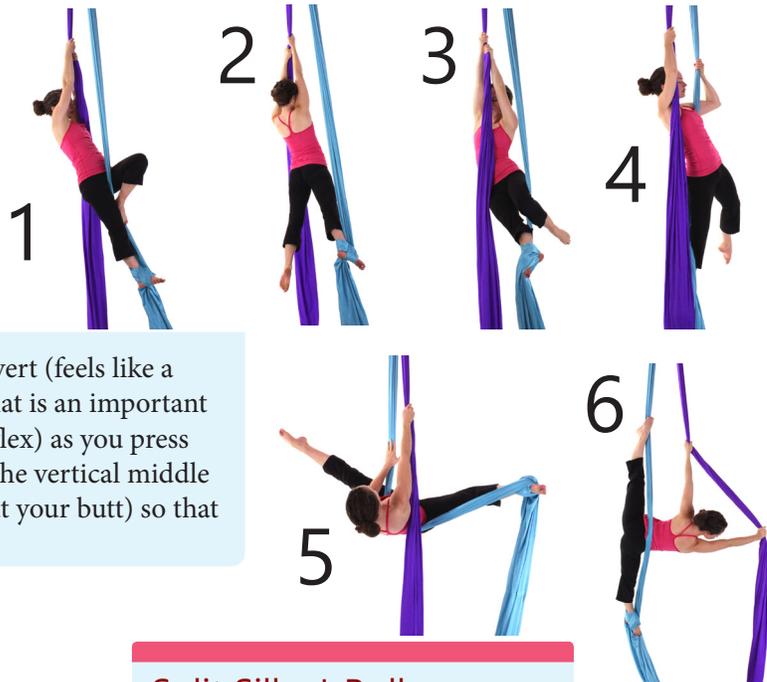
Featured Actions: Hip Block, J-roll, Arabesque, Roll-Up

About this move: This series will be repeated on fabric (silks together) with the exception of the J-roll retrograde, which is one of my personal favorites. I love retrograding moves that might not normally be retrograded because they can surprise you with some hidden gems for training! The J-roll retrograde teaches some roll-up body awareness that will serve you well in Level 3.

Split Silks Vertical Splits

Steps 1-4: From standing on a footlock on one silk, hold the free silk on the same-side-as-free leg. Rotate towards your free leg to face this free silk. Continue rotating until the back of your free leg hits the taut pole. Adjust into the arabesque position.

Steps 5-6: Invert, keeping the bottom leg completely straight. Make sure that the silks remains around your low back as you invert (feels like a one-sided crossback straddle, which is why that is an important prerequisite). Sickle the top foot (or strongly flex) as you press the arch of the foot onto the pole. Open into the vertical middle splits. Anteriorly rotate your pelvis (stick out your butt) so that the fabric remains in place over your sacrum.



Split Silks J-Roll

Steps 7-8: From the vertical split above, bend your bottom knee on the outside of the silk and drive this heel up towards the ceiling as you slide down. Slide your hands down as you lower your head to be the lowest part of your body. Allow your top hip to slide out from the wrap. The more you drop that hip, the less force you will have heading into the J-roll. (Optional hang here.)

Steps 9-11: Hold two hands on the free silk, facing your thumbs up towards the ceiling (normal grip). Pull up and stabilize in your core as you release your top leg. Drive the leg in a controlled manner down and around, landing in the position in photo #11, or another of your choosing (such as a sitting position).



Arabesque to Belay

Prerequisites: Arabesque, Belay

Starting Point: Footlock

Skill Family: Connecting: Footlock & Belay

Featured Actions: Roll-Up, Tail Pass, Slice

About this move: Recall that the underlying layer of the X crossing (for crossback straddle) is an arabesque. Here, the skill is akin to an entry from crossback straddle without going upside-down. Instead, we use the arabesque element to get to the same result. This is the third and final entry in the line-up of headside belays we are introducing at this level. (The last two belay entries in this chapter are feetside belays.)

Arabesque to Belay

Steps 1-2: From a footlock, hold the free silk on the same-side-as-your-footlock. Twirl into your arabesque, sending your free leg under the tail of the free silk as you turn so that the free silk is traveling across your back and over the top of your free thigh after your arabesque rotation.

Steps 3-8: Reach around the back-side of your base pole to grab the tail of the live silk. Pass the tail over your head. Hold two hands on the pole of this live silk and rotate between the silks, facing the live silk as you turn back to face both silks (essentially undoing your arabesque rotation from step 2). Once you are facing the two silks again, grab below the belay knot, remove your footlock and enter the belay hang.

Question-Led Teaching

Use critical thinking to arrive at this entry. Ask your students to come up with a way to get into belay that is similar to the crossback straddle entry but doesn't invert. They may come up with other interesting solutions as well.



Cross Hip Pull-Over Drop to Knees

Prerequisites: Double Catcher's, Pull-Over (Drill on Knot)

Starting Point: Double Catcher's

Skill Family: Double Catcher's

Featured Actions: Cross-Hip Pull-Over, Drop to Knees

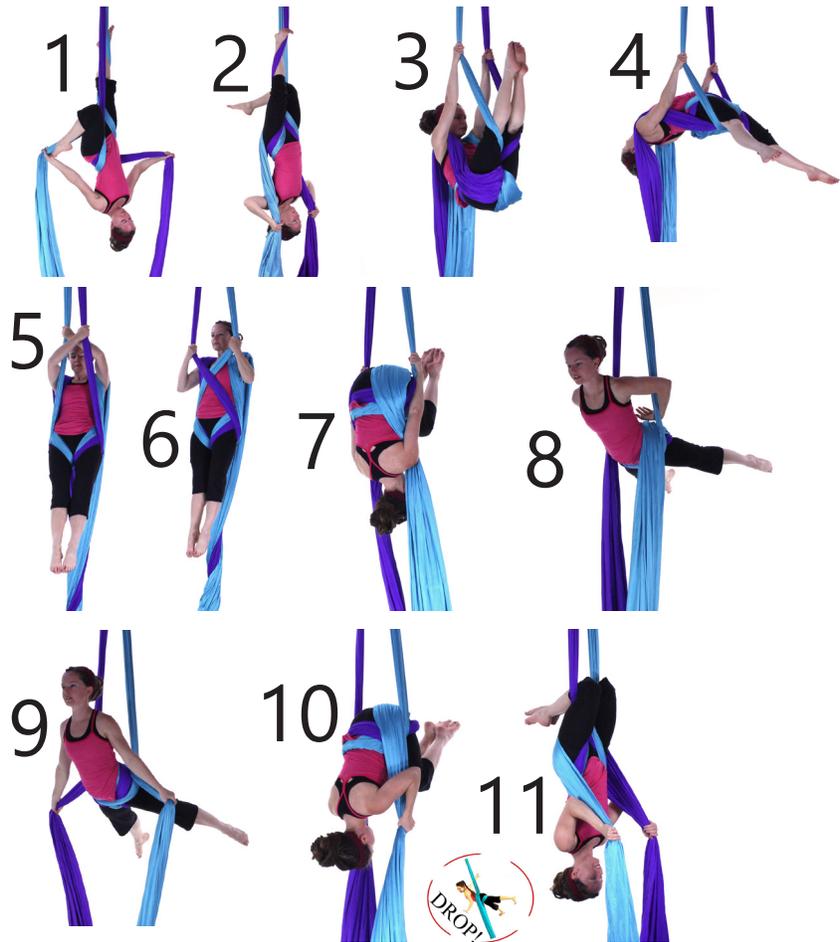
About this move: I highly recommend performing this drop on a stretchy fabric, or on a non-stretch attached to a bungee pack. Otherwise, be ready for a possible jolt at the bottom of this drop. This is an example of a drop that is more dangerous if you're too timid. For many drops, full commitment is best once you've decided to drop. Quickly toss to your knees so you're good!

Double Catcher's Cross-Hip Pull-Over Drop to Knees

Steps 1-4: From a double catcher's wrap, climb above your hooked knees to a chair sit.

Steps 5-8: Criss-cross your hands on the silks (one in front, one behind so as not to lock yourself in!). Pull the silks apart and lift your knees over the crossing, landing in a hip hang. *Optional step 8:* Lift up to a front hip balance.

Steps 9-11: From either the front hip balance (photo #8) or the hip hang (photo #7), hold your hands on the silks (and don't let go!). To initiate the drop, toss your bent knees through the silks. It's important to be confident and not go too slow.



Variation

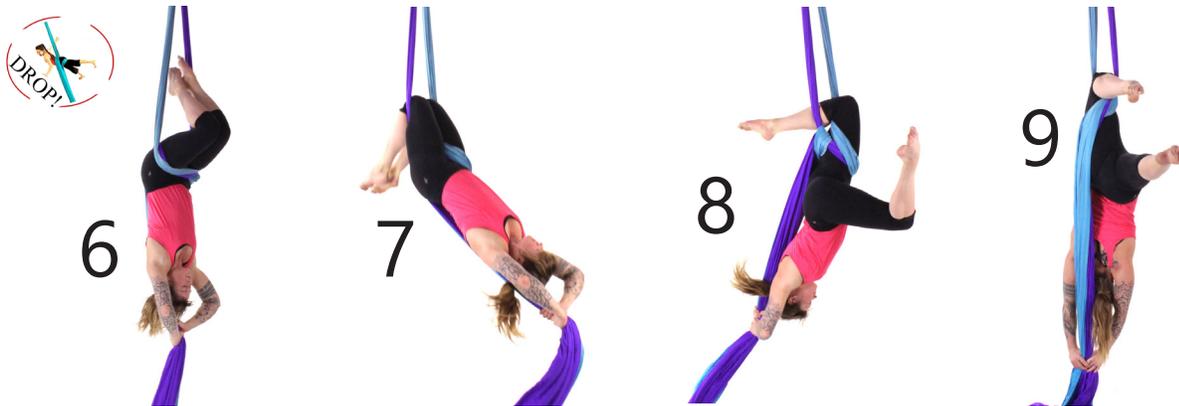
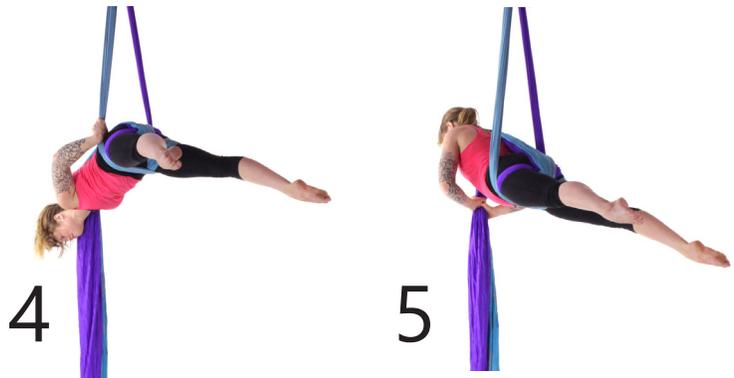
The thigh wraps are non-essential wraps for this drop. I like the added safety, but once you get the hang of the drop, you can start the crossing hip-pull-over from a basic crossback chair sit.



Hip Hitch Seat Cross-Hip Pull-Over Drop to Knees

Steps 1-4: Begin in a hip hitch seat. Cross the silks in front of you and pull-over above the crossing of the silks to land in a front hip balance (or a tuck in hip hang, like the drop on the previous page). Let the tails land over one shoulder.

Steps 5-9: Hold the tails that are draped over your shoulder. Bend your knees as you drop forward, sending your legs between the silks. Catch at the knees. Stay here or remove one knee to end in the single knee hang in the hip hitch seat. Exit as usual from here.



Thank you for taking time to check out this preview which gave you a sneak peak at some sample pages. Feel free to purchase this book at AerialDancing.com or Lulu.com. Hint: Lulu often has great coupons! If you are looking for a deal on our books, go there to purchase!

Thank you for supporting my life-long aerial documentation project.

Happy Flying :)

- Rebekah