

"INTRO TO PARKOUR" GUIDE COMPILATION

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Ver. 1.0

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Intro to Parkour: History, Philosophy & Related Disciplines

Parkour, a movement art, discipline and sport is relatively new under that name. In the past it was known as various things such as: running from the cops, getting outta dodge, bouncing and a bunch of other ones, but parkour itself has a different philosophy that doesn't stem from necessity and has made it much more refined than running from trouble or chasing a purse snatcher.

Parkour originates from France, in a Parisian suburb called Lisses. David Belle is credited with inventing it, but it should be noted that he was originally part of the group known as the Yamakasi that were his friends while he grew up in Lisses. They would devote large portions of their time almost every day to "training". Their training was largely endurance training and follow the leader type activity. It was about everyone doing the same thing despite body type and other factors that varied from person to person. As they continued to train their training became what is now known as "L'art du Deplacement" (French for the art of displacement). Many people mistake L'art du Deplacement with parkour, but they are two separate disciplines. L'art du Deplacement is about freedom in the environment, parkour is about something else. Later David Belle split off from the Yamakasi, as did a man named Sebastian Foucan (who would go on to create freerunning).

David created parkour after he left the Yamakasi. Parkour is similar to the art of displacement in many aspects but their underlying philosophies are different. Parkour is about efficient movement using through an environment whether getting to point B from point A, getting away from something or pursuing something. Philosophically parkour is about being useful. David Belle (and the other Yamakasi) were greatly influenced by the Méthode Naturelle of Georges Hebert, who was in turn inspired by Africans who were in excellent physical condition. A traceur (someone who does parkour) is expected to "be strong to be useful", this belief stems from the moral teachings that are part of Georges Hebert's Methode Naturelle. Freerunning and L'art Du Deplacement are two disciplines that are similar to parkour in many aspects and share many of the same movements but differ philosophically. The first to exist was L'art du Deplacement, created by the Yamakasi, this discipline is about freedom in one's environment. Freerunning is Sebastien Foucan's discipline, it is about self expression within one's environment and is more focused on aesthetics, recently there have been freerunning competitions, where freerunners are scored based on the overall aesthetic appearance of their runs, which has led many to borrow moves from breakdancing, gymnastics and various martial arts.

Hopefully this short explanation of parkour, it's history, philosophy and related disciplines has taught you a bit, if not there are many places to learn more in depth about all aspects of the discipline.

Intro to Parkour: Basics I

I'll cover landing, rolling and jumping in this article, they're the basest basics and should be worked on continuously no matter how good you think you are. I'll start with landing.

Landing comes in two variations landing with precision and landing without precision. If there is too much forward momentum however you should crouch into a forward roll, the best way to find out when to roll and when to "slap out" is to experiment with speed and height somewhere soft (like a mat or some grass). The first technique I'll explain is the "slap out". The slap out is exactly what it sounds like a means of distributing impact by slapping the ground. When approaching the ground bend the leg very very slightly, you want them to be bent enough that it's easy to further bend them but not so bent that they won't bend any further once you hit the ground. Spot the landing spot on the ground while you're still in the air (or better yet before you take off). Make sure you hit the ground on the balls of the feet and bend the legs to slow down your fall instead of stopping and then bending. The arms should come down in front of you and hit the ground with the palms and fingers while leaning forward slightly. It's pretty useful because if you have a bit of forward momentum you can keep it by using the arms to press off against the ground and push you up and forward. When landing exhale. However it's important to know that many jumps do not require a full slap out, the situation may simply call for the knees to bend less than 90 degrees and a bit of forward leaning.

Precision landing is a whole different creature. It is accomplished by keeping the feet close together and deeply bending the knees and spreading the arms out sideways. Land on the balls of the feet and lean forward or backwards to maintain balance. Precise one footed landings are called cranes and they are identical except only one leg is used while the other is kept straight. Precisions will be tough initially so choose something that isn't too thin and practice on that and gradually work to thinner rounder things until you can land on the smallest rails you can find.

Rolling is probably what most traceurs stress the most after landing in terms of safety. Not every jump will involve falling straight down, in fact a lot will have you moving downward and forward at the same time, these are the jumps that require a roll when landing. Rolling can be as simple or as complex as you make it. I'm going to make it as detailed as possible in hopes that you can correctly roll just by reading but only practice will make you roll your best. When you're in the air do everything you would if you were going to slap out, (spot landing, prepare the legs etc). However the landing here differs from the slap out as soon as the balls of the feet hit the ground, instead of bending straight down and slapping the ground you bend the legs while leaning forward. Use the hands and arms to slow your forward fall, by placing both palms on the ground with the dominant arm bent slightly inward and in front of the other arm. As you continue moving towards the ground turn the head away from the dominant shoulder. Touch the dominant shoulder to the ground and roll with the momentum diagonally towards the opposite hip. Be sure to exhale while rolling from shoulder to hip as you want the muscles to be tense when rolling but loose when landing. The feet should be underneath you with either both on the ground or one on the ground with the other leg folded underneath you, for parkour get used to having both feet on the ground. An alternate method for more distance in the roll or for when there is a lot of forward momentum is to use the legs as springs, land and bend them and then extend them while falling forward before touching the shoulder to the ground.

Jumping, a large factor in many more advanced techniques such as wall runs and vaults is a key skill in parkour. A large misconception in outside the parkour community is that jumping is about getting high off the ground, this is wrong the idea is to lift the body. Wait that's confusing, it might sound it at first but try this: jump as high as you can straight up, it really isn't that high up, now jump while throwing your arms up and bringing your knees to your chest. See the difference? The first jump you tried to get high up, the second one you aimed more at lift your body.

Jumping in parkour uses the whole body, the arms should direct a jump as well as help lift the body, the legs free space beneath a traceur to allow them to clear higher obstacles and core brings all the movement together while maintaining control and influencing direction. The entire body should be used when jumping as explained. The arms are swung in the direction of travel, the legs are either brought up to the chest to allow a traceur to clear high obstacles or brought up and forward to allow a traceur to land feet first against a wall or onto a far obstacle.

Intro to Parkour: Basics II

In this one I'll cover jumping while moving forward, the two handed vault, and speed vault. These vaults and the jumping method explained will help build the foundation needed to other techniques later on. We'll start with jumping while moving forward.

There is a large misconception regarding jumping while moving forward, many people will run take a small hop to prep themselves for a large jump then jump. This is a waste of movement and will hinder your movement in general. In parkour efficient movement is vital, and since the prep jump does nothing but slow you down it's a habit that a traceur should get rid of early on. A traceur should instead jump directly from their run without any slowing down, using one foot to push off the ground while the opposite leg pulls the body forward and upward. This will make vaulting and other techniques that begin with a jump or upward movement more seamless and fluid, which will increase overall speed in the long run.

The speed vault is a move used to clear lower obstacles while maintaining speed. The speed vault can be used to clear any obstacle low enough to jump over and some that may be a little higher, it varies with each person. The traceur runs at the obstacle and jumps forward while turning their body horizontally to allow the body to pass over while remaining relatively close to the ground. The lower arm is placed on the obstacle for stability and to provide a push while returning to the ground. The vault is very fast and low.

The two handed vault can be used to clear higher obstacles than the speed vault but it is slower and less fluid. It relies more on power than technique and requires more upper body strength than the speed vault. The two handed vault is simple to execute. A traceur approaches an obstacle and places both hands on top of it, pulls up while jumping and angling the body horizontally. As the body approaches the top of the obstacle the arm that is closest to the hips (the one that's "in the way" of your body) is removed from the obstacle and the body continues forward over the obstacle. The traceur then brings the body and angles him/herself vertically so they can land on their feet.

Intro to Parkour: Monkey, Kong, Dash and Kash Vaults

The monkey, kong, dash and kash vaults are some of the scariest to learn. They require both of your hands to be on the obstacle and your feet are placed in positions that initially are uncomfortable. I'm going to go over them in order of difficulty. These vaults are easy to mess up so take it slow with them.

The monkey vault is a vault often used to get used to the feeling of "passing your legs through your hands". The idea is simple, the technique isn't so hard as it is scary. To do a monkey vault approach a rail or similar obstacle. Place both hands on it about shoulder width apart or a bit wider with your fingers facing forward. Jump upwards and forwards while folding the legs to the chest. Push backwards on the obstacle to move your body forward. Pass over the obstacle with your legs folded close to your body. Unfold your legs and prepare to land while pushing off of the obstacle with your hands. Do this until you are comfortable with your legs going over obstacles in between your arms.

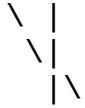
The kong vault is the monkey vault's bigger scarier older brother. It's very useful for clearing obstacles as well as vaulting and then executing another technique such as a cat grab or a precision landing. The kong vault is essentially a monkey vault where the traceur jumps before placing their hands on the obstacle. Once the hands are on the obstacle everything is the same, but a kong vault is more powerful in the sense that the traceur goes further after executing the move. One thing to keep in mind while learning the kong is to jump straight from a run instead of hopping then jumping, which as I've already explained will make jumps less high, and less powerful and efficient in general. This will prevent bad konging habits and allow for longer, stronger kongs in the long run.

The dash vault is probably the most difficult vault to learn psychologically. The idea of jumping over an obstacle feet first then placing the hands is very scary before you get used to doing it. Approach an obstacle such as a waist high wall and jump at it feet first (your body should be shaped like an L). As you continue through the air place your hands on the obstacle and push yourself forward. You can either push hard and continue forward and land with some forward momentum or push softly and pull the body towards the ground by lowering the legs, this makes for a more stable landing with less forward momentum.

The Kash vault is a fusion of the kong and the dash vault, hence the name. The move begins like a kong where the traceur jumps at an obstacle and places both hands on it while folding up the legs. However after that point it heads into dash territory, the traceur unfolds their legs as they push off and complete the vault as they would a dash vault.

Intro to Parkour: Lazy Vault

The Lazy vault is used to cross obstacles in a fluid controlled manner that is slower but more controlled than the two handed or speed vaults I've already covered. It's often used to cross an obstacle diagonally (see ascii drawing):



(the slashes are the path of the traceur using the lazy vault to cross the bar which is the obstacle).

The vault starts like a speed vault except the approach is diagonal, the jump and hand placement are all the same but overall the vault is slower. Once the first hand is placed on the obstacle however the vault changes, the body weight is shifted downward (and possibly forward if distance is desired), to control the downward movement the rear/back hand is placed on the obstacle and used to control the movement and may be used to push off the obstacle for a bit more distance.

Intro to Parkour: Wall Techniques

In a run you'll often come across walls that are in your way or close to other obstacles, these may have to be climbed or they could be used to clear other obstacles. The wall techniques I'm going to go over are the tic tac vault, the tic tac, vertical and horizontal wall runs and a variation of the horizontal one.

The tic tac vault is basically a speed vault with a slight variation, you kick off the wall with your top leg. It can be performed in two ways; jumping and kicking at the wall then placing the hand on the obstacle to be vaulted while in midair then passing over it. The other is to start like a normal speed vault but to kick off a nearby wall while over the obstacle for a little extra push.

The tic tac is not complicated and is the first step to horizontal wall runs. It's a bounce off of an obstacle to reach another location. It's good for landing on walls in cat or passing over adjacent obstacles at an angle. To perform a tic tac run at the wall at a 45 degree angle, lead with the leg closest to the wall when you jump at it. Use the same leg to absorb the shock and then spring off the wall, turn your upper body towards where you want to travel, swinging the arms in that direction will give a bit of pull to increase distance, but don't over exaggerate the movement, it will make losing balance easy.

Vertical wall run, the mythical ability to run up walls, known to ninjas as shoten no jutsu. There's no secret to it people, it's all about practice. Run at a wall at a slow jog, when you get about one or two meters away from it, sprint! jump straight from the run, (no hop) and place the ball of the foot on the wall (if your real flexible place the entire sole of your foot). Once your foot contacts the wall swing the arms upwards while straightening the leg. Initially you'll fly backwards but with practice you'll move upwards.

Horizontal wall runs are cooler than they are practical, you won't have to use this often but there are situations where you'll use it every now and then. Approach the wall at an angle at a medium to high speed. Jump forward but not too high and place your closest foot onto the wall and push both down and back to move up and forward. quickly place the next foot onto the wall and continue forwards. Your last step should be a tic tac away from the wall.

Another type of wall run is the turning wall run. It's like spinning against a wall. Approach and place the first foot like the first wall run. However instead of bringing your leg around to the wall spin your entire body towards the wall and tic tac off with the second foot. This one is a bit confusing to explain, watch a video of traceurs doing the technique for a better explanation.