

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Parkour Basics

Part 1: Two-Handed, Speed, and Lazy Vaults

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Parkour is about movement with a mindset of efficiency, pure and simple. The fact is, this mindset is developed through action, through experience of the movements. It is much the same for martial arts: many of the benefits come from an eventual understanding gained through practice, but there is no practice without learning the basic moves first. That being said, it's time to combine the ideas behind Parkour (CrossFit Journal issue 43) and the safety precautions (issue 44) with a solid foundation in the fundamental movements. We'll start with the basic

two-handed vault, which is the foundation of most vaulting, and then move to the speed vault and lazy vault, two functional techniques for overcoming a variety of obstacles.

First things first, since it can't be overstated: start off every training session by ensuring the safety of the objects and environments you plan to incorporate. Make a habit of having a good warm-up, starting with basic calisthenics and moving to more dynamic movement (for a great treatise on a proper warm-up, see CFJ issue 11). I find that quad pedal movement, or walking on all fours in different styles, is a fun way to loosen up that also leaves your neighbors questioning your mental health. Don't worry, after they see you jumping over walls and rolling around on the concrete, they will doubt you no more.

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Two-Handed, Speed, and Lazy Vaults (continued...)

Once you've warmed up and have checked and rechecked your environment, it's time to pick a good starting obstacle for your training—maybe a rail or small wall about waist height or slightly higher. The first, most basic, vaulting technique is the standard two-handed vault. Stand a short distance from the obstacle, close enough to reach out and put your hands on it without overreaching. Crouch down slightly, leaning back against your outstretched arms. As you jump up and over the obstacle, pull toward yourself with your arms, then press down to aid in your travel up and over to the other side, releasing as you clear the object. You will first release the railing with the hand on the side your feet are traveling on. This is necessary to avoid getting twisted up mid-move and to keep your body facing forward toward your landing. The other hand remains on the rail to guide your body toward the ground.

The two-handed vault is a hugely functional movement, combining full-body coordination, strength, and power, and it will lay a good foundation for the basics of all vaulting technique. To minimize the total work of your legs with the initial jump and your arms while supporting you in the air, you have to use good core-to-extremity recruitment that allows you to “float” with the least possible effort from any one body part. Practice this movement on both sides, getting a feel for the exact amount of jump, pull, and press needed to clear the object with the least amount of total effort.

If you have trouble with the two-handed vault, the problem is likely related to confidence and commitment. It is possible to use your outside foot (your right foot, if your legs are traveling on your right side) to give a slight tap on the top of the object in the mid-point in the vault to aid your travel. This will help to gradually establish the required movement pattern with a bit less risk and commitment. Over time, reduce the amount of assistance from your foot until you are able to overcome the obstacle in one fluid motion. Once you have this honed, it is time to move on to the speed vault.

The speed vault is a variation of the common one-handed vault (it can also be performed with two hands, but that's usually rather awkward). In the speed vault, you approach the object at a jog or run, leap up a few feet away from the obstacle, before your hand makes contact, and let your momentum carry you over. Your hand will act to boost and stabilize your body during the move, helping your feet come to a horizontal position in relation to the ground and giving you the push that will propel them back down on the opposite side. You will perform the vault on the arm on the same side as the leg you take your final step with. Typically, you will land on the opposite foot, as if the vault were just a single step in your run.

The speed vault requires commitment and speed to perform properly. When you master it, you can overcome almost any common vaulting obstacle with

The Two-Handed Vault



Start a few feet from the object so you can grab the top without overreaching.

Bend your knees and then jump up and over the object, first using your arms to pull yourself toward it and then pressing to aid your travel over it.

As your torso passes over the object, release the hand on the side your feet are traveling on to keep your body square to the landing area.

After clearing the object, extend your legs toward the ground to land smoothly.

Two-Handed, Speed, and Lazy Vaults (continued...)

The Speed Vault



A speed vault starts with a committed approach.

Take your final step about two feet from the base of the obstacle, depending on your momentum.

Leap up and over, using the hand that corresponds to your take-off foot to guide your body in the air.

As you pass over the object, push back with your guide hand, propelling your feet toward the ground to land smoothly.

little effort, and you can reach a narrow wall or rail at full speed and be over and past it and back in a full sprint before you know it.

With both of these movements, the ability to powerfully extend and then flex your hips and abs is essential to the efficient completion of the technique. In the mid-vault position, your core musculature provides the stability to transfer the power from your jump to the horizontal position above the rail. The subsequent hip extension on your dismount carries this momentum to the ground so that you can land in full stride, ready to overcome the next obstacle.

Another move, the lazy vault, is useful when you approach a wall or rail from an angle, with a bit less speed. You will still be running, but you will place the hand closest to the obstacle on top of it before you make your jump. As you jump, this hand will pull toward you while pushing down, and you will swing the corresponding leg up and over. As your leg clears the plane of the object, your outside leg will be leaving the ground, following the same path. As your hips reach the point where they are about to push your lead hand off the object, you will “pass” the rail or wall under your hips to your trailing hand to finish the vault. Once both

The Lazy Vault



Run up from an angle.

Jump off the inside foot as you place your closest hand on top of the object.

As your torso over the object, pass the object from your lead hand to your trailing hand and prepare to land.

Land smoothly and continue on your way.

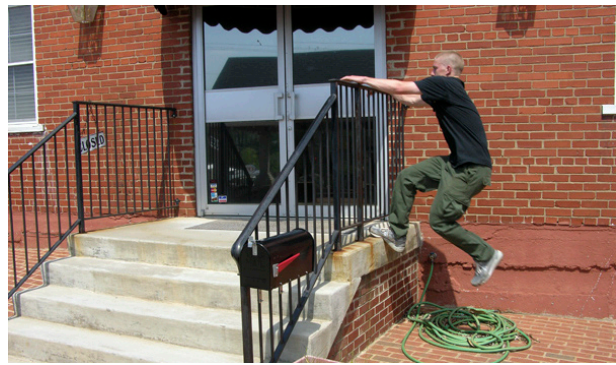
Two-Handed, Speed, and Lazy Vaults (continued...)

legs have cleared the object and are on their way down, you will push off, turning your torso in the direction you wish to continue. This is a very smooth move that can be performed quietly and quickly in many different situations.

One benefit of the lazy vault is the ability to adjust your direction of travel mid-vault. Once you become proficient with the basic mechanics of the movement, you will be able to spot a hazard in midair and use the rotation of your body above the obstacle to avoid it and continue on your way unhindered. This vault is also extremely useful for reducing impact when a vault ends in a drop that isn't quite tall enough to require a turn vault (which I will discuss in a later article). The control you gain over the rail allows you to essentially lower yourself to the point of contact, eliminating a good bit of the unnecessary impact and saving your knees some grief.

Once these movements are mastered individually, it will be time to incorporate them into a run, stringing together combinations of movements as the environment dictates. In the photo sequence below, I approach the porch railing with a run, use my first step to boost me into a two-handed vault, and then end with a lazy vault, which is useful here because of the lack of speed coming into the second railing.

These moves are a first step into the realm of the standard vaults and will help you build a foundation for the coordination and agility required for many of the techniques commonly used in parkour. By cultivating these techniques you will begin to move your body through space as one piece and realize the most efficient way to travel through your environment.



In this sequence I approach the porch in a run...



Use a step to boost me into a two-handed vault...



Then follow immediately with a lazy vault, which works well with the lack of momentum gained between obstacles.

Jesse Woody, age 26, father of two, has about eight years experience in fitness and nutrition (though a lot of that was time wasted on bodybuilding). He works in various capacities for the Woodberry Forest School in Virginia, including working with the outdoor education department and, currently, transitioning to head strength and conditioning coach. He's been practicing parkour for three years (and CrossFit for a little over one), though he's acted like a monkey his entire life. He is an administrator and frequent content contributor for the [American Parkour website](#).