

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Parkour Basics

Part 2: Monkey, Dash, and Reverse Vaults

Jesse Woody



After covering the basic two-handed, speed, and lazy vaults in last month's article, I will finish up the basics of ground-level vaulting technique here by exploring the monkey, dash, and reverse vaults. These three movements ride the cusp of practical technique. All three can be useful in the right situation, but most people seem to have a tendency to apply them for their flair more than anything else. I can think of some very practical situations in which I have used monkey and reverse vaults, but I have yet to figure out the true purpose of the dash vault. Perhaps it's just me, so I will cover the technique here anyway, as you can never have too much information.

Known as the saut de chat, or jump of the cat, in French, our first movement was mistranslated as the monkey vault by some of the original English-speaking traceurs. Gross misnomer aside, the monkey vault is a powerful diving technique that is quite often the first vault learned by new practitioners once they grasp the basics of vaulting in general, as its speed and power are very impressive. Unfortunately, this predisposes it to also becoming an overused method of clearing a variety of obstacles when other techniques might be more appropriate.

Where the monkey vault shines is in overcoming wider objects in one fell swoop. Often a speed vault is impossible to accomplish

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Monkey, Dash, and Reverse Vaults (continued...)

smoothly over wide walls, boxes, or the hoods of cars (with permission, of course), but the monkey vault is perfect. Learning the basics of this technique can help a new traceur develop the commitment and confidence required for many of the more strenuous movements.

Approaching an obstacle at a run, time your final step a few feet from the edge of the object. Make your last step a powerful dive toward the end of the obstacle, aiming for a point a few inches from the far edge (if it's a narrower object, such as a railing or single-brick-width wall, aim for the middle). Dive in an arch to end up with your hips slightly higher than your torso. This elevation of the hips, along with a forward lean toward your landing allows you to push with both hands, bringing both legs over at the same time. Keep in mind that they won't pass between your hands, as you will have pushed off in preparation for the landing already. Once your hands push off, your feet will travel over the edge of the obstacle and make their way toward the ground while your torso straightens in preparation for landing.

This is a hugely powerful technique when the needed commitment is learned, and mastering it makes it possible to overcome very wide objects. The most common problem with this move for inexperienced practitioners is clipping their feet on the obstacle mid-vault. This is caused by the torso remaining too vertical

throughout the movement (i.e., not enough dive), and trying to pass the feet over the object while the hands are still in contact with it. To make this vault, you must dive and then, as your hands make contact, quickly explode up and out by pushing your hands down and back. Only after your hands are free of the obstacle do your feet continue over. Mastering this aspect of the technique is largely a matter of committing to the dive and maintaining forward motion. This movement is best practiced initially in a padded gym setting, which can free new trainees from the fear of injury and allow them to focus purely on proper technique.

A movement closely related to the monkey vault is the dash vault. In both techniques you overcome the wall or rail with arms and legs parallel. In the dash vault, though, you essentially jump over the object to land in an L-sit position, arching your legs and letting your momentum carry you to the other side. I train with friends who swear by this technique, but it has always felt to me like a huge waste of energy. If I can dash-vault something, I can probably just jump over it, and the last thing my shoulders need is any gratuitous impact. Nevertheless, many of the concepts that are important for all of parkour are required for accomplishing a dash vault, so it is worth at least a small look.

As with any other vaulting technique, you will begin in a run. Your final leap will occur slightly farther from

The Monkey Vault



Take-off, launching into a dive toward the obstacle

Mid-vault, knees tucked and hips high

Hands press down and back, propelling you forward, before your feet pass over the object

Spot your landing, compress or roll, and continue on your way

Monkey, Dash, and Reverse Vaults (continued...)

the object than would be necessary for a monkey vault, as you need to clear your feet in front of your body without clipping the edge. Accuracy and coordination play a huge role in the success of this step, as overdoing your jump will land you directly on your butt, while not jumping hard enough (or too late) will have you clipping your feet and falling face-first onto the ground below. You want to skim as close as possible to the top of the obstacle, which reduces both the power required for the jump and the total impact as you land.

As your feet pass the edge of the obstacle, they will move from below your torso to in front of it and you will begin to descend toward the middle of the object. You want to land with your legs in front and your hands next to your hips. Your butt will skim close to the top of the object as your hands press down and back, continuing the momentum from your approach and final jump. Your legs will extend and arch toward the ground as you pass over the object, and you will allow your arms to extend all the way through to the end of the movement.

Problems with this movement generally stem from a lack of confidence. If you don't commit 100 percent to a powerful leap and to the required body position as you make contact with the obstacle, you are doomed from the beginning. With both the monkey vault and the dash vault, the closest I have come to creating a gradual learning process boils down to spending time in a safe environment (padded gym) and working on slightly lower obstacles. The latter is limiting, though,

as attempting the techniques on obstacles lower than waist-height seems to destroy the common movement pattern required for their successful completion. Better to find a safe spot to train or just suck it up and approach the move with the needed commitment rather than reinforcing improper coordination.

The last move I'll cover in my list of "mostly practical" techniques is the reverse vault. I believe this one has the highest possibility for misuse, as it involves a 360-degree spin above a wall or railing as you overcome it. At first glance this may seem entirely extraneous, but practicing this movement demonstrates very effectively that you can translate rotational core strength into horizontal momentum, an especially useful technique when you are approaching an object with less-than-optimum speed.

Starting out, it is helpful to begin the reverse vault similarly to the two-handed vault (described in the last CrossFit Journal issue), with your starting stance beginning a few feet away from the base of the obstacle. Take a couple of quick steps into a short hop and reach forward with your left hand palm-up and directly in front of the mid-line of your torso. As you jump, rotate your torso toward the left, placing your right hand to the left, palm facing away from your body and fingers pointed toward the ground. This description assumes you will be rotating counter-clockwise (over your left shoulder), so if you feel more comfortable starting with a clockwise rotation, reverse the hand placement.

The Dash Vault

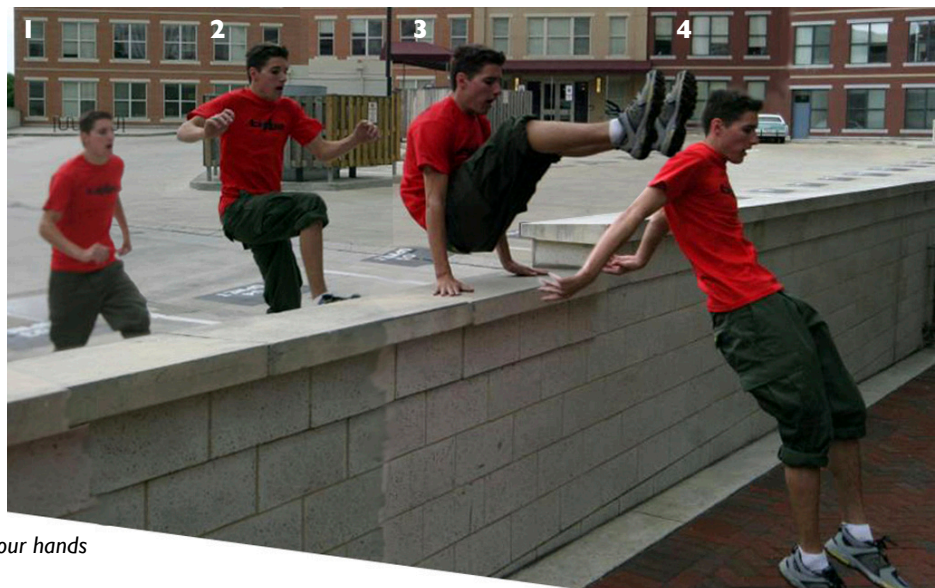
1. Begin with a committed run

2. Your final leap will occur slightly farther from the object than for a monkey vault, to avoid clipping the edge with your feet

3. As your feet pass the edge of the obstacle, they move from below to in front of your torso

4. Extend and arch toward the ground as you pass over the object and allow your arms to swing all the way through to the end of the movement

Land with your legs in front and your hands next to your hips



Monkey, Dash, and Reverse Vaults (continued...)

The jump is similar to that for the two-handed vault, except that you press down and toward your lead hip—that is, to your left if you are rotating counterclockwise. At the same time, lead with your head by looking over your left shoulder. This causes everything else involved with the spin to fall into place, as the movement of your head will lead the rotation of your torso and your legs as well as allowing you to spot the landing before you complete the rotation above the obstacle.

Tuck your knees up toward your chest and tighten your core to efficiently elevate your legs above the obstacle. As you pass the plane of the wall or railing, release your left hand (right if you are rotating clockwise) and begin to extend your legs toward the ground, keeping your eye on the landing area throughout the move. If you committed to the rotation and an efficient and powerful jump, you will have a good bit of momentum as you return to the ground, so it is best to approach from a slight angle, leaning back toward the obstacle. This allows your momentum to carry you to vertical as you absorb the shock from the landing. Land silently and smoothly and continue on your way.

The reverse vault is the one technique discussed here that can be effectively scaled down to a basic level. If you are timid about trying it, you can establish the rotational technique by starting from a crouch on the floor, placing your hands in front of your feet and hopping forward into the spin. Moving up from this level one step at a time is a great way to slowly build confidence and coordination in an apprehensive trainee.

So there you have it: the last few basic ground-level techniques distilled into some short descriptions for what I hope is comprehensible beginning training. Establishing these movements as parts of your daily training will increase all aspects of fitness in perfect conjunction with your CrossFit lifestyle. The added balance, coordination, agility, accuracy, and, above all, confidence that you can garner from these most basic movements will improve every aspect of your everyday fitness. These movements also serve as the foundation for the basic above-ground techniques in which you break free of the horizontal boundary we move within every day and begin to think along the vertical plane as well.



Reverse Vault



Set up the initial hand position, which begins your rotation

Jump, then press down and toward your lead hip; at the same time, begin to look over your back shoulder

Tuck your knees up toward your chest, and, as you pass the plane of the obstacle, release your left hand

Lean back slightly toward the obstacle as you approach landing

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](http://www.americanparkour.com).