

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Teaching the Jerk: Part 2

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The overwhelming majority of all competitive Olympic-style weightlifters use the split foot position when receiving the bar in the jerk, primarily because the split jerk has a larger margin of error than the push jerk or squat jerk in terms of exact placement of the bar in the frontal plane overhead.

In this article, we'll take you through a progression for developing an effective split landing position for receiving the barbell overhead. The first step is determining the dominant leg (the one that will be forward in the split). Then you must establish the proper placement of the feet in the split landing and practice hitting that position dynamically on every attempt.

### **Determining the dominant leg**

To determine the dominant leg to drive forward in the split, we use one of two high-tech techniques that we call "Trust me" and "Shove me."

Of course, using these techniques when teaching a class of 55 to 60 high school students requires discipline and in some cases cannot be used, for obvious chaos-control reasons (see the video "Shove me—Why it's a dangerous method"). Nevertheless, both are good techniques for finding the dominant leg for the split jerk.

### **Learning proper footwork**

Once the dominant leg is found, we want to establish a visual tool for learning the base of the

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### Method 1: "Trust me"

1. The athlete stands at attention facing me.
2. I place my hands on the front of the athlete's shoulders and ask him to lean forward and let me support his weight.
3. While my hands are supporting him and he is leaning forward and trusting my grip, I explain that I will be letting him go without warning. (I normally take him down about 10 degrees to a position of 80 degrees or so.)
4. When appropriate, I release him suddenly, so that he must catch his fall by stepping forward. The foot that steps out is normally the dominant one.
5. If the athlete appears to be anticipating the release too much, I sometimes ask a simple but out-of-context question, such as "What city was your mother born in?" This distracts him just enough to allow his natural instincts to kick in as he falls.



Trust me



### Method 2: "Shove me"

The athlete stands at attention facing away from me.

1. I walk behind the athlete and mildly shove him forward when he is not expecting it.
2. As in method 1, the foot the athlete catches himself with is usually the dominant one and will be the forward one in his split position.

Shove me



Shove me - why it's a dangerous method



## Teaching Progression



1. The first step is simply walking the feet into the proper receiving stance. With your feet on the 9-to-3 o'clock line, step a foot forward to either the 1 o'clock (right foot) or 11 o'clock (left foot) position. Now walk your back leg to the 7 o'clock or the 5 o'clock position, accordingly. At this point, you should be in about a half-lunge position. The hips should be square to the front, with the chest upright and the torso perpendicular to the ground. Note that the feet are not on the same vertical axis; each one is several inches out to the side (11 and 5 o'clock or 1 and 7 o'clock). Having this distance between the feet—a wider base—makes the position much stronger and more stable and balanced.

2. The next step is jumping the feet into the proper stance. Place the toes on the 9-to-3 o'clock line. Dip and drive the body upward while quickly jumping the feet out to the proper positions. The body will be in the same position as described in step 1. Recover by stepping back to the start position and then repeat for several reps, getting the feel of the feet. First do this with the hands on the hips, and then with the hands locked overhead throughout the movement.

3. On the recovery back to the starting position, the front foot steps back first and then the back foot comes forward, aligning the feet on the same horizontal line, at approximately the same width as in the landing position for the snatch, clean, and front squat.



4. Add a dowel or PVC pipe to the drill by placing the pipe on the back using a clean grip—i.e., with the hands just outside the shoulders. (In an actual jerk, of course, the bar will begin racked in front, on the anterior deltoids. We teach it from behind the neck first to drill the feeling of the bar traveling directly up rather than having to clear the face, which tends to distract novice lifters.) Dip, drive upward, and then split the feet into the landing lunge position while driving the body down under the bar with the arms.

Walk Split Land



Walk Split Land  
with PVC



Jump Split Land



Jump Split Land  
with PVC



## Teaching the Jerk: Part 2 (continued...)

split as well as the length of the lunge while splitting. On each platform, using a piece of yellow chalk, I draw a Murray cross, which is essentially just a cross with clock positions for 11, 12, and 1 o'clock marked at the top and 5, 6, and 7 o'clock at the bottom of the vertical axis, and a horizontal axis from 9 to 3 o'clock. I use the Murray cross to give a visual feel while working footwork drills for receiving the bar in the split jerk position. (It can be useful for teaching footwork and diagnosing and correcting landing problems in the clean and snatch as well.)

One of the first exercises I teach my high school students and my private clients is the walking lunge. I do this for several reasons, but a primary one is that I want the student to feel confident with their leg strength and flexibility while in a lunge position early on. Later, I can use the Murray cross and draw on the athlete's familiarity with the lunge to teach positioning of the feet while in the split.

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### Common problems

It takes a lot of practice to hit this landing position consistently. It is essential in these early stages to correct the landing position every time before standing. This is especially true when working with PVC. There are a few common mistakes that people make.

#### 1. Landing too narrow

Looking at the stance from the front, the feet should be about the same width as they are in a squat. Many new lifters land with the feet too narrow, closer to 12 and 6 o'clock than 1 and 7 (or 11 and 5) o'clock. Every time this happens in practice, the feet should be adjusted out to the proper width before recovering back to the starting position.



#### 2. Landing too far forward

The front knee should be just above or slightly behind the front ankle, not in front of it. The weight should be spread throughout the front foot, especially the heels, not concentrated in the toes or balls of the feet. The total load of the body and barbell should be spread evenly between the front and rear foot. The athlete should be able to step the front foot back first without much issue. A strong inclination to bring the back foot forward first means too much weight is on the front foot. The weight should be transferred back to a balanced position with the front leg at the proper angle before standing up.



## Teaching the Jerk: Part 2 (continued...)

### 3. Landing with the back heel down and in

The back heel should be up off the ground and very slightly turned out, with the weight on the ball of the foot, as in a lunge. In the incorrect position, the hip opens on one side, the torso twists a little, and the back heel comes slamming down. This is more common as an athlete approaches his or her limits.



Weight should not be added to the bar until the athlete moves consistently well with an unweighted dowel or PVC pipe. The athlete should be able to perform ten repetitions at speed perfectly before adding weight. It takes much longer to undo bad habits than to learn them correctly from the start.



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Adjusting Jumping  
Too Narrow



Adjusting Jumping  
Too Short



Adjusting Jumping  
with Back Heel Down



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