

the  
**CrossFit**  
JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Slacklining

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Slacklining (slacking) is borrowed from the climbing population, where it's often prescribed as active recovery after a hard day of mountaineering or rock climbing. A slackline is a lead of nylon webbing strung between two fixed objects. Upon looking at a slackline setup most people think "tightrope walking." Actually it is quite the opposite. While a tightrope does not sway or move, a slackline does. Known to recoil, sway madly, and bounce with every step or transition, it has been likened to surfing. These characteristics focus on movement, not musculature, and bring focus to stabilization in the most destabilized environments. Think hula-hoop on crack. This simple device can help to improve coordination, agility, accuracy, concentration, and balance. I have personally seen a slackline humble the freakiest balance junkies.

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*"Without gymnastics training we opt out of the most potent neurological training available to an athlete."*

*- CFJ September 2003*

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Potency can be adjusted for all skill levels. Tension on the webbing can be varied to manipulate line response time – the looser the line, the slower the feedback. We employed ski poles, human shoulders, and crash mats to get even the most balanced-challenged on the line. Baby steps are important. It is amazing to witness the smile on someone's face when they discover that

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## Slacklining (continued...)

the line responds with bounce and recoil against weight transfer. They just keep coming back!

We spent around 40 dollars for an entire setup (see gear list for specs). Setup time is about 5 minutes once you master the basics of setting a line with primitive gear (see “Running a Line,” below, and “Knots,” p. 8).

### Running a Line

1. Scout for two solid, immovable objects. Take into consideration the ground between the two points—the softer the better. Start low with your line—just above the knees. As you improve, move the line higher to keep it from hitting the ground.

- ✓ The height of the line will determine the distance you fall.
- ✓ As you master one line length, increasing it will provide new challenge.

2. Wrap your first runner around point A. Repeat with the second runner for point B.

- ✓ Use a [water knot](#) to secure the webbing, so you can untie the tensioned knot later.
- ✓ Point A (static) uses one biner; point B (dynamic) requires two.

3. Tie a figure 8 knot on one end of the slackline webbing. The knot will link point A to the main line.

4. From point A, walk toward your second anchor (point B), flattening the slackline as you pace. Once you are about 4 feet from the second anchor point, stop and tie a loose clove hitch knot. This is the first side of your tensioning mechanism, on the dynamic end of your line.

- ✓ Run two biners through the clove hitch knot.
- ✓ Ensure that the gates are opposite and opposed.
- ✓ Pull the knot tight.

5. As you zigzag between the dynamic end of your slackline and anchor point B, you are creating a 9:1 tensioning system:

- Take the remaining webbing from your clove hitch knot, and run it through the bottom biner at anchor point B.
- Return to the clove hitch knot and pass the webbing through the bottom biner. As you go, make sure your line stays flat.

### Gear list for a primitive system

1-inch tubular webbing

- Main line – We purchased 75 feet.
- Runners – We used two 6-foot sections.

Carabiners (biners) non-locking – oval shape

- 5 - Used for the anchor points and for tensioning the system.

Other

- Crash pads

### A bit about anchors and runners

Just about anything that you can securely attach a runner to can be used as an anchor point. If you search the Internet you will see people using telephone poles, cars, boulders, etc. We have had success with trees outdoors and with steel beams indoors.

- ✓ You will be producing great forces between two points, so you must use immovable objects. If your anchors give out, you risk injury or death.

A runner is a piece of gear (we used an additional length of webbing) that secures the main line to an anchor point. Each runner is tied in a loop with a water knot. We had to employ runners for outdoor setup, but dropped them on the indoor system, where we were able to use eyebolts instead. Things to consider:

- ✓ When wrapping trees, you run the risk of damaging the bark or your runners. Use a protective layer of foam pipe wrapping, cardboard, or a towel or article of clothing between your runners and the bark.

### Tips

- A primitive system is named such because it does not take any special equipment (pulleys, sheaves, ratchets, etc.) to set up.
- The sky is the limit in slackline setups. If you find that you get the slacking bug, consider investing in a ratcheting system to facilitate tensioning the main line.



## Slacklining (continued...)

- c) Walk back to point B, this time passing the webbing through the top biner.
  - d) Return to the clove hitched section for the final pass-through.
  - e) Finish the tensioning system by returning to anchor point B.
6. You can set the slackline by pulling the tail of remaining webbing. Depending on the distance between anchors, the tension you are practicing with, and the height of the line, it may require more than one person to tighten the system. Once you have the tension set, tie off the remaining lead.

### Things to consider with your setup

- ✓ Start with a short distance between the anchor points (6-10 feet).
- ✓ Short distances will be easier to travel and require less tension to keep the line off the ground.
- ✓ As you become better on the line you can extend your anchor points. We have experimented with lengths up to 50 feet—though it takes 2 or more people to tension this setup (this would be a good time to add a ratchet to your system).

### Outdoor Setup

We wrapped the runner webbing around two 8-10-inch diameter trees (padding removed for photos).



Once the anchors were set, we tied a figure eight knot and used a biner to attach the main line to the runner.





## Slacklining (continued...)

We walked the line to within about 4 feet of the second anchor point, taking care to ensure the line was flat.



We added a clove hitch knot and two biners to the dynamic end of our line..



We then started setting up the tensioning system. First, we ran the remaining line to the lower biner at point B, and then returned to the dynamic end of the line, passing it through the lower biner once again. This was repeated until the line was passed through each biner, bottom to top. On the final pass, we started to tension the line by pulling on the remaining lead.





## Slacklining (continued...)



## Slacklining (continued...)

### First Attempts

As with anything challenging, start out slowly. Most people new to slacklining will find that just stepping onto the line will be difficult. We set up the pictured line to be just a few inches off the ground when bearing a person's weight. Start by practicing stepping up with one foot and then the other and standing on the line.

When stepping onto the line, keep the active foot (on the line) close to your center of gravity and keep the back foot (on the ground) close to the active leg (as in the photo on the left, not as in the photo on the right). Step up onto the line quickly.



Work on staying loose in the hips, with your hands out to the side, shoulders squared and level, eyes raised. Feel the line. Again you can see that this line was very slack—such that it touched the ground in the center—used this way for teaching method and mastery.



### Tips for starting out

- ✓ Have fun!
- ✓ Use a spotter if you have poor balance.
- ✓ Remember that the line may snap back up quickly when you step (or fall) off.
- ✓ Relax, and don't forget to breathe!
- ✓ Focus your eyes on something at or around head level and near the end of the webbing—not on your feet or the webbing. Let your proprioception tell you where to put your feet.
- ✓ Keep your knees active, not locked. Arms are out for balance.
- ✓ Try, try again.

### Progressions | Challenges

- ✓ Stepping up, stabilizing
- ✓ Walking and turning around on each trip along the line
- ✓ Lunges
- ✓ Single-leg squats
- ✓ Bouncing and surfing
- ✓ Jumping starts, from the ground onto the line
- ✓ Turning around in place
- ✓ Toe touches
- ✓ Frisbee or Dynamax ball pass
- ✓ Press to a handstand and hold



## Slacklining (continued...)

### Spotting techniques

Spotting can be as simple as “lending a shoulder” or using sticks or poles. Progress from two poles to one, spotter with a “cold shoulder” (you hold on) to a “hot shoulder” (you touch only when you are falling). For safety, poles should reach over your head when you’re on the line. (as shown below)



### Indoor Setup

With the seasons changing, the weather in our area unpredictable, and the need to slack, we set up anchor points indoors at Crossfit North.

We installed 2 eyebolts on either side of the facility, ensuring that they met spec requirements for carrying load. Nylon fasteners are a must.

We used the same setup methods outlined in “Running a Line” but bypassed using two runners and attached the mainline via biners directly to one eyebolt (static side) and used one runner on the other (dynamic side) to allow the line to remain flat.



### Programming Ideas

Slacklining could be wrapped up into your gymnastics programming or useful for active recovery. Maybe an accuracy challenge when your body is “completely messed up” after attacking a workout? Heck, it’s plain challenging by itself!

### Master of the line

Longest line stand, distance traveled, or trips back and forth for time, or in an allotted time.

### Waiter walks| Waiter walk OHS rhythm

Walk to one end of your line and back with a light dumbbell - arm fully extended - switch each return. Create a rhythm: step, step, overhead squat. Learn to ‘work around’ (gyrate) with dumbbell in overhead fixation.

### Continental divide

Barbell is set up at one end of the line for thrusters. Handstand push-ups will be used on the other. For time: 21-15-9 reps of each, traveling the line each of the 3 rounds.

### Last one standing

Two people set up on the line and pass one light (6 pounds or less) medicine ball back and forth. Each participant passes the ball back and forth to one another. Passing pattern variations could be determined before the challenge starts. Last one standing wins.

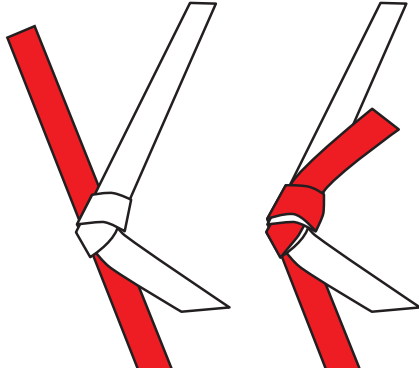
### References | Resources

- <http://www.slacklineexpress.com>
- <http://www.slackline.com>
- <http://www.rockclimbing.com>
- [http://www.rei.com/shop/Climbing.htm?stat=side\\_2](http://www.rei.com/shop/Climbing.htm?stat=side_2)
- <http://www.realknots.com/knots>

## Knots

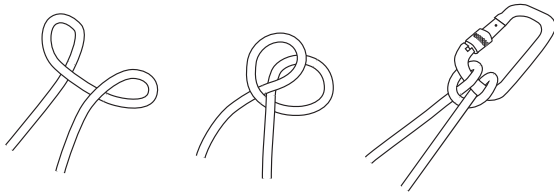
### Water Knot

- Make an overhand knot on one end of the line, and then follow it through with the second end.



### Clove Hitch

- Make two loops in the line and then lay one atop the other. The carabiners will go through the centers of the two loops.



### Figure Eight

- The figure eight on a bight is probably the most important and widely used knot in climbing today. It provides a stable and completely trustworthy loop at any point in the line.

