the CrossFit JOURNAL ARTICLES

Parkour Basics

Part 3: Jumping

Jessy Woody

My last two articles dealt with the basics of vaulting technique; now it is time to take the body awareness gained from vaulting practice and apply it to developing jumping power, accuracy, coordination, and, above all, balance. Jumps are essential to parkour, as well as everyday life, because they are often the fastest, most efficient way to get from one point to another, especially when moving between surfaces or objects that are on different levels. The basic two-footed jump and landing are foundational skills that lead to many other techniques, so learning to do them correctly is extremely important to the progression of parkour training.

There is no standardized way to jump. The movement itself is so inherently human and natural that it's ludicrous to assume that there is necessarily a right or wrong way to do it. Nonetheless, there are definitely a few points that will make jumping more efficient while assuring a good base for learning parkour movements that take the jump and expand it through more varied situations.

Begin in what has aptly been named the jumping position, with your feet

slightly narrower than in a squat or catch position in the Olympic lifts. Your feet should be turned out just slightly to facilitate proper biomechanics. Your body should be relaxed and ready.

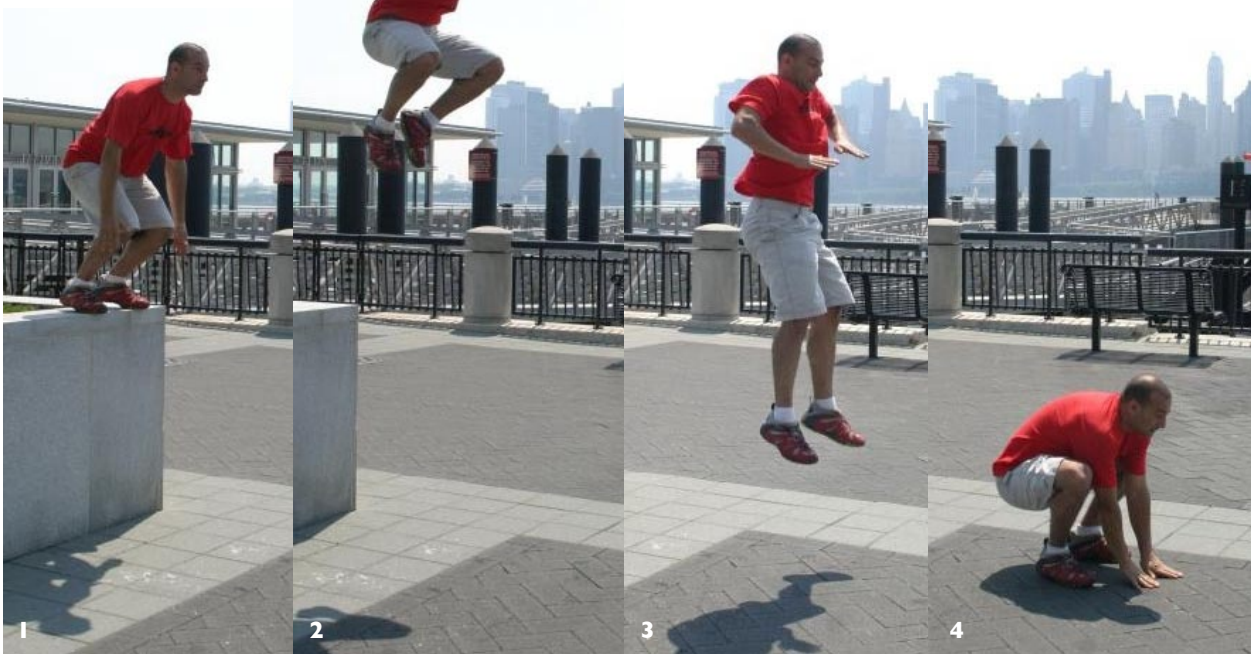
It is easy to think of a good jump as being created by the power of your quadriceps, but that misses the fact that it is a full-body technique. Bend your knees until you reach a partial squat position, bringing your weight toward your toes. As you explode out of this half-crouch position, the power for the jump will travel through your calves and ankles through your thighs and finally into a powerful hip extension. This will all happen in one fluid, coordinated movement.

One aspect of the jump that is often overlooked is the role that the arms and head play in effective application of the technique. When you dip toward the ground, swing your arms back. As you jump, throw them toward your path of travel (in this case, straight up), so that they reach their apex at the very end of the jumping kinetic chain.

As you reach the climax of this chain of movements, your head will follow your arms toward your path of travel. At no time should you be looking down at the ground or to the side, but rather slightly up or toward your landing area if you are jumping horizontally. If any part of this movement lacks either power or coordination, your jump will be weak and ineffective.

When you jump straight up, your legs can dangle toward the ground, as the movement is purely vertical. When you want to move in the horizontal plane, however, it helps to tuck your knees toward your chest to reduce the leverage you have to work against to make progress. Incorporating the tuck-jump technique into the midpoint of a jump keeps your body-mass centered and helps more effectively transfer your momentum forward. As your feet leave the ground, relax your ankles and hamstrings and forcefully tuck your knees toward your chest, using your hip flexors and lower abdominals. This movement should be less the product of rounding your back to meet your knees and more the end result of a coordinated effort from your upper thighs and trunk to bring your knees upward.

The amount you tuck is up to your personal preference, as you will find the most efficient technique through



Mark prepares for a jump from height by assuming the jumping position.

He jumps upward and tucks his knees toward his chest.

As he nears the ground, he extends his legs toward the landing area.

He lands on his toes and follows by bending his knees and then hips, finishing with his hands to dissipate the last of the force.

the CrossFit JOURNAL ARTICLES

Subscription info at http://store.crossfit.com
Feedback to feedback@crossfit.com

varied training. There will be a balance between the benefit of economical movement with the legs bent and the cost of the energy expended to do the bending. The sweet spot lies somewhere in between.

Once you're airborne, it is time to reverse the motion and prepare for landing. In mid-air, your body should be as relaxed as possible to allow for unhindered motion and effective transfer of momentum. As you begin to approach the ground, you should straighten your knees and hips and "reach" to meet the landing area with your feet. The movement pattern for the landing will be the exact opposite of the jump: you will first land on the balls of your feet, then bend your knees, then hips, then finally contact the ground with your hands between your legs to finish the movement. At no point in time should your heels bear any appreciable weight, as this means you have essentially "bottomed out" your absorptive ability and have taken on a jump that is too big for your current skill level. After your feet contact and you begin to descend, control the momentum by keeping "strong" and resisting the urge to flop uselessly on the ground. Use the eccentric tension in your hips, thighs, and calves to control the descent and make the landing smooth and quiet.

This basic movement pattern—tuck, explode, tuck, reach, and absorb—will serve you well in most techniques involving jumping from one place to another, whether you're leaping over a gap or flying across an alleyway toward a cat leap. Among all these techniques, though, the movement reaches no higher expression than in the precision jump.

A precision jump is basically a jump to a small area that requires concentration, balance, and accuracy to stick the landing. It is often performed on small walls and railings, but after training for a while you will begin to see the potential for this movement in everything from the rocks across a riverbed to tree branches or fence posts. Beyond the purely practical applications of the movement in your everyday environment, the training (not to mention the strength, flexibility, power , speed, accuracy, agility, coordination, and balance) required to perform a large and powerful broad jump onto an exceedingly small landing surface can benefit every athlete.

To perform a "precision," as it's known, follow the steps for the basic jump and landing outlined above, but apply them to a broad jump. Swing your arms back as you

Mark assumes the basic jumping position.

As he explodes upward, he swings his arms in the direction of travel—in this case, straight up.

As the kinetic chain of his ankles, knees, and hips reaches its apex, his arms are straight overhead.

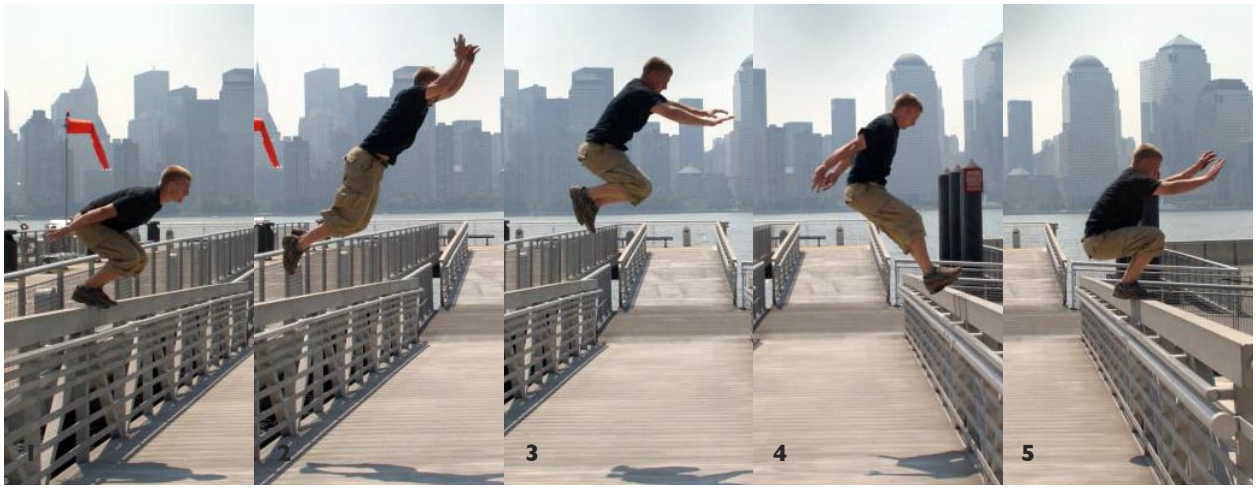
At the apex of the jump, he tucks his knees toward his chest.

Mark extends (slightly off-balance here) toward the landing area.

He absorbs the shock with his ankles, knees, and hips and prepares to explode directly into a run.

crouch, then explode at a roughly 45-degree angle toward your target while throwing your arms in the direction of travel. In the air, tuck your knees toward your torso as your body moves from an angle to more upright. Your arms will swing back behind you to help right your body in the air. As you begin to reach your landing area, spot the point of impact and extend your feet toward the surface, basically reversing the angle of takeoff with your legs while keeping your torso upright. This will put you in a V position with your upper-body angled forward in the direction of travel and your legs nearly perpendicular to this angle. The basics of all non-rolling landings apply: land on the balls of your feet and allow your knees and hips to flex to absorb the impact. The trick to sticking the landing is to adjust for the amount of forward momentum you will have by reaching ahead of your body with your feet, thus allowing your momentum to carry you to an upright position. As you land, it helps to swing your arms forward again to regain balance.

The precision jump is very committing and requires absolute focus on your point of landing once you start working up to smaller landing zones and larger gaps. This is its greatest strength, as I have experienced no other technique that works accuracy, focus, balance, coordination, and commitment better than the precision jump and all of its derivatives. Once you are able to confidently launch yourself toward a measly hand-railing from seven or eight feet and land with total control and balance, many other aspects of moving throughout your everyday environment will become much easier. That, in the end, is why we commit to the work that we put in day in and day out, and why incorporating parkour movements into your everyday fitness will help you reap its many varied benefits.



For the precision jump, assume the jump position, bend your knees, and swing your arms back.

As you reach the apex of your jump, tuck your knees and bring your arms back to right your body in the air.

As you approach the landing area, extend your legs toward the object and prepare to absorb your momentum and stand upright.

If your accuracy and balance are spot-on, you will be carried to your feet with perfect control to continue on your way.

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.

the CrossFit JOURNAL ARTICLES

Subscription info at http://store.crossfit.com
Feedback to feedback@crossfit.com