

# **The Aerial Hoop Manual**

## **Volume 1**

A step-by-step reference guide for teachers  
and students of any aerial lyra program

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**with Julianna Hane**

Photography by Matthew Leach  
and RED Creatives

## DISCLAIMER

This manual is not intended for a layperson to pick up and start learning on their own. All use (and misuse) of this manual is done so AT YOUR OWN RISK.

Check with your healthcare professional before inverting and going into positions that cause pressure to certain places on the body. For example, those with heart conditions and/or inner ear issues should not invert as it is a dangerous situation which can cause stroke, heart attack, dizzy spells, or further injury, including death. As with any exercise program, there is always a risk of injury. Also, working at any given height adds an increased risk of injury, including paralysis or death.

## A FAIR WARNING

While it is a hope that accidents are a fluke and never a trend, there has been an increased number of injuries on aerial apparatuses in the past few years.\* This is due in large part to a growing aerial community. By sheer statistics, the more people practicing the craft, the more injuries are likely to happen. However, it should be the goal of all practitioners to keep the number of injuries as low as possible. Due to a low number of experienced aerial teachers in ratio to the number of people learning aerial, a gap of knowledge and experience has developed. While experience cannot be rushed – it has to happen organically with time – you can immerse yourself in knowledge. This is part of the effort of these books, and the project of AerialDancing.com. Please take all safety warnings seriously and take things slow. While you can pile on knowledge, nothing replaces the wisdom that comes from experience, and this only comes with time.

*\*Source: Pure observation by being involved in the aerial community for a number of years.*

## BE SAFE

The top 10 safety precautions to heed:

1. Start by taking live lessons from a professional aerialist. Use this book for reference only.
2. Always check your rigging.
3. Always practice over a crash pad appropriate to the height level you are working at.
4. Never practice alone. Always have a spotter.
5. Always perform a solid warm-up prior to mounting an aerial apparatus.
6. Practice safe progression. (If you do not have the required strength, do not attempt the move.)
7. Don't make guesses. If you are not sure if something is going to "work," don't try it!
8. Focus on injury prevention exercises & proper shoulder placement early in your training.
9. Always practice new moves low to the ground. Better yet, perform there too!
10. Listen to your body. Take care of it and it will take care of you.

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This book may be purchased with bulk discounts. For information, send an e-mail to: [info@aerialdancing.com](mailto:info@aerialdancing.com).  
Corresponding video content is now available on [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com).

When practicing aerial hoop, always perform warm up exercises before attempting any individual exercises. Also, when practicing aerial hoop, always do so in the presence of a trained professional, with load-tested aerial equipment hanging from load-tested rigging, which has been set-up and inspected frequently by rigging professionals, along with crash pads underneath the hoop. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise program, especially one as rigorous as aerial hoop.

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this material, there is a real chance of injury in execution of the movements described in this book. The Publisher and all persons involved in the making of this manual will not accept responsibility for injury to any degree, including death, to any person as a result of participation in the activities described in this manual. Purchase or use of this document constitutes agreement to this effect. Furthermore, rigging of aerial equipment is not discussed in this manual. Consult a professional rigger when it comes to using any hanging equipment.

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# From the Authors

Dear Reader,

How I wish you could have been present for all the conversations Julianna and I had during the making of this book. We talked about so many ideas, but putting them all into this book would either overwhelm you or bore you to death. But I can assure you of our conclusions: There are a million and one ways to apply the knowledge that we present in this manual.

Sometimes our conversations centered around the differences between how the progressions make sense for a linear organization in a manual versus the progressions for teaching in the classroom. These are two very different ways of organizing material, and it is impossible to cover the latter in a book, since the way you teach this material will vary so widely depending on the background of the students. On that note, I would not be surprised if our next collaboration involved a book on aerial teaching philosophies. We have already incorporated many successful initiatives into our teaching styles, and Julianna has seen tremendous improvement in her retention rate.

Sometimes our conversations were about what the ideal aerial career looks like to each of us. Aerialists tend to make a living through either teaching or performing, but for many it is a mixture of both. Through the purchase of this book you have helped me come one step closer to my ultimate dream career. All of my profits after tax — of all of the manuals that I have written — are currently going into a fund that will build and open an aerial dance studio when the time is right. I had a small aerial dance studio once. It could not survive financially, and I long to have a studio that can. It was a gift to take the journey that I did because these manuals have been a part of it, but how I wish to just be an aerial teacher and choreographer once more!

Now here is how this book can be a gift to yourself: To really glean the magic of this book, you must put it into practice. Put the words on the page into your body. Make it come alive for

yourself. It is worth the time.

Of course have fun, but always play it safe so that you can continue dancing long into your old age. The only two injuries I have had in my last three decades of dancing have been on hoop. One injury happened years ago when I was being pressured under a director to perform to a level that my body was not at. My shoulder blade did a weird pop into my back rib cage, and years of physical therapy simply keep the pain at bay. The second injury was more recent: After the birth of my daughter, I was rushing back onto hoop, and didn't listen to my body like I should have. I was in the candlestick position and decided to let go against my inner voice telling me not to. My knee popped, and while it is healed, now and then I notice its weakness.

Getting injured has helped me be a better teacher because it has encouraged me to take a longer look at the risk factors of various moves. I have learned my lesson in the importance of listening. If I had done that, it would have prevented both of my injuries. The best safety lesson we can teach is listening to our bodies. Go slow. Some lessons will feel painfully slow to both the student and/or the teacher. Both of you just need a dose of patience, and have it with yourself as well as those who are a part of your journey. Some days you just need to rest, and stop when your body says stop.

Despite or perhaps because of the risks, the lyra is a powerful apparatus. It shows off flexibility and strength in ways unlike any other apparatus. It can also show off pure gracefulness. Pick a move, start spinning and you have yourself your first piece!

I have my own reasons for why I enjoy working with the lyra, but I also want you to hear from Julianna. While she started out loving fabric and scared to death of hoop, now the lyra is her "aerial home." She has a great passion for it,

which her students get to enjoy learning from. Her comments and reflections about how to teach aerial hoop have been a great help to me throughout this process. I turn you over to her now, to hear more about her story:

*"I was a dedicated fabric person for several years, having taught all levels and performed in a variety of venues. After all, everyone loves fabric, right? It's impressive, fluid, graceful, and soft. I had little interest in hoop because it gave me bruises and felt unstable. How could I possibly like an apparatus that doesn't mold to my body? It just didn't make sense to me.*

*Aerial dance pulls at my heartstrings because it combines grace with daring. I've always wanted to be a more daring person. I tend to be quite shy. So while I avoided the most frightening apparatus for a while, a mentor came along (Tandy Beal) and suggested I try hoop because it seemed like a good fit for my body.*

*I trained briefly with a Russian coach (Elena Pano-va) who made me to do some pretty scary moves. There was no questioning her authority - I just had to do what she told me. And that was the most amazing gift. I wasn't allowed to think or over-think - just do and do again. Let go, reach, catch. It was a simple existence that forced me out of my head and into the moment.*

*Learning to work the spin was another beast. I wanted/needed to gain more control over the spin. So another teacher (Aimee Hancock) told me to let go of my agenda and let the spin lead me. Wait... I'm supposed to be in control, right?*

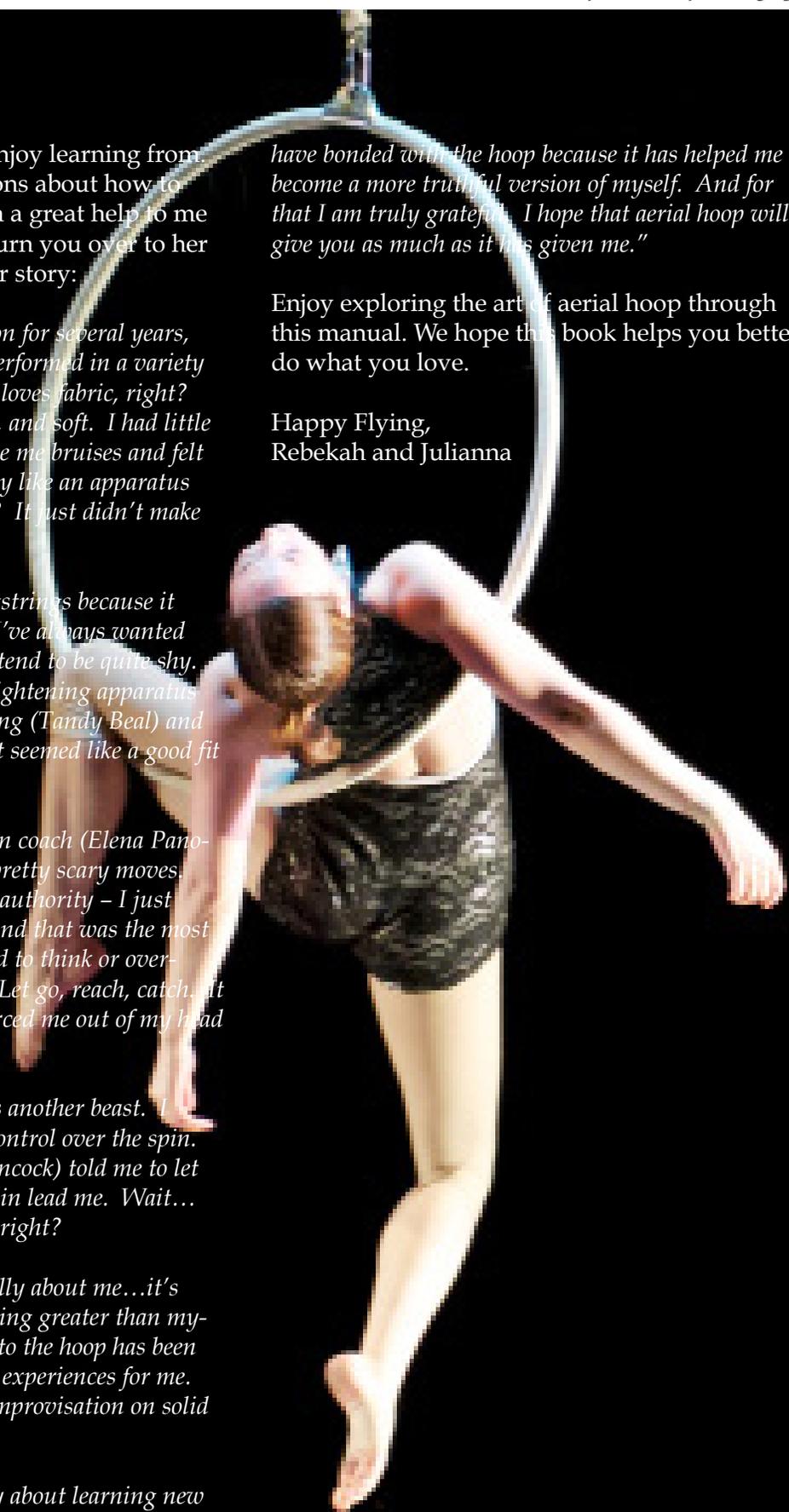
*But then I realized it's not really about me...it's about connecting with something greater than myself. The practice of listening to the hoop has been one of the most mind-blowing experiences for me. Practicing yoga and contact improvisation on solid ground has also helped.*

*For me, aerial hoop isn't really about learning new skills...it's about learning to live life a little better. I*

*have bonded with the hoop because it has helped me become a more truthful version of myself. And for that I am truly grateful. I hope that aerial hoop will give you as much as it has given me."*

Enjoy exploring the art of aerial hoop through this manual. We hope this book helps you better do what you love.

Happy Flying,  
Rebekah and Julianna



# Introduction

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The term *lyra* is an abbreviation of the original way the aerial hoop was advertised in the 1890's, as a "lyric hoop." The word lyric is a synonym of lyrical. It means the object – whether it is a poem, a short story or in this case an aerial apparatus – is being used to express one's emotions in an imaginative and beautiful way. The purpose of this manual is to give you the tools to do just that.

Whether you are just beginning the lyrical hoop or are a seasoned aerialist, I hope the pages of this book bring a splash of something refreshing and new for you to explore. Whether your background is in dance or the circus, this book is meant for you. This manual brings together the best of both worlds in a series that doesn't require too much contortyness, too much superhuman strength, nor does it require knowledge of ballet, etc. You just need to be in good physical condition, be ready to gain some proud battle wounds (a bruise or two), and be ready to have a good time.

## About this book

This book is written both for students and teachers. Students will find an excellent resource to help them remember what they have learned in class, and teachers might find a new way of explaining a move, a new tip to give out during class, or find a move to teach that they had almost forgotten about, etc. Since this manual is directed to both teachers and students simultaneously, you will notice that we flip flop between intended audience from one paragraph to the next; however, the overall voice of the book is as if the reader is a student, new to the material. We find it is helpful to speak as if to a student even if the intended audience is a teacher because then a teacher learns how to speak to a student. Occasionally, we will speak directly to teachers, but we also acknowledge that it is all one continuum at the end of the day.

*The Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 1* is written as an introduction to the lyrical hoop. It includes both beginning and intermediate foundational moves. Almost all moves described in this volume can be adapted for either a single point or double point hoop. The moves are more specific to the type of hoop in *The Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 2*, where we explore the terrain on the top bar and above the hoop. Volume 2 contains more advanced movement in the lyrical hoop, as well as alterations and more transitional options between the foundational moves.

In the block below the title for each move, you will find prerequisites as well as information about that move or family of moves. It is not safe to attempt a move for which you do not yet have the strength or background understanding to complete. Following the prerequisites can help reduce risk of injury. You will also find other boxes that include short articles that will support your learning or teaching of this apparatus. And finally, at the end of the movement, you may see an exit box, guiding you towards an exit possibility. However, the most recommended exit for all moves is the retrograde whenever possible.

*Retrograde* is a term in dance meaning to rewind or reverse a phrase of movement. To develop strength both physically and mentally, we recommend practicing as many moves as possible using a retrograde exit. A retrograde exit uses critical thinking, spatial intelligence, and body strength to execute it. It also helps reinforce learning. Students will know the moves backwards and forwards! Simply follow the pictures and steps backwards to find your way back to your starting point. Sometimes there are other exit possibilities that make sense in addition to the retrograde, or at times in lieu of, and we highlight these in purple boxes.

## Transitional Progression

Aerial dance teaching involves different processes to guide students in two core areas: 1) moving functionally on the apparatus, which includes strength, flexibility, coordination, and spatial awareness, and 2) expanding one's expressive range. The first five chapters of this manual address the function of moving into and out of shapes/poses on the hoop. Each chapter is generally organized from beginning to more advanced movement. When you first begin learning (or teaching a new student), pick a little from the beginning of each chapter, with the exception of the last chapter. Once this foundation has been established, students are ready to move on to the transitions addressed in the last chapter.

When first learning the lyrical hoop, straightforward transitions are best. Once you have a solid foundation of basic skills, shift your focus to transitions before adding new moves to your repertoire. This statement reflects our teaching/choreographic philosophy of exploration beyond traditional moves, but we ask you to consider it. Transitions can transform a relatively simply beginning sequence into an intermediate or advanced piece. The mark of a professional performer is hidden in the transitions!

Transitions are the essence of dance because they involve continuous motion and flow. Transitions enable "beginner" skills to become "intermediate" by changing the way movements are connected together in sequence. In many cases, teachers feel the need to offer new and different moves in each class. If you find yourself in this camp, consider incorporating transitions into your classes to not only amp up the creativity, but to also dive into a new level of complexity. Direct routes between poses may fall into the beginner category, but indirect routes present a greater challenge to the intermediate/advanced student.

To clarify the progression from beginning to advanced sequencing, consider the ways that moves are performed at varying levels of learning:

*Beginning:* Teachers offer a clear and specific sequence of actions that arrive in a still shape (which is often the name of the move, i.e. lion in a tree). Students who master the move may then be asked to perform several moves in sequence, but the connections between the moves are based on the original actions taught keeping the lesson simple and clear. This way of moving is similar to yoga in that each still pose has a basic movement entrance and a basic movement exit.

*Intermediate:* Rather than focusing solely on one route to get to a still shape, students can try multiple routes or transitions to connect moves. Teachers can even create movement problems for students to solve. For example, students could seek transitions between two simple moves that may not fit together so obviously (i.e. inside lion to outside lion).

*Advanced:* Advanced aerial dancers move beyond the predictable pattern of actions arriving in still shapes. They surprise the audience with variations in phrasing by using stillness in unusual places, as well as action in places you might expect stillness. Phrasing also involves building up energy, dying down, or emphasizing the middle of a phrase of movement. We talk a bit more about phrasing in chapter four of this manual.

To better understand the transitional flow discussed in this chapter (and throughout the manual), we are in the process of creating video content that will be available soon on AerialDancing.com.

# Aerial Hoop Terminology

Defining spatial orientation on aerial hoop by using the outer environment is a daunting task. If you work with a swivel, one minute you're facing east and the next you're facing west. As a result, we have chosen to use the body's direct relationship to the hoop and gravity as a way of describing how to execute each move from a spatial perspective. To keep it simple, we have chosen to map out the hoop using the following terms:

**Plumb Line:** The vertical line of the hoop from top to bottom. This technique is used in the construction industry to make sure walls line up with the pull of gravity. There are other terms that are used in the aerial hoop world such as "on-axis" and "off-axis." These terms are helpful when you explore spinning and swinging. For example, if you pull the apparatus off-axis and then leave the ground, you will swing. It is hard to cover topics such as swinging and spinning in a book of still pictures, so we use these terms sparingly.

**Horizon Line:** The horizontal line directly in the middle of the hoop that connects the left and right sides. This will be helpful when naming poses such as "horizon splits outside the hoop." The word horizon in the title tells you that it is on the horizon line of the hoop.

**Clock image:** Imagine that there are numbers on your hoop that match the face of an analog clock. We will often describe body placement using numbers to add specificity. For example:

- 6 o'clock is the bottom of the hoop
- 12 o'clock is the top of the hoop
- 3 o'clock is the right side
- 9 o'clock is the left side

A combination of numbers like "10 and 2" might describe hand placements.

**Parallel:** This refers to the body position where the hips are lined up alongside the hoop.

**Profile:** This refers to the body position where the hips may be perpendicular, or the body relative to the hoop. Just remember how you would pose if someone was drawing your profile.

In dance, movement can be divided into two categories: action, and stillness. In most cases, an aerial hoop "move" requires the aerialist to move until he/she reaches a still pose or shape. In other cases, the "move" is really about continuous flow and has no still destination. In this manual, we will discuss both types of moves and refer to them as either static or dynamic (to borrow from the rock climbing field). Here are the origins of these terms.

**Static climbing** refers to slow, careful shifts of weight from one foot or hand to the other. When applied to aerial dance, static movement refers to careful shifts of weight from one pose or shape to another (example: lion in a tree).

**Dynamic climbing** refers to using bursts of power that propel the body to new holds using momentum and release. The application to aerial dance is the same – dynamic aerial movement uses momentum and release to create a continuous flow (example: long hang beats).

We highly recommend seasoning your classroom environment with movement terminology that makes sense to you and is consistent throughout your curriculum. The goal is communication, and as long as everyone can understand, mission accomplished!

## Families of Movement

There are two main ways of classifying poses on any apparatus: by shape or by relationship of the apparatus to the body. Shape depends heavily on the position of the arms and legs extended into space. For example, a straddle is a shape. You can perform a straddle in many different locations on a hoop. We have pictured a few straddles here in the blue box.

Notice how each straddle pictured is in a different location on the hoop. In this manual, the families of movement will have more reliance on location to define the family than shape. So each of these straddles, while similar in shape, will be found in different movement families. For example, the straddle in the lower right corner is in the back balance family. (This pose is commonly referred to as straddle back balance. This name includes both the shape as well as the movement family.)

In each movement family, there are many shapes that can be created. For example, the concept of the

back balance family is that the sacrum rests on the hoop at 6 o'clock. From here, there are many options. We show a few examples in the magenta box below. These variations are covered in chapter five; however, like



many of the movement families covered in this manual, the archetypal pose is covered in detail, and then variations are shown for you to explore. It would be redundant to cover each variation individually. They all share the same fundamental ideas found in the archetypal pose. You will see detailed steps in how to get into one main pose, then the rest is for you to explore.

One idea that is fun to play with is finding the “edge” of the movement. It is about circling and reaching the limbs through space to see where and how you can move but still remain in a particular movement family. The reason it is preferable to think in terms of movement families rather than individual poses, is that it allows the flow element to be found much more readily.

When you think about the back balance as a place to move rather than a position, it now becomes a place that is ripe with qualitative movement possibilities, rather than a set of quantitative poses to move between. This philosophy gives value to even weird, unusual positions that might normally be ignored. The possibilities become infinite rather than finite; the goal is now action rather than stillness. The students can feel more ownership over the positions they choose, rather than feeling like they must conform to a single, correct pose. It opens up a world, rather than shuts any door. This is the beauty of movement families.

The lyra is unique in the world of aerial apparatuses because it is circular, opening a world of rotational equivalences that exist on no other apparatus. When learning, we separate moves into the categories of “lower bar” and “top bar.” This helps make learning simple and easy to follow. However, once the vocabulary is established, the next progression is to think rotationally.

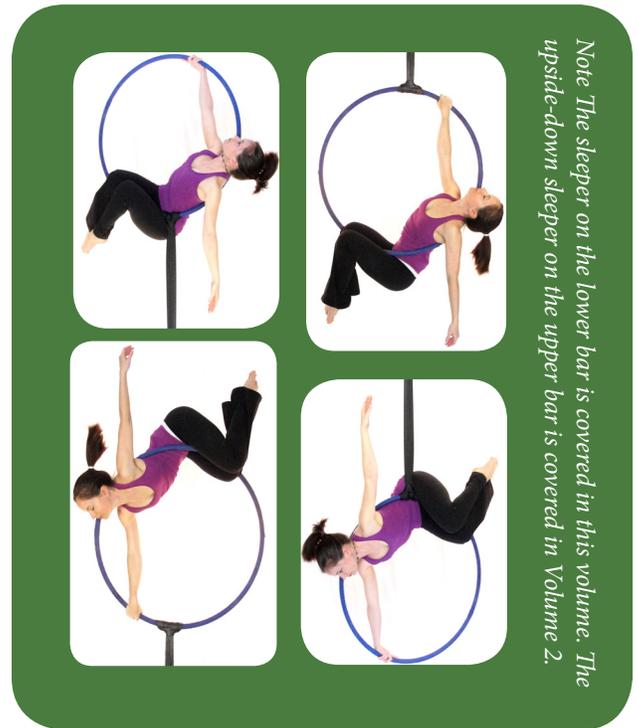
For each new pose you create, challenge yourself to change the degree on the hoop with which you do the movement. You can scoot this way and that, or you may take it up along the “side bar” or rotate it completely around! Below is an example of a shape that has been rotated 180 degrees (and flipped). The hoop always maintains the same position relative to the body, so it remains in the same movement category in that respect. If the hoop didn’t have a span set, would you be able to tell which pictures are right side up and which have been turned upside-down? Is your brain hurting yet? This is one of Rebekah’s favorite choreographic challenges to explore, mainly because she likes brain teasers, but also because this line of logic often leads to new poses to explore. Some moves feel impossible to rotate, but then others can produce gems of movement.

Rotational families are different than the basic families of movement that stay at one location, such as the back balance example we covered a moment ago. As you rotate, the shape category remains the same; the hoop remains the same relative to the body, but the body’s relationship with gravity changes. What is different about these moves is internal: different muscles are at work in each position.

The mathematician in me enjoys seeing these equivalences. If you were to remove gravity (and the span set), there would be nothing to separate these two moves. In some modes of movement philosophy, it makes sense to separate these moves, but in other ways, it makes sense to clump them. These ideas are not covered extensively in this manual series, but we wanted to present the thoughts and ideas to you here to add challenge to your aerial practice when you are ready to take it to the next level of analysis.

Creativity comes as you explore not only the variations with a family, but the rotational equivalences as well. It is about classifying, not by name, but by position relative to the hoop, by shape, or by degree of rotation so that you can understand and start to “read” aerial moves. Once you understand equivalences, you can take a movement that is familiar and rotate it, flip it, or translate it to a new apparatus and have something new out of something old. Or change the variations of movement right where you’re at. It is this kind of problem solving that launches you into complex choreography.

The best thing we can do for our aerial students is to get them to think beyond each pose. This is accomplished not by giving all the answers and showing them every pose anyone has ever invented, but by training them how to ask the questions that inventors and choreographers ask. If someone believes they lack creativity, it is simply because no one has shown them how it can be learned. It is something we can teach. The process contains valued treasures of problem solving and critical thinking. This is what we hope to impart to the next generation of aerial dancers: spur-of-the-moment creativity can be inspired and systematical creativity can be taught. Creativity is a “muscle” you must learn to flex.



## Moving Forward

As the aerial community works to classify the various poses and movements possible in aerial work, each apparatus presents its own set of unique challenges. Much of my own theory includes more questions than answers, but that's part of the point. It's not about having the answers, it's about finding the right questions to pose and then discovering more every time you look for the answers. At this point in the game, the goal is to create systems of thought that can be taught in order to help students navigate the choreography and "creating-new-moves" terrain.

## Unification Theory

In abstract algebra (which is a fabulous math class to take in college), there is something called *isomorphisms*. It is a beautiful concept. Here's how Wikipedia elaborates on it without getting too "mathy" on you (however, you'll still have to read slowly to let it sink in):

*"Isomorphisms are studied in mathematics in order to extend insights from one phenomenon to others: if two objects are isomorphic, then any property that is preserved by an isomorphism and that is true of one of the objects, is also true of the other. If an isomorphism can be found from a relatively unknown part of mathematics into some well studied division of mathematics, where many theorems are already proved, and many methods are already available to find answers, then the function can be used to map whole problems out of unfamiliar territory over to 'solid ground' where the problem is easier to understand and work with."*

They should have changed the "solid ground" in the above definition to "free air space" and you'd get the idea! One part of aerial theory is about finding and exploring all of the isomorphisms, (which you can think of as equivalences), between apparatuses. If you've worked on more than one aerial apparatus, you've probably already made the observation that there are many overlapping movement ideas. For example, you can do a straddle back balance on fabric, on a trapeze, on a lyra, etc. Experienced aerialists can hop on any apparatus, traditional or invented, and automatically have a wide range of vocabulary simply because the underlying fundamentals are very similar.

The way in which you approach aerial hoop will directly depend on your movement background. Julianna and I had some "ah-ha" moments when the most logical transition for each of us were strikingly rooted in our backgrounds. Julianna choose the movement that took her front to back because that's how she does it on trapeze, and I naturally picked the way that was more twisty and winding because that's how I perform it on fabric. It can be more intuitive to go from trapeze to hoop than fabric to hoop since trapeze and hoop are both "hard bars", but both progressions work!

In many ways, the fabric sling operates like a soft trapeze. It is a fun exercise to translate work from hoop to sling, or the other way around. Sometimes, it is helpful for students to learn the mechanics of a new movement on the sling before getting on a hoop or trapeze, due to the forgiveness of fabric. These are all modes of teaching to explore as you build your own learning/teaching philosophy. We highly recommend working on multiple apparatuses at the same time to get the taste for the comparison. While they share similarities, it's fun to find the flavor and feel of each pose on each apparatus. You are likely to have one apparatus that connects more with you than others. This is your aerial home. And you are likely to have others that stretch you as a performer and as a person. Work both in and out of your comfort zone, both in aerial and in life.



# Chapter One: The Foundation

*New to hoop? Don't be afraid!  
Just learn where to place your shoulder blade.*

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As you approach teaching or learning hoop for the first time, your highest priority should be safety and injury prevention. This is why the teaching of proper shoulder placement is crucial. Other safety precautions include inspecting your rigging, and practicing over a mat whenever your feet leave the ground. The more height = bigger mat needed. Next, always work with a spotter. For some reason, kids like to give spotters lots of practice by purposely falling off into their arms. But in all reality, the main job of a spotter should not be catching people. Spotters can help share a person's weight in a position, such as in the knee hang, where it is helpful to have a spotter hold under the shoulders (see more in chapter 2). Spotters can also hold the hoop to make sure it doesn't go flying off when a sudden shift in weight distribution takes place, and they can steady a spinning hoop. They are the outside eyes of the operation. Talented spotters see danger long before injury happens, and can help prevent an accident with verbal cues or physical assistance.

Another safety tool is using proper progressions. Teach modifications and easier moves before teaching more challenging moves. It can be dangerous to try a move before your body is ready. An example of good progression technique is to start students on a low hoop. You would think this would be common sense, but when people are teaching unprofessionally, they will often just teach the "cool" and "grandiose" moves, completely skipping steps. We recently encountered some students who had a large vocabulary of advanced moves on hoop, but knew very little of basic, fundamental movements. They were thankful for instruction that emphasized proper progressions.

Be at the height of your sensory awareness so that the hoop does not surprise you with any sudden movements, etc. We cover "steering the hoop" in this chapter which helps you gain familiarity with your hoop. Always respect the risks of the hoop. It is made of steel (or other hard metals), and it freely gives bruises. There's hoop pain, and then there's injury pain. As Jerusha "Juice" Horlick puts it, "We smile through hoop pain because it is just so gosh-darn beautiful, but injury pain we avoid." Take care of your body so that it can always help you fly.

Once you have your hoop safely rigged over a mat, a spotter/teacher, a respect for the hoop, and a knowledge about using proper progressions as well as other injury prevention methods, you are ready to begin experiencing hoop. This chapter gives you a place to start. The two most fundamental "moves" to teach are: grip technique and shoulder placement. After that, we have a smattering of fundamental exercises in the following categories: hoop control, conditioning, body awareness, and exploration. A few of these exercises do require the students to know basic mounts, but if you have a low hoop, that mount is simply pulling up onto the hoop like you would get onto a swing at the park. And it should be just as fun, if not more so. :)

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# Grip Holds

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Ready to build  
calluses

**About this move:** The grip test will put your hands to the test, so take care of those hands. Our favorite hand treatments include ice after a long workout (a cold beverage works well), and holding wet black tea bags. The tea tans the skin and makes it thicker like leather. Hold the tea bags for five minutes per hand, and repeat as often as you like. On the flip side, you can use lotion to soften calluses - just not while you are in class!

## GET A GRIP ON GRIP

Gripping a metal hoop can cause discomfort at first. The skin at the top of the palm will fold under creating pressure and building calluses. (For that reason, it is best to remove all rings.) The good news is that our bodies are adaptable, and you can get used to the grip. It is also completely normal to get a “flash pump” in the forearms from gripping the hoop over periods of time (the term “flash pump” is borrowed from rock climbing – the arms build up lactic acid suddenly and become unusable). Drop the hands and shake the arms out to relieve some of the pressure.

To help reduce forearm soreness: Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Make fists, roll them under towards you, then out and extend hands forward, opening up towards the ceiling, and extend your fingers. Repeat slowly for several minutes. Add this exercise into your warm up routine to help build stamina. Also, drink plenty of water (and make sure you are getting all your needed nutrients) to keep all your muscles in peak working condition.



### Overhand Grip

Hold onto the hoop with the knuckles facing you and fingertips facing away. Always wrap the thumbs under the bar. Your hands may be at varying distances apart depending on what move you are preparing for. The wider you hold your hands on a hoop, the more stress can be placed on the wrist from gripping the curve. Other factors also come into play such as having a smaller hoop, where the curvature is greater.

On the hoop, it is the default grip for moves that are in the hoop/on the top bar (i.e. moves above the horizon line where the concavity is downwards). In below the hoop moves, you are more likely to see an underhand grip being used amongst dancers.

*Training Tip:* Pull ups are a great way to build your grip strength and vice versa. They go hand in hand.

### Underhand Grip

Hold onto the hoop with fingertips facing you and the knuckles facing away. Wrap thumbs under the bar.

You may find this grip to be your personal preference for moves under the bar due to less wrist strain. It also allows you to use your biceps, which makes this method easier. Just make sure to work both grip methods so that you will be ready for all movements.

### Alternating Grip

Standing profile to the hoop, hold onto the hoop so that your hands face different directions.

Once you have hand grips conquered, you can play with letting go with one hand. Practice a little bit of weight transfer at a time. Gradually work up to holding all your weight on one hand.

*(From hanging on two hands)* When you let go with one hand, one of two things might happen: your hoop spins or you spin. Because of the swivel, it's typically the hoop.

## MORE ON GRIP

While we are on the subject of gripping the hoop, let's talk about how to avoid the yucky stickiness that often comes from taping the hoop. There are a couple tricks to the trade: (1) Buy tape that is zinc-oxide free. You can get this type from medical supply places. It typically only comes in white, so you'll have to be lax with this rule if you want color. (2) Always tape up your hoop from bottom to top. If you were to tape in reverse, then the tape will roll downwards and get really sticky when you grab it. Also, feel free to use chalk. This can help when your hands are hot, tired, and/or sweaty.

When you are hanging out below the hoop, grip ultimately comes down to personal preference. When you look at the pictures throughout this manual, you will notice both grips being used interchangeably. The pull over to hip hang is a classic example of a move where about half of the hoop community prefers overhand and the other half prefers underhand, and we have reflected that fact in our picture-taking.

The dancers who prefer overhand may have been trained by an aerial school that teaches trapeze and prefers to keep technique consistent across all bar work. The overhand grip is harder and it gives you much needed strength training. Do not neglect it, even if your preference is underhand.

In certain moves, the wrong grip choice could be dangerous. For example, when you are executing a knee hang on the top bar, an underhand grip would be unsafe. It does not provide the same control as overhand, and it could tweak your wrists, leading to injury. This is especially true during the learning process. When you see advanced performers breaking rules, keep in mind they have the strength to do so.

As you move around the hoop, notice where you grab and how you are shifting your weight. Grabbing with both hands on the side of a single point hoop will make it tip whereas grabbing the side of a double tabbed hoop will not make it tip as easily. However, if you hold at the top of a double tabbed hoop, be careful. It could surprise you with a sudden tip of the hoop.

No matter what hoop you are on, always notice the relationship of tipping around the tabbed points (one or two). The hoop as a whole will tend to move away from weight. When you put weight on the very top of a double tabbed hoop, you can tip it so that the hoop flies forward. If the tabs are far enough apart, then the hoop can flip entirely upside-down. For this reason, it is more stable to have tabs closer together, but you have to balance this with some other considerations. You need your hips to be able to fit between the tabs, and you may also want room for your hands. The more "tippy" you want your hoop to be, the farther those tabs should be.



### One Hand Grip Low

Place one hand at the center of the bottom bar (6 o'clock). Engage the shoulder and core so the entire body supports the position. Straighten the legs and arms, using the feet on the ground to take some of the weight.



### One Hand Grip High

Hold high on a single or double tabbed point hoop. Notice how the hoop tips in the direction of the applied weight. Also note that your grip changes from overhand to underhand as you rotate around the hoop.



# Shoulder Positioning

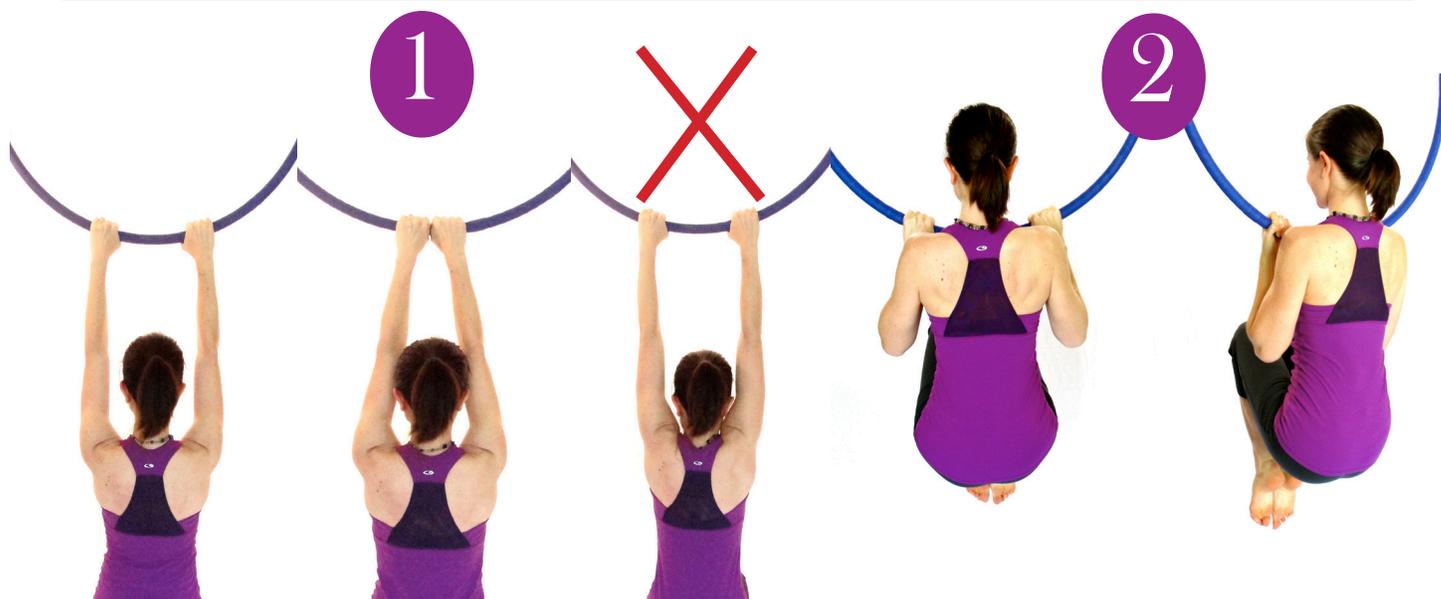
**Prerequisite(s):**  
Grip Holds

**About this move:** The rotator cuff is full of tiny muscles that allow your shoulder to rotate in circular pathways. When hanging in unsupported positions (shoulders elevated), all the body weight falls onto the tiny muscles. To recruit the larger muscles of the upper and middle back (rhomboids and latissimus dorsi), engage your shoulders by drawing them together and pressing them downward away from your ears.

## PROGRESSION EXERCISES: 0 % - 100% OF WEIGHT

Always engage the shoulders from the base of the scapulae (shoulder blades). To progress incrementally, try taking only half of your weight onto your hands. Maintain some pressure through the legs into the ground. When you are ready, take a little more weight. Only take as much weight as you can manage with fully engaged shoulders.

One game that Rebekah likes to play with students is “Am I touching the ground with my feet?” She places something in front of her legs so that no one can see whether or not her feet are on the floor and then she has the students guess whether her feet are lifted or not. The activity demonstrates the skill that we want all students to desire - of being able to have such neutrally-reinforced shoulders that the moment of lift off is blended seamlessly into ground work.



### Straight Arm Hang

Hold the hoop using an overhand grip with hands at most shoulder width apart (you can have them closer but typically not farther). Engage the shoulders and straighten the arms. Depending on the height of your hoop, you may need to bend the knees and sink the hips as if sitting in a chair.

*Leg Lifts:* As long as you have the proper shoulder engagement, you can also try lifting your legs off the ground. If you are truly engaged with your core, it will not be impossible to lift your legs. Work your way up to performing a straight leg straddle exercise with straight arms. But start with what is comfortable.

*Training Tip:* Exploring rotator cuff exercises is an excellent supplement to build shoulder strength and prevent injury. Google “Thrower’s Ten” for some great exercises from the physical therapy community on how to focus on the rotator cuff.

### Bent Arm Hang

Practice using the grip of your preference. Engage the shoulders, then bend the arms until the shoulders reach hand height. Tuck the legs into a ball and hold the position. Don’t forget to breathe.

When you have conquered this position, try straightening the legs. See if you can start to head your toes over your head and through the hoop. Perform a combination of bent and straight leg exercises.

*Cross Training Tip:* Do handstands and lots of them. They are the perfect complimentary exercise to the movement you are doing here in the shoulders. (Put your feet on a chair to modify.)

# Warm Up Stretches & Exercises

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Proper Shoulder  
Positioning

**About this move:** A proper warm up is key to a successful workout. Always include a ground warm up prior to getting on an aerial apparatus and then progress the warm up onto the apparatus. The following are a few exercises and stretches to add into your warm up routine after the ground warm up that gets your blood flowing, raises your heart rate & temperature, and gets the breath moving.

## Pull Up in Lunge

Using a lunge is the perfect way to give your muscles just a fraction of total body weight, allowing you to focus on proper shoulder positioning as you squeeze up and down through the pull up motion. This is a great precursor to full pull ups, which we cover in the coming pages.



## SHOULDER STRETCH WITH SPAN SET

Grab a spare span set, rope, towel, or whatever you have lying around, and use it to gently stretch the shoulders. In the first exercise (pictured left), use the span set to pull your hand down along the spine. Keep the pelvis tucked under to help avoid arching the lower back. In the second stretch, pull the hand towards the ceiling. It won't take much to feel these stretches.



## SHOULDER STRETCH (FORWARD FOLD)

Notice there are two stretches different here. In the picture on the left, the stretch is more in the shoulders because the belly is pulled in. In the picture on the right, the belly has been released, allowing the back to arch. This stretch can be felt more through the back and hamstrings, as well as the shoulders. The more you hinge at the waist, the more intense the stretch. You must use extra caution in the second stretch so that you do not force the shoulders beyond their limit. Always keep space in the back ribs so that you avoid the shoulder blades digging into the back in unsafe ways. Use a safe balance of these two stretches, picking whichever one is applicable for the day and your body's needs.



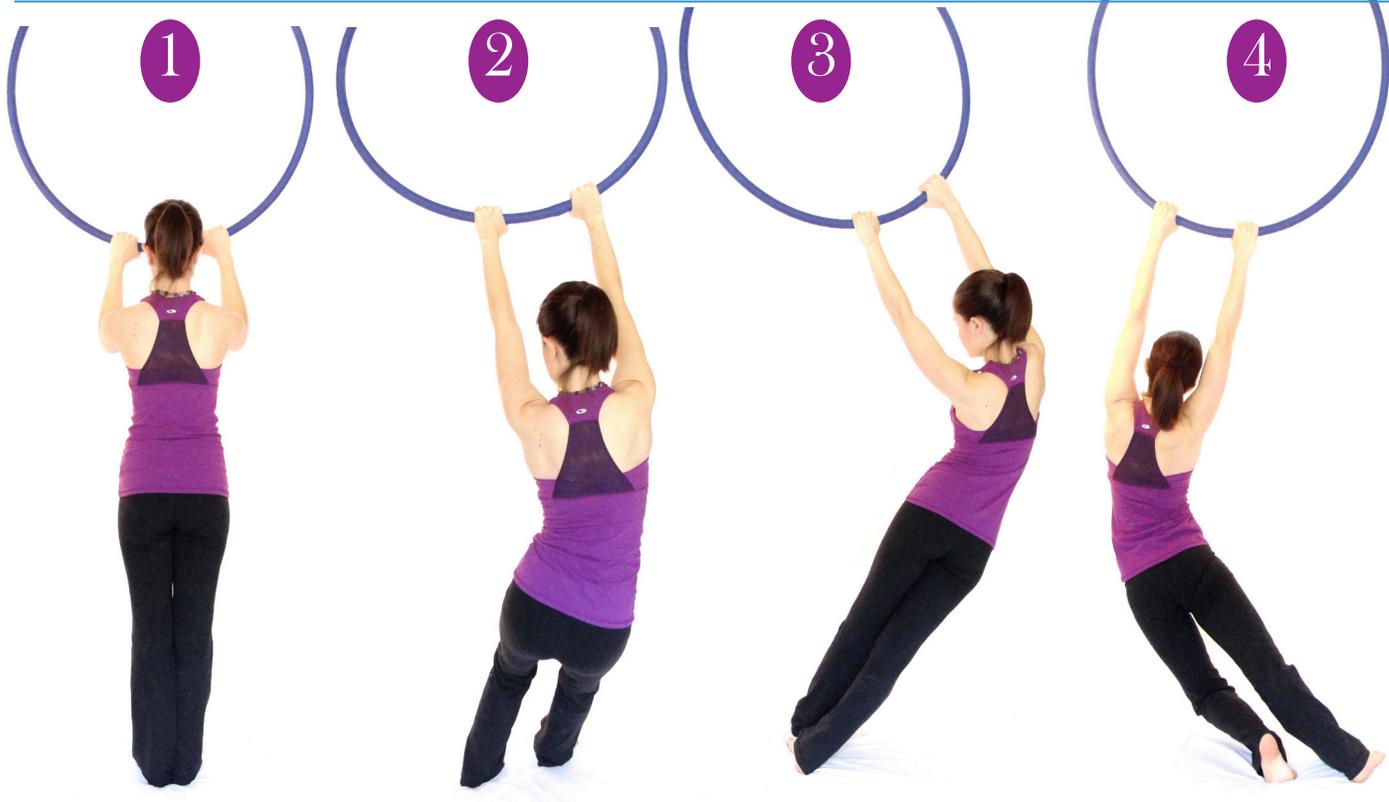
## Washboard Abs

This exercise is an excellent way to practice core engagement, especially as it connects to the work being done in the shoulders. Begin by leaning slightly forward on your hoop while standing up on your toes. Press the hoop forward with your body inclined at an angle. The more you lean forward, the harder the move will be. Keep the belly pulled in, shoulders pressed down and back. Press the hands towards the ground to come back to the start position. Repeat as desired.

# Pulling Taffy & Sweet Spot Exercises

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Proper Shoulder  
Positioning

**About this move:** *This warm up comes from single-point dance trapeze, but it works well on hoop. The purpose is to provide a flexible warm-up that both engages and lengthens muscles in a variety of angles. It also provides an improvisational element to the warm up. This exercise is thoughtful, and must be performed slowly with concentration. For that reason, it is a good way to get the energy of a group focused.*



## Pulling Taffy

Grip the hoop on either the lower bar or the upper bar if the hoop is low enough. Engage the shoulders, bend the knees, and soften in the hip joint to release your weight downward. Plant your feet underneath the anchor point. Gently push in different directions with your feet, allowing your body to lengthen and stretch.

## Sweet Spot

*Another single-point dance trapeze warm up includes finding the “sweet spot.” This spot on the ground is the center point under the apparatus. If you have hit the center of the target with your feet, you should spin slowly for an infinite amount of time without needing to adjust your feet. This technique can give you a wealth of choreographic options.*

Stand under the hoop using any grip. Engage the shoulders, bend the knees, and soften the hip joints. Plant your feet in what you think is the center directly beneath the anchor point. While maintaining the same body position during the entire exercise, allow your body to pivot around the center point. As you progress into more advanced spinning on hoop, this awareness will be invaluable. It can be frustrating to start a spin when you are not directly over your sweet spot—it makes you go all wonky—which could be the choreographic choice, but it’s never fun when it’s unintentional.

Note that if your weight is not directly on the sweet spot when you pull your weight off the ground, you will start to swing. It takes practice and control to be able to lift your feet off of the ground without moving the hoop. Keep this awareness each time you mount the hoop. See if you can make the moment your feet leave the ground be a moment that no one notices because the transition is so smooth. Unless of course, your intention is to swing. In that case, pull the hoop off axis, and off you go!

# Pull Ups & Lock Offs

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Ready to build calluses, grip strength and biceps

**About this move:** Pull ups involve the motion of lifting the body to a bent arm position. Lock offs are a static position where the body is held with bent arms at varying degrees. Pull ups can cause tendonitis if overdone or performed incorrectly. To avoid this problem, always finish your pull ups with slightly bent elbows. Also do as many push ups as you do pull ups to maintain push and pull muscle balance.

## ABOUT LOCK OFFS

A lock off is a term from rock climbing that is defined by the following action: “Grip a single handhold with enough strength to allow the other hand to shift to a new handhold.” Since rock climbing often involves asymmetrical moves, locking off involves just one arm to get the other one ready for action. In aerial dance, we have adapted the term to include both arms. You can lock off the arms to prepare the rest of the body for movement. You can lock off at different points within the pull-up range: 45 degrees, 90 degrees, 135 degrees, and 180 degrees.



### Pull Ups

Pull ups can often be more accessible when sitting in the hoop because the arms are already bent almost to the top of the pull up range. The bottom bar acts as a seat to catch your hips when you lose steam. Practice pulling your body weight up and off of the bottom bar. Use your back strength as much as possible. (Remember everything you learned about shoulder positioning and apply it here!)

Pull ups on the top bar are the perfect time to start the critical conversation about the core involvement. In this exercise, keeping your core engaged means that if your elbows bend even half an inch, your hips will lift the exact same amount. If your core goes soft, it is possible to bend the elbows at the start of the pull up while the hips remain on the hoop. In this case, you know the core is not engaged properly. Have the student re-start the exercise. For beginner students, this is an excellent exercise.

You can also do pull ups below the hoop using a chair to assist (*photos 3 & 4*). Having your feet on the ground will take some of the weight off making the pull up easier, but don't rely too heavily on your legs! Practice pull ups in this position with hands in either overhand or underhand or alternate between both.

**Challenge:** Holding onto one wrist, try a one arm pull up with the feet supporting you in either a chair or a lunge position.

### Lock Offs

Hold the body in a pull up position. When sitting in the hoop, you can practice from 90 degrees and above to develop your pull-up range.

**Body Awareness:** Notice how the hoop shifts slightly when you pull more with one arm than the other. You may discover that one side of your body is significantly stronger than the other, in which case it will be important for you to strengthen your weaker side before practicing more advanced moves.

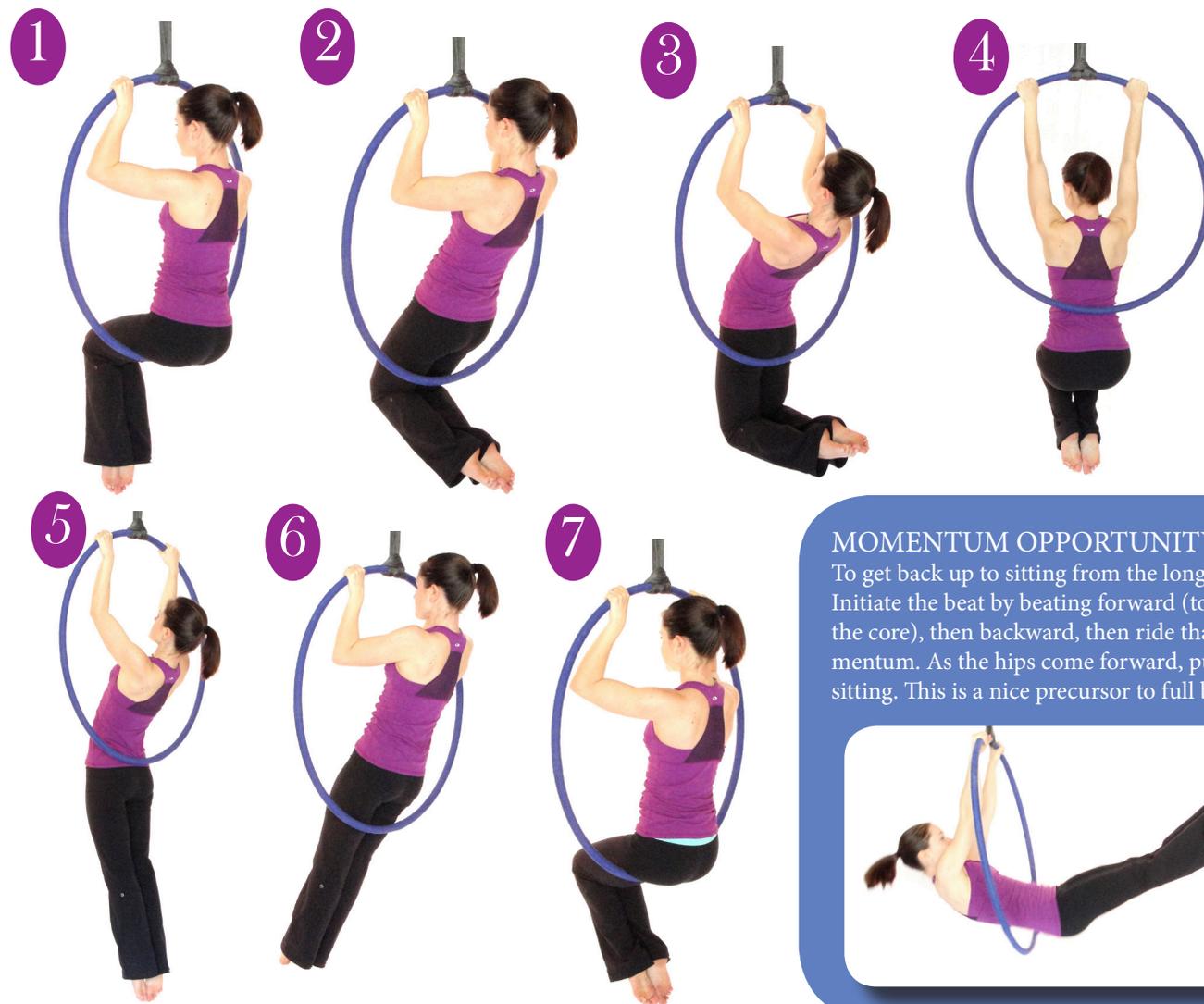
Now go do your push ups!

# Long Hang on Top Bar

## Prerequisite(s):

Pull ups

**About this move:** This move is easy to enter, but difficult to exit. Remember our advice in the introduction about not starting a move that you do not have the strength to complete? Here's a good place to put that to practice. If you cannot do a pull up yet, then you are going to get stuck in your long hang! Make sure to follow prerequisite guidelines, and have a spotter just in case.



## MOMENTUM OPPORTUNITY

To get back up to sitting from the long hang: Initiate the beat by beating forward (to engage the core), then backward, then ride that momentum. As the hips come forward, pull up to sitting. This is a nice precursor to full beats.



## Long Hang & Pull Ups on Top Bar

Start seated in the hoop. (Note: If you are on a double tabbed hoop, place your hands on the outside of the tabs to avoid flipping the hoop up and away when the bottom is de-weighted.) Pull up slightly to bring your hips off the bar. Shift your pelvis forward and lower down in front of the hoop to a straight arm hang. Try hanging with the legs straight, bent, or in a pike position. To get back on the hoop, engage the core and shoulders and pull up holding the body in a straight position. You can also use varying degrees of momentum (see blue box) to make this transition.

This is a perfect addition to the familiarization tour (coming up in the next couple pages). Another great way to use this position is to practice shoulder shrugs while holding a hollow body position (with a nicely engaged core).

**Shoulder Warning:** Anytime you are hanging on your shoulders in movement, there is potential risk for shoulder injury. The risk factor is greatly increased if you just swing your body off the front of the hoop without proper control. Don't "jump" off the front of the hoop to get into this position. Lower yourself down with a reverse pull up.

# Steering the Hoop

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Lock off

**About this move:** Learning how the hoop moves is an important part of exploring this new apparatus. It will have important ramifications later on. For example, it can be dangerous to have just a single knee hooked on a single point hoop due to the way the hoop tips to the weighted side. (It can be done as long as you have one hand hooked as well, but this is advanced.) Learn how shifts in weight will move your hoop.

## ABOUT STEERING THE HOOP

Steering applies to not only rotational motion, but front to back as well. The bottom line in steering is learning to control the placement of the hoop in space to the smallest degree. You can try various steering exercises whether you have a single or double tabbed hoop. The weight of the hoop will impact how you learn about steering. Some hoops are solid steel and will not move through space very easily. It takes a lot of effort to steer them through space. Some hoops are hollow and made of lighter materials. With this kind of hoop, your steering efforts will sometimes be aimed at preventing the hoop from flying through the air! Keep these ideas in mind as you learn, and then do not forget them throughout training, especially if you change what kind of hoop you use.

### Steering the Hoop w/ Feet

Pictured to the right is an example of steering the hoop on the bottom of the feet to move the hoop front and backwards. This involves the entire body, not just the feet to work at steering. Take into account how the weight of your hoop will impact these moves. You may not get a heavy hoop horizontal. That's okay.



*We like to call this position of the hoop "the pond."*



### Getting a Feel for How Far Your Hoop Tips

Hold the top bar, pull up and lock off. Begin moving the wrists forward and backward so the bottom of the hoop shifts forward and backward. It is very subtle and challenging at first. On a double-tabbed hoop, use extreme caution when de-weighting the hoop when your hands are on the inside of the tabs. If the tabs are far enough apart, you could easily tip the hoop completely upside-down.

### Driving the Single Point Hoop

Get to know the movement of the single point hoop by placing the hands on the top bar equidistant from the point of attachment. Notice how the hoop tips one way or the other depending on how you shift your weight.



# Familiarization/Exploration Tour

**Prerequisite(s):** *Depends on what is in your tour.* **About this move:** *This familiarization tour includes the basics of traveling all the way up and all the way down the hoop. The tour is known as a “low-high score” in the aerial dance world. In the circus world, it is known as an “up-down.” There are many variations for beginners through advanced aerialists since the tour can also be used for conditioning purposes. Here, we focus more on the aspects of using it for beginners to explore.*

The familiarization tour allows the student to do what they are super excited to do - get up on that hoop! They come to class eager to experience what it feels like just to sit or stand on the hoop. The familiarization tour can be adapted to fit the level of students and the height of the hoop. If the hoop is low to the ground, then you do not necessarily need to pre-teach a mount. The students can simply get on like they would a swing in the park! And they can stand on it just like they would stand on a tire swing. This should feel very natural and hopefully will bring out a sense of play in both children and adults alike.

If you have a group of students who are more dance-inclined and/or have higher body awareness due to their backgrounds, encourage improvisation and exploration once the basics of the familiarization tour has been taught. Improvisation is movement that is created spontaneously, occurring within free or highly structured environments, but always with an

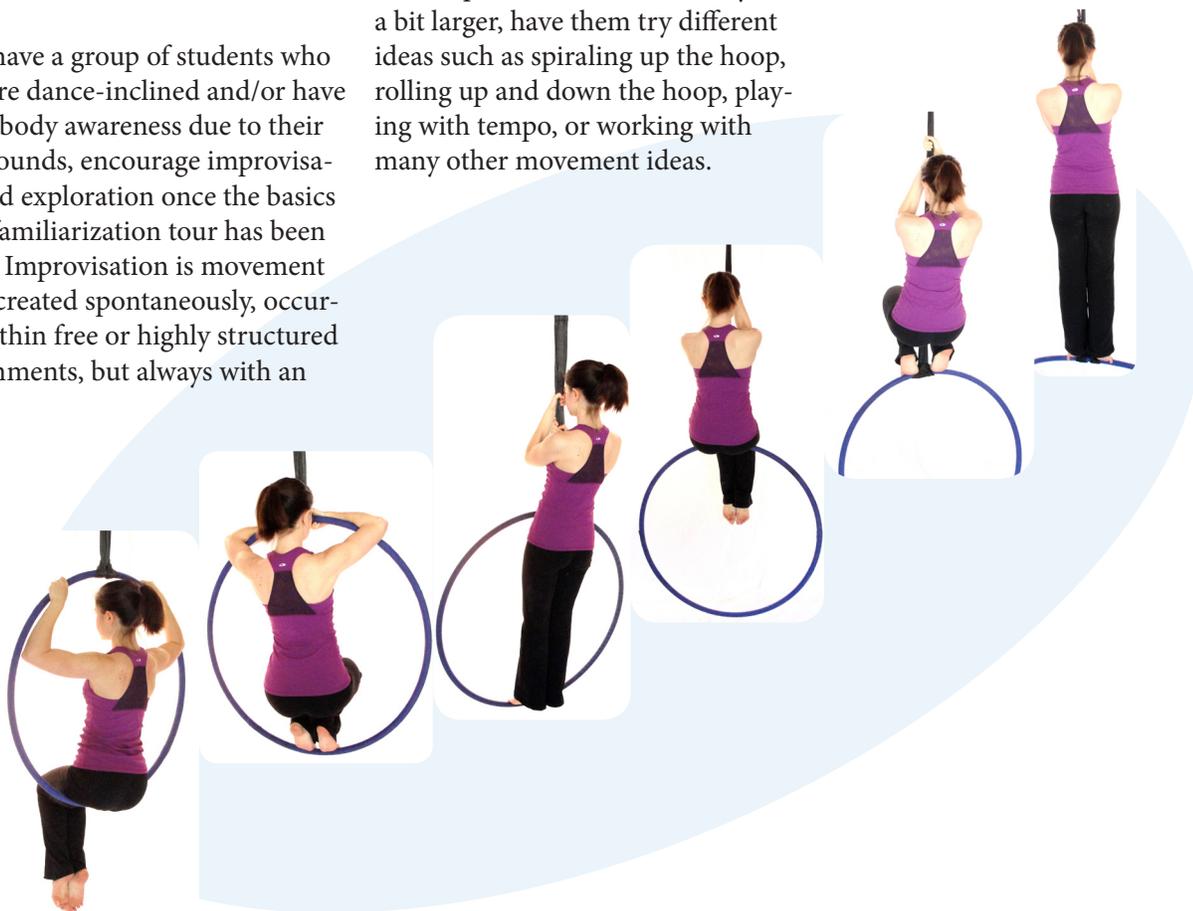
element of chance. It provides the dancer with the opportunity to bring various elements together, and requires focus and concentration.

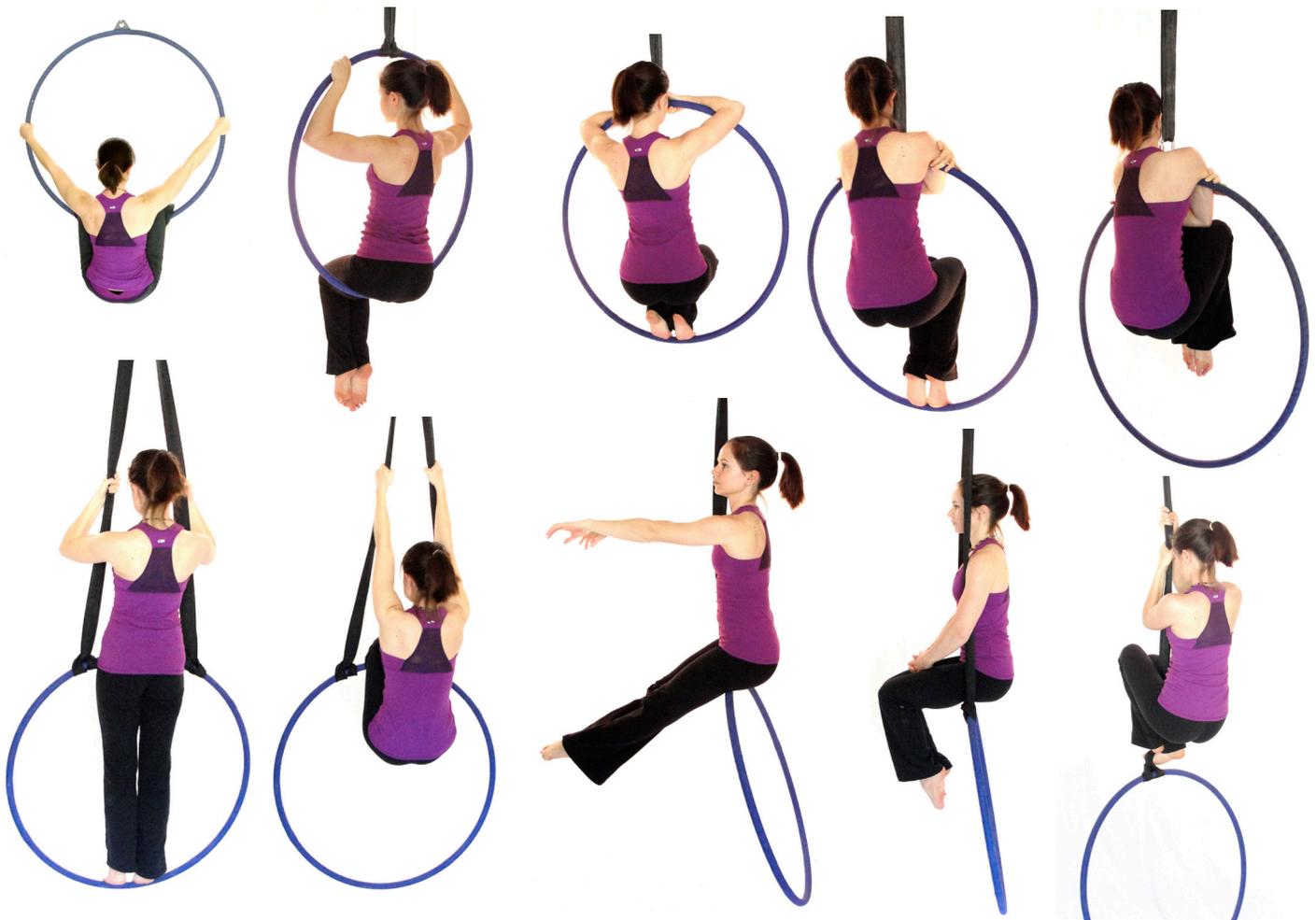
Give simple suggestions such as working on balancing while sitting, leaning out (while holding on with at least one hand), trying different shapes with the legs, and/or suggest an overall sense of finding the “edge” of the current weight placement in any particular position.

For advanced movers, put on music and allow them to improvise movement while they move up and down the hoop. Once their vocabulary is a bit larger, have them try different ideas such as spiraling up the hoop, rolling up and down the hoop, playing with tempo, or working with many other movement ideas.

## The Skeleton of the Tour

Shown below is the bare bones skeleton of the familiarization tour. The steps shown are: sitting, squatting, standing on the lower bar, sitting on top of the hoop, squatting, and standing on the top bar. This is demonstrated on a single point hoop as a default, but you can apply this concept to a single or double tabbed hoop. There is much that can be done to fill in the body of the tour; this is simply the starting outline.





### Filling in Some Details

If the hoop is higher off the ground, then a basic mount should be taught prior to the familiarization tour. For example, the straddle mount or double knee mount are both great fundamental mounts. Along with a basic mount, a basic dismount should be taught. This can be the retrograde of the mount.

After the mount comes sitting in the hoop. First time students should be encouraged to spend time feeling comfortable sitting on the hoop. Once balance is established, try various body shapes from sitting. (More in chapter 4.) The next progression is toe squat where the student sits on their heels with the toes on the lower bar. (The transition to the toe squat is expanded upon on the next page.) From here, if you are on a single point, hug the rope or span set and you can hover by lifting your weight into your arms. This exercise can also be performed on double point, but just remember what you learned in the steering section. Watch out for how the hoop might tip.

Next is standing on the lower bar, with progression to standing on the top bar. There are a variety of ways to make this transition. At first, choose a straightforward method such as walking hand over hand up the rope(s). (More details on the next page.) Practice leaning away from the center in different directions, but keep both hands on the rope at all times if you are a beginner (much more elaboration in chapter 4).

Once the apex is reached, retrograde to come back down off the hoop. It can be a wonderful exercise of focus, as well as strength/conditioning to practice the entire process up and down the hoop with even symmetry of the body. During times of creativity/improvisation, choose more asymmetrical movements and transitions. As body awareness, strength, and hoop vocabulary grows, add basic movements to the exploration tour as well as elements of improvisation appropriate for the current skill level of the student. This tour is also great to include in warm-up and can be used as a conditioning tool when the appropriate challenges are a part of it.

## Trash Can to Toe Squat

**About this move:** The trash can is a transition to get from sitting to toe squat in the hoop. It is used in the familiarization tour, and it is worth expanding upon here. When beginners are unaware of this transition, or they forget about it, they can have very messy and awkward transitions between simple movements such as sitting and toe squat.



### Use the Trashcan to Get to Toe Squat

*Trashcan:* From sitting with the hands anywhere above 9 and 3 o'clock, sink back to knees.

*Toe Squat:* Place the ball of one foot onto the bar followed by the ball of the other foot. Sit on your heels keeping them lifted. The thighs should be parallel to the ground.

### Variation

Try placing just one foot on the bar to rock over and sit on the heel. The other leg should hang straight down to create an asymmetrical shape. Then, place the free leg next to the bent leg so you can sit on your heels. You can hold with your elbows on the hoop for stability.



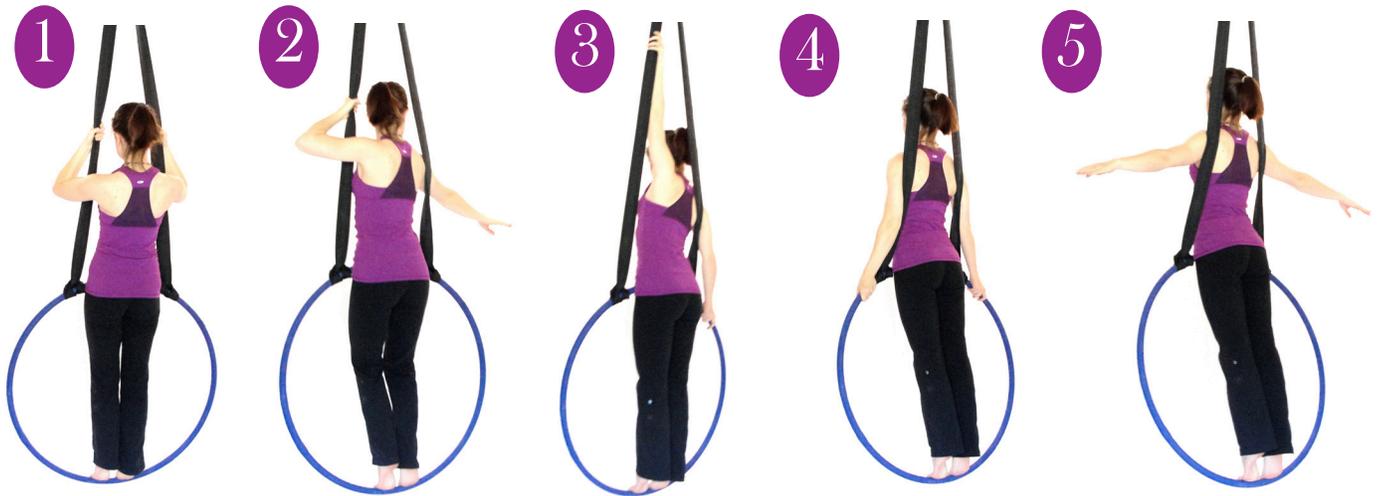
## Standing Up from Toe Squat



### Standing Up From Toe Squat

It is important to get a feel for how the hoop may tip at any given moment depending on how you shift your weight. For example, if you lean back while standing up from the toe squat, the hoop tips, but if you stand straight up without leaning back, it will not tip. When you are first learning, try to keep your body in a straight line (up and down-wise) to prevent the hoop from tipping. As you progress in strength, hoop awareness, and improvisation skills, you can purposefully tip the hoop for choreographic purposes.

## Standing on a Double Tabbed Hoop

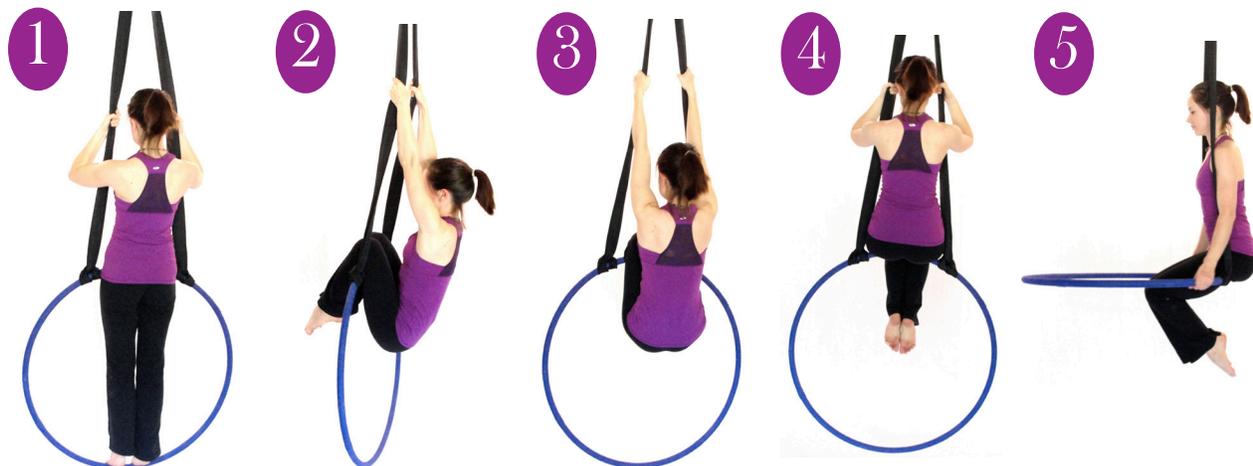


### Standing on a Double Tabbed Hoop

For beginners with high body awareness, shifting the arms to the other side of the ropes is perfectly intuitive. They hardly need any instruction and they will easily get their arms to the other side. But people who have not had a lot of movement classes in their life and/or are timid in the air will need good instruction about carefully placing one arm at a time through the ropes or span sets. The part that tends to throw beginners off is when they let go with the first arm in order to send it between the ropes. Often times, students will not have their weight forward enough in order to counterbalance their arm coming off the rope. Have them lead with the elbow. Once the elbow is between the ropes, they can let go with their hand. Also, make sure the weight of the body is forward, not leaning back. This will help them remain balanced.

Another challenge is the retrograde exit. Beginners will tend to choose unfavorable hand grips which means that they have to do a lot of “fussing” to get back to where they started. Think carefully about where you come from so you know where to go back to. This is a lesson that will help you at all times on any aerial apparatus.

## Sitting on Top of a Double Tabbed Hoop



### Sitting on Top of a Double Tabbed Hoop

Again, movers with high spatial skills will transition smoothly to the top of the hoop. It can be helpful for some beginners to break this transition down in steps that mirror the ideas that were covered in using the trashcan to get to the toe squat OR the ideas that are presented in the tuck mount (see chapter three) where you use a seesaw action to lift the body onto the hoop from the trashcan position. This seesaw action helps to use the idea of levers and pulleys rather than the pull of the biceps to leverage the body up to sitting. Play with the ideas you have learned about steering the hoop.



# Chapter Two: Under the Hoop

*They whirled, swirled and twirled  
Down in the underworld<sup>1</sup>.*

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This chapter includes basic inversions that can be used as conditioning exercises as well as preparations for the mounts in chapter three. Some basic inverted positions include ball/tuck, pike, and straddle. These inversions can be combined in many ways to come up with a perfect conditioning exercise. Even though you will practice these positions from the floor, minimize the effort with which you push off the ground each time so that you can build the strength you need to progress in your training.

Speaking of pushing off of the ground, now is a perfect time to remind you about the “sweet spot” that we talked about in chapter one. Remember where that spot is because it is the exact spot to push off from to avoid swinging once your feet leave the ground. If you are off axis, you will swing. Now, you may want to do this on purpose, but you also may not want to be swinging around as you are trying some new moves.

According to Susan Murphy, aerialists should not look at their hands unless it is specifically choreographed that way. This practice is great for developing artistry when you have had plenty of practice, but it can be dangerous for beginners when they are initially learning new skills. Where you fix your gaze will differ depending on your goals in the moment. When learning new moves, you should look at where your body parts are located or headed, especially things such as hand placement. It is not until after you have learned a move and only once you are comfortable with it, that you can begin to execute the aerial dance aesthetic that takes your gaze anywhere but your hands!

Another practice that may change once you get into choreography, but should be habit when you are learning, is to keep the head in line with the spine. Positioning the spine correctly sets you up for more efficient and connected movements. When you are in a rounded spin position such as the ball/tuck, keep the chin tucked to the chest to complete the line of the spine. Tucking the chin to the chest is also important when you begin dismounting the hoop using the trashcan. During this transition, the hands move to the bottom bar. Most beginners release their necks allowing the head to hang back. This habit disengages the core and also prevents the mover from seeing what they are doing. On the flip side, if your back is arched in other positions such as the back arch on the top bar, feel free to let your head hang back. This keeps the head in line with the spine. (Never snap it backwards; always use a smooth transition.)

The last couple of moves covered in this chapter can be challenging: the ankle hang, candlestick and profile ankle hang (a.k.a. running man). However, there is a little trick to making them just a smidgen easier: SPIN! Spin can give you a lift like nothing else (well, I suppose a spotter could, but they don't look so great in the middle of a solo). While some dynamic moves are more difficult to execute while spinning (case in point: straddle inversion with straight legs-that takes some serious core!), moves that require pushing outward suddenly become a little easier. The ankle hangs (both profile and parallel) are prime examples of this phenomenon.

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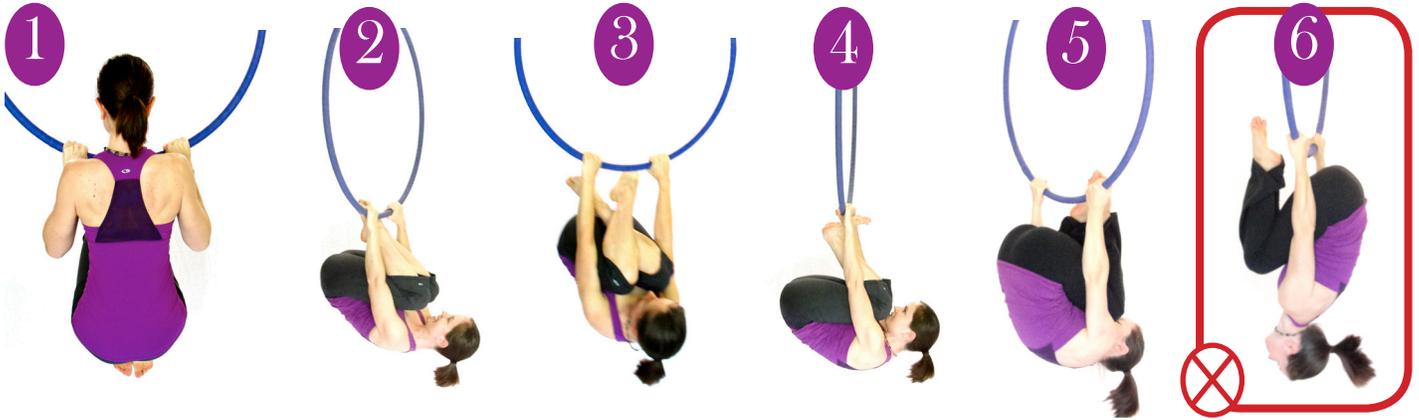
<sup>1</sup>Robert Davidson coined the term “underworld” for the area beneath the apparatus in aerial dance.

# Ball/Tuck Inversion

## Prerequisite(s):

Lock off

**About this move:** Most inversions (when the feet are free) are easiest when starting with bent elbows. As you invert, straighten the elbows to allow the body to rotate upside-down. Since the hinge point (elbow) is close to your center, bent-arm inversions are much easier than straight-arm inversions that hinge from the shoulder joint. Once you conquer this move below the bar, you will be ready to progress to the top bar.



## Rotate Around Elbows into Ball

If you are on the lower bar, you can start with either overhand or underhand grip. Grip wide enough to get your hips between your hands. Perform a lock-off with elbows bent and prepare the body for movement. Lift the pelvis high into the air as you bring your knees under the bar, then the feet. Straighten your arms as you invert. Point, flex or even cross your feet to help get them under the bar. Your choice may depend on body proportions. Once you get your knees and feet on the other side of the hoop, keep your chin tucked to a round spine. It is tempting to release the neck and look towards the ground as if flipping, but don't! Releasing the head will cause you to lose core connection, as well as prevent you from seeing what is going on. (Later, you can make it a choreographic choice.)



## Aerial Dance Mount

Hang under the bar in a chair position. Using straight arms and legs, place the toes on the bar. This variation requires flexible hamstrings, but no specific upper body strength. Pulling with the toes, curl up into a tuck position.

*This variation of mounting the apparatus originated with the aerial dancers using low-flying dance trapezes.*

## PROGRESSION TO TOP BAR

Most "bar" moves are best learned on the lower bar and can then be performed on the top bar. When you are on the top bar, it is recommended to hold in an overhand grip because the concavity of the hoop supports proper wrist positioning. In addition to how it affects your grip choices, the concavity will also change the nature of many moves. For example, the knee hang on the top bar will feel much less supported than the knee hang on the lower bar. But, the general idea of each move will remain intact as you transfer your skill set to the next level. Your spotter/coach can help you look out for danger spots. For example, when you de-weight the bottom bar when performing the tuck on the top bar, you must be very careful so that the hoop does not swing out.



# Pike Inversion

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Ball/Tuck  
Inversion

**About this move:** A balanced pike position can be tricky to find. Notice two major alignment points: 1) the legs are parallel to the ground, and 2) your arms pass perpendicular to the thigh near your knee. These are demonstrated in photo 3 below. If you are unsure whether your pike position is correct, ask a friend to tell you if your legs are perfectly level. If your studio has a mirror, use it to view and adjust your position.



## Begin with a Tuck

Again, the hand grip choice is up to you. It should not be a position that causes strain to your wrists or shoulders. The key thing for this inversion, as in the tuck inversion, is that your arms are wide enough apart to get your hips through.

## PROGRESSION TIP

As you progress, come up to this position with your legs straight during the entire movement instead of tucking as you go up and down.



## Straighten the Legs

Prepare for a nice stretch as you straighten the legs. Lengthen through the backs of the knees (*photo 3*). Your forehead does not have to be on your shins (although kudos if it is), but make sure that you do not release the neck (*photo 4*). This disengages the core, and you may lose your focus. Your legs should be nearly parallel to the floor, not perpendicular.

Sometimes students tip over too far (*photo 5*)—this is a great prep if you are going into the skin the cat exercise (see Volume 2), but in the pike inversion, this is not the goal. One more tip: If a student does have their head back, tell them to *slowly* tuck their chin to their chest. This will help avoid a collision between head and knees.

## AN EXIT

Instead of the retrograde exit, you can prepare for straight arm movement and get a good stretch by placing the feet onto the bar and lowering the hips. Maintain a pike position on the way down, and keep the arms straight while you lower the legs. Minimize the amount of pressure your feet place on the bar in order to maximize the amount of work that your core does for this transition.



# Straddle Inversion

## Prerequisite(s):

Lock Off,  
Ball/Tuck  
Inversion

**About this move:** The straddle is the perfect conditioning exercise for many of the core muscles used in aerial work, including the back. In a straddle, the spine can either be straight or rounded depending on what move comes next in your sequence. Practicing both positions and transitioning from a rounded position to a straight spine builds tremendous back strength. We discuss more about this in chapter three.



## Prepare Grip

Place the hands extra close together. They can even be touching at the center of the hoop. Due to this close hand placement, we recommend the overhand grip.

## Frog Legs

With bent elbows, frog the legs by turning out from the hip socket. Keep the feet pointed throughout the move. The technique of this position is akin to the ball inversion with the legs turned out.

## Straighten the Arms and Legs

Continue to invert by straightening the elbows and the legs simultaneously. To achieve a straight back position, pull down using the shoulder blades, sending the sitz bones higher up toward the bar and look straight ahead. Depending on your body proportions, your sitz bones may or may not actually touch the hoop.

See the straddle mount in chapter three for more on the discussion of rounded back versus straight back.



## Profile Straddle

You can also perform the inverted straddle in profile by starting in an alternating grip. Hold both hands off center (not at 6 o'clock), and then develop the legs into a straddle. A rounded spine is pictured here. The shoulders are still engaged, but the legs maintain a closer relationship to the torso. The chin remains tucked as long as the spine is rounded.

## PROGRESSIONS

You can retrograde the exit using bent elbows and knees, or you can try using straight arms and legs to build strength (pictured here). If you practice lowering down with straight arms and legs only hinging at the shoulders and hips, you will eventually be strong enough to enter the straddle position using straight arms and legs!



Here is a sample progression for any inversion exercise:

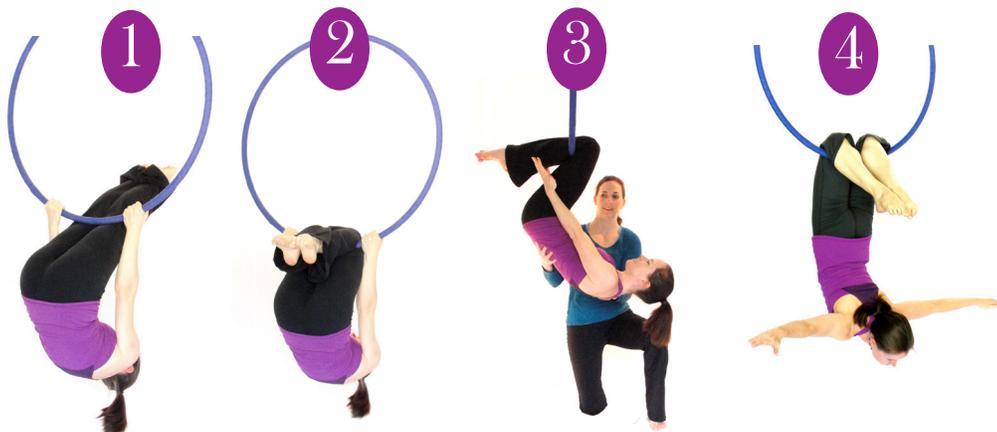
- Entry: bent arms & legs. Exit: bent arms & legs
- Entry: bent arms, straight legs. Exit: bent arms, straight legs
- Entry: bent arms & legs. Exit: straight arms, bent legs
- Entry: bent arms, straight legs. Exit: straight arms, straight legs.
- Entry: straight arms & legs. Exit: straight arms & legs.

Also keep in mind that overhand grip can be harder than an underhand grip. So another great progression track is to go from an underhand grip to an overhand grip.

# Double Knee Hang & Beats

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Pike Inversion

**About this move:** This is the first hang an aerial student learns on both hoop and trapeze. When spotting the knee hang, always stand to the side of the student (rather than in front of or behind). This gives the student some freedom to move forward and backward without bumping the spotter. The student should do many core and hamstring exercises on the ground to prepare the body for this move. This helps avoid muscle cramping.



## From Pike Inversion to Knee Hang

From a pike inversion, hook both knees on the bar. Prepare for the next step by squeezing your heels to your buttocks and engage the abdominal muscles so that you can release your grip with maximum control. It is important for a spotter to be present. Slowly roll down through the spine, keeping the hamstrings engaged and the feet pointed. Once you arrive in a knee hang, push the pelvis forward to fully engage the hamstrings and backside. This engagement will help you stay on the bar. Some aerial schools teach a straight hang with no arch, and others encourage the arching of the back.

*Note to spotters:* Hold under the back and shoulders as the student lowers and returns.

*Note about grip:* Most schools that teach trapeze teach overhand grip in order to be standardized across all bar work, but it's really up to you when you are on the low bar.

*Progression:* Feel free to enter the knee hang from the straddle inversion as well. The only difference is that your hands will be between your legs when you hook your knees.



## Knee Hang Beats

Begin with a double knee hang. Swing forward first to engage the core. Start small and gradually getting bigger with your swings. As you progress, work on looking up and getting height on that backswing (*photo 2*). Once you build the strength and momentum, tap the hoop at 5 and 7 o'clock (or higher). To finish, slow yourself down until you stop swinging.

## EXIT OPTIONS

For the retrograde exit, spine positioning is key. Tuck the chin to the chest as you reach for the bar. Return to a pike position, and tuck under the bar.



While we recommend retrograding every move, there will be times when you need to conserve energy. Sometimes, it is easier/quicker to exit the most energy efficient way. In the case of the knee hang, hold both hands on the side of the knees. Lift the legs off and lower with control.



# Splits Under Bar

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Basic inversions  
(ball/tuck, pike,  
straddle)

**About this move:** A split with the back leg touching the bar is one of the most basic skills in flying trapeze. As you can see, it translates well to both the bottom and top bars of the hoop. As you progress, you can remove your legs from touching the bar. A beginner will be surprised how challenging it is to balance without the leg on the bar. At first, the hands will wobble, but you will steady them as you gain strength and body awareness.



## Into Bent Arrow

As you go into a ball/tuck, only bring one foot under the bar. Proceed to a bent arrow position. (That term will make more sense after studying arrows which are introduced on the next page.)

## Back Leg on Bar

Allow the back leg to come into full contact with the bar, then straighten the bent leg toward your face.

## Splits!

Keep the back leg in contact with the bar, arch the upper back and look at the ground. Feel free to bend the front leg. Once you have mastered the version on the lower bar, you can progress to the top bar. It is more stable to hold outside the tab points, but, as shown in the picture, you can hold inside if the hoop is stable enough.

## PROGRESSIONS & VARIATIONS

*Leg Off the Bar (photo on the left below):* Once a student has mastered the split with the back leg on the bar, the next progression is to perform the split (or stag) with the legs parallel to the ground without the back leg touching the bar. To remove the back leg requires a significant amount of control. Once this progression has been mastered on the lower bar, you can take it to the high bar. Hint: A sign of mastery is that your arms no longer shake when you proceed into and/or hold this position.

*Sideways Split (photo on the right below):* For a split variation that is not too difficult, change the direction of the split so that the front leg goes towards a back arrow position, and the back leg points forward as if it was going to into a piked arrow.



# Arrows & Tofu Hook

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Basic inversions  
(ball/tuck, pike,  
straddle)

**About this move:** An arrow is defined as a movement where you are hanging on one or both hands (practice both at first), and pointing both legs in the same direction. The legs are typically straight, but can be bent as a variation. Tofu hooks are similar to arrows, but you bend one leg over your arm. Practicing a series of arrows and tofu hooks one after the other is serious conditioning.



## Tuck Under Bar

Bring one bent leg under the bar while keeping one leg straight. This brings you into the bent arrow position.

*Family Fun Fact:* In this series we are defining movement categories by how the body acts in relation to the bar. Sometimes the aerial community categorizes by shape instead. The bent arrow is one such position. You will find the “arrow” position in a few different movement families with the same name.



## Straight/Vertical Arrow

Straighten both legs so that your body is vertical. (This is akin to doing an upside-down popsicle or horse position.) Squeeze the legs together, and pull the shoulders down (towards your feet). Lengthen the spine so the hips rise up toward the bar.



## Back Arrow

From a straight arrow, rotate the hips so you are sitting on your forearm. Arch your back so the legs fall behind you. Try bending or straightening the legs for different shape options.



## Pike Arrow

From a straight arrow, rotate the hips as in a “V” arrow. Pike and fold at the hip joints so the legs fall toward your face. Squeeze the legs together. Keep the back straight.



## Tofu Hook

From a pike arrow, bend the front knee and hook it on the arm. This isn't an arrow (since the legs are bent) but it is certainly in the family.



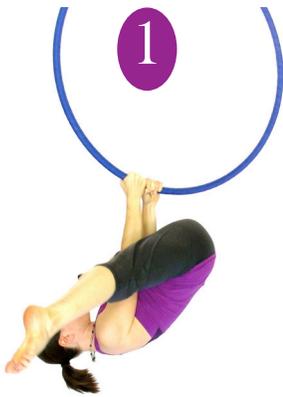
## PROGRESSIONS

Once you have mastered a basic single arm hang, and feel comfortable with arrows, you may be ready for one arm arrows. Start in the tofu hook. Remove the arm that is not under your leg and hold onto the wrist of the arm that is still holding the bar. This is a great intermediate step to full one arm arrows. Anticipate a possible change in direction when you let go with one hand. Make sure the shoulder is securely pulled into the socket because there is a possibility of fast rotation or even falling out.

# Single Knee Hang with Hand, Elbow, etc

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** This hang is different from the single knee hang because one hand stays on the hoop along with that hooked knee. However, it doesn't have to be a hand that hooks. You can also hook an elbow, a wrist, etc. Creativity can really get juicy! Think of the knee and hand as your bases of support, anchoring you to the apparatus. Now observe and move through the expansive space surrounding you (called your kinesphere).



## Profile Straddle Inversion

Stand profile to the hoop using an opposite grip. Straddle under the hoop.

## Hook a Knee

Hook one knee on the bar. It doesn't matter which one! Try variations in the placement of the hooked knee.

## Same Side

Release the same hand as free leg for same side single knee hang. You can also try holding your elbow on the bar instead of hand. Also, vary your style in the positions of the free arm and leg.

## Opposite Side

Switch hands for an opposite side knee hang. You can also make things interesting by using one or more elbows to hang on instead of your hand. (See blue box.)



## PLAY TIME!

From this basic position, there are many shapes to explore. Pictured are a few examples to start the brainstorm. What other shapes can you create?



## VARIATIONS

Pictured is an outside knee hook. One straightforward entrance is as follows: start in the double knee hang. Remove one arm and the corresponding outside leg. Be careful with your knee in this position.



## TAKING IT TO THE TOP

The single knee hang is not a move that translates well to the top bar. You have to even out your weight by using one knee and at least one hand on the opposite side of the hoop to balance. This gives the look of a single knee hang, but the balance of a double knee hang. If you are on a double tabbed hoop, keep in mind what you learned about the way the hoop tips. It may rotate away from you. Use extra caution in this terrain.

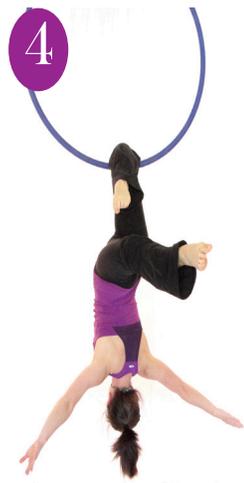
# Single Knee Hang

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Double Knee Hang

**About this move:** Single knee hangs are much harder than they appear! One exercise to get you ready is to place a span set or rope looped over the bottom of the hoop, one on each side of your legs in a double knee hang. Hold the straps as you lift one leg at a time straight up to the ceiling as high as you can. Keep the toe pointed straight up, lift the hip high and then lower. Switch and repeat. It REALLY works the muscles you will need here.



**Single Knee Hang**  
Begin in a double knee hang with engaged hamstrings and gluts. Straighten one leg reaching the toes toward the ceiling. Keep the hips completely square and level. If you notice any change in the hips, this indicates a muscular weakness on the supporting side. (Add some floor adductor/abductor exercises into your routine.) Once the free leg is straight, move the leg directly to the side drawing a ½ rainbow. The knee of the moving leg should remain forward.



**Spotting Technique:** The spotter is crucial to this exercise because of the level of difficulty in engaging the inner thigh and hamstring muscles when you are new to hoop. Spotters should support under the shoulders while being off to one side. If the student comes tumbling down off the hoop, they simply fall right over the spotter's shoulder and roll off the spotter's back.

**Leg Behind**  
Circle the leg behind you, pushing the hips forward. Maintain square hips for this exercise. Once you have built the muscle in proper form, you are free to take choreographic liberties to work in turn out, etc.



**VARIATIONS**  
In one variation sometimes called the pretzel hang, the free leg hooks over the ankle of the hooked leg (pictured left). Sometimes people report that this one hurts worse than the regular single knee hang, but it can subconsciously feel safer. The other variation is to hook the ankle of the free leg onto the hoop in what's called a talon hook (pictured right). By keeping one foot hooked, a student is able to test out the single knee hang without taking all of his/her weight. It is helpful to have other ways that a beginner can try the hang; however, we highly encourage using the knee hang method described above as the core exercise to build proper muscular control in a knee hang. Then, use variations to supplement.

**STRETCHING AFTER SINGLE KNEE HANG**  
If you are working with proper form on these single knee hang exercises, and especially if you have muscle weakness, your hamstrings and inner thighs are going to be very happy with a nice stretch session afterwards. It is a fabulous habit to stretch after every workout. Stretching helps keep the muscles long, limber and in peak working condition. Stretching can also help reduce soreness and after-workout fatigue.



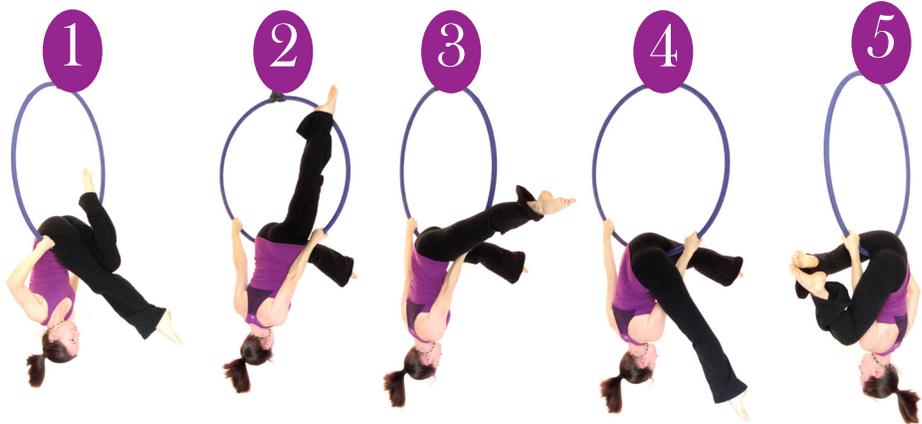
# Half Hip Hang

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Hip Hang (see chapter three)

**About this move:** The half hip hang gets its name from the fact that it is the hip hang with your weight on one leg instead of two. The second leg can be anywhere in space, so the moment you lift that second leg, technically, you are in half hip hang. There are numerous ways of getting into a half hip hang. We demonstrate getting into it from hip hang so that the technique is understood in its proper context.

## Hip Hang to Half Hip Hang

Start in a hip hang. Bring one leg through to the other side of the hoop. (It is shown pointing straight up, but you can have it bent as well.) Drop the free leg to the side like the arm on a clock. Continue dropping the leg until all your weight is settled onto one thigh. The final leg position can either be bent or straight.



## HALF HIP HANG VARIATIONS

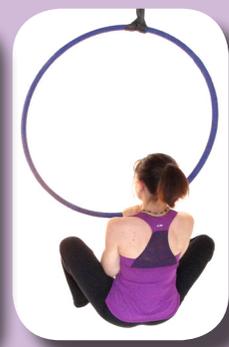
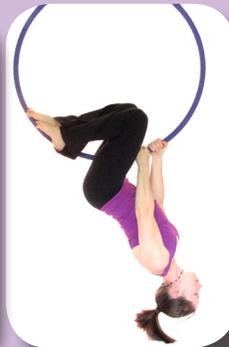
Once you are in the half hip hang, there are many positions to explore. At first the hang may be uncomfortable due to pressure on the inner thigh, so it can be nice to share some of the weight with a hooked elbow or foot. You can hang free once you are comfortable with the pressure.

*Half Hip Hang Splits:* Either facing upward or sideways, grab onto your front leg and release the back leg. Notice that your body will tip until you find the right balance. Do not over tip!



## AN EXIT WITH STYLE

Grip the hoop in an opposite grip. Roll to one side, placing the feet on the inside of the hoop. Experiment with foot placement and upper back extension (expression). Bend the elbows and legs as you lower into an upright position (frogging).



# Hip Hang to Single Leg Block

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Hip Hang (see chapter three)

**About this move:** A block requires pressure from some body part to keep the body from falling over. If there is a block present, then you know the move is impossible to balance in, and hence cannot be a “zero-effort” pose. When you start studying effort phrasing to help you create pieces of choreography, you will want to account for poses that allow you to rest and poses where you get to work. And you get to work this one.



1

**Hip Hang**  
Start in hip hang (pictured left with style). Hold the hoop in either grip method. Act like you are coming out of the hip hang, but instead, block one leg on the side of the hoop.



2

## Leg Back

Continue the free leg in the arch until the free leg is reaching behind you. Play with various positions such as straight and bent.



## A NEW MOUNT

The reason that this pose is in the mounts chapter is because you can use these ideas as you go into the hip hang or dismount from the hip hang. When beginners are first learning the pull over, it can be tricky. So, a good modification you can teach is that if you can just get one (or both) legs onto the hoop, then you can push off the side(s) of the hoop to develop the body into the hip hang position. While you are using this method, you may as well make it look purposeful, elegant, and well, lyrical!

## WORK THAT EXIT

Just as the exit from the regular hip hang is an opportunity for a workout, here is another one! You can perform the retrograde to return to the hip hang, or you can work your oblique control by lowering your hips to one side or the other, collapsing (with control) into a stag position before exiting to a lock off.



# Bird's Nest

## Prerequisite(s):

Ball/Tuck  
Inversion

**About this move:** *The bird's nest is a position where the feet are hooked somewhere – can be the hoop, ropes above the hoop, even your own arms – and then the body is turned “inside-out.” When you do this move on your arms, it looks a little more like its namesake, a bird's nest. But you have to be pretty bendy to do that variation. For the rest of us, a nice long curved bird's nest will do just fine.*



### Start in Ball/Tuck

Ball/tuck underneath the bar. This move can be performed with either overhand or underhand grip although overhand typically works best for shoulder placement.

### Hook Ankles

Aim your feet through the hoop, opening your ankles to either side of the hoop. Flex and hook your feet.

### Open Body

As you straighten your legs, push your hips forward and open up the chest. (Don't open too much too soon.) Once your legs are as straight as can be, arch your back as much as you are comfortable. *Spotters:* Make sure that the student does not push the hips too far forward before the legs are secure enough to handle the shift in weight.

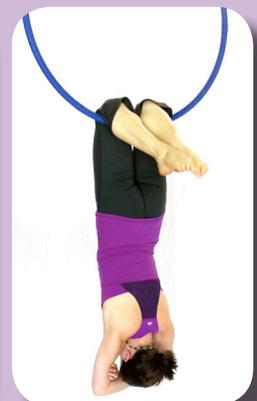
## PROGRESSION TIP

Once you are secure in this position, you can advance the move by pointing your feet. Just make sure to keep your legs pressing outward and that the hoop is pressing into your feet to hold your legs in place.



## AN EXIT

To initiate the exit, change the concavity of your chest. Press your rib cage backwards between your arms as the pelvis passes back underneath the bar. As you shift your weight back, press your feet into the hoop to remain balanced. Once you can balance your weight in your hands, lower the feet, coming into a knee hang or retrograde back into the ball/tuck.



# Parallel Ankle Hang (aka “V” Hang)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** This ankle hang is done with the body parallel to the hoop, as opposed to profile. It is not the most pleasant feeling on the ankles when you first try it. In fact, if you never warm up to it, don't worry. It's not for everyone. But for those of you who like a challenge with a side of pain, saddle up, this one's for you. It helps to have a hoop of the right size. Not too big and not too small. With just the right fit, you'll feel great in this pose.



## Ankle Hang

Begin in inverted straddle. Thread your legs into the hoop and hook the ankles on each side of the hoop. Press the back of the legs into the hoop. Put energy into straightening the legs for a secure hold. *Spotters:* Spot below the shoulders for the duration of the movement as the student progresses according to their level of strength. Request that the student maintains a curved spine the entire time to make spotting easier on you. A curved spine protects the student's head from impact if he/she was to slip out of the position.

Different size hoops will affect many moves. In this case, it is more difficult to do an ankle hang on a hoop that is too large for the length of your legs. If you have shorter legs, it may be easier on a smaller hoop. If the hoop is large, push your legs outward as hard as you can. This can be difficult because the abductor muscles are typically less developed than the adductor muscles of the legs. Do leg raises to the side with weights or bands to help strengthen the weakness.

## PROGRESSION TIP

It is possible to do the ankle hang with pointed toes. The secrets are: You must be up high enough, your legs must be straight enough, and the legs must be pushed hard enough into the hoop. If you increase the coefficient of static friction enough, you do not have to have anything touching the upward facing surfaces of the hoop. It can be done. Just make sure to have a spotter.

## VOCAB TIME

**Abduction** is the movement of a body part away from the midline. In functional anatomy, it is a movement which draws a limb away from the median sagittal plane of the body. (See the introduction to chapter six for a visualization of the sagittal plane.)

**Adduction** is simply the opposite. It is the movement of a body part toward the midline.

## EXIT OPTIONS

The best exit, as always, is the retrograde. Use that awesomely strong core to re-grab the hoop at 6 o'clock and develop the legs back into a straddle. Sometimes students grab the hoop behind their legs when coming up from the ankle hang, especially if their entry into the ankle hang was from another move such as birds' nest. That is perfectly acceptable. Just make sure that the student does not tip into a skin-the-cat position where the integrity of the shoulders could be compromised. After the hands are placed on the hoop on either side of the buttocks, keep the weight as close to the hoop as possible. Tuck back under the hoop to exit.



OR



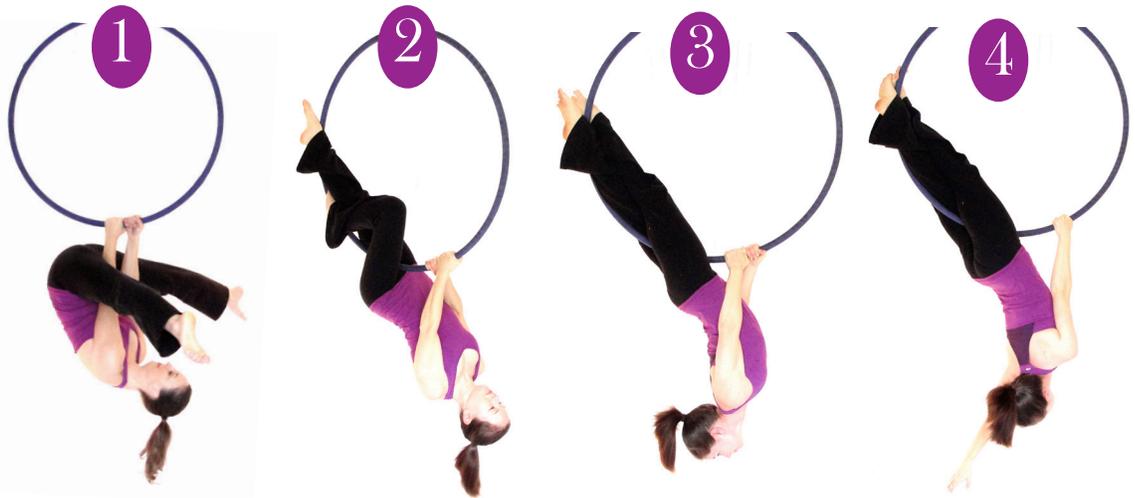
# Candlestick

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** *The candlestick is so named because the body looks like a candlestick dripping with wax. In this pose, the legs are crossed up one side of the hoop. It is a beautiful position to point the toes and keep the hands on the hoop as you arch the back. When the hands are on the hoop, this is a beginner's move. Progressing to letting go is quite advanced and requires a great deal of strength. Work in increments.*

## Legs Hook

From a profile straddle inversion, hook your legs on the far side of the hoop, crossing your legs. You can point the toes, arch back and end the position here or continue on to let go with one hand.



## Secrets to a Successful Candlestick

The secret to a successful candlestick (letting go with both hands) includes three main points. 1) Start the hands at 6 o'clock so that your legs end up nearly perpendicular to the ground; 2) Get your hips as close to the bar as possible to minimize the space between you and the bar while you maximize your leg's ability to squeeze together, and 3) Push the hips up towards the ceiling as you squeeze the heck out of your legs.

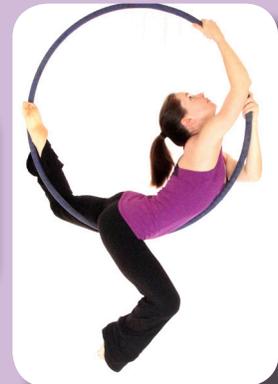
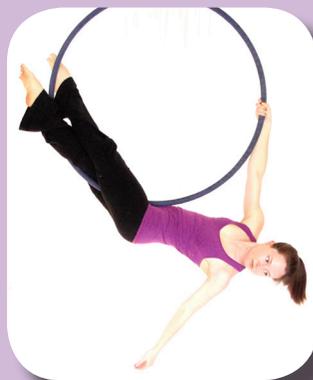
*Note: This is not a beginner's move. Do NOT just let go and see what happens. You can injure your knee too easily when letting go when your muscles are not prepared to handle the weight.*

## EXITS FOR DESSERT

The preferred exit while training is the retrograde. It's like taking your vitamins. Once you have taken your vitamins, you can have dessert. Here are a few toppings to put on your cake. As you come out of the position with straight legs, simply bend your legs right where they are for a lovely pose (first picture on the left below). Another option demonstrated is a transition into the belly roll. Walk your hands up the hoop and roll up into the hoop. Roll in the direction of the top leg. Release the bottom leg down and stylize.



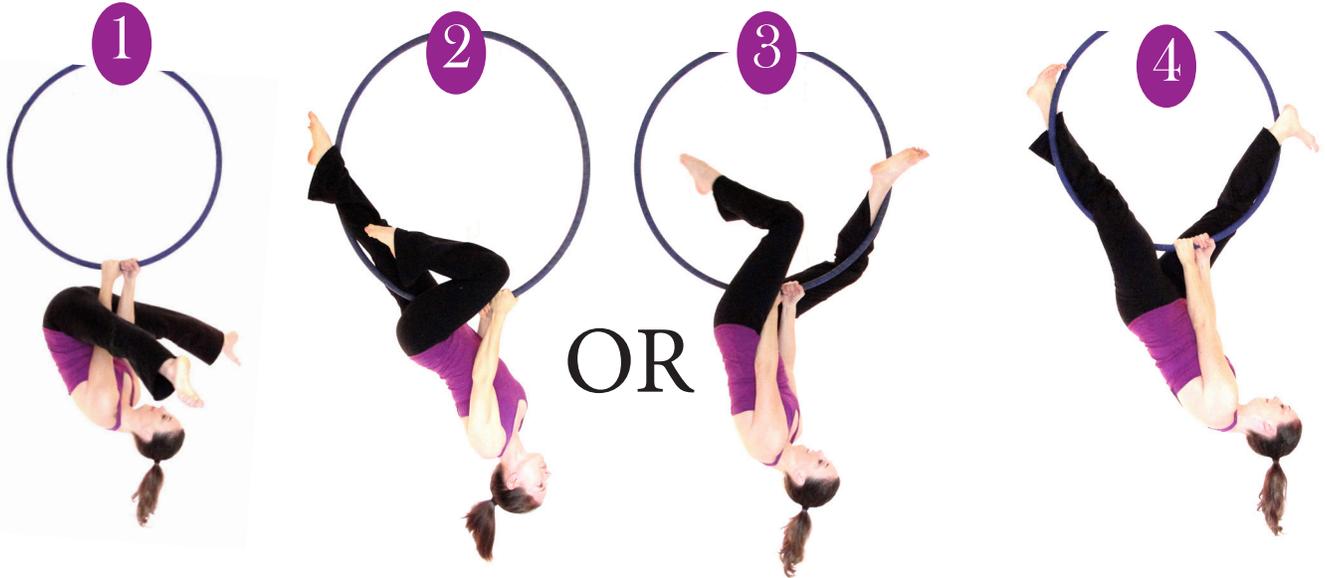
OR



# Profile Ankle Hang

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** *In this move also known as the running man or scissors, your body is profile to the hoop (hips perpendicular to the hoop), and one ankle is hooked on each side of the hoop. It requires a great deal of leg and core strength, as well as pain tolerance while learning. Hooking the ankles can be tricky on a hoop that is not the right size. So, if you can't do it at first try, don't worry, it might not be you – it might be the hoop.*



## Profile Ankle Hang, a.k.a. The Running Man, Scissors and Peter Pan

Begin in a straddle profile to the hoop with opposite facing grip. We are demonstrating two options for the next step: (Photo 2) Start by hooking the back leg using the techniques of candlestick (on the previous page) OR (Photo 3) Go directly into the double leg hook by hooking the back and front leg at approximately the same time. Do your best to minimize the amount of space between your hips and the hoop. If you are on a hoop that is too small for your long legs, you may have more space (see picture 7). In this case, stick to the method of flexed feet. If the hoop is larger, you may like to try pointed feet (photos 6 & 8). Either way, practice with just one hand many times before you ever attempt letting go with both hands. Your ankles need to grow accustomed to where they will have pressure, and your legs will need to gain strength. Also, the position with one hand removed is a beautiful position in and of itself. Take your time with progressions. There is no hurry. Rushing will cause you to lose your connection to listening to your body's needs.

*This is not a beginner's move. The position is simple to understand, but the technique and required strength is advanced.*





# Chapter Three: Mounting the Hoop

*Learn how to get up on that ring  
So that you can do your fav' thing!*

---

This chapter on mounting the hoop also implicitly includes dismounts. We don't cover cherry bombs or anything like that in this hoop manual series, sorry! (You will have to go learn from an experienced circus coach to get instruction on those.) But we do cover how to gracefully and safely get yourself on and off the hoop.

The easiest way to mount the hoop (getting into the hoop/lyra/ring) is to have the hoop so low that you can just sit on it like getting on a swing at the park. This is not a bad idea for a class who is brand new to the hoop, when you are practicing challenging moves in the hoop, or when you are practicing moves above the hoop. Start with a low hoop and then raise the level as you progress. Now, assuming the hoop is at chest level or above, one of the simplest mounts is to hook a leg and walk your hands up the side. This basic idea underlies the first two mounts covered in this chapter: the single knee mount and the vine climb. The symmetrical mounts (tuck mount and straddle mount) require a bit more muscle strength and control. For this reason, we highly suggest incorporating these later two mounts into conditioning exercises. It helps build a balanced body rather than getting into ruts by mounting the hoop with the same dominant leg every time (which we know you're likely to do anyway when you are not in training mode).

Prerequisites to the symmetrical mounts include the knee hang and the straddle inversion. Make sure students get plenty of practice with these foundational skills prior to teaching these mounts. Work on chin up holds (lock offs), knee lifts and inversions as the precursors to these mounts. Also, start the hoop low enough (bottom bar below the top of the head, as low as chest) so that the student can use bent arms when they start on the ground. This allows them to use their legs to push off when inverting. As the student progresses in skill level, then the height of the hoop can be raised (ex: above the head just within reach for most advanced level).

We introduce the tuck mount before the straddle mount. As to why it tends to be taught first, aerial hoop teacher Liz Cooper commented, "I tend to teach the tuck mount before the straddle mount because the tuck will lead to the basic knee hang with knees together. I've found students have a stronger knee hang with knees together than from the straddle (where you'd end up with knees apart outside your hands), so it's safer to teach that first, then the straddle one."

In this chapter, you will also find mounts such as pull over to hip hang and the bird's nest pull up. The bird's nest pull up is dual purposed. It is in this chapter because it is technically a mount, but really, we are placing it here so that you will build the strength you need to execute the pike shoot, which is where you go directly from the pike under the bar into a back balance. In this chapter, we break it down in slow motion using the feet hooked on the hoop to help assist you as you gain strength to pull in this unique direction.

---

# Vine Climb

## Prerequisite(s):

Ready to climb

**About this move:** *The vine climb and single knee mount are so similar you might not be able to tell them apart at first. The vine climb has slightly less technique. You basically climb up one side of the hoop until your thigh is on the hoop and then reach across. In the single knee mount, you will reach across while your knee is still on the bar, and then lift the body. (That is ever so slightly more challenging, so we'll cover that next.)*



## Grab High

With an opposite facing grip, grab as high as you can on one side of the hoop. If you are on a single point hoop, this will pull the hoop down considerably as you pull up. (In the single knee mount, you start by straddling, but here, we go straight onto the hoop.)

## Hook the Leg

Using the ground below, push off bringing one leg high enough to go over the lower bar. If you grabbed high enough, you can place your leg so that the lower bar is under your thigh. Once your leg is hooked, just keep climbing hand over hand up the hoop.

## Reach Across and Climb Up

Once you have climbed enough to be more comfortable with where the hoop is under your thigh, reach the arm across and pull yourself into what we call “horse” position. It's like you are saddled up and ready to ride!

Alternatively, bring your free leg over the hoop to enter the sitting position.



## PROGRESSION TIP

As you progress in strength, try climbing hand over hand during the first step of the vine climb. Climb hand over hand up one side of the hoop until you reach the horizon line (of the hoop prior to tipping over).



# Single Knee Mount

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** The single knee mount works best when the hoop is higher above your head, or when your hands are lower on the hoop upon hooking the knee. From there, you can either pull up to horse position, or add the leg and come up to sitting.

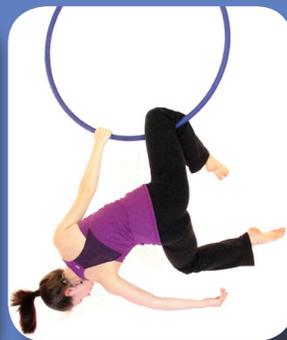
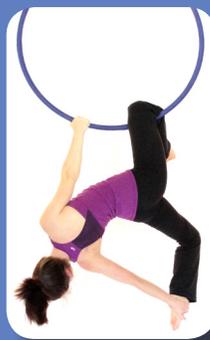


## Opposite Grip

Stand profile to the hoop. Using an opposite facing grip, straddle under the bar. A round back straddle is the easiest version for transitional movement. Hook one knee near the center of the bottom bar.

## CONNECTING IDEAS

Remember playing in the single knee hang with a hand hold, elbow, etc back in chapter two? Well, here's the perfect opportunity to start connecting ideas. Try connecting your favorite shapes into continuous movements. Explore various timing or phrasing options. If your stomach can handle it, add in a spin before your feet leave the ground. (Read more about spinning in the purple box on this page.) Play with images or intentions. Or just have fun with the space around you!



## THE DYNAMICS OF SPINNING

Spinning adds a powerful dynamic to any aerial movement. Once spinning, move away from center or open the body into a bigger shape to slow the spin. Pull toward your center and close into a small shape to speed up. As you go into single knee mount with spin, there are going to be segments where the movement requires the body to be more inward; just anticipate spinning faster, and you can open up to a huge shape once you get the opportunity. As you extend and reach out into space, the spin will quiet down.

## Grab Across Hoop and Come up to Horse (or Sitting)

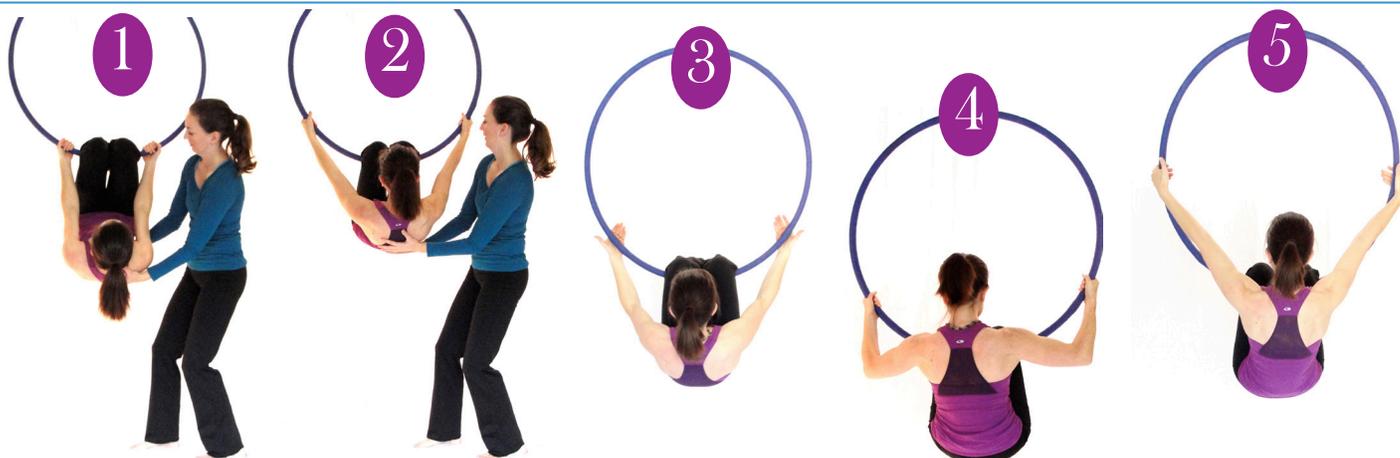
Reach across with one hand to 9 o'clock, then adjust the other hand to reach 3 o'clock so the hands are at the same height. Push down with the legs and pull up with the arms to slide to a horse, or bring the back leg through to come up to sitting. Alternately, use a bit of momentum and slide both hands up the hoop at the same time. This can be a great time saver as you move into choreography and want to transition up in as few weight-shifts as possible.

# Tuck Mount

## Prerequisite(s):

Double Knee  
Hang

**About this move:** The tuck mount is the perfect symmetrical mount, meaning your body can remain in mirror symmetry for the duration of the movement. For that reason, it is a perfect addition to conditioning routines. You can use beats swings under the hoop as a way to get into this mount, but add those in after you have the foundation of this movement.



## From a Knee Hang Prep to Gripping the Horizon

Begin with a prep for a knee hang by placing the backs of your knees on the lower bar. Underhand grip can be used so that you do not have to switch your grip in the coming steps. Using shifts of momentum, get your hands higher on the hoop. These shifts in momentum can be either little rocks to inch your hands up the hoop or a big sweeping motion of the body in knee hang beats (covered in chapter two). If you use knee beats, the momentum from the swing will allow you to grab the horizon of the hoop in one motion. At this point, you need to have your grip around the outside of the hoop in order to safely pull your body towards the hoop. *Spotters:* Have the hands under the back to help as needed. One hand protects the upper back/head, while the other supports the hips.



## Seesaw Motion to Sitting in the Hoop

Once your hands are close to or above the horizon line of the hoop, you have two options for the seesaw motion: (Photo 6) straighten both legs or (Photos 7 & 8) straighten one leg. It can be helpful to learn/teach the straight leg method first so that you learn how the body weight shifts here. The seesaw motion is so named because you begin with the pelvis low and the feet high before throwing the legs down to lift the pelvis up. Push your legs down into the bar as you slide to a sitting position. This seesaw action should bring you directly up to sitting without too much bicep action.

# Straddle Mount

## Prerequisite(s):

Straddle  
Inversion

**About this move:** The straddle mount is similar to the tuck mount. The only difference is that you enter from a straddle inversion. This means that the hands will have to do a little switch-a-roo action from between your legs to the sides of the hoop. You might find that this extra traveling helps get you up the sides of the hoop a little easier. Use the seesaw action described on the previous page as you come up to sitting.

## Straddle Mount

Prepare an overhand grip with the hands close together. The hands can be touching or have a small amount of space between them. Straddle under the hoop. (Since you are moving dynamically, it can be advantageous to use a rounded spine in the straddle to support the action of “going places” after the straddle.) Hook both knees on the bar in a wide knee hang position to avoid squashing your hands. Flip your grip and use bursts of momentum to climb up both sides of the hoop. Push the legs down and pull up to slide to sitting. (See tuck mount for more details about the seesaw action.)



## EXITING

The secret to a successful retrograde exit is sliding the hands down the hoop before you sink the buttocks. The lower you slide your hands, the less you will have to slide once you sink back. However, if you start with your hands too low, then it will be difficult



to gracefully sink back (especially for beginners). It will take a few tries to find the perfect hand placement, but you'll get it. No worries.

## MORE ABOUT STRADDLE UPS

The straddle inversion was covered in chapter two. This is a continuation of the ideas presented there regarding the choice between round and straight back.

Straddle ups are a vital skill in aerial dance no matter which apparatus you use. You do not need the strongest biceps to achieve a good straddle up, but back and deep core muscles are key. There are two types of straddle ups:

Round back straddle ups involve a curved spine while looking up toward the hands. Hips are lower in this position. The round back version works well for transitions to other places such as a knee hang. (This is why we have demonstrated a round back straddle up on this page.)

Straight back straddle ups use a straight spine while focusing out to the audience. Hips are higher in this position. The straight back version is an excellent set-up for meat hooks (see Volume 2.)

Interchanging between round and straight back straddle ups makes a great addition to any conditioning program. Add spine changes to the different types of entrances and exits (bent or straight arms, bent or straight legs, etc) to increase your power and stamina. Use ground variations of these exercises in warm-up.

# Belly Roll

**Prerequisite(s):**  
vine climb or  
single knee mount

**About this move:** *The belly roll demands that your entire body be involved in the movement. It's easy to fall into the mindset of, "I can use my arms to do this move." Keep in mind that your feet and core are doing just as much work. If you begin to overthink the move, try allowing your kinesthetic sense to sort out the details. Let your body's sensory organs in the muscles, tendons, and joints naturally respond as you move.*

## Belly Roll Into the Hoop

Stand profile to the hoop and use an opposite grip (not pictured). Pull up and lift your feet to place your legs on the hoop. You can add a straddle transition here or not, making it similar to either the single knee mount or the vine climb respectively. Climb up the side of the hoop, using the foot to leverage yourself into a roll to the belly. Make sure your inner thigh connects with the hoop (*photos 2 & 3*). Whichever foot is on top will determine the direction of the roll. Once your belly is on the hoop, you can keep your back foot hooked on the hoop and stylize the free leg (bent or straight is shown in *photos 4 & 5*). You can also release the arms if you are secure in your positioning.



## BELLY ROLL EXERCISE

Practice doing multiple rolls by steering with the feet. Each time you roll to the belly, a subtle lift and shift of the pelvis will make this move more comfortable. Men may want to vary their method to make the transition do-able. Aerialist Clayton Woodson gives the following advice for the guys: "Pull down with the arms to keep the chest high, keeping your heart near your hands. Press down through the inner heel of the trailing leg to lift the hips up one side of the bar then press down on the inner heel of the leading leg to lower the hips down the other side of the bar. Perform this weight shift just as the body passes through the inside of the lyra. There is a trick of timing that comes with practice that makes this effortless."



# Pull Over to Hip Hang

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Lock Off

**About this move:** A hip hang is a wonderful position to receive a stretch down the backs of the legs. Include this move at the beginning of every workout to let gravity help you stretch. Flex your feet, give your legs a big hug, and do your best to straighten your legs while hugging around the legs. This position is also a great way to get up on the hoop. To progress, combine with a roll to and from sitting (see chapter six).

## Pull Over to Hip Hang

Stand facing the hoop with the hands in either grip. Place the hands hip width apart so that you will not land on your hands! Driving the motion from the pelvis, pull down with the arms and lift up with the pelvis into a very slight pike position. Keep the bar as close to you as possible. Aim your legs through the hoop over your head. Allow your hips to continue to rise as your legs reach through to the other side of the hoop. Arrive in a hip hang with either bent or straight knees. A comfortable hip hang should allow the bar to rest on the soft flesh below the iliac crests (hip bones) of the pelvis and above the pubic bone. Your bones should not be hitting the steel hoop. Release the hands.



## WORK THAT EXIT

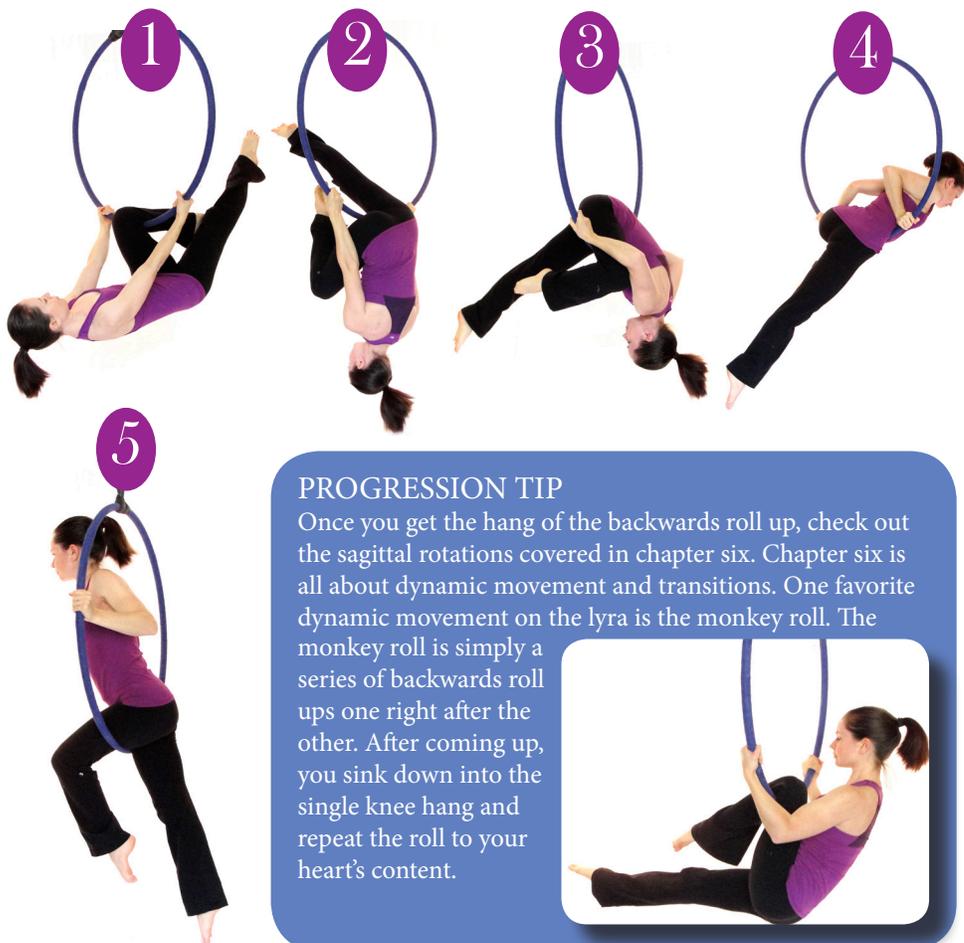
The exit from a hip hang is an excellent opportunity to condition your body for challenging moves like a full planche. One position to try includes having straight legs. Do your best to create one straight line with your entire body (no bend at the hips). If this is too challenging, bend at the knees. When you get to the point that you can no longer move away from the lower bar with control, come back over into a hip hang and exit with control. Do a slow forward roll, arriving in a lock off to build strength. It is harder with an overhand grip, so try that next.



# Backwards Roll Up (Pull Over to Horse)

**Prerequisite(s):** Single Knee Hang, Pull Over to Hip Hang, Horse

**About this move:** This move is the perfect progression of the symmetrical pull over to hip hang. In this mount, you begin under the bar in a single knee hang. Then, use the same movement principle as the pull over to get your pelvis up and over the bar. The only difference is that you land on your thigh, which can be challenging at first to execute with the grace of a professional. Don't worry – you'll get there.



## PROGRESSION TIP

Once you get the hang of the backwards roll up, check out the sagittal rotations covered in chapter six. Chapter six is all about dynamic movement and transitions. One favorite dynamic movement on the lyra is the monkey roll. The monkey roll is simply a series of backwards roll ups one right after the other. After coming up, you sink down into the single knee hang and repeat the roll to your heart's content.



## The Backwards Roll Up

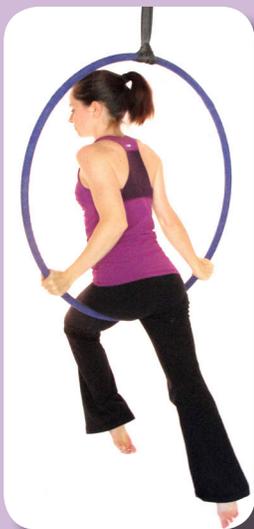
Begin in a single knee hang with your hands on the bar on either side of your knee. An underhand grip is used for this mount because it makes it easy to slide your hands up the hoop after the rotation without having to change grip.

The rotational motion that comes next is very similar to that of the pull over to hip hang. (In fact, feel free to warm up with a couple of pull over to hip hangs before attempting this move.)

As you lift the back leg up and through the hoop, go all the way over until your hips pass over the bottom bar. Land with your thigh on the hoop. Slide one hand up the hoop to help you balance as you arrive in horse position.

## THE RETROGRADE = FORWARDS ROLL A.K.A. 1/2 MILL CIRCLE

From horse, hold your hands around 5 and 7 o'clock with an underhand grip. If your hands are too far apart, you will strain your arms trying to hold your weight at the bottom of the roll, so hold relatively close to your hips. Roll forward with your weight going into your hands as you roll. Keep rolling until you can bend that top knee over the bottom bar. The momentum might bring you up to the position shown in the third photo. From here, you can sink (with control) back into a knee hang, or whatever pose you'd like. Repeat forward rolls by rocking up to horse and starting again. (Use the methods demonstrated in the single knee mount earlier in this chapter to end in horse.)



# Pull Up from Bird's Nest

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Bird's Nest and  
Back Balance

**About this move:** In this move you will arrive in a straddle back balance which is a great example of the "shelf" concept. In theory, every joint in your body can form a shelf and allow you to hang from it. Have you ever seen performers hang from their wrists, elbows, ankles, neck, etc? By arching your back in this move, you are creating a shelf with your lower back/sacrum to support your weight.



1

**Bird's Nest**  
Start in bird's nest with either underhand grip (pictured left) or overhand grip (pictured right). Pull your body up towards the ceiling, using your hooked feet for assistance.



2

**Butt back**  
The pull up by itself is a great exercise, but to get on the hoop, you need to go into a back balance by arching your lower back and placing your sacrum on the bar. Open up into the straddle back balance position.



## EXIT

To exit, tuck your pelvis and carefully drop back to bird's nest with control. Exit into a knee hang or the ball.



## PROGRESSION TIP

Once you get the hang of pulling yourself up onto the hoop, rely less and less on your ankles for assistance. Eventually, you should be able to lift your body straight up to the ceiling without hooking the ankles.





# Chapter Four:

## Beginning Moves in the Hoop

*Hang out like a chimpanzee  
Exploring moves in the fam-i-ly!*

---

This chapter covers many of the major families of moves on the hoop. Keep in mind that each movement category has an underlying concept. Once you are in a given movement family, there is more than just a pose – there is a whole world to explore! Many of these fundamental ideas extend beyond the aerial hoop to other aerial apparatuses. Review the introduction for more thoughts on these ideas (move classification theory).

This chapter begins with the sitting family. While simple, it is the pose in which lyra performers spend the most amount of time! It is the perfect resting pose. Add a touch of spin, a beautiful costume, the perfect setting, and you do not have to do much. You can just sit there, perhaps moving an arm to wow an audience. It can speak volumes in its own simple yet elegant way. From sitting, leaning is the next progression. Think of leaning as moving away from and coming back to home. This progression has its own beginning, middle and end built right in for all the choreographers out there!

We will then explore phrasing, which is a tool you can use to start working on choreography. (Yes, even with just a few simple moves!) Using the sitting position and effort phrasing, you can plan your moves and resting moments. This allows your body to make it through a piece that is eventually ten minutes or longer in length.

Next, we have a more intense version of leaning out with the splits down family. You can lean way out to the front or back of the hoop while pushing the hoop out with any part of the leg. Here, we explore pushing out with the toe in order to go towards a splits position. Once you feel comfortable in horse, you are ready to lean out from the horse position. If you lean out with just one leg and one hand on the hoop, this is called the star or arabesque position. All of this from an idea of leaning! Whew.

After all of that leaning away from the center, we take a break by pulling everything in towards center by crawling inside the hoop. This position is called man in the moon, and can take many different shapes and positions of rotations within the hoop. Rebekah's favorite shape is called the nautilus (well, that's what she calls it at any rate). See if you can spot it. Then find and name your own favorite shape in the man in moon category.

Lastly, we have some of the larger families on hoop: lion in a tree and mermaid. These are two separate movement categories that you will likely come back to again and again on hoop. There are many derivatives of these moves that you are welcome to separate into their own categories or clump as one. We do a little of both, so you will see subcategories on these pages of the different cousins in the movement family. We will continue to grow the movement vocabulary in chapter five and then extend into sequencing through example transitions in chapter six. Ready to meet your new families? Here we go.

---

# Sitting Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Grip Holds,  
Steering the hoop

**About this move:** *The sitting family is comprised of movements where the weight of your body is balanced on the sitz bones or under the thigh on either the top bar or the lower bar. Once your sitz bones are positioned, you may continue to hold for balance with your hands, or release and balance in bodyshapes. The main featured position is the L-sit. Many movements stem from this profiled sit.*

## Sitting on the Hoop (photos 1-3)

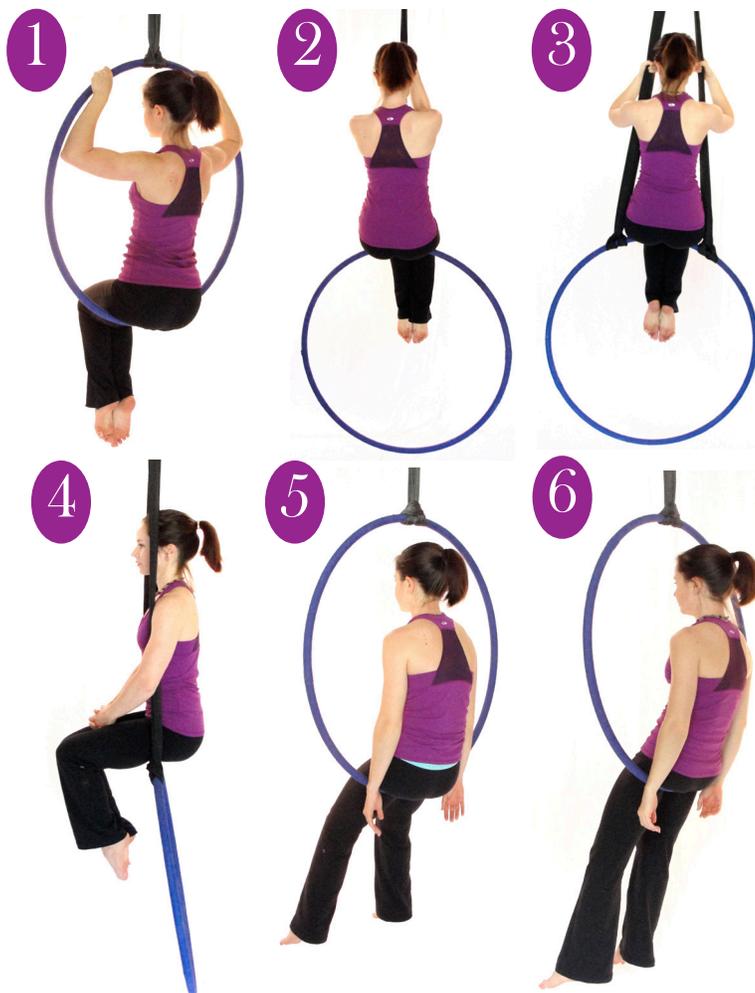
There are two main places to sit in the hoop: on the lower bar and on the upper bar. If you are on a single tabbed lyra, then sitting above the hoop requires the rope to be between your legs. If you are on a double tabbed lyra, you can sit between the ropes. Remember, the wider the span sets, the more cautious you must be about the hoop tipping front and back.

## Balancing in Sitting (photos 5 & 6)

There are two main placements of the sitz bones. First try relaxing (yes, you can even slouch!) with the hoop under your thighs (*photo 5*). Next, slide your sitz bones forward so that you are supported by your bottom blubber (*photo 6*). This is not as secure for balance, but you will need it during transitions. It's also good for the occasional lengthening of the hip flexors during workouts.

## L-Sit (photos 7 & 8)

Begin in a sitting position, gripping the hoop at 11 and 1 o'clock. Lift the hips slightly to shift the pelvis toward a diagonal. Create an "L" position by straightening the front leg horizontally and dropping the other leg straight down beneath you.



## PLAY TIME!

Explore various positions of the torso while sitting in the hoop. The primary ways of moving the torso are flexion (creating a concave shape), extension (creating a convex shape), and rotation (includes twisting). Notice how your hips must adjust to support your balance.



# Layback Family

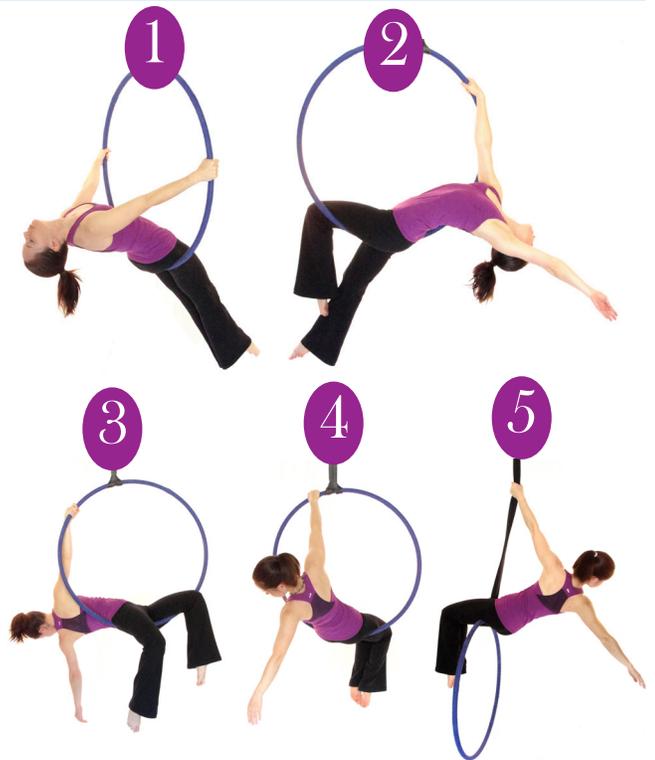
**Prerequisite(s):** *Sitting, Grip Holds* | **About this move:** *The layback family is the group of poses that can be performed from sitting on any part of the hoop, holding on with one or both hands and then leaning away from center. In this segment, we explore laybacks where both legs are on the same side of the hoop. Also, the hoop remains under the thighs. In coming pages we will examine the hoop at various places under the leg and look at one leg on either side.*

## Two Hands Layback (photo 1)

Start in a sitting position. Place the hands about halfway down the hoop (3 and 9 o'clock). Lean backward into a straight body position. Feel free to arch the upper back to add expression.

## One Hand Layback (photos 2-5)

Start in a sitting position with only one hand on the hoop. The closer to the anchor point, the more stability you will have. Further from the anchor point creates more freedom for movement. Try different grip holds on either side of the anchor point(s). These are all excellent preparatory exercises for later movements. Try allowing the legs to relax in various positions or squeezing the legs together. Notice which placement of the hips feels most comfortable in each version. When you are above the hoop (photo 5), you do not have the same freedom of choice with the legs. The legs need to remain squeezed together when you are on a single point hoop. You can have them straight or bent, but keep your legs together to keep your body on top of the hoop!



## PHRASING EXERCISES

In order to truly grow as an aerialist both in strength and artistry, we highly recommend exploring movement phrasing on the hoop. Phrasing is a term created by Rudolf Laban, a dancer and movement analyst active in the mid-20th century. It refers to the:

- preparation (pre-beginning),
- initiation (beginning),
- exertion (middle),
- and recuperation (end) of a sequence of movement.

### Phrasing Explorations

- 1** Even phrasing/static movement: Practice sequences in slow motion to feel the progression from one position to the next. Carefully shift your weight without any “bumps in the road.” Beginners will gain incredible coordination and strength from this exercise.
- 2** Dynamic movement: Ride the momentum from one movement to the next for efficiency. Notice what muscles must be engaged and what muscles can be released. Beginners will gain a new sense of freedom because they will learn to use their energy efficiently. Rather than using up all their energy in the task of learning and executing basic moves, they can learn how to work on the apparatus in a way that preserves strength for more advanced moves. Remember that proper shoulder engagement is extremely important when moving dynamically.
- 3** Mix it up: Combine static and dynamic movement together opens many possibilities for functional strength building and expression. Try these variations of phrasing:
  - a. Building up: low intensity to high intensity
  - b. Dying down: high intensity to low intensity
  - c. Accent the middle: low-high-low or high-low-high

# Splits Down (Hang from top bar family)

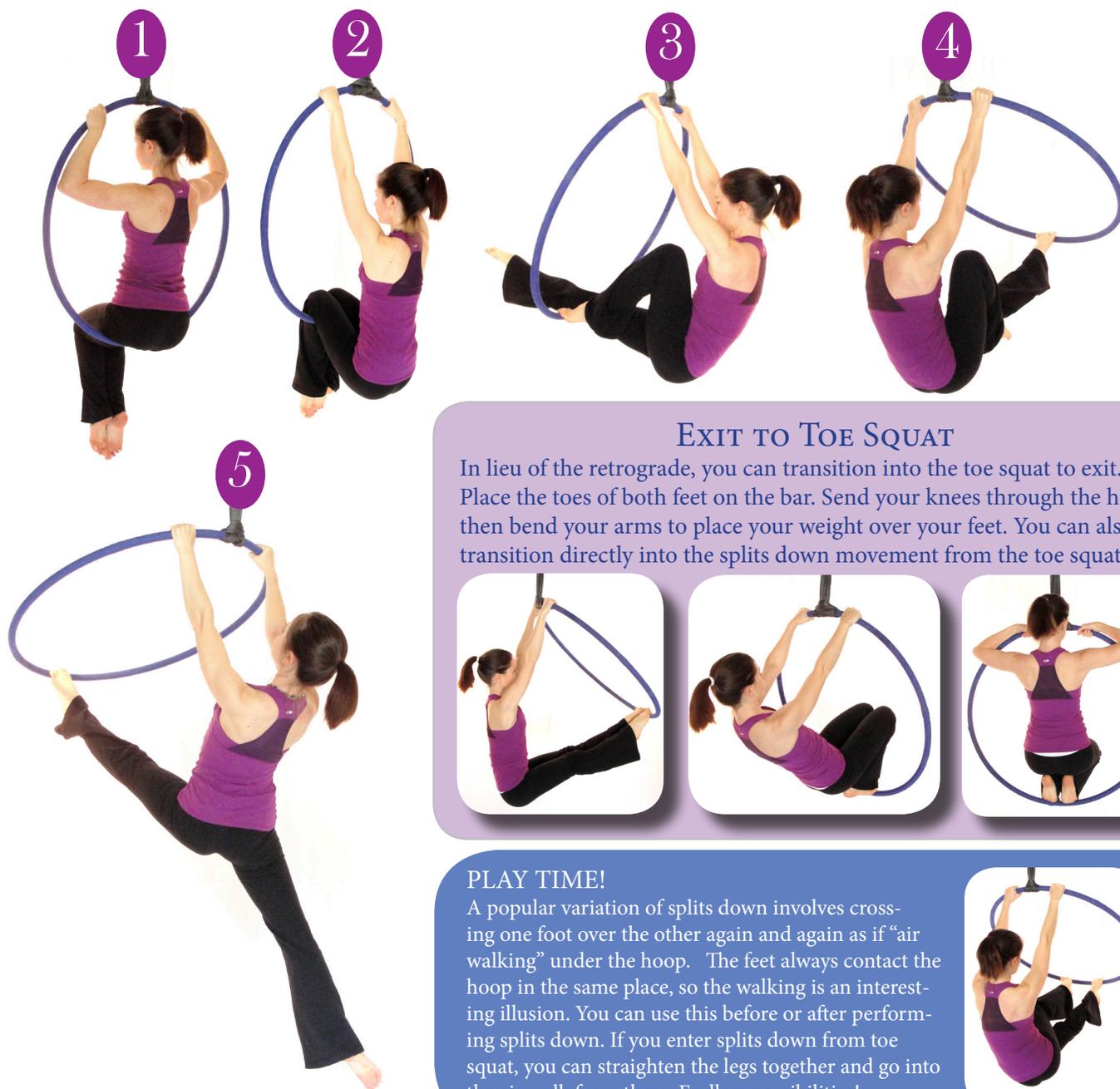
**Prerequisite(s):**  
Grip Holds &  
Trashcan

**About this move:** *Splits down is the first beginner move involving a major tilt of the hoop. It creates a beautiful image since the relationship of the hoop to the performer's body drastically changes from one moment to the next. Exploring the tipping and steering components in chapter one will help students have excellent body/hoop awareness during this move. We will cover splits down in behind and in front of the hoop.*

## Splits Down Behind the Hoop

### Splits Down Behind the Hoop

Begin in a sitting position with the hands around 11 and 1 o'clock. Trashcan by sinking back to the knees and straightening the arms. Place the ball of one foot on the bottom bar. Lift the other leg out of the hoop and tuck into your chest. Straighten the tucked leg and extend it behind you. Arch the upper chest for added expression. Remember to always keep the shoulders engaged!



### EXIT TO TOE SQUAT

In lieu of the retrograde, you can transition into the toe squat to exit. Place the toes of both feet on the bar. Send your knees through the hoop, then bend your arms to place your weight over your feet. You can also transition directly into the splits down movement from the toe squat.



### PLAY TIME!

A popular variation of splits down involves crossing one foot over the other again and again as if "air walking" under the hoop. The feet always contact the hoop in the same place, so the walking is an interesting illusion. You can use this before or after performing splits down. If you enter splits down from toe squat, you can straighten the legs together and go into the air walk from there. Endless possibilities!



## SHOULDER SHRUGS

While hanging from the top bar, this is an excellent time to practice the proper shoulder engagement with some shoulder shrugs. Shoulder shrugs not only help reinforce the proper shoulder positioning, but they also allow you to stretch the shoulders. By keeping one knee hooked on the lower bar, this relieves some of the weight pulling on your shoulders. Performing exercises like this one is the key to injury prevention.

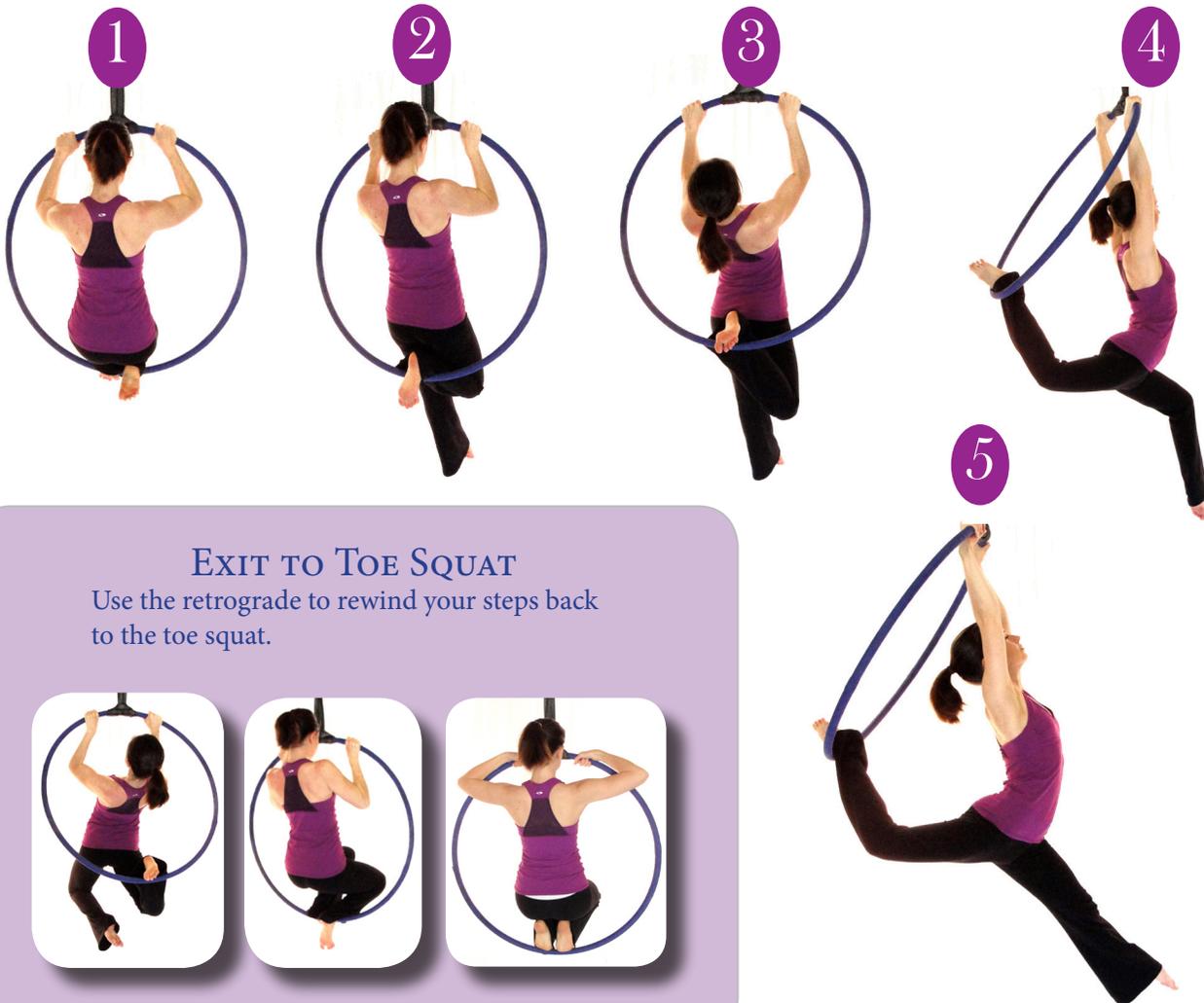


## Splits Down in Front of the Hoop

We are still in the same family of hanging from the top bar. The idea is the same: push the hoop away from the center as you extend away from the hoop. It is more difficult to do a full split in front of the hoop. As with the previous move, do not let the title intimidate you. You do not actually need to be in a full split to be in this position. However, it is a good idea to warm up your splits regardless. It is always important to warm up your shoulders and back, and for this move, a bridge on the ground would be an excellent addition to the warm up. Bridges are great for preparing the back for extension. Bridges also help stretch the shoulders, which is always a plus.

### Splits Down in Front of the Hoop

Begin in a toe squat with one foot turned under so that the front of the ankle is resting on the hoop. This will become the back leg in your split. Flex this foot as you lift your body weight up into your hands. Straighten the other leg and begin to lower your body down. *If you do not feel you have the strength to come out of the position, do not go into the position.* Push your flexed foot away from your body as you lower. Hang with proper shoulder engagement. Extend the front leg out in front of the body or other positions as you stylize.



### EXIT TO TOE SQUAT

Use the retrograde to rewind your steps back to the toe squat.



# Horse and Stag Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Grip Holds

**About this move:** A horse position places one leg on either side of the hoop. Your weight should be placed on the front leg near the top of your hamstrings. The stag position is easily misunderstood. The weight of the body continues to rest under the sitz bone of the front leg, even as the torso leans forward and arches. As the torso leans forward, the arms block the motion. The technical name could be “forward horse with arm block.”

## Horse (photos 1 & 2)

There's not much to say about getting into horse except that you need to have one leg on each side and the weight should be under the front thigh. Pressing the front leg down will allow you to lift the torso further upward, rather than sinking backward. At no point in time should your weight ever be directly between the legs. Practice squeezing your legs together as you transition back and forth over the hoop so that the weight bypasses sensitive areas.

## Stag (photos 2-8)

From horse, keep the weight on the front sitz bone and lift the back leg. (A variety of arm positions are shown in photos 3 & 4.) Lean your torso through the hoop until you feel a nice stretch in the pectoral region (photo 5). If this is comfortable, straighten the arms as you lean, pressing your arms into the hoop to keep you from falling. (Technical note: This is called an arm block.) As you stylize, bend one or both legs. Return to horse to exit.

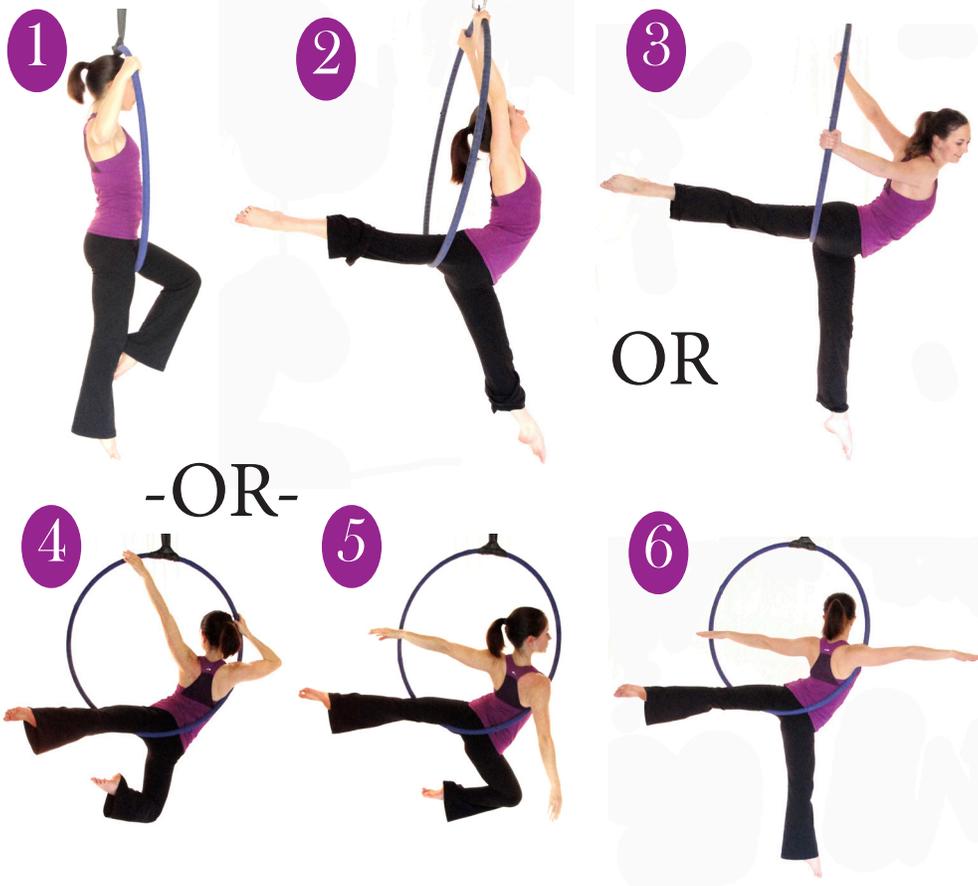


# Lean Out Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Grip Holds  
Horse

**About this move:** *The lean out family is yet another way to lean away from the center of the lyra. The archetypal pose is a full lean, but we are going to cover a gentler variation so you can be kind to your shoulders. The pose in photo 6 below has similar principals to outside lion, which is covered in chapter five. In the outside lion, the leg is rotated out so that the knee turns to face the ceiling. Here, the leg stays rotated inward and down.*

## Lean Forward (or Sideways) from Horse



### Lean Out

From horse, lean forward with your hands high. (Lift up as you pass the lower bar from one leg to the next.) With your weight on the top or side of the thigh (depending on how turned out the leg is), arch the back. Always listen to your body's limits. It helps to have a larger hoop, which requires less arch in the back.

In photo 3, we show a variation with one arm holding low on the hoop. In this case, the arms reach down and behind you, rather than over you. It requires less shoulder flexibility than the previous pose.

In photos 4-6, we demonstrate a variation where you lean the body into the side of the hoop. By keeping one arm behind the hoop, you create a block where you can extend the arms and legs out into space.

### PUT A TWIST IN IT

As you go into the lean out, cross your hands on the top of the hoop. Then, unravel the crossing as you twist away from the hoop. Try the legs in various positions. As you twist back, bring the free leg into the hoop to arrive in the sitting position.



# Star/Arabesque

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Laybacks

**About this move:** The star/arabesque family is categorized by one hand holding at the top of the hoop while the thigh of one leg is on the lower bar (or across the hoop from the hand). One of the most challenging parts of this move for beginners is simply holding on with one hand. To build grip strength, practice basic leans and laybacks on one hand in the days and weeks prior to learning this movement.

## Star/Arabesque

Begin in a sitting position with one hand around 11 or 1 o'clock.

Roll away from your supporting hand, slightly bending the opposite leg.

Bend the opposite leg into a passé position (a ballet position that looks like a triangle). The hoop will be contacting your inner thigh of the straight leg.

Reach away from the hoop with the free arm and leg. Look over the shoulder for added expression.

Bend both legs for a stag look. Add an arch in the back for expression.



**SPIN TECHNIQUE** The Star/Arabesque family allows you to transition from sitting to a horse position while moving through a stunning position. If your hoop is spinning, make sure your free hand is reaching in the direction of the spin. Arching your upper back toward the spin will increase the spiral and continue the propulsion of the turn. Remember, when you're in the widest version of this shape the hoop will turn more slowly. As you pull in, the spin will increase.

## AN EXIT

Roll back toward your supporting leg and hand by bending both knees. Grip the top of the hoop with both hands.

Tuck the free leg back into the hoop. Try a plain sitting position or crossing the legs.



# Man in the Moon (Profile Sit Family)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Balanced Sitting

**About this move:** The man in the moon positions involve a great deal of balance and focus. Since your body is completely flat with the apparatus (like sitting inside of a tire), you will need to experiment with positioning the pelvis. Some people prefer the pelvis to be perfectly centered on the hoop, while others prefer to be slightly off to one side.

## Man in the Moon

Begin in a sitting position.

Shift into an L-sit.

Place your hands near the anchor point in an opposite grip.

Lean back so your spine rests against the hoop.

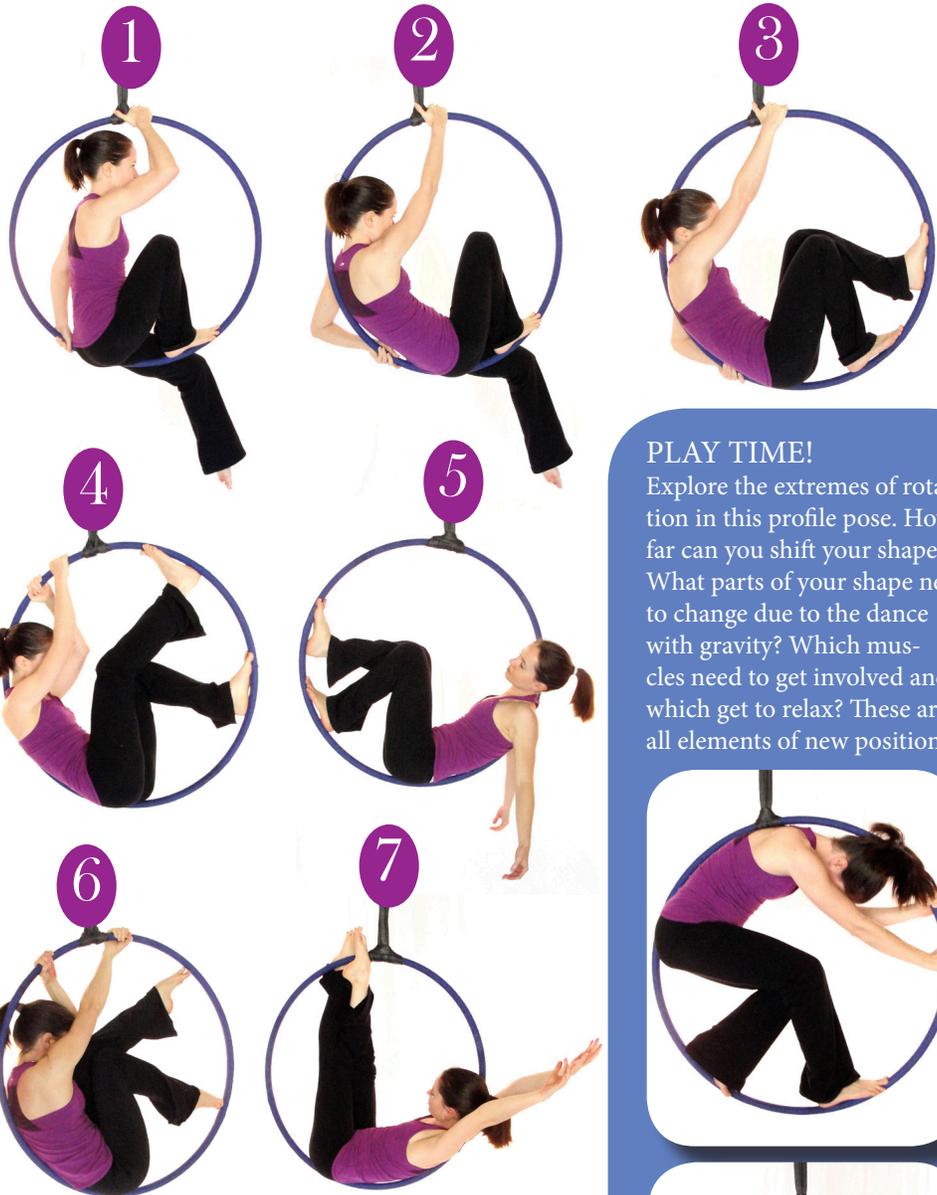
Place one foot at a time inside the hoop. Press feet against the hoop strongly for support.

Actively press the feet inside the hoop while pulling with the hands to shift the position.

If you want to release the hands, do so slowly. You may need to shift your hip placement to help your balance.

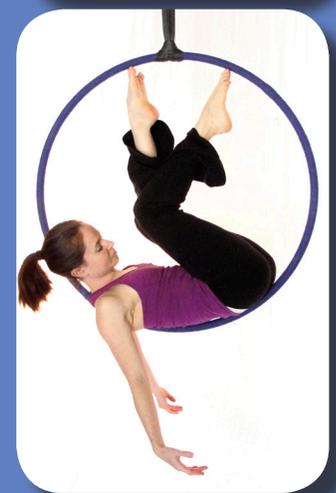
### Variations

Experiment with different foot placements, flat feet versus raising the heels, and crossing the legs.



### PLAY TIME!

Explore the extremes of rotation in this profile pose. How far can you shift your shape? What parts of your shape need to change due to the dance with gravity? Which muscles need to get involved and which get to relax? These are all elements of new positions.



### AN EXIT

Cross the legs in a relaxing position. Change your grip back to an over-hand grip, then shift your weight back into horse. Hint: When you choose your hand positions, turn towards whichever leg is crossed on top to smoothly transition to horse.



# Inside Lion a.k.a. Lion in a Tree

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Horse

**About this move:** *Lion in a tree (inside lion) involves having one leg bent on the bottom of the hoop and the other leg hanging straight down behind the hoop (along with the pelvis). Contact points with the hoop include the side of the torso and the opposite knee. The hoop passes on the inside of the torso. Later in this manual we cover outside lion, in which the hoop passes under the same contact points, but passes on the outside of the torso.*

## Entrance 1: From Horse

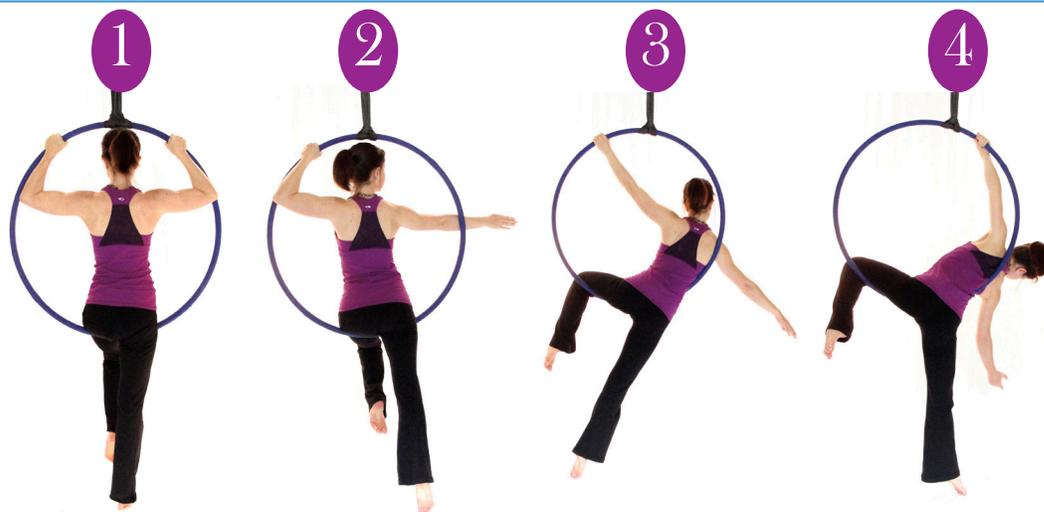
### Lion From Horse

Begin in a horse position.

Reach one arm out to the side and in front of the hoop.

Follow your reaching arm, shifting your body to one side of the hoop.

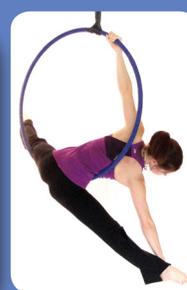
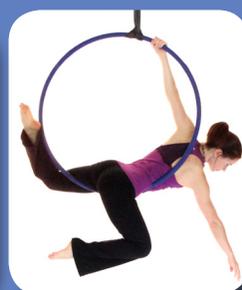
Rest your torso on the hoop. Release the top arm if you feel comfortable doing so.



### PLAY TIME!

Explore all the variations from this position: bent legs, straight legs, facing downward, facing upward, etc. Play with finding the “edge” of the movement. How far can you reach?

The picture here on the left shows a variation of lion called monkey. The weight is supported on one knee and both arm pits.



## Entrance 2: From Man in the Moon



### Lion in Tree From Man in the Moon

Begin in man in the moon with the legs crossed. Notice which leg is crossed on top, and use the same arm to grasp the top of the hoop. Use the other arm to grasp the bottom bar with the fingertips toward the spine. Shift the pelvis out of the hoop. Your bottom leg should drop straight down towards the ground and then stylize as you wish.

# Sleeper

## Sleeper Variation

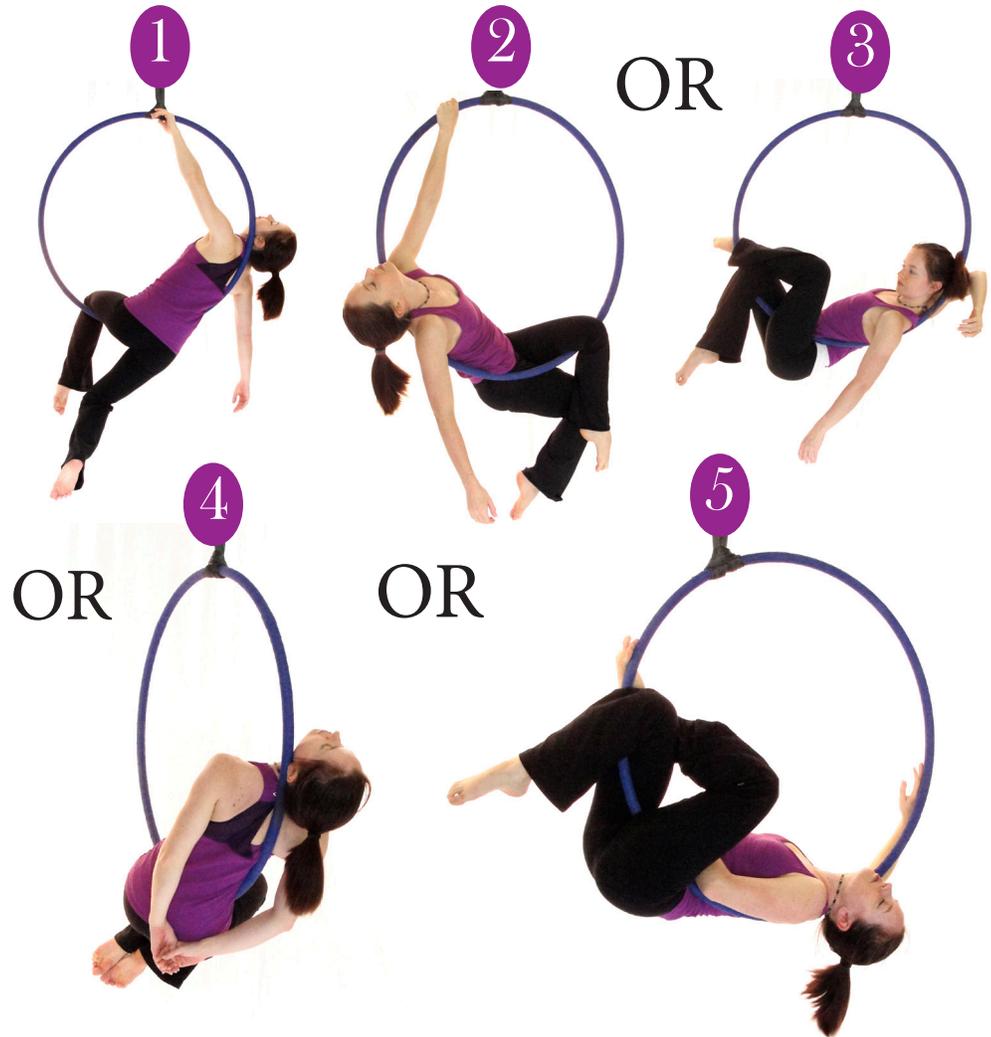
The sleeper position is a derivative of lion in a tree where the upper torso rotates towards the ceiling. The hoop passes under the mid to upper back.

From lion in a tree, rotate to look up towards the ceiling. Bend both knees, crossing the free leg underneath the hooked leg (photo 2). This can be a final position, or:

Photo 3: Cross the free leg over the hooked leg. Or...

Photo 4: Squeeze both legs together. Or...

Photo 5: Shift your weight down so your back is resting closer to 6 o'clock. Cross the free leg over the hooked leg and experiment with foot positioning.



## TRANSITIONS TO AND FROM SLEEPER

Let's take a moment to address photo 5 above. You can scooch and wiggle your way around the hoop until you get into this low-riding sleeper OR you can transition here from other movements. The latter way is more choreographically pleasing (depending on the nature of the piece of course), but generally keep in mind that there are other ways to get into movements besides the "direct" way. This is what chapter six is all about. There, you will learn about the knee slider transition which will set you up perfectly for the deep sleeper position pictured here. (That is how I arrived here for picture-taking by the way!)

## AN EXIT

Grip the top of the hoop with both hands, getting each hand to either side of the anchor point. Release the torso from the hoop. Keep the top knee bent and hooked onto the bottom bar. Extend the top leg first, then the back "free" leg. Reach the free leg through the hoop and return to a sitting position.



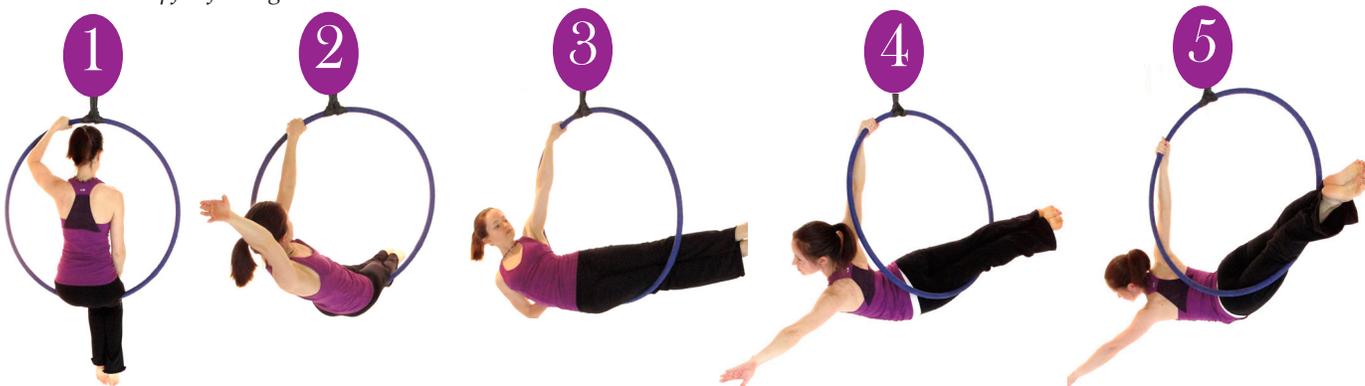
# Mermaid Family (& Angel Roll)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Laybacks (a.k.a. the lean family)

**About this move:** In the mermaid family, the legs are tightly held together as if forming a mermaid's fish-like tail. In the outside mermaid, the body rolls away from the hoop so that the front of the body is exposed to the outside. In the inside mermaid, the body lays parallel to the hoop, with the front of the body on the "inside," next to the hoop. The crossed-legged mermaid is a variation of outside mermaid.

## Outside Mermaid

Outside mermaids can feel quite exposed when first trying them because the body rolls away from the hoop with only minimal support at the thigh and gripping hand. The hoop also tends to move a great deal during the thigh rolling process, so rolling towards a spotter's arms is helpful for beginners.



### Outside Mermaid

Begin in a sitting position with one hand at 1 or 11 o'clock. Layback with the legs together. For assistance as you roll, reach behind your body with the free hand to grip the hoop. Then roll onto one thigh so the legs are stacked. Reach the back arm out away from the hoop and arch the upper back. For a deeper mermaid position, begin with the hand slightly further away from the anchor point. This allows the torso to drop further and create a bigger arched position. To exit drop the pelvis as you reach back to return to the sitting position.

### AN EXIT



## Inside Mermaid



### AN EXIT



### Inside Mermaid

Begin in a sitting position with the side hand in overhand grip and the top hand in an underhand grip. Lean sideways, passing the hands until the arms are straight. The weight will transfer from your sitz bones to your bottom thigh. Release the bottom hand and reach away from the hoop. To exit, bring your torso toward the hoop and pike at the hip joints. Drop the pelvis to return to the sitting position.

## Crossed Legged Mermaid (from Man in the Moon Profile Sit)



### Crossed Legged Mermaid

Begin in man in the moon with legs crossed. Notice which leg is on top, and grip with the same hand high on the hoop. Grip behind your lower back with the other hand. Straighten both legs, and keep them as close together as possible. Rotate the body away from the hoop, squeezing the legs together. Release the bottom hand (from behind your back) and reach out into space.



**EXIT TO SLEEPER:** Grip the top of the hoop, then bend the knees and drop the pelvis down to enter sleeper.

**EXIT TO SITTING:** Grip the top of the hoop with both hands and bend the knees. Turn back into a sitting position.

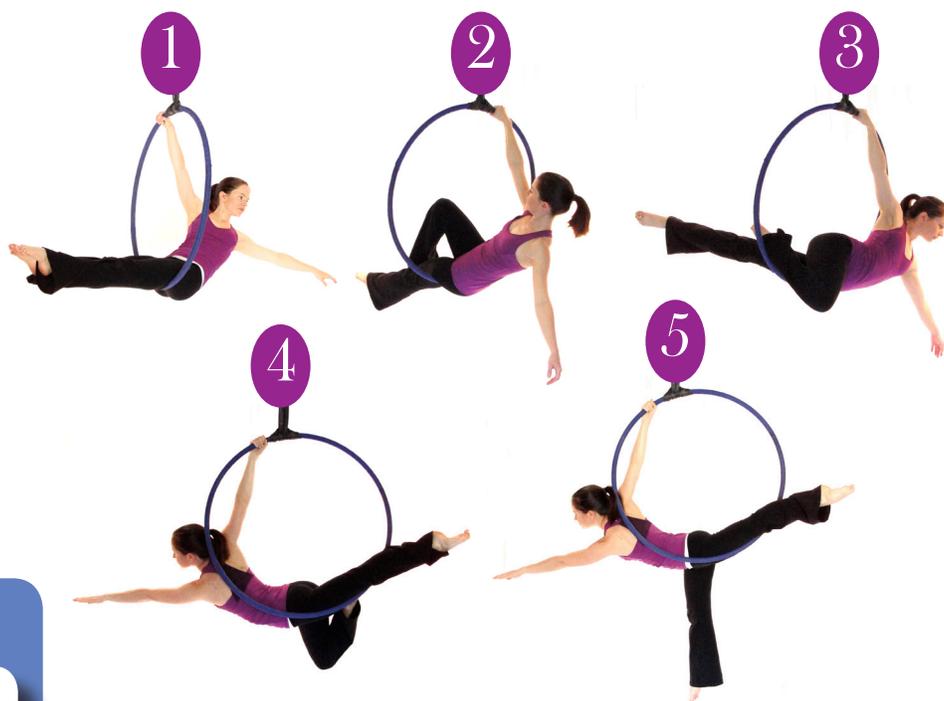


## Angel Roll from Mermaid

### Angel Roll

#### (Mermaid Extension)

Begin in a sitting position with one hand at the top of the hoop (just like going into regular outside mermaid). As you lean for an outside mermaid, bend the top leg bringing it through the hoop and down in front of your body. It will take some practice to find just the right spot to roll to on your thigh. Rotate as far as you safely can, and then extend the free leg if you would like.



### ALTERNATE VIEW



### EXIT TO SITTING

In the roll back to the sitting position, the secret is in the drop of the hips. This prevents a roll to the back—which is perfect for a transition into dragonfly, but not so great for the retrograde of the angel roll.





# Chapter Five: Intermediate Moves

*Lions, gazelles, hip hangs and more  
Front balances, back balances, Amazons galore!*

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This chapter is a continuation of the ideas started in chapter four with movement families. The level of difficulty in this chapter is roughly intermediate, but could be called beginning or advanced depending on the type of circus or dance school. Many of these hoop moves come to us from the long legacy of trapeze. If you have worked on other apparatuses, then you may simply be learning about the nuances of mapping the moves that you already know onto hoop. If you are just beginning aerial work, let me assure you that your task of learning any other aerial apparatus has been cut in half by learning these aerial movement ideas set before you in this manual, especially in chapters four and five. The underlying ideas of aerial work overlap continuously.

In this chapter you will meet outside lion, which is a cousin of the regular lion in a tree. Both lions have the same concept of one leg and the torso resting over the bar. The only difference is which side of the hips the hoop passes—either in front or behind, hence the names. Lions are classic movement families on any aerial apparatus, so it's good to get a feel for them. In chapter six, we will cover various methods of transitioning between the two lions. This will help you learn more ways to get in and out of these poses. It also proves that level of difficulty can be determined by transitions not just destinations.

One reason we cover outside lion before covering other positions is that it functions as a “home base” of sorts. For instance, when coming out of back balance, it is very natural for the body to end up in outside lion. In fact, it can often place the hoop around the body so that it is the most comfortable outside lion you've ever been in! This supports the claim that the straightforward way of getting into a pose is not always the easiest or most comfortable way. If you cannot quite find a comfortable positioning for a pose, do not give up on the pose! You may find another entrance to the position that will completely change your mind about the pose.

In this chapter, there are some great examples of press supports and blocks. A *press support* requires the brute force of an arm or a leg pressing into hoop in order to remain in the position. In other words, it's not hooked or held by squeezing the grip. Two major press supports are the neck-hand press support and the under armpit-hand press support. The colloquial names are Amazon and dragonfly respectively.

A *block* is a balance position that has been shifted off axis and requires the use of an arm or leg to prevent falling. We have already covered a fantastic example of a block in the stag position in chapter four. When horse position is shifted off axis (in this case forwards), it requires the blocking of the arms (at the forearms) on the hoop to keep from falling forward. In this chapter, the main examples of blocks are the popsicle family and the foot block. See if you can spot other blocks throughout the chapter. (Hint: You will find blocks in the front hip balance, the gazelle and more!)

---

# Outside Lion

**Prerequisite(s):**  
*Inside Lion in a Tree*

**About this move:** *In some circles, this move is known as a Mary Contreras, puppet, half puppet, and more. We chose to use the term "outside lion" because it has the same contact points as lion in a tree (inside lion) but with the back surface of the body resting in the hoop. To help you remember which is which, think of the terms "inside" and "outside" as referring to the placement of the bar relative to the body.*

## Entrance 1: Outside Lion from Horse

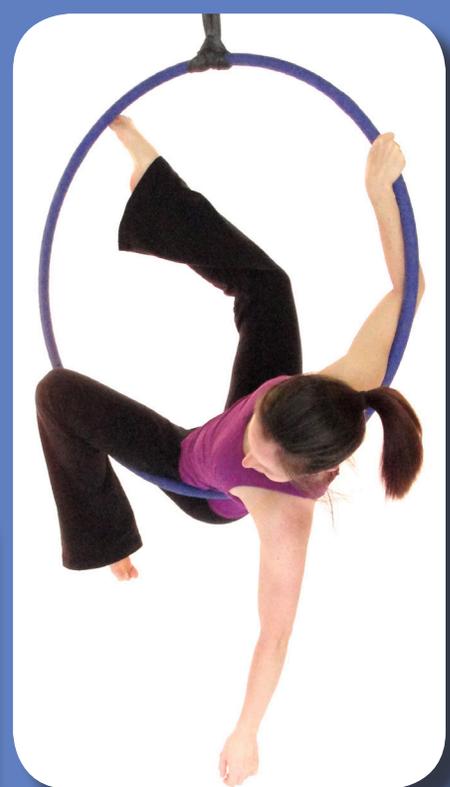
### Outside Lion From Horse

From a horse position, lift the pelvis off the hoop and slide it forward and down. Rotate and bend the back knee until it hooks on the hoop. Bending the elbow opposite the bent knee, block that shoulder behind the hoop. This will allow your torso to rest on the hoop.



### PLAY TIME!

Explore the many variations within this move - bent legs, straight legs, reclining further, grabbing the feet, placing the feet inside the hoop, twisting the spine, etc. Play with finding the "edge" of the movement. Where does this movement end and another begin? At what point does the move become something new? Everyone will have different answers to that question.



## Entrance 2: Melt into Outside Lion from Sitting

### Outside Lion From Sitting

Start by sitting way up high on one side of the hoop. Hold with one hand as you reach across and in front of the hoop with the other. Lean into the lonely side of the hoop using your grip to support this shift. Shift your grip along the hoop (using both hands as you go) for support. Notice which leg is now on top. Remove the top leg so it drops down.



## Cuddle from Outside Lion

### Cuddle

Bring the bottom leg up to the hoop and cross it over the other leg.

### Terminology Review

Cuddle is when both legs cross over the bar. Sleeper is when only one leg crosses over the bar. Sleeper is derived from inside lion.



## Lion to/from Man in the Moon



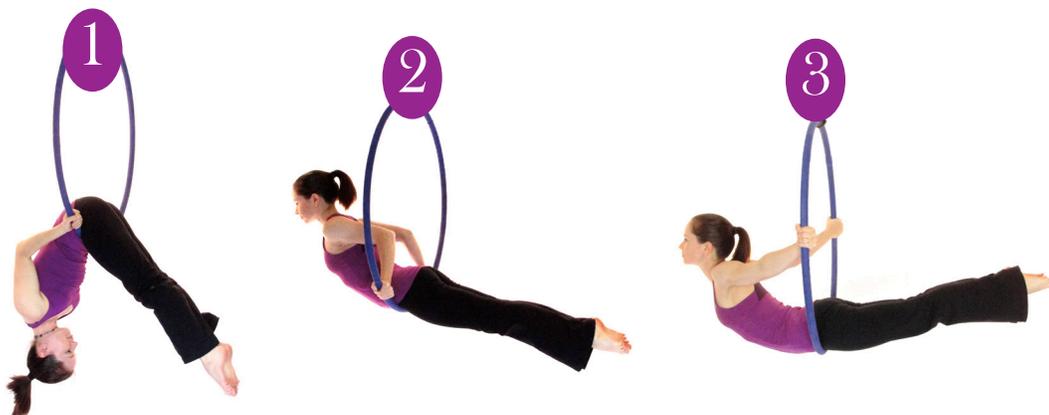
### From Man in the Moon

Holding the hoop for stability, place one thigh on the hoop and send your hips to the other side of the hoop. Lean the torso in the same direction as the hooked knee to enter the outside lion position. Retrograde these moves to return to the man in the moon position.

# Front Hip Balance Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Hip Hang

**About this move:** *Front balance can be a relaxing position, but it can also be frightening to beginners for several reasons. First, the placement of the hips is crucial. Second, knowing the back-up plan of tucking into a ball when you lose balance adds a sense of safety. Third, it takes time to build the back, core and hamstring strength to maintain this position for any length of time. But once you master it, it can feel like flying.*



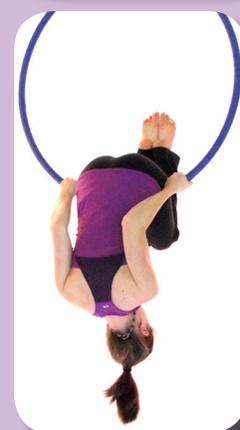
## Extend Up to Front Hip Balance

Start in a hip hang. While lightly holding the hoop, develop the torso up towards the ceiling (roll through the spine) while engaging the legs and buttocks. Squeeze the legs together and connect the engagement through the entire body (core work!). When you feel mostly balanced, slide the hands up the hoop towards the horizon and extend through the body even more.



## EXITING

If you lose your balance, you need to know what to do. It's like the fire drill: tuck and roll! If you continue to roll, place your hands on the hoop and roll into a lock off with proper shoulder positioning. Practice falling into the tuck/ball position without using your hands. "If you think you are going to fall, tuck into a ball."



## Exercise to and from Front Hip Balance

Begin in a hip hang. Practice rolling up sequentially through the spine by tucking the tail bone underneath first. You will feel the pelvis shift on the bar to accommodate the change in balance. Keep the chin tucked until you have rolled through each vertebra of the spine. Be sure to soften through the heart space before lifting the head. Lift the head last and release your arms to the side. Engage the back, core and hamstrings by lifting the heels upward. Keep the knees straight. Retrograde the steps starting with the tuck of chin to chest to return to a hip hang. Exhale when rolling down to soften the torso and articulate the spine. For those with tightness, it helps to practice from standing on the ground.

# Popsicle Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Man in the Moon

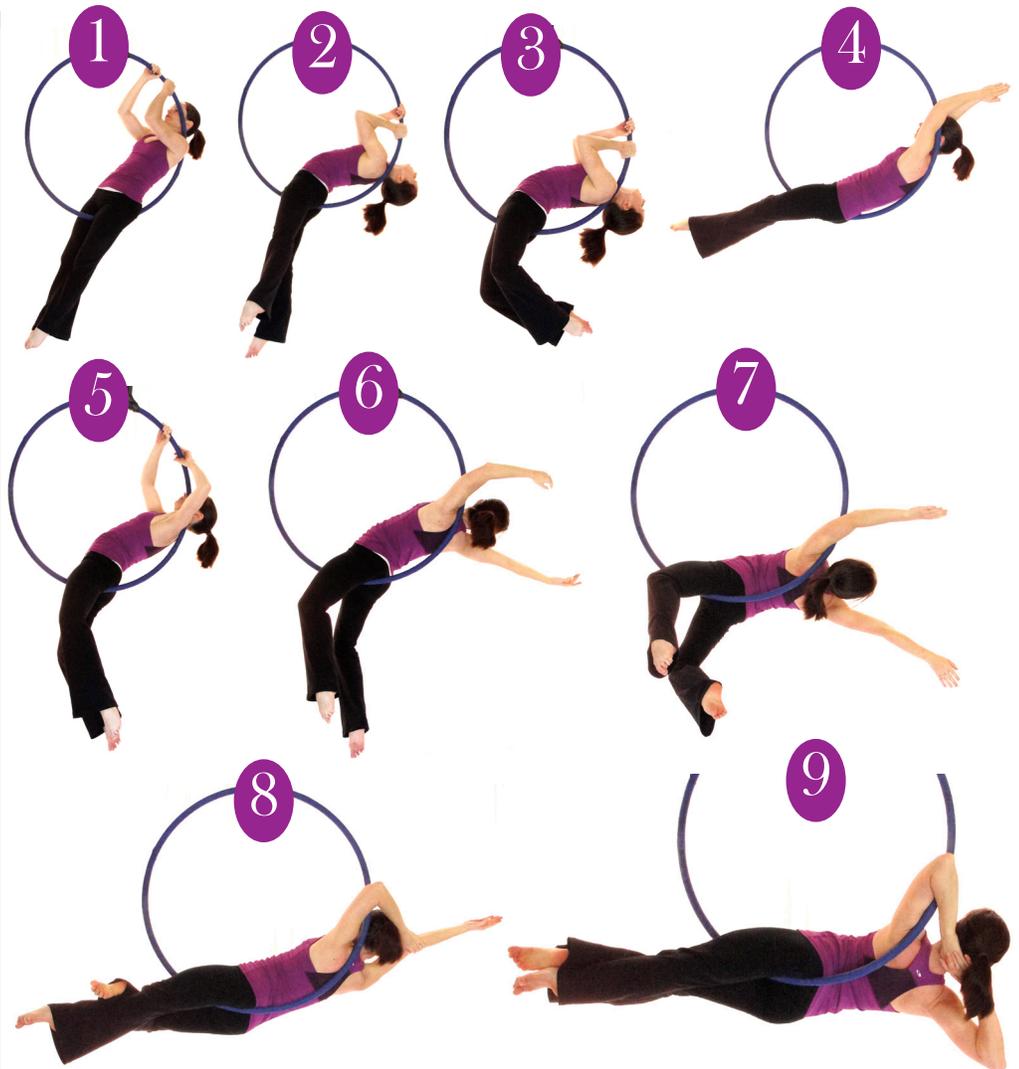
**About this move:** The popsicle gets its name from the archetypal pose in this category where the aerialist looks like they are a popsicle, with one leg on either side of the hoop and the body is perfectly vertical. From this basic concept many moves are born. Use an arm block to hold some body weight the body moves towards the horizontal. This is a challenging position. Feel free to play anywhere along the spectrum.

## Popsicle Moves

*Profile in Hoop (photos 1-4):*

Begin by rotating your body profile in the hoop with one leg on either side of the bottom bar. Make sure to be slightly off to one side so that the hoop does not actually pass directly between the legs. With one hand high and one hand low, you can transition into other moves, including rotations through the sagittal plan. Or, use an opposite grip overhead and move into various positions, as shown.

*Tilted (photos 5-9):* Secure the hoop at the shoulder/top of the arm as you tilt to the side. Bring the legs and arms into various positions (as long as the top arm stays extended over your head for the block). The more the hips are rotated and are perpendicular to the ground, the more dramatic the position will be. If you decide to have your legs together, squeeze the legs to get the heels together, or cross the legs for some beautiful shapes.



## EXITING

When exiting from the tilted popsicle, you can transition into outside lion in the tree. The popsicle position also transitions well to and from man in the moon position.



## PROGRESSIONS

From the tilted popsicle position, hold the hoop above your head and rotate the body towards the ground, being careful not to let the hoop slide past the knee, (i.e. keep the hoop passing over the quadriceps). This is a perfect precursor for an advanced transition that involves rotating to the ankle instead of the thigh. Both of these movements require shoulder flexibility and high attention to proper placement, not to mention back flexibility. Be kind to your body!



# Amazon

## Prerequisite(s):

Man in the Moon

**About this move:** Press supports require radiating pressure from the core outward. Not only are you pressing with the hand, but also the spine, head, and other limbs depending on the position. Extending outward into space with free limbs is also extremely helpful. The Amazon is a press support that involves pressing between the hand and the neck (or top of the shoulder).



## From Man in the Moon

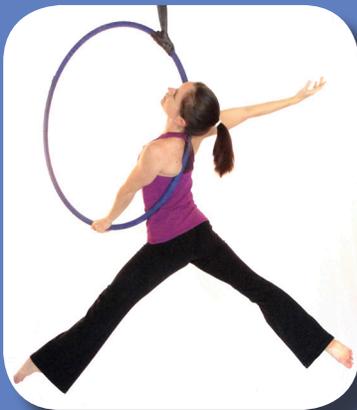
Place one hand high and one hand at the small of the back (there should be a small space there - if not, adjust your spine to make room for the bottom hand to grip the bar). Place your head to the side of the hoop. Follow the direction of your knuckles - if they face left, take your head to the left side of the hoop.

*Optional Steps 3-4: Pressing firmly against the hoop with the top foot, release the bottom foot. You can practice the press support by removing your top hand and pressing your spine into the hoop while keeping one leg on the hoop.*

For the full Amazon, re-grip the top of the hoop. Release the head backward and block firmly against the hoop, keeping your bottom arm straight. Release the top leg. If the position is secure, carefully release the top hand.

## PLAY TIME!

Experiment with different leg and arm positions.



## EXITING

To retrograde back to the man in the moon, re-grab the hoop (whichever grip you prefer), and bring your outside leg up onto the hoop. Then, tuck the back leg under your bent leg to sneak back into sitting profile on hoop (i.e. man in the moon).



# Dragonfly

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Strong Wrists

**About this move:** This move shares similar characteristics to the Amazon as well as back balance on the rope. It's similar to Amazon because it falls in the press support category. The difference is that the hoop passes under the arm instead of under the neck. Flip to the end of chapter six for instruction on how to transition between Amazon and dragonfly. A move called dragoncatcher is also covered, which often comes after dragonfly.

## Dragonfly from Sitting

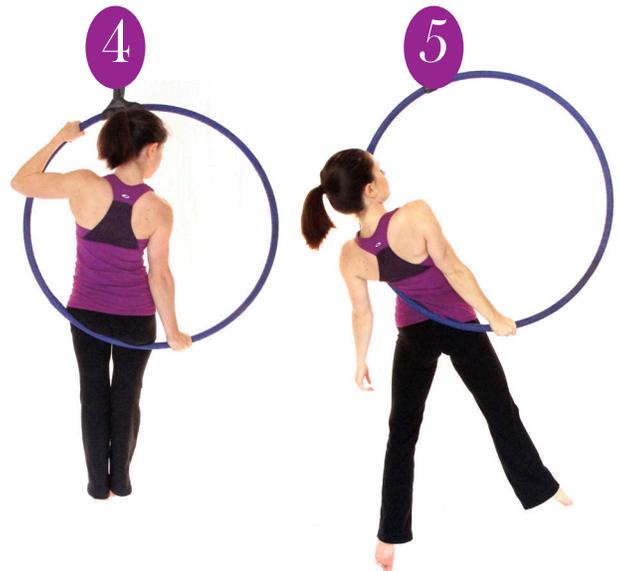
From the sitting position, use one hand on the bottom of the hoop to lift and scoot yourself up one side of the hoop. Engage all muscles and lift up off of the hoop. Press the hips forwards. Lower the body so that the hoop is around your back, passing under the arm. Keep the bottom arm straight and strong, causing your back to press into the hoop. Once you are secure in this position, remove the top hand. See the blue box for ideas on stylizing this position.



## EXITING

Almost all transitions from Amazon work with dragonfly and vice versa, since the two moves are so similar. Here, we demonstrate one possible exit from dragonfly.

Replace the top hand on the hoop above your head. Lean the body backwards. As you lean, bring the inside leg into the hoop. Once the leg is resting on the hoop, transition into your favorite move: outside lion, etc.



## PLAY TIME!

Feel free to experiment with different leg and arm positions in this press support.

Because of the body position in the hoop, the dragonfly is closely related to the side back balance that can be performed on rope or fabric. In Volume 2, we cover side back balance above the hoop, which will utilize the rope (or span set, etc) and the hoop. While the shape is similar, the mechanics are vastly different.



# Knee Hang on Top Bar Family

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Strong tuck inversion to knee hang on lower bar

**About this move:** The knee hang on to the top bar offers a whole new world of tricks (as opposed to double knee hang on the lower bar), but also introduces the variable of tipping. Single tabbed hoops can easily tip side to side and double tabbed hoops can easily tip front to back. Use caution when working. Pictures show use of a double tabbed hoop as well as a single tabbed hoop. Warm up with bridges on the ground.

## Arch Back Pose 1

### Gentle Arch with Arms Back

Begin in knee hang on top of the hoop. If you have two tabs, place the knees between the ropes. If the hoop is single tabbed, place one leg on either side of the rope/span set, etc. Release the hands and roll down through the spine while pressing the hips forward. This hamstring engagement will secure the position. Slide the hands down the sides of the hoop. Place them around 5 and 7 o'clock. Press arms out behind you.



## Arch Back Pose 2



### Arch for Bendy Backs

Begin in a knee hang on top of the bar. Place the hands behind your head. Grasp the hoop about knee-width apart. Arch your back and press the hoop away. Look at your hands to support the position from the spine. Also, support your shoulders with lots of “room” under your shoulder blades. The bigger the hoop, the less arch will be required.

## Arch Back Pose 3

### Gentle Arch with Arms in Front

Begin in the same position as the arch back pose 2. Tuck the chin to allow the hoop to pass overhead (or under the head, depending on how you like to orient space). Press the hoop away from your torso with the hands, and arch looking away from the hands. This pose is more spine friendly than arch back pose 2.



# Foot Block

**Prerequisite(s):** knee hang on top bar, outside lion

**About this move:** In this move, the upper back rests on the hoop while the feet block on the top of the hoop. Theoretically, this is an outside armpit hang (see Volume 2) with a foot block on the top of the hoop. It requires a relatively small hoop--and especially if you have short legs! The size of the hoop relative to your body proportions will have a direct affect on the look of this move or whether it is even possible.

## Foot Block from Faux Toe Hang

One way to get into the foot block is by starting from a partial ball inversion. Place the top of your feet over the top of the hoop, with the contact point high on the top of the foot. Steer the hoop so that the hoop lands under the thoracic spine (under the rib cage). Slide the hands down or release them if you are secure. Once you have your thoracic spine in a comfortable position, you can transfer your feet to the front side of the hoop and stylize as you desire.



## OTHER ENTRANCES

There are other ways to enter the foot block. One includes a back and forth wiggle until the hoop is in the right spot. As the body lowers, the leg reaches up to the top bar to spot.



## EXIT STRATEGY

Shift your weight sideways so that you are lying profile in the hoop. This can easily transform into a low man in the moon position or a lion.



## PLAY TIME!

From the foot block, you can enter a position known as wineglass. It is a cousin of the outside lion. In fact, you can easily transition to and from the outside lion from here.



This is a great stretch for your splits. Plus, it helps prepare you for rib cage hangs (Vol. 2).

# Gazelle (Profile Laybacks)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
L-sit

**About this move:** Gazelles are traditional moves performed on trapeze. If you are used to performing gazelle on a trapeze, then transitioning to hoop will feel strange at first due to the curvature of the apparatus. New aerial students may want to learn gazelle on a trapeze before trying it on hoop since the ropes of a trapeze allow for more movement and adjustments in the aerialist's body.

## Gazelle

Begin in an L-sit. Bend the bottom leg toward your chest. Lean back and shift your hands so that your body ends up on one side of the hoop and your bent leg on the other side. Lift and shift your pelvis over so that your sacrum ends up centered on the bottom bar. Some aerialists prefer to lean back, bend the knee, and shift the pelvis all at the same time. Hug the bent knee into your chest. Press your straight leg into the other side of the hoop for stability. Continue holding onto the knee with the same side arm (right arm if the right leg is bent) as you release the other arm and lower the torso below the bar. Press the inner thigh of the front leg firmly into the bar. If you feel secure in this position and your sacrum remains centered on the bar, release both hands. *Spotters:* Hold under the back and shoulder when the student releases the arms.

## PLAY TIME!

Explore the many variations within this move: one bent leg with one straight leg, and vice versa, or bend both legs; try grabbing feet, twisting the torso, etc. For a gazelle split, grab the heel and straighten the front leg. Be sure that your back leg has not lost constant pressure with the hoop.



## AN EXIT

There are many transitions from this position (see chapter six), but for now simply retrograde the position by climbing back up the hoop hand over hand.

*Spotters:* Hold under the shoulders during the movement.



# Back Balance Family

## Prerequisite(s):

*Flexible Splits,  
Bird's Nest,  
Lion in a Tree*

**About this move:** Back balances create the illusion of hovering. Since the sacrum is a flat bone, it is the best place to put the bar. To maintain your balance in certain leg positions, arch the lower back to create a shelf effect. Remember that tucking the pelvis will cause the hips to slide, which is helpful when exiting the move but not so helpful when trying to maintain the position.

## Back Balance

From sitting with the hands around 3 and 9 o'clock, lean back. Twist the body from side to side to scoot the bar toward the sacrum. Frog the legs outward. (Note: Flexibility helps in this position. A wider straddle creates a more stable position.) Straighten the legs into a straddle position and arch the lower back to create a shelf. Lower the torso and release the hands if you are secure.

**Spotters:** Hold under shoulders.



## EXIT/TRANSITIONAL OPTIONS

There are so many ways to transition to other moves! To name a few:

1. Exit to bird's nest (make sure to have your hands the appropriate distance—wide enough to fit your knees on the bar between them.)
2. Exit to outside lion in a tree by placing one leg through the hoop to catch as you bring your body up.
3. Rotate your body towards inside lion. You can use your foot on the bar to assist or style.

**PLAY TIME!** Once you get the hang of the back balance, experiment with other leg positions. Figure out how you need to position your pelvis to maintain balance. For example, if you place the top foot on either side of the top of the hoop (feet side or head side), you need to shift your weight accordingly so that the back balance can work its magic.

One of the more powerful images on hoop is that of the full body balance (pictured right). Straighten the legs and carefully extend the arms. Use a subtle lengthening and shortening of the torso/core to actively balance the position without using the hands.



1



2



3





# Chapter Six: Transitions

*Here are our random thoughts  
On how you might connect the dots.*

In this chapter, we present transitions as well as a few dynamic moves on the hoop. Once a student has mastered the still shapes, they are ready to start connecting the dots in typical and not-so-typical ways. That's where this chapter comes in handy! It not only gives you a few example of ways to connect moves, but more than that, it gives you the tools to think about movement categories overall. Rotational movement can be broken into three categories using a bit of Laban terminology, and some words from the medical community. (We are using many different ways of saying the same thing in hopes that at least one word helps you understand what we mean.) Rotational movement can take place within one of three planes or a combination of the three:



**Transverse/Table/Horizontal Plane** (*depicted in green*): Motion that swipes across the front of the body is an example of motion in the transverse plane (example: wiping off a table). If you stand on two feet and start spinning in circles like Rebekah's little girl does, you are rotating in the transverse plane.

**Frontal/Coronal/Door/Vertical Plane** (*depicted in blue*): A cartwheel is an example of rotation in the coronal plane. In this chapter, we present movement in the frontal plane in the form of rotating from sitting to hip hang and back again. There are many different ways to stylize this "air cartwheel" in the aerial hoop and other apparatuses.

**Sagittal/Wheel Plane** (*depicted in red*): Motion that takes you frontwards and backwards like a somersault or back-handspring is movement in the sagittal plane. On the aerial hoop, this will take the form of mill circles and rolls into hip hang or single knee hangs.

After covering the major rotational movements, we veer off into other ideas in transitions. Transitions can help you change the way you are facing in the hoop, a handy skill to have in your back pocket. We cover two ways to switch between the two lions. One way allows you to remain facing the same way and another switches your orientation in the hoop. This idea can be abstracted to help students understand that there is more than one way between two positions and each can be favorable for various choreographic purposes.

The grand finale of transitions is a classic favorite to teach beginning lyra students. It is gazelle to arrow (a.k.a. half hip hang with foot block) to single knee hang. While we are on the topic of gazelle, we show a few bonus transitions from gazelle as well as some other variations that we did not have room to show you the first time we looked at gazelle. Speaking of not having enough room to show you cool, awesome moves, you may want to pick up a copy of Volume 2 to continue your exploration of the beauty of the lyrical hoop.

# Transverse Transitions

## Prerequisite(s):

Horse, Long  
Hang Pull Ups,  
L-sit

**About this move:** *Spinning the hoop is one example of a transverse transition. Next in line is the horse to horse transition, which rotates the body in the horizontal plane. The other transition we present here is a twisting entrance into hanging on the top bar. Because of the rotation involved, the retrograde to this move is next to impossible! Instead, we recommend hooking a leg to exit into horse.*

## Horse to Horse

### Horse to Horse

From horse with your left leg in front, rotate towards your right and switch your hands between 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock. Once the hands are switched, rotate the rest of the body and lift up over the bar as you rotate to face the opposite direction. Lower into horse position with the right leg in front.



## Sitting to Long Hang Behind Hoop

### Sitting to Long Hang

From sitting, rotate sideways so that you are profile in the hoop (L-sit). Change your hands so they both momentarily grip at 1 o'clock. Keep rotating your torso. Reach back over your shoulder to grip the second hand at 11 o'clock. Lower your body with control down to a long hang.

Exit by hooking a leg on the hoop. Proceed into horse, etc.



# Long Hang Beats

**Prerequisite(s):** shoulder injury prevention knowledge

**About this move:** Beats (or tempos) are wonderful transition moves using momentum instead of brute strength to drive the action. Try beats on a trapeze bar first, or hang your hoop 7-8 feet off the ground so you can practice beating from the bottom bar. If you're a beginner practicing beats from the top bar, the bottom bar can hit you in the back pretty hard. Also, the bottom bar can be painful if the hoop you are working on is too small for your body.



## Long Hang Beats **\*\*Sagittal Movement\*\***

Start hanging under the bar or on the top bar. Slowly and gently start swinging your legs front to back without folding or piking at the hips. Think of yourself as a pendulum in a grandfather clock, and keep the motion small to start. Keep the arc of the beat equal in both directions, front and back. This is not an abdominal exercise, so no crunching! As you become more comfortable with releasing the lower body into the swing, start increasing the size of your beats. If you're unsure of your form, keep the beats small. In most cases, once your body understands the motion and becomes strong enough to handle the momentum, the beats will increase in size on their own without you forcing it.

## Shoot Out Long Hang Beats

Start sitting on the hoop with the hands at around 11 and 1 o'clock. Tuck up into a ball, pulling your hips off the bottom bar (photo 1). Force the legs out straight in front of you like a cannon firing. Your body should hover parallel to the ground for just a moment, with the only hinge happening in the shoulders (photo 2). Keeping the shoulders engaged, allow the body to swing. Reach out through the toes to create one giant arcing long hang beat (photo 3). When the legs return to the front and you feel the rise of your hips in the swing, pull up to a sitting position on the hoop. Alternatively, you can pull all the way through until your feet are on the bottom bar (photo 5).



## Transition from Back Balance into Beats

Start in a back balance on the lower bar. As you tilt forward, reach for the hoop. Don't be too anxious. Arrive at the proper time. It helps to balance the motion by bringing one leg up as the other leg goes down. Once you have the hoop, swing out into a beat.

*Note that this is an advanced movement. Both the back balance and transition require high body awareness.*



# Frontal Transitions: Sitting <math>\leftrightarrow</math> Hip Hang

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Sitting  
Hip Hang  
Mermaid

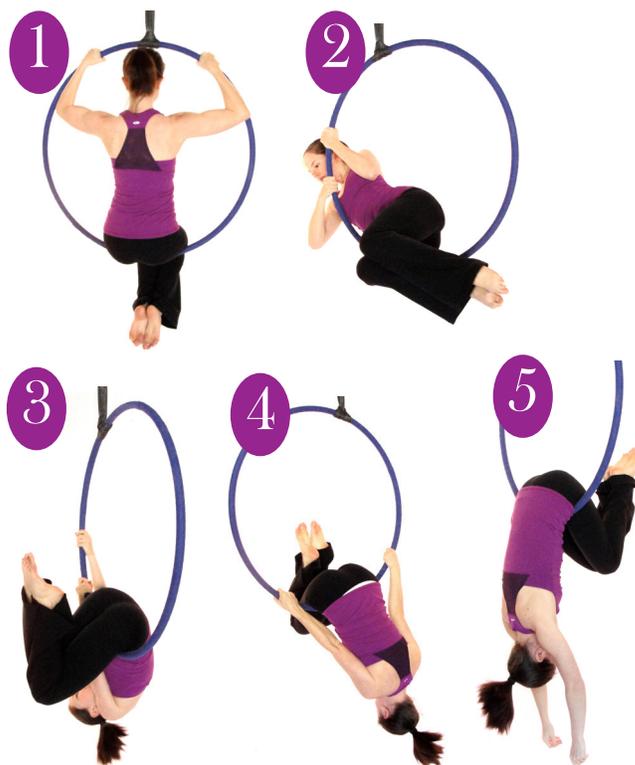
**About this move:** We cover two main methods of rolling through the doorway plane. These two ways can be categorized by their movement quality: rigid versus a “melting” quality. While we have listed the classical method first, we suggest starting with the melting method because it can be more comfortable for beginners. In practice, the transition between sitting and hip hang tend to be a combination of these two extremes.

## Sitting to Hip Hang: Rigid Roll

### Classic, Straightforward Sitting to Hip Hang

From sitting, bring both hands to one side of the hoop. Keeping your spine in one connected line from the top of the head to the tail bone, tilt your torso sideways in front of the hoop so that your torso passes your hands in front of your body. Maintaining a slight tuck position and moving the body as a whole unit, roll over the side of your thigh. Disconnecting at the waist causes the torso to move sideways, leaving the hips in a seated position. You may need a second engagement of the core/back to rotate the hips. If you are not used to the pressure on the side of the thigh, this can be uncomfortable, so don't pause—keep rotating!

Continue the rotation over to the top of the thighs, straightening the arms and then allowing the hands to slide down the hoop as necessary to arrive in hip hang. You may need to grab the hoop on either side of your hips to help adjust your body to the center of the hoop. Hint: Rolling from center tends to take you up the hoop, so if you start a little off center and roll down the hoop, you can arrive more centered at 6 o'clock in hip hang.



## Hip Hang to Sitting: Rigid Roll



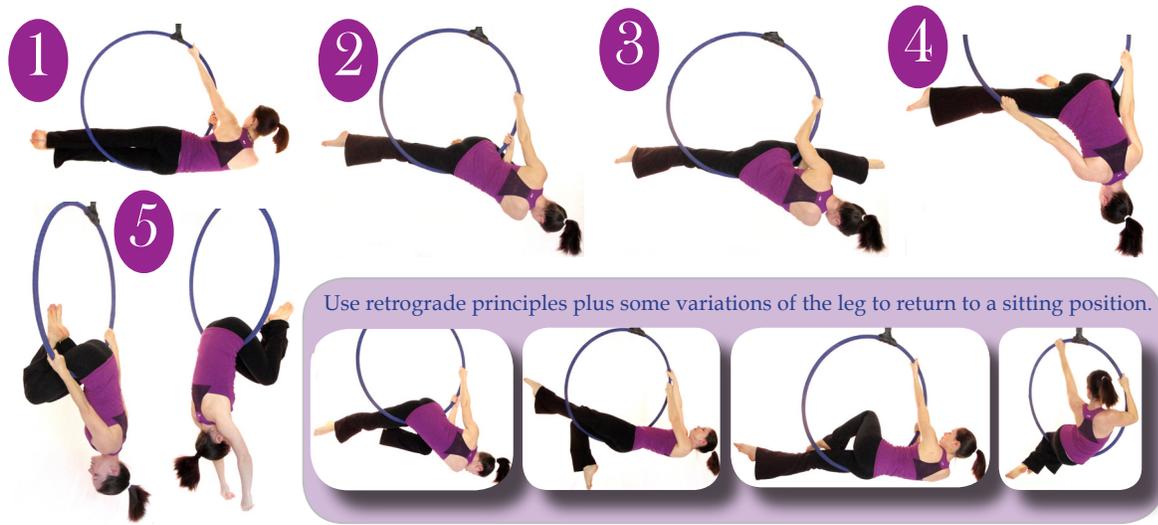
### Roll up to Sitting

From the hip hang, reach your hands as high as you comfortably can up one side of the hoop. Rotate your hips so that you roll around your thighs. (Students risk rolling out of the hoop if not properly instructed on this step.) The legs should remain on the opposite side of the hoop as the torso. Once the backs of the legs are next to the hoop, complete the rotation up to sitting.

## Sitting to Hip Hang: Melt Through Inside Mermaid

### Melt Through Inside Mermaid

From sitting, go into inside mermaid. Keep rotating by allowing the weight of your head to drop towards the ground and slide your hands down the hoop. Feel free to add a split (photo 3). Sink into a hip hang.



Use retrograde principles plus some variations of the leg to return to a sitting position.



## Hip Hang to Sitting: with L-pop



### L-pop to Sitting

From hip hang, use your obliques to reach and grip relatively high on one side of the hoop.

*In photo 2, we demonstrate an optional, intermediate step of placing the leg closest to your hands up on the hoop. This can be a helpful step for beginners with low hoop awareness. The block helps prevent them from rotating out of the hoop, which is the most common error in this move.*

In one quick motion, rotate the hips up towards the ceiling as the leg that was closest to your hands reaches upwards and the opposing leg downwards. Use the leg block to help lift your top arm up to 1 o'clock. Once you grip the hoop, bring the leg down in either a crossed legged position (photo 5) or make minor adjustments necessary to arrive at the regular seated position (photo 6). The rotation tends to take you up the hoop as you roll, so if you want to arrive at 6 o'clock on the dot, start your hip hang slightly up the hoop so you can roll down onto center.

# Sagittal Transitions (Rolls)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Lion in a Tree, Half Hip Hang, Single Knee Hang, Hip Balance

**About this move:** A prime example of a sagittal transition is the forward roll from horse to single knee hang. The retrograde of the forwards roll (horse to single knee hang) is the backwards roll up. That was introduced in chapter three. Here, we are going to cover variations of the same type of roll that have different ending positions. We also cover an entirely new roll from front hip balance into an outside knee hang.

## Horse/Stag Entrance to Half Hip Hang

### Start in Horse/Stag

Begin the stag position gripping the hoop around 5 and 7 o'clock or lower. Slowly roll forward by tucking the chin and rounding the spine. Allow the hip to settle onto the hoop feeling your weight at the top of the inner thigh. This entrance can help set you up for optimum body placement for the half hip hang.

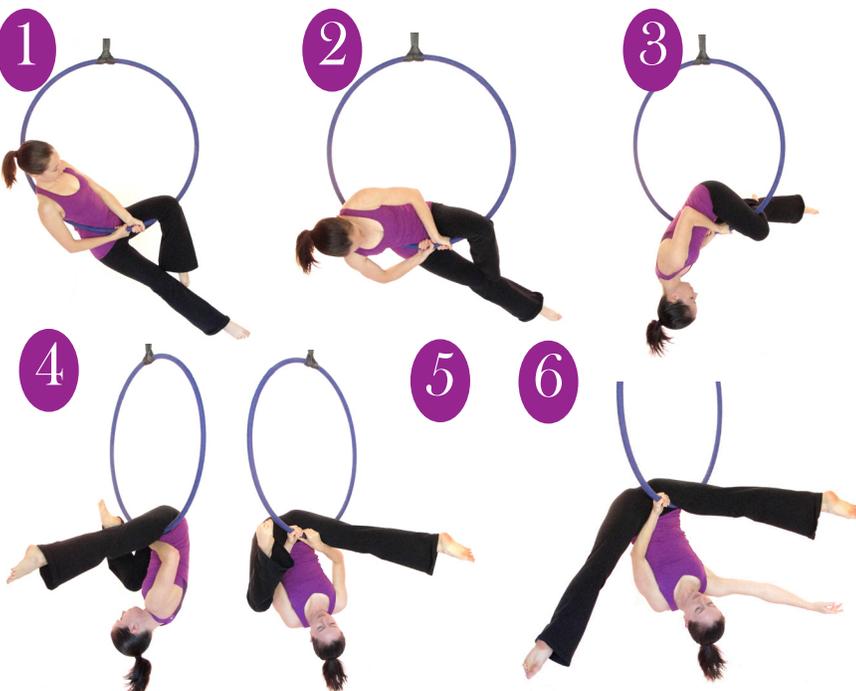


### End in Half Hip Hang

If you chose a hand grip that was too high or wide, you may need to slide your hands down the hoop so that you are not straining to hold after the roll.

Again, experiment with various positions with hands and legs. We have demonstrated the option to squeeze legs straight and together, as well as hold behind the knees with the arms.

## Front Roll: Lion in a Tree to Half Hip Hang



### Lion to Half Hip Hang

From lion in a tree, hold the hoop in the gap under your bent leg. With control, allow your torso to drop forward. As you roll, bend at the waist. Stay "weighted" in your back leg so that you stop the momentum while you are in a half hip hang (i.e. think heavy leg thoughts).

If you are ready to do positions such as splits here, you will be celebrating this transition because with practice, you will be able to roll directly into those splits. That maneuver looks awesome! (Check out the half hip hang in chapter three to see variations.)

If you are ready for a challenge, figure out how to give yourself the best advantage for rolling into single knee hang. \*

\*Answer: Place the knee at 6 o'clock.

## Monkey Rolls

In monkey rolls, connect a series of backwards roll ups, one right after the other. See instructions for the backwards leg roll up in chapter three (the chapter on mounts).



## Forward Roll: Mill Circles

### Mill Circles

The forward roll or 1/2 mill circle was covered in chapter three (and pictured here). It was the exit to the backwards roll up mount! A full mill circle takes you all the way around the hoop and back up to horse. To perform a full mill circle (not pictured), keep the front leg straight and kick forcefully down and back (hoop under the thigh) with momentum as you complete a full circle around the hoop. You can go all the way around, returning back to horse. Squeeze the legs together throughout the movement. The thumbs must be forward in the preparation. Full mill circles can be rough on the hands. Avoid a sticky hoop.



## Front Hip Balance to Outside Knee Hang

We briefly mentioned the outside knee hang in chapter two. There are not that many comfortable ways directly into this position. We like this one the best and so we are including it here. If you have ever had a knee injury or struggle with knee issues of any kind, we recommend you refrain from performing this transition and the outside knee hang.



### Hip Balance to Outside Knee Hang

With one hand, hold with thumb towards the ceiling as you lean roll forward out of the front hip balance. As you roll, grab the hoop with your second hand or elbow (shown in blue box). Release the leg closest to your hands and allow that leg to come through the hoop. The other leg hooks in an outside knee hook. Stylize as desired.

### AN EXIT

Grip the hoop in opposite facing grip. Lock off and release the leg from the hoop. Lower the legs with control.



### VARIATIONS

Remember the variations used with the single knee hang? Feel free to apply those ideas here. Example: You can hook at the elbow as you rotate around.

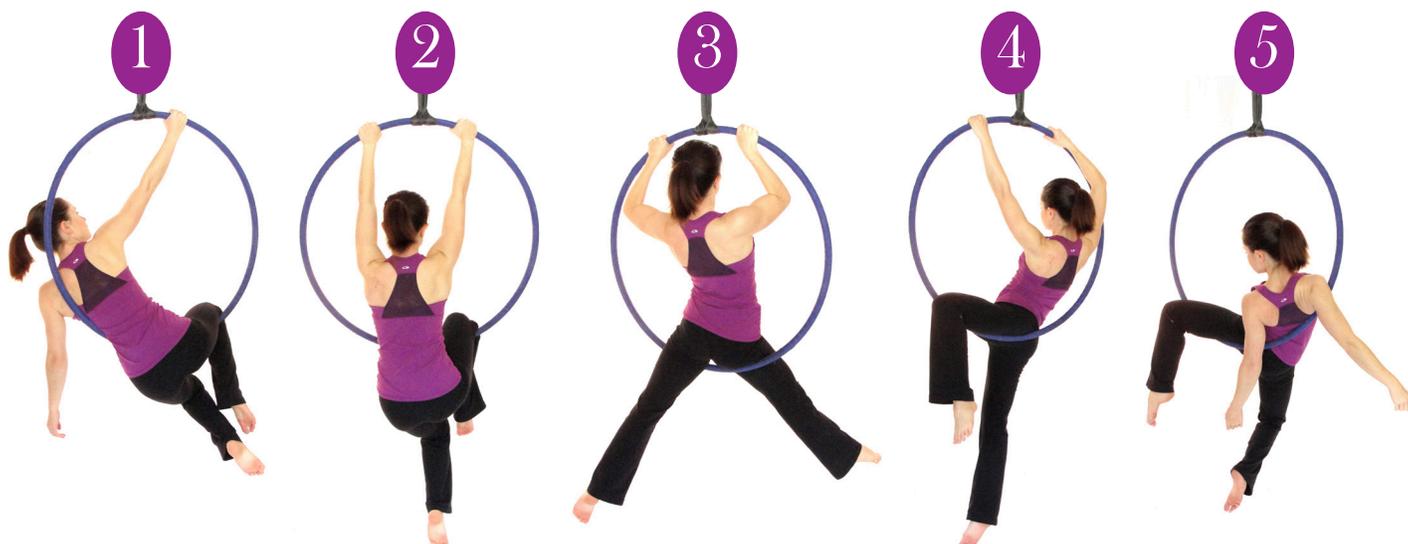


# Lion to Lion (Same Face & Change Face)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
inside and  
outside lion

**About this move:** Understanding how to shift your orientation to the audience gives you more choreographic options. Many times it does not matter because hoops are rigged on swivels, but sometimes you may want a change. It's also good to know a variety of routes between any two moves. And if you are ever improvising and need to change direction, you will know what moves to pull out of your pocket!

## Lion to Lion: Same Face



### Inside Lion to Outside Lion

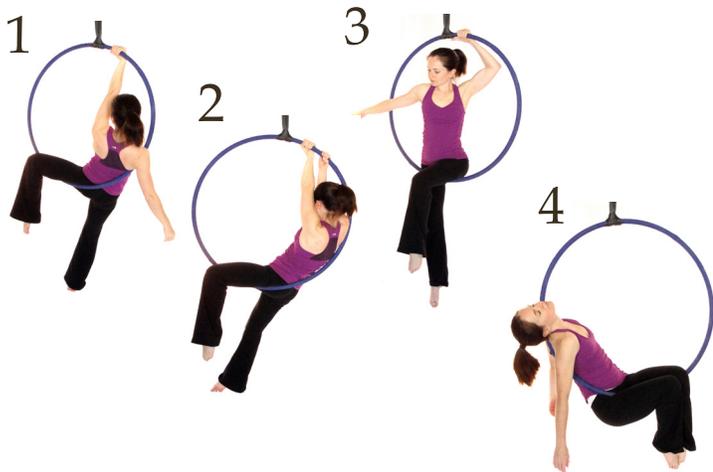
We start our journey through the jungle with inside lion in a tree. With the top hand, reach over to the opposite side of the hoop to set up for a 1 and 11 o'clock grip. Once you have both hands in place, straighten the inside leg and travel forward through the hoop (while being cautious to pass over delicate areas). Bend the back leg as you let your buttocks drop down on the inside side of the hoop. Bring the appropriate arm over the opposite side of the hoop to pose, stylize, and/or relax in outside lion.



### Outside to Inside Lion

From outside lion, reach your hands to the top of the hoop around 1 and 11 o'clock. Straighten the back leg (by the way, nice opportunity for a pose here), and pull up, making your way backwards through the hoop. Bend the front leg as you sink down behind the hoop. (Well, you don't have to bend your leg. To keep things interesting, we've shown a straight leg version of lion in a tree in photo 4.) End in inside lion in a tree, stylized to your taste.

## Lion to Lion: Change Face



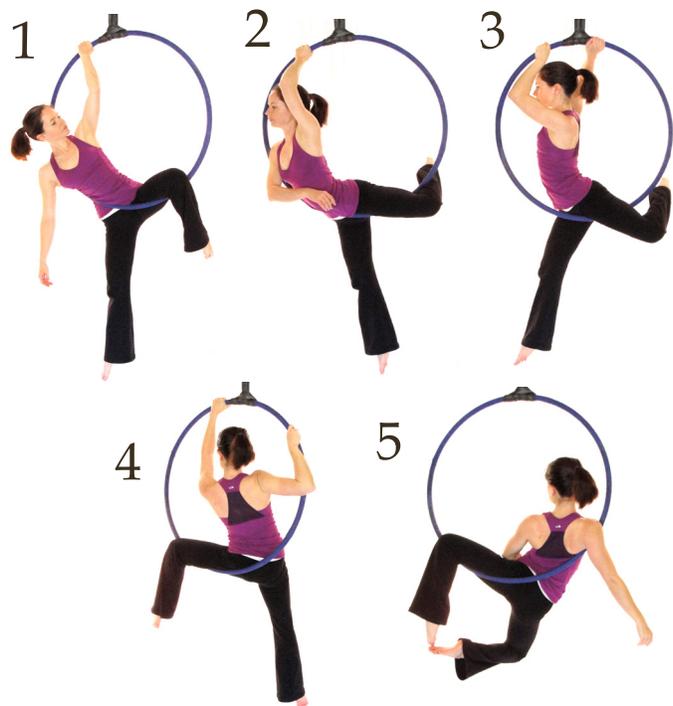
### Outside Lion to Inside Lion *pictured left*

Since the goal is to change the way you are facing, you must think ahead about what your grip needs to be when you turn around. That is how you should choose your first hand placement of the top hand from outside lion (*photo 1*). Sneak your second arm and shoulder around the hoop. (You may need assistance by momentarily holding with the free hand on the hoop - *photo 2*.) Once you have wedged free, you've set yourself up for an automatic turn back towards the hoop (as long as your grip choice was correct earlier). Reach your free arm through the hoop and over to the side to proceed into inside lion.

### Inside Lion to Outside Lion

*pictured right*

From inside lion in a tree, reach the top arm above your head at 1 o'clock. Use an underhand grip with your thumb towards the rigging point. Rotate your body around your wrist so that you can free your shoulder, then reach over on the other side of the hoop. Once you have the hands planted at 1 and 11 o'clock, pick up your weight just enough to slide the thigh along the hoop (from 5 o'clock to 7 o'clock). With the bent knee in place, sink into outside lion.



### Outside Lion to Outside Lion *pictured left* (change from right to left, etc)

From an outside lion with the right knee hooked, reach up next to the tab with your right hand. Maintaining control of the hoop (most difficult step right here!), release the left hand and subsequently, your torso out of the hoop. Steer the hoop with the remaining hand so that you now face the hoop from the outside. It's optional to use both hands for the following step. Switch which leg is in the hoop, using methods similar to a belly roll or a popsicle squeeze. Once the left knee is hooked, you are on your way to the lion on the other side of the body. Complete the movement by reaching the applicable hand behind, into the hoop and following with your shoulder and torso. Relax into outside lion on the other side!

# Press Support Transitions ( & Dragoncatcher)

## Prerequisite(s):

Mermaid  
Amazon  
Dragonfly

**About this move:** Here we have transitional ideas for moving between the two press supports as well as a transition to a new position known as dragoncatcher. This terminology, no surprise, comes from trapeze. We thought we would keep the terminology alive. Dragoncatcher is a cousin of the angel pose which we fully cover in Volume 2. Here in Volume 1, we already covered the angel roll, which has similar ideas.

## Between Amazon and Dragonfly

You can transition back and forth between Amazon and dragonfly quite simply by temporarily holding the top of the hoop with the free hand. Hold your weight while you transfer the shoulder around the hoop to get to one position from the other.



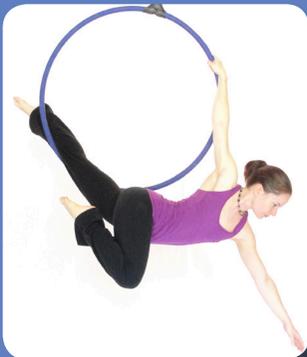
## Dragonfly to Dragoncatcher

One classic transition from dragonfly is to go into a position known as dragoncatcher. From dragonfly, put your free hand on the top of the hoop. Bring your legs through the hoop so that the front of your ankles catch on the opposite side of the hoop. Carefully release the lower body towards the arms of a spotter. Remain holding with the top hand. The lower the hand, the more this position will be angled downwards. To exit, climb your hands up the hoop to come up to a sitting position.

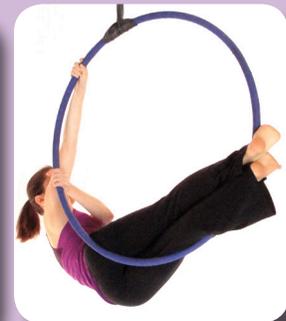


### PROGRESSION

Dragoncatcher shares many movement ideas with the mermaid and what is known as the angel roll (covered in chapter four). The only difference is that here the ankle is hooked, bringing more of an arch into the back.



### AN EXIT: Pull back up to the sitting position.



# Gazelle Transitions

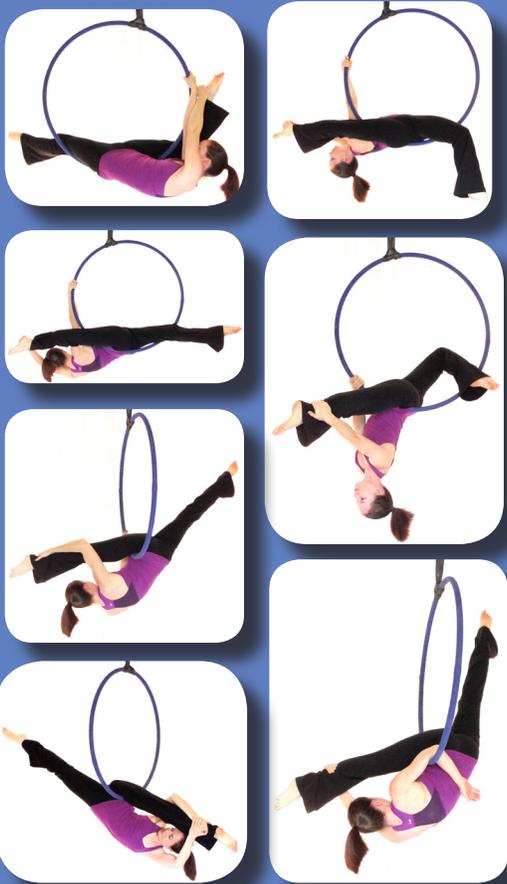
## Prerequisite(s):

Gazelle  
Half Hip Hang  
Single Knee Hang

**About this move:** Here is our grand finale – classic transitions that can be built into beginner sequences. Here we have the gazelle to arrow to knee hang sequence. Arrow in this context is referring to the shape of the body, not the position. The main purpose of throwing transitions at you is to get you excited to start making your own sequences and connections between all of the moves that you know. Enjoy!

### PLAY TIME!

While we are here in gazelle, we might as well talk about some other ways to play! Below, we show another variation of gazelle splits, as well as a way to transition in the half hip hang splits. This is more advanced, but we thought you might enjoy getting ready for Volume 2, which covers splits all around the hoop.



## Gazelle to “Arrow” (Half Hip Hang)

In a gazelle with a bent front right knee, reach to the hoop behind your buttocks with your right arm, and reach to the hoop next to your knee with your left arm. (This can be quite a twist.) Allow the back, straight leg to float its way to pointing up towards the ceiling. If the hoop is large, your foot can be off to the side so that you can block in this half hip hang position (a.k.a. arrow).



## “Arrow” to Single Knee Hang

From this half hip hang position with one leg blocking near the top of the hoop, twist towards the side of the thigh that is on the hoop. Hold the hoop with both hands. Cross the bent leg over the edge of the hoop so it will “catch” into the knee hang. The top leg to passes through the hoop to the other side and continues down towards the ground. End in a knee hang.



## Gazelle to Hip Hang Transition

From the gazelle, position your hands as if you were going into the arrow position (major twist), then rotate the legs like two hands of a clock. Try to move the legs evenly so that the bottom leg stops at 6 o’clock when the top leg stops at noon. Then, bring the top leg down to join the other leg in hip hang.





# Appendix Articles

## The Physics of the Hoop

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Being an aerialist, there are all kinds of physics concepts that you are constantly playing with and exploring. Gravity is of course an obvious one but another concept that many aerialists utilize is rotational motion. Anytime you spin on the apparatus, you are experiencing rotational motion. Unlike translational motion (where the location of an object changes) which is taught in most high school physics classes, rotational motion is a foreign concept to many. While the subject of rotational motion is quite large, the main concept an aerialist should know is inertia.

Inertia is a physics term that relates to how difficult it is to change an object's motion. For a spinning object, such as the hoop, an aerialist provides a torque on the hoop to get it spinning. How fast this torque makes the hoop spin depends on the value of the hoop's inertia. A hoop with a small inertia will spin faster than a hoop with a large inertia. While the formula for inertia depends on the rotational motion of the hoop, the inertia also depends on the radius of the hoop and its total mass. For a normal single point hoop spinning around the point, the formula is  $I=0.25MR^2$ , where M is the mass and R is the radius of the hoop. This equation shows that an increase in mass of the hoop (such as choosing steel vs. aluminum or solid vs. hollow) or choosing a larger hoop will increase the overall inertia of the hoop.

A large inertia means that it is more difficult to change the rotational motion of the hoop. Thus it requires more torque (force) to get the hoop spinning and more torque (force) to stop it. A larger inertia also makes the hoop want to keep spinning or remain motionless depending on the motion. When an aerialist is on a hoop, every motion of the body, shift of weight displacement, and movement on the hoop is going to cause the hoop to also rotate and shift. The hoop does this to maintain a constant rotational momentum. The larger inertia hoop will rotate and shift less than a smaller inertia hoop, making larger inertia hoops preferable to aerialists who wish to maintain a certain direction (generally towards the audience) during a performance.

When an aerialist is on a hoop or any other apparatus, their body is part of the total rotational inertia. So the aerialist can affect the rotational motion on the whole system. This can be seen when an aerialist is hanging below the hoop and is spinning. If the aerialist goes into the splits, they are moving some mass away from the center, thus increasing the rotational inertia of the system and so slowing down the spin. If they pull their body into the center of the system, the rotational inertia decreases and the spin gets faster. Figure skaters, gymnasts, high divers, tumblers, etc. all use this physics concept to control the speed of their spins by changing their rotational inertia in the same manner.

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*Matthew Leach, main photographer for this manual, doubles in life as a physics nerd – I mean physics teacher. He enjoys teaching at the high school level. At nights, he is currently working towards a PhD in nuclear engineering.*

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# Choosing the Right Aerial Hoop

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## Size

In the circus world there are two schools of thought in determining an appropriate size lyra for your body:

1. Leg length: From standing, measure from the floor to iliac crest (hip bone).
2. Torso length: From seated, measure from the base of the pelvis to the top of the head.

Measuring the torso/spine is probably the most accurate choice since in traditional circus acts the performer must be able to sit comfortably inside the hoop without hitting the head on the top bar. Typical hoop sizes range from 34" to 36" in diameter. Shorter performers choose the lower end of the spectrum, etc. Of course, keep in mind there are exceptions to every rule! Some feel they "outgrow" a small hoop, while others find they can shrink their hoop as they increase their flexibility.

On the aerial dance side of the spectrum, lyra size can be based on the images used in a piece. For example, if the performer wants to stand up inside the lyra, the diameter of the hoop must match his/her measurement from foot to shoulder. Other aerialists choose very small hoops, from the gymnastic ring size on up. As with all suspended objects, if you can find a welder to build it, you can perform on it.

## Steel vs. Aluminum

Each type of lyra has advantages and disadvantages. Steel is strong, but it bends significantly before it breaks. Aluminum is less strong and it shatters as it breaks with sudden impact. Steel is heavier, but more stable. Aluminum is light, but highly mobile, which can be a better selection for above-the-hoop moves where you are moving the hoop through space. Most traveling aerialists who need to carry their lyra onto a plane choose aluminum due to weight requirements and because it's easier to cart around. Be sure to consider all of your specific needs before making a purchase.

## Hollow vs. Solid

Solid hoops are heavier and feel much harder to the touch. They move, tip and spin less easily. In this way, they are more predictable. Performers who prefer static moves requiring a high degree of balance enjoy solid hoops. On the other hand, some prefer a lighter, hollow hoop for the very fact that it will flip more easily. Performers would like to do "tippy hoop" moves typically obtain lyras with less mass. Even if you do not perform tippy hoop moves, you might still prefer a hollow lyra because it is lighter, easier to get spinning, and is more forgiving when you accidentally bump your elbow, etc.

## Single Tab vs. Double Tab

In Volume 2, we explore moves that are specific to single point hoops and double point hoops. Personally, I tend to use a hoop with no tabs so that I can rig either with one span or two. In that way, I can switch between performing single point and double point. There are pros and cons. As always, the final decision is yours.

In the meantime, here are some guidelines to choosing the number of tabs. One of the main reasons students prefer double tabbed hoops is because they do not tip from side to side (easily), and can be more stable.

Also, those who like swinging trapeze often find they like double tab hoops, which can be rigged from two points. You can also rig a double tabbed hoop at one point, creating a dance-trapeze effect. This allows for swinging on any axis. However, a double tabbed hoop tends to move in flat circles, whereas a single point can spiral or rotate in many planes.

Some aerial artists prefer their hoops single tabbed because that's where they have found their aerial home. Aerial hoop artist T Lawrence-Simon is one of those aerialists. Here are his personal thoughts:

*"I personally prefer single tab over double tab for what I do and for what I teach. I know exactly where the hoop is at all times. For instance, I do LOTS of beat work between the top of the hoop and the bottom. If the hoop is double tab, with the force and dynamics I use, the bottom bar could be anywhere when my hands are between the two tabs up top.*

*Based on what I like, I have trained extensively on single tab. Here are some of the reasons I am not a fan of double tabbed. (Don't get me wrong, I have many students that I train on double tabbed, it's just not my personal preference.)*

*1) I do not like the lack of control. "Is it gonna tip forward or back?" Yes, I've seen some people who really control that thing, but most do not.*

*2) I like playing with the hoop on and off axis (pulling a side of the hoop down toward the ground so it tilts out) and on double point that just looks clumsy, because one of the ropes has to go slack when the hoop tilts up, and it just looks...flaccid.*

*3) I also happen to be a rope enthusiast, so I love me a good hoop with a 6-8 foot rope above it. I can use the hoop AND the rope, I can remove myself from the rope, etc."*

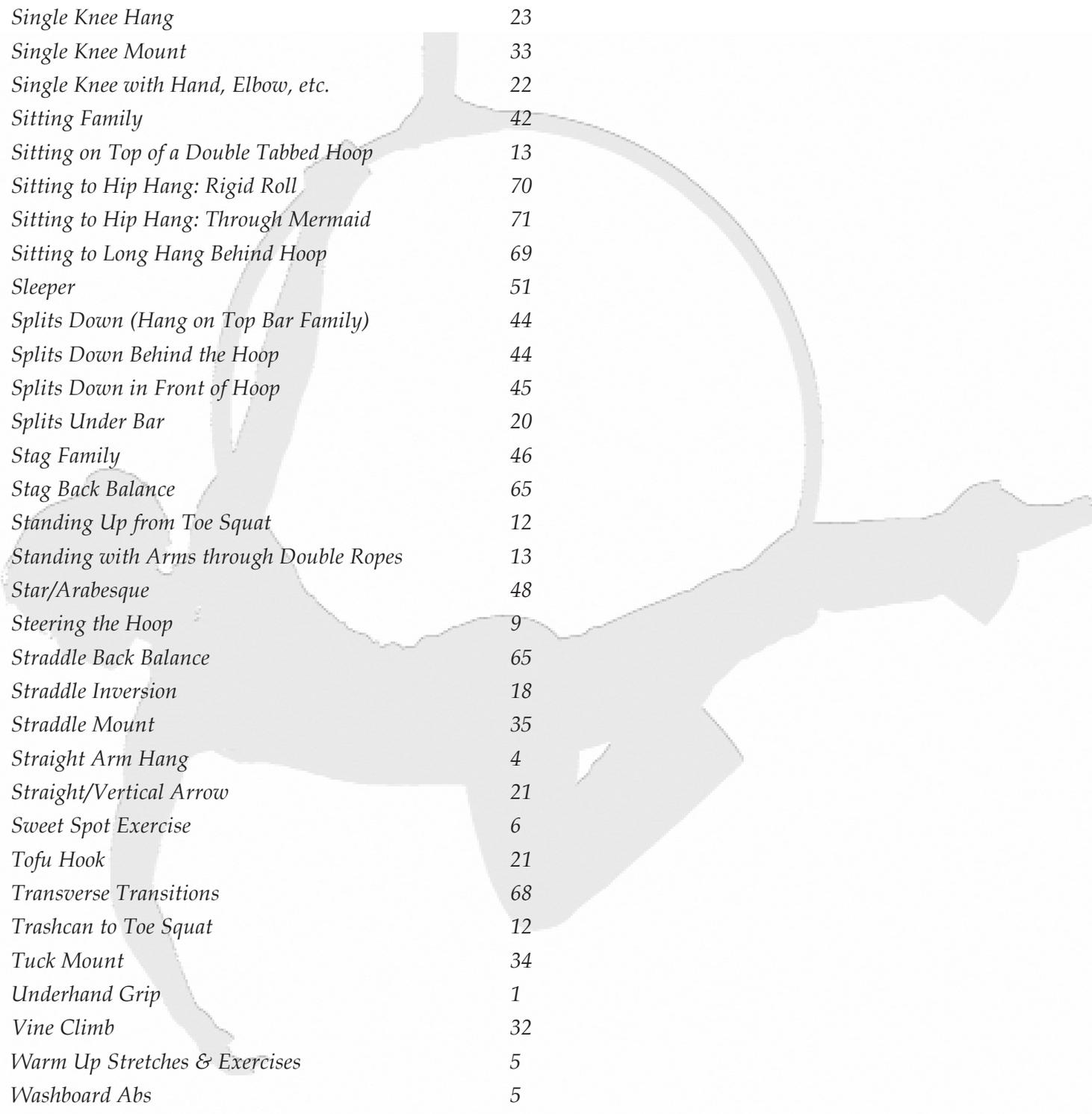
On the flip side is aerial hoop artist Rachel Stewart, who prefers a double tabbed lyra. She writes,

*"I personally think double tab allows for the most interesting range of movements. I have not yet met a dynamic trick that can't be done on it, barring one or two variations on spin (which can actually still be done on double, but requires a pulley). And the space between the span sets can be used as a trapeze, which gives me extra vocabulary of movement that would otherwise be lost. Many single-tab top-of-lyra moves can still be done on a double tab. There are a couple that can't, but the trade-off is worth it for me."*

The two tabs on a double tabbed hoop can be placed at anywhere from right next to each other (making it essentially a single tab) to 180 degrees across. The latter is known as "tippy lyra." True tippy lyras have two tabs directly across from each other, and are rigged with swivels at the tabs to allow for continuous horizontal rotation. It is whole 'nother beast to say the least!

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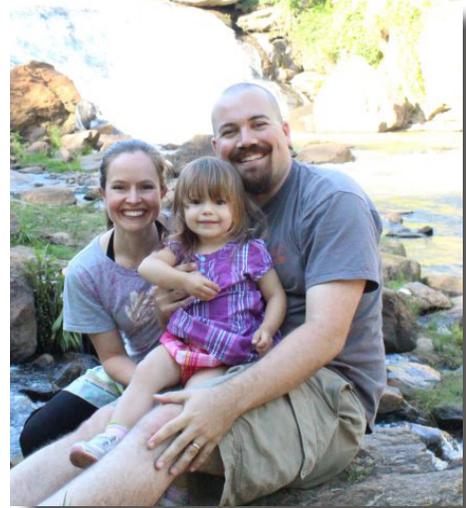
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## About the Author

Rebekah Jean Leach has been dancing for over three decades now. Anywhere she is, is her stage, starting with the fireplace hearth when she was 3 years old. In college, she took her first official course in dance. On the wall, was a picture of dancers dancing in ropes. She felt the urge – the calling, if you will, to higher ground. At age 22, she attended a workshop by Fred Deb held at the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, CO. Before the festival, she attended a performance of Fred Deb's with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. That performance changed the course of her life.

In 2008, Rebekah and Matthew Leach opened an aerial dance studio in Ojai, CA. Rebekah combined her background in education with teaching her love of aerial dance. However, when the recession hit, and Matthew was laid off from his job, hard times hit. Plan B went into action. Relying on her technical background, Rebekah joined the Navy, where she is currently a commissioned officer teaching sailors at the Nuclear Power Training Command in Charleston, SC. When her active duty commitment is complete, her dream is to once again open an aerial dance studio. All of Rebekah's profits from the sales of these manuals are going towards that end. Thank you for helping dreams come true.

*Rebekah currently lives with her loving husband, Matthew and adorable daughter, Naomi, in Charleston, SC.*



## About the Contributing Author

Julianna Gaillard Hane, a native of South Carolina, traded life on a cotton farm to be a dancer and aerialist. Julianna's first experience in aerial dance happened at Winthrop University (where she received a B.A. in Dance) when she performed in two rope & harness works by Mary Beth Young. She then continued her study of aerial work at New England Center for Circus Arts with Elsie Smith, Serenity Smith Forchion, and Aimee Hancock. She has also studied with Bay Area artists Joanna Haigood and Elena Panova.

Julianna holds a M.F.A. in Modern Dance from the University of Utah. During her graduate study Julianna founded Revolve Aerial Dance, a school and performing company specializing in aerial fabric, trapeze, and aerial hoop. Through the company she co-produced aerial concerts, performed in corporate events, and set an aerial dance work on the Snow College Dance Company in Ephraim, Utah. She wrote her master's thesis on aerial dance choreography under the guidance of Donna White, Eric Handman, Abby Fiat and Tandy Beal. She also wrote an aerial dance curriculum for her studio and a teacher training course to mentor new aerial teachers. This manual has been an extension of that work.

*Julianna moved Revolve Aerial Dance to Charleston in 2010 to collaborate with local dancers, musicians, writers, and other artists in her home state.*



# Acknowledgments

More people helped with this manual than all of my previous manuals combined. This was one of reasons that I feel that this manual has turned out to be the best manual I have worked on thus far. This manual, more than any others, reflects not just my own work as an artist, but that of the entire aerial lyra community. (Another thing that helped make this manual awesome was access to better programs to help design it! I created the other manuals in a program not meant for books, and they were formatting nightmares. Now I have to go back and revise all my old manuals. Ah, the list of things to do...)

The aerialists directly quoted in this manual are: T Lawrence-Simon ([hoopartist.com](http://hoopartist.com)), Rachel Stewart, Liz Cooper, Jerusha "Juice" Horlick, and Clayton Woodson. I appreciate their work as aerial teachers, and am delighted to have their contributions in this manual.

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This was my first attempt at co-authoring with someone by my side as I went through this process, and it has been absolutely wonderful! I am so happy that Julianna Hane joined me for this adventure. Her words are completely intertwined with mine to say everything better than either of us could have said it alone. I cannot wait to do more collaborations with her and with other artists.

And of course, last but not least, my amazing, talented, supportive, loving, dedicated husband, Matthew Leach. He keeps me blessed as well as balanced.

# Aerial Dance Manuals by Rebekah Leach

Beginning Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Part 1

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Part 2

Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 1

Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 2

Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 1

Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 2

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available on *AerialDancing.com*.



