

FOUNDATIONS OF FLIGHT

LANDING OUT

AXIS

Flight School®

Brought to you by Niklas Daniel and Brianne Thompson of AXIS Flight School at Skydive Arizona in Eloy. More skydiving educational content and information about professional coaching services is available at axisflightschool.com.

PREPARING

Before making a skydive, especially at a new location, jumpers should receive a comprehensive briefing from an experienced local jumper (preferably an instructor or Safety and Training Advisor) or ground staff. Some DZs provide their customers with a planning board near the loading area that displays valuable information such as an aerial map of the DZ and surrounding area, as well as up-to-date weather and wind conditions. To be a source of reliable communication, the DZ must update the planning board frequently and jumpers must check it throughout the day.

Take note of the landing areas and be aware of what the wind conditions are on the surface, as well as aloft. Know what the expected aircraft heading on jump run will be and where the first and last release points should be. Some considerations:

- What is your intended opening altitude?
- What ground hazards will you be flying over on your way to the landing zone? Some may be hard to see like power lines or uneven terrain.
- What are the sizes of the potential alternate landing areas? And are you skilled and accurate enough to land there safely? How difficult will it be to get out of that area?
- If you are landing on a road, is there traffic?
- Landing on private or government property may be considered trespassing and have legal consequences.
- Is livestock or wildlife present? What might your presence damage or disrupt?

SPOTTING

If you are prepared and take a good look down before you exit the aircraft, you can avoid most worst-case long-spot scenarios. Do not be afraid to ask the pilot for a “go-around.” While the DZ may not want to burn more fuel than is necessary, jumper safety should remain the higher priority. Another option, if operations permit, is to deploy at a slightly higher altitude. You can use that extra altitude under canopy to travel a greater distance.

CANOPY FLIGHT

After completing your post-opening procedures, turn toward the DZ, flying a straight ground track. Regardless of your initial perceived ability to make it to your desired landing zone, visually scan your surroundings for alternate landing areas, mentally checking off the ones you pass and anticipating the next one. Apply the appropriate methods to increase glide as discussed in the November 2023 “Foundations of Flight.” If all goes well, you should notice the DZ moving down in your visual field. Keep in mind that the wind conditions you find yourself in can change with altitude. As long as you are above 1,500 feet AGL (as recommended by the Skydiver’s Information Manual), keep fighting your way back. Knowing when to give up the fight is critical, especially if there are obstacles between you and the landing area. Trying to clear obstacles at low altitude with a “maybe” or “I hope so” attitude is a gamble not worth the risk.

LANDING

You should aim to make it back to the DZ’s landing area with sufficient altitude to feed into the landing pattern. Keep in mind that a landing pattern may already be established in the opposite direction of your arrival. If so, remove yourself from that area to avoid jousting and focus on flying a distinct landing pattern to your predetermined safe out. There is no shame in landing out. It’s better to secure a safe landing you can learn from than risk injury to yourself or others. *A long walk beats a short carry.*

If you are landing off, chances are others are, too. There is safety in numbers. Do your best to land together so you can help each other out if necessary. It is good practice to jump with a cell phone with the numbers of manifest and the DZ’s Safety and Training Advisor programmed into it. If you need help, you can also share your location with others by dropping a pin on your map application. It is easier for a search party to locate a group than a bunch of individuals.

When landing out, remember to implement the landing priorities we covered in the May 2022 installment of “Foundations of Flight.” If hitting an obstacle is unavoidable, do so with a level wing, flaring to at least half brakes to contact the obstacle as slowly as possible. Prepare for impact using a parachute landing fall (PLF).

Information about AXIS’ coaching and instructional services is available at axisflightschool.com. The authors intend this article to be an educational guideline. It is not a substitute for professional instruction.

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