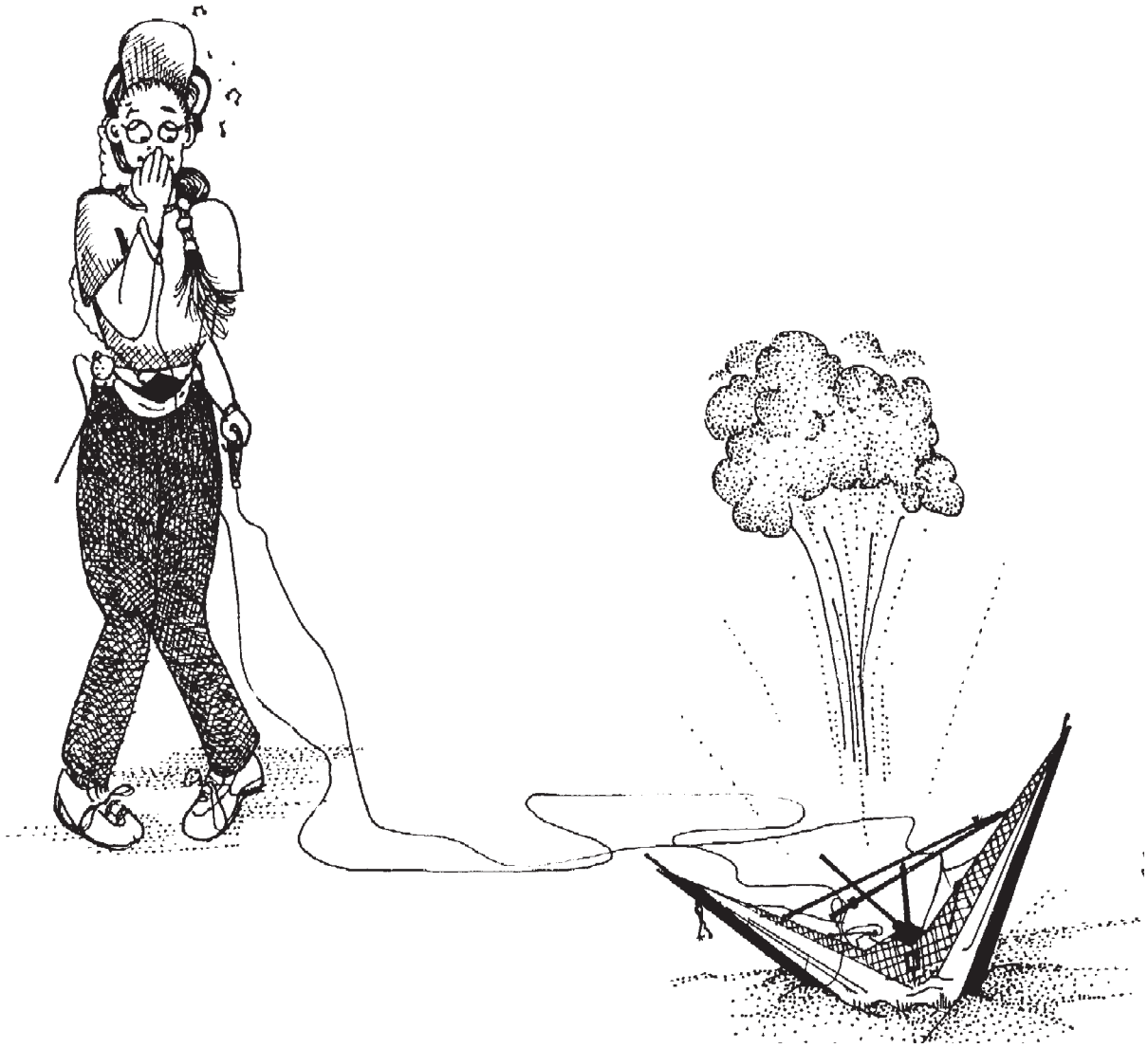


Introduction - Basic Magic: A Flying Refresher Course

Sport kites can do things no other kite can do.

In the hands of a skilled flier, your kite can amaze onlookers as it loops, dives, and dances its way across the sky under complete control.

With a little information and a bit of practice, you can be that skilled flier. But before you can run, you need to learn to walk. So before we begin to talk about maneuvers, advanced performance control, and fancy tricks, we need to make sure you can launch, fly, and turn.

If you consider yourself a fairly proficient flier, go ahead and skip this "refresher course". On the other hand, if you are just getting started, take the time to master basic control before you move on.

At worst, you'll spend a few extra hours having fun with your kite, and there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

Layout and Launching: For beginners, your flying line should be between 100 and 125 feet long. Shorter lines reduce response time and make the kite move too fast for most inexperienced fliers. Longer lines make maneuvers harder to complete. After you unroll the lines, make sure they're the same length and that they're securely fastened to your handles and kite.

Your kite and all of your line should be laid out before you launch. Look around to make sure that there are no obstacles or people anywhere within reach of your lines. This is the only way to know that you are clear and safe.

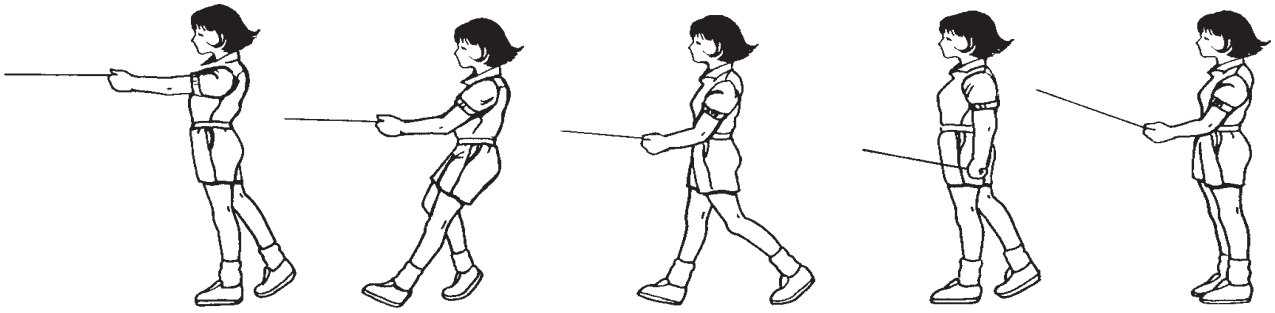
Anchor or "stake" your handles down, then walk back to the kite and stand it up using the flylines as a tension against the wind. Be sure the kite isn't standing straight up when you're done. Unless it leans away from the handles a little, it will try to take off and fly by itself!

Go back to the handles and carefully pick them up, keeping equal tension on both lines. Try not to let the kite move. Before you lift-off, complete the "Pre-launch Checklist". Do everything on this list before every launch.

Pre-launch Checklist:

1. Check the area under where your kite will be flying for possible hazards - especially people.
2. Look behind you to make sure you have a clear path if you need to back up.
3. Make sure your flylines have equal tension so that the kite will launch straight.
4. Check the sky for other fliers.

Now, pull your hands straight back down to your sides. The kite should lift right up into the air.



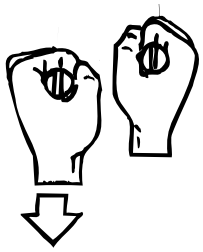
In lighter breezes, combine these arm movements with several smooth steps back. This will add the extra power you need to lift-off cleanly. Later, we will talk a lot more about combining hand and foot movements for better flying.

It's not unusual for new fliers to crash a few times when they first practice launching. That's fine -- as long as you don't hit anyone on the way down.

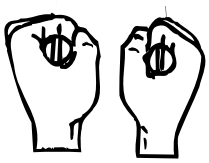
Safety and Courtesy: Even before you leave the ground, you should be thinking about safety. A maneuverable kite is a PROJECTILE -- capable of doing injury and property damage. Even in a moderate wind, a typical stunt kite can be moving at over 60 miles per hour. If someone gets hit by anything moving that fast, it's going to hurt. So when you fly, remember to fly carefully.

Steering: There are three, and only three, basic steering movements. Any maneuver you do, from simple to the most complex, will just be a combination of Left Turns, Right Turns, and Straight Lines. That's all there is to it!

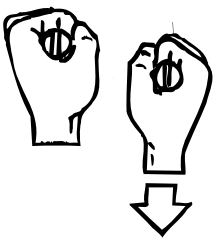
Later we will learn about several different ways to complete these turns and get slightly different performance results. For now, focus on what we call "pull-turns".



PULL-LEFT
TO TURN LEFT



HOLD EVEN
TO GO STRAIGHT

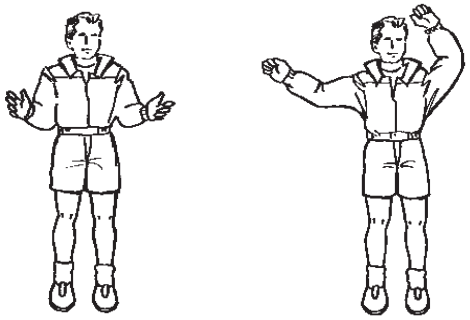


PULL-RIGHT
TO TURN RIGHT

Remember that "straight" can mean flying straight in any direction, not just up.

Keep turning to the right and you will eventually complete a loop. The fact that the lines have twisted has absolutely no effect on the way the kite flies. Right is still right and left is still left. To get rid of the twists -- just turn in the other direction.

Pulling back on your handles will make the kite fly faster. Your normal reaction in a crash will be to hold the handles tighter and to pull back on them to try and save the situation. That is exactly the wrong thing to do. You'll just make the kite accelerate and hit the ground harder.



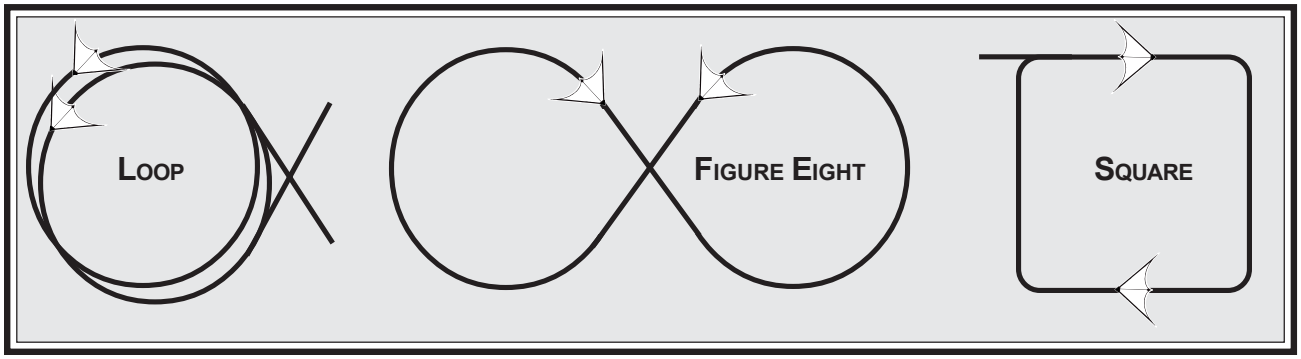
STAND LIKE THIS -- NOT LIKE THIS.

If you think you're going to crash, try moving toward the kite to slow it down. If you need to, run toward it.

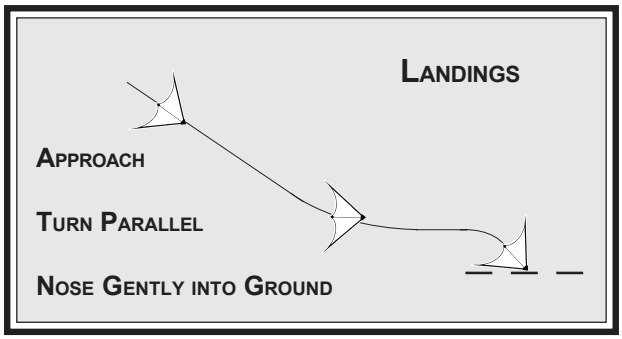
While you're flying, keep your arms at your sides. Holding them higher doesn't make the kite go up and holding them farther apart only makes you tire more quickly.

Let the kite do the flying while you just steer.

Later on, we'll be talking about lots of different figures and flying techniques. To improve your skills, practice these three basic maneuvers - the loop, the figure eight, and the square.



Landings: A normal, planned landing takes advantage of the fact that, as the kite flies farther "out" to the right or left, it loses drive and speed. Simply fly the kite to the point where it runs out of forward drive at the same time it reaches the ground.



Start at a medium altitude, and steer down toward the ground at the far edge of your flying area. When you reach an altitude of about four feet, turn up slightly so you are parallel to the ground. Then, as the kite slows, make a gentle turn toward the ground. Step forward to ease the kite into a graceful landing.

Picking a Flying Site: Your flying efforts will be much more successful if you find a site with smooth wind and little turbulence. Seek out large open spaces. On a field bounded both upwind and downwind by obstructions, you're better off flying as close as you safely can to the downwind end of the field.

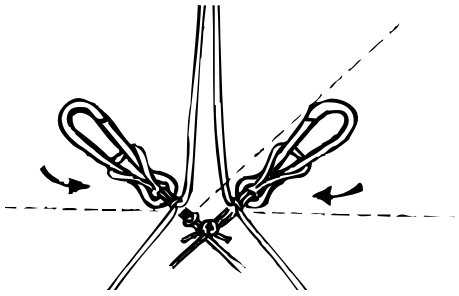
The basic formula for turbulence is that unsteady winds will extend seven times farther than the height of whatever object is causing the disruption. If a tree is 100 feet tall, you need to get 700 feet away to find clean or steady wind.

Tuning: We refer to any adjustments you make to your kite for wind changes or performance as "tuning". Usually, these adjustments are made by moving the place where your flying lines connect to the bridle. This is called the "tow point".

Kites almost always come from the factory with an "average setting" marked on the bridle. Adjust your tow point to these marks and the kite should perform fine in most wind conditions.

The important thing to remember is that the tow points should be even on both sides of the kite. If one tow point is above the mark, and the other is below it, your kite will perform in unexpected ways.

PULL THE CLIPS TOGETHER AND MAKE SURE THEY ARE EVEN



The same is true of your flying lines. They should be exactly equal in length. If the lines are unequal, the kite will think you are pulling on the shorter line and try to turn in that direction.

And that's all there is to the basics! Now, go practice. When you can confidently launch, control your introductory maneuvers, and land, you're ready to move on. So far you have only scratched the surface. Get ready for the fun stuff!!