

## A Turning Approach

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Whether you are in the slalom course or out on an open lake with some buddies, it is an endless challenge to complete a turn with a nice tight rope and avoid the dreaded “slack”. In slalom, each stage (wake crossing/approach, turn, and acceleration) influences the other. If one stage goes wrong, typically the next will too. Therefore, it is important to break down each stage and examine the correct techniques you need to follow to successfully run the course or even make one perfect turn on an open lake.

One of the important stages of the slalom event is the turn. However, to accomplish a successful and efficient turn it is critical to understand the correct technique during your “**Approach**” to the buoy. The approach begins during the wake crossing, continues through what is typically called the “edge change” and is completed just prior to the actual turn. Here are three elements to consider in beginning to improve your “Approach”... today.

## A) Wake crossing



The first element of the approach begins as you cross the wakes. Over the past several years, techniques at this stage have changed dramatically. Today, the “new school” technique has changed the way people choose to think about the approach, beginning with the **wake crossing**. The ideal position while crossing the wakes with this new technique is a combination of four steps. Here are some basic tips for each step:

### 1) Have shoulders open and square to boat:

Practice this one on shore with your handle.

Chest should be open and facing the boat as you cross the wakes.

Arms are relaxed and your head is up, not thrown back.

### 2) Stay in the middle of your ski:

Practice crossing the wakes without a course.

Video tape yourself as you cross the wakes. Are you leaning back, (to the back of your ski) or are you leaning away (from the boat)? You want to be leaning away from the boat, but not leaning back. Some slight back foot pressure is acceptable, although try to keep a more even balance between your feet. It correlates directly with the binding placement and fin set up of your ski.

Stop taking those crashes out-the-front. They hurt. Get in the middle of the ski!

### 3) Allow hips to move away from handle (“compressed position”)

Practice this one on shore. Keep the handle low so that you are in full control. It should be somewhere between the height of your knees and your hips while you cross the wakes.

Try this: Get into the “old school” lean position, keeping the handle against your hips, close your shoulders and straighten your legs. Are you strong in this position? Do you feel you have some leverage?

Now try this: slowly open your shoulders toward the boat (or where the boat would be), bend at your knees and ankles, and finally, allow your hips to drop down and away from the handle slightly. How much more leverage do you have now?

Compare this technique to a tug-of-war. Would you stand with your legs straight, head back, and turn your shoulders sideways? No. If you did that you would probably end up on the ground! Instead, ideally you would bend your knees and get as low as possible, keep your head up (to see if you are winning) and open your shoulders towards your opponent. (Oh yeah, and hold on for dear life!)

Note: Compression and dropping the hips down should not be interpreted as dropping the hips back. The body position needs to remain centered with a straight line from the shoulders, through the hips, and down through the center of the ski.

#### 4) Create a progressive cut across the wakes:

The effort of the pull should start easily, then gradually increase as you move toward the wakes, thus creating width in your approach.

If you start too hard, you'll get pulled forward through the wakes and you'll ski directly towards the buoy.

When you cut progressively, it's easier to maintain control of the handle and to have a wider path out towards the buoy. As you swing out wide for the turn, the rope stays tight all the way through the turn taking care of any unwanted slack.

### B) Arms/elbows in



The second element of the approach is a technique that is commonly called your “edge change.” The edge change begins at the centre of the wakes and continues into flat water prior to the turn of the buoy. At this point, you want to remember one crucial thing... **“arms/elbows in.”** This technique allows you to keep control of the handle so that it doesn't pull you forward going into the turn. As you finish crossing the wakes, think about keeping your elbows tucked into your side and slightly bent before you begin to extend the handle out for the turn. It is important that you understand that this is a very quick movement and does not take long to do. Avoid keeping your arms in all the way to the apex of the turn as you still have to allow extension of the arms to complete the turn successfully.

### C) Stand tall into the turn



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The last element in the approach to your turn is the ability to come out of your compressed position and **stand tall into the turn**. By standing tall, you are able to accomplish 3 benefits:

- 1) You are able to shift more of your weight towards the middle of your ski. This produces some deceleration in to the turn.
- 2) You are also bringing your hips further forward which allows the ski to turn much more fluently.
- 3) You are able to use your whole body as an extension instead of just using your arms to reach in the turns.

Again, this can be practiced inside or outside of a course. For skiers that seem to have trouble with “jerky” or unstable turns, try the “stand tall into the turns” technique and you will soon discover a much smoother and more stable feeling during this stage.

Combining these simple techniques in your “Approach” should give you the confidence to make your turns as smooth, fluent, and controlled as possible. I always suggest that if you can’t ski with an experienced coach, have someone watch you who knows what to look for, or have some video footage taken of you skiing. This will assist you in your progress and will help you to critique yourself in a positive way. The bottom line should always remain the same: have a good time and be patient with these techniques. Soon you too will see the benefits of a successful approach!

# The "Approach"

## Quick Tips

1. Wake crossing
  - Open and square your shoulders to the boat
  - Stay in the middle of your ski
  - Allow hips to move away from handle ("compressed position")
  - Create a progressive cut across the wakes
2. Arms/Elbows in
  - Keep your elbows tucked into your side during the edge change
  - A very quick movement
  - Keep control of the handle so it doesn't pull you forward
3. Stand tall into the turn
  - Shifts more of your weight towards the middle of your ski
  - Brings your hips further forward, to decelerate
  - Uses your whole body as an extension