

Johnson City

CIRCUS ARTS

Dear Student,

Welcome to your first aerial class!

Aerial silks is something that a lot of people *want* to try, but most never do. Some don't have the confidence, or are afraid of it. To some people, the idea of practicing a *circus* art just seem too remote to consider. Congratulations on making it past the first hurdle, and signing up for a class! Aerial arts can be very fun and rewarding.

The students who take my classes have dramatically varying goals for class. Some seek out aerial training purely for fun, and that is great! Some are seeking exercise, and aerials provides excellent strength, flexibility and cardio training. Some are seeking aerial skills as a form of artistic self-expression, which can be very rewarding. Some are seeking professional opportunities in performance or teaching, and this *is* possible with *many years* of training.

No matter what your personal motivations are, with perseverance, you will find aerial arts incredibly rewarding. I am *very* passionate about teaching aerials, and I will do everything I can to help you in your journey.

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Class Rules

- Only get on the silk when specifically told to by the instructor, and work on what you were instructed on.
- Do not teach or help instruct other students unless under the direct supervision of the instructor.
- Wait until the end of class to take pictures. If you want to have pictures, let the instructor know at the beginning of class, and a specific time will be designated near the end of class for this.
- Guests may attend to watch, but should not interact with students during class; this can be very distracting.
- Students and guests may not use other equipment at the facilities, such as the gymnastics equipment at ATG or the martial arts equipment at TOT.

Safety Guidelines

- If you feel unsafe, speak up!
- If you see something that you feel is unsafe, speak up!
- Some things in aerials tend to hurt a bit, but this should be minor. If something hurts too much, don't do it, and talk to your instructor about it. Know the difference between the "good pain" and "bad pain", and if you experience the "bad pain", don't do that move, and talk to your instructor about it.
- If you are too tired to do a move safely, then don't do it, and talk to your instructor about it.
- Always let your instructor know at the beginning of class about injuries or medical conditions that may affect you in class.

If you practice aerials outside of class:

- Only practice moves that you have been taught by a professionally trained aerial instructor, and that you are completely confident that you remember.
- Never do aerials without a mat, at least 6 inches thick.
- Never do aerials alone.
- Never try to teach yourself new moves from videos you found online.
- Never accept aerial instruction on new moves from a novice aerialist.
- Always warm up and stretch before practicing aerials.
- Always have your rigging inspected by someone who really knows what they're doing. Rigging can get very complicated. Rigging should always be inspected by someone other than the person who set it up, and periodically re-inspected at least once a month.
- Never rig from a tree unless your rigging has been inspected by a professional arborist.
- Be very aware that differing environments can dramatically affect your abilities and your safety. Factors can include temperature, humidity, fabric stretch, rigging stretch, rosin, types of fabric, clothing, insects, and psychological factors. Even the psychological impact of being in a new space, or having people watching you can dramatically change things.
- If you are performing, even casually, you (or your company) must have liability insurance.
- If you are teaching, even casually, you must have liability insurance *and* aerial teacher's training.
- These rules are universal. If you see people breaking these rules anywhere, speak up!
- **Johnson City Circus Arts reserves the right to remove students from classes if it becomes clear that these rules are being habitually broken outside of class.**

Class Registration and Payment Policies

- Payment in advance is required to reserve a spot in class.
- If you don't show up to class, or cancel for class in the last 24 hours before class, you forfeit your payment for that class.
- Before 24 hours, you can cancel or reschedule class at any time with no penalty.
- All payments are final; no refunds.
- Payment method options include cash, check, card or Paypal, but only Paypal is available through the web site.
- Class size limit is 5. Occasionally a 6th student will be admitted under special circumstances.
- You can always show up to class without being signed up, but you have no guarantee of getting a spot. Students who were already signed up online get priority.
- Class spots are first come, first serve.

Notes for your first class:

Larger piercings and jewelry must be removed, because it can get caught in the silk. Do not wear clothing with metal parts, such as zippers or clasps. Skin-tight clothing is ideal, but not a requirement. Gym clothes are fine. It's recommended that your ankles are exposed, and that your armpits are covered, but again, these are not absolute requirements. As you become more advanced, you will want to avoid clothing made with synthetic materials because these can melt when doing drops, but this will not matter until you are an advanced student. Avoid using lotions or ointments on your hands or feet right before class, because this can make the silks much more slippery.

I make a very strong effort to make sure that silks class is fun, and not excessively difficult, but no matter what, *learning aerial silks is hard*. It's hard for *everyone*. Never compare yourself to other students, and don't be discouraged if you don't get moves on the first try. Or the second or third or fourth... Keep trying, and you will get it! Repetition is important for learning aerials effectively.

Conditioning outside of class will help you tremendously. At the end of each class, we typically do a few conditioning exercises, but this typically isn't enough to make a huge difference to your strength. I mainly include this section of class so that you learn exercises which you can then practice at home to build more strength. The vast majority of first time students in my class don't yet have the upper body strength needed for aerial silks, but with some commitment, it isn't as difficult as you might think to build this upper body strength. Even 10 minutes a day of conditioning on your own will go a long way in my class!

Some things we do can seem quite scary. You may be doing things that push your comfort zones. You should always keep your safety in mind, and never be afraid to speak up if you feel unsafe, but also keep in mind that the mats we use *work*. I take things very slowly with new students, and never make anyone do anything they don't feel safe doing. Anytime a new student is going upside down, I spot them closely. If you want me to spot you closely for a certain move, or have any requests related to how I spot you, don't be afraid to ask. If I'm working with another student, feel free to wait until I'm done so I can spot you.

Moves you are likely to work on in your first few classes:

- Sitting in the sling
 - A sling will be tied at hip height. Sit down in this, and then lean back. Slide one hand down on the pole, then flatten palm against the pole as you release. Reach back behind you and extend.
- Crucifix in the sling
 - Put the sling on like a backpack, with silk running across your back (where a bra strap sits). This position is called crucifix.
 - Toe Taps: Kick one foot up at a time, and tap it against the pole.
 - Inverting: Raise your feet over your head and bring them to the outside of the poles in a straddle position. Let the knot slide down your back so that it goes around your waist. Let go with hands.
- Standing in sling
 - Stand in the sling with one foot. You can either choose to put the silk under the ball of your toe as you point your foot (“relevé”), or under the arch of your foot with a flexed foot.
 - Grab poles above you, and arch your body through. This should give a pleasant back stretch.
 - As you come back through, catch the poles in your armpits. Push your foot forward, and let your hips sink back. This position is called arabesque.
- Standing in open silks
 - Wrap the silk once around your calf with the silk starting *inside* your knee. Hold on with straight arms as you lift up the other leg, and pinch the silk between your feet.
- Footlocks from the ground with hands
 - Stand on the mat. Wrap the silk around your leg, starting *inside* your knee. Grab the silk beside your knee and pull some slack through. Pull this slack across the top of your foot, creating an “X” on top of your foot, and then bring it back under the arch. This will form a secure knot that you can stand on. The pole should end up on the *inside* of your foot.
 - To get out of this, let your hips sink down, and use the “shoelace” of your free foot to push the pole away from you just above the footlock.
- Footlocks with feet on the ground
 - Sit on the edge of the mat with the silks in your hand. Wrap your leg using your hands. Then, replicate the knot described above, but using only your feet. Do this using the “shoelace” of your free foot. This foot must hit the pole as high as possible to give enough room for the wrap.
- Footlocks with feet in the air
 - Stand in the silk. Do the exact same motion as practiced on the ground to put on a footlock using only your feet. You will need to keep your hip flexors engaged as you do this.

- Basic wrap climb
 - Stand in the silk. Reach up high with your hands. Keeping your arms straight, unwrap your leg, pull your knees up into your chest, rewrap and pinch. Push your feet out in front of you as your straighten your knees, and *then* stand up. Reach up high with your hands, and repeat.
 - To come down, keep the silk pinched tightly between your feet, and slide down slowly, hand over hand.
- Inversions
 - Stand on the mat. Wrap your hands twice around the silk, “as if you were brushing your hair back”, or “as if you were hugging the silk”. Your hands should be at shoulder level with elbows bent, *not* straight up, or at head level. Pull your knees up into your chest with some force. As you do this, your hips will naturally rise. Keeping your elbows in tight to your chest, let your legs lead you over so you are upside-down. Practice going from pike to plunge and back to pike while upside-down. Keep your chin to your chest.
 - When coming down, avoid coming all the way through backwards; instead, come down the same way you came up. Try to come down under control if possible.
 - Some people struggle with inversions for years. It can be very difficult, both physically and psychologically. Do not be discouraged if you don’t get this in your first few classes.

Conditioning exercises to practice at home:

- By far the best exercises that you can do at home are chin-ups and pull-ups. If you can’t do a chin-up or pull-up, then stand on a chair, then step off of it and use the bar to slowly lower yourself down. You can buy home chin-up bars at Walmart, Target or a thrift store for under \$30. I’ve seen them as low as \$5 at thrift stores. Many gyms have weight assisted pull-up machines, and those can be very helpful. Lat pulldown machines also accomplish the same thing, and tend to be easier to use.
- Other well-known exercises that are helpful include holding a plank position, holding a superman position (laying on your front with chest and legs raised up off the ground), push-ups, and sit-ups. Sit-ups are more effective than crunches.
- “The Alphabet”: This is one of my favorite aerial exercises. Stand on one leg. With the other leg, straighten your knee and point your toe, and then spell out the capital letters of the alphabet in front of you in very big letters. This strengthens the hip flexors, which are especially useful for climbing and footlocks.