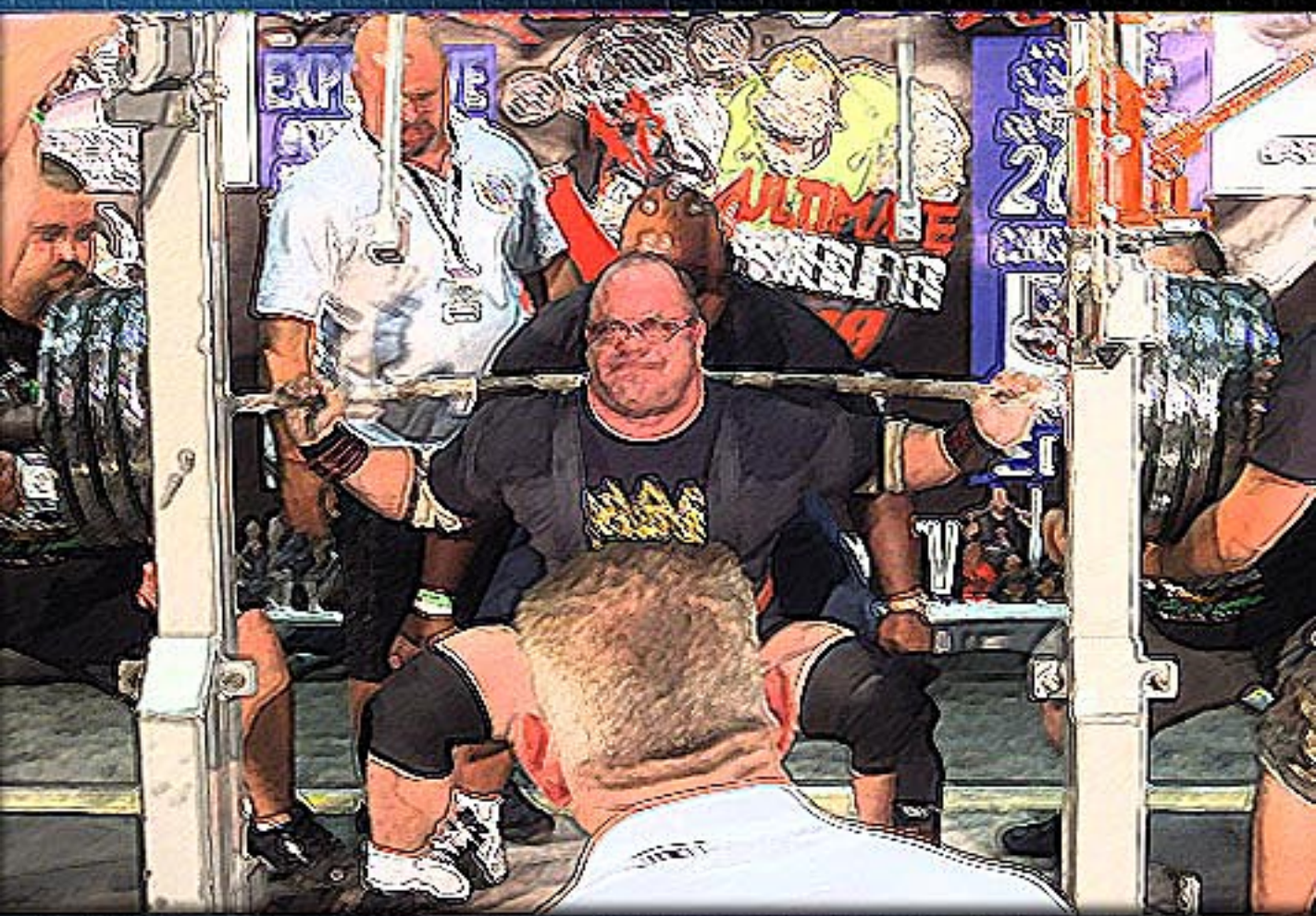
SQUAT

LIKE A POWERLIFTER



THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO A PERFECT SQUAT

Joe "Ironman" Norman

TEAM JAX

SQUAT LIKE A POWERLIFTER

The Beginner's Guide to The Perfect Squat!

by Joe “Ironman” Norman

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Introduction

Me squatting 1,003 lbs. @ the APF Single-Ply Nationals (Cover Picture)

Hello there and thanks for downloading my guide.

My name is Joe Norman and I have been a top ranked competitor in the sport of Powerlifting for many years now. I have been weight lifting for over twenty years, with over thirteen years' experience in powerlifting. I have made a name for myself as one of the most powerful squatters in the sport today. I hold numerous national and world squat records in three weight classes.

Before I started out in the sport, I was weight lifting in the gym like most other people. I was one of those guys that would load 600 lbs. on the bar and perform a three quarter squat, thinking I was the man and thinking I was benefiting from squatting. When I started powerlifting and learned how to squat properly, that 600 lb. squat went down to 400 lbs. overnight. It took a while to learn the proper squat form, but once I did, not only did the weights increase but my whole body became stronger in the process, reaping the full benefits from the exercise.

There are all kinds of techniques and ways to squat, but the best way to learn is from the experts and those people are the powerlifters. Powerlifters have worked for years to fine-tune techniques that enable them to squat weights that most people in the world couldn't imagine would be possible. Not only will these techniques get you stronger, but they will minimize you risk of injury.

In my first book "Monster Squat", I discuss these techniques and everything else it takes to squat those impossible weights. What has recently come to my attention is that there are many people out there that are just interested in learning how to squat properly. My book is mostly geared toward advanced lifters but Chapter 1, "Squat 101", was written specifically for beginners.

I decided to take Chapter 1 of my book and make it into this guide. What you will find inside are the following topics:

- How To Squat
- Text Book Definition
- Setting Up
- Bar Position And Grip
- Foot Placement
- Unracking/Backing Out
- Top Three Powerlifting Techniques
- Racking The Weight

When you are finished with this guide you will have the knowledge to be able to not only squat properly, but to squat like the powerlifters. After that, if you are ready and think you can handle it, check out "Monster Squat", and learn what it takes to squat impossible weights.

Squatting is simple:
put the bar on your back,
squat down,
stand back up…

Lester Estevez (1,000 lbs.)

Squat Like A Powerlifter: Squat 101

Jordan (JoJo) Groff (710 lbs.)

How to Squat

Squatting is simple, put the bar on your back, squat down and stand back up. Couldn't get any simpler, right? Wrong. The wrong technique (form) for your body type will not only inhibit your full potential, but can also lead to injury.

The way most powerlifters squat can be summed up into three techniques: Dive-Bomb, Slow and Steady, and Controlled Blast. I will go into details on these a little later, but first things first—let's discuss the mechanics of the squat.

The squat can be broken down into three sections: setup, squat technique, and recovery. Each has their own parts. Below is a summary of the process, with more details to come.

Setting up:

- Bar position and grip: Placing the bar on your upper back or lower neck and setting a grip with your hands on the bar.
- Foot placement: Placing your feet in the appropriate position and angle to perform the squat.
- Unracking/backing out: Lifting the weight out of the rack and taking steps backward with the weight to establish your foot position.

Top Three Techniques:

- Dive-bomb
- Slow and Steady
- Controlled Blast

All techniques have the following common parts:

- Breaking the weight: The initial part of lifting the bar out of the rack.
- Descent: Lowering the bar.
- Getting in the hole/breaking parallel: Reaching the bottom of the squat, at or below parallel.
- Recovery:

a) Turn the weight around: Changing the direction of the weight when in the hole (the lowest point of the lift).

b) Drive: Pushing the bar from the lowest position back to a fully upright, standing position.

c) Sticking points: Any time during the drive when the weight loses momentum; usually occurs when the force applied to pushing the weight switches from one muscle group to another.

Racking the Weight:

- Racking the weight: Placing the bar back into the rack at the end of the squat.

Textbook Definition (Or Something Like That)

Let's pull it all together into a textbook definition on how to squat.

Step up to the bar facing forward. Place your hands on the bar a little wider than shoulder width, and grip the bar. Lower your head under the bar and push your shoulders into the bar, firmly placing the bar on your upper back (bar position). Make sure the bar is centered on your back. For monolift lifters, place your feet under the bar at shoulder width or wider (foot placement). Bend at the knees, keeping your trunk in the most upright position; make sure your head is pulled back with your chest raised. Your lower back should be arched. It is very important to try and keep your back arched throughout the lift. Take a deep breath and hold it. Using your legs, straighten your knees to unrack the bar.

If you plan on backing the weight out, place your feet close together under the bar. Take a deep breath and bend your knees. Using your legs, straighten your knees to unrack the weight. The weight may be oscillating a little; wait until the weight is steady and you have full control of it before taking any steps backward. Once in control, take a short step back away from the rack, usually with your stronger leg. Follow with the other leg, taking a step back at a slight angle away from your body, placing the foot on the floor toe pointing away from your body. With the first leg, take a step to the side to widen your stance, placing the foot with its toe pointing away from your body (foot placement).

WAIT UNTIL THE BAR STOPS ALL MOVEMENT before attempting to squat. Make sure you have full control of the weight before beginning your descent. With the weight under control, start the descent by pushing your knees out and your hips slightly backward, almost like you were about to sit in a chair (breaking the weight), bending your knees at the same time. Continue to lower the weight until the top

surfaces of the legs at the hip joint are even (parallel) or, ideally, lower than the top of your knees (breaking parallel).

Once at the bottom of the descent, reverse the direction of the weight using your legs and your hips (turn the weight around). Continue pushing the weight up (drive) until your body is in a fully upright position and your knees are locked out.

To rack the weight, monolift lifters, your training partners will push the rack arms back into position. Place the bar back into the rack arms, release the bar and step back from the bar. Non-monolift lifters, at the top of the recovery, wait until the bar is motionless, then take steps to get your feet back under your body, one foot at a time. With help from your spotters, step forward to rack the weight, release the bar once it is placed back in the rack, and step back from the bar.

That's pretty much the squat.

The above summary is good and will work for most people, but if you want to achieve a perfect squat, we need to get into the details, so you will have a better understanding of the variations and be able to decide which variation will help you in your quest.

Setting Up

One of the most important parts of the squat is the set up. When set up properly, you maximize your chances to make the lift. With a poor setup, the weight could become unstable, out of control, feel overwhelming, and ultimately lead to a failed attempt. With the proper setup, you control the weight, which in turn will give you the edge needed to successfully perform the lift. Let's break the setup down into its three parts. They are as follows:

- Bar position and grip: Placing the bar on your upper back or neck and setting a grip with your hands on the bar.
- Foot Placement: Placing your feet in the appropriate position and angle to perform the squat.
- Unracking/backing out: Lifting the weight out of the rack and taking steps backward with the weight and establishing your foot position.

Let's look at these in a little more detail.

Bar Position and Grip

The "bar position" refers to the placement of the bar on your back. "Grip" refers the grip taken on the bar with your hands, as well as the position of the arms and elbows. The three main positions for bar placement are: low (below the trapezius muscles—traps—and just above the shoulder blades), high (on top of traps) or middle (across the middle of the traps, on top of the rear deltoids). Let's go over the benefits and drawbacks of each.

Low Bar Position

Figure 1:1 - With a low bar, notice the shoulder blades are crunched together with the bar resting at the bottom of the traps.

With the older, less supportive gear, lifters often used a low bar position (see Figure 1:1). The belief was that the weight would be closer to a lifter's center of gravity, therefore placing it in a more stable position to squat.

Benefits: The more stable the weight, the easier it is to lift. In addition there is less neck pressure, more surface area contact between your back and the bar, and shorter distance between the bar and the lifter's center of gravity.

Drawbacks: One of the biggest draw backs with this position is that most lifters are not flexible enough in their shoulders and arms to get the bar in the proper position without leaning over a little. This works well for the lighter weights, but as the weights get heavier there is more pressure on the arms and shoulders to hold it in place. What I have witnessed and experienced with this bar position is that most lifters worry more about keeping the bar from sliding down their backs than actually squatting the weight. This ends up putting more pressure on the lower back, especially at the bottom of the lift. That isn't what you want when trying to hit a perfect squat.

Setup: To set up properly for this bar position, step up to the bar and take a wide grip on the bar. Set the rack or monolift up to line up just below your sternum. You want the bar low in the rack so you will be able to clear the rack when it's placed low on your back. A wide grip will allow you to squeeze your shoulder blades together and allow you to get the bar low on your back without too much stress on your arms and front deltoids, seeing that your arms will be pulled in a position behind your back. For those who are less flexible, it might be necessary to use a false grip. The false grip is when your thumbs are on the same side of the bar as your fingers. With a false grip, you want to make sure you push the bar tight into your back with your palms. It is hard to keep the bar from sliding when using a false grip, so hold tight.

High Bar Position

Figure 1:2 - With a high bar the elbows can be placed in a position more under the bar than the other positions. Bar contact with the lifter is at a minimum.

Let's talk a little about a high bar position (see Figure 1:2).

Benefits: The biggest benefit from this position is that your body can stay in its most upright position throughout the lift. If done correctly, there is no worrying about the bar sliding down your back. Another benefit is that you can help support the bar with your arms and shoulders.

Drawbacks: There are a few drawbacks with this position. One, it can be hard to keep your head up during the lift with a large amount of weight pushing down on your traps. Second, there is very small surface area contact between you and the bar, making it easier for the bar to become unstable. With the high bar position, you have to make sure you stay upright throughout the lift, especially when you push out of the hole with your legs. When you turn the weight around in the hole and straighten your legs first, this may cause your butt to shoot out and up first, resulting in the bar lining up in front of your knees, "getting out in front" of you. The least that can happen is that you will have to use all of your lower back strength to get the weight back in the proper position to finish the squat. The worst? Maybe injury. The bar can also roll forward higher on to your neck, causing more injury. The neck isn't designed to hold heavy weights.

Setup: To set up for a high bar position, step up to the bar and take a wide grip. A wider grip will be necessary to stabilize the bar. Your grip should be no less than the furthest rings on the bar. Make sure the rack/mono is set high, usually lined up with the top of your sternum. Duck your head under the bar and push your lower neck/upper traps into the bar. Push your body up forcing the bar down onto the top of your traps. Finally, raise your chin tilting your head back as much as is comfortable before unracking the weight.

Medium Bar Position

Figure 1:3 - Medium bar with the elbows raised to the sides helping to create a plat-form across the rear deltoids to support the bar.

Last but not least, let's talk about the medium position. If done correctly this position is the most effective (see Figure 1:3).

Benefits: This bar position combines the advantages of the other two positions. There is just a little less surface area contact than the low bar position, but a lot more than the high bar. With the proper grip, the medium bar position is as stable as the low bar position. With this position, you will be able to take whichever grip you feel most comfortable with. You will also be more capable of keeping your body in an upright position throughout the lift, as well as keeping your head up.

Drawbacks: I really can't think of any drawbacks for this position.

Setup: When setting up for this position, you want to have the rack/mono lined up roughly vertically centered with your sternum. Take a comfortable grip on the bar. A good grip is just a little wider than shoulder width. Duck your head under the bar and push your middle traps into the bar. Push your body up until the bar settles on the bottom of your lower traps and lines up with the top of your rear deltoids. If done correctly, you will feel the bar settle into place.

Bar Position Summary

To summarize, a low bar puts the bar closest to your center of gravity with the maximum amount of bar contact, while also creating stability throughout the lift, but pulling the arms and shoulders behind your back, making it hard to hold the bar in place without leaning forward. The high bar gives you the least amount of bar contact, but allows you to stay in the most upright position. If you lean over at any time on

the recovery, there is a high probability you will miss the lift. With a medium bar, there is enough bar contact to help support the bar, making it easier to hold, as well as stabilizing it throughout the lift.

Grip

Now that you know the basics of bar position, let's talk a little more about your grip and arm position. Your grip should be what is most comfortable to you and will vary according to the bar position you choose. However, certain grips work best with each bar position.

When using a high bar, it is best to take a wide grip with your elbows under the bar, almost like you were going to shoulder press the bar. This stabilizes the bar. Also, with your elbows under the bar, you will be able to push the bar up, relieving pressure on your neck.

The best grip for a low bar is to pinch the shoulder blades together and try to keep your arms bent at the elbows at roughly 90 to 110 degrees, with the elbows behind the bar. If at all possible, try to hold the bar with a full grip, thumbs wrapped around the bar. If you aren't flexible enough, you may want to use the false grip, but remember, use your palm to push the bar tight into your back for support.

As for the medium bar, you can grip the bar in pretty much any position you want. Whichever grip you decide to use, you need to try and make a platform with your shoulders and arms for the bar to rest on. This can be accomplished by lifting your elbows up to the sides, then rotating them back. The bar should be resting across your rear delts and lower traps. This can be done with both a wide and a narrow grip.

Play around with your grip—you will see which one will suit you best. Start out with the ones mentioned here and try some variations of each until you find the one that works. The most important thing to remember is that for a max lift you must be as comfortable as possible.

My 700 lb. raw personal record

Foot Placement

Once you have mastered the bar position of your choice, the next thing you have to worry about is your feet. Proper foot placement is essential to a successful squat. Where you place your feet for optimum performance is based on two key factors: your leg strength and flexibility. Let's go over a few positions that most lifters use.

Where you decide to place your feet is going to be based on your flexibility and leg strength. For example, if your hip flexors aren't very flexible and you have strong quadriceps (quads), then a closer stance will work. The more flexible you are in your hips, the more a wider stance will work.

There are a few things to consider when deciding what stance to use. Generally, the wider the stance, the more the hips, glutes, and hamstrings are used to push the weight. The closer the stance, the more involved the quads are. One of the biggest things to consider is comfort—you want to pick a stance that is comfortable to you. Ideally, you want a stance that lets you squat down below parallel, with your back in the most upright position, arched at the base, chest up, shoulders back, all while keeping your knees from floating out over your toes, the whole time being comfortable. Sounds impossible? Not really. It's won't happen overnight. It will take some experimenting on your part to find the stance that works best for you. Experiment with stance width and toe positions using slight variation of each until you find the one that is best.

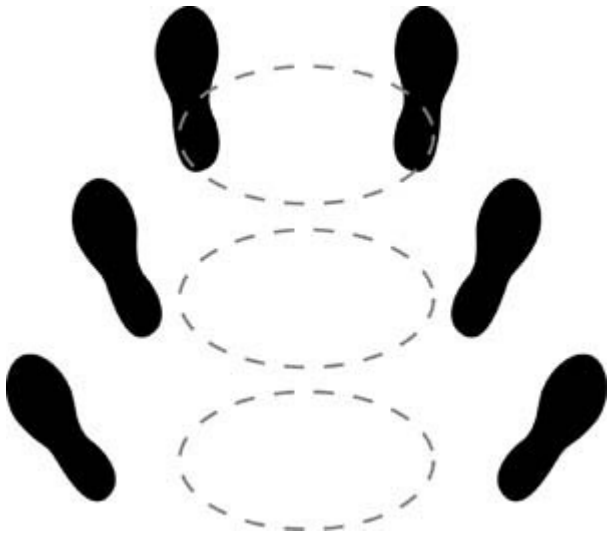

Figure 1:4 - Common foot placement

Look at figure 1:4. The dotted line represents your torso and of course the black foot shapes represent your feet. At the top, you will see that the feet are placed straight down under the body, hip-width apart, toes pointing out very slightly. This is the common close stance. As you look down at the image, you will notice that as the feet get farther apart the toes are being pointed out more each time. By pointing your toes out, this will allow your hips to open up more in the hole.

Here's a good exercise that will help you find a good starting point. Take a box that is roughly equal to the height of your knees from the floor. If you are new to squatting below parallel, start with an ordinary chair instead of a box. Place a broomstick or just a bar on your back using the bar position you decided to go with. Now, stand in front of the box with your feet placed, as shown in Figure 1:4 for a close stance. You want to be at least a foot in front of the box. With your lower back arched, head and chest up, and

shoulders back, push your butt back and squat down to the box. Try to keep your knees from floating out in front of your toes on the way down. Once you reach the box stand back up. Squat down a few more times, changing your toe position each time.

Repeat this exercise with the other two stances shown in Figure 1:4. As your stance gets wider, you will want to push your knees out as you descend. This can be accomplished by spreading your legs. As you try these exercises, you want to take note of the one that meets all the criteria mentioned before. You want to start with the stance that came closest and work from there. When you are finished experimenting, try it with some light weight and compare the results. The results may vary, but you will be able to figure out which stance is the best for you.

Un-racking/Backing Out

Now that you have your bar position and foot placement mastered, it's time to unrack the weight. Unracking the weight may be a small part of the lift, but it is not any less important than the rest. If you unrack the weight wrong it could feel like you have the weight of the world on your back, but when done correctly, the weight will feel light and you will be in control. There's nothing like the feeling you get when unracking a heavy weight, with the bar planted firmly on your back, the weight pushing down on you, all while staying in control.

Before you unrack the weight you want to make sure the rack is set to the appropriate height. For those who plan on using a monolift, start with just the bar at a height around mid-sternum. Duck under the bar to get it into the bar position you plan on using. Place your feet into your desired position by bending your knees as much as needed. Make sure to get your body in the most upright position. Using your legs, straighten your knees out to raise the bar out of the monolift arms. Check the distance between the bar and the lift's arms. You want that distance to be only a few inches. If the bar is any more than six inches from the arms, raise the monolift. Another thing to watch out for when using a monolift is that the bar comes straight up off the arms. You don't want the bar to run up the front of the arms as you unrack it. This means you are standing too far forward under the lift, so pull both feet back. If the bar ends up out of the arms far enough to squat without having to pull the lever on the lift, then you are standing too far back from the lift—place your feet further forward.

For those who plan on backing out the weight, you want to start by getting the bar into the desired position on your back. You want to have the rack set to a height that allows you to stand with both feet close together under the bar, knees slightly bent. With your back in the proper position, stand up the same as described above, by straightening your knees. Make sure the bar comes straight up out of the rack, clearing it by only a few inches.

There are a few things to keep in mind when unracking the weight. As the weight gets heavier you need to keep an eye on the amount the bar bends. When you get up to the monster weight, the bar will be bending, so you might have to lower the lift/rack to compensate. Also take note, if you have the arms of the monolift or the rack set to a wide position, you may not notice the bend until you unrack the weight. Speaking about rack width, if you plan on backing the weight out of a wide rack, take care not to hit the racks with the weights as you step backward.

So far, you have the bar positioned, your feet planted, and the rack set to the appropriate height. It's time to unrack the weight. There are two methods used most often. The first is to power the weight out. To do this, take a deep breath, then push up hard and explosively with your legs. The weight will come out of the rack with force and speed. The benefits are that you don't feel the force of the weight much until you are already standing with it. The drawback is that the weight can become unstable. The bar will tend to

bend and recoil a little, making it harder to control. The second method is to control the weight out of the rack. To do this, take a deep breath and slowly push your body up into the weight, use your legs and hips to steadily push the weight up out of the rack. You will feel the weight more this way and it will come up slower, but you will maintain control over it at all times. Either method will work fine, just remember the most important thing: don't attempt to squat until the weight stops all motion. If you are using a monolift, you are ready to squat. For those who are backing out the weight, you are almost ready.

When backing weight out, you want to take small steps. There is no reason to walk back far away from the rack. You only need to be far enough back not to hit the rack during the lift. As I mentioned earlier, take a deep breath and unrack the weight with your feet close together directly under the bar. You may want to have one foot placed a little forward, as this can make it easier to take a step backwards. While holding your breath, take a step back. Some lifters like to take a step at an angle away from the center of their body, so all they have to do is take another angled step with the other foot and they will be step up ready to squat. I call this the two-step method. When you step back at an angle, if you don't shift the weight appropriately to the nonmoving foot, you put yourself at risk of injury. The second step of this method makes it hard to control the weight due to the angle your leg will be at from the initial step. If you plan on using this method, take it slow and make sure the weight stops all motion before taking each step.

Sylvester (Sly) Crumbley (970 lbs.)

Another back-out method is what I like to call the step, step, and side step. Take your breath as before, and take a step directly back away from the rack. Follow with the other leg. Once both feet are together, there are two options. One, take one step to the side as far as you need to get into position. Two, take a side step with one foot then one more with the other to get into position. If you elect to use the first, you won't be centered with the rack, but that doesn't really matter, the rack is irrelevant during the rest of the squat.

Either method mentioned above will most likely take one whole breath to perform, once settled, you will want to take another before starting your descent. You are now setup and ready to squat.

Technique

So, now that you mastered the setup, what's next? Squat down and stand up, right? Not so fast. You need to decide on a technique. There are so many different techniques you can use to lower the weight, with tons of variations on each, so I have decided to discuss the top three according to my opinion.

Now, I'm sure you are wondering how I came to pick these three. The three I'm going to discuss are the most common I've seen competitive powerlifters use. I can tell you that I haven't seen anyone who squats super heavy weight not use at least one of these, or a slight variation of one.

The three most common techniques are as follows:

- Dive-bomb
- One Motion
- Controlled Blast

Every technique has the following common parts:

- Breaking the weight: The initiation of the squat.
- Descent: Lowering the weight.
- In the hole/breaking parallel: The bottom of the squat, at or below parallel.
- Recovery:

  a) Turn the weight around: Change the direction of the weight when in the hole (at the bottom of the lift).

  b) Drive: Pushing the weight from the squat position back to an upright position.

  c) Sticking Points: Any time during the drive when the weight stops momentum, usually occurs when the force applied to pushing the weight switches from one muscle group to another.

The next step is to figure out which technique will work best for you.

Dive-Bomb

The Dive-Bomb technique is very simple. This technique is almost a full free-fall of the weight.

1. Breaking the weight: To break the weight with this technique, start by pushing your butt back and relaxing the muscles in your legs.
2. Descent: The descent is pretty easy—allow the weight to come down fast. Keep the weight under control, but bring it down fast.
3. In the hole/breaking parallel: When you reach the hole, the speed of the weight will help you break parallel.
4. Turn the weight around: Keeping your back tight, use your glutes and hamstrings to rebound the weight out of the hole.
5. Drive: The speed of the bar coming up from the rebound will help your legs drive the weight back up.

6. Sticking points: The speed of the weight should help you through most sticking points.

This technique relies on speed and the rebound effect of your body to turn the weight around at the bottom, almost like it bounces back. It is a good technique for lifters with limited flexibility due to the fact that the speed of the weight will help them break parallel. Personally, I like to use this when warming up. It's a good way to stretch your muscles.

Benefits from this technique are as mentioned earlier, namely that it helps you break parallel. You don't spend a lot of energy lowering the weight, which leaves your body in a good condition to push the weight back up. When your body's natural reflexes kick in at the bottom, the force needed to turn the weight's direction back around is limited, leaving more energy for your body to use in the recovery.

There are drawbacks with this technique. When the weights get really heavy and are moving fast, your body will have a harder time changing the momentum of the weight. Another drawback is lack of control. You can control the weight on the way down as much as possible, but once your reflexes kick in at the bottom and turn it around, there is a possibility of losing control. An example you will see most often is a lifter's butt coming up first, causing the weight to get pushed out in front of their body. This is usually caused by a weak lower back. The back is strong enough to hold the weight on the way down, but not strong enough to stay erect when it's time to stop and turn the weight around.

There are a few key things to watch out for. When done properly the weight will tend to recoil from the quick change in direction, so you will want to practice this with the lighter weight and work up to the heavy weight. What I mean by recoil is the bar will change direction before the weights do, causing the bar to bend. Then, the weights will change direction and shoot up with some force, causing them to come up faster than the bar for a split second, essentially bouncing up and down on each side. The recoil usually happens on the way up right after you come out of the hole, so be ready. Tighten your lower back, push your belly into your belt, and hang on. Make sure the weight doesn't throw you forward.

One Motion

This technique is just like it sounds. Bring the weight down with one constant speed and push it back up at the same speed.

1. Breaking the weight: You want to break the weight the in the same way as the Dive-Bomb: push you butt back and start the descent.
2. Descent: On the descent you will bring the bar down at a steady speed. The speed is up to you, but you want to move it at a good pace. The whole point is to bring it down in full control.
3. In the hole/breaking parallel: Once in the hole, you will have to judge when you make parallel, the speed of the weight won't be fast enough to help you break parallel.
4. Turn the weight around: You will want to try and turn the weight around at the same speed as the descent. Turn the weight around by pushing your hips forward, while keeping your back tight. It is important not to bend over at the waist and let your butt come up first.
5. Recovery: Try to bring the weight back up at the same speed or faster than your descent speed. When done properly, the squat from top to bottom and back to top should look as though it was one motion.
6. Drive: You will have to push with your legs and thrust your hips forward pretty hard; there will be little rebound bar speed to help.
7. Sticking points: You will also have to deal with any sticking points the same way: push your knees out and drive your hips through the bar

The One Motion technique is the best way to stay in control of the weight at all times. That is the biggest benefit. Maintaining control over the weight makes it hard for something to go wrong. If something does go wrong, you should be able to compensate in time to fix it.

The drawback to this technique is that you will feel the brunt of the weight throughout the whole movement. Also, you will have to hold the weight for a longer time. You will need to build up some endurance for this technique to be effective. Another drawback is the difficulty of breaking parallel. The bar won't be moving fast enough to force you down, so you will have to judge parallel for yourself.

Since you will have total control over the bar at all times during the lift, there isn't much to watch out for. All you will have to train for is the strength and endurance. You want to train your muscles to be able to hold the weight for an extended period of time while holding a deep breath. Make sure you "stay tight" throughout the lift.

Controlled Blast

With this technique you will use a slow, steady, controlled descent and a fast recovery.

1. Breaking the weight: Start this technique the same as the others—by pushing your butt back.
2. Descent: Bring the weight down at one steady speed. Make sure you have total control of the weight at all times.
3. In the hole/breaking parallel: Once you break parallel, use your hips and legs to exert as much force as possible—"explode"—to change the weights direction and start the recovery.
4. Recovery: You will want to push your hips forward and try to force your feet through the floor.
5. Turn the weight around: Think of it as though you were trying to jump off the floor. All this should happen in a split second. The point is to get the bar moving in the opposite direction with as much speed as possible.
6. Drive: The force you use to explode the weight will help with the drive on the way up. Try your best to keep applying as much force as possible after the initial burst.
7. Sticking points: If you can keep the bar moving up with speed, it will be easier when hitting any sticking points on the way up.

The benefits for this technique are the same for the descent as the One Motion technique and the same for the recover from the Dive-Bomb. To recap, you will have full control over the bar on the descent, making it less likely for an error to occur, and if you "explode" properly out of the hole you will have the benefit of bar speed on the way up.

The drawbacks for this technique are similar to the others as well. You will still have to hold the weight for a longer period of time on the descent, as well as pay more attention to breaking parallel. On the way up, the bar should be moving relatively fast, so there could be a little loss of control.

This is a very effective technique for all types of lifters, but it takes a lot of practice. You will have to train your muscles to fire at the appropriate time. Timing is everything. Practice this technique on every weight, even when using just the bar. You want your muscles to remember when they are supposed fire. Practice until it becomes second nature for them.

There are some issues to watch out for. You will be exerting a lot of force out of the hole, so make sure your butt doesn't come up first. Keep your head up, chest out, and lower back tight. Push your belly into your belt, and then explode. Watch out for recoil as well. If you explode with a lot of force, the bar can tend to recoil.

Whichever technique you decide to go with, try to bring the bar down in a straight line. Remember the exercise from the foot stance section? Try that exercise again with a little variation. Stand up with the bar and get into your stance. Now, have a training partner hold a broomstick or a two-by-four board straight up from the floor directly in front of the bar. Now squat. Try to keep the bar the same distance away from the stick all the way down and back up. To start you will need to push you butt back as though you were trying to sit in a chair. Also, as you lower the weight, try to keep your knees from floating out over your toes. You can accomplish this by pushing your knees out and spreading your groin. When your knees end up over your toes, most of the force needed to recover the weight has to be generated from your quads, taking your hips out of the lift. The ideal position for your legs throughout the squat is to have your shin perpendicular with the floor, ankle at approximately a 90 degree angle. This takes pressure off the knee joint and utilizes more of your thigh and hip muscles for the lift. Practice this exercise with slight variations to your stance until you master it.

Here are a few helpful pointers to help you master your technique:

- First, when you break the weight, start by forcing your butt back and bending at your hips. This immediately forces your hips to help your back support the weight.
- Maintain control of the bar as much as possible. Having control of the bar will help you recover from most things that can go wrong during the lift.
- Push you knees out laterally. You want your shins to be perpendicular to the floor. Just spread your knees out on the way down.
- Keep your back arched and in the most upright position throughout the lift. Keeping your head up and chest out will help keep your back in position.
- "Stay tight." Keep your breath held, push your belly into your belt, shoulders and arms firmly gripping the bar, head up, chest out; every muscle that isn't involved in moving the weight should be used to support and control the weight.
- If your toes or heels come up at all during the lift, you need to adjust your stance. First try pointing your toes in or out before adjusting the width of your stance. I actually point my right toe out more than my left. There is no rule about being symmetrical, just do what works for you.
- If your knees push in when you start to recover the weight, you are probably standing too wide. Bring your stance in until it stops.
- Did you have to lean over at the bottom to break parallel? Yes. You will need to play around with you stance. The most common cause of this is inflexible hip flexors. Try pointing your toes out a little. The more you point out your toes, the easier it is for your hips to open up. The reverse is also true—if you are finding it too easy to break parallel you can point your toes forward to allow your hips to lock up at the bottom, which forces the weight to push you down.
- Trust your partners. Listen to what they say. They will be able to notice things that you can't while squatting. Learn to take constructive criticism.

Racking the weight

Now that you've found the technique that's going to give you that perfect squat, there's only one more topic to talk about and you will be ready to squat: racking the weight. There really isn't much to say about this, but it's important nonetheless.

As a monolift lifter, you won't have too much to worry about. Your partner will be pushing the arms back into place once you complete the lift. The main thing to do is to wait for the arms to be locked into place before placing the bar back into them. Sometimes the weight will slide down your back, especially during a heavy lift. You may need your partners to lift up on each side of the bar to guide it into the arms. Make sure the weight is in the arms before releasing it. Also don't turn your head to either side to check if

you are in the arms. This isn't good for your neck and can lead to injury. Your partners should make sure you are in.

For those who are backing the weight out of a rack, make sure the bar is motionless at the top of the lift, and then bring your feet together before attempting to walk back toward the racks. Don't take a step toward the rack with your legs spread apart, as you will probably not clear the rack and you will be putting your legs at an odd angle to support the weight. It never hurts to have a training partner on each side help support the weight as you walk it back in. Once your feet are together, step approach the rack until the bar is in. Don't take one step and lean forward to re-rack the weight. You will see lifters do this all the time. This is lazy and dangerous. If you miss the rack, the weight will be out in front of you and you risk hurting your back and neck. Same thing applies as above—don't turn your head.

Yury Chakur (860 lbs.)

Summary

Now that you know all you need to know about the mechanics of the squat, you need to experiment. Try different bar positions, grips. Try different stances. Try all three techniques. When you experiment, make sure the weight is fairly light, something you can handle in case something goes wrong. Also, have your spotters/training partners keep their eyes on you for some constructive criticism. Like I said earlier, they will see things you don't. When you find what works for you, practice, practice, practice. Practice on every set, even the warm-up sets. Get your body used to your setup and technique until it becomes second nature.

Now take what you learned, go to the gym and squat!

I hope you found this guide useful. Please consider putting up a short review on Amazon. I would very much appreciate it! If you have any questions or comments I can be reached by email at teamjaxfl@gmail.com. For more information check out the following web links:

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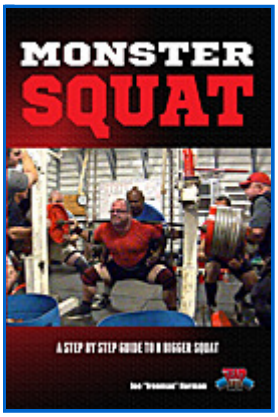

As I said at the beginning of this guide, it is the first chapter in my book "Monster Squat". When you are ready to take your squats to the next level, you will find the following additional topics discussed in the full book:

- Setting up a training schedule to maximize your effort toward your monster squat
- Choosing the proper exercises to build a strong powerful squat
- Lifting gear, from single-ply to multi-ply
- Taking your squat to the competitive level
- Mental preparation

Learn what it takes to get under the monster weights!

SQUAT LIKE A POWERLIFTER

The Beginner's Guide to a Perfect Squat!

Joe "Ironman" Norman

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