

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

Four fundamental principles that define good skiing technique

We know good skiers when we see them. They seem unbothered by funky snow or flat light. They can rail on groomers, stomp over moguls and float through pow. Regardless of snow conditions or type of run, they seem to bring the right tactic to breeze down the hill. And worst of all, they don't seem to get tired. Damn them, those good skiers, making the rest of us look so flawed and human.



BY KARIN KIRK

What do they have that we don't?

What are the underlying skills that make good skiers good? At the core of it lies a set of simple principles that define efficient, functional skiing at any level.

1. TIP THE SKIS ON EDGE, BUT USE YOUR FEET FIRST

Nothing beats the powerful sensation of ripping through a carved turn. The sidecut of every ski is designed to produce an arc on the snow when the ski is tipped on edge. Thus, a turn can be made by simply putting the ski on edge riding the arc all the way around the turn. Fun indeed, but easier to execute when you let your feet and legs do the majority of the tipping, rather than hucking your whole body into the turn.

Try this: on a groomed green run, tilt the skis on their edges by using nothing more than your feet. Press into the snow with your little toe on one foot and your big toe on the other foot. Feel the connection between the edges of your feet, the edges of your skis, and the snow. This simple, subtle move is the basis of sound edging skills. After all, the skis are connected to your feet, are they not? So moving your feet is the most efficient way to move the skis. This approach also keeps your body tall and balanced, allowing you to focus on staying centered and moving with your skis all the way through the turn.

Avoid leaning way into the turn. That would be a case of tipping the skis with your entire body, which is inefficient and unbalanced, and you'll find it difficult to get gracefully out of that over-committed position at the end of the turn.



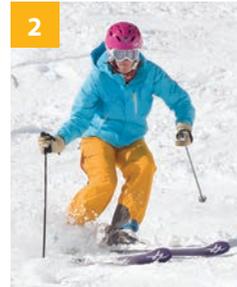
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1

2. TURN YOUR LEGS UNDER A STABLE UPPER BODY

You knew I was going to say this one, right? It's one of the most well-worn concepts in skiing. But note how I didn't say, "keep your upper body facing down the hill." First of all, I can't use that phrase anymore, after seeing dozens of well-intentioned husbands/fathers barking that command at their wives/kids, it makes me cringe. But think of it another way. Think of your legs and skis turning back and forth, getting their job done while your core stays nice and tight. We know you've got six-pack abs hidden somewhere beneath your down sweater, right? So use your strong core to keep everything collected and balanced. Then, let your legs do the work.

This is especially helpful when skiing off-groomed. Sometimes our whole body comes unwound such that we end up pointing slightly up the hill by the end of the turn. Phew, that means we have a really long way to go if we are to move down the hill to start the next turn. So try this: before you begin a set of turns, tighten your abs as if you were doing an abdominal crunch. Ski away with that tension in your core, and steer your legs and skis while keeping the rest of your body out of the equation. Also, be mindful of your inside hand and don't let it drop behind you. When executed correctly, this tactic will help you feel ready for the next turn, no matter what the conditions.



3. BALANCE OVER THE OUTSIDE SKI

Physics-wise, the force of traveling around a turn will pull you to the outside of the turn. Conveniently, that's just where you want to be. Thus, the outside ski carries the majority of your weight, with an important exception being in deep snow where it's better to pressure both skis evenly. But in any case, your outside leg becomes the structural element of your whole body. Ideally, your body stacks up over that outside ski, resulting in level hips, level hands and level shoulders. This is a rock-solid position that allows you to withstand just about any turn.



By contrast, a common mistake is to lean in toward the hill. This removes weight from the outside ski, which leaves you with in a washed-out turn. As the inside hand drops

toward the snow, it pulls the hips and shoulders with it, and all that structural integrity disappears. Try this: start each turn by shifting your weight to the new outside ski and then deliberately standing on that leg. This will set you up for a strong turn right from the very beginning. As momentum builds through the turn, keep pushing on that outside ski. The faster the turn, the harder you'll push. Strive to feel the power and balance that comes from that position.



4. STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SKI

Do you ever feel your weight rocking back to the tails of your ski? Welcome to the club. Everybody does. But have you taken up permanent residence in the back seat? Well, then it's time for a change of address.

Concepts 1-3 only work if you are standing in the middle of the ski. All the tipping, steering, absorbing, carving and every other ski move you've heard of will only work if you are in a balanced position to start with. By far, the most common mistake in skiing is getting too far back. It happens to everyone. Everyone, period. But the key is to recognize it when it happens and to fight like crazy to avoid staying there. There are a million ways to remind yourself to stay forward. Should you ever need some new strategies, just listen to any ski lesson, anywhere: "Keep your hands forward!" "Press your shins to the front of your ski boots!" "Stand up tall!" "For the love of God, get out of the back seat already!" (This example being from my ski lessons, clearly).

Well, if those endearing phrases haven't cured your back seat habit, then think of it another way. Stand in the middle of the ski. As the ski moves, strive to keep up with it. It goes through compressions, over bumps, through a crud pile and across ice. In each of those cases the ski might speed up or slow down. Stay with it! Be proactive, anticipate what the ski is going to do and go there with your body. The middle of the ski is a moving target and you need to move right along with it. Of all the skiing skills, balance is the most dynamic. To stay in balance requires constant movement and adjustment.

Want a quick evaluation of your balance? Hop off the snow. It's nearly impossible to jump from an unbalanced position. If you can hop in between each turn, you're on your way to functional balance. But I won't lie, achieving a balanced stance is hard, and this is why coaches have dozens of tactics to help improve balance. But of all the fundamentals, this is the key. If you want to be a better skier, chances are this is the place to start.

OK, now get out there and rip through that spring snow. Don't let the variable conditions get the best of you — keep your fundamentals solid and think about these keys to good skiing. See you out there! ♦

Karin Kirk is a Bridger Bowl ski instructor, Ridge guide and staff trainer who, for the love of God, tries to stay out of the back seat. She can be reached at karin@kirkframeworks.com.