

**New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club**  
**Intermediate Ski Curriculum**

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## **Which group should I join?** (skills and fitness)

Ask yourself: "Am I comfortable snow plow turning on a slope and doing step turns?"  
If the answer is "no," stick with the beginners. That's just what the beginner group will practice.

If the answer is "yes" and you think you are an intermediate student, "Have I skied for most of a day, 5 miles or more?"

*You should be fit enough to be out all-day, ski six miles & do some work up and down hills.*

## **Why Learn Intermediate Skills?:**

When people learn downhill (alpine) skiing, they usually learn that only beginners snowplow, and once you move beyond beginner level, you parallel ski and no longer snow plow. This is NOT true for cross-country and back-country skiing. Please check this attitude at the door. Cross-country & back-country means having options & making choices, depending on conditions & terrain. Just because someone can parallel or telemark turn doesn't mean they don't snow plow when necessary.

A skilled cross-country or back-country skier has a repertoire of turns and skills. For example, on a mountainous back-country tour or hut trip when a trail is narrow or icy or steep or trees are close and skiers carry heavy packs, to descend treacherous places they may snowplow, use kick-turns, or make a wide traverse instead of going down the fall line. When the legs are tired or the snow very deep, skiers may use techniques such as parallel or use step turns. Good judgment means using whatever is safest and comfortable for each skier.

Please choose the goal that's right for you and start from your actual level of ability and fitness. Cross-country and back-country skiing include the quiet beauty of the class 1 tour through meadows & forest, groomed tracks and familiar trails, hut trips, scenic kick and glide or skating tours, telemark turns on slopes, trail-less back-country wilderness, steeps above tree-line in the mountains. It's all good!

The NMCCSC does a lot of back-country touring. We want you to join us, to learn, to be competent, safe, and have fun.

## **What Are Intermediate Skills?**

### **Basic Intermediate Skills:**

- stem christie
- parallel turns
- telemark turns
- controlling speed & direction on hills (turning, traversing)
- using skins

### **More advanced Intermediate Skills:**

- back-country skills
- handling variable snow conditions (powder, ice, no tracks)
- linking turns
- skiing down the fall line (vs. traversing)
- control in variable & adverse conditions
- avalanche training
- navigation skills
- independence (self-reliance, knowledge sound judgment, willingness to learn more, assume responsibility & confidence, experience)

In the NMCCSC lessons, we spend the morning practicing turns then tour in the afternoon.

# On-the-Snow Lesson

## Learning & Falling:

We'll show you lots today. You won't get it all in a day. You must practice to teach yourself these skills a step at a time. There's a Japanese saying, "Fall down seven times, get up eight." Keep trying.

When you are learning new skills, trying to push your limits, you will fall. Remember that the best way to fall is to fall on your butt on the uphill side, skis downhill of your body.

Remember how kids think that learning, even falling, are fun? Let's try for "I want to do that. It looks like fun!"

**Stem Christie:** As Ned Gillette states it, "begin stem christie turns by snowplowing across the fall line, then close your skis, bringing them parallel. Gradually reduce the snowplow part of the turn so you bring your skis parallel earlier."

- Weight the outside ski so inside ski can slide easily
- Bend knees for stability
- Lean forward, not back
- See Parallel Turn

## **Parallel Turn:**

### Standing Still:

- bend your knees and keep them hip-width apart
- Keep skis hip-width apart, parallel
- Shift your hips and knees to the right side so you weight both right ski edges
- Your hip moves to the same side you are edging
- This is different than the snow plow which used inside edges
- Shift your weight back and forth from one side to the other
- You should feel the edges bite the snow
- This only works if your boots are stiff enough to transfer the shift to the ski
- Now, start to traverse across a low slope and repeat these movements slowly
- Keep your weight over the middle of the skis or forward, not behind the balls of your feet

### The Turn:

- In the arc of the turn you will shift your weight and change the edging
- Begin by weighting the skis evenly, skis flat on the snow
- Lean forward to start moving, pressing your shins against the tongue of your boot
- Press the outside edges into the snow
- On the fall line, shift your weight the outside ski to make the turn
- Lean forward
- Rotate your shoulders in your turning direction
- Your shoulders will move left if you hips move right (& visa versa) during this mid-turn stage
- Your shoulders come back to center as you come out of the turn
- Lean hard on that outside ski.
- Your weight is on the downhill (outside) ski as you come out of the turn
- Transfer the weight from the right ski to the left ski as you turn to the other side
- It's easier to turn if you're moving a little faster
- It's easier to turn if your skis are closer together -but less stable while you are learning

## Common Errors & Tips:

- Straight legs - bend those knees!
- dragging the tails instead of using the edges (or your skis are too long) - press shins forward
- Skis too far apart so inner edge of uphill ski catches
- Skis so far apart it's difficult to shift weight
- Start by narrowing your snowplow in order to make skis parallel
- To narrow your snowplow, really weight the outside ski and let the unweighted ski float in parallel
- Don't wait too long to turn - you accumulate speed while you move
- Try holding your poles (the lunchtray) out in front with both hands
- Poles in lunchtray position, shift poles toward downhill in order to shift shoulders
- i.e., torso rotates in direction of turn

## **Telemark Turn:**

### The Stance:

- Practice the stance on the flats

- Bend both knees, one behind the other, standing still, move your body up and down, absorbing with knees
- Move forward on the snow with one leg pushed forward, just hold the stance
- Stop, then move straight on the snow with the other leg forward
- Then, moving, push one leg forward, then the other.
- Your back knee should be somewhere behind your front calf.
- Then try this while traversing on a slight slope.
- Next, you raise and lower your body up and down as you shuffle.

#### Tips:

- Keep your skis hip width apart and parallel
- Keep your arms out front for balance. Don't rely on poles.
- Pretend you are holding a lunch tray--hold your poles with both hands out front of your body.
- If the back foot goes too far back you risk crossing your skis. Don't get stretched out.
- Front knee should be over the toes.
- You can only weight your skis when your body is above your feet, heels under your butt.

#### The Turn:

##### Legs:

- Start in position for a snowplow or more experienced or downhill skiers might start with a stem christie or a parallel turn. This is when your whole body is tallest.
  - When you are pointing down the fall line, adopt the telemark stance
  - Slide your outside leg forward and crouch.
  - Your whole body should lower.
  - Concentrate on weighting the outside ski.
  - Slide your skis back to parallel at you complete the turn
  - Transfer the back ski forward
- Try starting in the tele stance and then moving into a turn so you get the feel for it

##### Shoulders & Torso:

- Upper body should be quiet, barely moves, faces the fall line-diagonally
- Torso leans downhill and forward
- Bend at the waist - exaggerate this for practice
- Tip your downhill shoulder down so your body forms a C with the opening of the C facing downhill.
- This keeps your uphill shoulder from dropping, a common tendency that causes you to lose your balance.
- Your upper body keeps to the fall line.

##### Hands:

- Keep your pole tips behind you, not in front of you. Keep your hands in front of you.
- Don't put much weight on your poles. Barely tap the snow.
- Turn around the pole, but don't weight it, don't lean on it
- Reach out with pole and plant it lightly

#### A note about old school/new school telemark stances

##### Getting low in the stance = old school

It's not wrong. It's just style and there are pros and cons to low or tall tele skiing. You're more stable when low. It's better for steeps and crusty snow conditions. It's also much harder on your legs if you're skiing all day.

##### Standing Tall in the Stance = new school

A taller stance = easier transitions between turns. Stiff boots make the taller stance easier. It's better for powder and groomed snow. You're not as stable in a taller stance. Your center of gravity is higher. Newer equipment makes this stance possible.

Either way, concentrate on weighting the outside or back ski.

##### Common Errors & Tips:

- uphill shoulder dropped - "C-bend at waist" or lunch tray helps
- poles tips out front
- keeping front leg straight
- back foot too far back
- getting too stretched out, back ski too far back, skis will cross
- outside ski floating-unweighted
- falling backwards - weight of should be over boots and forward, more weight on outside ski
- Hold your poles in your hands across the front of your body-like a bar or a tray in front of you.
- If you're dragging a pole, pretend you're holding a lunch tray

- Practice one thing at a time until your brain assimilates that body position or move

#### At the beginning

- You will probably hold your skis in the stance and not move them constantly.
- You are concentrating on learning so much that this is too much at the start

#### Feel the Rhythm:

- Ideally, you are alternating synchronously in 3 planes
- The body goes up and down
- The lower body swings side to side with each turn
- The feet and skis go forward and back.
- As you get more advanced you keep your skis moving, so there's a constant flow of movement in three directions.
- Keep your senses alert for the feeling of rhythm. When you start to move in this way your body and brain have assimilated the postures and movements and it's becoming automatic. When you were a kid and learned to ride a bike, you had to think about it. Then it became automatic to balance, pedal, steer, brake, speed up or slow down, and look around at the other kids. This isn't so different. We're just not used to having to learn to move at our ages.

- go to the bunny hill at Sandia and buy a lift ticket or skin up
- Repetition will help immensely and you'll progress more quickly

### **More Advanced Intermediate Skills:**

#### **Linking Turns:**

- Transition from one turn to the next immediately
- Make smaller turns than when you traverse
- Spoon someone else's tracks
- Follow behind another skier
- Stay on the fall line instead of traversing with long stretches between turns
- In tele turning, keep your skis moving forward and back at all times - don't freeze in the stance
- In parallel turning, keep shifting your weight instead of holding one position
- Feel the rhythm - a constant flow of motion in a pattern, swaying back and forth

#### **Skiing the Fall Line:**

- Instead of traversing, face straight down the hill
- No straight segments between turns
- Keep your torso facing downhill while the legs turn to the side
- Lean forward and bend downward more for stability
- Transition from one turn to the next immediately
- make smaller, tighter turns
- "Spoon" someone else's tracks
- Follow behind another skier
- keep your skis/body moving- i.e., don't freeze in one stance
- Control your speed
- Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway!

#### **Control in Adverse Conditions:**

- Stop to regain control
- Check your speed
- Traverse carefully either up or downhill if conditions warrant extra caution
- Back off the hot-dogging and snowplow or whatever is needed (bad conditions are not where you practice new skills)
- Better safe than sorry if you are tired out (no injuries!)
- Put skins on for downhill if necessary (e.g. for a steep and icy descent with a heavy hut trip pack)
- Stop to regain your composure, look around you and plan your moves
- Visualize what you want to do, not what you don't want to do

#### **Skins**

- Full-length skins are **necessary for most hut trips**
- Keep the adhesive **bottoms clean** (pine needles, leaves, dirt, snow)
- Skins **must fit your skis** in length and width so there's tension to hold them on and your metal edges are exposed
- Wear gloves/liners when applying or taking off skins to keep your hands warm and dry
- **Practice at home** BEFORE you go out in the snow **for first time**
- **Cool skins off** before putting them in the snow (I.e. don't take them from the warm car or hut straight to the snow! -

- warm skins **melt snow on contact**, get wet - snow sticks to them
- Stomp compacted flat area with your skis - to apply or remove skins
- In **wind**, fold over **in sections** to keep it from sticking in the wrong places or getting in the snow
- Keep your skins **dry!** Snow sticks to wet skins
- **Don't ski or stop** in wet, melting snow

### **Powder Skiing**

- When touring-striding, kick your tips up as you move forward. Punch your ski upward and lift to keep from catching skis under crust or heavy load of powder
- Keep your feet under your body.
- The powder will slow you down so you don't need as much edging.
- Carve smaller turns in any style of skiing
- In snowplowing, use less edging to float higher in the snow instead of digging deeper.
- In parallel turns, lean back a little -not too far- to keep your tips up.
- In telemark skiing, don't get too stretched out, keep the skis close together (side by side) and the back leg should be parallel to the snow at its lowest. Emphasize weight on the back ski.
- In deep snow unweight your skis as you turn, try hopping a bit, pop up as your body moves up and down.

See **Back-country Skills** Document

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### **References:**

*Allen & Mike's Really Cool Telemark Tips*, Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland

*Allen & Mike's Really Cool Backcountry Ski Book*, Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland

Youtube videos

Touring Uphill Strides:	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IA6rU0QB2E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IA6rU0QB2E</a>
Touring Basics:	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0nvwYheDVO">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0nvwYheDVO</a>
Skins on & off	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX5UWvZfihs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX5UWvZfihs</a>
Telemark Turn on Cross-country skis	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1U8jiKghcAg">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1U8jiKghcAg</a>
From Snowplow to Telemark Turn	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqpS41vV_ww">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqpS41vV_ww</a>
A Fun backcountry ski video:	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZRradvzQ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZRradvzQ</a>

There are umpteen parallel ski turn videos out there. Find some you like.