Olympic lift progressions

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Learn the Olympic lifts from the top down: master the pulls from mid-thigh first, lower the starting point step by step, and add the catch only with a coach.

Why it matters: The snatch and the clean and jerk are fast, technical lifts. Breaking them into small steps is how coaches teach them, and the first steps, the pulls, already build most of the power (see "Olympic lifts: power in the pull").

Before you start

- **8 to 12 weeks of regular strength training,** including squats and Romanian deadlifts with good form.
- **Quiet, controlled landings** on squat jumps and box jumps.
- **A barbell and plates,** and a space where you can drop to a stand without hitting anything.
- **Not if** you have back, shoulder or wrist pain under load. See "Soreness or injury?"

The ground rules

- **Pulls first** in the session, after your warm-up, while you're fresh.
- **2 or 3 reps a set,** 3 to 5 sets, 2 to 3 minutes' rest. Every rep fast.
- **Stop the set** when the bar slows down or your position slips.
- **Film a set** from the side every week or two (see "Film your form").
- **Pulls you learn here. Catches you learn with a coach.**

The hang position

Every pull starts here.

1. **Grip:** hands just outside your thighs (clean grip), overhand. For snatch-grip pulls, hands wide enough that the bar sits in the crease of your hips when you stand.
2. **Stand tall** with the bar against your thighs, arms long and loose.
3. **Hinge:** push your hips back and slide the bar down your thighs to mid-thigh or just above the knees. Shins stay nearly vertical; shoulders move slightly in front of the bar.
4. **Brace** your trunk. This is the hang.

Stage 1: the pulls (on your own)

Learn them in this order. Move on when the current one looks the same rep after rep on video.

1. **Jump shrug** (light). From the hang, jump straight up and shrug your shoulders to your ears. Arms stay long. Land softly where you started.
2. **Hang high pull** (light to moderate). Same as the jump shrug, then let your elbows travel up and out so the bar rises close to your body, to about the bottom of your ribs.
3. **Mid-thigh pull** (heavy). From blocks or rack pins at mid-thigh, stand up fast and shrug. Use it for your heaviest pulling.
4. **Clean pull from the floor** (moderate to heavy). Like a deadlift with a clean grip, then stand up fast and shrug once the bar passes your knees.
5. **Snatch-grip high pull** (light). The hang high pull with a wide grip.

Each has full setup, cues and common mistakes in the exercise library.

Stage 2: the full lifts (with a coach)

Coaches usually teach the catch in this order. Use it to follow along, not to teach yourself.

The clean:

1. Front squat with the bar resting on your shoulders (the rack position).
2. Hang muscle clean: the bar is pulled to the shoulders without dropping under it.
3. Hang power clean from mid-thigh, then from above the knee, then from below the knee.
4. Power clean from the floor.
5. Clean: catching in a full front squat.

The snatch:

1. Overhead squat with an empty bar or a dowel.
2. Snatch-grip high pull (Stage 1).
3. Hang power snatch from mid-thigh, then from above the knee, then from below the knee.
4. Power snatch from the floor.
5. Snatch: catching in a full overhead squat.

The jerk:

1. Push press: a short knee dip, then drive the bar overhead with your legs and arms.
2. Push jerk: the same drive, then drop slightly under the bar to catch it with arms locked.
3. Split jerk: drive, then split your feet into a lunge to catch it.

Landmine steps

A landmine holds one end of a barbell to the floor, so the bar moves in an arc and can't drop on you. It's a gentler way to learn fast lifts. Each has its full description in the exercise library.

Start with	Then progress to
Landmine squat jump	Barbell jump squat, with a light load
Landmine push press	Push press (with a coach)
Landmine split jerk	Split jerk (with a coach)
Rotational landmine press	Medicine-ball rotational throws

A sample week of pulls

Day	First exercise	Sets × reps
A	Jump shrug	4 × 3, light, fast
B	Hang high pull	4 × 3, light to moderate
C (if you train 3 days)	Mid-thigh pull	4 × 3, heavy

Follow each with the rest of your strength workout. The "Olympic pulls" workout in Plan workouts sets this up for you.

Checklist

1. 8 to 12 weeks of strength training first.
2. Learn the hang position.
3. Jump shrug, then hang high pull, then mid-thigh pull.
4. 2 or 3 fast reps a set; stop when the bar slows.
5. Film a set every week or two.
6. Catches only with a coach.

Related guides

- Plyometrics: jumps and throws
- Learning a new lift
- Film your form

Related articles

- Olympic lifts: power in the pull
- Power training