

Compilation of

Fear control techniques, tips and suggestions.

By: various pilots from around the world.

The fear of heights in this sport is irrational. **Think of it this way:** The higher up you are the more time you have to screw around before you hit the ground, **and the more time you have to fix problems, and to toss your laundry.** There is safety in altitude. It's not the fall that hurts, it's the sudden stop at the end

Looking at the horizon rather than straight down helps.

Everyone fears thermal turbulence at a different level. **Fly on days that are within your skill and comfort level.**

There are points where even the best pilots run for their lives but if you're flying in those conditions your first mistake was launching.

You will increase your bump tolerance with experience and learn when enough is enough.

One thing that helps me is tacking on a few things to my preflight check. I do it every single time and that eliminates a TON of fear because you know you did your best to gauge your equipment and what you could predict of the conditions:

a) Get a horizon reference straight out from launch in the direction of the wind and stare at that point after launching for at least ten seconds (which is also a good count before starting any kind of 360 turn), that way if you launch with half a

wing etc. you'll be fixated on a point that instinctively corrects the problem... if you stare at the ground after a bad launch you will hit it. **Object fixation is human instinct... fixate on the right thing.**

b) Take a deeeeep breath and smile. After all you're about to fly like a bird. **Too cool.**

c) In turbulence try to flow with it and not fight it.

For practice drive a very bumpy road holding a hot cup of coffee. Think of your hips as a shock absorber and see how well you can flow with the bumps (not spilling the coffee of course). Do that in the air and suddenly turbulence is very fun (to a point) and not scary.

We can all feel fear in a situation where the outcome is not well defined, this is natural and healthy. A pilot without SOME degree of fear is probably reckless.

What is unhealthy is to be up there in good conditions, and scared shitless at the smallest movement in the harness, or the minute you get high, these are unfounded fears, there is no real outside evidence for them. In fact, height buys you safety, and letting your fear keep you low over is ridge is just downright dangerous.

There are a few pragmatic ways of dealing with fear at the time it happens. To be terrified while you are flying is both unpleasant and risky, since it will act as a mental block. **Judy Leden suggests taking control of your breathing and also relaxing your shoulders.**

I like to use one-point, an Aikido technique where you focus on a bodily point just below your umbilical region, and towards the inside. The combination of both techniques works really well.

If you are stiff, the wing will react much more badly to turbulence. To a certain extent, active flying can be achieved by letting the arms hang from the brakes, and letting your torso just roll naturally in the harness.

Be physically relaxed, breathe deeply and slowly, **focus on what is happening within your immediate environment** (and not those deep dark fears inside your head).

Do not let your body become rigid.

Dani Crespo suggested to me that, when in roudy air, a degree of aggression can also help. Turn into turbulence when it pushes you away and swear at it in a loud voice if it pisses you off (Spanish is brilliant for this) :)

When you are on the ground, take some time out to get to know your fear. After all its a mental process you put in place (maybe subconsciously), so you have the right to deconstruct it. **The SIV example was a classic for me once I had analyzed it:** there you are, 3000 ft up in the air over a beautiful Turkish beach, and then suddenly your instructors calm voice comes over the radio and entices you to do the most outrageous manouvers and scare yourself stupid. A few minutes later you are down on the beach and touching the ground feels as safe as climbing back into the womb. It's very clear to me what kind of association (height=fear) is getting set up here!!!

Use disassociation to view things in a more impartial manner.

Imagine you are a bird, viewing yourself flying.

Watch how you successfully went through the SIV exercises, how you confidently dealt with them. Now watch yourself at a later time flying on a perfectly calm day, full of fear at the smallest movement of the wing. Take the image and feelings that you like, and enhance them: the size, brightness, the colors, sounds, the feeling of confidence. Take the one that you don't like and shrink it, make it black-and-white, see it as a still photograph, put a match to it and watch the ashes blow away in the wind... **Mental exercises such as the can create new empowering associations to replace those that produce your unfounded fear.** Checkout some books on sports psychology or Neuro-Linguistic Programming, which has fast and efficient patterns for dealing with phobias such as the swish. Above all don't think this is only happening to you, and don't let it spoil your enjoyment of flying. **Fear is something within you that you should really get to know.**

Jocky Sanderson strongly believes that **the best pilot is the one having the most fun** and, the SIV course is structured in that manner such that having done the SIV, you get time to go out and do some superb XC flying, and really chill. These fears are things that are inside of you and under your control, you will overcome them and enjoy flying again!

GET SMASHED! You can fly like the big dogs in the worst possible conditions once you no longer care. Many of the gutsiest pilots do this - just ask around. Just kidding...

DO NOT FLY SMASHED! What a stupid comment. Some people never overcome fear. There was a highly successful business man that had a fear of heights. So, he learned how to fly, and would get high and fly straight down towards the ground to overcome this fear. He never did, but died one day when he failed to pull out.

**Don't expect to overcome your fear.
Recognize it. Understand it. Embrace it.
Use it.**

Kiting in progressively stronger conditions gave me a legitimate basis for increased confidence.

I saw my skill increase - and my confidence increased. Building skill and confidence will naturally decrease fear to some degree. It productively shifts mental focus and empowers you while actively dealing with both skill and fear. My kiting exercises increased my confidence in high wind launches. Try it, or dream up your own exercise tailored to your own needs. **If fear can melt into concern, that's healthy.**

I believe it's Tom Skerritt who at one point says : "Son, I'm not going to blow sunshine up your ass!" So,

next time you fly identify every scary moment.

Then divide those into two categories: objective (rotor, strong wind and other out-of-the-envelope-stuff) and **subjective** (what if I get whacked although it does seem calm, I hate altitude and other gee-what-the-heck's-got-into-me-kindastuff).

See which prevails. If it's the first, well, welcome to the club! And there is no need to fight this fear because it is in fact your greatest safeguard against serious bodily harm. Once I had lost my fear of rotor, only to have it substituted by a fear of lifting heavy objects due to my L1/L2 fracture...Strive to increase your prowess with the glider and these fears will dissipate into a kind of conscious awareness thingy which is always there but doesn't really bother you. However, if most of your fear falls in the subjective category, then:

- 1. stop.** Why do it if it doesn't feel good? Take up another sport or form of flying (HGs don't tend to have frontals). Or maybe being afraid does it for you? In that case go to step 2.
- 2. get psychiatric help** (since we've never met it is a bit presumptuous of me to dish out this kind of advice - I mean no offense, it's just that I've seen a couple of people fly because they thought they had something to prove and I've also accompanied some of them to the ER)
- 3. on the ground,** read mind-boggling philosophical stuff (Sun Tzu and Tom Clancy do the trick) and apply it in flying
- 4. In the air,when shit happens, curse, and do it loud.** I have fun making up all these new profanities out of the basic inventory that every language possesses. It's like LEGO blocks, I never cease to amaze myself by my constructions (I once integrated a horse, the wing's mother and a larger quantity of blood all in one curse during a stall followed by a large asymmetric). Sometimes I even curse in foreign languages (maybe we should start a thread on that, I would like to learn some more spanish...)
- 5. Someone once said that scenarios come in threes:** best case, worst case and just in case. Think ahead and have all three ready. It'll take your mind off fear and even if something happens you'll be ready
- 6. In Desiderata it is said** "...many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness...". Eat, drink, urinate (before or during), be warm, fly with friends. 7. have a healthy sarcastic approach to sh.t happening. I use thoughts like "oh no not a crash today, I don't have my clean shorts on" or "going up 7 m/s?! Gee I wonder how much it would be if I could get my wing to reopen..."

Get yourself onto an SIV course. You will learn how your wing will react, and it builds up your confidence a lot. You will go home a better pilot. Those 50% collapses don't seem as big after the course! In fact they don't really bother you if you are high. However don't come back over-confident. Always respect the conditions and fly within your limits.

Concentrate totally on flying as well as I can. If I do this for say 5 to 10 minutes the fear usually goes without me even realizing.

Say, OK **I will stick it out for say ten minutes** and if I still feel scared I'll land. Again, the fear usually at least reduces enough in the 10 minutes for me to stay up.

Scream, laugh, or sing at the top of my voice. This is a good way of releasing the inner tension.

Before and during every flight, I take some deep breaths and tell myself,
**I'm good to have a great launch,
and a wonderful flight.** The conditions are perfect and I will fly safely, smartly, and will have a great time! It sounds nuts, but breathing deeply and positive affirmations go a long way. **Good Luck!**

I have been flying for 10 years but unfortunately that means I've had to experience all the realities of this sport (good friends killed or seriously injured, fear for my life in gust fronts and horrendous collapses, etc). Nonetheless I love this sport and have found ways to overcome my fears.

First identify what is scaring you.

Is it real?

Is this fear justifiable? Fear can be a healthy response if it is keeping you from launching in conditions to strong. I used to have a lot of fear after my friend died but eventually I realized that it wasn't the wing, site, or weather I was afraid of, but just unjustifiable personal fear. I still have fear about launching in windy conditions, or flying near dust devils or overdeveloping clouds, but I like to call it good judgment. As far as the bump factor goes. I think that inducing collapses, and other maneuvers to build up tolerance. Fly often and in your comfort zone to build up confidence. **Also, listen to what you are saying to yourself.**

Fly often and in your comfort zone to build up confidence. The rest will come in its own time.

If it doesn't and your still having fun then get over it and have fun.

There are a lot of things about your psychology we haven't determined yet, so we're going to have to get close--real pals -- to root out the problem.

You might be new to thermal flying. You might have intermediate experience, but it is the worst part of the day that scares you. You watch your buds get high and go, and it drives you nuts that you aren't with them.

Make sure you have a wing you can count on and fly in appropriate conditions.

Set your harness to the wing's specs, which is nearly always tighter than you think.

Fly earlier in the day,

and if after a few flights like this you're thinking "this is boring, I need...more" then you're on the right track.

You might have lost sight of your goals, and one goal is to increase your bump tolerance. Say "I'll take my lumps for an hour, and then I'll land." You will still be scared while you're up there, but at least you will have accomplished something.

If you have a goal to go a few miles, keep that in the back of your mind while you battle your way to cloudbase.

Remember that thermals soften up as you get higher,

so recall a mental image of how nice it will be after you've climbed for a while.

Concentrate on your turn while in the thermal.

If you have a good turn with weight shift you're a lot less likely to get whacked hard, and you have something besides fear to think about.

When things get whacky, look up and watch your wing while you fly, so you can visualize the wing itself reacting to the turbulence.

If something goes, you'll be the first to know and can react even more quickly. This is not supposed a habit that you take to your day-to-day flying. I'm flying a wing **that hasn't yet earned my trust**, so I do this a lot now. After a day of punishment, recount how many actual whacks you took. My guess is not very many.

Perhaps you are a seasoned pilot who noticed that things scare you now that you laughed at previously. You're getting kicked but have nothing to learn and nothing to prove. Go ahead and land, and on your next flight

create a goal for yourself. If you can't make a goal, do something else for a while and get back into flying when it is more of an adventure and less like a torture.

I remember a few years ago in a competition (Bassano, Italy). I was thermaling alongside 80 pilots. Some of them were making eights in middle, so I felt so uncomfortable and frozen - shaking. I start to think: "Why I doing this if I don't enjoy it. Could I just relax and do what I can..." That did not help, so I thought:

Wait! What is the worst thing can happen to you? To die. if you are scared, you maximize your chances, specially frozen like this...

So it is better that you just relax and concentrate on flying. That way you can do more and react better (faster and not overreact). Well, to finish the story, after 5 minutes of this kind of thinking, I found myself flying relaxed again, (after I had gone from this thermal and found another). I came to goal this day I notice that (in this period) it takes 20 minutes of flying to relax and get comfortable with the conditions.

Respect you limits

Fear of death is mankind's greatest enemy. Only when you've made death your friend can you truly begin to live.

Try to complete a basic license program for skydiving.

Even if you never skydive again, it is money well spent.

In my opinion, **fear in this sport is really your friend, unless it becomes "unreasonable."**

For example, if I'm feeling nervous or scared at launch, that's telling me that I should not launch. I don't... I either wait and see if conditions change and calm my fears or go home and come back another day.

As far as fear during flight: The other day, I launched into pretty rowdy conditions and soon realized that I really wished that I was back on the ground. For a few minutes, my wing was "flying me." It was tossing me around and scaring me more each second. I think that it is sometimes a matter of perception (psychological). After a few minutes of this, I actually started getting pissed. I took a deep breath and said to my self, "OK, enough of this crap." I then "took control of the wing," not in a sense of over controlling it, but more

like just flying the wing instead of it flying me.

The conditions did not change, but my flight did. In fact, it turned out to be one of my best flights. I think in many cases, it's all about attitude. On the other hand, if things are WAY out of control, just get down as soon as you can and land--it's not worth the risk.

In smooth conditions, with plenty of altitude, practice your asymmetric collapses and frontals.

It is actually good practice, and fun. It's amazing how much of a non event a typical collapse can be if you are to the point of reflexively reacting to it. Of course that's not to say that flying into a rotor is going to be a joyous occasion, but the typical collapse will not bother you nearly as much as it used to. An SIV course once a year is good, but IMO it is not enough. You should practice the milder maneuvers (collapses--most likely thing to have happen to you in flight; more so than stalls, spins, etc...) whenever you can - **i.e. lots of altitude and smooth air.**

Fear is the friend that sharpens your senses.

A friend once told me butterflies are good you just have to get them to fly in formation.

Knowledge dispels fear,

Jocky Sanderson said.

Rational fear vs irrational fear

There is rational fear: I am between 10 and 100 feet high above this ridge therefore if I get the worst possible collapse I am too high to crash and walk away and too low to throw my reserve and have it open in time.

Or, I'm not making the transition to that spine back ridge because I am flying towards it in a really strong headwind and there is nothing beneath me but trees.

Or, I'm going over the back in this thermal, damn, dropped out - oh well if I head downwind along this gulley I'll pop out into the valley reasonably high. Sinking about into the gulley, and the tailwind is a bit strong, can't turn now - wingtips hitting both sides. Oops.

Then there is irrational fear - oh my god it is a long way down. What if all the lines break? What if the stitching in my harness comes undone? What if I fall out - better tighten all the straps...

Or, I'm climbing nicely but boy is this thermal rough, there goes half the wing, still going up though wow its rough - hope I don't fall out of it...

The rational stuff helps decision making. The irrational stuff doesn't.

Recently, I've been getting the irrational stuff from about 1000 feet to within 1000 feet of cloudbase and in thermals over 4 up (but not in cloud or during low saves, and not during competitions or on XC flights in company).

It goes away when I start thinking of something else - really concentrating on flying, on traffic avoidance, or getting the camera out works quite well, or staring at the compass trying to find the edge of the cloud.

"Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering."

Yoda.

Based on my experience,

the way we breathe, is directly related to the way we feel.

It helps me focus on the task, and it helps my mind to process the newfound fear control.

No Fear...Not. I never liked the expression, "No Fear". I think that

a little fear is a good thing.

"Rational fear is what keeps us from doing something REALLY stupid"

I remember the first BIG thermal that I hooked into and took up all the way. I was scared. I got so high, so quickly that I wanted to get down closer to the ground. **Funny thing is, I got what I wished for and more.** I was stuck on the ground in no time and wished I was still in the air.

Keep these in mind:

- 1) Having confidence in your equipment (do your checks),
- 2) Flying the right wing for your skill level,
- 3) Flying in the right conditions.

Gin Seok Song tells us to:

'take deep breath, put all energy here (he gestures to his center, his belly, his hara) and fly'.

He then says that if it still doesn't feel good, go land.

John Pendry says that his secret is having a

memory like a goldfish -
he just forgets everything that happened more than 30 seconds ago.

Jocky suggests **letting out a laugh or a scream.**

I have actually found that it works! I let out a kiai (the shout from the belly from martial arts) and make something happen on purpose. If I can make one thing happen on purpose it seems easier to make the next thing happen on purpose and pretty soon I feel OK. Seems to work for me... (or I go land :-).

I breathe deep 5x

and follow it with a loud scream.

The Litany against Fear

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer.

Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

A mere one weekend without flying and my hands are shaking at launch.

**PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.
KITING, KITING, KITING.**