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Glissading can be hazardous. Don't glissade in crevassed terrain.
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The biggest risk with glissading is losing control at such high speed that self-arrest is not possible. Maintain control of speed and of your ice ax.
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SNOW CLIMBING

Techniques

Descending snow



Snow Climbing: Techniques: Descending Snow

One mark of a skillful snow climber is the ability to go downhill efficiently and confidently. Many otherwise competent and aggressive climbers blanch at the prospect of going forward down a steep snow gully. You can minimize those downhill jitters by mastering a few descent techniques. **Plunge-Stepping.**

When going down, just like going up, technique is determined mainly by the hardness and angle of the snow. In soft snow on a moderate slope, simply face outward and walk down.

Plunge-Stepping: With harder snow or a steeper angle, use the plunge step, a confident, aggressive move.

1. Face outward, step assertively away from the slope, and land solidly on your heel with your leg vertical, transferring weight solidly to the new position. No timid steps allowed.
2. Avoid leaning back into the slope, which could result in a glancing blow, less secure steps, and perhaps an unplanned glissade.
3. Keep the knees bent a bit, not locked, to maintain control of balance.
4. Hold the ice ax in one hand in either the self-arrest or self-belay grasp, with the spike close to the surface, well forward and ready to plant in the snow. You can spread and move the other arm for balance.
5. If this style of plunge-stepping does not feel secure (on harder or steeper snow), then it's necessary to plant the ax as low as possible in a self-belay before each move and advance the feet in a sort of crouched, modified plunge step.

Glissading and Downclimbing.

Glissading: Glissading is one of the joyous bonuses of mountain climbing, offering the fastest, easiest, and most exhilarating way down many snow slopes for a climber on foot. Use it on slopes where you can keep your speed under control.

There are **3 principal methods** of glissading. Which one you use will depend on how hard and steep the slope is, how safe the run-out is at the bottom of the hill, and how good you are at glissading.

1. *The sitting glissade:* The easiest to learn; works on soft snow where you would bog down if you tried a standing glissade.
 1. Remove crampons. Sit in the snow fairly erect, knees bent and boot soles planing along the surface.
 2. Slide, holding the ax in self-arrest position as you go downhill. Run the spike of the ax, like a rudder, along the snow on one side of you. Keep both hands on the ax. Maintain control!
 3. To stop, use the spike to slow down, then dig in your heels. For an emergency stop, simply self-arrest by rolling into position toward the side opposite the spike.
2. *The standing glissade:* The best method, if you know how to do it and conditions are right. Most effective on a firm base with a softer layer on top. Correct standing glissade technique is very similar to downhill skiing.
 1. Semicrouch over your feet with bent knees and outspread arms.
 2. Increase speed by bringing the feet closer together and leaning farther forward over the feet.
 3. Slow down and stop any number of ways: Stand up and dig in the heels; turn the feet sideways and edge; crouch and drag the ice-ax spike as in the crouching glissade, or perform a turn similar to skiing in which you rotate the shoulders,

upper body, and knees in the direction of the turn and roll the knees and ankles in the same direction to rock the feet onto boot edges.

3. *The crouching glissade:* Much like the standing glissade, except the climber holds the ax in the self-arrest position to one side of the body, sits back, and drags the spike in the snow. Slower than a standing glissade and easier to learn. With three points of contact, it is also more stable. However, turning is more difficult, as is controlling speed with edging.

Downclimbing: On steep snow where you may not feel secure glissading or plunge-stepping, you can face into the slope and climb down backward, kicking steps straight into the slope. Use the ax in the stake position as a self-belay.