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Lead Climbing

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Lead Climbing: How it Works

* These steps are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Step 1

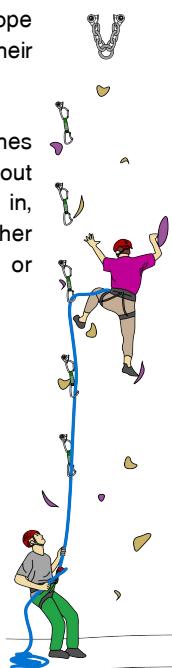
The climber ties in to one end of the rope. The belayer attaches their belay device to the rope next to the climber.



Step 2

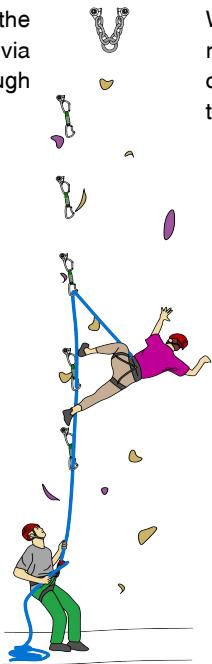
The climber clips the rope into quickdraws on their way up the climb.

The belayer switches between feeding rope out and taking it in, depending on whether the climber is below or above a quickdraw.



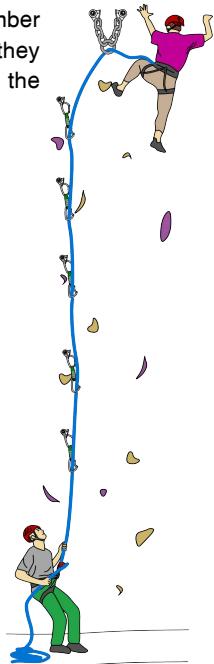
Step 3

If the climber falls, the belayer holds the fall via the rope running through the highest quickdraw.



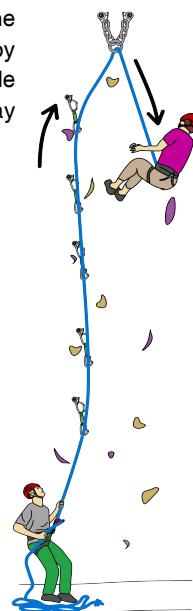
Step 4

When the climber reaches the top, they clip the rope through the top anchor.



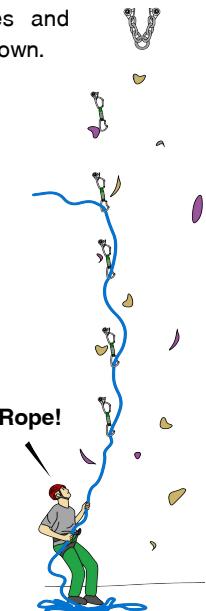
Step 5

The belayer lowers the climber to the ground by letting the rope slide through their belay device under control.



Step 6

The climber unties and the rope is pulled down.



Before You Lead Climb

Before you lead climb, there are three extra things you need to do which you wouldn't do if top roping:

- 1) Stack the rope
- 2) Close the system
- 3) Attach quickdraws to your harness

1) Stack the Rope

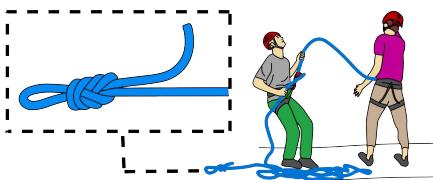
You'll need to stack the rope before every lead climb so it will feed out without tangles while you're climbing. Beginning at one end, simply feed the

rope into a pile on top of your rope bag, or a clean area of the ground. The climber ties into the top end of the rope.

2) Close the System

Tie a knot in the end of the rope. This 'closes the system', so it is impossible to accidentally lower your partner off the end of the rope.

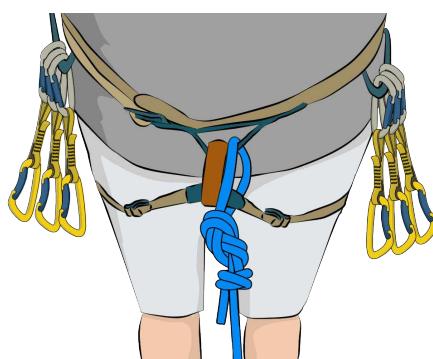
The rope which the gym provides should be long enough anyway, but it's a good habit to get into if using your own rope.



3) Attach Quickdraws To Your Harness

Some indoor walls have quickdraws already attached to the wall, but for those which don't, you'll need to bring your own.

Clip half of them to the gear loops on the left side of your harness and the other half on the right side. Clipping them to your gear loops with the bolt-end carabiner will make it easier when you come to use them.



Make sure to bring enough quickdraws with you. You'll need one for each bolt, plus a spare in case a mystery bolt

appears that you couldn't see from the ground.

How To Lead Climb

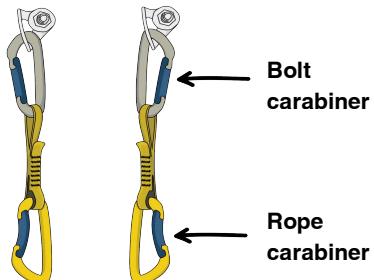
While you are lead climbing, there are four extra things you'll need to do that you wouldn't do if top roping:

- 1) Clip quickdraws to bolts
- 2) Clip the rope into quickdraws
- 3) Clip the rope through the top anchor
- 4) Pull the rope down when you finish

1) Clipping Quickdraws To Bolts

If the quickdraws are not already attached to the wall, you'll need to clip your own to the bolts.

Simply clip the bolt-end of your quickdraw to the bolt in the wall. It doesn't matter which way it faces, but make sure it is hanging neatly.

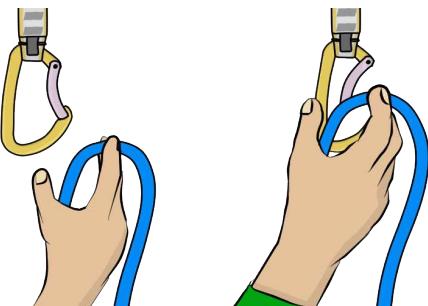
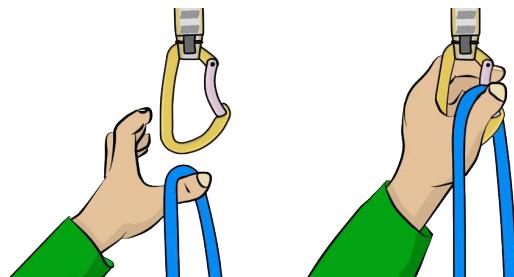


2) Clipping the Rope into Quickdraws

The easiest way to clip a quickdraw is to place your fingers around the back bar of the carabiner, then use your thumb to flick the rope through the gate.

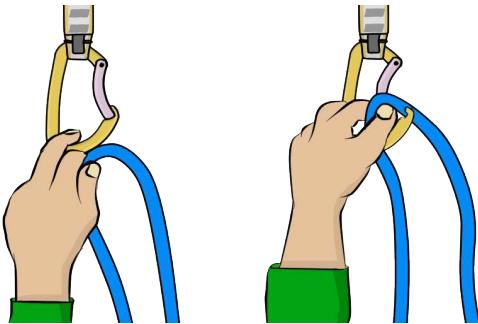
The pressure of you pushing the rope on to the gate will open it — you don't need to open it with your fingers.

If you're clipping with your other hand, you'll need to hold the back bar with your thumb and use your fingers to flick the rope through instead.



Another way is to steady the carabiner with your middle finger and then flick the rope through with your thumb.

Practise these three techniques at ground level before heading up a route. Make sure you're comfortable clipping quickdraws with both hands, in either direction.

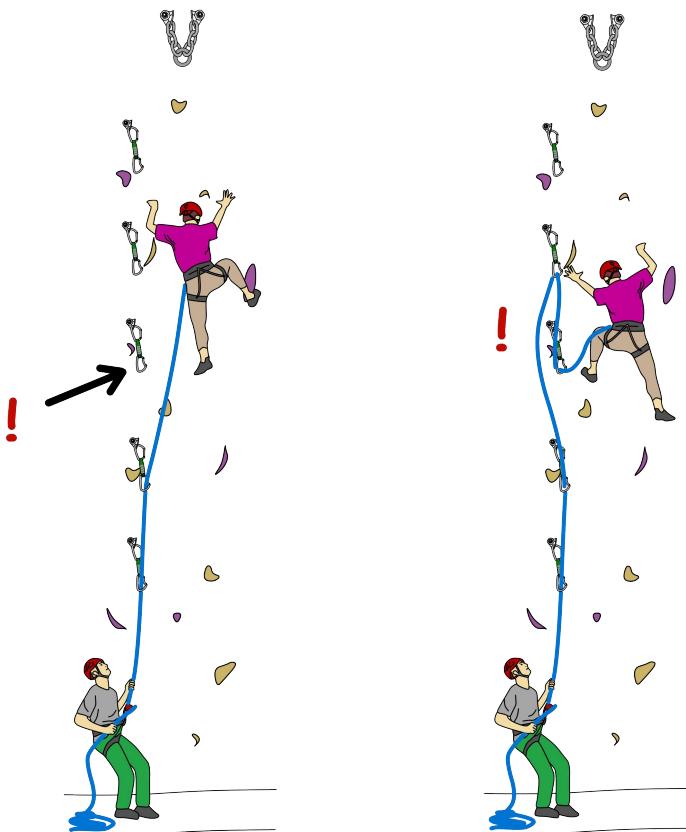


Warning! Skipping Quickdraws

You need to clip every quickdraw to stay safe. Never miss any out.

Warning! Z-Clipping

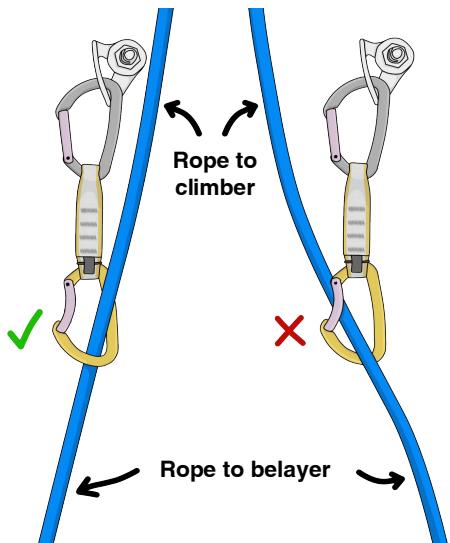
You'll end up with a z-clip if you take the rope from beneath the last quickdraw and clip it to the one above. Make sure to clip them all in order.



Warning! Back-Clipping

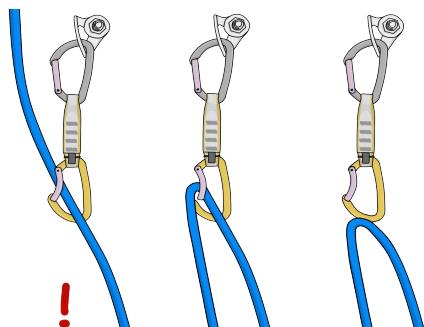
The rope needs to be clipped through the quickdraw so that the end of the rope attached to you comes out of the front side of the quickdraw.

If you fall, the rope will stay clipped through the carabiner.



If you clip it the wrong way (known as back-clipping), the rope could snap through the carabiner's gate during a fall. This would unclip the rope from the carabiner.

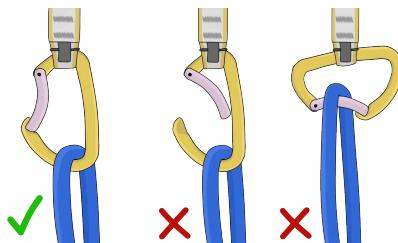
When belaying a leader, keep an eye out for them accidentally back-clipping, and let them know if they have!



Warning! Cross-Loading

A carabiner is cross-loaded when it is loaded sideways. This makes the carabiner much weaker, meaning that it could break during a fall.

Also make sure the carabiner's gate has snapped shut after you've clipped the rope through it. If it stays open, the rope could easily fall out.

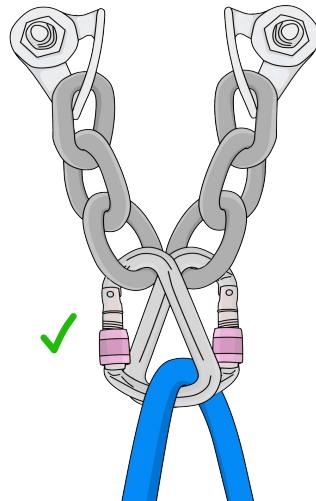


3) Clipping the Rope through the Top Anchor

Once you get to the top of the wall, you'll need to clip the rope through the top anchor.

Different walls have different systems for this — some have two snapgate carabiners, some have one or two screwgate carabiners that you'll need to unscrew first. Ask one of the staff before leading if in doubt.

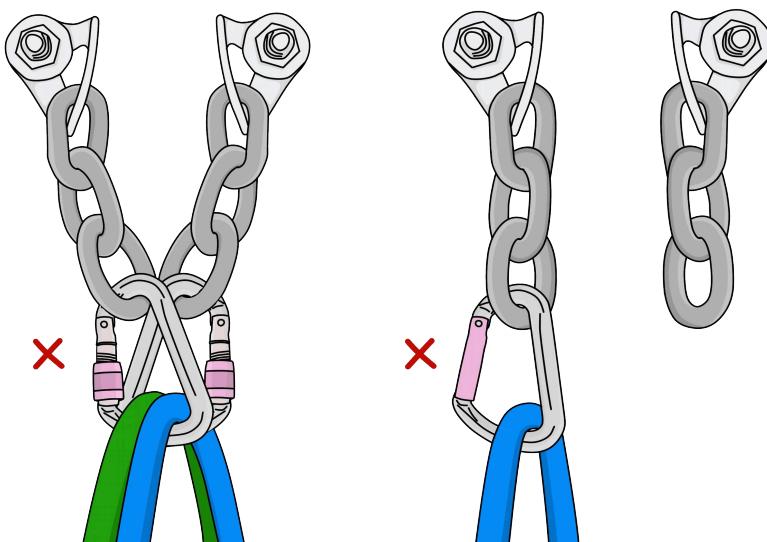
Once you've clipped your rope through the top anchor, you can be lowered down in the same way as if you were top roping.



Incorrect Top Anchor Setups

Clipping your rope through the same carabiners as another rope will cause the ropes to rub together when you lower down. This will damage the ropes, making them less safe for future use.

Only clipping half of the anchor is dangerous because you will be risking your life to a single carabiner. Clip them both.

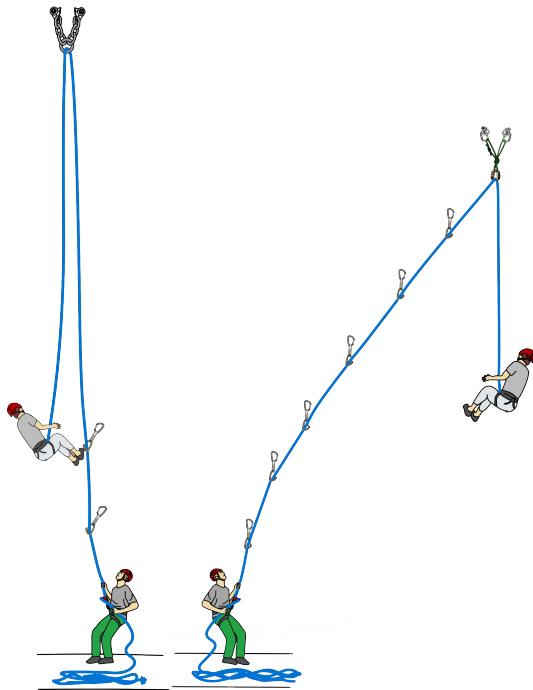


Lowering Down

If you've attached your own quickdraws on the way up, you'll need to collect them on the way down.

Simply lower down, unclipping them from both the bolt and rope, and then clip them back to your gear loops. The belayer will need to stop lowering you at each bolt so you have time to do this.

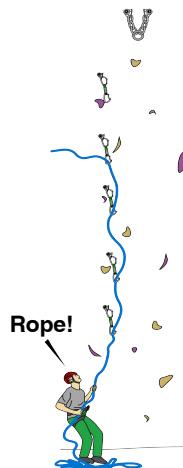
Many gyms have quickdraws permanently installed, especially on overhangs. In this case, just lower down the same as for a top rope.



4) Pulling the Rope Down

Untie any knots from the rope before pulling it down. Shout 'rope' before it falls so everyone around you is expecting it — a falling rope in the head hurts!

Pull the rope so the falling end drops down through the clipped quickdraws. This will slow it down and make it safer.

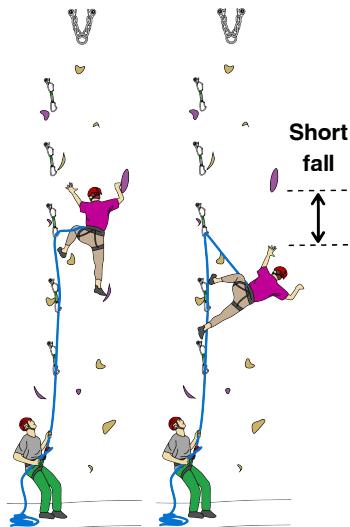


Understanding Fall Potential

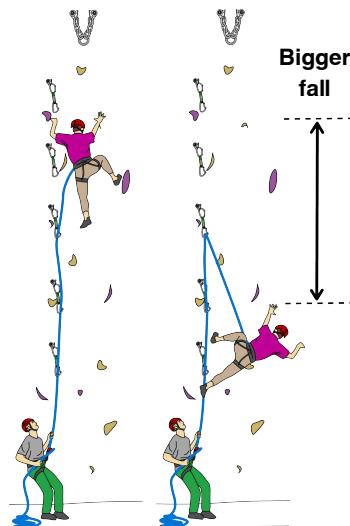
Leading for the first time can be pretty scary. Suddenly you're exposed to much greater consequences than you would be with the security of a top rope. If you fall, your chances of hitting

something (such as a large hold) are increased. The belayer and leader should work together to keep the leader's fall potential to a minimum.

If you fall while next to a quickdraw which you've just clipped, the fall will be short.



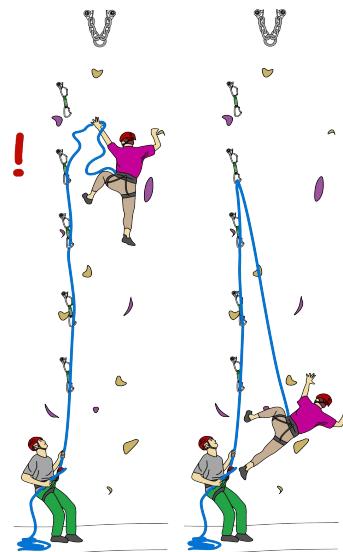
But if you fall when above the last quickdraw, you'll take a bigger fall. This may be further than you think as the rope stretches to absorb the force of the fall.



It's important not to clip quickdraws too soon. It can be tempting to pull through meters of rope to clip way above your head. But doing this means there's a lot of slack rope in the system so you'll fall a lot further if you slip while trying to clip.

Instead, wait until the quickdraw is between your shoulders and waist, then clip it. This reduces the distance you could potentially fall. It is also less strenuous and quicker.

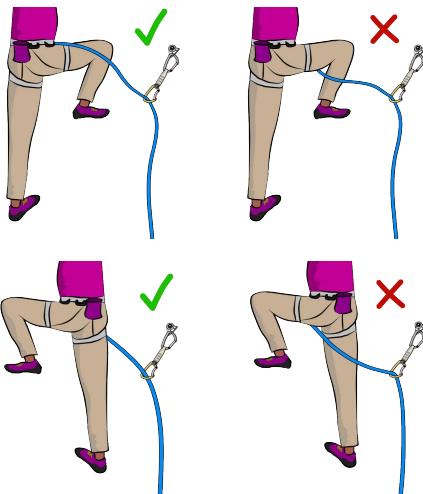
Obviously, if you fall before clipping the first quickdraw, you'll land back on the ground.



Where To Position the Rope

When lead climbing above a quickdraw, make sure the rope is running to the side of your legs.

If you fall with the rope around your leg, it can flip you upside down, causing you to hit your head on the wall and get 'rope burn' behind your knee.



Lead Climbing: Top Tips

- Try to clip from a resting position, if possible. It's much easier to clip a quickdraw while you're hanging from a big hold on a straight arm than hanging from a tiny hold on a bent arm.

- After a big lead fall, let your rope 'rest' for five minutes to recover its elasticity. If you get straight back on the wall and then fall immediately, the fall will be more abrupt and less comfortable.

How To Lead Belay

Step 1

Attach your belay device so there is just a few meters of rope between it and the climber's knot.

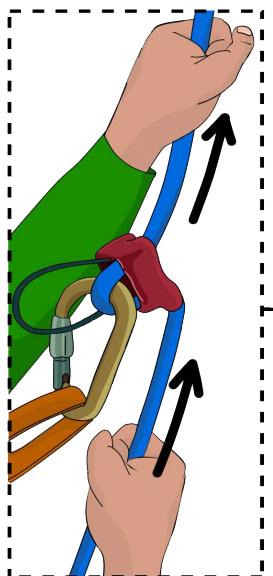


Step 2

When the climber is moving up the wall, you'll need to feed rope out to them instead of taking it in.

Place one hand on the rope above the belay device and the other on the brake rope below. Use both hands to shuffle rope upwards through the belay device.

Then slide your hands one at a time back down the rope so you are ready to give more slack. Make sure not to let go of the brake rope!

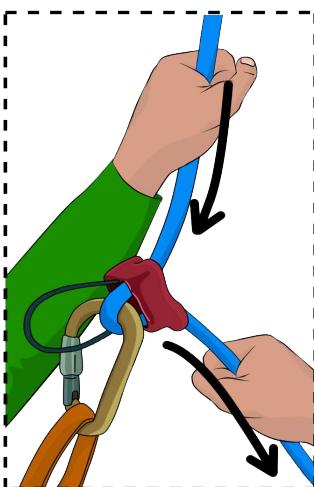


Step 3

Once the climber has clipped the quickdraw but is still below it, they're effectively on a mini top rope, so you'll need to take in a small amount of rope until they're level with the quickdraw.

This ensures that slack rope is kept to a minimum. Remember that the climber will need enough slack to make the next move, but not so much that you create unnecessary fall potential for them.

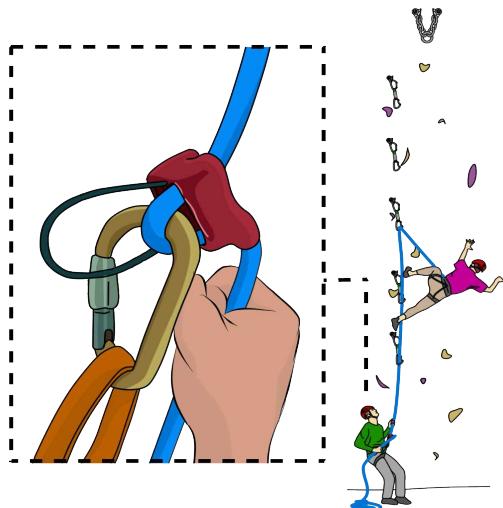
Continue to give slack as the climber moves up, and take in rope as required.



Step 4

To catch a lead fall, hold the rope downwards in the lock off position.

If the leader takes a big fall from above a bolt, the force will be much greater than a simple top rope fall, so it will be much harder to hold — keep a tight grip on the brake rope and pay attention!



Belay Position

Before the First Bolt

Before the leader reaches the first bolt, you'll need to 'spot' them, just the same as if they were bouldering.

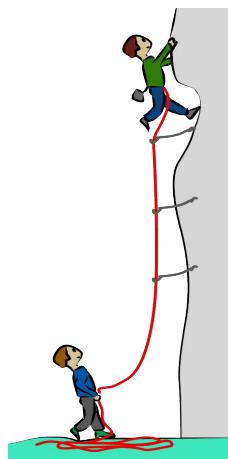
Make sure to have just enough slack in the rope so they can reach the bolt.



After the First Bolt

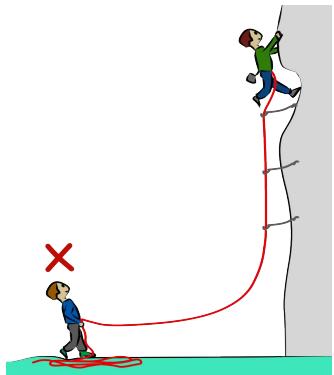
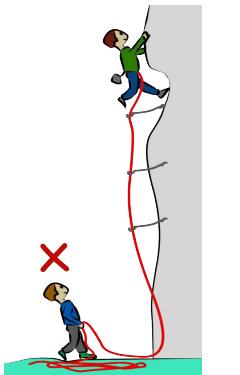
Stand close to the wall, and in-line with the leader. Maintain a good stance in a position where you can see them.

The rope should go up and out from your belay device to the climber with minimal slack in the system.



Common Mistakes

- Leaving too much slack in the rope.
- Standing too far back from the wall.

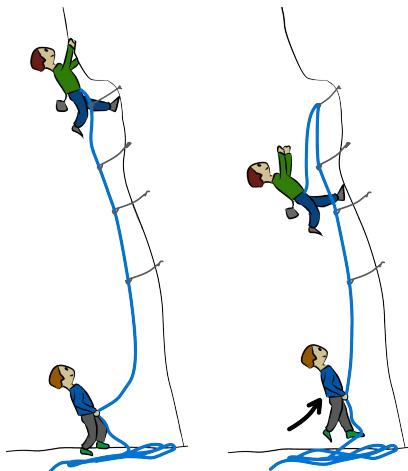


Soft Catches

On steep routes, a 'soft catch' is a common technique which makes the fall much more comfortable for the leader and stops them from slamming into the rock when the rope gets tight. The leader will fall further during a soft catch, so make sure to only use this technique on steep, overhanging routes where you are certain the leader cannot hit anything.

To soften a fall, belay with your knees bent. Straighten them during the catch, allowing the weight of the falling climber to pull you upwards slightly. You could even take a small hop just as the rope begins to pull tight.

There are many situations when a dynamic belay is unsafe. A lightweight belayer might be pulled upwards into the first quickdraw which could



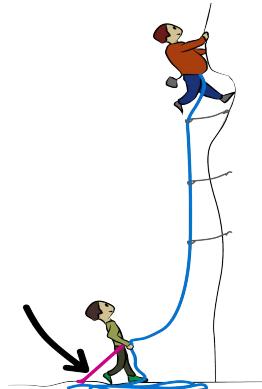
disengage their belay device, or the extra rope could cause the leader to hit a large hold or the ground. Watch your partner carefully and learn to recognize how much of a dynamic belay (if any) is appropriate.

Weight Differences

If the climber weighs more than the belayer, a fall usually lifts the belayer into the air, naturally softening the fall for the climber.

However, if the climber weighs significantly more, a fall could cause the belayer to slam into the wall or be 'sucked in' to the first quickdraw. There is a real danger of losing control of the belay if this happens.

To combat this, the lightweight belayer can anchor to the ground. This technique, however, reduces the belayer's ability to move around the base of the route and give a soft catch. A good compromise is to attach



to a ground anchor with enough slack to move around and give a soft catch if needed, but not so much slack that you would be pulled into the first quickdraw. Ask a member of staff for help with this.

Lead Climbing: Learning Tips

For your first few times belaying (for either top rope or lead), it can be useful to ask a qualified member of staff to hold the brake rope too. This acts as a back-up so the climber will still be safe if you fail to hold the rope correctly.



It's also possible to have a top rope set up in addition to the lead rope. This means you can practise the techniques of leading, with the increased safety of a top rope. Ask a qualified member of staff for help with this.

