

The Keys To Slalom Gates

Written by **Chris Rossi**

Photography by **Scott N. Atkinson**

Place yourself as close to the outside of the left wake as possible; one foot to the left of the bottom of the wake will be sufficient.

Align the body properly. Stand tall and be centered over both feet.

Set a smooth, yet committed edge. To do this properly, envision yourself falling off the left side of your ski without the support of the rope. Yes – that is correct – without the support of the rope. The closest sensation I can relate to it would be to do *nothing* in your edge out. Just fall over smooth enough that relatively no load is added to the rope when the line comes tight. One key that really helps me with this is to think to open my grip at the moment I want to start my edge out. Another concept would be to think about leaving the handle where it is, and just fall away from it. Again, the goal is to get moving without the load.

When you reach the bottom of your fall, the upper body will catch a small amount of load. This load picks up the skier and releases the ski. You will just feel yourself rising up and the only thing you should think about is letting the ski go wherever it wants to go. The freer your fall was in the last stage, the more energy you create. This

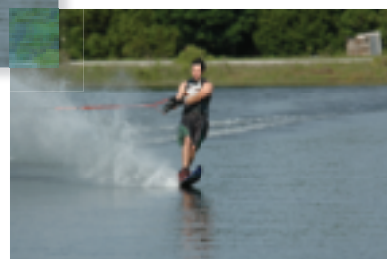
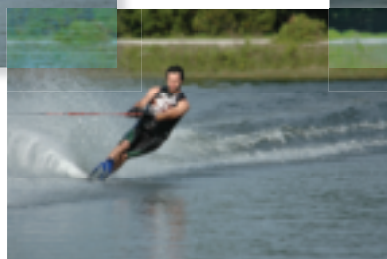
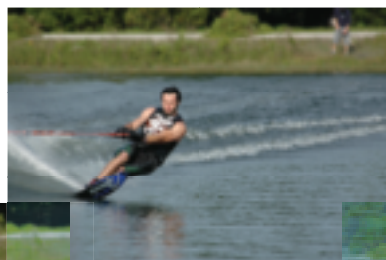
energy is what makes the ski shoot from side-to-side. When watching a pro skier, it's almost shocking to see how much energy exudes through the edge change.

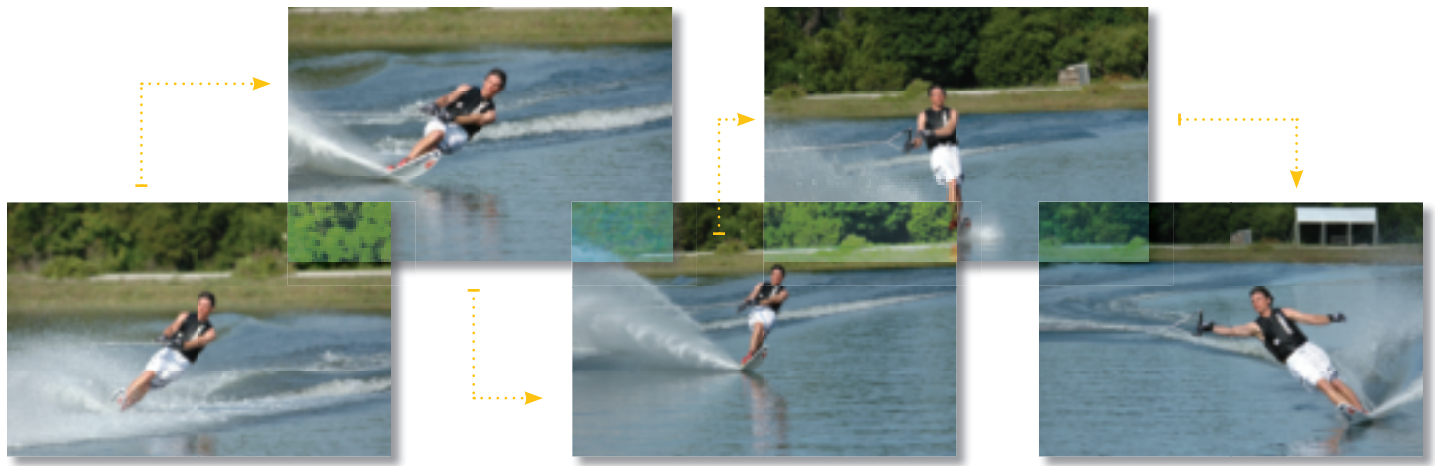
Ski out. No matter if you are skiing a one-handed gate or two-handed gate, once your ski has shot out, the best thing you can do is try to ski it out as far as it will go. Quite simply, relax your arms and ski away from the handle all the way out to the apex. I just really focus on being balanced and light.

At apex, think about just falling over so smooth that the rope never feels you come on to it. Another way to think about it would be to just start a turn in, and keep turning all the way to the second wake. Yes, just keep telling yourself to turn, turn, turn, turn, turn, and turn. I hope you are getting the point. If you missed it, it's that the rope will never lead us in the direction we want to go. The more you rely on the rope, the more you go in the direction of the boat. By just falling over or turning all the way to the second wake, we slowly roll the ski to its max at the second wake. At any moment in this cut if you feel load, just let go of it and keep moving. Load will only act to stand the body up, so the way it works in my head is loading = edge change.



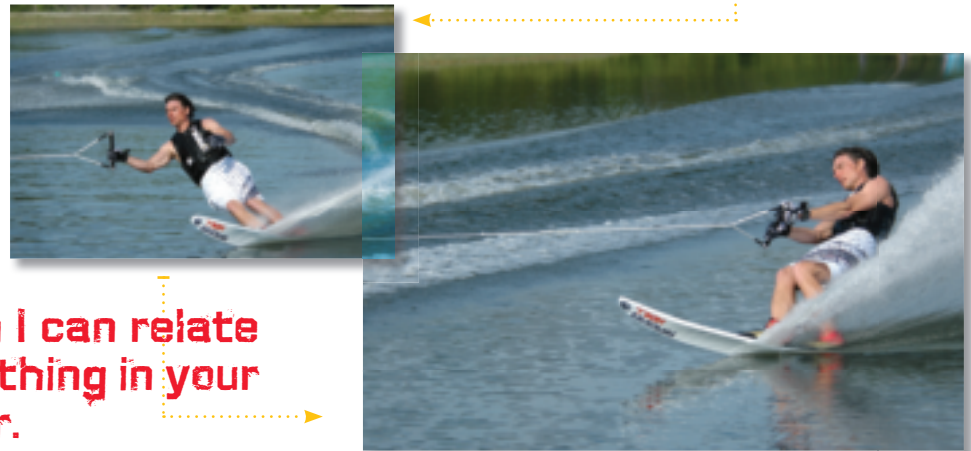
If you look at where most skiers begin to load (hint: pretty much right at the buoy) the force that has just been applied to the ski is an edge-change force. We know as skiers that an edge change out by the buoy will not work, so instead we fight to not get pulled to the inside. That does not feel good as you know. Let go of the thought that you need the rope to somehow slow the boat down and make up some imaginary time into buoy one, and just turn, turn, turn, turn, turn, and turn, all the way to the right-hand gate buoy.





Key Notes

- I did not address when to turn in. I field more questions on this than almost any other. My answer is always the same, I turn when I reach the apex of my pre-turn. At no other point will I get a better turn. So if I miss my gates (20 percent in practice), the only correction I make is to start



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my edge out slightly later. The same mentality should be adopted for two-handers, but obviously on a slightly larger scale.

- I also did not address technique. I believe you will naturally fall into your best form *if* you are falling free of the rope or load. Use these thoughts to help progress the gate you have already spent countless hours perfecting.
- Loading the rope = edge change. Tie your handle to the pylon in a boat. Now practice your perfect cutting position. Now, when you are in your strongest position, imagine the pylon taking off away from

you at 30-something miles per hour. Think you could hold on? Not a chance. So why on every cut you make do you choose to try this?

- You cannot push your ski and not be loaded, so for those of you that push your skis into the edge change, this only sends you quicker to the inside edge, thus makes you more narrow. No need to throw your ski around, just focus on being balanced and moving without load or pulling.
- This gate works for every pass. When you reach your hardest pass, more often than not, you think you have to go much harder

than you do. My 39 gate feels identical to my 32 gate. The only thing that changes between them is that I shift when I start my edge out as each rope has a slightly different rhythm. When I learned to run 38, my biggest key was telling myself that it was only 32 over and over again just before turning in.

Chris Rossi is a professional skier and coach who is sponsored by Radar Skis, Tige Boats, O'NEILL and Performance Ski & Surf. For more discussion on this and many other ski-related topics, visit proskicoach.com and slashslalom.com.

