

Paragliding accuracy target approaches

Part 2: Final approaches

Last month UK squad pilots William Lawrence, Katie Sykes, Simon Sykes and Andy Webster gave their thoughts on general aspects of an approach. Here they concentrate on the final approach to the target.

The comments are applicable to both tow and hill launch methods, but please note that some comments relate to how experienced pilots fly to the target. New pilots should not attempt to fly with deep brake or near the stall point in early flights.

Do you like a long or short finals?

Katie Sykes. Short. There's too much time to overthink and mess up on a long finals.

William Lawrence. I prefer shorter finals as it allows for a shorter period of maximum attention. This stops me planning my approach and lets me fly purely instinctively, which for me allows a more fluid, adaptable and successful approach.

Simon Sykes. I would rather a short finals over long, but generally a middle length to give time to correct and think – but not too long to get tired on the arms.

Andy Webster. I prefer a long finals so I can get on the desired glide angle in good time, with a stable glider and minimal brake movement. A low turn-in onto finals, with the increased speed in the turn, will mess up my perception of what is going on.

How do you judge when to turn in on finals, and do you turn in hot or cold?

Katie Sykes. I don't plan it, I just do it. I try and turn in hot regardless, so there's always something you can do to hit the pad.

William Lawrence. I prefer to turn in hot, as it's easier to lose height than gain it. My decision to turn in is a gut reaction – I turn when everything feels right.

Simon Sykes. Always hot and always the same height and distance back; then I sink to where I need to be for the conditions.

Andy Webster. As I described in Part 1, I'll pick a distance behind the target to turn in dependent on the wind speed. I will always turn in hot, expecting to S off some height as an insurance policy to avoid landing short.

What brake setting do you prefer on finals, and does it vary with wind?

Katie Sykes. I don't plan it, but I think I

come in with half brake so I still have options either way. In light winds though I tend to come in faster so I can stop at the pad (in theory).

William Lawrence. Half brake is how I begin my approach, as I can easily increase or decrease depending on weather changes, or if I've simply misjudged my angle slightly.

Simon Sykes. Half brake, giving maximum options both ways.

Andy Webster. Half brake is a good setting that allows some adjustment in either direction.

How do you adjust your flight if you're not on the correct glide on finals?

Katie Sykes. Panic, then tell myself to calm down, and then do something about it.

William Lawrence. If I find myself too hot I'm confident with my stall point, so losing height is relatively easy. If I'm falling short I may attempt to use speed bar in stronger conditions, or induce a small dive and use ground effect to carry me that bit further.

Simon Sykes. Never turn away. Go parachuted if too hot; if cold, lay back and drive forward.

Andy Webster. If I am so hot that brakes can not resolve the issue, then S-turns are required. If I am in a cold position, controlled use of the speed bar may get me to the target.

How do you get around flying your eye to the pad?

Katie Sykes. Practice many, many times. You need to try it and get it right – and mess up – to find the way that works for you.

William Lawrence. In order to fix this I trained for a long time by aiming about two metres past the pad. Now I aim to get to the target a couple of feet above the pad and then drop vertically onto it.

Simon Sykes. Experience!

Andy Webster. Initially I am flying my eye to the target, visualising a straight line to the pad that I am going to fly down (the same as flying 'on the wire' in parachuting). Closer to the target I transition to thinking about getting over the top of it to sink down on to the pad for a stand-up landing.

Do you have any routine in the later part of your flight?

Katie Sykes. Normally panic that I'm going to drop short and put on my speedbar.

William Lawrence. In stronger winds I like a slow and steep approach with minimum control movements. For lighter winds I approach slightly faster and use a bigger flare just before landing. This gives me a moment where I hover just long enough to place my foot exactly where I want it.

Simon Sykes. Aim to be 1m above the pad and to drop on to it.

Andy Webster. On finals I try to keep my brakes as steady as possible. If I am reasonably hot I will flare for landing – on to the pad I hope. If I am a little cold I will release a bit of brake to make sure I can get over the top of the target.

What part of your foot do you prefer to hit the pad with?

Katie Sykes. Ball of foot or toe.

William Lawrence. I aim with my big toe, with my heel slightly turned out so I can see exactly where the DC is in relation to the sole of my shoe.

Simon Sykes. Toe.

Andy Webster. I have a rubber stud in the middle of each boot toe. I try and land on a stud with my boot at a 45-degree angle. This also provides a good position to run off any ground speed when landing in nil wind.

Any particular problems or conditions you do not like?

Katie Sykes. Thermal or light winds I find trickier. With the former you could just be unlucky; with the latter I find it harder to judge the glide, and then I might not be able to stop at the end.

William Lawrence. Overly thermic conditions are challenging, and zero wind is my least favourite.

Simon Sykes. Nil wind.

Andy Webster. Thermic, low wind conditions are an absolute nightmare. Unfortunately these conditions occur a lot at overseas competitions!

What type of glider characteristics are the best for accuracy?

Katie Sykes. Not too fast, both sides go evenly when braking, and not too twitchy.

William Lawrence. Slow and stable. You need a glider that remains stable near or in the stall, and recovers its airspeed smoothly. Most modern EN A gliders suit accuracy brilliantly.

Simon Sykes. A glider that parachutes stalls symmetrically, and doesn't drive forward too fast on recovery.

Andy Webster. Low EN A gliders with a docile response to brake movements are good characteristics to have in accuracy. I also like a glider with relatively high brake pressure to provide good feedback on what is happening.

Anything else important of note?

Katie Sykes. Don't overthink it.

William Lawrence. Start simple by judging your glide with minimal control inputs, and build up to flying in on more brake. Don't attempt to fly anywhere near stall point without completing an SIV course or similar first. It should be done in a controlled environment over water before adding a target.

Simon Sykes. Never give up, no matter what.

Andy Webster. There is a lot to learn in paragliding accuracy, especially when thermals and wind effects around hills are factored into the equation. So expect a gradual improvement over time rather than instant results, and always fly safe without exceeding your limits.

Compiled by Andy Webster



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Three times Paragliding Accuracy National Champion Simon Sykes



Two Times Paragliding Accuracy National Champion William Lawrence



Current Paragliding Accuracy League Champion Katie Sykes