

Catching

Step one on your ultimate journey! Learn all the different ways that you can wedge 175 grams of plastic between your mitts.

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Catching Basics

Before even throwing, ultimate players need to know how to catch—if you are unable to catch a disc, you cannot begin to play the game. It is the most fundamental skill in the sport and yet, very few players continue to actively practice catching once they have moved on to other aspects of the sport.

There are two main ways to catch a frisbee: the clap catch (AKA pancake catch, alligator catch) and the claw catch (AKA crab catch, lobster catch). Rowan McDonnell from Excel Ultimate has an excellent video covering the basics.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/imBI1iTeCZc>

As shown in Rowan's video, clap catching is the most secure method of catching the disc for two main reasons:

- Having two hands come together gives a larger vertical margin of error for catching when compared with claw catching where your margin of error is roughly the size of your palm
- Clap catching often allows you to use your body as a backboard for your catches so even when you mistime your catch and the disc passes between your hands, you are likely to get a second chance if you position your body directly in the disc's flight path and it hits your torso or arms

Clap catching also has the added benefit of being the easiest catching method to transition into a throwing grip from—your hands are already on opposite sides of the disc, which allows them to more easily work in tandem to position the disc comfortably in your dominant hand. Whereas when you claw-catch you will either have only one hand on the Frisbee or both hands on the same side, requiring slightly more work to grip the disc properly for throwing.

With these advantages, players looking to minimize catching errors should always clap-catch when possible.

At first, most players will catch by using only their arms. However, players should very soon after begin using their feet to position their body in front of the disc to securely catch discs that aren't thrown directly at them. Felix Shardlow from Hive Ultimate demonstrates and explains this concept in his video below

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/9rMjoenStWI>

This method applies to every type of throw, including curving throws and over-the-top throws. There's a tendency, specifically with over-the-tops, for players to try and catch the disc above their heads even when there are no nearby defenders.

This is not to say that ultimate players don't need to know how to claw-catch. There are certain situations where claw-catching is required:

- When a disc is too far to clap-catch comfortably even with active repositioning
- When you have a close defender and need some extra reach to get to the disc before they do
- When laying out—clap-catching while diving has an increased chance of shoulder injury due the motion of getting a hand under the disc often causing one to land on their lowered shoulder

Mastering both types of catches is necessary for every ultimate player but knowing when to use each one intuitively to minimize drops requires a lot of practice and experience.

Running Catches

Catching while running becomes necessary with the introduction of defense. On offense, you need to ensure that once the disc is thrown in your direction, you are able to catch the disc before the person defending you intercepts it. All of the tips highlighted in the [basic catching](#) page are even more relevant while running since you are inherently bouncing up and down as you run, introducing more variance to the disc's movement.

Situations involving running to catch a Frisbee can be generally divided into two categories: when you are running towards the thrower (in-cuts) and when you are running away from the thrower (out/away/deep-cuts).

In-Cuts

When you are running towards the thrower and the disc is thrown towards you, The disc will move much faster from your perspective when compared to catching while stationary. This means that you have less time to react to the flightpath of the disc and the act of catching the Frisbee becomes more challenging. This section of a video from Rise Up introduces the basics of catching while running toward the disc along with a simple drill involving two people.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/bB-zFGj3XGM?start=588>

Very rarely in game-time situations are you cutting directly at the thrower and the disc is thrown straight towards you. Typically you are running at an angle relative to the thrower and the disc will be thrown such that the moment you see the frisbee leave the thrower's hands, you need to adjust your trajectory to reach the Frisbee in the shortest amount of time. This typically involves finding a straight line that you can run along that will intersect with the path of the disc. This sounds complicated but as with most things, it becomes second-nature with practice.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/LTygm8A7WtA>

One thing coaches will stress is that you need to maintain your speed as the disc reaches you AKA "running through" the disc. Many new players will attempt to make the catch easier by slowing down prior to the catch or taking a wider angle, giving the frisbee more time to reach them and decreasing the relative speed of the disc. This is a bad habit as it gives defenders the ability to catch up to you or take a sharper angle to the disc and intercepting it. Some coaches teach players to jump before the disc reaches them, forcing the players to maintain their momentum through the

catch. This is a crutch that players should break from once they become more used to catching at speed—it's not uncommon to see players jump to catch a chest-height disc only for the frisbee to suddenly drop, causing the player to miss the catch. Staying grounded as the disc approaches you puts you in a much better position to react to any sudden changes to a disc's trajectory whereas jumping commits you to a specific motion both during and after the catch.

Obviously still jump if you need the extra height to catch a disc that is above you.

Out-Cuts

With out cuts, you are running away from the thrower, but the basic idea of identifying a line that allows you to intercept the disc in the shortest amount of time remains the same. The unique challenge of away cuts comes from not being able to maintain vision of the frisbee and thrower due to them being directly behind you as you run. Away throws are also often thrown higher than regular passes for longer travel distance, avoiding players other than the intended receiver, and giving the receiver more time to catch up to the disc. The increased height of these passes makes catching harder because the frisbee is at a catchable height only for a portion of its flight path as it is coming to the ground. Anticipating the disc's flight and getting into position to catch it is called [reading](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/dj-qcNptGj0>

Reading

Reading is the ability to anticipate where a disc will end up based on its flight shape and characteristics. It is a skill that is heavily emphasized during [deep cuts](#) where you need to chase down frisbees above you and may need to jostle for position with another player to reach the disc before they do. However, reading is helpful in any situation where you're catching a frisbee.

Johnny Malks provides a video explaining how to catch certain deep hucks along with examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/snlhMmk9jdY>

Learning to read mostly comes down to experience and body control. There are a few basic cues that beginners should look out for: As the disc descends, whichever way the frisbee is tilted down towards is the direction that it will drift towards and the speed of its descent is dictated by how flat the disc is as it comes down—the more tilted it is, the less it will float. Unless thrown extremely inside-out (IO), discs thrown with enough spin & force tend to turn more outside-in (OI) over the course of its flight. That means discs thrown slightly IO tend to flatten out and flat throws will start to turn OI. If a disc loses momentum and hangs midair. It will maintain its current tilt and drift in that direction—sometimes this will be in the opposite direction of the disc's initial flight path if the disc is tilted backwards. In general, it is much easier to read a disc that is curving towards you rather than away so if you know the way in which the disc is going to curl and you have enough time, position yourself wide in the direction that the disc is going to drift such that the frisbee floats toward you and any adjustments you make are toward the frisbee as it approaches you.

Just like every other throw, catching away throws is easiest when you can clap-catch at chest height. However, with the exception of up-line cuts, most away-cuts will be the target of deep throws, which typically give defenders a better chance at blocking the disc for the reward of more yards gained in a single throw. As a result, receivers making away cuts will often be required to claw-catch in order to beat their defender.

Finally, players making away-cuts need to be able to read the disc without constant vision of the thrower and the frisbee after it is thrown. The ideal method for this task is to look over your shoulder at the thrower immediately after they release the disc, identifying the general path of the disc from a quick initial look and adjusting your cut according to its anticipated path until it either flies close enough such that you can track it without changing your cut or you reach an ideal position to turn and catch the disc.

Sometimes while running an away-cut, the trajectory of the disc will cause it to crossover from being behind you on one side to being behind you on the other side, making it impossible to maintain vision of the disc without spinning 360 degrees. The correct way to track the frisbee in

this scenario is to keep looking at the disc while it is on one side until it leaves your field of view and then turning your head forwards to face the other side, picking up the disc in your vision from where it exited on the original side. Several clips in the deep cut compilation demonstrate this method, including the very first clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/dj-qcNptGj0>

The more you practice these situations, the better you will become at all of the different parts of reading the disc. Your ability to anticipate the flight of the disc from the initial look will become more accurate and your judgment of what route to run to get to catch the disc as early as possible will become more refined.