Knots

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The BMC
The British Mountaineering Council is the representative body that exists to protect the freedoms and promote the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers.

The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.

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Introduction

This is the second revision and first web version of this booklet which has received much support from novices and experienced people alike.

All knots require practice and must be checked regularly. Stiff ropes will be more difficult to tie than soft ones and the knots may be less secure. Some knots can be tied by several different methods.

Which knot?
The main reason for the choice of a particular knot for use in a mountaineering or climbing situation are its strength, security and ease of tying. All the knots recommended in this booklet have been chosen as the strongest and most suitable knot for the purpose mentioned under “use”.

Length required for knots
All knots require a significant amount of rope in order to be tied. To emphasise this point the length required is stated for each knot.

Figure of Eight on the bight* and rethreaded

Advantages
This is a comparatively simple knot to tie which will stay tied even with a fairly stiff rope.

Disadvantages
Few, but it is not so easy to adjust as the bowline. Can be difficult to untie after loading.

Uses
1. For tying on to the rope
2. For attaching to anchors

The two different uses involve tying the knot differently as shown below.

Advice
Can be inflexible when used for anchoring as it is difficult to adjust. If tied wrongly it usually turns into an OVERHAND Knot (q.v). The Figure of Eight is a stable knot but a stopper knot is often used to tidy up the loose end.

Length required:
1.1 mm - 150 cm
9 mm - 120 cm.

* bight = a fold at any point in the rope with which the knot is tied
Overhand Knot
on the bight

**Advantages**
Easy to tie. Does not come undone even with fairly stiff ropes

**Disadvantages**
Not easy to adjust. Very difficult to untie after being loaded.

**Uses**
Poor alternative to the Figure of Eight for tying onto the rope as it is less strong and more difficult to untie. Equally poor alternative for anchoring.

To join two ropes for abseiling.

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Bowline and variant

This is the “classic” knot for tying on to the rope.

**Advantages**
It is easily adjustable but should be finished with a “stopper” knot tight against the bowline since a bowline can work loose.

**Disadvantages**
In stiffer ropes it often will not ‘bed down’ and can work loose.

**Uses**
Suitable for tying on to the end of the rope. It can be used either when tying around the waist or to a harness. Convenient for tying around large anchors (e.g. blocks).

**Advice**
Care should be taken when tying this knot because if tied too loosely it may turn into a slip knot. It is important to finish off the knot with a ‘stopper’ knot.

Length required: 11 mm - 85 cm, 9 mm - 75 cm.

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**Bowline Variant**

**Advantages**
Less likely to work loose once tightened. Stronger and more secure. Stopper knot unnecessary.

**Disadvantages**
More complex to tie.
**Bowline**

for chest & sit harness

Most harnesses (but not the Whillans harness!) can be connected to a chest harness to give the higher point of attachment which is desirable when carrying a sack as in alpine or winter climbing.

The method shown is very suitable for this purpose. The user is advised to experiment with the adjustment of the knot by hanging suspended in the harness.

As shown in the diagram, the most comfortable (and the safest) angle is achieved by adjustment of the two loops (one through the chest harness and the other through the sit harness). **Don't forget to finish off the knot with a stopper knot after adjustment.**

When attached to the rope in this manner it is best to anchor to the mountain from the front and to use a belaying method other than a body or shoulder belay (such as a Sticht plate or the Italian Hitch method.

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**Fishermans Knot**

**Advantages**
Fairly easy to tie.

**Disadvantages**
Can work loose, especially with stiff ropes.

**Uses**
Joining two ropes for abseiling. Forming rope slings. Poor alternative to Double Fishermans.

**Advice**
The ends should be taped in order to minimise the possibility of the knot working loose but it is important to check regularly to ensure it is still bed firmly.

Length required:
11mm - 85cm, 9mm - 60cm.
Double Fishermans Knot

Advantages
Strongest knot for joining ropes.

Disadvantages
Care needed to tie correctly. Relatively bulky.

Uses
Joining ropes such as for a long abseil or forming rope slings.

Advice
Ends should be taped to minimise the possibility of the knot working loose. Check regularly to ensure it is still tied firmly. A Triple Fishermans may be appropriate for particularly slippy cord.

Length required:
11mm - 105cm, 9mm - 75cm

Clove Hitch

Advantages
Fast and relatively simple to tie and adjust.

Disadvantages
Not as strong as the FIGURE OF EIGHT on the bight for anchoring. Not safe to use at the end of a rope.

Uses
Anchoring the non-climbing members of the party on fixed ring belays.

Advice
Practice in tying the knot is essential because its normal use is in situations where speed may be important.
Italian Hitch
(A friction hitch, not a knot)

A very useful means of absorbing the energy of a fall. Used with an HMS karabiner it provides a useful friction hitch for belaying, lowering and abseiling.

Advantages
Very quick to set up.

Disadvantages
Easy to tie incorrectly.

Uses
As a direct belay with an HMS karabiner, for abseiling or lowering off.

Advice
Practice in tying and using this knot is essential in order to ensure its correct application.

Prusik

Advantages
Relatively simple to tie.

Disadvantages
Can slip on wet or icy ropes.

Uses
Ascending ropes, often in a self-rescue situation.

Advice
It is essential that the PRUSIK knot is tied using rope much thinner than the rope around which it is tied.

Length required: 30 cm required for knot alone in 5 mm rope sling.

French Prusik

Advantages
Can be moved by hand when under tension.

Disadvantages
Can release under tension so should not be used for ascending.

Uses
Protection during abseil or locking off by the belayer after a fall. Hoist and pulley systems.

Advice
Best tied with a fairly short loop. As with the Prusik, relatively thin rope should be used.
**Klemheist**

**Advantages**
Can be tied with any size of tape used for slings.

**Disadvantages**
Cannot be released under tension. May jam up.

**Uses**
Can be used in any prusiking situation. Ideal when only tape slings available.

**Advice**
Three or more complete turns usually required. For clarity diagram shows the Klemheist being tied with cord - the process is identical when tape is used.

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**Tape Knot**

**Advantages**
Relatively simple to tie.

**Disadvantages**
Can easily work loose. It is essential that the knot is tightened under load before use.

**Uses**
The only knot suitable for tying tape

**Advice**
Make sure the knot is tight. The end should be taped to minimise the possibility of the knot working loose. Check regularly to ensure it is still tied firmly.

Length required: 25mm tape - 65cm.