

CHAPTER 2:

FLYING BASICS

Fighter kites can do things no other kite can do.

Even in the lightest of winds, a fighter in the hands of a skilled flier can amaze onlookers by not only staying in the air, but doing figure eights, dives, twists, and dancing its way to great heights.

And of course, they do it all on only one line which makes those multi-line sport kite fliers awfully jealous.

If you are a novice, your first goal is to simply keep the kite aloft, gradually learning to use your hands and fingers to manipulate the subtle pulse of the flying line so that the kite performs to your will and artistry.

Soon, you too will learn to “talk with the wind”. Like any new language, it requires patience and determination, but the rewards of mastering this skill can never be taken away.

The first time you fly a fighter, take time to get to know your kite. Watch its movements closely. Feel its pull on the line and on your fingers. Watch how it responds to your control. Don't fly it too high or try fancy maneuvers. There is plenty of time for that later.

From the beginning, you should learn to fly your kite. It should not be flying you!

**Victor Heredia
San Diego, California**

Before you Leave the House

Most people who ride bikes remember falling off or crashing when they first started learning. So did they quit trying? Of course not — they picked themselves up and kept on practicing.

Practice is the key to becoming a skilled fighter kite flier. Don't let a few crashes slow you down at the beginning. They are much less painful than falling off a bike.

So let's go flying.

Before you leave the house, there are a few basic things you might want to consider.

1. Many fighter kites on the market come with an instruction sheet. If you have one, read it. If you didn't get one, contact the store or manufacturer where you bought the kite and see if one is available.

Every kite is different. Instruction sheets contain specific information on assembly, fine tuning, replacement parts, and warranties. This is important stuff! You may want to take it with you just for reference, but don't lose it.

2. If your fighter uses a dowel for a spine, buy an extra one now. Shaping and bending can be done a lot easier at home than on the field. Don't let a broken spine cut your day short.

3. Have you picked a flying site? It helps to know where you are going before you try to get there. Better read the Chapter on selecting a location.

4. Check the wind. Fighters perform well in a variety of wind conditions, but for your first few sessions, it should be "clean" or uninterrupted and blowing around 4-6 miles per hour. Less or more is all right, but not as easy.

5. Take a helper if at all possible. Having a "ground crew" eases the process considerably. If no help is available, be sure and read the section on Self Launching .

Also remember to take your kite, any stray parts, and your flying line. We only mention this because we're good at forgetting things like that.

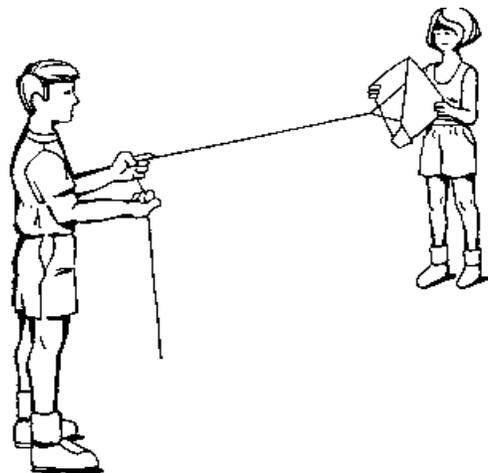
Assisted Launching

Launching is a lot easier at first if you have a friend to help.

Stand with your back to the wind with about 10 feet or so of extra line beside you loose on the ground. Have your assistant stand about 50 feet away, lightly holding the kite at its outside corners with the nose pointing up.

Positioning the kite is very important. When you launch, the kite is going to move in the direction it is pointing. Make sure it's pointing up at the sky instead of at some obstacle - like a spectator.

Having extra line is also important. You need to let line out to control your fighter. If you use all of your line, you won't have any control.

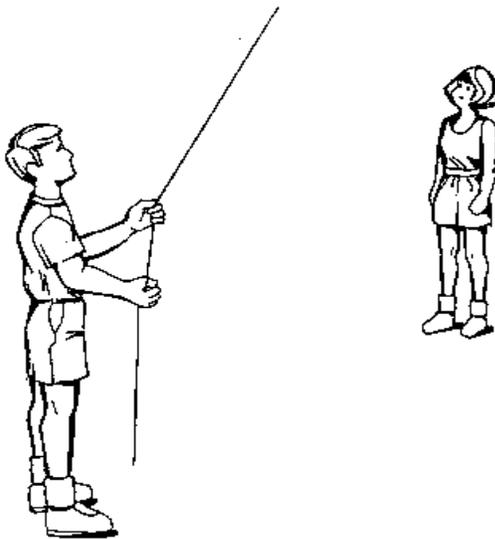


Now complete the “Prelaunch Checklist”. Do everything on this list before every launch.

Prelaunch Checklist:

1. Check the area under where you will be flying for possible hazards — mainly people.
2. Look behind you to make sure that you have a clear path if you need to back up. Backing up is usually not necessary for fighter kite flying, but most kites are conditioned to move backward as a natural way to get a kite out of trouble. Check around to make sure that, if you instinctively begin to move backward, you won't be moving into trouble.
3. Look around your feet. Make sure that your loose kiteline isn't tangled in itself, in rocks or weeds, or in your shoelaces. Loose line loves shoelaces!
4. If there are other kite fliers around, check the sky for traffic. Fighters are designed for close contact with other kites. But your first flight is not the best time to confront them. Make sure the sky is clear and announce to any nearby fliers that you are ready to launch.

Finished with the checklist? On your signal, your helper should allow you to gently but firmly pull the kite out of their hands and into the air. Think of it as almost snatching it away from them.



Continue a strong steady upward pull on the line to start the kite up and into the wind. Maintain tension on the line to keep the kite climbing.

If winds are light, it may be necessary to steadily pull in line to keep the kite moving ahead. Let any excess line drop to your feet as you pull in.

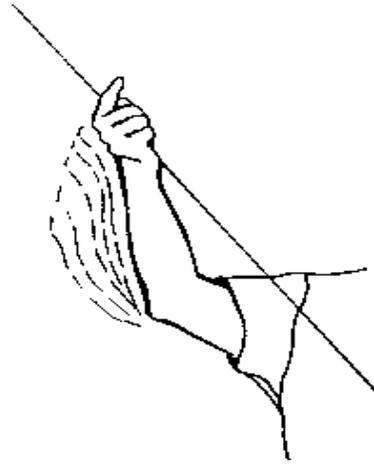
When you feel the pressure of the wind on the kite, slowly let line out. That doesn't mean you can just let the line loose. Remember to keep some friction on the line to maintain control.

Running with the kite is perhaps the most common mistake that beginning fliers make. Don't run. It causes awkward flight patterns because you are too involved with your feet when you should be watching your kite and thinking about your maneuvers. You can create your own wind for your kite's surface with short tugging motions on your line.

**Dinesh Bahadur
Pacific Grove, California**

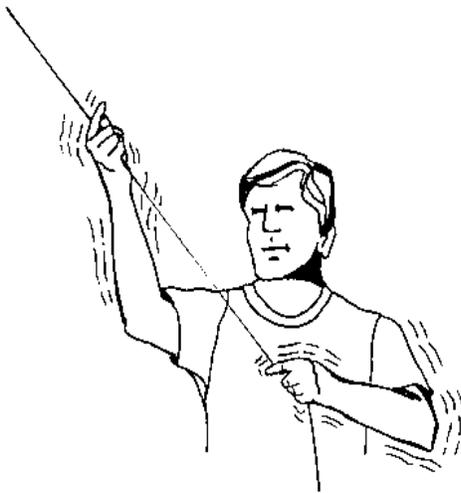
Try giving the line quick, rhythmic jerks or tugs - line in to climb - line out when you feel wind pressure. Tugging creates extra wind pressure on the kite.

Allow the kite to climb to a height of 50 feet or more where you can practice maneuvering and line handling without smashing into the ground.



Line Handling

Line handling is a two handed process. Don't ever let one hand free until you have firm control of the line with the other hand. Both hands should work evenly with short, smooth movements.



Hold the line near the tip or first joint of your index finger. Use your thumb as an anchor. Practice pulling in hand-over-hand and then letting line out quickly. Work close to your chest - pulling continuously with rhythm. You should be working at an angle - from right shoulder to left hip, or from left shoulder to right hip.

Once the kite is airborne, it will be easy to let out yards and yards of line using only the slightest tugs. After a certain distance, however, you'll want to stop the kite from going farther. The higher it goes, the less control you have, and if you run out of line, you'll have no control at all.

Losing control of the kite is the most common mistake new fliers make. If a kite flies up at too high an angle, it may "overfly" you, turn nose down with it's back to the wind, and come straight toward the ground.

How do you regain control?? Take in any slack line fast. Tug hard until the kite is airborne again. A kite is "airborne" when it maintains its position in the air, with minimal line slack, and you can feel it at the end of your line.

As you continue to practice, avoid slack line. Loose line leads to bad flying habits.

I like to use a "corkscrew" technique. Let line out and the kite will loop into a circle. As the kite turns up at the end of that circle, tug line in so the kite climbs a few feet. Then let line out again to start another circle. This is a real effective way to gain altitude.

Ric Merry
Seattle, Washington

Maneuvering Your Fighter

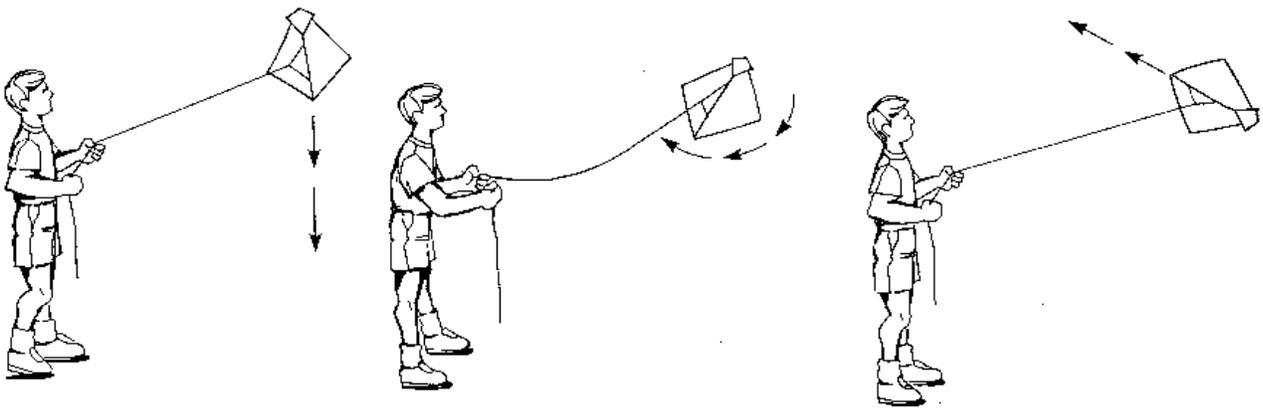
Handling fighters is a matter of pulling in line to make it move, and playing out line to achieve distance and control direction.

Fighter kites take commitment, practice, and constant attention. The result is a graceful, controlled response to the wind which is like flying a leaf on a string. Each hesitation and thought is translated into motion as your fighter traces your state of mind on the clouds. When your mind and body are synchronized, controlling your fighter is effortless.

Jim Glass
Boulder, Colorado

If the kite is moving in the wrong direction, let out line. A quick loosening of line tension will slow or stop forward motion. Just let the line slide out smoothly through your fingers. Depending on the wind, your fighter will relax and float, change direction, or begin to spin around the bridle tow-point.

When the kite is pointed in the direction you want, put tension on the line and the kite will move in that direction. Pull in - either in a steady hand-over-hand motion for long, sustained flights, or in sharp tugs to make the kite quickly dart a few feet.



When the wind is adequate to basically keep my kite in a stable overhead position, yet not so strong as to make it stick there, I like to use a "guitar strum" to maintain position. Reach up as far on the line as you can with one hand. Bring the line in to the other hand where you can slowly let it out while reaching up again.

It's great to strum and pick your kite into squares and triangles in the air.

Ric Merry
Seattle, Washington

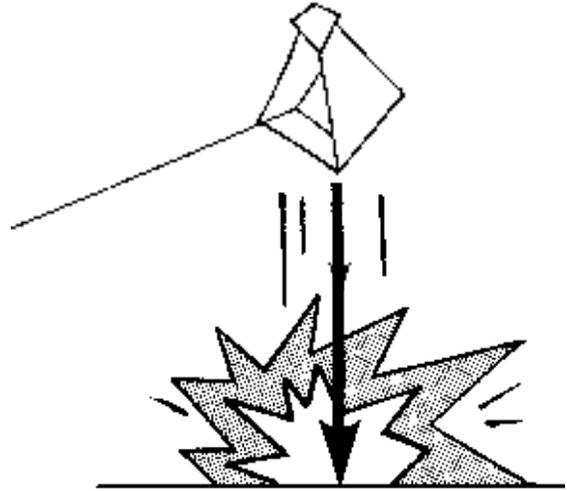
A good practice exercise is to move the fighter left and then right across the sky.

Use line tension to fly the kite into the air. Then begin to let out just enough line to make the kite stop rising and begin to turn. When it is pointing to the left, provide tension again by pulling in. Then make the fighter unstable again so you can turn it back to the right. Now practice repeatedly turning left and right.

Another good training routine is diving and recovering. Go lower - then lower - then

LOWER. With practice, your reactions will become quick enough that you will be able to fly within a few inches of the ground without crashing.

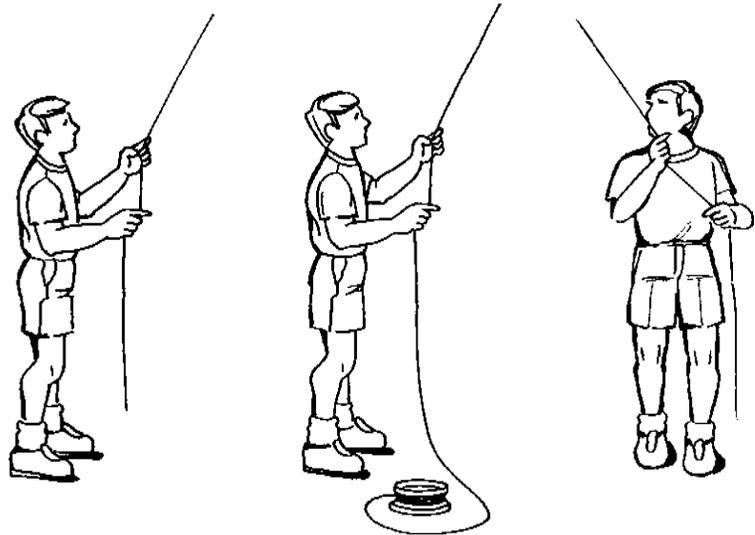
If you think the kite is going to nose-dive into the ground, let out some line. Don't panic and pull in - that will only make the kite fly faster and hit harder. And a hard crash could break the spine or damage the nose section.



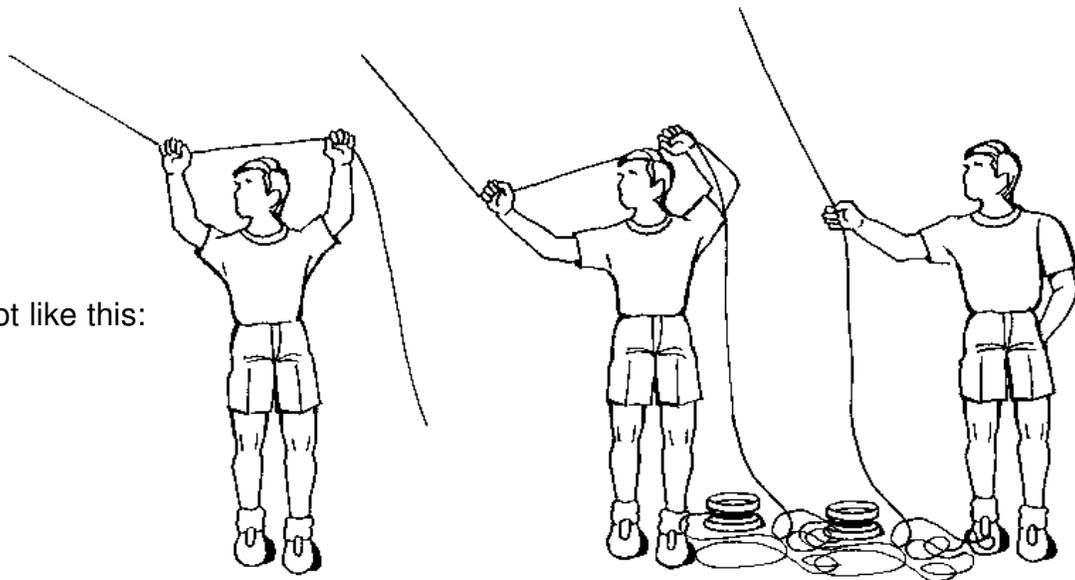
The proper stance for controlling your kite is knees slightly bent, elbows close to your sides, and hands in front of your chest. Flapping your arms doesn't help the kite fly and it makes you tired much more quickly.

Continue to use both hands on the kite line and make sure the line doesn't get all tangled up around your feet.

In other words ... stand like this:



Not like this:



Remember, if your kite dives toward the ground, pulling on the line won't make it go up again. It will make the kite zoom toward the ground even faster. Loosen the line. Let the kite become unstable. Then pull in when the kite points up and fly away from the crash. Your friends will be amazed!

You can make your kite spin faster by attaching 1/4 to 1/2 ounce of gum or putty to the bottom of the center spine. I usually carry a supply of putty so I can fine tune the responsiveness of my fighters in different wind conditions.

**Stan Swanson
Boulder, Colorado**

Quick, intricate maneuvering is developed through good line tension and sharp signals.

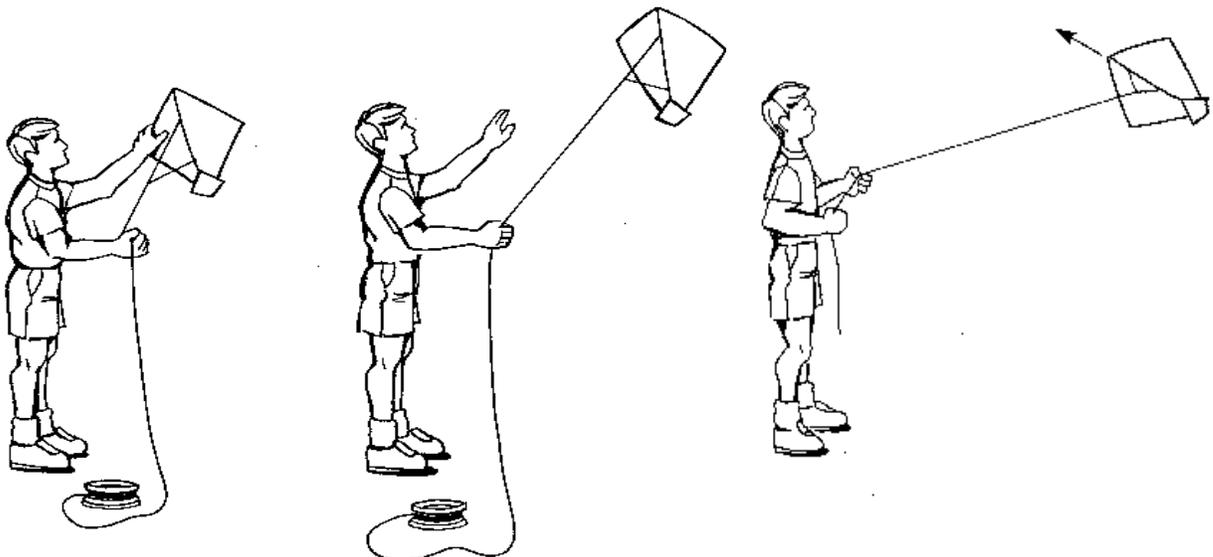
Beginners often find it easier to sharpen their skills with the help of a training tail. Attach about ten feet of tail to the base of the kite. Use plastic, light ribbon, or crepe paper cut to one-and-a-half inches in width. This new tail will slow down the action of the kite during your learning period.

Think of it almost like "training wheels" for your kite. As you gain experience, cut off a foot or two of tail at a time until it can be eliminated entirely.

Solo Launching

With practice, you will soon be able to launch your fighter without a tail, without an assistant, and, eventually, with little or no wind.

To launch solo, grasp the nose of the kite with one hand and hold the line in the other. Release the kite, let the wind carry it for a short distance, then pull up on the line to gain height.



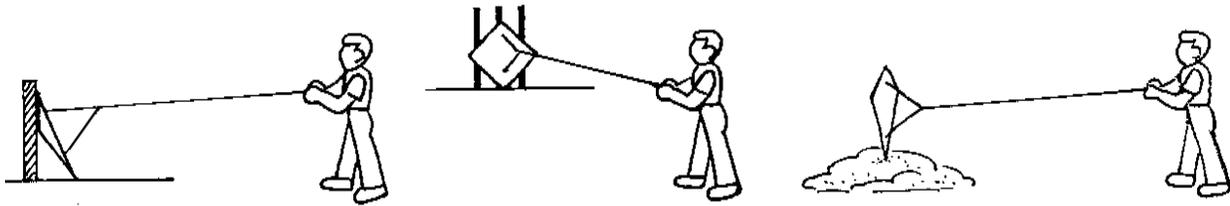
Repeat this several times to get your desired elevation.

In Nagasaki, I saw fliers perform an interesting hand launch. Holding the kite by the bridle, they would flick it out into the wind. The kite would float on the wind for several meters, then the flier would pull the line taut. It was very efficient.

**Pierre Fabre
Paris, France**

Sometimes in light winds, hand launching can be difficult and you may prefer to begin with a bit more line in the air. At times like this, you may want to “create” a launching assistant.

A fairly cooperative assistant can be made from sand, sticks, or almost any kind of prop for the kite. Simply lean your fighter against the “assistant” and move back into the wind, playing out line as you go. When you are ready to launch, take in the slack line and lift the fighter into the air.



The nice thing about this kind of assistant is that they never demand equal flying time.

In time, you will learn to launch your fighter right off the ground. A curved center spine makes this much easier. If the kite is face-down and the nose is pointed up-wind, a quick tug on the line will lift it a few inches into the air. With quick reactions and good line handling, you should be able to maintain control and gain altitude.

Just remember not to make a habit of dragging your kite across rough ground while trying to get it back in the air.

A self launch can take time to master. If you have trouble at first, stick with it. Be stubborn about learning and take time to practice. And remember, every time you hit the ground, you can effect the kite's tuning. Check it over. Maybe that's why you're having trouble.

**Robert Loera
Honolulu, Hawaii**

Launching alone will take practice until your reaction time develops. Then it will seem as easy as getting out of bed in the morning - which we admit is easier on some days than others...