

# HOW TO SQUAT: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

# CHEAT SHEET

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## Things that are entirely up to you:

1. bar position
2. hand position
3. elbow position (for back squats)
4. head position
5. stance width
6. foot angle
7. sitting back vs. sitting down
8. degree of forward knee travel etc.
9. footwear (as long as it has a solid sole)
10. squatting with a belt or not

## Things that are non-negotiable:

1. Don't let your knees cave excessively.
2. Don't let your spine round.

## General recommendations

1. Squat as deep as you can for general training purposes and for weightlifting.

2. Try widening your squat, sitting back, and using the low bar position to limit depth for powerlifting.
3. Try to drive your hips forward under the bar to break through the sticking point.
4. Squat low bar to build more hip strength.
5. Squat high bar to build more quad strength.
6. Front squat to build more upper back strength.
7. Lift every rep as explosively as possible

## My personal squat assessment checklist for clients:

### The setup:

1. Is your walkout efficient? 2-3 steps is preferable, but 4 is acceptable just to make sure everything is squared away
2. Does the middle of the bar line up with the middle of your back, or is it offset?
3. Is the bar resting firmly on your back, or is it sliding?
4. Are you breathing into your abdomen, or are your shoulders elevating when you inhale?
5. Are your wrists cocked back, or are they straight? If they're cocked back, don't worry unless it's accompanied by pain.

### The lift itself:

1. Are your feet stable, or do they move? (It's not uncommon for people to start with their feet pointed too far forward, and for them to rotate out a bit during the initial descent; if the bottom of your shoes are too grippy for this to happen, then you may see the lateral part of the heel of your shoe raise a bit.)
2. Is your weight shifting excessively forward or backward? Do your heels rise off the ground, or could you lift your toes up off the ground if you wanted to?

3. Does your spine flex at any point in the movement? (Lumbar is more common than thoracic; also note whether lumbar flexion actually occurs at the bottom of the squat, or whether your spine starts in hyperextension, and then just moves back toward neutral.)
4. Is your depth adequate for your training goals? In general, if you can maintain spinal position, deeper is better, but around parallel is generally fine for athletes and casual lifters, powerlifters should break parallel, and weightlifters should be as close to ass-to-grass as possible.
5. Is your knee tracking pretty decent? Don't worry too much about a little knee valgus or knee varus as long as there's no accompanying pain, but excessive valgus and varus should be avoided (this is a bit of a judgement call; after you see a lot of squats, you learn the difference between "your knees ticked in a bit on the ascent" and "holy shit, no, don't do that").
6. Are forces pretty evenly distributed between the quads and the hip extensors? This is usually an issue that either responds very quickly to good cuing (people with strong quads who were always taught they need to sit way back in the squat, or people with strong hip extensors who are afraid of a reasonable degree of forward lean – just getting rid of some bad habits), or it's an issue that's just indicative of your current strengths and weaknesses, with your current technique simply representing the most efficient way your body has found to move the load. If it's the latter condition, cuing doesn't affect technique or performance much, but your technique will naturally shift as you address weak links.
  1. Improve quad strength if your squats wind up looking like good mornings.
  2. Improve core bracing if there's more than a 15-20% gap between your squat and your deadlift.
  3. Improve hip extensor strength if you don't meet the first two criteria.

## General Issues:

1. Do you *feel* strong, stable, and balanced under the load?

2. Does squatting cause any aches and pains, whether acute or chronic (wrist, elbows, knees, hips, back, etc.)?
3. Do you have adequate ankle, knee, and hip mobility without load? Do those things change with load? If ROM decreases when loaded, it's a control issue, not a mobility issue.
4. Do you shift your weight to one side, or do you rotate excessively? Again, this is a bit of a judgement call, since everyone is asymmetrical to some degree.
5. Are you wearing the right shoes? Any shoe with good traction and a solid sole is fine; with or without a raised heel is just a matter of preference, but cushion-y soles should be avoided.