

BONDAGE FOR BEGINNERS

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CLASS OVERVIEW

Bondage for Beginners is our most popular class. It's a really fun one to teach, but you need to be on top of your game: we need to fit a lot of material into 3 hours.

About the students

In our in-person Seattle classes, we get a range of experience levels, from people who are regulars in the kink scene to people who've never taken a kink class before (and may very well never take another). Most of our students have a general internet familiarity with kink, but many have no connection to the kink community and have only a limited understanding of concepts like safewords and aftercare.

We want to expose students to a range of play styles, but are careful not to demo intense play or anything that's likely to be triggering to people.

"Soft skills" versus "core skills"

It's common to refer to non-technical kink skills as "soft skills". We don't like that term because it implies those skills are somehow secondary to technical skills. Instead, we refer to things like negotiation and aftercare as "core skills".

Class structure

This is our most structured class, with a regular progression throughout the class and in each module. The core skills we present follow the evolution of a typical kink scene, with negotiation in module 1, safety and consent in module 2, in-scene communication in module 3, and aftercare in the conclusion module.

Each module introduces one or two technical skills within the context of a demo showing the skills in action as well as a set of beginner-appropriate play dynamics.

Student goals

There's a ton of technical content in the class: most students will grasp all of it, but some will struggle with the amount of material. The priority is teaching the core skills and the "why" of bondage: the handouts are good enough that students can fill in gaps in the technical skills on their own time.

We've done our job if everyone has a good time, acquires a solid understanding of consent and essential kink skills, and is able to use the single column tie to put together a basic bondage scene.

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Single students

Bondage for Beginners is our only core class where we allow single students. To avoid putting students in uncomfortable situations, we don't allow students to pair up in class: if you didn't arrive with someone, you won't be tying them today.

Although the curriculum involves partner ties, each module has material for single students to practice during pod time.

When possible, try to put single students in the same pod, so that pod can focus on single student techniques rather than having to serve singles as well as pairs. It may make sense to have slightly irregular pod sizes to accommodate this.

GENERAL TEACHING NOTES

Student skill levels

Our core bondage series has one beginner class:

- Bondage for Beginners

and three intermediate classes:

- Bondage for Sex
- Bondage for Immobilization
- Bondage for Pain

In theory, the intermediate classes have a prerequisite of knowing how to tie a single column tie and understanding basic kink skills. In practice, we find that a non-trivial percentage of our students show up with essentially no bondage skills. Those students are at a modest disadvantage in the intermediate classes, but we are able to provide enough one on one attention that they do OK.

It's important, however, that we always have printouts of the single column tie on hand, and that every instructor be ready to teach it as needed.

The module system

All our classes are broken into 3 or 4 modules. Each module focuses on a particular topic, usually with a technical skill, a core skill, and some practical application.

In order to keep things interesting without overwhelming students, each module is generally presented by a pair of instructors.

Lecture and demo

Each module begins with a mix of lecture and demo, where we present the material. When possible, we present the material in a demo where we combine discussion of the technique and demonstrate it in action. In some cases, the nature of the material dictates that we present it in lecture format.

This part of the module is where we teach the “why”:

- What does the technique do, and when would you use it?
- Why do we tie it the way we do?
- What are the important things to remember when you use this technique?
- How is this technique useful to me?

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In addition, we are priming the students to learn the technique in pods by exposing them to the key parts of the technique.

Keep it moving

In order to keep the class engaging, we try to keep lecture to 10 minutes or less and demo to 15 minutes or less. When we need to go longer than that, we generally try to break the material into parts, and intersperse different chunks: switch between lecture and demo, or between different presenters.

If your skill and rehearsal time permit, it's ideal if you and your teaching partner can trade off within each chunk. In a perfect world, each section would feel like a discussion / collaboration between two instructors.

Integrate content into your demos

Similarly, in an ideal world, there would be almost no lecture—instead, all of the lecture material would be organically integrated into the demos. For example, it's good if you present a list of safety rules to the class that includes a warning about making sure that bottoms don't fall over when their hands are tied. But it's better to tie someone's hands and then explain to the class why you can't ask them to walk across the stage on your own.

Storytelling is well-known to be a powerful technique for improving student engagement and retention. You should aspire to having every one of your demos be a story.

Pods

After lecture and demo, students break into pods to learn the actual techniques. This is when we focus on "how":

- How do you tie this technique?
- How do I adapt this technique to my body?

Pod time is also a great time to answer questions, check in on how students are doing, and give people extra one on one attention.

Our standard class format has 24 students and 4 instructors, giving us pods with 6 students and 1 instructor.

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Running a pod

You may need to adapt based on the needs of the people in a particular pod, but the standard way to run a pod is:

- Check in with folks about how they're doing and see if anyone has any needs or requests for pod time.
- Present each of the technical skills. Depending on the skill, you may want to present it several times. In some cases, it's best to ask folks to just watch the first time and then follow along on subsequent times.
- Tell people to practice while you watch, answer questions, and offer advice. If you have students who need special adaptations or alternate techniques, now is the time to help those folks. It may make sense to take the quick questions first and send those students off to practice on their own while you help people with longer questions.
- People are often interested in watching new techniques or adaptations—if you have more than one pair who need special attention, it can work well to work with all those pairs at the same time, helping one pair while the others watch.

1: THE SINGLE COLUMN TIE

We begin with the single column tie because it's by far the most important bondage technique. If students learn it well, they have everything they need to have a ton of kinky fun.

The fundamental theme of this module is figuring out what kind of kink experience you want to have with your partner and then working backward to figure out what kind of bondage will get you there.

Negotiation

We want people to take four key things from the negotiation section:

- Negotiation is a vital step for having a good scene
- Negotiation can be fun and sexy
- We're priming students with some key consent concepts (especially Ask, Don't Guess)
- There's a difference between negotiation and in-scene communication. Students should have a clear understanding of which is which, and understand that in-scene negotiation is a high-risk, advanced technique that is only appropriate when both parties have extensive experience and skill.

If anyone is feeling pedantic, it's obviously fine to negotiate to take things off the table in the middle of a scene. What we want people to avoid is negotiating for anything new in the middle of a scene. In practice, just saying to avoid in-scene negotiation seems to be the best way to communicate that point to most people.

Kneeling Position

For many people, this is the first real kink scene they'll ever see. We want it to be fun, sexy, and approachable, as well as sneaking a ton of educational content into it. The demo should touch on a number of different play styles, but be careful to avoid likely triggers for people. The spanking should be mild and light-hearted, and you should avoid any kind of harshness, degradation, or CNC.

This is where we introduce the concept of scene intent: what kind of experience do you want to have with your partner? We demo using the same bondage to create several very different scenes, and talk about the small details that steer a scene in one direction rather than another.

This is also where we introduce the idea of bottoms as active participants in scene creation and management. Whoever's bottoming in the demo should model active bottoming and take an active role in presenting the content.

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At least once in the class, a bottom should request (and receive) an adjustment to a tie during a demo.

Nerve Safety

This section is tricky. We put it early in the class because nerve safety is a vital topic in bondage and one that's often neglected or rife with misinformation. At the same time, this is a beginner class and all the material in the class is low-risk for causing nerve damage. We have three goals here:

1. Communicate clearly that nerve damage is an important topic
2. Teach our four key nerve safety points, plus the basics of circulation loss
3. Expose students to the nerve tests so they are aware of them and can find them in the handout if and when they start doing more advanced bondage.

Single Column Tie

This is the most important technical skill in the class. It's also a platform for us to introduce a number of important bondage concepts and techniques. Even more than with most techniques, it's vital that you follow the handouts exactly when teaching this.

The key concepts we communicate when teaching this are:

- What a bight is, and how to double your rope.
- The reverse tension. Our standard phrase is "go through the bight, reverse direction, and adjust tension". Repeat it often.
- Tension. We want students to learn that tension is important and to start developing tension-management skills.
- The half hitch. We use the concept of a triangle shape when building the half hitch, both because it's easy for students to understand and because it paves the way for explaining which direction the rope should exit the knot.
- Tuning the tie to be comfortable on wrists and ankles. We want students to learn those specific skills, but we also use this as a way to introduce how we think about putting rope on the body.

We also introduce the lark's head but don't explain it in detail.

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Common problems

We've put a lot of work into polishing the single column tie presentation, but it's inevitable that some students will run into challenges while learning it. Here are the most common issues we tend to see:

In making the second reverse tension (step 5), some students will try to double back through the bight, rather than through the first reverse tension. Some of them will understand the issue as soon as you point it out to them, and some will need further guidance. For some people, it's helpful to visualize the bight / reverse tension as a cup: if you pour water into the top of the cup, it'll stay in the cup. But if you hold the cup upside down and pour water on it, the water will slide right off.

When preparing for the half hitch after the second reverse tension (step 7), some students will build the half hitch on the wrong side of the reverse tension: they'll make a beautiful reverse tension and then go to the other side, completely undoing the reverse tension. Pointing it out is generally enough to fix the problem.

Fully snugging the half hitch (step 10) is hard for a lot of people. It's best to show this as a two step process:

1. In the image in step 9, pull the rope up right where it transitions from gray to blue. This will pull all the slack out of the triangle, pulling it snug around the blue rope. This puts all the slack in the blue rope.
2. Now pull the blue rope down, pulling the slack all the way out of the knot.

Advanced skills

Some students will find that just learning the single column tie takes all their available pod time. Other students, however, will blast through it and need additional things to work on. Here are some ideas for them:

- Practice tying the single column tie with just one wrap, or with three. If you have time, you can explain the pros and cons of each.
- Work on your tension management.
- Practice tying on different body parts (and especially the subtleties of tying comfortable column ties on wrists and ankles).
- Practice tying on two columns. Add simple frapping by winding the remaining rope between the columns.
- Explain why it's best to have the rope exit the half hitch in the direction it'll eventually be pulled. Show how to use the direction of the triangle to manage that.
- For especially advanced students, explain the subtleties of which direction to turn after each reverse tension, and show how in an ideal column tie, the direction of the first reverse tension will dictate the ultimate exit direction of the rope.

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The progression of this pod is generally:

1. Quickly teach rope coiling. This generally goes quickly and smoothly, and it's best to get it out of the way early, so you don't have to pull the pod back together after the single column tie.
2. Teach and practice the single column. This will take much of the pod, and some students won't go further than this.
3. People who are comfortable with the single column can either work on refining it or move on to practicing the kneeling position.

Single students

Single students should focus on refining their single columns rather than the kneeling position.

2: HANDS BEHIND HEAD

Module 2 introduces the ladder rung and the bar tie and uses them to create the hands behind head position.

The fundamental theme of this module is adapting ties and techniques to work with your body and your play style.

Consent

We blend consent into the whole class, but this is a high-level look at the entire topic. The one key message we want people to take from this is “Ask, don’t guess”. Fundamentally, we’re driving toward the goal of unambiguous consent.

Getting the right amount of nuance is tricky here. We don’t have time to present a full theory of capacity as a component of consent, but we want to get people thinking about the implications of playing while intoxicated. At the same time, it’s unrealistic to simply tell people not to drink and play. Our goal is to give people a solid set of best practices as well as an awareness that consent is a complex topic.

We also, unfortunately, need to inform students that consent violations are a big issue in kink. They need to know that many popular people (including instructors) are not safe or ethical. You don’t need to dwell on this or scare people, but they should be aware of the issue.

Consent should be woven into the entire class. Find little moments in your demos to ask permission (and sometimes to say no and negotiate a different approach).

Ladder Rung

The first technique is the ladder rung, which we teach as both a building block for other ties and as a useful technique in its own right. This is a fairly quick presentation, but there’s lots of room here to briefly demo some of the fun, connective potential of the tie (for example, very briefly demoing the idea of using it for whole-body cocooning). We’ll be using the ladder rung twice later in the module (one in the bar tie and once in hands behind head), and it’s good to foreshadow that now.

In pods, you can show advanced students some of the many variations of the ladder rung (tied off versus not, number of wraps, etc.)

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Pod considerations

The ladder rung is a fairly quick technique for most people to learn—the hardest part is often figuring out a good anchor for the ladder.

Depending on student ability and interest, you can consider introducing:

- Multi-wrap ladder rungs.
- Locking ladder rungs with a half hitch.
- A deeper examination of the problem of cinching when you pull on the connecting rope. You can explain why this makes second column ties difficult and discuss possible “good enough” solutions.
- Application to various situations, including locking limbs together (this will be useful for the crab later on) and cocooning.

Bar Tie

The bar tie is a fantastic tie. We want to communicate three key things about it:

- It can be useful to attach two limbs with some separation (for example, in the hands behind head position).
- The bar tie makes a great handle.
- It’s one of our favorite techniques for making positions more accessible for different body types.

It can be a bit slow to demo, so it’s worth practicing your technique. Consider keeping the bar fairly short and bundling the rope in your hand so you don’t have to pull it through every time you make one turn in the spiral.

Once you’ve tied the bar tie, leave it in place for hands behind head.

Pod considerations

Some of the common issues we see with the bar tie:

- Problems with the ends of the tie being too tight or too loose. There’s no magic here—it’s just a question of helping people get the details right and learn how much tension works best.
- Trouble with the terminating half hitch. The geometry of the end of the bar tie can make it hard for people to visualize how to do the half hitch. It may be helpful to create some extra space by unwinding one or two spirals or pulling some slack, so that students can more clearly see the half hitch coming together.

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Possible advanced topics:

- How many reverse tensions should you have before starting the spiral?
- Adding a second spiral on top of the first one.
- Using a ladder rung for the center attachment (including details of making a little space so you can seat the ladder rung more securely).
- Holding the rope in your hand while building the spiral, so you don't have to keep pulling it through.

Hands Behind Head

Hands behind head is a fun position for all kinds of play.

It's also a really good platform for starting to teach people how to adapt ties to different bodies and play styles. In particular, there are a lot of options for what you anchor the hands to (under the butt, through the crotch, under the breasts, in front). The right choice depends on what's comfortable to your body as well as what kind of headspace you want to create or avoid.

Pod considerations

This is a simple position to tie and people usually don't have trouble learning it. There are a number of reasons people might need help with adaptations, however:

- The standard position might be hard on their shoulders. Possible adaptations include making the bar tie longer for more separation, lowering the elbows, or placing the hands in front rather than behind the head.
- Body geometry that makes anchoring below the butt unstable, or discomfort with tying around the butt / crotch area. Possible adaptations include anchoring with a crotch rope, anchoring under the breasts / pecs and anchoring around the waist.

Other adaptation options include:

- Tie the position in a chair, with the hands tied to the back of the chair rather than the body. This loses the ladder rung, but may work well for some people.
- Tie in a kneeling position, with the rope tied back to the ankles

Advanced students may enjoy adding frapped column ties to the arms to prevent the bottom from slipping out of the tie. This is a fiddly technique that challenges students to control tension well.

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Safety

We finish the module with a discussion of safety—first some specific safety rules, and then a general discussion of risk profile. It's fun to flow naturally into this section from hands behind head by means of discussing the fall risk associated with someone walking while their hands are tied.

We want to take safety seriously, but in a matter of fact way. There's no need to resort to fire and brimstone (except maybe for the part about not leaving a tied up person alone).

As with consent, weave safety into the entire class—consider taking a moment every now and then to point out some relevant safety topic in your demos.

The general progression of the pod is:

- Teach the ladder rung. This is normally pretty quick (it's usually best to save any enhancements for individual students later in the pod).
- Teach the bar tie. This is a bit time consuming—take the time to teach it well, but try to save some time for practicing hands behind head at the end.
- Let students practice hands behind head, or work with them on refining the ladder rung and bar tie.

Single students

Single students obviously can't tie hands behind head on themselves. One option is for them to work on improving their ladder rungs and bar ties.

Some alternatives for ambitious singles:

- Lock the lower legs together by putting a column tie around the ankles and making a ladder rung right below the knees. Challenge students to manage tension well and get a secure lock-off. Students are unlikely to have issues with the common peroneal nerve (on the outside of the leg, right below the knee), but be mindful of that if someone ties ridiculously tight around the calf.
- Ladder the entire legs together (this requires some flexibility).
- Tie the ankles together, then kneel and finish with a ladder rung around the waist (also requires flexibility).

3: TYING OFF AND CRAB

In our final module, we introduce basic tying off technique and the crab position. These two techniques pair well: the crab is greatly enhanced by tying it off to the bed.

A full crab position tied off to the bed is a fairly complicated proposition, requiring several different technical skills as well as managing multiple comfort and headspace issues. Some students will be ready to put all of it together, and some won't be able to do more than just get the gist of each individual technique.

Depending on the venue, this can be a tricky module for students to practice. Very few venues have a dozen beds with riggable hardpoints, so you'll need to improvise based on what's available. In addition to taking advantage of any bondage furniture that's on hand, consider using pillars and chairs as hardpoints. In a pinch, you can let students tie off to their own bodies, with a reminder that the round turn and two half hitches should never be tied on a person during an actual scene.

Tying Off

We use the round turn and two half hitches for tying off. In some cases it's appropriate to just use two half hitches, but most students aren't ready for the complexity of figuring out when it's appropriate to skip the round turn.

This technique is a good time to revisit the ideas of scene intent and active bottoming. Tying off adds numerous ways to change the feel of a scene, as well as potentially making it more challenging to sustain. You will likely need to improvise exactly what you demo depending on what hardpoints are available to you at the venue.

If you have access to a suitable hardpoint, it's fun to demo how the round turn lets you reel in a feisty bottom, and how it makes it easier to tie under tension by isolating the knot from tension in the line.

Pod considerations

Some students will have trouble tying two half hitches in a row, but that usually clears up with a little help and practice.

Advanced topics:

- You can show advanced students how to slip their half hitches if desired.
- If students are curious, you can discuss when the round turn is helpful and when it's appropriate to skip it.

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In-Scene Communication

Begin by reviewing the difference between negotiation and in-scene communication, with a particular emphasis on avoiding in-scene negotiation. We present in-scene communication as a way to keep a scene running smoothly and make course correction.

We focus on three kinds of communication:

- Verbal communication includes safewords, traffic lights, and explicit verbal communication.
- Non-verbal communication includes tapping, dropping keys, and “three of anything”.
- Implicit communication is reading your partner’s tells.

All three are appropriate, but the core principle here is “ask, don’t guess”.

Crab Position

The crab position is great for a number of things, but especially for penetrative sex and access to the genitals. It’s also a great platform for going deep on the idea of adapting a position to suit your body and intent.

There’s a great deal of variation in what works for different bodies, and few people can comfortably do all of the variations we show in the handout. Encourage students to experiment and get creative.

Pod considerations

The handouts show several techniques we don’t teach in class including the square and parallel lashings. Feel free to teach those during pods as appropriate, and to refer students to the online tutorials for them. (It’s a good idea to have printed copies of the square lashing on hand).

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The pod sequence is:

- Teach the round turn & two half hitches
- Review the crab position and assist students as they practice it

If students have extra time after mastering the basics, there are lots of things for them to work on.

They can tie the crab again, with a particular focus on:

- Creating headspace with their partner, and/or
- Managing tension well throughout the tie, and/or
- Working on adjusting small details for comfort

The teaching outline has a long list of other options for exploration.

Single students

The crab position isn't a good tie for single students. They can choose to go deeper on the ties they've already done, or choose to work on the mermaid tie.

The mermaid is just a simple ladder up the legs. Begin with a column tie at the ankles and finish with a ladder rung around the waist. This is a good tie for working on tension management as well as practicing more secure ladder rungs (using half hitches or frictions at each one). You can also show students how to join rope if appropriate.

CONCLUSION

Beginners has a longer conclusion than most of our classes—it's almost a fourth module, without a pod.

The fundamental theme of this module is “what next?”

Aftercare

As we teach basic aftercare skills, we're also doing a little gentle aftercare for this class. We've covered a lot of material, much of which can bring up a lot of feelings for new people. We want to encourage them to take care of themselves and each other as they wind down from the class.

We present aftercare as an important skill the students should understand and practice. The key parts are:

- Immediate aftercare—food, blankets, snuggles. This is for winding down the scene, but usually not for evaluating and planning.
- Delayed aftercare—typically a checkin a day or two later. Also talk about drop, which many students won't have heard of before.
- Triage and problem solving. These are really important when a scene doesn't go according to plan, but they are tricky to do well. This is a good time to briefly introduce concepts like accountability and focusing on the person who experienced harm, although we don't have time to go deep on those topics today.

Gear

New students typically have a lot of questions about rope—what to get, and where to get it. We want to cover the basics, without getting lost in the weeds. If anyone has a lot of deep questions, invite them to follow up with you after the class, but resist the temptation to spend ten minutes discussing different jute vendors.

Finding Your Kink

Our final topic for the class is the one we want them to focus on as they head out into the world. Once again, we return to the centrality of experience: what kind of kinky experience do you and your partner want to have together?

It's obvious to most of us who've been doing this for a while that this is a lifelong quest, but that isn't at all obvious to many of our students. The most important thing for them to take from this section is the idea that most of us have complicated, non-obvious kinks, and it's worth putting time and effort into figuring yours out.

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If you can interest them in investigating their kinks and give them a few starting points for that investigation, you've done enough to get them well started.

This section benefits immensely from a personal anecdote about your own kink journey. Make sure to rehearse it well and have clear pedagogical intent behind the story.

The conclusion is pretty straightforward. You should plan on spending a few moments promoting our next class and perhaps one other local event. Make sure you have a compelling story about what's cool about each class or event you discuss.