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## Aerial silks

**Climbs, wraps and drops** are some of the techniques performed using aerial silks suspended from the ceiling.

The fabric used to perform **aerial silk tricks** is usually made of a stretchy polyester Lycra. Already quite long, the length is sometimes doubled to provide the artist with two strips of fabric.

Aerial silks are also known as **tissu**.

**Ancient Egyptian acrobat**  
c. 1180 B.C.

## In a word

The word **acrobat** is from the Greek *akrobatēs*, "to walk on tiptoe." A group of acrobats is called a **troupe**.

## A bit of history

The ancient Egyptians were performing acrobat shows as early as 2400 B.C. Four thousand years ago, the Minoans on the Greek island of Crete staged elaborate acrobatic contests where men and women leaped over bulls. The tradition of Chinese jugglers and rope dancers can be traced back to the Chou Dynasty around 1027 B.C. By the time of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), acrobatic performances such as rope walking and pole climbing were popular entertainments in China.

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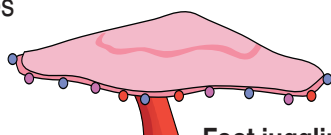
# ACROBATS

An acrobat is a skilled performer of gymnastic feats, like walking on a tightrope, swinging on a trapeze, or tumbling and balancing with great agility and coordination.

Many modern athletes and entertainers use acrobatics in their performances.

Gymnasts, dancers, martial artists, skaters and scuba divers use acrobatic techniques in their work.

Acrobats perform alone, in pairs or in groups.



Foot juggling

Acrobats perform barefoot or wear shoes specially designed for flexibility and comfort.

Contortionist

Natural ability and rigorous training allow contortionists to bend and flex their bodies into extreme and unusual positions. Most are front-benders or back-benders; very few can do both.

## Practice makes perfect

Acrobats must practice every day to maintain their skill level and improve their moves.

In the past, acrobatic skills were traditionally kept in the family, with techniques being passed from one generation to another. Today, some families continue this tradition, but it is more common for people who want to learn to be acrobats to attend specialized circus schools.

## Joining the circus

Acceptance into many of these professional and elite circus schools is very competitive, with only a third of applicants being accepted.

Such schools teach aerial techniques, working with silk, rope, lyra, static trapeze (a bar hanging from the ceiling), unicycling, high wire, tumbling and Chinese acrobatics. Physical and mental conditioning are a vital part of mastering these acrobatic skills.

## The flying trapeze

**Jules Léotard** (1838-1870) was a famous acrobatic artist who invented the trapeze technique and the tight bodysuit that bears his name — the leotard. The popular song "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" was written about him in 1868.

Aerial artists risk life and limb when they perform without safety nets.

Knowing where their **center of gravity** is at all times (even when upside down) is a vital skill for acrobats.

Many circus acrobats are former gymnasts.

**Adagio** is a kind of dance where one performer lifts and carries a balancing partner. The balancing acrobat performs splits and other poses.

## Aerial Hoop

The aerial hoop is also known as the **lyra**, **aerial ring** or **cerceau**. This circular steel apparatus looks like a hula hoop suspended from the ceiling.

Acrobats using aerial hoops can create powerful performances with static, spinning or swinging moves.

Aerial hoop classes are becoming popular as a mainstream fitness option.

## Circuses

Many modern circuses focus on the acrobatic arts — creating mood through movement, costumes, lighting and music.

The Canadian **Cirque du Soleil** is one of the most successful of these circuses.

Other famous acrobatic circuses include the Shangri-La Acrobats and the Golden Dragon Acrobats from China.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.aerialphysique.com>; <https://www.circusesandsideshow.com>; [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com)

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