

Clendenin
Method

FOUR WORDS FOR GREAT SKIING



by John Clendenin
with Peter Keelty

*LEARN THE SECRETS TO SPEED MANAGEMENT AND UNLOCK
THE DOOR TO SKIING ANYWHERE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

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How Great Skiers Ski

The Simple Moves of All Great Skiers

Let's take a closer look at the four basic moves of all great skiers and the Four Words® that form the foundation of the Clendenin Method™.

Word One: DRIFT

Great skiers like Kim Reichelm shape their turns. She creates turn shape by regulating how she moves over her skis as she finesse her edges. Great skiers finesse their edges—progressive release or engagement—as needed for various tasks, either to maximize speed, as in a race-course, or to control speed, as in moguls and powder. We call this ability to shape turns: **Drifting**.



Word Two: CENTER

In order to direct the drift, great skiers like Jonny Mosley can balance on either ski. This management of balance allows him to pressure either ski at will, especially in moguls. We call the skill of balance management: **Centering**.



Great skiers **drift** (shaping their turn) and **center** (balancing in their turn) all the time. When they change direction, they simply **touch** and **tip**.

Word Three: TOUCH

The pole touch is the cue that signals the body to commit to a new turn. The touch always precedes the turn. The touch of a great skier like Glen Plake is a seamless component of the turn. It never appears as a separate move, but rather as an integral part of his turn. This seamless use of the poles is called: **Touching**.



Word Four: TIP

The skis of great skiers like Bode Miller always tip on edge when entering a turn, and remain parallel like they're on rails. His skis appear to be extensions of his feet, allowing him to respond freely in any terrain. Moving the skis on or off edge is called: **Tipping**.



Together, these Four Words®—**Drifting** and **Centering**, **Touching**, and **Tipping**—embody the mechanics needed to link one great turn after another. Great skiers are always **drifting** to shape their turns and always **centered** on their skis. To change direction, a pole **touch** cues their feet to **tip** their skis. Their turns look seamless, balanced, and controlled. Their moves are not forced, heavy, contrived, or abrupt. Like a falling leaf, great skiers move simply and effortlessly. *All* skiers can acquire efficient technique through the Four Words® and the progressions called **Keys to the Kingdom**®.

"Since gravity holds us here, we might as well learn to dance in it. The better we get, the more it's like flying."

— Johnny C.

The Four Words[©] in Depth

◆ Tip: The Most Important Moment[®] in Skiing

“The most beautiful moment in skiing is the moment we commit to gravity—the moment the skis change edge angle, giving up their grip on the old to embrace the new. This is the moment we fall with gravity and dance.”

– Johnny C



Tipping and Edge Angles

Tipping is the act of *changing the angle* of the skis' contact with the snow. Changing edge angles initiates change of direction. Edge angle changes are referred to as *releasing* and then *engaging*.

Our initial focus is on releasing edges. Releasing engaged edges initiates a turn of skis from across the fall line to down the fall line, eliminating any need to stem or hop. As skills develop, focus shifts to engaging edges.

Engagement occurs as we maintain the tipping edge angle through the fall line. A skilled skier can progressively manage edge angle to achieve the intended drift, either for maximum edges when carving or managed edges for speed control.

Most skiers come to us with preconditioned edging skills dominated by the big-toe edge of the outside/downhill ski. To improve, they must learn to let go of their security hold with this dominant big-toe edge.

“The transition between turns is really the centerpiece of what we all do as skiers.”

Preface – **Brilliant Skiing, Every Day**, Weems Westfeldt

Drift and Center Keys

The Skill of Drifting (creating intended turn shape) is related directly to the most underrated maneuver in skiing—sideslipping. Though neglected, the sideslip is one of the easiest moves to learn. Mastery of the sideslip is mandatory for expert all-mountain skiing. Sideslipping develops balance, centering and edge control.

The Killy Stance drills show us how easy we can focus attention on sensations detected by the broad soles of the feet—the heels and the toes. During sideslipping, sensitivity develops on the sides of the feet—the Big Toe Pad[®] (B-TP) and the Epiphany Pad[®] (EP). (See p. 33.)

The Skill of Centering derives from the two activities humans do the most, standing and walking.

When stopping on a street to greet a friend and chat for a few minutes, we often stand with our feet pointed slightly out, balancing intuitively on the outside of one foot, then switching to the outside of the other. We are always on one foot or the other, or both, with either foot available beneath center for balance adjustment at any time. We do this without conscious thought.

The same is true of walking. Take a few steps. Notice that you land on the fatty tissue under the little toes and then roll to the big toe side pushing off into the next step.

Little-toe side (EP) landing and big-toe side (B-TP) push-off is most obvious in the movements of expert skaters. This is also exactly how great skiers make great turns.

Important: perform each of the following in both directions.

1) Killy, Angulation and the Kinetic Chain

(Terrain – groomed blue)

Assume the Killy Stance with skis across the hill, perpendicular to the fall line. Notice that you've engaged the uphill edges of both skis, more specifically the little-toe edge of the uphill ski and the big-toe edge of the downhill ski. Stand on the edges so that both skis are level and each would balance a full martini glass.

Now quickly empty both imaginary martini glasses up the hill by tipping *both feet to the uphill side*. Tipping the skis uphill increases the strength of the edge-set. Notice that you did not have to consciously adjust your upper body for balance. Your hips moved automatically into the hill and your head moved out over your skis.

Tipping skis up the hill created a naturally *angulated* posture. This is the body's response to movement initiated in the feet. This angulated shape in the body is the effect caused by the **Kinetic Chain**. Any action in the feet creates action in the ankles. Action then moves to the knees, then to thighs, hips, torso, shoulders and head. The **Kinetic Chain** proceeds naturally from the feet up (See Inclination with Angulation, p. 85).



Fig. 1

Keys to the Kingdom[©]

Favorite All-Inclusive Key

1) Balance Migration[©] from a "Stop" (Terrain – groomed green)

The primary purpose of the Balance Migration Key[©] is to develop awareness of the all-important relationship between your center-of-mass and your feet at turn initiation. This relationship is paramount for great skiing and especially for speed management in the bumps.

This key is like an onion with many layers. The descriptions along with the pictures address the most basic aspects of the Key. We also touch on some of the more advanced technical aspects (deeper layers) for CM skiers who have mastered the basics of this wonderful Key.

An axiom of the Clendenin Method is that the downhill/outside/bottom ski is the first ski to release into the new turn. There are three ways to release the downhill/outside/bottom ski – 1) pick it up; 2) tip it down slope; and 3) both pick it up AND tip it down slope. (See how Killy releases in our Blog Video at clendeninmethod.com - Johnny C's Blog). In the Balance Migration Key[©], we pick up the downhill ski a couple inches in order to simulate its release before the Key begins.



Stage 1 – The Beginning Stance

1) **From a Stop.** On a green slope, stand with your skis across the hill at a S-T-O-P. This exercise begins with no forward movement relative to the snow. When executed properly the skis move downslope with not one inch of forward movement.

2) **Poles.** From a standstill, place your downhill pole in the snow about a foot-and-a-half down the hill from the heel of your bottom foot. It's okay to put your hand on top of this downhill pole and use the pole for support. The up-hill pole is held out of the snow in a Killy Hand position (see page 55).

3) **Feet.** Using your pole for support, pick up your bottom/downhill ski about two inches off the snow – with your ski level and even with your uphill (stance) ski. Your top stance ski remains engaged on its little-toe edge in the snow.

Variations of Major Keys

1) Touch to Squeegee

(Terrain – groomed green/blue)

Here's another look at the Most Important Move. Practicing this little magical **Squeegee Move**[®] trains the feet to re-center us on the inside/uphill ski. When the Most Important Move is combined with the Most Important Moment (the touch-tip), it guarantees a parallel entry into our next turn. The parallel entry (no stem) is the linchpin of the Clendenin Method.



Touch to Squeegee

Here's how you practice the Touch to Squeegee Key.

1. Find a gentle, groomed green/blue run.
2. Ski directly down the fall line at a moderate speed with your feet about six inches apart (Image 1).
3. Swing the pole into the pole target - beside and halfway between the toes and the tips of your skis (Image 1).
4. As you feel the sensation of the touch in your hand and pass the pole (Image 2), tip the foot (next to the touch) and scrape it in. At first, the tip and the scrape are soft and gentle. The Squeegee (scrape-it-in) should have a consistent pressure and should be done so the boots and skis come together evenly and parallel.
5. Timing the scrape with the pole touch trains the feet to respond to the touch (not vice versa). This timing should become universal in all your skiing.
6. As you scrape and squeeze one foot toward the other, turn shape begins effortlessly (Images 3 and 4).

Mastery and Tactics

Johnny C – Keys for Speed Management in the Bumps

The following speed control techniques render mogul skiing balanced and effortless.

Note: these speed control tactics cannot be executed with a stem entry because the skier cannot stem or hop from this cross-slope angle coming up the bump.

1) Scrape Speed: Practice on Groomers

On a groomed blue run, check speed before each turn with an aggressive engagement of the uphill top ski. Make short radius turns in the fall line, braking with the little-toe edge of the uphill ski until you can maintain constant speed for multiple turns. With each check, you should feel the sensation of balance and repeating pressure on the pad of the little-toe side of the uphill foot (the Epiphany Pad®). Continue the drill until you can maintain a constant speed for multiple turns on steep groomed terrain.



2) Control Speed: In the Bumps

On an easy bump run, use the same technique to scrape speed as you did on the groomers. Slide into position for turn initiation at the top of the bump.



Using the uphill ski as a gentle brake is the most efficient way to control speed in the bumps. As a bonus, this move also puts you in position to initiate the new turn effortlessly from a balanced, top ski. Notice how the snow covers my bottom boot. The spray is coming from my top ski as I balance on it to break my speed on this steep bump run.

When you combine a series of turns by alternating pivot-turns, bump to bump, sliding down the back of each bump, and scraping speed with the uphill ski (like linked hockey stops), we call it **cascading**. These turns typically have minimal shape. Cascading is a skill useful to tame steep plateau bumps.

John Clendenin's Ski Method helps everyone ski effortlessly. He has it down pat!
– Jonny Moseley, Olympic Gold Medalist

John has a way of explaining complex things in simple terms anyone can understand... I endorse John and recommend his Ski Method.

– Stein Eriksen, Olympic Gold Medalist

Feedback from Readers of the First Edition:

We just got back from a week at Whistler where I referenced your book and then practiced some of the corresponding exercises every day... by the end of the week, the cumulative improvements added up to a breakthrough of skiing profound enough that I now have your book placed on my coffee table at the office so I can tell everyone about it!

Tara Prakriya

I have just finished reading 'The Clendenin Method' book for the first time, in preparation for the forthcoming ski season in Australia. Although I have yet to put skis on this year I know I am already a better skier. Your explanations have made explicit so many details (moves, sequences of events, points of balance, use of feet, edging technique, pole technique, summed up by Drift, Centering, Touch, Tip and the Keys of the Kingdom) that are alluded to in other books but never fully explained. Thank you for a highly readable book with wonderful, coherent, complete, and easy to comprehend descriptions of skiing technique.

Myron van der Waerden



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