

What is Parkour? This article outlines some basic principles.

In a nutshell, parkour is the art of movement in which one overcomes the obstacles in his/her surroundings in the most quick, efficient and flowing way. It encompasses running, jumping, vaulting and climbing to overcome those obstacles. Parkour can be performed without special equipment, in any environment, both natural and man-made. It requires one to develop and utilize strength, balance, agility and fluidity, and apply them with prudence, awareness, control, and cool-headedness.

The word "Parkour" is a modification of the French phrase "parcours du combattant," roughly translated as "military obstacle course." At first glance parkour looks like an extreme sport, and it certainly has many of the same qualities of an extreme sport. However, it is considered by many practitioners (known as "traceurs") as more of an art and discipline. It has creative and aesthetic elements that allow for individual expression, and also promotes inner strength and personal growth.

It introduces us to complete freedom from restraining obstacles, and it is this freedom amidst the routine and regimentation of much of modern society that makes parkour very appealing. It is a method that's available to us at any time to deal with the obstructions facing us, both mental and physical. No obstacle, no barrier, no restraint can stop the traceur; they continue moving forward in spite of, and in harmony with these.

While parkour does allow for a great deal of originality, there is a certain methodology commonly used when practicing it. The traceur chooses his/her own path through the environment adapting to and using anything in this path to create unique and flowing movement. When many techniques or moves used to overcome obstacles are linked together in an efficient and continuous way, it is known as a "run." If you see someone that looks like they're running from the police, but there is no one in pursuit, it's probably parkour.

This idea of the chase captures the movement of parkour quite well. In fact, it is the form of movement that our ancient ancestors may have used to hunt for food, or escape from predators on the plains of Africa. There is certainly an instinctual quality to it. In adapting instantaneously to whatever comes forth without thinking about it, we naturally flow over and around all obstacles. In practicing parkour, we are reviving and honing that ancient instinct.

The attitude behind parkour also incorporates the mentality of a child at play. That boundless imagination and energy combined with a complete disregard for social precedents and expectations epitomizes the traceur. Others look at a rail or wall and see a restraint; we look at it and see a launch pad. And hey, let's not forget that we do this because it's fun! The world is our jungle gym, let's go play.