Secrets of the Handstand

By Logan Christopher

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DISCLAIMER

The exercises and advice contained within this book may be too strenuous or dangerous for some people, and the reader should consult with a physician before engaging in them.

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Secrets of the Handstand

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# Table of Contents

- Intro  
- Praise for the Secrets of the Handstand System  
- No Excuses  
- Leadup Stunts  
- Kicking Up Against the Wall  
- Wall Handstand  
- Reverse Handstand  
- Cartwheel Up  
- Walkup  
- Wall Walking  
- Frogstand  
- Advanced Frogstand  
- Tuck Planche  
- Headstand  
- Yoga Headstand  
- Headstand Leg Raises  
- Forearm Stand  
- Elbow Lever  
- One Arm Elbow Lever  
- 60 Seconds  
- Balancing on the Wall  
- One Leg Wall Balancing Drill  
- Hand Position  
- Wrist Flexibility  
- Kickups in the Open  
- Bob Jones Style  
- Gymnastics Style  
- Kick-up Practice Drill  
- Pressing Up  
- Getting Down from the Handstand  
- How to Balance  
- Hands  
- Elbows  
- Shoulders  
- Head  
- Don’t Walk  
- Arch vs. Straight  
- Shoulder Flexibility  
- Back Flexibility  
- Achieving a Straight Handstand  
- How Often Should I Train?  
- Sample Training  
- What’s Next?  
- More Resources
Intro

Welcome to Secrets of the Handstand.

Many years ago I watched my friend first do a handstand. It wasn’t very good, but immediately I was hooked. And I wanted to be able to do it too. Unfortunately it wasn’t easy. I started practicing regularly. I began to search out any and all information I could find on how to do the handstand but really couldn’t find much at all.

Eventually I stumbled across some old books by the best hand balancers of their time and this got me started. With more practice over a couple years it became easy to hold a stable freestanding handstand.

I began a website for people like me, who wanted to learn how to do this, and more advanced skills, but lacked the information on how to get there.

Back in 2008 I released a DVD called the Secrets of the Handstand Quick Start. It’s aim was simple, to give a proven step-by-step plan to achieving a 30 second freestanding handstand. You see, I had taken the long and slow road on achieving my handstand, by going straight for it. Only after I struggled along for more then a year did I have some success. But I learned there was a much faster way. These ideas came to me from Professor Orlick, and were refined with my own experimentation with myself and clients.

Later on I refined the system and now it’s in it’s 3rd version, with tons of extra tips and drills to make your progress even faster. And for the first time I’ve written a manual to go along with the DVD’s for this system.

You can get the first version of the video online for free! All you have to do is go to [www.LostArtOfHandBalancing.com](http://www.LostArtOfHandBalancing.com) and signup with your email address. You’ll immediately receive the video which will show you better then words and pictures can how to do many of the drills in this book.

I would recommend you read through this book once in it’s entirety. Then go back and start using the drills for wherever you’re at. It’s meant to be a reference guide that you can refer back to again and again.
Praise for the Secrets of the Handstand System

All these testimonials are for earlier versions of the system. What you now hold in your hands is even better.

Better Explanations Then Anywhere Else
"I have viewed the video......You did an awesome job explaining the technique and showing the variations of handbalancing. I especially liked the part where you taught the forearm stand, I tested myself out on that and did what everyone really starts at shrugging the shoulders and not keeping the upper arms perpendicular to the floor, I held that for a few seconds then I tried the best I could the way you did it and was difficult but I held for a second or 2 longer then what I originally tried. The frogstand was better explained then I was originally taught and with practice I know I can get better. Great job bro and I will be practicing these more often no matter what.....You got something special here and its made me want to do better in my conditioning and coordination."
-Ben Bergman

More Progress in 3 Months than 3 Years!
"If I had Logan's Secrets of the Handstand DVD I could have made more progress in a couple months than my first 3 years!"
-Tyler J. Bramlett

Making Instant Breaktrhurs
"I was playing around the other day with the frog stand and I had a hard time till I watched it again and overlooked a key element you mentioned. I was afraid at first of smashing my face in the ground....but lo and behold when I gripped the ground hard I stayed in that position for about a minute! If I can make instant progress like that I can’t wait to see what this month of training will bring me. Having someone around my age put in there own words how they achieved there goals makes it easier for everyday folks to understand."
-Felix Cincotta

Consistent Kick-up and 20 Second Handstand
"The quickstart handstand guide has definitely helped me with holding a handstand. As a bit of background, my fitness level was pretty high from a mixture of weight lifting and other sports. I could just about hold a rather shaky handstand before I started, but it was all from strength, not skill. The things that really helped was how to kick-up into the handstand, and the technique of leaning into the hands to increase stability. The longest I’ve held a handstand for is just over 20 secs, which I’m very pleased with. The kick-up is a lot more consistent, I would say I manage to catch about 7/10 handstands I attempt. I really appreciate the techniques you’ve shared, particularly because the approach was not from a pure gymnastics background."
-Roger Earp of Kent, UK
How to Hit Sweet Spots Magically Transfers over in Video
"I practiced the tiger stand a lot against the wall but after weeks of practice I could never consistently find that "sweet spot." After seeing you do a tiger stand in the video, that same day, when I went to the gym it took me 2 tries and now I can easily and consistently find the "sweet spot" hold the tiger stand. I must have unconsciously picked up something when I watched you kick up and hold the tiger stand.

Another thing I learned from the video is that the kick up is way more important than I originally thought. I was basically muscling the handstand back from my kick up (which was way too hard). I could do it but it took a lot of energy. For the past few days I just worked my kick up over and over again. After only 2 days of working my kick up I am hitting my "sweet spot" 8 times out of 10 when before I was only hitting it 1 or 2 times out of 10 and the other handstand attempts I was muscling back from an over anxious kick up.

So, your videos were helpful to even someone like myself who has been practicing handstands successfully for several weeks. Just seeing someone else do the move and step me through the process, which is something I have read about and knew all ready, helped me greatly. Thanks a lot."
-Ricky Duelley

70 Year Old Consistently Holding 10 Second Handstands
"I'm now able to correct my under or over balance in time to stay nice-and-straight for almost 10 seconds. I've discovered how easy it is to over-correct! It's definitely important to be gentle! Your Quick Start DVD has been very helpful. It applies well even to a 70 year old student! Thanks again."
- Richard Cabot

"Good step by step program that will give you quick progression."
- Omari Rose of New York, NY

"Great reminders of the basics, reminding me to correct my form, to get back to basics, everything flows from there."
- David Kelso of Glasgow, UK

"The frogstand was useful in that it showed me another way to strengthen my wrists for handstands (and other uses)."
- Les Green of Omaha, NE

"The tips on hand placement and shoulder positioning were excellent!!!"
- Matthew Nelson of Toronto, Canada

"Very good course! Now I can balance far away from the wall, with the help of one leg only. Even can free stand for about 3-4 seconds."
- Dmitry Gubenko of North Caulfield, Australia
"The lead up skills were very helpful as was the focus on total body tension."
- Donald Thomas Nicholson of South Lyon, MI

"Yes some of the exercises helped my balance, and starting from scratch to attempt a static handstand was also very useful as I was walking around to keep my balance instead of mastering balance first and then walking."
- Simon Fell of Lincoln, UK

"The lead up exercises were great in developing hand balance and strength."
- Brendan Blake of Jerrabomberra, Australia

"It has given me progressions for getting to the handstand - not there yet, but building good frogs, heads and wall handstands."
- Matt Staples of Nottingham, UK

"Providing a foundation within the quickstart guide was key and helped me improve my overall strength, endurance, and coordination."
- Sly Chatman of Phoenix, AZ

And that’s just some of what I have available.

By the way I would love to hear of your success. Please drop me an email at info@lostartofhandbalancing.com with your success story anytime.

You can also write a review on Amazon for this book, which will help other people to get this system and start achieving their handstand goals.
No Excuses

There are no excuses. If you want to learn the handstand you can do it.

Height doesn’t matter. I’m 6’2”. While this is a disadvantage for any gymnastic skill you’re still able to do anything. Sure it will take more work, but you can do it.

Age doesn’t matter. Yes, it’s much easier if you start out when you’re young, but unless you have a time machine or are young right now, that’s not an option. Why complain about it? Just practice instead. I have 70 year old clients that learned the handstand using this formula.

Weight doesn’t matter. Again, a lighter weight is certainly easier. But it won’t stop you. This picture of Bert Assirati will answer your questions about if it can be done when you’re heavy or not.
Lead-up Stunts

This entire system is based on one thing. That is the use of lead-up stunts. But what are lead-up stunts? Let’s talk about the handstand first. Many people, myself included, started trying from the get-go to balance out in the open. They fall over again and again. They are unable to hold for any length of time. (I’m sorry if you’re not holding a handstand for at least 5 seconds you’re not HOLDING a handstand.)

So instead of going straight for the handstand, why not work on easier skills. An analogy I like to use is with the deadlift. If you do exercises in the gym you’re probably aware of this basic strength movement. All it involves is picking up a barbell off the ground. If you were to walk into a gym your first day, would you immediately try to lift 500 lbs? Absolutely not. Instead you would start with what you could lift and build up from there, with progressive jumps over time.

Yet people go into the handstand just like going for a 500 lb. deadlift. But you can’t just take weight off yourself in order to do the handstand. Instead you need to start with more basic skills, that take less body leverage, less balance, and allow you to build up slowly to the handstand. Although I say slowly, this does allow you to achieve the handstand much faster through the systematic use of the lead-up stunts in the pages to follow.

The five main lead-up stunts are as follows:

1. Wall Handstand
2. Frogstand
3. Headstand
4. Forearm Stand
5. Elbow Lever

You’ll also find a number of variations and related drills you can do around these, but these are the main five you’ll want to work on.

You’ll find some come easier to you then others, but each helps you in one or more ways towards developing the skills you need to do the handstand.
Kicking Up Against the Wall

Before we can do the wall handstand we need to cover how you get into the position. The easiest way to get there is to kick-up into position. Use a stable and clear wall. This makes it the easiest and most safe way to get started so you’re not worried about falling or hitting anything on your way up or down.

Start with the hands about one foot from the wall. The hands should be pointed forwards, or just slightly to the outside. If your wrists are not flexible enough to support your weight look at the later section on wrist flexibility.

Keep the elbows locked out. At no time do you want to allow the arms to bend when you are holding a handstand. This sets up a bad habit to balance with bending the arms. Furthermore, you’re strongest when you are supported by your bone structure rather then relying on the muscles of the arms. Of course if you’re doing bent arm presses or handstand pushups this is a different matter but for now keep them locked both during the kick-up and the hold.

Start in a sprinter’s stance with one foot behind the other. You’re going to kick hard off the back leg up towards the wall. When it is raised high, you’ll jump off the other leg. When you first try this everyone has a tendency to under kick, that is not use enough force to get into the handstand. So start there but then kick a little harder until you get both feet on the wall. Avoid kicking too hard that your foot goes through the wall or that you bounce off.

You can use a spotter to assist you in getting up into position, but with a tiny bit of practice you should easily master this yourself. If you feel very unsafe you can put pillows or other cushions around so that if you fall you won’t hurt yourself.

Another thing that stops people is that they lose all sense of balance and control when they get upside down. Don’t worry. This will become easy with practice as you begin to become familiar with being upside down.

Now that you’re in the handstand position it’s time to hold it.
Wall Handstand

This is the first lead-up stunt. This trains the handstand position while virtually eliminating the balancing aspect of it. It allows you to get comfortable being upside down, to get the correct body position, and build endurance for standing on your hands.

As before keep your elbows locked out. Also thing of shrugging the shoulders up towards your ears.

Later on in this book we will discuss the differences in an arched handstand and a straight handstand. Suffice to say, for now, either way is fine as long as it’s comfortable to you.

The head can be in line with the arms or looking down at the floor and your hands. This second position is usually the easier one, later on when you’re balancing, but doesn’t matter much when you’re against the wall.

Keep the legs together and point the toes upwards. With this your entire body should be rigid, but not full of 100% tension.

Do not hold your breath. This is a common mistake people make while trying to hold the handstand. Instead breathe normally.

It is normal, at least in the beginning, to feel all the blood rush to your head. This will become more comfortable with time. Also breathing properly, rather then holding your breath, helps.

Work to increase the amount of time you can hold in this position.
**Reverse Handstand**

The reverse handstand is a wall handstand where you face the other way. Instead of your back facing the wall, your front side will.

Everything about the position is the same except that you’ll find this exercise has a much different feel to it.

This is the favored way of gymnasts as it tends to build the straight style of handstand better, while the regular wall handstand allows you to arch more. As the straight style is harder to do, the reverse handstand against the wall will also be harder to hold.

The biggest thing to work on besides extending the amount of time you can hold this position, is to bring your hands even closer to the wall. This requires more shoulder flexibility and a straighter handstand.

What many beginners end up in is a position that’s more like a very elevated pushup. This changes the effects bringing the chest more into play, and also working the core, rather then getting in a real handstand position. This is fine as an exercise, but if you’re working to improve your handstand, make sure you get vertical.

There are a couple of different ways to get into this position which we will address next.
Cartwheel Up

Before attempting this move you should be at least halfway decent with doing regular cartwheels. If you’re not here is an article and video that will walk you through them - http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/articles/how-to-do-a-cartwheel/

The only difference here is you’re doing the cartwheel in order to get into the reverse wall handstand position. You place one hand down followed by the other and as soon as you’re about vertical you’ll touch the feet to the wall. If you’re not completely vertical you can then walk your hands back and your feet up further the wall to get into your final position.

Try doing this with both sides, although most people will find they prefer one way more then the other.

This same method can easily be used to get out of the handstand.

It should go without saying that you need more space for this method and you’ll want to be sure you won’t kick anything or anyone when you get up or come down out of the position.
**Walkup**

The other method to get into the reverse handstand is the walkup. This requires less acrobatic ability but a little more strength.

Start crouched down with your butt facing the wall. Place your hands down on the ground as if you were about to get into a pushup position. Instead now you’ll walk your feet up the wall and walk your hands closer to the wall at the same time.

You can get into and out of the handstand the same way. Raising up and lowering down itself is a great exercise for building arm and shoulder strength, as well as teaching you to keep tight in the midsection and the whole body.

Another alternative for getting out of the reverse handstand is rolling out. You’d bend your arms, tuck your head, and roll out of the handstand.
Wall Walking

A variation of doing a handstand against the wall is to start walking. If holding the position is easy, you can make the move more dynamic. This is great to lead-up to walking on your hands in a freestanding handstand, which will be addressed later.

This can be done either in the normal, or reverse, handstand.

To walk you pick up one hand and step slightly to the side. The other hand is then raised and follows. Make sure to go in both directions.

Try to keep your body tight as you walk. This is a good habit for the future. If you allow things to go loose, when you try balancing later with movement you’ll fall right out of position. Keep everything in control while you walk to your left and right across the wall.

Walking on the hands builds more strength and stability in the arms and shoulders, even done in this easy wall manner.

You can work to go a further distance or increase the amount of time you spend walking.
**Frogstand**

The next main lead-up stunt is the frog stand. This is known by many other names like the crowstand, gargoyle and the knees on elbows stand.

The frogstand teaches you to balance on your hands. Although you are maintaining your entire bodyweight like in the handstand, and just on your hands, the leverage of the movement is much less. You have a center of gravity at least three times lower then the handstand so it’s much easier to balance. Yet it teaches you to move the hands exactly as you need in the handstand.

Start out in a squat close to the ground. Place your hands pointing forwards a little further then shoulder width apart on the floor. Spread the fingers wide and grip the ground.

Bend the elbows to about 90 degrees. Place your knees on the outside of the elbows. Tip your body forward until all your weight is supported on your hands, with your knees fully supported on the elbows.

Once you are up in the air with only the hands touching the ground you’re in the frogstand and you’re goal is to balance.

You’ll find how to over and under balance using your hands. If you press hard into the ground with your fingers you’ll come right to your feet. If you let up completely with your fingers you’d faceplant if you didn’t stop yourself in some other way.

So as you balance manipulate your body using your hands and fingers to keep yourself in the air.

One other note. As you improve the amount of time you can hold this position you may notice that the hard part is not balancing but in keeping in the tucked position. You may even find your knees starting sliding off your elbows. To combat this you’ll have to keep the abs tight and squeeze in with the legs.
Advanced Frogstand

The advanced frogstand will not necessarily build your balancing ability any more then the regular frogstand. But it can help with future moves, and some people even prefer it to the regular frogstand although it is harder.

In this position you’re still going to support your knees against the elbows, but instead of them being on the sides they’ll be pressed into the back of the elbows, and the elbows will be kept straight rather then bent.

This does train the straight arm position needed for the handstand, but is more a lead-up stunt towards straight arm presses and the planche. For this and the following move you may turn your hands out to the sides to relieve the wrist strain.
**Tuck Planche**

This is another move that helps strengthen the body, but doesn’t help much with balancing.

It is the first in a long line of progressions towards a full planche. Yet this preliminary move is beyond most people.

Here again you’ll have straight arms, but now you’re supporting your entire weight with your arms alone. The knees are on the inside and not touching the arms at all. You tuck the knees up to your chest and raise yourself off of the ground.

This requires arm, shoulder and abdominal strength to be able to do.
Headstand

The headstand is the third main lead-up stunt for the handstand. It teaches you to balance your body in the open, but here you have a much bigger base of support, so balancing is easier to do.

The easiest way to do the headstand is to get into a tripod position. That is your head will be on the ground and the hands will be in front of your face to form a triangle.

Some people recommend to do the headstand on the top of your head. Others recommend to be more on your forehead where the hairline starts. I suggest you try both and find out which one works better for you.

If you’ve never done a headstand before I recommend you start out against a wall. If you overbalance it is trickier to save yourself then in a handstand. So until you are comfortable doing it in the open, use a wall to spot yourself. You can kick up with your feet against the wall then easily bring them off to do the headstand.

You can kick your legs up into place like in the kick-up used for the handstand against the wall. You can also raise them up in a leg raise which will be covered soon.

Keep the body tight. Keep the legs straight, together and the toes pointed. The back can be kept straight or slightly arched.

Balance by pressing down, or letting up with the hands as needed.
Yoga Headstand

This is an advanced variation of the headstand. It lessens your base of support and thus requires you to keep the balance better with your body.

In this headstand instead of your hands being placed across the ground you’re going to clasp them behind the head. So your base that is touching the ground will be your head, and the forearms. Your base has shrunken almost in half.

This becomes much tougher to balance and correct yourself in. So after you’ve mastered the regular headstand and can hold it for a long time, give this one a shot.

As a slightly easier version then this, but harder then the regular headstand you can put your hands and head in a line, rather then in a triangle formation.

For even harder versions you can eventually balance on your head alone, with no hands or arms to support. This is a very advanced move. If you’d like to work up to it check out this article: http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/articles/head-balancing/
**Headstand Leg Raises**

This exercise helps build strength and control in the midsection.

Start in the basic headstand with both feet still on the ground.

To start with the easy version bend the knees of both legs. Instead of kicking up you’re going to contract your abs and raise them up until they are overhead and straight. Lower them down in the same manner and repeat.

You can then move on to doing this with the legs straight but in a straddle position, that is spread wide.

And finally you’ll work with the legs piked, that is straight and together. Raise them up until they are overhead, then lower until the toes touch the ground, and repeat.

There are also more advanced variations that help towards press handstands but this is enough to get started for most people.
Forearm Stand

The forearm stand is the fourth main lead-up stunt. It is not seen nearly as much as the others, but that doesn’t make it any less useful. It is known by other names like the lion or tiger stand.

The forearm stand builds your balancing in the open ability. It has a bigger base of support then the handstand, but less then the regular headstand. It’s also slightly more removed from the ground making it a little harder.

Plus it is great for developing shoulder and back flexibility.

When you’re first trying this move I encourage you to do it against the wall. For most people it is even more foreign to them then the handstand, so may you want to start slow.

Place the forearms and hands on the ground. They should run parallel to each other and not point in at the elbows or the hands. The elbows should be bent at 90 degrees with the back of the arm being measured. The hands should be flat on the floor with the fingers spread.

The head will be pointed at the floor and the nose only an inch or two above it. From this position you kick up into the forearm stand. As mentioned before this requires more back flexibility then a regular handstand.

When you’re balancing press down with the hands to save from overbalancing. Let up on the hands and press down with the elbows to stop from underbalancing.

The forearm stand is necessary to be able to do Tiger Bends, which are an advanced pressing move that involves going from the forearm stand into the handstand. It’s an amazing move, but don’t even think about trying it yet.
**Elbow Lever**

This is the final main lead-up stunt for the handstand. This move is also known as a two arm half planche.

The lever builds balancing ability though in a different manner then the handstand. Mostly it teaches you to keep your body tight in a levered out position.

Kneel down on the ground. The hands will be placed with the fingers pointing backwards or to the outsides. The elbows are bent and placed against the abdomen. The more inside you can be the better off you are. If your elbows are on the outsides of your body you won’t be able to support your weight.

With your hands on the ground and the body resting against the elbows you’re going to stick your head and upper body forward. Your feet will serve as the counter-balance. Straighten the legs. Arch the back slightly as you bring the feet off the ground and balance in this position.

The elbows will be bent less then 90 degrees for this moves as you must be slightly levered forward to counter-balance the legs. This is because you’re body is not split 50/50 where the balancing point is. Yet most people try to keep the 90 degree angle in this move, and this leads to them not being able to balance.

The first time you do this move you’ll likely find it’s quite uncomfortable with the elbows digging in. Be sure to flex the abs so you’re not actually poking your organs. Besides that you’ll gain comfortability with practice.
**One Arm Elbow Lever**

This is actually quite an advanced exercise. I just wanted to mention it as something you can work up to later.

The only difference with this move is you’ll know be on one arm rather then two. The balance of this move is much trickier, as you’re not only going back and forth but side to side as well.

You can start it out easier with the legs tucked or straddled, and then work up to the legs straight and together position.

Also you’ll notice some lean towards the side you’re balancing on is completely normal.
**60 Seconds**

Here are your first goals. Before you even attempt the freestanding handstand I want you to work up to one minute or 60 seconds in each of the main lead-up stunts.

1. Wall Handstand
2. Frogstand
3. Headstand
4. Forearm Stand
5. Elbow Lever

You’ll find that some of these come easier than others. If they do you can work on some of the other variations. For instance if the headstand is easy, but you’re still working towards the other moves, do the yoga headstand and try to get to 60 seconds there.

It’s not an absolute requirement that you master every one of these moves. But if you do build up to 60 seconds in each of these moves, then the freestanding handstand will be much, much easier.

Everyone wants to skip ahead to that part, but without the foundation it’s just going to be frustrating work. Contrary to that, working on these moves you’ll probably find you can add time just about every day to most if not all of these moves, at least in the beginning.
Balancing on the Wall

If you’ve held a handstand against the wall for 60 seconds you can begin to work towards balancing while still against the wall. This means you bring your feet a little off the wall and work on balancing using your hands. At first you may only get a couple seconds, but with practice you’ll start feeling the balance and gain the ability to make the necessary corrections to hold this position.

There are two different ways you can work on this, the two leg and one leg versions. Either of these can be done in a regular wall handstand or the reverse position.

For the two leg version you’ll use a little force with the toes to bring both you feet off of the wall. Remember to keep them tight and together. Try to keep your body position the same the entire time.

I’ve noticed that some people when doing this tend to change the arch in their back more or less as the try to come off the wall. That’s why I favor the next version more.
One Leg Wall Balancing Drill

Here you’re going to only touch the wall with the toes of one foot. The other leg should be kept in the place it would normally stay in in the handstand.

Again, this works for the regular or reverse position. Remember to switch legs.

If you’re in the regular position you’ll have to distance yourself from the wall more then you normally would. You want to be the full length of your lower leg away from the wall so that the upper leg and still be in line with the other leg.

For the reverse position it won’t require more then a little separation of the legs.

When you’re starting out keep the leg you use against the wall in it’s same position so that if you need it you can reach and touch the wall right there. As you progress and get better you can move the leg to its normal handstand position. Remember to move slowly and in control as movement tends to throw off your balance.

It is ideal to work up to at least 15 seconds of a freestanding balance in one of these wall balancing drills before you move onto the balancing out in the open.
Hand Position

Let’s talk about hand positions. The normal position you want for handstands is for the index or middle finger pointing directly forwards. The hands should be placed on the ground exactly shoulder width apart.

But there are sometimes when you want to go with a wider hand position. For instance in presses it can be easier to both turn the hands to the outside and go wider then shoulder width. This may make the press easier, but then balancing in the handstand will be harder.

Some people have a hard time doing handstands because of a lack of wrist flexibility and pain that may be associated with that. This was something that I battled with for a long time. Some helpful drills are in the next chapter.

Alternatives to the hands flat on the ground position are a way to work around this issue. They also give the wrists a rest to some degree, and many will find they’re actually easier to balance with, after some getting use to them.

The first option is parallel bars. These change the balancing from wrist flexion and extension to ulnar and radial deviation. Basically you change the way the wrists bend in order to keep your balance. These keep your wrists straight and thus relieve any strain caused by supporting weight in a fully extended wrist position. You can use any pushup handles, parallel bars or any number of other options.

The second option is hand balancing stands. These still keep the hands flat, but the fingers can then wrap around. If you watch any professional hand balances you’ll almost always see them use some version of hand balancing stands in their act. This is because you can grip the object and have even better control of your balance, which is important for even more advanced moves like the one arm handstand. I’ve made pairs of these available for purchase at:

http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/products/hand-balancing-stands/

In any case, when you’re first starting out you may notice your hands and wrists become sore and/or fatigued. With regular practice you’ll be able to build up the volume you can do. In the beginning don’t over do it, but allow time for your body to adapt. You can also use the substitute hand position methods as you see fit.
**Wrist Flexibility**

Understand that the handstand in the normal position requires your wrist to be able to bend back 90 degrees. For some people this is easy. For others not so much. Luckily there are a few things you can do about it.

First off, just working on handstands by themselves for most people will be enough to build up the strength and flexibility required.

For others you may need to add in some supplementary stretching. Before I start hand balancing I’ll spend just a few seconds loosening my wrists. I do this by grabbing the fingers with the opposite hand and pulling back, focusing more on getting the wrist stretch then just the fingers. Do this with straight elbows. For me this is enough to get started at this point.

However, earlier in my life I sustained some injuries and had a real hard time even holding a handstand due to my right wrist. If you need to go even further I would recommend stretching out after your practice or at a separate time.

My favorite stretch involves getting into the Cobra position from yoga. However the difference is that you’re going to point your hands back towards your body and keep the pinkies touching. If you can’t do this from the start you can keep your hands further out, or even slightly pointed out to the sides.

I also like to balance this out by going to the other side, working on wrist flexion. While kneeling on the ground I’ll place the back of the hands on the floor pointing towards my feet. Then I’ll apply pressure down. If you can withstand the strain you can go into a pushup position like this.
Kickups in the Open

In this book so far we have talked a lot about balance. That is one part, and a very important one, of being able to hold a freestanding handstand. However there is another equally as important point. And that is getting up into the position.

The easiest way to do this is the kick-up. We covered the beginner’s version before, of starting in the sprinter’s stance. You can do this out in the open, however it quickly becomes a waste of time, to have to get into a down position before you kick up. That is why we’re going to go into two superior versions of kicking up. Once you’ve mastered these you’ll also be able to use them against the wall.

Let’s look at two people. Let’s assume both these people have balanced 15 seconds in the handstand when coming off the wall and done all the lead-up stunts successfully.

But one person has not practiced their kick-up at all. As they work on doing the freestanding handstand they kick up and come right down many times. They have a hard time hitting the sweet spot where they can even begin to balance. Maybe they hit one out of ten and then they can actually practice balancing in the handstand.

The other person has practiced their kick-up diligently. They get up into the sweet spot 8 or 9 times out of ten. They can then work on their balance as they’re in the range where they can balance using their hands. This person will spend a lot more time actually practicing the handstand then the other person without as much wasted effort and frustration.

Understand if you’re not within a certain limited range, especially when you’re starting out, then nothing you do will save your handstand and you’ll come to your feet. So by practicing the kick-up you can actually get into this range. Having your kick-up dialed in so you can use the same force each time will allow you to get lots more balancing practice in a lot less time. Yes, it’s that important.

Trust me, I was on the wrong side of this equation when I got started and I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I did.
Bob Jones Style

This version is taught in The True Art and Science of Hand Balancing by Bob Jones which is available at:

Since this was my first exposure to how to kick up it is the one I have used all along. It specifically goes better with an arched style of handstand.

The simple idea behind this one is to keep the arms perpendicular to the ground the whole time. So once they are in position they never leave it. Instead your body and legs rotate into place around the arms.

Starting in a standing position with your arms hanging by your sides. Have one leg (the one you’re going to kick up with first) slightly behind the other. As you bend forward at the hips this leg raises up and the arms come straight down to the ground. The kicking leg generates enough force, with the other leg coming up to meet it, to get you into the handstand.

What you want to avoid with this method is diving into position. Your arms come straight down. They do not move forward because then everything has to get into place. It’s also then harder to use the same force each time, because it depends on how much you dive.
**Gymnastics Style**

This is the kickup method done by all gymnasts. For these reasons it is preferable to do with a straight handstand position.

Here you start with your hands locked out overhead. They will remain in this position the entire time. Although they are in a different position, they once again do not move.

Lunge forward with one foot as you bow down and reach your hands to the ground. Kick off with your back leg and bring the other foot to meet it. You should get up into a straight handstand.

So with this method you ARE diving forwards as opposed to the Bob Jones style.

Depending on which handstand you’re going for will be the primary driver in which kick-up style you end up using. In the beginning I recommend trying out both to figure out what works for you best.
Kick-up Practice Drill

This drill is the best way to dial in your kick-up. This works regardless of which kick-up style you choose to do.

For this drill we will use a wall. The object of this drill is just to kick up into a freestanding handstand, hold the position for 2 seconds, and then come back to your feet. You are not working on holding the handstand, except getting into the correct and stable position, in this drill.

The wall is there in case you kick too hard and overbalance. Instead of having to get out and reset yourself you just come back to your feet. If you underbalance you’re right where you need to be to do it again. So this same drill can be done without a wall, but it may take a little more effort.

You repeat the kick-up for 10 or 20 reps. When you can nail a handstand with almost all, or every single rep, you’re doing great. Keep practicing until you get to this point.
Pressing Up

There are other methods of getting into the handstand. These include all variations of bent arm or straight arm pressing.

The kick-up is the easiest and least effort move to get into the handstand. All presses are harder to do.

The Hand Balancing Mastery Course covers all manners of pressing and much else: http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/products/hand-balancing-mastery-course/

You’ll want to work on these movements in the future, but for now forget about them.
Getting Down from the Handstand

We’ve covered getting up into the position. What about getting down?

There are a number of methods you can use, some better then others. You must know these to be able to safely practice the handstand out in the open.

Underbalancing. Any time you underbalance you simply come back to your feet. You can rest or reset and then move onto the next attempt. All other methods here refer to when you overbalance.

The Cartwheel Method. This is the easiest and most used method. All you do is take a step with one hand, turn and cartwheel out of the handstand. That means after your hand touches your foot will come down, followed by the other foot and then you’re on your feet once again.

The Roll Method. When you overbalance you can tuck your head, bend your arms, round your back, and do a somersault out of the handstand. Make sure you properly tuck and round or else you could land flat and possibly injure yourself. This method is not preferred because it takes more time and effort, plus you don’t necessarily want to roll in all areas where you might practice hand balancing.

The Bridge Method. This is NOT recommended except as a more advanced stunt. When you overbalance you’ll arch your back and land in a hand bridge with both feet. If your bridging skills aren’t up to par don’t try this. But if you do want to I recommend getting started with this article on the gymnast bridge:

http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/articles/gymnast-bridge/
How to Balance

Next we’re going to address the different ways you can balance yourself in the handstand. Some of these are better than others. Some are to be used for normal balance. Other methods can be used when you need to save your position.

Let me start with what to me was a big AHA moment. Have you ever balanced a broom or other straight object on your hand? If you’ve done this then you know that in order to keep this balanced you pay attention to the top of the object. By seeing it move you can easily correct the balance by shifting the bottom.

However, if you pay attention to the bottom, by the time you notice it’s not balanced it may be too late to correct it. And if you do correct, often times you'll overcorrect and come down anyways.

This same fact holds true in the handstand. Although you are looking at your hands most of the time, you need to pay attention to your feet. If you keep your body tight, any movement at the feet can be felt and then corrected. Your manipulations with the hands or shoulders will then move the feet, assuming your body is kept tight. If it’s not then the correction will not be transmitted and you’ll likely lose balance.

So while you may be watching your hands, keep your mind on your feet. This way you can easily correct the balance. Of course, this takes practice, but we will get into additional tips to help you out.
**Hands**

It is called HAND balancing for a reason. Not only are you on your hands but a large portion of the balance comes from what you do with the hands. You should already be familiar with this from what we covered before starting with the frogstand.

When you are shifting towards overbalancing you will press in harder with your fingers. When you are shifting towards underbalancing you will let up with the fingers.

Because of how your hand is in this position you have much better control towards the overbalancing side. This is because your hand goes off in one direction. That is the hand extends from the wrist on one side only and not the other. For this reason you should keep slightly towards overbalancing as you have more control there.

You also want to spread your fingers wide. This gives you a slightly wider base then if the fingers were close together. Also focusing on gripping the ground. Some people even advise keeping the fingers slightly bent. By doing so you have better strength which you can exert thru the fingers.

If you think about the length of your hand from the end of the palm to the tips of the fingers strive to keep the balance in the middle where the palm goes into the first knuckles of the fingers.
Elbows

If you bend your elbows you can save yourself from underbalancing. This is a last resort and not something you want to get into the habit of doing in order to balance. It is much better to keep your arms locked out the entire time when you are balancing and use the fingers and the shoulders to do the rest of the work. That’s because both of these work in two directions to some degree while the elbows only go one.

By unlocking the elbows you’re then relying on the strength of your arms. You won’t be able to hold handstands for a long time this way, whether freestanding or against the wall. Yes you need this strength for presses, but it is best to only do that when you intend to press, and not slip into this to save your balancing, like in the handstand pushup below.

If you find yourself bending the arms a lot while holding handstands make a conscious effort to lock them out hard and keep them there while balancing.
Shoulders

The shoulders, besides that hands, are the other main areas where you can shift your balance from. In the beginning I tell people to focus 100% on the hands for the balance. This is because the shoulder weaving is a little more advanced. That being said once you have some balancing ability with the hands its not too hard to start using the shoulders.

When overbalancing, you’ll push the shoulders back in the opposite way. This is like bringing the head through further past the shoulders. To carry this very far you’d end up going into the Grand Arch position where your chest is extended far back and your legs far forward.

When underbalancing you’ll end up planching to some degree. The end conclusion of this would be the full planche move though most people won’t go nearly that far. Usually only a little is needed to save yourself from an underbalance. Your shoulders shoot forward (remembering to keep the elbows locked if you can) to save the balance.

Once you regain balancing using either of these shoulder weaves you’ll work to get back into the main balance where you then take back main control with your hands.

The truth is if you stay perfectly balanced the hands can do all the work. You only need this and other techniques when you go outside of what you can accomplish with the hands.
Head

The head should not be used as a main component for balancing. That doesn’t mean moving it won’t change your balance though. Soon we’ll be covering arched and straight handstands. One of the differences there is where the head lies. Part of this is because the body follows the head. If you tilt your head back to look at the ground your body will tend to arch. If you keep it in line with your arms its easier to keep a straight back. But this also shifts the balance point.

If you bring your head down, through the shoulders, and tuck your head to your chest, any shift along this line would throw you into overbalance.

If you tilt your head back more to your back this will put you into underbalance.

When you are balancing you shouldn’t rely on the use of the head, though occasionally you may need it. The reason you don’t want to rely on it is it should stay in one place. The inner ear is used for your balance. If it’s moving around you have to reorient yourself to some degree. By keeping your head stationary it’s easier to balance.
Don’t Walk

There is another method of balancing that can be done but should be strictly avoided. That is walking, or rather stumbling around, on the hands.

The reason for this is simple. Walking on your hands is actually easier to do then just standing on them. This is because you can walk in whatever direction to catch your balance. However, if you rely on this then you may never learn how to stand still.

In my opinion, walking on the hands should only be done after you can stand still. It should be treated as a more advanced skill so that you can do it under control and start and stop when you choose.

So when you are practicing standing on your hands any time you over or under balance and take a step with your hands come down to your feet and start over. Don’t try to save it and get back in position, cause mostly likely you’ll end up stumbling around more.

Also I would avoid the legs bent at the knees position in your handstand except for some specific reasons.
Arch vs. Straight

Is the arched handstand wrong? Many people will say yes, but I disagree.

While you don’t see it as the mainstay for gymnasts or professionals anymore, it use to be the only way to do it. A straight handstand was saved as a more advanced skill, which it is.

Some people also say the arch will hurt your back. This is not true, as long as you’re not excessively arching, and don’t overdo it.

Some say you can never get to advanced skills with an arch. Again, not true. There were many people that could do one handed handstands with an arch in years past. While it might not be as effective, as a straight handstand, those skills are possible.

Here is why I teach a curved or banana handstand position as some people call it. The arched handstand is an easier position to learn and people will be able to master it in a fraction of the time it would take to master the straight handstand. It’s also the natural position a newbie will take when they attempt a handstand. That’s why I encourage most people to start there. Then the straight handstand can be learned once you have the foundation.

The arch also has it’s uses. Even among gymnasts most will go into the arch when walking forwards, because it is much easier to do, then in a straight handstand.

Still, if you want to learn how to do a straight handstand only, this book will provide you with the details to do that. For the most part everything is the same, just a few small changes it what we do.
Shoulder Flexibility

One important part of the straight handstand is that it takes a lot more shoulder flexibility than the arched position. You must be able to lock out both arms completely overhead and even a little beyond for optimal balance and positioning.

The best way to build this is simply by working on wall handstands and focusing on opening up the shoulders more. Other drills can mimic this motion, but none work as well.

Some other options include gymnastic bridging, doing dislocates with a towel or rope and the overhead reach shown below.
Back Flexibility

I wanted to take a moment to talk about back flexibility. When you’re doing the arched handstand your legs will be over your head and your head facing towards the ground.

With an arch you can have a little bit of an arch or a lot. Either way is fine as long as it works for you.

What you want to avoid is getting loose and allowing gravity to pull your legs down further than they want to go. If you do this it can place some strain across your back. But as long as you stay tight you shouldn’t have any back problems.

The other reason you might feel some discomfort is if you overdo it. Especially when you start training you’ll want to ease into what you’re doing.

Also after a training session you can even out the stretch by working in the opposite direction. Do the plough as it’s known in yoga. Lay on your back then raise your legs over your head and try to touch the ground behind your head.
Achieving a Straight Handstand

So you want to do the straight handstand? What steps should you take to achieve this?

For one, I would switch to using exclusively the reverse wall handstand position. This one is much better situated for building the straight handstand position. Besides that you can do all the lead-up stunts, except the forearm stand as that won’t do you much good. Also in the headstand make sure you straighten it out rather then arching.

Your head doesn’t need to be kept completely inline with the arms when balancing. But it is tilted less back then the curved handstand. You can still look at the ground in this position by looking up through the top of your eyes, with a little tilt in the head.

The main component to hold a straight handstand is to get into the hollow position as it’s known in gymnastics. Lay with your back on the ground. Flex the abs and raise your feet and hands off the ground. Keep the hips straight and do not bend them. This is the hollow position and what you want to re-create for the handstand.

However, it seems easy to do when standing up or laying on the ground. But when you do it in the handstand it can be a different matter. Instead of just trying to tuck the pelvis up, which could cause you to pike the hips, think of bringing your ribs down to your pelvis.

It is helpful to have a person, or a camera, to look at your position and give you feedback. Often times you may think you’re in the correct position, but be unaware of where you truly are in space.

Work on holding this position against the wall. When its easy to hold for time, start trying to balance in it by coming off the wall. Then kick up into this position. If you form breaks at any point stop and start once again.
How Often Should I Train?

Know this. The more often you train the better results you’ll get.

This of course also depends on if you’re doing the correct practice, working on things within your skill levels and where you can achieve improvement.

If a person trained two hours everyday and couldn’t do a handstand, yet worked for a one hand handstand, they would accomplish nothing. Skills have to be in a certain range within your ability or close to it for you to get good at them. That’s what this whole system is built on. Start with easy skills and build from there.

That being said the more time you devote to practice within this range the better you will get.

Can you train everyday? Absolutely. Even if its just ten minutes this is best. You can still make progress if you don’t work on handstands daily, but it is such a fine motor movement that you need to do a lot. In the circus, hand balancing is known as the most difficult of all the arts on can perform.

The bare minimum you’d want to practice at any one time is about ten minutes. If you want to get good, and get good fast, you’ll want to do much more then this. Of course, if you’re just starting out you need to build up overtime. Half an hour, one hour or even more is plenty for most people.

If you want to become one of the world’s best expect to do several hours of practice each day.

At no time do you want to continue past fatigue. It is best to do skill work like learning to balance, before any strength or endurance work which can be done afterwards.
**Sample Training**

In the beginning you work on the five lead-up stunts. You decide to work on two or three of them each day rotating which ones you do each day. Some of them you find easier then the others, so you play around with the variations on these. Perhaps it takes you three or four weeks of dedicated practice to get to 60 seconds in each position.

After that you start working on balancing by coming off the wall. You also start at this point to work on the kick-up drill. After you work these for a while each day you finish off with some of the lead-up stunts and their variations. It only takes you about two weeks until you can balance off the wall for 15 seconds and can nail nine kick-ups out of ten in the drill consistently.

Now you start practicing out in the open. You work on adding time. Anytime you feel your balance isn’t doing that great you may go back to the wall. If you’re kick up isn’t doing well you’ll practice more on that. You also revisit some of the lead-up drills when you want to. Within another three or four weeks you’ve held a handstand for 30 seconds.

Can it happen this fast? Yes! If you follow this system as it’s outline and practice each day. For some people it will take longer. For others it will be even shorter.

Don’t think you have to follow this plan to the letter, but find out what works for you. Every person is individual so they have to figure out what works best for them. But stay within the boundaries of this system and you’ll be glad you did.
What’s Next?

So now that you’ve accomplished a 30 second handstand what comes next? There are tons of options!

Work on holding the handstand even longer.

Work on holding the handstand in different body, leg and arm positions.

Work on press handstands.

Work on walking on your hands.

Work on jumping on your hands.

Work on the one hand handstand.

Work on the planche.

Work on hand to hand balancing.

Work on combining hand balancing with tumbling skills.

Work on handstand on the fists or fingertips.

And even more. Check out the next page for a bunch more resources available on hand balancing and acrobatic skills.
More Resources for Hand Balancing and Acrobatic Success

Hand Balancing Mastery Course  

The True Art and Science of Hand Balancing  

The Ultimate Guide to Handstand Pushups  

Tumbling Illustrated  

Trampoline Handbook  

Advanced Bridging Course  
http://www.advancedbridging.com/

Tapp Brothers - Parkour Crash Course  
http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/go/parkourcrashcourse/

Tapp Brothers - Get Your Backflip Now  
http://www.lostartofhandbalancing.com/go/backflip/

Gold Medal Bodies - Floor One  
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