

Cycle: Mastering Commitment (Engagement) in Lead Climbing

Course Overview

This 7-session cycle is designed for climbers aged 13-16 who are already comfortable lead climbing at a 5c level. The theme is **Engagement**—the physical and mental commitment required to push past comfort zones, manage the fear of falling, and execute high-intensity movements on lead.

Materials & Equipment Needed

- Climbing harnesses, shoes, and chalk bags
- Dynamic lead ropes (per pair)
- Belay devices (Grigri or similar preferred for safety during fall practice)
- Bouldering mats/area
- Stopwatch
- Colored tape or "markers" (optional)
- Assessment rubrics/journals

Session 1: The Leap of Faith (Mental Engagement)

Objective: Students will demonstrate "engagement" by intentionally taking and catching lead falls in a controlled environment.

I. Bouldering Warm-up: "The Dyno Game" (30 min)

- **Activity:** Set 3 specific "jump" moves on the boulder wall. Students must commit 100% to the jump.
- **The Twist:** "The No-Hand Landing." If they miss, they must focus on a safe, active landing on the mats.

II. Lead Climbing: "The Flight School" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Instructor demonstrates a "soft catch" belay and a proper falling posture (limbs loose, exhale, look at the wall).
- **We Do:** Partner checks. In pairs on a 5a/5b route, the climber takes a fall with the bolt at waist height.
- **You Do:** The "Commitment Ladder." Climb a 5c. At bolt 4, fall with the bolt at the waist. At bolt 5, fall with the bolt at the knees. At bolt 6, fall while reaching for the next hold.

III. Conclusion: Success Criteria (20 min)

- **Recap:** Did you hesitate? Engagement means deciding to move even if you might fall.
- **Assessment:** Can the student fall without "grabbing" the quickdraw or rope?

Session 2: Power & Precision (Physical Engagement)

Objective: Engage maximum physical force to execute "must-make" moves on lead.

I. Bouldering: "Three-Move Max" (30 min)

- **Activity:** Find a boulder problem that is way too hard. Students have 3 attempts to stick just *one* move. Total physical engagement for 5 seconds.

II. Lead Climbing: "The Deadpoint Challenge" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Demonstrate a "Deadpoint"—hitting a hold at the apex of an upward movement.
- **We Do:** On a vertical 5c, identify "reachy" moves where static climbing is impossible.
- **You Do:** "The Gap." The instructor marks two holds with tape on a 5c+ or 6a. The student must skip the intermediate holds, forcing a dynamic, committed move on lead.

III. Conclusion (20 min)

- **Recap:** How does "trying harder" physically change your mental state?
 - **Assessment:** Success is defined by the student not "giving up" before the move is finished.
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Session 3: The "No-Take" Zone (Endurance Engagement)

Objective: Engage the will to continue climbing despite "the pump" (lactic acid build-up).

I. Bouldering: "The Human Knot" (30 min)

- **Game:** 4 students on the boulder wall at once. They must move around each other without touching the floor. Forces awkward positions and physical commitment to stay on.

II. Lead Climbing: "The 10-Second Rule" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Explain the "No-Take" mindset. If you are tired, you rest on the wall, not the rope.
- **You Do:** Climb a long 5c+. If the student wants to "take," they must instead count to 10 out loud while hanging on a hold, then attempt three more moves.
- **The Twist:** "The Silent Assassin." Climb the whole route without making any sound with your feet. If you "pop" a foot, you must do 5 pushups at the end.

III. Conclusion (20 min)

- **Recap:** Where did you find extra energy when you thought you were finished?
 - **Assessment:** Did the student reach the anchors without sitting in the harness?
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Session 4: Creative Risk (Strategic Engagement)

Objective: Engaging with the route through problem-solving and "reading" the line.

I. Bouldering: "The Blind Beta" (30 min)

- **Activity:** One student is blindfolded. Their partner "directs" them through a V1/V2 boulder. Requires total trust and physical engagement with unknown holds.

II. Lead Climbing: "The Forbidden Hold" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Show how to bypass a "crux" hold by using high feet or a different body position.
- **You Do:** On a 5c+ route, the instructor "tapes over" the best hold in the middle of the route. The student must commit to a sequence they didn't plan for.
- **Fun Element:** "Climbing Poker." Every time they use a "forbidden" hold, they lose a "life." They start with 3.

III. Conclusion (20 min)

- **Recap:** Commitment isn't just about strength; it's about committing to a new plan mid-climb.
 - **Assessment:** Can the student find an alternative sequence without descending?
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Session 5: The Redpoint Mindset (Performance Engagement)

Objective: To engage with a route at the "limit" (6a or 6a+).

I. Bouldering: "Add-On" (30 min)

- **Game:** Student A does 1 move. Student B does move 1 + move 2. Continue until someone falls. High intensity and social engagement.

II. Lead Climbing: "The Project" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Demonstrate "working a route"—brushing holds, visualizing the sequence.
- **You Do:** Students choose a route 1-2 grades above their comfort zone (e.g., a 6a+).
 - **Phase 1:** Bolt-to-bolt. Figure out the moves.
 - **Phase 2:** The "Engaged Go." One full attempt to climb as high as possible without "taking."

III. Conclusion (20 min)

- **Recap:** How does it feel to commit to a route you aren't sure you can finish?
 - **Assessment:** Student identifies their personal "crux" and describes how they committed to it.
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Session 6: Speed & Flow (Rhythmic Engagement)

Objective: Engage through continuous movement to minimize time in "stress zones."

I. Bouldering: "Speed Traverse" (30 min)

- **Activity:** Traverse the bouldering wall as fast as possible. If you stop moving for 2 seconds, you're out.
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II. Lead Climbing: "The Metronome" (70 min)

- **I Do:** Demonstrate "Flow"—clipping quickly and moving immediately.
- **We Do:** Practice "mock" speed climbing on a 5a lead.
- **You Do:** "The 3-Minute Challenge." Students must reach the anchors of a 5c in under 3 minutes. This forces them to commit to moves quickly rather than over-thinking.

III. Conclusion (20 min)

- **Recap:** Did moving faster make you feel more or less secure?
- **Assessment:** Comparison of time between the first and second attempts.

Session 7: The Master of Commitment (Final Evaluation)

Objective: Consolidate all forms of engagement: Mental, Physical, and Strategic.

I. Bouldering: "The Creation" (30 min)

- **Activity:** Students set their own "Commitment Boulder" for their partner—one that requires a big jump or a very tiny hold.

II. Lead Climbing: "The Big Final" (70 min)

- **The Challenge:** A "Lead Marathon." Students must climb three different 5c/6a routes.
 - **Route 1:** Must take a voluntary fall at the crux.
 - **Route 2:** Must climb with "Silent Feet."
 - **Route 3:** Their "Project" from Session 5.

III. Conclusion & Celebration (20 min)

- **Summative Assessment:** A brief reflection. Where were they at the start (scared to fall, hesitant) vs. now?
- **Award:** Hand out "The Commitment Award" (or a snack!) for the most improved mental toughness.

Differentiation Options

- **For the Hesitant:** Use "Top-rope Lead" (climbing on top rope but pulling a second rope up to clip) to practice the *mechanics* of engagement without the fear.
- **For the Advanced:** Increase the grade to 6b or introduce "skipping clips" (only with expert supervision and high bolts) to increase the "run-out" and mental engagement.