BRITISH GLIDING ASSOCIATION

Safe Start 2026

A refresher self-briefing for glider pilots.

About ***Safe Start***

Every year, several glider pilots taking part in the sport we love damage their gliders through unfortunate accidents. In some cases, pilots are injured, and, sadly, some of those pilots have not survived.

Experience protects us - until distraction, complacency, or fatigue take over. Every pilot, at every level, occasionally makes a mistake.

It is a well-known fact that refresher information helps to build resilience.

This self-briefing has been put together to help glider pilots enjoy a safe start to their 2026 flying season. We hope it’s useful.

BGA 2026

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The big picture

Most flights occur without mishap.

No-one sets out to have an accident.

However:

Every year, there are many gliding occurrences that result in damage, and several that result in injury.

Year	Injury	
	Fatal	Serious
2025	0	5
2024	2	2
2023	4	5
2022	2	4
2021	0	6
2020	1	6
2008-2019 average	1.8	4.4

The main risks

- Preparation for flight
- Stall / spin
- Collision
- Landing, including out-landing
- Launching

Glider prepared for flight? Facts.

Each year, several pilots attempt to launch with something vital disconnected, missing, misplaced or unlocked.

The consequences of failing to *confirm* that a glider is fully prepared for flight can be catastrophic.

Unless we mitigate for human factors including distraction and assumption, there is a high probability of a mistake slipping through and causing an accident.

Glider prepared for flight?

Always:

- carry out a daily inspection including positive control checks
- use the revised DI book
- carry out ABCDE & pre-flight checks with care

Never interrupt anyone or allow yourself to be distracted

Never assume – always check

ABCDE – Airframe, Ballast, Controls, Dolly (wing/tail), Environment

Pre-flight checks

Controls, Ballast, Straps, Instrument, Flaps, Trim, Brakes, Eventualities, Canopy*

Rushed, cursory or omitted checks can be disastrous.

Controls full and free movement? A large passenger or cockpit equipment can be a hazard…

“Closed & locked” – *and checked?*

- If a canopy opens in flight, at best that’s a significant distraction.
- Airbrakes opening during a launch will of course lengthen a ground run and reduce the climb rate.

During pre-flight checks:

Never interrupt anyone or allow yourself to be distracted
Never assume – always check

Image Nordic Gliding

*or as required by the aircraft flight manual

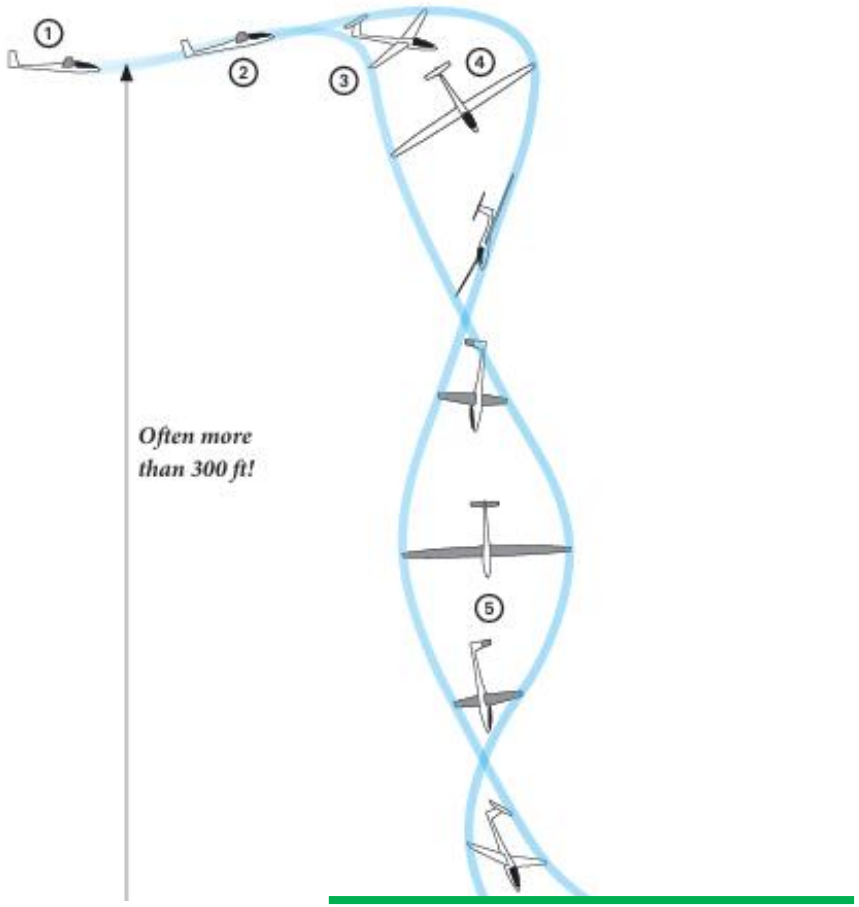
Stall / spin?

If a wing reaches the stalling angle of attack, it will stall. If the glider is flying out of balance, one wing will stall more than other. Unchecked, a spin is likely to result.

A fully developed spin at circuit height *may be* recoverable depending on the glider type and flying skill…

A wing-drop stall – the precursor to a spin – *is* recoverable at circuit height by any pilot…as long as the pilot recognises it and takes the correct recovery action!

Spin following failure to recognise stall with wing drop



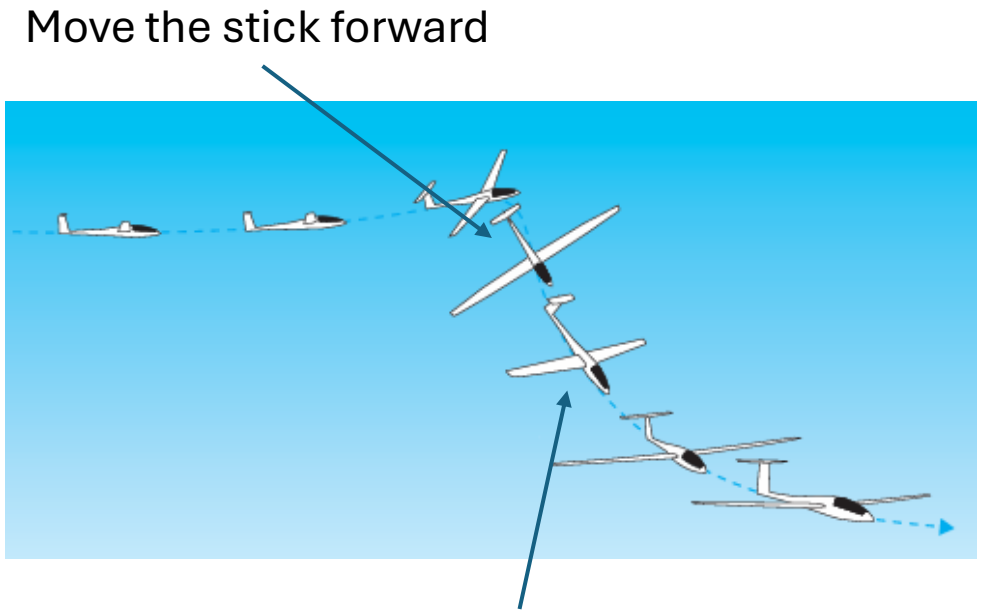
Stall / spin avoidance

Always respond to any pre-stall or stalling symptoms by moving the stick forward.

The nose dropping despite the stick moving rearwards means the glider is stalled. And if the glider additionally rolls without pilot input, the glider is stalled with wing drop.

Always respond to any stall including a wing drop stall *by moving the stick forward*.

Stall with wing drop – and recovery



Stall / spin prevention

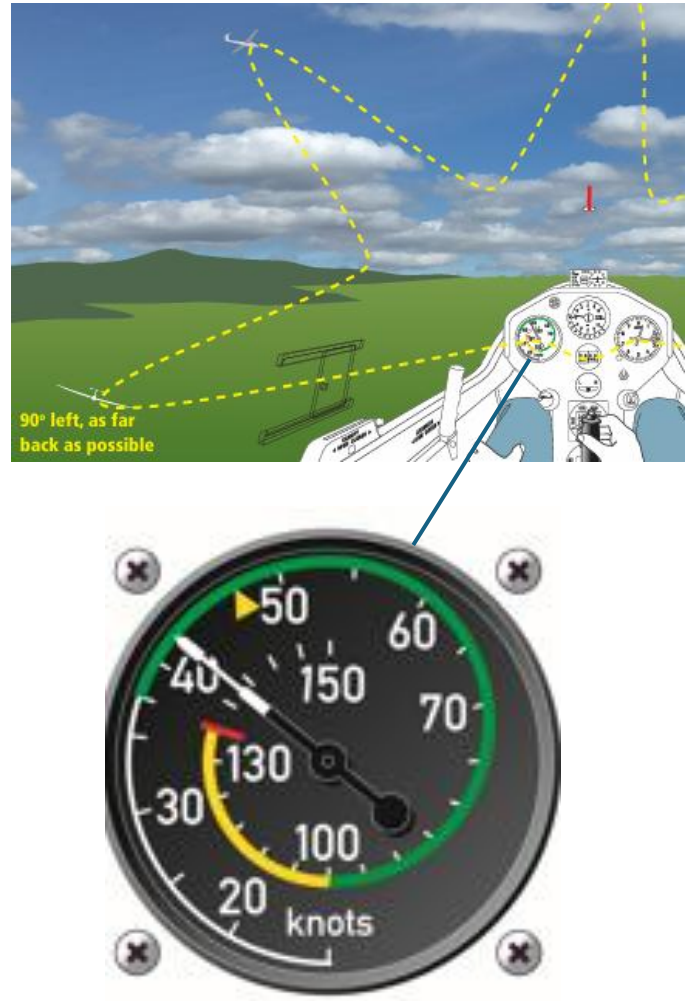
If you do allow yourself to get distracted, particularly when stressed, you can unthinkingly apply control inputs that stall the glider.

Always pay close attention to the airspeed when flying and react to the warning signs of an impending stall at any stage *by moving the stick forward*.

A scanning technique of *lookout – attitude – instruments* will allow you to regularly monitor airspeed.

Be prepared by regularly practicing wing drop stalls and recoveries in all the gliders you fly (remember HASSELL)

Height, Airframe, Straps, Security, Engine, Location, Lookout



Collision avoidance

Mid air collisions are thankfully rare, but usually catastrophic.

It is every pilot's responsibility to maintain *effective lookout*. Use the 'lookout-attitude-instruments' scan cycle.

Fly predictably, particularly in the circuit and in thermals.

Circuit radio calls can improve situational awareness.

All aircraft owners are encouraged to equip with FLARM.

Please read more here

Circuit hazards

The activity and runway designs at airfields can result in potential conflict. Clubs should develop well thought-through local circuit procedures designed to avoid collision risk.

Pilots flying in the circuit can be busy and spend a significant part of their lookout time assessing height, position and angle to the landing area. Pilots should

- always adhere to circuit procedures
- always try to be predictable in the circuit
- where agreed as part of club procedures, make appropriate circuit position radio calls

Landing issues

Wheel retracted, poor circuit judgement, late change of planned touchdown point, or unplanned landing all feature in landing accidents.

Get into the habit of lowering the undercarriage when deciding to join the circuit. And use a pre-circuit checklist, e.g. WULF.

WULF - Water-ballast, undercarriage, loose articles, flaps

Instructors - student pilot not flying as briefed during the launch or approach? Take control.

More landing issues

Field landings have added risks, including late field selection and over-reliance on turbo engines.

Pick a field early. Once carefully selected, continued soaring attempts become far less stressful.

Run the turbo before leaving the airfield. Be prepared for it not to start or for a partial power failure. *Always* have a safe field available.

Landing out following an aerotow failure is rarely practiced. Have in mind the *actual fields* you could land in if the launch fails. That may require pre-flight planning.

Safe launching

Safe launching awareness and techniques have saved many lives over the past 15 years or more.

Continued awareness will help to minimise the likelihood of a mistake.

The BGA guidance for the start of a launch is:

Start the launch with your hand on the release

If you cannot keep the wings level, release IMMEDIATELY

“Release IMMEDIATELY” means BEFORE the wing touches the ground

Why hand on the release? Because you need to pull the release within half a second of taking the decision to release. *Why immediately?* Because the cartwheel that may follow a wing drop onto the ground can be so rapid that no recovery by releasing or other means is possible

Safe *winch* launching

Wing-drop and cartwheel accidents *are still happening*.

Grass short enough? Full use of the airfield to minimise cross-slopes and cross-wind? Position of the cable on the ground? Hook offset? Which wing to hold?

Are the wing runners and signallers trained for these safety critical tasks?

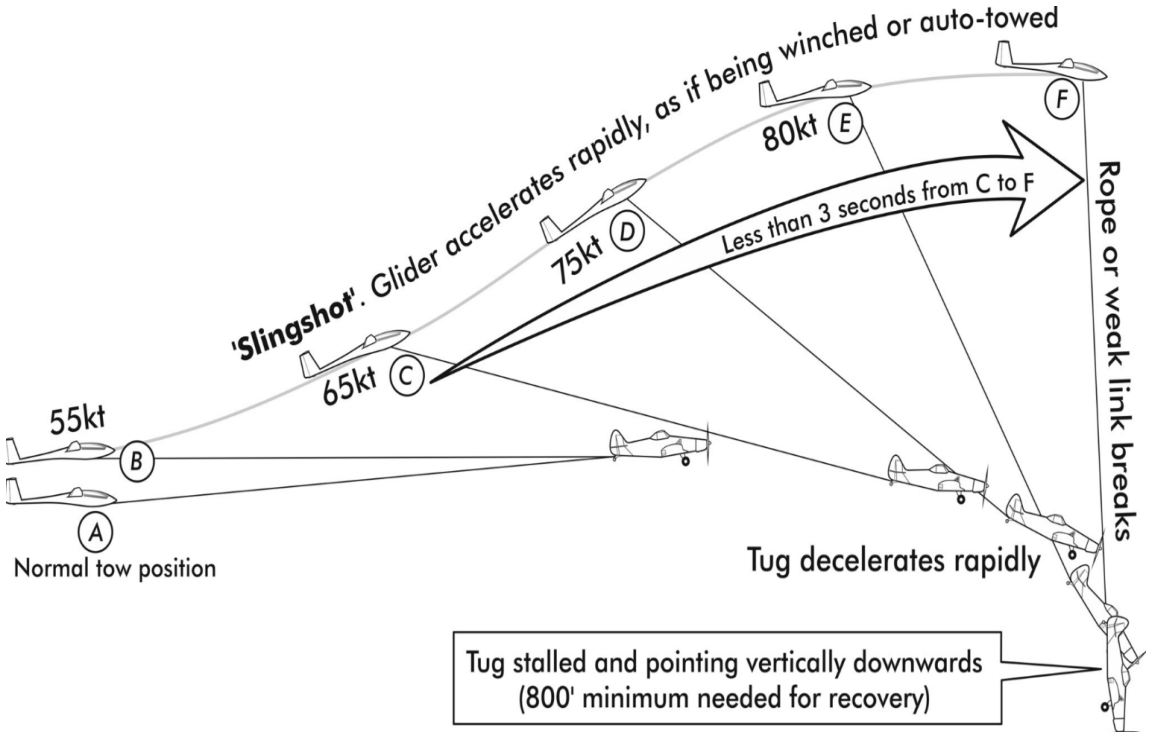
Remember, start the launch with your hand on the release. If you cannot keep the wings level, release IMMEDIATELY.

Please read the safe winch launching guidance here

Aerotow launching hazards

Aerotowing may appear to be a benign method of getting airborne in a glider, but there are inherent hazards, including:

- Distraction
- Tug upset
- Towing performance
- Launch failure



Safe aerotow launching

Have in mind the *actual* fields you would use if the launch fails. That may require pre-flight planning.

Think about take-off performance & eventualities.

During the tow, the glider pilot's focus *must* remain fixed on maintaining the glider's correct position.

If a glider is not climbing as expected on tow, *physically check* that the airbrakes are locked.

If you see a collision hazard on tow, tell the tug pilot.

After release, visually ensure the rope has separated.

Soaring protocol

The soaring protocol aims to describe known good practice based on many decades of hard-learned experience of soaring in thermals and on hills and ridges.

It does not replace the need to comply with the rules of the air.

Please remind yourself of the soaring protocol here

Keeping it legal – pilot and aircraft

Check that you meet the SFCL rolling recency requirements. You can read more here.

Being fit for flight is very important. Feeling unwell, stressed, or unsure? Don't fly. You can read more here.

Ensure your glider has a valid ARC, annual, and insurance (and don't forget to update FLARM software).

IMSAFE Checklist

- I - Illness
- M - Medication
- S - Stress
- A - Alcohol
- F - Fatigue
- E - Enough (food, water,other)

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Have fun and fly safe!