



Maybe you've just discovered flow and you want to learn more, or maybe you've heard the term flow before, but you don't really know 'what are flow arts', or maybe you stumbled here by accident while free-falling down a Google rabbit hole. Whatever brought you here, if you're new to flow arts and you want to know more about flow arts and prop manipulation, you've come to the right place.

Learning anything new can be a daunting process, with new phrases, terminology, and an overload of information to wrap your head around. That's why we've decided to create a series of intro to flow pieces with some of the essentials to help you get started. This article will cover the basics of what flow is and introduce you to some of the more common props in the flow arts world.

When people talk about flow, or flow arts, they're generally referring to a movement-based art form involving the manipulation of objects commonly referred to as props. Flow combines aspects of martial arts, dance, and circus with object manipulation to form an activity that anyone (yes, anyone!) can enjoy.

Flow arts includes a wide range of props, from stunning day-flow or practice props, to LED varieties and of course, fire props, and we appreciate them all! Today, we'll take a quick peek at what these props are, with more detailed features to come in the not-too-distant future.

Poi



What are poi?

Poi are strings with a large ball attached to one end, and often a handle at the other end. Poi are most commonly manipulated in pairs but they can be spun in threes or more too. Poi originated right here in Aotearoa and were traditionally made from a ball crafted out of swamp plants attached to a woven flax rope.

Historically, poi were used in Māori action songs and dances, and helped to develop skills that could also be used during weapons training and fighting. Traditional poi are still widely used in New Zealand in kapa haka (Māori performing arts), and for games and exercise. As poi grew in popularity and spread across the globe, techniques from other cultures fused with traditional poi to create a new style of poi spinning.

Is learning poi difficult?

Poi can be a relatively easy prop to get the basics of, with more complex tricks requiring more practice. There's a huge amount of information, tutorials, and resources available when it comes to learning to spin poi.

If you're keen to learn more about where poi came from, why poi are so important in New Zealand, and what traditional poi are made from (plus so much more) check out our in depth article on poi: [Te Korero mo te Poi \(The Story of Poi\)](#)

Staff



What is a staff?

A staff is a stick-like object, with or without grip and weighted ends, that's spun around the body. The staff has been around for hundreds of years in various forms, was traditionally used by Polynesian and Asian cultures, and it's still common to see staff being used in martial arts today.

There are generally two distinct staff spinning styles – spin and contact. A spin staff will be lighter and can come with a short grip, or no grip at all. This style is generally fast paced, and the fingers and thumb are used to grip and control the staff. A contact staff will be heavier and usually comes with a long grip covering most of the staff. This style relies less on using the hands to grip and more on using other parts of the body to maintain momentum and control.

Learning staff spinning

It's generally pretty easy to learn the basics of staff spinning, with more complex and contact moves becoming a little more difficult.

You can have a look at our article [Isn't a Staff just a Stick?](#) for the nitty gritty on staff spinning, its history and links to martial arts, and the various types of staff used in flow arts.

Buugeng



What are Buugeng

Buugeng (pronounced bu - short oo sound, gen - hard G sound), also known as s-staff, are a pair of s-shaped 'blades' (not sharp) that are manipulated together to create a magical illusion. There are commonly two shapes – radial and sinusoidal. The radial shaped buugeng have a more rounded curve, while the sinusoidal curve is slightly more elongated.

Buugeng were originally introduced as s-staff in the 1980's by a juggler named Michael Moschen (the man behind David Bowie's crystal ball in the film *The Labyrinth*). In 2001, a Japanese performer by the name of Dai Zaobab tweaked Mochen's design to create what we now know as buugeng. Translated from Japanese, buu means martial arts, and geng means illusion.

Learning how to spin buugeng

Buugeng are not known for being an easy prop to manipulate due to their shape. It's often recommended to try double staff first as this helps with understanding double prop concepts with a less tricky prop.

Check out our article [Hypnotic Squiggle Sticks](#) for an in depth look into where buugeng came from, the various sizes and styles of buugeng, and a fascinating timeline of the life of buugeng.

Double Staff



What is Double Staff?

Similar to the staff, double staff are stick-like objects, with or without grip and weighted ends. Double staff can be full sized staffs or shorter ones, which are sometimes referred to as batons. As the name suggests, double staff are used in pairs and can be manipulated with spin or contact techniques. Double staff can also be used for juggling – it's common to see more than 2 staffs being juggled.

Double staff are thought to have originated in dance and festivals in Europe and Asia, before progressing into the military where rifle twirling became common to see in parades, and then into baton twirling which is now a competitive sport.

How do you spin two staffs?

Double staff can take a bit of getting used to as opposed to a single staff due to using both hands at the same time, often doing different things, but are a great way to get used to double prop concepts.

Our article [Isn't a Staff just a Stick?](#) will give you a more in depth look into double staff and the origins of baton twirling and how it evolved into double staff in flow arts.

Levi Wand



How does a Levi Wand work?

The levi wand is a carefully balanced stick with an 'invisible' string attached to it. This enchanted prop originated from the magic trick known as the Dancing Cane, where a magician would use sleight of hand to create a mystic illusion of a levitating stick.

The levi wand we know today stems from Flow Toys, who tweaked the idea of the Dancing Cane to create the Flow Wand. Levi wands can be used with a short string or with a long string for a wider range of moves.

Learning to spin levi wand

The levi wand is pretty easy to grasp the basics of, although once you start progressing into some of the more complicated moves, you'll require patience and persistence.

Dragon Staff



What is a Dragon Staff?

A dragon staff is essentially a contact staff with spokes on each end. The full length of the staff is covered with grip, and it's manipulated using a combination of rolls and contact style techniques – making use of body parts more than hand grips – creating a visually stunning effect with the spokes.

Dragon staff is a pretty new prop, only gracing the flow arts world in 2002. While there are similarities to the Chinese martial art, Fei-Cha (using a trident, or fork style staff), the dragon was not modelled after Fei-Cha.

Is dragon staff hard to learn?

The dragon staff is not as easy as staff to learn, although the extra weight slows it down which can help lessen the learning curve of a new prop.

If you want to know more about the history of dragon staff, who invented dragon staff, and what size dragon staff you should get, have a read of [Age of the Dragons](#).

Hoop



Is Hooping a Flow Art?

Also known as hula hoop, this prop is a large ring that can be twirled around the body. Hoops have been used as a children's toy and a form of exercise for hundreds of years. Native Americans used hoop dance as a form of storytelling, and records of wooden and metal hoops becoming popular have been dated back to the 14th century. The modern hoop was made popular in 1958 by toy makers Wham-O after a friend brought a bamboo exercise hoop back from Australia.

How long does it take to learn hoop?

Hooping can be simple to learn how to spin around your neck, waist and arms, with more complex tricks, and spinning more than one hoop, requiring time and patience.

You can check out our in depth article, [The Inside Scoop on Hoop](#), for some fascinating hooptastic facts.

Juggling Sticks



What are Juggling Sticks?

Also known as devil sticks, flower sticks, or simply ‘sticking’, juggling sticks are a set of 3 sticks – 2 hand or control sticks, and one flower stick. The sticks are often covered in some type of grip to aid in control, and the flower stick can come with tassel flower ends, or tapered ends.

The first image of juggling sticks dates back to Prague in the 1820’s, although it’s believed they have a Chinese origin. Juggling sticks exploded in popularity in the 1970’s, and by the 90’s they had become a significant part of juggling culture.

Learning to juggle with sticks

It can take a little practice to get the basics of juggling sticks down, but once you master the ‘tick-tock’ move, many other tricks fall into place relatively easily.

Check out our article [What in the Devil are These Sticks?!](#) to learn the difference between devil sticks and flower sticks, the history of juggling sticks, and how they evolved into what we see in the flow arts world today.

Fans



What are Fans?

A fan shaped object with a handle that is often used in pairs. Fans have been used in dance for thousands of years, and it's thought that their origins date back to the Han Dynasty in 200 A.D. Fans became popular in the western world around the 1930's and today's fan spinners often use techniques inspired from belly dancing combined with fan tech – a trick focused style of spinning.

Learning to spin fans

Standard fan dancing can be fairly easy to learn, while technical fan spinning is a bit more difficult and will require practice and patience.

Rope Dart



What is a Rope Dart?

A rope dart is a long rope, often about 3 meters, with a head, known as the dart, on the end (as seen in Kill Bill: Vol 1). The dart head can be anything from a metal blade to a tennis ball. Other props stem from rope dart too, like meteor dart (a 2 headed rope dart) and puppy hammer (a rope with a dart head on either end of it).

Rope dart was originally a martial arts weapon, with the first dart dating back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Nowadays, rope dart can be spun using martial arts inspired techniques – usually faster with a combat feel, or dance inspired techniques – usually slower-paced with more fluid movements.

Is rope dart easy to learn?

Most people find learning rope dart relatively easy. This could be due to the fact that when you accidentally smack yourself with your dart it hurts, so you learn pretty quickly how to avoid doing that.

You can take a peek at our article [The Low Down on Dart](#) to learn what rope darts were traditionally used for, the history of rope dart, and the difference between a meteor hammer and a rope dart.

8 Rings



What are 8 Rings?

Also known as isolation rings, this prop is a pair of rings shaped like an 8 that are manipulated to create impressive illusions. First created in 2009 by Renegade Juggling, 8 rings borrow techniques from hoops, and from other double props such as poi. Similar to iso sticks, 8 rings use isolations to make it seem like one ring is stuck while the others move around it. While they may resemble juggling rings, they're not designed to be thrown and juggled.

Learning to spin 8 rings

8 rings, like buugeng, are not known to be easy to learn. These will take practice, patience, and perseverance to master.

Juggling



What is Juggling?

The art of juggling involves throwing and catching multiple objects simultaneously. From balls to clubs, and hats to knives, juggling is an art form widely recognised across the globe. Juggling is thought to have originated in ancient Egypt circa 2000 B.C., although there's also evidence of juggling in the Aztec Empire, and in Chinese, Irish, Greek, and Roman history.

Is juggling a hard skill to learn?

Learning to juggle requires focus and patience but juggling 2-3 balls can be pretty easy to learn. The more objects you add, and the weirder their shape, the more difficult juggling becomes.

Take an in depth look at juggling with our article [Juggle me This!](#) to learn about the history of juggling, the various types of juggling, and some fun facts all about juggling!

Contact Juggling



What is Contact Juggling?

Unlike traditional juggling, contact juggling involves keeping the ball/s in contact with your body as much as possible, using balance and rolling. Contact juggling is often performed using a clear acrylic ball, or multiple balls, but grippier silicone balls can be used too. Contact juggling is thought to have Asian origins, was brought to the western world in the 1800's and became well known thanks to the 1986 movie *The Labyrinth*.

Is contact juggling easy to learn?

Contact juggling can have a steep and frustrating learning curve, and it's often recommended to start with a silicone ball over an acrylic ball, as the silicone will give you more grip.

Iso Sticks



What are Iso Sticks?

Iso sticks are a slightly less common prop and resemble miniature double staffs. They're generally used to perform isolation tricks, where one end is 'glued' to the spot, and the rest of the staff rotates around that spot. Iso sticks are a great introduction to double props.

Learning to spin iso sticks

Iso sticks are one of the easier double props to learn due to their small size, although wielding one in each hand takes time to get comfortable with.

Diabolo



What is a Diabolo?

A diabolo is a double coned bobbin – an hour-glass shaped object – that is spun and thrown using a string attached to two sticks. The diabolo looks a little like a large yo-yo, and is often misspelled as diablo, which is Spanish for the devil. The diabolo was derived from the Chinese yo-yo and was introduced to the western world in the late 1700's.

Is diabolo easy to learn?

The simpler tricks on the diabolo can be pretty easy to learn, with multiple diabolos and more complex tricks requiring more patience.

So, there you have it – the tip of the flow iceberg. It's important to note that everyone will learn and adapt to a new prop at different rates, and the learning curve information here is just a guide. We encourage anyone interested in picking up a prop to give it a go – you never know what you might be capable of if you never try!