

Bridge pose – designed and engineered, constructed, and finally used as a bridge!

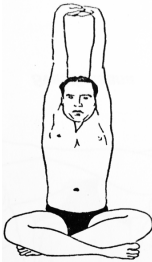
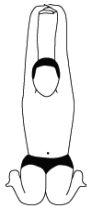

Ultimately bridge pose done classically requires courage to drop back independently from shoulderstand. But there are supported versions all can practice helping develop the skill and confidence to eventually practice the drop back.

But before the final pose, we should begin with the designer/engineer perspective.



Open your practice with the invocation or sit quietly considering the journey to the quieter inner self.

Bridge pose design – The first step is to actively collect the components necessary for the design. Setu Bandha requires long thighs, open chest, pliable upper back, and flexibility in the arms and shoulders. Also, we need the ability to do a difficult pose with a quiet mind. So this first set has those aims in mind.

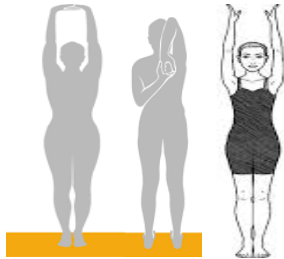


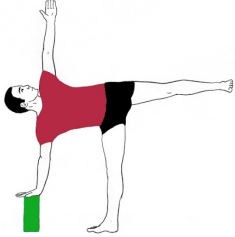
Parvatasana in Swastikasana	Lift low back Extend side chest Straighten elbows	
Virasana with arm movements	Sit on height as needed Keep spine well lifted Take deep breaths when your arms are working hard	
Adho Mukha Virasana	Use bolster for head and arms	

Next, a few upright standing poses. Repeat the set at least twice alternating between two mental confinements as the origin of your execution of the poses.





1st repetition - execute your pose originating from the pelvis and radiating to the limbs.

2nd repetition - originate from the sternum area, keep the chest wide open and broad, and radiate to the limbs.


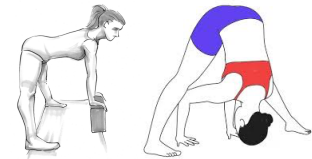
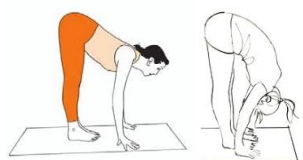
Remember this is the “collect bridge components stage” of the practice. So have in mind your objective of bridge pose; picture its shape even while doing other poses. Watch yourself critically, observe mistakes, or lack of focus. Find ways to correct or intensify your poses. Repeat as many times as you have the enthusiasm to do so. Use of the wall for the back foot. Or have your back to the wall, or face the wall, as you’ve been taught in class if you like.

Tadasana with arm movement	Be stable in your legs. Squeeze a block between your upper thighs Keep chest lifted as you challenge your arms	
Utthita Parsvakonasana	When working from the pelvis keep buttock tucked in When working from the sternum control pelvis but also elongate chest towards head.	
Utthita Trikonasana	When starting from the pelvis, open the back leg hip towards ceiling When working from the sternum press shoulder blades into back ribs and elongate spine	
Ardha Chandrasana	When working from the pelvis keep inner thighs well lifted When working from the sternum stretch both arms away from the center chest	

Setu Bandha requires a long stretch through the thighs and side chest. A few cycles of Surya Namaskar or a few repetitions of Adho Mukha Svanasana and Urdhva Mukha Savasana adds to collecting the components needed to build Setu Bandha. Using the chair for this is just fine. Do at least 3 repetitions, more if you have the drive. End with a few attempts of Ustrasana.

Tadasana with Namaskarasana	<p>Lift the thighs</p> <p>Lift the abdomen off the pelvic floor</p> <p>Raise the arms as you begin to go back for down dog</p>	
Adho Mukha Svanasana	<p>Lift the thighs</p> <p>Lift the abdomen</p> <p>Elongate side chest with arm stretch</p>	
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana	<p>Extend the thighs while you keep the knees firm</p> <p>Coil the chest into a back arch</p>	
Ustrasana	<p>Extend from the knees, through the thighs into the side chest</p> <p>Release the head from a well lifted chest</p>	


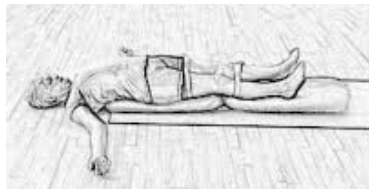
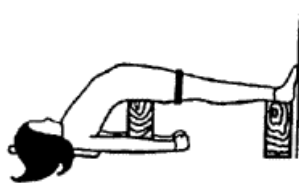

Setu Bandha is an inversion and as such it has the head and heart below the navel, and it is also in a way a back arch. The next three standing poses have concave (back arch) phase and head down phase. Spend time studying both phases.

Parsvottanasana	<p>Move sternum forward when concave</p> <p>Soften neck and face when head is down</p>	
Prasarita Paddotanasna	<p>Step wide, lift inner thighs</p> <p>Move sternum forward, with shoulder blades in</p> <p>Then head down, shoulders up</p>	
Uttanasana	<p>Feet close or joined</p> <p>Sternum forward with shoulder blades in</p> <p>Then head down</p>	

** Here would be a fine place for continuing level students to put in their Sirsasana work followed by Sarvangasana. If you have been taught the drop back into Setu Bandha go ahead and give it a try.

Setu Bandha quiets the mind and is a metaphor for the reason we practice – to bridge over difficult spans, and develop more of a relationship with our inner selves. Breathe comfortably while you appreciate being the traveler. The engineer and construction crew did their work.

Now a few versions of supported Setu Bandha. Pick one version and hold for 1-5 minutes (or longer) if comfortable. Continuing level students will get something different out of the supported versions. Those students can now settle in and do some long inhalations and exhalations in their supported bridge. If new to Bridge pose even the supported version can be a challenge. A one or two-minute attempt is fine, to begin with, and over weeks of practice, a longer hold will be possible. Do your best to stay balanced and centered on the props. They are shown below with the easiest first.

Cross Bolsters – Even if you have only one bolster you can find something to elevate the middle of your one bolster.	Start sitting with hips a little below the highest point. Slide back to enter. Continue to slide back to exit , don't try to sit up	
Bolster bench - you may have enough blankets or couch cushions to build a sturdy but padded bench	Start sitting in center of bench Lay down and slide back Slide back and off when exiting	
Blocks – This requires more practice. Becca showed using her laundry basket in a recent post	Place folded blanket under shoulders, not head Block under sacrum, not lumbar Lift feet higher than sacrum if low back hurts	
Adho Mukha Swastikasana	Simple cross leg forward bend with head supported will relieve any back discomfort.	
Savasana	Take time to carefully place yourself in good alignment. Use your bolster under chest or "knees if you like.	