

# Gymnastics – it's not that scary!

Whenever the word “gymnastics” is mentioned, some teachers immediately think of young gymnasts performing unpronounceable tricks on expensive and unwieldy equipment. However, gymnastics in the primary PDHPE syllabus is nothing like the skills we all witnessed in the gymnastics events at the Sydney Olympic Games. It is all about the exploration of movement and students being able to control and move their bodies in a range of ways.

Gymnastics provides students with opportunities to explore what their bodies can do, the space within which their bodies can move, the effort involved in the movement and the environment within which such movements take place.

The focus for gymnastics in PDHPE K-6 is on exploring movement, leading to the acquisition of some preliminary gymnastics skills. Students learn to control their body in a variety of situations. The major areas to address in the gymnastics strand of the syllabus are:

- *Non-locomotor skills*, including bending, twisting, stretching, static balancing etc.
- *Locomotor skills*, including running/walking, hopping/skipping, jumping/landing etc.
- *Elements of movement*, including spatial awareness, dynamics, relationships
- *Composition*, including simple combinations of locomotor and non-locomotor activities.

## Skill development

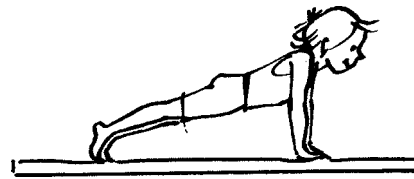
The following information explores some of the categories of skills that need to be covered when exploring the gymnastics component of the K-6 syllabus. Suggested teaching activities for developing these skills have been included.

### 1. STATICS

Statics are all the “held” or “still” positions in gymnastics and should be the starting point for any gymnastics program. Statics can be sub-divided into three categories:

- Supports: where the shoulders are above the apparatus
- Hangs: where the shoulders are below the apparatus
- Balances: with a small base of support.

Once basic statics have been learnt they can be extended and varied to help develop skills, physical attributes and correct posture.



### Developing the skill: Sample activities

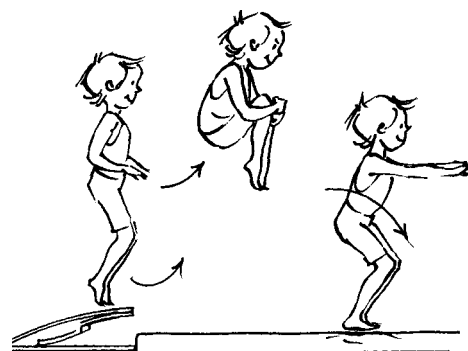
- Challenge students to balance:
  - on one body part
  - on two body parts
  - on three body parts
  - on four body parts.
- Perform partner and group activities to develop co-operative balances, such as leaning against each other and trying to stand up without using hands to assist them, or leaning as far away from each other as they can.
- Introduce balance shapes such as:
  - knee scale
  - lunge
  - arabesque
  - “V” sit.
- Practise balances through problem-solving activities, e.g. on a bench, try to pass each other without leaving the equipment.

### 2. SPRING

The spring involves students projecting themselves into the air. It can involve springing from both legs, one leg or even from two hands and two feet. Landing techniques must also be proficient before students perform any springing activities.

Springing activities can be sub-divided into two categories:

- unassisted (e.g. off the floor or bench)
- assisted (e.g. off a springboard or beatboard).



## Developing the skill: Sample activities

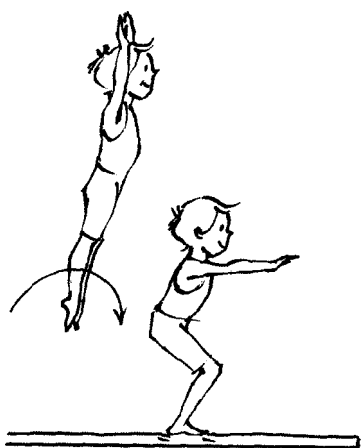
- Explore different ways of jumping, e.g. on the spot, over objects, off objects.
- Jump for:
  - distance: across an imaginary puddle, a hoop or parallel ropes
  - height: imagine picking an apple off a tree
  - accuracy: landing on a target.
- Copy the action of a seesaw. One partner springs up while the other goes down.
- Make different body shapes whilst in the air, e.g. star jumps, tuck jumps, clap above the head.
- Design a series of jumps, varying starting and landing positions, e.g. jump from one foot to two.
- Practise a running take-off from lines or ropes and progress to a running take-off from a mini-trampoline or beatboard, emphasising flight with height.

## 3. LANDINGS

Body control on landing is an important skill because it enables students to control the movement of their body. It is used in all jumping activities and in a range of games and sports.

Remember for landings:

- initial contact with the mat is on the balls of the feet, followed by bending of the ankles, knees and hip
- feet should be about shoulder width apart
- the heels should not spring back up but should remain on the floor.



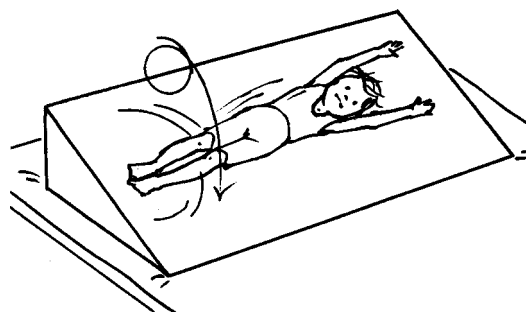
## Developing the skill: Sample activities

- Rock from toes to the balls of the feet and onto the heel; spring up and down on the spot; bend knees softly as feet return to the floor; land on toes, balls of feet, then heels as softly as possible.
- Have students land on both feet from various heights and from different directions, e.g. forwards and backwards.
- Make turns in the air before landing, e.g. 1/4 turn, 1/2 turn.
- Get students to jump from small benches onto mats, controlling their landing.

## 4. ROTATIONS

A rotation is any turn or spin around an internal axis. These include:

- turns, left or right
- rolls, forward and backward
- cartwheels.

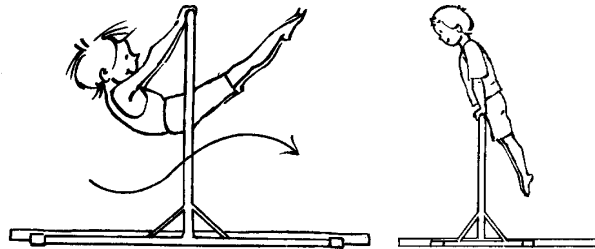


## Developing the skill: Sample activities

- Get students to do a log or pencil roll while lying on a mat. Roll sideways to the right, return left (hips and shoulders should rotate at the same time).
- Vary the log roll by holding a partner's hands.
- Explore different ways of rolling using:
  - different directions, e.g. forward, backward, sideways
  - different starting positions, e.g. crouched, lying, standing
  - consecutive rolls.
- Practise forward rolls from different positions, such as from a squat, or roll down a slope.
- Practise backward rolls, e.g. rocking to hands and feet from a squat position.
- Revise and build on cartwheel progressions.

## 5. SWINGS

Swings play a central role in gymnastics as they develop spatial awareness, body tension and grip strength. They can be broken into two sub-categories:



*Hanging swings*

*Supported swings*

Students need to have developed skills in hanging before they are physically able to swing safely. They should also be able to demonstrate reasonable grip strength before advancing to swing activities.

### Developing the skill: Sample activities

- Explore different grip combinations with thumbs curled around the bar, e.g. overhand/underhand/mixed grips.
- Make a shape with:
  - two hands and two legs
  - twisted body
  - one-hand swing.
- Practise swinging activities such as:
  - from a front support, swinging legs under bar and back
  - alternating between curling and stretching
  - alternating between swinging and hanging.
- Use task cards incorporating different types of swings.

## 6. LOCOMOTIONS

Locomotor activities occur frequently in gymnastics and some are unique to gymnastics, e.g. moving along an apparatus. Others, such as running, skipping, jumping and landing, are generic to many games and sports.

Locomotions can be broken down into three sub-categories:

- on the feet
- supported
- hanging.

### Developing the skill: Sample activities

- Set up an obstacle course for students. The activities should encourage students to investigate different ways of travelling, using their feet.



- Practise different ways of travelling, such as different directions or speeds and changes in body positions, e.g. high, low, medium.
- Investigate ways of changing body position.
- Design travel sequences that combine changes of shape and level.

It is important to reinforce the elements of movement, such as spatial awareness and dynamics (hard and soft), when teaching the skills in gymnastics. This enables students to understand levels, force, time and rhythm, while working within set boundaries and in set formations.

Gymnastics also provides students with an opportunity to work in pairs and groups. Including activities such as task cards and problem-solving activities in the gymnastics unit allows students to develop such skills as interacting, communicating, decision-making, moving and problem-solving.

For further information and ideas about teaching gymnastics try the following resources.

#### **ACHPER**

- *PEP series: Gymnastics Lower Primary* (30 lessons)
- *PEP series: Gymnastics Upper Primary and Lower Secondary* (40 lessons)

Available from ACHPER on telephone (08) 8340 3388.

#### **NSW Gymnastics Association**

- *Gymnastics: "What is it?"*
- *Gymfun manual*
- *Gymnastics skills manual*
- *Gymkits*
- *Gymfun lesson plans.*

Available from Gymnastics NSW, telephone 9763 5011.