



Community Coaching Fundamentals

Step 6: Preparing for your practice



Reference Material



PARTNERS IN COACH EDUCATION

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Coaching Tip: Practice doesn't make perfect - practice makes permanent. Only perfect practice makes perfect permanently!

Source: NCCP Level 1 Coaching Theory Manual

This section on Preparing for Your Practice Coaching Session complements the information provided in section 7 of the Introduction to Community Coaching Reference Material, and is directed primarily at supporting you, as a developing coach, in your role working with children during the FUNdamentals stage of development.

This section is also intended to provide you with materials that will assist you if you choose to work with athletes in the Learning to Train stage, and to prepare you for the next step in the NCCP Coaching progression, the “Competition Coaching – Introduction” program.

6.1 Tips for Leading a Practice Session

The FUNdamentals stage is critical for learning skills. All basic technique skills, both classic and skating, should be learned by skiers before the end of this period of development. To achieve this requires well-planned and executed practice sessions. To assist you in delivering effective sessions, a checklist of tips for preparing/leading a practice session has been provided below:

- Begin with the checklist of important considerations in section 4.1.1. Successful coaching of the sport of cross-country skiing is highly dependent on appropriate pre-session preparations.
- Use the practice plan templates provided in section 5, and develop your own practice-specific plan (plus a backup plan for all outdoor sessions), taking into consideration the terrain you have to work with, the weather forecast, etc.
- Be prepared so that you have the option of being flexible.
- Determine in advance what teaching aids/equipment you will require, and have them ready ahead of time.
- Plan for the terrain you will need, where at the ski area you should hold the practice session, and how your group will practice each skill.
- Plan how you will explain and demonstrate each skill; select the main teaching points (two to three is a good number); use clear, concise instructions.
- Introduce skills using their correct names.
- Create progressions – complex tasks are often learned more easily when presented in steps.
- Keep in mind that the attention span of children is limited, especially in the cold.
- Keep the demonstrations and instructions in front of the group to a minimum – this step should take approximately 1.5 minutes.
- Detailed instruction and feedback should take place on a one-on-one basis while the group is working on a skill.

- ❑ Ensure that the participants can carry out basic movements before combining them with complex skills and manoeuvres.
- ❑ Choose games that reinforce skills learned during the practice session, and know where these games fit into the progressions.
- ❑ Plan how you will explain each game.
- ❑ Keep variety in the program; activities, games and locations should vary.
- ❑ Make good use of the time available.
- ❑ Arrange for an appropriate coach to skier ratio.
- ❑ Arrange for parent helpers to chart progress and assist with special activities when needed.
- ❑ Make corrections on an individual basis. Often those who are performing a task correctly will make unnecessary changes because of comments made to the group as a whole.
- ❑ Allow for variable learning speeds and individual differences.
- ❑ Always give feedback when a skier learns a skill; be positive and use variety.
- ❑ Keep in mind that learning is an individual challenge, and avoid comparisons unless they serve as a reward for progressing to a new skill.
- ❑ Keep children active – they learn by skiing!

Tips for Evaluating Your Practice Session

- ❑ Was there a positive, FUN atmosphere?
- ❑ Did you speak at least once to each participant? If you missed someone, make a point of talking to them at the next practice.
- ❑ Were all the children active throughout the session?
- ❑ Did each child make some progress towards learning a new skill?

Key Parts of a Complete Practice In Community Sport



Time	Practice Part	Key Contents and Tips
variable 2-3 min	Introduction	Before practice begins: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Arrive early. ✓ Inspect/prepare facilities. ✓ Greet each participant as they arrive, get a feel for their preparedness – both clothing and equipment. At the beginning of practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Start on time. ✓ Ask participants to gather in front of you. ✓ Talk briefly about the goals of the practice. ✓ Give specific safety instructions. ✓ End with a team cheer.
5 min 5-10min	Warm-up Motor Skills	Ski play to raise body temperature. Short activities/games that build overall motor skills. Never skip a warm-up. Develop a routine and build good habits.
25 min 10 min	Main Part Game	Sequence three or more exercises/activities together in a progressive fashion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use cooperative exercises/activities whenever possible. ✓ Avoid elimination activities, because participants who need the most practice get eliminated first (e.g. if you lose the ball you are out). ✓ If parent assistants are available, set up stations to minimize downtime and line-ups. Play games that reinforce the techniques taught during the main session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use mini-competitions; participants like to “play” the sport!
20 min	Ski Play	Play time on skis under supervision. Provide some one-on-one technique instruction.
2-3 min	Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ End with hot chocolate, snacks and a short social time at the Daylodge. ✓ Talk to each participant at least once during the practice session.

The Perfect Demonstration

A picture is worth a thousand words. This is so true in sport. Movement needs to be seen to be learned, with words used only as highlights. ***Planning a good demonstration is like planning a film!*** Here are the steps:

- 1) **Why the skill?** Name it! Then say simply and briefly how, where, and when it is used.
- 2) **Teaching Points.** Choose two to five teaching points to emphasize. Make up short, descriptive key words or phrases to highlight each.
- 3) **Teaching Aids.** Decide if an aid (a chart or video for example) would help. Use an aid only if it will add something important to the demonstration.
- 4) **Formation.** Design a formation so that everyone will see and hear the demonstration clearly. Ensure the athletes face away from distractions such as the sun, or other activities.
- 5) **View.** Decide on the best angle to show the skill - sideways, head on, from behind, or a mixture of these. A certain teaching point might fit best with a certain view!
- 6) **Demonstrator.** Choose someone who can perform the skill correctly at the athletes' present level. Be sure your demonstrator is willing!
- 7) **Repetitions.** Decide how many times you need to repeat the demonstration in order to cover all the points, but avoid confusion or boredom.
- 8) **Questions.** Make sure the athletes understand. Ask if they have any questions. Help the athletes recall the key words or phrases you used.

Three important tips to remember are:

- With younger or inexperienced athletes, use only one or two teaching points.
- The entire procedure should last about 70 seconds. Three minutes is the absolute maximum.
- Rehearse!!!

6.2 Self-Assessment Sheet

Practice Coaching #2: Skill Progression, Intervention and Communication

Criteria	Yes	No
Skill Progression		
The progression for skill development is appropriate for the age/ability of the participant		
Coach focuses on the appropriate key points for the skill to be developed		
Coach adjusts the activity for more advanced and less advanced abilities within the group		
Comments/suggestions:		
Intervention		
Coach scans the entire group constantly and intervenes with a variety of participants		
Coach looks for input/feedback from the participant		
Correction or reinforcement is clear and a visual is provided		
Correction or reinforcement is brief and participant returns quickly to activity		
Coach focuses on communicating <i>what to do</i> (not what NOT to do)		
Comments/suggestions:		
Communication		
Coach speaks in a calm tone of voice (i.e. does not yell at the participants)		
Coach uses language that the children can easily understand		
Coach refrains from the use of foul language		

Words and body language used in the correction or reinforcement are positive *		
When praise is given, it is specific, not general (e.g. “you are doing ___ well”, not “nice one!”)		
Criteria	Yes	No
Coach acts and speaks with enthusiasm *		
Comments/suggestions:		

*This looks like: Smiles; nods in the affirmative.

*This sounds like: Cheers; “Sally, you did very well. Way to go!”; “Johnny, I see that you are improving at ___. Great job!”

*This feels like: “High fives;” safe pats on the back; a hand shake of congratulations (use these only if the child/youth is clearly comfortable with physical contact from you).

Counting Interventions During the Activity	Number
Duration of the activity in minutes (when participants are practicing, excluding explanation & demo)	
Total number of interventions with the entire group	
Total number of interventions with individual participants	
Total number of different participants with whom the coach intervened	

Remember, more is not necessarily better. The total numbers are only to give you an indication of how often you are intervening and whether you are moving among the group or focussing only on certain participants.

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6.3 Giving Feedback

General Comments about Feedback

- ❑ Timing is everything: the individual needs to be open to hearing feedback, and near enough to hear what you have to say.
- ❑ Draw the skier's attention to some element external to his/her body, or to the anticipated effect of the movement (i.e. what happens to the pole or ski), rather than on the way the movement is being done.
- ❑ Allow skiers to practise a skill without too much interruption. The more you talk, the less they can practise!
- ❑ Repeating the same general comments such as "That's great!" or "Keep going!" is not enough. It is not wrong to make these comments; however, the most effective feedback goes beyond general encouragement.
- ❑ To promote the acquisition and development of skills, the information provided must be specific.
- ❑ To be useful, feedback must be accurate. To be accurate, the coach must: (1) have a good understanding of the skills the individual is working on; (2) have a clear reference point as far as correct execution is concerned; and (3) be in the right place/position to best observe the skier's performance.
- ❑ In the case of motor skills, a demonstration (i.e. non-verbal feedback or the execution of a very precise movement) is often useful.
- ❑ Although feedback is important and contributes to learning, avoid giving feedback too often, or too much at any one time.
- ❑ Keep in mind that it is the quality of feedback that determines its effectiveness, not the quantity.
- ❑ When providing feedback to athletes, coaches should aim for:
 - ✓ Positive feedback.
 - ✓ Specific feedback.
 - ✓ A good balance between descriptive and prescriptive feedback - descriptive feedback that is both specific and positive may influence the athlete's self-esteem in a positive way.

Types of Feedback

First determine whether the skier is making progress or not, and then decide what kind of intervention is best. This is what the different types of feedback would sound like:

Types	Definitions	Examples
Evaluative	The coach assesses the quality of the performance; he/she then makes some kind of assessment or judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That’s fine! • Good job! • No, not like that! • Not good enough!
Prescriptive	The coach tells the athlete how to execute the skill next time they practise it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throw it higher! (general) • Get your arm higher! (specific)
Descriptive	The coach describes to the athlete what he/she has just done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The build-up was too slow (general) • Your legs were extended just as they should be (specific)

How Did You Do?

Ask yourself the following questions after a practice. Was my feedback:

- Specific, not general? For example, “You did _____ perfectly!” rather than “That’s fine!”?
- Positive and constructive, rather than negative and possibly humiliating?
- Directly linked to the skill or behaviour that needed to be improved?
- Informative and relevant to the most important performance factors?
- Balanced, i.e. it contained information on what the skier has done well, as well as what still has to be improved. For example: “Your _____ (movement) has improved. The next thing to do is _____ (add another level of complexity or refinement to the movement)”?
- Clear, precise and easy to understand?

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