

# How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice

For All Levels Of Gymnasts

by Coach John Howard

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# Physical Preparation for Practice

This is an explanation of the many things a gymnast can do to prepare for a practice physically, mentally and psychologically in order to maximize their progress during that practice. Just like you would expect a coaching professional to prepare for a practice, preparation by an athlete for practice can and will result in better practices and better progress.

Gymnasts of all levels, from gymnastics class students to high level optional team gymnasts, need to understand what it is that they can and should do to make sure they get the most out of practice. Parents should help (not nag) gymnasts prepare for a successful practice and reinforce good practices. Gymnastics instructors and coaches should teach gymnasts how to prepare for and how to get the most out of practices.

Gymnastics practice time is limited. One of the most important functions of coaching gymnastics is to choose what to work on given the limited amount of time. It is possible that even a 1 1/2 hour practice would not be enough time to do everything a gymnastics coach would like to do in a day. In fact, the last time I listed all I would ideally like to do in daily practice, it came out to 32 hours of work. Good luck to me or any other coach trying to fit that into one day of gymnastics practice :)

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

It is evident that since gymnastics practice time is at a premium that coaches and gymnasts should do everything possible to maximize the time effectiveness of their practice. Practice time needs to be carefully managed. In order to do that, careful preparations for practice need to be made.

In addition to time management, physical and mental preparation for practice can help gymnasts get the most out of a practice. Being physically and mentally prepared for practice also makes practices more efficient and successful. Psychological preparation is often completely overlooked by gymnasts in their practice prep.

Physical preparation means two things. One a gymnast needs to be healthy, unimpeded by injury and physically fit enough to fully participate in practice. Two a gymnast needs to have all of the tools for practice physically available in the right place at the right time. This includes things like leotards, grips and other personal gymnastics and personal accessories.

A successful practice starts the night before. When you physically prepare for practice the night before, when you are not in a rush to get ready for practice, you are more likely to remember everything you need and have the time to re-stock and perishable personal training items like athletic tape and pre-wrap.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

Prepare everything you need to take in one place or put in your gym bag the night before or immediately after you come home from practice. Having a pre-packed bag is a sign of good planning. That way you are instantly ready to go if circumstances the next day before practice limit your practice preparation time. Bring all your necessary personal equipment from home.

Team gymnasts sometimes have the advantage of having a personal locker at the gym where they can keep much of their personal equipment. But this may even complicate the situation, as they still need to make sure they have everything they need, so they must remember what they run out of and remember when they are at home what is in their locker. Team members must be especially vigilant their last practice before a meet and make sure they take home what they need for a meet (grips, music, etc.), most especially if they are not leaving to the meet from the gym.

One of the things that many gymnasts and team gymnasts forget is that they need to have back-ups ready. While for class gymnasts, it may not be a big deal, not having grips for a team gymnast means they have wasted a day of practice. And the price a gymnast pays for forgetting their grips when they go to a meet is even higher, especially if it is a big meet. The other highly critical items for a team gymnast at a meet includes their team leotard and their FX music, especially if they are optional gymnasts.

# Psychological Preparation for Practice

It is also important to set and/or review your personal goals for your next day's gymnastics practice right before you go to bed. Your coach may or may not have goals for you. Regardless, you should incorporate goals for your next practice into your nightly review. If your coach has not done so, you should set specific goals for every event and training area (like conditioning) that you might possibly do the next practice.

Personally setting personal daily practice goals is not as difficult as one might think. The first goal is to review and perfect the skills you have already learned on each event at previous practices and improve your consistency and execution on those skills. The second step is to improve the execution and consistency of skills at your current level of practice or competition. And your final goal is to learn the next skill in the progression leading to higher level skills. When you set and review your goals the night before practice, you will most likely "dream" of accomplishing them.

You will also want to prepare your mind for a successful practice the next day by visualizing a great practice, great skills and routines before you go to sleep. Mental practice is often the best practice since you don't make any mistakes in mental practice. Doing mental practice of skills and routines right before you go to bed again often means that you will mentally practice those skills and routines all night in your dreams, literally hours of extra practice.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

You have to be mentally prepared before practice with your daily goals in mind and be in control of your mind, attitude and self-talk. You want to psyche yourself up to have a great practice. You want to start practice enthusiastic focused and determined. And you want to control your self-talk and make sure you are stopping any negative thoughts and talk, celebrating and reinforcing your successes and positively programming your mind, body and behavior.

# Steps for Success on the Day of Practice

## What to Do When You Get to Practice

One of the first major steps for success at practice is to arrive early enough. On time to practice means being there at least 15 minutes in advance of class or practice. Experience will show if you need more time than 15 minutes to be completely ready for practice, when it starts.

Gymnasts have a difficulty in that most of them are not old enough to drive and must then depend on their parents to get them to practice early. Parents are not always as concerned with being on time to practice as gymnasts and coaches are, since they may have many other priorities, but gymnasts must do the best they can to help their parents get them to practice on time by being ready.

There are any number of things you need to do when you get to the gym and before practice starts. This is why you need to arrive early, so that you may get all your pre-practice activities done and be ready when practice is scheduled to start.

Check in with front desk, if required. Gyms almost always need a record of your attendance. Greet all gym staff and gym owner, where practical. At the gym and in life, it is always a good idea to be polite to everyone you come in contact with, especially those you know you will come in contact with frequently. You never know when you will need their help.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

Get dressed for practice and make final physical preparations (like hang up your coat, strip down to your workout outfit, fix your hair, etc.). Get ready any necessary practice gear, like grips. Store your other personal items in the designated area or in a locker. Find a coach and get taped, if necessary. Then, go to designated area for where your practice begins.

Greet your classmates or teammates. It is common for gymnasts to want to talk and catch up with everything their friends, teammates and classmates are doing. Get your catch-up communication done with your classmates or teammates before practice, especially if you have coaches who think it is a good idea to restrict talk between teammates during practice.

Prepare physically and mentally for practice. Do any extra personal pre-stretching (not skills) that you need or want, like if you need extra shoulder stretching, if allowed. Review your personal daily goals for strength, flexibility and each event so you are focused on making progress.

When you see them or when your practice starts, greet your coaches. When your coaches give you your directions for practice, you want to “Stop, Look and Listen.” Stop and look at your coach. Listen carefully to their directions about exactly what you are supposed to do. If you do not understand the directions, ask the coach to please repeat or explain them.



## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

While coaches should be doing this, before you do any gymnastics skills, double check and make sure all mats and equipment are properly set and in place and adjusted for where you need them to be. Different size and skill gymnasts may need mats in a somewhat different place, so you may need to move mats when it is your turn.

When you are first learning a skill, focus first on what you need to do the skill safely. Safety should always be your first consideration in gymnastics practice. When you can already do a skill safely, focus on getting to the correct finishing or landing position.

Do not hesitate to ask questions or tell the coach if you believe you cannot do the skill safely by yourself. If you have doubts, you are more likely to hesitate during the skill, which is not safe. Ask for a spot if you need or believe you need one. Don't ever hesitate to ask for a spot if you believe you need a spot to be safe.

When you go for a skill, go 100%. Do not hold back or only partially go for a skill. Hesitating is much more dangerous than going your hardest for a skill. Stopping in the middle of a skill like a back somersault is the worst thing you can do. Half of a somersault means you land on your head. Going all out for the skill and not quite making it all is infinitely safer than stopping in the middle.

Hustle and give 100% effort. This is commonly expected of athletes in other sports but overlooked in gymnastics practices. If a coach tells you to do something or go somewhere, do it as quickly as is safely possible. The faster you do things in practice, the more turns and practice you get. Remember, you will get out of training what you put into it.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

While you need to listen carefully to your coaches, sometimes you need to take what they tell you with a grain of salt. When you are listening to coaches, you are looking to find anything and everything that will help you progress in the sport. Filter out anything negative that they might say or analyze what their positive intention might be in saying what they did. If, for example, they say, “Your cartwheels are terrible.” you can figure out that there are things in your cartwheel, which you need to work on and improve.

Listen for and lock in any positives that your coach may say. For example, if your coach, tells you, “You had a great lift into your back tuck.” you want to notice that, celebrate your success to lock it into your mind in a positive manner and make sure that you lift like that into every back tuck from now on. You want to repeat behaviors that are correct and when your coach compliments you, that is always something you want to make sure you continue doing.

It is always surprising how often how who is first in line becomes such an issue and point of contention. You don't need to be first in line. You want to be the best in line. If you are last in line, you have the opportunity to observe what everyone else does, learn from their mistakes and successes and be more likely to take full advantage of your practice turn.

In gymnastics it is not the first one in line or even the one who learns skills first (although that is always fun and a win of sorts), it is the one who learns it best and can perform it best at the necessary time (a show or meet). Compete to do that, rather than compete to be first in line. Where ever you are in line, listen carefully and know what you are supposed to do when it is your turn and do it to the best of your ability.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

Be a good classmate or teammate. Look for things your classmates/teammates are doing well and praise them, whenever possible. You will help them lock in their progress that way and increase your social standing at the same time.

Be ready to help the coach with whatever is necessary, like moving mats and getting or putting away equipment. Again, the more quickly tasks like this are completed, the more useful practice time you will have.

## Learn Visually

Most people learn most quickly when they learn visually, in other word, they learn quickest when they learn by watching. Oftentimes, in practices, there are times when gymnasts must wait their turn while other gymnasts are practicing. This is a much-wasted period of practice time by most gymnasts.

If for example, in a class of six gymnasts, let's say, a gymnast takes their turn, and just listens to the advice the coach gives them. If they don't pay any attention to what the other gymnasts do or what the coach says to the other gymnasts, they only learn what the coach tells them.

If a gymnast in that situation, however, takes their turn and then carefully watches what all of the other gymnasts do and what the coach says to them, they can learn up to five times more. They can watch and learn from every gymnast's experience, not just their own.

The lesson is to visually learn from other gymnasts in your group. Watch those in front of you, so you can see not only what to do, but the best way to do it and listen to the coaching advice given to others and learn from it.

When you see someone doing the required skill exceptionally well, mentally lock that into your mind and then imagine yourself doing it just like that or better. And don't forget to take the opportunity to congratulate your classmates or teammates when they do something well.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

If there is nothing else particularly useful to observe, while you are waiting your turn, you can use the time to visually rehearse what you are going to do next. Again, visual practice is very useful and can give you the equivalent of extra practice turns. So take every opportunity to practice in your mind while waiting your next turn, especially right before your next turn.

## What to Do After Practice

There are a number of things to do at the end of practice. Make sure you put back any gym equipment you have used where it is supposed to go. As you should do wherever you go, leave the gym better than you found it.

Gymnasts, like everyone else, tend to remember negatives more than positives, giving them a negative slant toward their gymnastics progress and performances. To help counteract that tendency, you should have been celebrating your steps of progress all throughout practice to increase your motivation. But you also want to further lock accomplishments into your mind by recording your progress and accomplishments in writing in your journal. Identify any crucial lessons you have learned. Doing all of this right after practice while it is fresh in your mind, is the best way to make sure you do not forget any of your successes and progress.

This is also the best time to set your goals for the next practice. Review your practice in your mind. Set and write down new goals for next practice based on progress from this practice. If you made any steps of progress in any category, you will want to write down the next goal step in the progression and start your mind on the way to accomplishing that next step. Any goals you did not get to work on or if you did not make any progress on, carry forward to the next practice.

Don't forget to say goodbye to your coaches and to thank them for helping you. The relationship between gymnasts and coaches is always complicated and it helps to be on the best terms possible. Say goodbye to all your friends, classmates and teammates as well.

## **How To Get The Most Out Of Every Gymnastics Practice**

Make sure you collect all of your belongings that you need to take home. Use the checklist if you need to, but make sure you have and have done everything you need to do before you leave the gym.

Before you go to bed, review and celebrate again the progress you've made. Review your goals for the next practice and visualize yourself achieving them just before going to sleep.

# Gymnastics Practice Checklist

(Not all gymnasts at every level will need all of the items on this list)

- Daily event practice goals
- Gymnastics journal
- Gymnastics diary
- Gym bag
  
- Warm-up suit
- Leotard
- Sports bra
- Briefs
- Biker shorts
- Spare leotard
- T-shirt
- Sweatshirt
  
- Running shoes
- Footies
- Beam shoes
- Beam belt
  
- Floor music
- Daily event practice goals
- Gymnastics journal
- Gymnastics diary
  
- Hair prep
- Hair pins
- Hair spray
- Hair bands
- Hair clips
- Scrunchy
  
- Water bottle
- Energy snack
- Sports/Energy drink
- Grips
- Grip bag
- Grip brush
  
- Neoprene wristbands
- Cotton wristbands
- Rubberbands
- Finger wedgies
- Spare grips
- SecondSkin
- Tuff-Skin
- Pumice stone
- Fingernail file
- Fingernail clips
- Rip scissors
- Melaleuca oil
- Preparation H
- Pre-wrap
- Athletic tape
- Tape scissors/tape cutter
- Tite-Grip Grip Control Formula
- Personal chalk
  
- Video camera
- Cellphone to video training
- iPod for mental training
- Ankle weights
- Wrist weights
- Weight vest
- Therabands
- Parallettes
- Shoulder stretching rope/stick
  
- Personal hygiene products
- Lip balm
  
- Record your practice results
- Set your goals for next practice
- Collect all of your belongings
  
- Gymnastics Practice Checklist :)