

FOCUS►

Subfocus►

CONCEPT OF BALANCE

Shapes, Levels

Grades 1, 2

Standard 1

The physically literate individual demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.

Grade-Level Outcomes

- Maintains stillness on different bases of support with different body shapes (S1.E7.1)
- Balances on different bases of support, combining levels and shapes (S1.E7.2a)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- Maintain a balanced position on chosen bases of support for three seconds, demonstrating the four basic shapes (grade 1)
- Maintain a balanced position on chosen bases of support for three seconds, demonstrating different shapes and levels (grade 2)

Safety Concerns

- Disturbing or touching others as they work is not permitted (important safety protocol for gymnastics work at all times). (Standard 4)
- Safe use, transport, and storage of mats (S4.E1, E4, E6.1) (S4.E6.2a.2b)

Materials and Equipment

- Sufficient space for students to work safely, on floor or mats
- Small individual mats (one per student) if available; carpet square for outdoors
- Whiteboard

Introduction

When you first studied balance in kindergarten, we discussed what the word means and established the criteria for balance. Can anyone recall the two criteria? Watch me as I stand on one foot, and tell me whether I am balanced (model by standing in a front scale with arms waving, almost falling over). Was I balanced in that position? No, I was about to fall over. Watch again (model with a firm base of support but arms moving). What about that one? I was not about to fall over, but was I balanced? No. Balance means I can hold the position perfectly still, and I am not about to fall over—not about to lose the balance. The second criterion is being able to hold the position for several seconds; we will say three seconds for our work. Many of you can kick up into a handstand, but only a few of you can hold it for several seconds. You have not mastered a skill unless you can keep it under control and hold perfectly still for several seconds. Tell your neighbor the two criteria for balance in gymnastics.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BASES OF SUPPORT

Review bases of support, emphasizing stillness. Have students practice by choosing a variety of bases of support for their balances.

- Select several students with different bases to demonstrate their balances. Have students ask a neighbor to name the body parts used as bases. Write the list on the whiteboard.

Head*

Knees

Belly

Hip

Shoulders

Hands

Elbows

Back

Feet

Base of spine

- Encourage students to try new bases of support as they view the listing on the whiteboard.

**When students use the head as a base of support, they must always accompany it with another body part as the base. Students must never attempt to balance on the head alone.*

- Have student try these teacher-selected bases of support:

Two hands and two feet	Two hands and one foot
Two feet and one hand	Two elbows and two knees
Two hands, head, and two feet	Two hands, head, and one foot
Shoulders and upper arms	Stomach only
Back only	One foot
Base of spine only	
- Challenge students to use free body parts to create two different balances for each base of support named.

Note: Students who are in competitive gymnastics clubs may need a reminder to save some skills for outside school because other students who are not ready for the skills may attempt them.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: WIDE TO NARROW

Balances on wide bases of support, such as feet and hands shoulder-width apart, knees and elbows shoulder-width apart

- Balances on narrow bases of support by moving body parts close together
- Discussion with class regarding stability on wide versus narrow base

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: DECREASING THE NUMBER

Balances on wide bases of support, created by the number of body parts serving as bases, such as two feet, two hands

- Balances on narrow bases of support by reducing the number of body parts serving as bases, such as two feet and one hand, one foot and one hand
- Two knees and two elbows decreasing from four to three to two bases of support
- Balances on narrow bases of support with opposition, such as one foot and opposite hand, one knee and opposite elbow

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: MUSCULAR TENSION

What was the difference in your stillness, your balance, when you were on a wide base versus a narrow base? When you were on four body parts as bases versus only two or one body part? Correct. The balance is more difficult. Let's learn a secret for maintaining balance in those difficult situations; it's called muscular tension.

Have students tighten their abdominal muscles while seated in self-space. (Remind them to breathe.) Have them tighten the muscles in their arms and legs yet not change their shape or position on the mat.

- Challenge students to balance on the base of the spine by rocking backward slightly while seated until their feet are not touching the floor. Tightening the abdominal muscles is the key to stillness.
- Have students repeat the wide to narrow balances, emphasizing the tightening of the muscles as the base becomes narrower.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BALANCES AND SHAPES

Have students try balances on different bases of support to create wide, narrow, curled, and twisted shapes.

- Teacher-selected shapes with student balance response. Encourage a variety of responses.

- Challenge students to use different bases of support for each of the balances created to demonstrate shapes.
- Students try different bases of support for wide (narrow, curled, twisted) shape. Expand students' skills with balances to demonstrate each of the four shapes.
- Allow several minutes for students to explore balances for each of the shapes and select their best balance for each.
 - Have students demonstrate their best balance for each of the shapes, holding stillness until you give the signal to change to the next balance.
 - Have students repeat the four balances, concentrating on the transition from one balance to the next by performing smooth, purposeful movement in the weight transfer.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BALANCES AND LEVELS (GRADE 2)

Review from kindergarten balancing with the body in various positions; review levels from the movement concept lessons.

- Have students create balances at different levels—high, middle, low.
- Direct the students to challenge themselves with balances that require muscular tension to maintain stillness, such as a high-level balance other than standing on one foot, a low-level balance that elevates the body off the mat, and a middle-level balance that is very narrow or on very few bases of support.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: BALANCES, SHAPES, AND LEVELS (GRADE 2)

Review with the class the many body parts and combinations that can serve as bases of support. Remind them of the many balances to demonstrate shapes that the class created in the previous lesson (or earlier tasks).

- Have students explore body shapes in balances at high, middle, and low levels.
- Challenge students to create a balance using each of the four shapes and at least two levels (high, middle, low).
- Extend the challenge with each of the four shapes and different bases of support at each level, such as wide, narrow, and twisted balances, each with a different base of support at low level, at middle level, and at high level; and curled balances, each with a different base of support at low level and at middle level.

Assessment

Grade 1

Select your four favorite balances to represent the four shapes from all that you tried today. Practice each one again to be sure you can hold it absolutely still for three seconds. When you are confident, ask the person next to you to watch your balances. He or she will watch for the following: stillness, ability to hold position for three seconds, and muscular tension. Your partner will give you a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down, depending on the stability of your balances.

Grade 2

Select your four favorite balances to demonstrate shapes and levels; be sure that each one has a different base of support. Practice each one until you can hold it absolutely still for a three-second count. Get a piece of paper and a pencil from the assignment table. Draw each of your balances and label the base of support and the level. After you complete the drawing, show each balance to the person on the mat nearest you. He or she will give you a $\sqrt{+}$ if the balance meets the two criteria, a $\sqrt{\approx}$ if you still need to practice the balance, and a $\sqrt{-}$ if you cannot hold the balance.

Closure

- What did we add to our study of balance today?
- What are the two criteria for a good gymnastics balance?

Reflection

- Can students hold the gymnastics balances stationary for three seconds with no wiggles, no wobbles, and no loss of balance?
- Can they balance on different bases of support to demonstrate a variety of levels and shapes?
- Do students challenge themselves for a higher skill level, yet being aware of safety?
- What aspects of the lesson do I need to reteach? Which students need individual attention? Which students need challenge at a high level of skill?

Note: All too often, lessons in gymnastics are simply an introduction to the skills for children, an exploration rather than mastery. Many of these lessons require more than one class period for mastery. Do not rush; wait until you observe that the children have mastered the skills before moving on. Gymnastics is no different from games skills in this respect.