

LESSON 5: HITTING

Grade-Level Outcomes

Primary Outcomes

Catching: Catches, with a mature pattern, from different trajectories using a variety of objects in small-sided game play. (S1.M21.7)

Striking: Strikes a pitched ball with an implement to open space in a variety of practice tasks. (S1.M20.7)

Embedded Outcome

Accepting feedback: Provides corrective feedback to a peer, using teacher-generated guidelines, and incorporating appropriate tone and other communication skills. (S4.M3.7)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- demonstrate the proper footwork for fielding fly balls, using all critical elements of a mature pattern during small-group fielding practice tasks and game application.
- hit a pitched ball into open space using proper striking form during small-sided game play.

Equipment and Materials

- Ball options: tennis balls, Wiffle balls, racquetballs, foam balls, etc.
- Bat options: Wiffle bats of different sizes, tennis rackets, wooden paddles, wooden dowels
- Home plates
- Cones or markers (6 for each group of 4 students)
- Pedometers
- iPads or digital video cameras

Introduction

Begin with a review of catching fly balls. Do a performance check for understanding, by asking all students to show you the position of their bodies when catching a fly ball. Ask questions about the technique, specifically “why” questions (e.g., Why should the non-throwing-side foot be slightly ahead? Why do we need to have two hands ready to catch? Why do we use the crow hop?). Provide an individual step-count goal.

Instructional Task: Review Catching Fly Balls

■ PRACTICE TASK

Partner Fly Balls

One partner is the tosser and the other is the fielder.

- Tossers make an underhand toss for a short fly ball directly in front of the fielding partner.
- Fielders run in to catch the short fly ball and return the ball to the tosser.
- The tosser then throws a fly ball over the head of the fielder, making him drop-step and run back to catch the overhead fly ball.
- The fielder throws the ball back to the tosser.
- The pattern continues with a short fly ball and then an overhead fly ball until 10 throws have been made or the designated time is up.

In the partner activities, each set of partners should take two balls of choice in case one goes out of play.

Extension

X-ball catching: Partners are set up as in the previous fly ball practice task. Four throws and attempted catches are made before partners switch. The tosser makes the following throws so that the fielder is making catches in the four corners of an X:

- Short fly to the right
- Overhead fly to the left
- Short fly straight ahead
- Overhead fly to the right

Refinement

Many students have trouble with footwork. Stop the drill and practice footwork if needed.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- Partners choose the type of ball they want to use in the fielding activities.
- Partners determine the distance apart they want to be.
- Partners determine the speed at which the balls are thrown.

What to Look For

Critical elements for fielding fly balls:

1. Fielders assume an athletic stance, with non-throwing-side foot slightly ahead.
2. Fielders call for the ball.
3. Fielders have both hands ready for a two-hand catch: “When it’s high, thumbs will meet; pinkies touch when it’s at your feet.”
4. Fielders absorb the ball into the body.
5. Fielders crow-hop and throw: “Thumb to the thigh and up to the sky” (big arm circle).

Critical elements for jab steps (balls hit in front of the player):

1. Fielders take a quick and short step toward the ball to start momentum.
2. Fielders run hard for the ball, pumping both arms.

Critical elements for crossover steps (balls hit to the side):

1. Fielders pivot the foot on the ball side.
2. Fielders cross over with the foot on the non-ball side.
3. Fielders run hard to the ball.
4. Fielders square up to the fly ball, and get in ready position to make the catch.

Critical elements for drop steps (balls hit behind the player):

1. Step backward at an angle with the foot on the ball side.
2. Turn body and run, pumping both arms.
3. Square up to the fly ball, if possible, and get in ready position to make the catch.

Instructional Task: Hitting (Striking)

■ PRACTICE TASK

Demonstrate the technique of hitting. Discuss the bat as a lever, along with the relationship between the length of the lever and the speed of the swing. Remind students that they have been previously taught the skill of hitting, but there are more details to learn to be a successful hitter.

Hitting progression:

Each student has her own bat, or partners share one bat and give feedback when watching each other. Students are in self-space, all facing the same direction. Intersperse skilled students who may help others. Emphasize safety.

- Students show the proper grip on the bat. Put the bat out to show it as an extension of the arm.
- Students show proper ready position and jump straight up from that position (possible only if the ready position is balanced).
- Students take dry swings in slow motion. Stop the swing at the contact point to show that the top hand is in a hand-shaking position.
- Students put bat behind back, hooking it in their arms, and a ball beside the back heel. They rotate and push the ball with the back heel if they are “squishing the bug” properly.

Extensions

- Hitting practice: Using a home plate to show pitch location, partners hit off a tee, do a soft toss, or hit a pitched ball. Switch by repetitions or by time.
- Assign a peer assessment of hitting.

EMBEDDED OUTCOME: S4.M3.7. Using appropriate technology (e.g., iPads, digital cameras), students record each other hitting off a tee or hitting a soft toss. Students watch the video together and complete a written peer-assessment checklist.

Refinement

Step toward the pitch. Hit *through* the ball. Chin moves from front shoulder to back shoulder.

Guiding questions for students:

- Why do you line up your “door-knocking” knuckles when gripping the bat?
- How do you make your stance balanced?
- Why do you want to take just a short stride?
- At the contact point, why should your top hand be in a hand-shaking position?
- What is the purpose of the follow-through?

Video analysis: Teacher-created checklist or rubric of critical elements

Student Choices/Differentiation

- Partners choose the type of balls they want to use in the hitting activities.
- Partners choose the type of bat they want to use in the hitting activities.
- Partners choose to use a tee, hit a soft toss, or hit a pitched ball.
- Higher-skilled students practice hitting inside or outside pitches by setting up the tee in those locations, soft-tossing to those locations, or pitching to those locations.

What to Look For**Critical elements for striking:**

- Batters use the proper grip (door-knocking knuckles lined up).
- Batters assume a hitting-ready position (balanced athletic stance).
- Batters step and extend (take a short stride toward the pitch, begin to turn, throw hands out).
- Batters rotate (twist trunk so that back leg forms an L and back foot “squishes the bug”).
- Batters follow through, continuing the swing to roll wrists over and wrap bat around the back.

Soft toss:

1. One partner with a bat stands in hitting stance.
2. Other partner kneels facing the batter, but off to the side and slightly ahead of the batter.
3. The partner who is kneeling makes a slow toss into the batter's hitting zone.

Instructional Task: Game Application of Hitting

■ PRACTICE TASK

2 v 2 hitting:

Groups of four play 2 v 2. From home plate, two foul lines go out about 60 feet (18 m) to form a triangular-shaped playing area. Place markers about 20 feet (6 m) apart at the 60-foot home run line. Put another set of markers about 40 feet (12 m) from home plate that designate a triple. Add a third set of markers about 20 feet from home plate that designate a double. A ball hit between home plate and 20 feet is considered a single.

Teams: The offensive team includes a hitter and on-deck hitter. No base running is included. The defensive team includes a pitcher and catcher.

Scoring: A ball hit in the single area moves an imaginary runner to first; double area moves all runners two bases; triple area moves all runners three bases; home run area scores all runners.

Outs: The hitter strikes out (swing and miss or foul balls count as strikes). Three outs and the teams switch.

Emphasize safety. Set up playing areas so they radiate out from a central open space.

Refinement

Know your best pitch area to hit. With no strikes, the area is small. With one strike, the area is larger. With two strikes, the area becomes the entire strike zone.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- Groups choose the type of bats and balls they want to use in the game.
- Groups determine the size of their playing area.
- Groups determine the number of strikes per batter and the number of outs per team.

What to Look For**Critical elements for striking:**

1. Use the proper grip (door-knocking knuckles lined up).
2. Assume the ready position (balanced athletic stance).
3. Step and extend (take a short stride toward the pitch, begin to turn, throw hands out).
4. Rotate (twist trunk so that back leg forms an L and back foot “squishes the bug”).
5. Follow through (continue the swing to roll wrists over and wrap bat around the back).

Critical elements for pitch selection:

1. Strike zone is from knees to shoulders.
2. Students should know the pitch location that is ideal for their swing.
3. Students make decision to swing according to the pitch location and the strike count.
 - With no strikes, perfect pitch area is very small.
 - With one strike, perfect pitch area becomes larger.
 - With two strikes, perfect pitch area is very large within the strike zone.

Organization and Safety

- Ensure that the size of the playing space is appropriate to students' skill level.
- Give safety reminders for students to look that the batter and catcher are ready before pitching.
- Have the catcher stand back at least 5 feet (1.5 m) behind the hitter. Have the on-deck hitter stand on the right side, well away from the hitter and catcher.
- Set up playing areas so they radiate out from a central open space.

Formal and Informal Assessments

- Checks for understanding of catching fly balls and hitting
- Peer assessment of hitting technique (rubric or checklist of critical elements)

Closure

If students are primarily at the pre-control and control levels in hitting skills, use questions such as:

- What are some things to remember about hitting a ball?
- Why are those things important?
- Show me how you get into your hitting stance. Why do you want to “squish the bug” with your back foot?
- What does the follow-through look like?

If students are primarily at the utilization and proficient levels of GLSP (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2012) in hitting skills, ask questions such as:

- Can someone show me the difference between hitting an inside pitch and an outside pitch?
- In what game situations would you try to hit to the right side of the field?
- When you were playing the 2 v 2 hitting game, what did you need to do as a hitter to be successful?
- How did you work with your partner?
- Was it easy to score runs? Why or why not?

Reflection

- Are students able to use their hitting skills in modified game play?
- Are students working together in game applications of the skill?
- Are students ready to add base running to the hitting skill?

Homework

Ask students to come back to the next class with the answer to the question: Which class of lever would swinging a bat represent?

Practice the hitting motion at home by getting in the batting stance with hands on hips, putting a ball by the back heel, and “squishing the bug” to make the ball move away from the foot. Do 20 trials.

Ask students to update their physical activity logs.

Resources

Wiffle Ball: www.wiffle.com

Internet keyword search: “proper footwork for outfielders,” “catching fly balls,” “fielding fly balls,” “softball hitting mechanics,” “baseball hitting mechanics”