Basic Lesson Plans for Athletics

Developed in conjunction with Paula Radcliffe & Loughborough Sport
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Key

× Pupil/Athlete

→ Athlete Movement

--- Ball/Implement Movement

Hurdle

Introduction

Athletics is a sport that can be enjoyed by everyone. Each child should be encouraged to find their own strengths in athletics, among the broad selection of running, jumping and throwing events. The sport allows and encourages working at personal performance improvement, as well as competing against others on an individual or team basis.

These lessons provide basic rationale, sessions and practice drills which have been developed by Paula Radcliffe and Loughborough Sport (Loughborough University). They are intended mainly for children who have little previous experience of athletics events or athletics training.

Typically, you can spend about 10-20 minutes on each event/activity, depending on the total amount of time that you have available. The activity itself may be gently progressive but, if not, you will need a warm-up of 5-10 minutes. Also, if you have the time and the activity has been quite energetic, then you would benefit from 5-10 minutes of warm-down activities – mixtures of jogging, walking, running sideways, bouncy walking, bouncy jogging, walking backwards, relaxed skipping etc., as these are very good aids to recovery if performed afterwards.
Technique and Flexibility Exercises – Specialised Warm-Up

Here are some additional warm-up exercises you can do after a basic warm-up (as shown on the Tesco Sport for Schools and Clubs DVD). Make sure you build up gradually from low intensity to higher intensity work, and only gradually extend the range of movement to a level a, or beyond, that likely to be called for in the event to be practised.

**OBJECTIVE**: To warm up appropriately as a basis for safe, effective, athletics activity. To improve movement quality and to build confidence.

**Organisation:**
- Groups of 3-5 (depending on numbers)
- Numbers 1, 3, 5 ready behind start line of 10-15m running zone, with numbers 2 and 4 waiting just beyond finish line, facing back towards start line.
- Continuous relay basis - continue in each activity until 2-3 repetitions completed by each individual.
- Emphasise control of body position and movement – NOT speed!

**Coaching Points:**
- **High Knees Drill** – alternately raise thighs to horizontal with sprinting rhythm but slow forward motion (you can get the feel of this by initially running on the spot). Arms must be used in slightly exaggerated running action – working across the body (but hands never crossing the midline) and with elbows slightly out.
- **Heel Kicks Drill** – heels kicked up to buttocks in sprint rhythm but again with slow forward progress (can get used to this by doing ‘half kicks’ initially). Arms must be used as in full running action (see above).

**Harder (advanced):**
- **Claw Drill** – same as ‘High Knees’ but emphasising quick clawing action of leading leg/foot to ensure that foot contact is directly under the body (not out in front!) and that there is a strong push back from underneath the body.
- **Chicken Drill** – progress forward with sprint rhythm but with legs kept straight, with active ground contact on ball of foot – sometimes emphasising height of rebound and sometimes going for greater length of strides.
Hurdles

The hurdles are an explosive and exciting event in which the athlete demonstrates power and agility to get to the finish line as fast as possible – it is modified sprinting. Children require adjustable hurdles to take into consideration differences in height and capability.

**Phase 1**

![Phase 1 Diagram]

**Plan view**

- 6 hurdles with one metre spacing in between each one.
- Walk over each hurdle emphasising lead and trail leg techniques. 2-4 repetitions on the right side then the same on the left side. Push trunk forward when clearing barriers.

  - **Lead leg**: Drive the lead knee high towards the hurdle before extending the heel across the barrier. Pull the foot actively back to the floor on the far side of the barrier. All this action wants to be performed in line with the running direction.

  - **Trail leg**: the thigh of the trail leg is pulled out to the side and parallel to the ground with the heel tucked up tightly to the back of the thigh as it crosses the barrier. As the knee passes the hurdle rail it continues to be pulled through until it is back in the line of running with the lower leg pointing to the floor.

**Phase 2**

- 6 canes 6-8m apart for 3 stride rhythm between, (For sprint hurdles there is this 3 stride rhythm so always same lead leg – but it is useful for all hurdlers to learn skills on both legs.)

  - Run over the canes exaggerating the lead knee pick up on clearance.

  - Gradually increase spacing of canes so this action is performed as a fast sprint.

**Phase 3**

- Replace canes with low hurdles.

  - Repeat the three stride rhythm at controlled speed. 2-4 repetitions on each side.

  - Increase first spacing for greater speed and then hurdle height to progress hurdling ability.

  - For 400m hurdling especially experiment with 4 strides in between (to alternate lead legs) and 7 strides in between (to develop spatial awareness.)

**OBJECTIVE**: The hurdles exercises focus on the importance of developing a good technique to enable the barriers to be cleared as quickly as possible.

**Organisation**:

**Phase 1**

- 6 hurdles with one metre spacing in between each one.
- Walk over each hurdle emphasising lead and trail leg techniques. 2-4 repetitions on the right side then the same on the left side. Push trunk forward when clearing barriers.

  - **Lead leg**: Drive the lead knee high towards the hurdle before extending the heel across the barrier. Pull the foot actively back to the floor on the far side of the barrier. All this action wants to be performed in line with the running direction.

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**Phase 2**

**Coaching Points**

- Keep Hips High
- Sprint Naturally
- Drive across the hurdles
- Adapt the hurdle height and spacing to the athlete, not the other way round
Throwing

As a safe introduction to the techniques of these exciting strength-based activities, you can practice the fundamentals (separate sessions for each event) as follows:

JAVELIN STYLE – with small footballs, softballs, volleyballs or (a little more costly) ‘turbojavs’. The thrower’s hand supports the implement from underneath (tennis balls are too small to encourage this).

SHOT PUT STYLE – using softballs, small footballs, beanbags, or (better still) small medicine balls

**OBJECTIVE:** to provide safe experience and performance progress in throwing/putting

**Organisation:**
- Mark out throwing area (as on left) with tape, chalk, or cones
- Group pupils (as on left) with only one at a time from each group in the ‘throw area’
- ON COMMAND, group number ones all throw, then walk to back of queue in the waiting area – and number 2’s move into the throw area.
- Nobody collects until ALL implements/balls are thrown – then all walk together ON COMMAND, collect, and walk back.
- 3 standing throws/puts each, then (if capable) 3-6 from short run of about 3-5 strides (javelin simulation) OR using small sideways shift/glide (simulating shot).

**Coaching Points**
- Throw from ‘power position’ – sideways stance, weight mainly on back foot from where it transfers forwards by strong leg drive, against resistance of braced front leg and with foot firmly on ground slightly to left of throwing direction (for right handers)
- JAVELIN STYLE – hand under ball/turbojav, arm straight and withdrawn to rear, hand at shoulder height or above, shoulders sideways-on, non-throwing arm bent and high in front of body (forearm in front of face), keep chest up, eyes aimed at imaginary ‘target’. Begin movement with strong rear leg drive to rotate hips, and shoulders to the front, then LAUNCH implement high over (not around) shoulder.
- SHOT STYLE – implement tucked into neck, hold with thumb and fingers (‘clean palm, dirty neck’). Weight mainly over rear leg, knee a little bent, shoulders/head turned totally to rear. Free arm bent in front of body. Then, drive strongly from rear foot and thigh, to rotate hips, chest and shoulders to front, and ‘PUT’ (i.e. PUSH from neck followed by FLIP of elbow and wrist) implement high and forwards.
Safety

• To progress from the above to more advanced activity, using proper athletics throwing implements and/or onto the rotational long throws (discus and hammer), is exciting, but can be very dangerous unless implemented correctly. To go beyond the throwing activities and implements suggested above, expert and suitably qualified direction and guidance are an ABSOLUTE MUST.
Jumping

Valuable preparation for the jumping events can be done away from specialist facilities. However, activities encouraging maximum effort jumps from each foot separately should not be long delayed – and from short ‘approach runs’ (1-7 strides).

Standing jumps from 2 feet simultaneously are fun and useful ‘tests’ but not closely related to the events in this group (high jump, long jump, triple jump, and pole vault).

Jumping activities can be very demanding on soft young joints and limbs, so use cushioned shoes, compliant surfaces, and make progress very cautiously.

1) Shuttle Running

**OBJECTIVE:** to develop skills and confidence in hopping and jumping.

**Organisation:** (1-3 exercises per lesson/session)

1. **Shuttle Running** (may serve as warm up) – continuous, 3-5 persons, group relay (for movement quality NOT speed) over distance of 10-15 metres, 3 repetitions each on high bouncy running (getting higher on each rep) and 3 x long bounding runs.
2) Hopscotch

½ metre squares

3) Hopping Shuttle Relay Races

See diagram 1) above

OBJECTIVE: to develop skills and confidence in hopping and jumping.

Organisation: (1-3 exercises per lesson/session)

2. Hopscotch (see left) – various formats possible of one- and two-footed hops, jumps, landings, changes of direction, balancing, picking up coin, slate or quoit, etc.

OBJECTIVE: to develop skills and confidence in hopping and jumping.

Organisation: (1-3 exercises per lesson/session)

3. Hopping Shuttle Relay Races - groups as for Shuttle Running (above). Races involving right- and left-leg hops (2-4 x 10-15 metres)
4) Approach Run Practice

**OBJECTIVE:** to develop skills and confidence in hopping and jumping.

**Organisation:** (1-3 exercises per lesson/session)

4. Approach Run Practice – in alternation with partner, take 8 fast, big, bouncy strides from start line. Partner observes and marks 3rd contact point (with cone or chalk).Then 3 attempts in opposite direction, from the marked point, still using 8 similar strides (with eyes looking ahead at distant object). Partner checks how close you are to the original start line on your 3rd contact. Then try process again, checking end of 5th stride.

5) Hopping/Stepping Routines

Various arrangements possible.

**OBJECTIVE:** to develop skills and confidence in hopping and jumping.

**Organisation:** (1-3 exercises per lesson/session)

5. Hopping/Stepping Routines – with recovery breaks (non-impact exercises), work through 1-2 x 10-15 metres of:

- (i) left leg hops
- (ii) right leg hops
- (iii) hop step jump from left foot start
- (iv) same but off right foot
- (v) hop, hop, step, step, jump.

Later, you can test these (2 tries on each) for distance, but with soft safe surface for final landing.

**Coaching and Safety Points**
- Use arms for momentum and balance and free leg to assist re height and distance.
- Use heel-toe or ‘full-foot’ action (avoid landing exclusively on front part of feet)
- Try for landing with foot coming down and directly under body – not out in front.
- Take care, with surfaces, shoes, and techniques, to avoid slipping
- Stop immediately if any discomfort in feet, shins, ankles, knees, hips or back.
Middle/Long Distance

Paula Radcliffe set a world record in the 2003 London Marathon (42 kilometres) of 2 hours 15 minutes 25 seconds. Marathons though are only for trained, seasoned, senior athletes! While younger, Paula ran fast times for 800, 1,500, 3,000, and 5,000 metres, all excellent events which challenge mental strength and physical endurance.

OBJECTIVE: to develop fitness and experience in middle distance running.

 Organisation:

A. Foundation Phase (3-6 weeks)
Use 3 off-track workouts and build gradually from 1-2 per week to 3 or more.

- **Workout 1 – ‘Relays’**
Jog 5 minutes, then go into teams of 3–5, on grass or dirt trail surface of about 300 metres with natural landmarks preventing cutting corners. Athletes numbered 1 to 5, with odd numbers at first start line and even numbers at a second start line (marked at midway round the circuit. Each runner hands on to next team member after doing a half circuit. The activity continues for 10 minutes when top 3 teams are acknowledged. Finish with 5-10 minutes jog if time available.

- **Workout 2 – ‘Out and Back Run, with Reverse Handicap’**
All run to well-known meeting place via 5-10 minutes relaxed run loop (slow runners to start in advance and fast runners after main group). Meeting point to be quickly accessible for teacher/coach who notes approximate order/timings of arriving runners. A brief rest is followed by 4-10 x 60 metres ‘striders’ (i.e. 75% of full effort) with technique emphasis (see below). Then after brief rest, run back to start – on a rough individual handicap basis with aim of trying to have all arriving at finish simultaneously.

- **Workout 3 – ‘Continuous Easy Run’**
Run for 10-15 minutes if possible (walking phases are allowed but keep to a minimum). It is important to run slowly/easily so as to run longer. If feeling OK, you should try to for a bit more each time and 15-30 minutes should be achievable for most (depending on age and ability). If it feels fairly comfortable, after 3-4 of these runs you may try a cross-country race or two (or personal ‘time trials’ of about 1-2 miles) for experience and fitness benefit.

B. Implementation Phase (3-6 weeks)
Up to 2 per week PLUS an easy run

- **Workout 1 – ‘400 metres repetitions’**
After 5-10 minutes jog and a few 60-80 meters striders, to get the feel of 1,500m pace and effort, try to do at least 5 reps of 400m at what feels like 75% of top speed, (but up to 10 is possible in subsequent sessions if you can build up to that and get the pace right) with a 200m jog recovery between each (walk recoveries are OK but you should try to progress beyond the need
to use them. For 800 metres preparation try 3-4 reps only at what feels like 85% of maximum speed – and have 5 minutes recoveries. Warm down 5-10 minutes.

- **Workout 2 ‘Pied Piper Grass Session’**
  Run for 20, 40, 60, 90, 120, 90, 60, 40, 20 seconds on undulating grassland – with shuffle jogging 3 times the length of the previous repetition. After each repetition, the leader becomes the ‘pied piper’, turns and shuffle jogs in opposite direction to that of the rep, and all others turn to follow when they meet him. A shout or whistle is given 5-10 seconds before next rep start, and all turn again to jog forwards ready to commence again.

**Coaching Points:**
- Run tall, keep head steady, shoulders low and relax jaw, neck, and forearms.
- Consistent running style regardless of pace and tiredness
- Familiarise with track pace and effort levels