

The Right Rehearsal

Make sure your start prepares participants for the fun and the finish.

When I started in group fitness almost 20 years ago, I was taught that the warm-up offered many benefits and was a mandatory segment of a properly designed class. Even so, I took warm-ups for granted and saw them as an obstacle I needed to overcome in order to get to the “good stuff.” It took me years to figure out that a fun, effective warm-up could set the tone for the entire workout and mean the difference between an average class and an exceptional one.

Today, there are many types of classes, and no one warm-up is universally appropriate. The warm-up is the dress rehearsal, and its movements should be specific, or similar, to the workout. For instance, an advanced strength and conditioning class might include high-intensity ballistic intervals, or drills that consist of multiplanar movements. In the warm-up, rather than marching in place or rocking side to side, you’d execute low- to moderate-intensity exercises that involved acceleration and deceleration, side-to-side and front-to-back movements, and rotation. The focus would be on specific neuromuscular patterning and functional range of motion.

Whatever the workout, before you begin, make a preclass announcement to warm up participants *psychologically*. Tell them the format, intensity level and main focus of the class so they know what to expect. Address any special conditions, such as injuries or pregnancy, at this time. Always allow participants to modify movements and work at their own pace. Consider the positive results of dynamic flexibility over static stretching, and focus on balance, coordination, postural control and joint stability.

Sample Warm-Up

The following warm-up (7–10 minutes) is specifically designed for a strength and conditioning class that uses a step platform.

- Inhale, exhale 2x; abduct, adduct arms (16 counts).
 - March in place (16 counts).
 - Alternating R and L, step-touch 4x, rock side to side 4x; add rotation/punch or reach across body (8 counts).
 - Double step-touch R, double step-touch L (8 counts).
 - Alternating R and L, step-touch 4x (side leaps) (8 counts).
 - Alternating R and L, squat 4x (8 counts).
- Repeat.*

Final Breakdown

- Alternating R and L, weave and jab 4x (8 counts).
- Alternating R and L, shuffle 2x (8 counts).
- Alternating R and L, bound 4x (8 counts).
- Triple squat R, L, R 1x (8 counts).

Dynamic Stretch

- March (16 counts).
- Transition: toe taps on bench (16 counts).
- Heel lift 4x, arms reaching overhead (right foot is lead leg on platform, left heel lowers and lifts from floor) (16 counts).
- Knee lift 4x (16 counts).
- Knee lift, hold 3 counts, 4x (32 counts).
- Knee lift, abduct bent knee, 4x (32 counts).
- Stationary lunge 8x (32 counts).
- Stationary lunge, hold 3 counts, 4x (32 counts).
- Stationary lunge, hold 3 counts and rotate torso toward supporting leg, 4x (32 counts).
- Transition: Bring back leg toward bench and hinge at hip; front leg is straight, heel is on bench, back leg bent; place hands on small of back with elbows bent at sides (16

counts).

- Hip hinge and extension 4x (lowering and lifting for hamstring stretch with flat back) (40 counts).
- Remain in hinged position then roll up through spine (8 counts).

Repeat dynamic stretch for left leg.

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