

BY AMANDA ADAMS, PHD

Something for Everyone

Combination classes offer balance, cross-training and increased interest.

Twenty years ago, if a friend said she was going to “aerobics,” you had a pretty good idea what that entailed. Today, however, that same person might attend any number and style of group exercise classes, including high-low, step, kickboxing, funk, hip-hop, cardio dance and circuit training, to name only a few. These diverse choices only scratch the surface. All of them can be mixed and matched to create fantastic format blends. While not a new concept, combination classes offer myriad benefits to instructors, program directors and participants.

INSTRUCTORS SHOW OFF

Just like any other professionals, group fitness instructors are subject to occasional malaise. One way to battle this is by looking at class design from a different angle. The combination-class approach offers many perks.

Demonstrate Talent. Many instructors invest significantly in their training and education. Combination classes allow them to show off their knowledge and talent in more than one area. Someone who’s been a great step instructor for 10 years may also have developed exceptional kickboxing skills. By combining these proficiencies into one class, she can approach her abilities in a refreshing way and renew her outlook.

Avoid Burnout. Combination classes help ease exhaustion for the busy instructor trying to keep classes interesting and enjoyable. Dividing the format into two or three sections makes it easier to develop choreography. Anyone who has had to create new moves week after week can appreciate the difference between coming up with 50 minutes of interesting steps versus 25. Less choreography doesn’t “dumb down” classes; it gives participants a chance to master two or three combinations in a condensed time

block. Efficient instructors save additional combos for the next class.

Keep Pace. Most instructors, at one time or another, have glanced at the clock to find that only 10 minutes have passed when it feels more like 30. This sinking feeling isn’t pleasant, and good instructors don’t want students to experience it. When a format is split, the pace clicks right along. A great warm-up flows into the first two combinations and, before you know it, it’s already time to switch to the next format.

After two or three engaging segments, it’s suddenly time to cool down and stretch. Consistently shifting one’s attention helps with the pacing. There’s no time to settle in and get bored, because the cues and the stimuli change.

Avoid Overuse Injuries. Teaching the same format week after week can be mentally draining, but the physical effects can be more serious. Variety de-

creases physical fatigue and helps instructors avoid overuse injuries. Cross-training may enable instructors to enjoy several more years of teaching.

PROGRAMMING PANACHE

Introducing combination classes is also beneficial for program directors, who these days have an increasing number of duties to fulfill in addition to developing and maintaining the class schedule.

Less Subbing. It’s not unusual for an instructor to take a “mental health day” every now and then. An occasional substitute is fine, but frequent subbing is not good for the growth and maintenance of a class. Instructors keep classes they enjoy and will prioritize them on their schedules. Members notice the consistency and quality of the instruction.

Utilize Equipment. With only so many spots on the schedule, how often

Combination Class Examples

Want to offer combination classes but don’t know where to start? The chart below lists a few examples. Look at your talent pool and develop your own fantastic ideas.

Type	Format Possibilities	Notes
cardio–cardio	> high-low & step > step & kickboxing	Usually done in a half-half format, but can be interval style as well.
cardio–strength	> step & weights > cardio dance & Pilates > circuits of all kinds	Probably one of the more traditional combination formats, but you can be creative with transitions, stations and equipment.
cardio–stretch (mind-body)	> kickboxing & yoga > cardio dance & stretch > cycle & stretch (yoga for cycle)	Be sure instructors are well trained and that transitions from intense cardio to stretching are safe.
strength–stretch (mind-body)	> stability balls & stretch > body toning & yoga > Pilates & yoga	A great way to emphasize the benefits of stretching; very complementary formats.

MEMBERS COME FIRST

Instructors and program directors aren't the only ones who benefit from combination classes. Participants also stand to gain.

Balanced Workouts. No matter how many times you tell certain members that doing six indoor cycling classes a week isn't the most balanced approach, they'll want to continue because they simply love to do that. Combination classes may pique these members' interest and encourage them to try a different format. Cross-training may make them less prone to overuse injuries.

Exposure to Something New. Despite good intentions, people don't always explore different classes. Perhaps they tried yoga once but didn't like the teacher and decided it wasn't for them. A combination class exposes participants to additional exercise modalities. Students are more likely to take a step class after being introduced to step as the other half of a class they already enjoy.

Increased Satisfaction. Because combination classes are unique in design and touch on different aspects of exercise, participants perceive them as a better workout. They view the instructors as more knowledgeable and the effort as more manageable. The combinations also tend to be simpler, so participants enjoy a sense of accomplishment. This may ultimately lead to better adherence and bigger classes.

Whether they're basic interval, half cardio-half strength or more complex yoga fusion classes, combination programs showcase the exciting variety the fitness industry has to offer. Instructors find renewed vigor in their work, and program directors discover new creative license. Most important, new participants emerge and current ones find additional pathways to fitness.

Amanda Adams, PhD, is the owner and director of Fitness Evolution Inc. in Reno, Nevada. She has a doctorate in psychology, with a focus on health behavior change. A certified personal trainer and group fitness instructor, she is a YogaFit® trainer and provides continuing education courses for ACE and AFAA. You can reach her at amanda@fitnessevolutioninc.com.