

Gymnastics for All

Getting Started Guide: Performance Groups and Demonstration Teams

May 2021



Contents

Acknowledgments	2
Gymnastics for All Introduction	3
Purpose	4
Benefits	4
Getting Started – The Program	5
Planning the Program	5
Planning the Year	6
Delivering the Program	7
Organizing the Group	7
Managing the Class	8
Getting Started - The Routine	9
Conceptualizing the Routine	9
Planning the Routine	10
Teaching the Routine	15
Gym for All Events	17
References	18

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the many individuals and groups for their contributions in the preparation of this resource, including the Gymnastics Canada Gym for All Council and their provincial/territorial Gym for All Committees, Working Groups, and individual leaders/experts.

Gym for All Council reviewers:

Jamie Benson (Gymnastics Saskatchewan)
David Brown (Gymnastics Nova Scotia)
Lauren Cohen (Gymnastics Ontario)
Alexia Dupuis-Gaudreault (Gymnastics Quebec)
Bobby Kriangkum (Alberta Gymnastics Federation)
Laura Thomson (Rhythmic Gymnastics Manitoba)

Developed and edited by:

Meredith Warner Program Manager, Sport Development Gymnastics Canada

This resource has been inspired by and adapted from the "Demonstration Gymnastics" manual published by Gymnastics Canada in 1998, written by Fran Purvis, Rob Smilie, and Robyn Fox.

Gymnastics for All Introduction

Gymnastics for All (GfA) is recognized as an official sport discipline by the Fédération International de Gymnastique (FIG). As explained by the FIG, "the Gymnastics for All movement strives to bring nations together through a world of movement and physical activity, contributing to global health, fitness, and friendship. Anyone, regardless of age, shape, or ability can take part in Gymnastics for All activities as part of a daily fitness routine." (FIG Gymnastics for All - History)

Consistent with the International Federation's commitment to inclusive gymnastics programming, activities, and events, Gymnastics Canada (GymCan) also recognizes "Gymnastics for All" (GfA) as an integral part of the organization across Canada. The focus of GfA is Fun, Fitness, Fundamentals, and Friendship:

- Gymnastics for All is considered the foundation of all gymnastic disciplines.
- Gymnastics for All offers a wide variety of participation opportunities for people of any age, gender/gender identity, physical ability, or background.
- Gymnastics for All activities contribute to personal health, fitness, and well-being (physical, social, cognitive, and emotional).
- Gymnastics for All activities develop the fundamentals of movement in a fun, inclusive environment.
- Gymnastics for All promotes personal/group achievement, celebrates diversity, and creates meaningful friendships!



While GfA activities may easily be incorporated into an individual's daily fitness routine, GfA can also be showcased through group demonstrations, performances (i.e., Canadian Gymnaestrada and World Gymnaestrada) and competitive team events (i.e., World Gym for Life Challenge).

Purpose

The purpose of this resource is to provide recommendations and instructions to help coaches and club administrators "get started" with Gymnastics for All (GfA) demonstration teams and/or performance groups.

The "GymCan Gymnastics for All Event Handbook" will provide supplementary information regarding performance gymnastics opportunities available to groups from the local to international level.



Benefits

Gymnastics for All offers clubs and coaches a valuable opportunity to diversify their programming and attract a wider range of potential participants. A thoughtfully designed Gymnastics for All program can demonstrate a club's commitment to access, equity, and inclusivity within their community.

The discipline of Gymnastics for All provides an internationally recognized platform to reach a diverse range of community members and provide a positive and rewarding sport experience for everyone involved.

The benefits of offering a GfA program are unique to each individual, but some advantages include:

- Promotion of club/organization at local events;
- Provides a challenging alternative to individual competition;
- Develops skills in more than one gymnastics sport/discipline;
- Develops social and emotional capacities group dynamics, teamwork, patience, cooperation, etc.;
- Retains participants who may not have the time or ability to participate in training for individual competition;
- Prides an exciting opportunity to travel, meet new people, and develop friendships.



Getting Started — The Program

Planning the Program

Before starting any GfA performance gymnastics program there are three main areas that a coach and club must consider and/or define:

- Program logistics
- Program goals
- Program objectives
- 1. Some questions to consider regarding the **logistics** of the program may include:
 - What opportunities exist within the current club programming?
 - What is the size of the facility space available?
 - Will any apparatus or equipment be needed?
 - How many participants can the program accommodate?
 - Will the program require additional support (coaching/administrative)?
 - What are the goals of the coach and/or club?
 - What are the interests and goals of the gymnasts?
 - What stage(s) of development (Sport for Life's LTD) are the participants in?
 - What skills (technical/aesthetic) do the gymnasts wish to learn?
 - What skills can the coach(es) teach according to their NCCP certification level and other qualifications (dance, music, yoga, etc.)?
 - When will practices take place and for how long?
 - What performance opportunities are available and when are they held?
 - Is mentorship available (within the club, community, province)?
- 2. With a solid understanding of the program logistics, the goals of the program can be established. Program **goals** might include:
 - encouraging continued participation in gymnastics;
 - developing physical fitness, technique, and performance skills;
 - fostering team spirit, cooperation, and inclusion;
 - exposing gymnasts to the aspect of performing in front of an audience;
 - attracting and encouraging new gymnastics participants;
 - celebrating a creative approach to the sport of gymnastics.
- 3. Once the program goals have been defined, specific objectives related to these goals can be identified. Program **objectives** might include:
 - the type of routine a group will perform (i.e., single routine/medley, no/small/large apparatus, small/large group size);
 - the skills included in the routine;
 - the events in which the group will participate.

Completing the program concept phase will allow the coach and club to move forward with a solid platform for participant recruitment. A conceptualized program also allows for clear communication and understanding between the various program stakeholders and helps guide the more detailed program planning and delivery phases.



Planning the Year

When establishing the yearly plan, it is often easiest to start by identifying the dates of any/all scheduled performance events and special activities. Each event should be assigned a level of importance relative to the overall program goals (i.e., community demonstration, Club Display, Provincial Gymnaestrada, etc.) and itemized clearly on the official program calendar.

Next, an inventory of all training opportunities available to the group should be added to the program calendar (i.e., number of sessions per term or year, number of classes per session, number of classes per week, length of each practice, etc.). The date of the group's very first practice should be flagged as this class represents the official launch of the program.

The final steps to preparing the annual calendar include identifying any known interruptions in the regular schedule (i.e., holidays, club closures, vacations, etc.) and flagging any extra activities available to the group (i.e., club fundraisers, social events, etc.).

Knowing the number of classes available prior to each performance event/activity, along with knowing the importance level of each performance, allows the coach to allocate an appropriate amount of time for the group to learn the routine and choreography, refine the technical skills/dance steps/apparatus set-up/etc. and finally, polish the performance. The balance of training time outside of performance preparation should be spent on improving physical fitness, learning new skills, exploring creative movements and dance, and of course, having fun.



If the performance dates are not known at the time of yearly planning, the first scheduled class can be used as a starting point to plan forward. The same broad categories will be used when allocating time for the group to:

- improve physical fitness;
- learn new skills;
- establish a fun, social group dynamic;
- learn the routine and choreography;
- refine the technical skills/dance steps/apparatus set-up/etc.;
- polish the performance.



Delivering the Program

Organizing the Group

In the case of a large and/or diverse group of participants, teaching the full group all at once may not be the most efficient approach. There are several alternate methods a coach may use to maximize activity including:

a) Sub-Grouping

Dividing the group into smaller groups, each working separately on similar skills/elements may be more effective in some cases. Gymnasts can be brought together to practice after they have had enough time to train within the smaller groups.

b) Stations

Distributing the focus of each scheduled class into pre-set stations with regular, timed rotations will ensure everyone is given the opportunity to practice and/or refine the skills and elements identified within the daily lesson plan.

When using the station approach, it is important that the activities are not only developmentally appropriate and safe but, are also interesting and engaging so the participants are motivated to stay on task while working on their own. If the participants start to lose focus too quickly, the coach can add variations to the activity, include more stations and/or decrease the time allocated at each station. Meaningful variations could include group-based idea generating (i.e., formation, timing, skill sequencing) to encourage holistic development of the individual, group, and program.

A coach may wish to stay at one station to provide specific instruction and oversight as the groups rotate through the circuit. Alternatively, a coach may choose to circulate to each of the groups as they work at each station.

Some key considerations for a coach when using the station approach include:

- Ensuring all required apparatus is properly and safely set up;
- Establishing clear guidelines for group and individual safety;
- Explaining/demonstrating each station and including options to increase/decrease the difficulty/complexity/etc.;
- Incorporating visuals (i.e., charts, diagrams, task cards, videos, etc.) to help guide participants.

c) Group Leaders/Demonstrators

Carefully selecting individuals to take on the responsibility of leading the group/demonstrating can be an efficient approach especially when teaching routines (choreography, dance steps, formations, etc.).

The demonstrators/group leaders will be required to learn the routine prior to the class. While this approach includes some level of preparation prior to the class, it may expedite the process of teaching the routine to the full group.

When working with the whole group, a group leader/demonstrator can be placed at the back or sides of the group to guide the gymnasts through turns and directional changes. Demonstrators may also be strategically interspersed throughout the group so there is a nearby leader insight for all participants to follow.



The coach may also ask a demonstrator to work on a specific portion of the routine with a smaller group or individual participant. This option may be paired with the station approach.

d) Partners

Gymnasts can be paired together as an alternate approach to creating routines, refining skills and/or problem solving. Partner work often offers an enjoyable variation from a regular class format by encouraging gymnasts to challenge each other's creativity, foster positive relationships and celebrate individual successes.

Managing the Class

When working with a large group of participants, it is important for the coach to establish an effective communication style to ensure proper instruction and direction is provided to everyone. Coaches may accomplish this by:

- Asking the gymnasts to gather close when addressing the group;
- Giving succinct instructions in a clear, loud voice;
- Using large gestures and precise movement demonstrations;
- Asking questions to assess/confirm understanding;
- Standing in a location that is visible to all participants;
- Wearing something distinctive so they are easily identified by the gymnasts;
- Using a microphone or auditory signal (i.e., clap) to amplify the speaker's voice and/or provide real-time cues with/without music.



Individual interactions and one-on-one instruction between a coach and participant will be limited if the group is big, but a coach must be able to monitor and assess the impact of the overall program on an individual level. Coaches should allocate time and availability outside of the group practices to address questions from individual participants.

Getting Started - The Routine

Conceptualizing the Routine

When the coach is ready to build the routine, a systematic approach will help to develop creative ideas in the right direction. There are several questions that should be considered by the coach including:

Purpose Why is the performance or demonstration being offered? Are all club programs being

showcased or is the performance specific to the GfA program? Will the performance emphasize the whole group, individuals within the group, or a combination of both?

Occasion Does the performance coincide with any particular event (year-end club celebration,

community event, competition)? Does the occasion impose or suggest a format or

theme?

Audience Who will be in the audience? How many spectators will be in attendance? What will

they expect? What do they understand about Gymnastics for All? Where will they be located? Will the ideas (i.e., music, messaging, actions) portrayed be appropriate

for all?

Place Where will the performance take place? Are there any time or space restrictions?

What equipment is available? Can equipment be modified or combined to suggest a new approach to the standard apparatus? Are there change rooms/washrooms

available?

Performers What are the goals of the gymnasts? What skills and abilities are they hoping to

showcase? Are they experienced performers, or will this be their first time in front of an audience? Will the gymnasts have an opportunity to rehearse? Will the ideas (i.e.,

music, messaging, actions, costuming, etc.) portrayed be appropriate for all?



Planning the Routine

Once the concept of the performance has been established, the coach can begin mapping out the routine. Planning a routine includes:

- Establishing a theme;
- Selecting the music;
- Deciding on the materials (equipment/apparatus);
- Developing a floor plan including entrance/exit points, location of apparatus/props, location of audience:
- Choreographing the routine (i.e., skills, formations, dance steps, transitions, etc.);
- Visualizing the aesthetics (i.e., costumes, make-up, props, etc.).

Performances may include a combination of gymnastics, dance, and other performance components. Groups may be inspired to include FIG recognized gymnastics disciplines/apparatus and/or non-traditional gymnastics sports/apparatus. Props and costumes are permitted and encouraged.

Theme

A well-defined theme can add structure and cohesion to the routine. The right theme will inspire and engage gymnasts and capture the interest of the audience.

The theme may be simple or complex, but should consider age so the topic is relatable for the gymnasts. A simple theme could be the presentation of skills a group has learned over the course of a year (ex. "The Joy of Movement"). And a complex theme could set a mood and tell a story with carefully selected skills, choreographed movements, costumes and music (ex. a re-enactment of a story such as "Cinderella"). Inspiration for a theme may come from anywhere:

- Music (ex. a 50's theme inspired by "Rock Around the Clock")
- Equipment, apparatus, or prop (ex. "Flip, Flop, Fly" for a mini tramp routine)
- Individual skills or talents of the gymnasts (ex. "Tumbling from A to Z" for a group of mixed ability gymnasts)
- Occasions/festivities (ex. "Winter Wonderland" for a performance during the holidays)
- Book or movie
- Current or past local or world events



NOTE – Cultural appropriation (i.e., use of elements such as culturally-specific music, dance, costumes, imagery of a minority group that has historically been exploited or oppressed in a way that does not respect their original meaning, give credit to their source, or reinforces stereotypes) can be hurtful and contribute to marginalization. Coaches and program leaders should seek out guidance from cultural leaders (i.e., elders, cultural associations) to determine if the theme is appropriate and if so, how best to honour cultural traditions.

Music

Music can create excitement while inspiring and motivating group members. The music selected for a routine must reflect and enhance the theme and fit the structural components of the routine. A coach should consider the following when selecting the routine music:

- If the routine includes quick, explosive movements and skills (ex. tumbling, mini-tramp or vaulting-type displays, exchange of handheld apparatus, large formation changes or group work/dance series), fast paced music might be the most suitable choice.
- If a routine features extended or sustained movements (ex. acro balancing), slower music may enhance the routine.
- If the chosen theme is associated with a certain culture or historical period, the music should be authentic to or reflective of the culture/historical period.
- If the routine is made up of simple moves, then simple music may be the best fit while more complex routines might require more complicated music.

Choreography can lead or follow the choice of music, but the routine should be developed in a way that features the gymnasts, not the music. The music must not overwhelm the routine, it must be part of the routine.

Apparatus

While apparatus is not required in a performance routine, it does offer a platform for innovation and creativity. There are two categories of apparatus - those which can be held and manipulated with the hands or other parts of the body (Hand-Held Apparatus), and those upon which the gymnasts perform (Large Apparatus):

Hand-Held Apparatus

Anything that can be held and manipulated is fair game in Gymnastics for All including both traditional and non-traditional hand-held apparatus (balls, ribbons, hoops, scarves, buckets, umbrellas, etc.).

The apparatus should be of a size that the gymnasts can manipulate without difficulty (i.e., short ribbons for smaller gymnasts) but, large enough to be easily seen by the audience. Including a variety of apparatus can add interest and contrast to a routine. Gymnasts may switch and use several items throughout the routine, but they should be given plenty of opportunity to practice with the actual apparatus before performing in front of an audience.



Large Apparatus

Large Apparatus in the "Gymnastics for All" discipline is not limited to competitive gymnastic apparatus. Competitive equipment is not always the best choice for displays as it is often hard to move, may require floor plates or special "tie-downs" and may have a limited accessibility. Instead, a coach may choose to



utilize benches, boxes, mats, and/or mini-tramps in interesting ways. These items are much more portable and manageable than full size beams and bars.

Using multiple apparatus as opposed to a single piece can be effective, especially when the group is large. It is difficult to capture the attention of the audience if the activity is limited by gymnasts waiting for their turn. It is also not advised to include apparatus that must be adjusted for each individual gymnast. If adjustments are required, they should be incorporated into the choreography to maintain the energy of the performance.

Creative Use of Stationary Apparatus

Restage and Rethink: Equipment can become props, scenery, or a stage. With a little imagination, the possibilities are endless:

- Folding mats can make great "flats" for performers to appear and disappear.
- Stacked mats or a bench can provide a pedestal to showcase basic handstands, rolls and walkovers.
- Springboards can be lined up, side by side for a group vault.
- An equipment cart can become a boat for gymnasts to smoothly sail across the performance floor.

Re-arrange the gym: Coaches may choose to switch up a practice session by placing mats or equipment in a new pattern to see what the gymnasts are inspired to do. With the right safety instructions and oversight, gymnasts can be encouraged to create and sample their own equipment combinations.

Brainstorm: Write down as many ideas as possible, without making any judgements about how realistic they may be. Afterward, look over the list, eliminate the impossibilities, and you will be left with at least a few thoughts which you might want to develop further. "How can twelve people use a vault box at the same time?" "How can you do bar skills when you have no bars?"

Try on a Metaphor: Imagining that the equipment or the performers are something else may help coaches and gymnasts think outside the box:

- What if this vault were really a **horse**? What would we call it? What would it do if we jumped on it? What would happen if it ...?
- What if these parallel bars were a bridge? What would it join? How would we cross it? What would be on the other side? What is under the bridge?
- What if you went out for dinner and all the restaurant servers were gymnasts? How would they take orders? How would they serve food?



Safety: Whatever the inspiration or variation, safety must always be addressed before incorporating the creative idea into a routine.



Choreography

Choreographing the routine is often the hardest part for a beginning coach. Although this is the most exciting and creative part of Performance Gymnastics, the vast number of choices and lack of technical rules can be overwhelming. There are some guidelines which can be used to help choreograph a routine.

Helpful Suggestions and Guidelines to Choreographing a Routine:

- Keep the routines short and simple for young gymnasts or participants with introductory level skills. Younger gymnasts do well with props and visual reminders (similar to going through a circuit). Experienced gymnasts or those with intermediate to advanced skills may enjoy longer, more intricate routines. As the group gains experience, complexity and variation can be added to the choreography and skills.
- If there is a large range of abilities and skill levels within the group, the routine should be structured in a way that allows all gymnasts to perform at their most appropriate level. Time can be reserved within the routine to highlight each level and showcase their abilities.
- If the routine includes large apparatus, ensure it can accommodate each individual gymnast with minimal adjustments. Moving and/or adjusting the apparatus should be built into the choreography so the performance can flow smoothly without distractions or disruptions.
- Document the routine using detailed instructions, diagrams, and illustrations. Charts showing the positions and formations of the gymnasts at key points in the routine are also useful when organizing a routine. Copies can be shared with the gymnasts.
- Visual cues can help performers maintain correct positions or formations during the routine.
 Chalk lines or pieces of tape can be placed on the floor or around the perimeter of the floor to
 help with alignment. Another method is to use specific gymnasts as points to orient the rest of
 the group.
- Keep the lines of movement clean and clear. Eliminate all unnecessary movement. Gymnasts should know where they are going and move with purpose and precision for the duration of the routine.
- Timing of the movements and skills is critical to a polished looking routine. The gymnasts must perform their skills in time with the music and in coordination with each other. Lyrics, vocal cues, musical beats, and/or moments in the music can all be used to cue the gymnasts.
- Allow for the possibility that a gymnast may not make the big performance. Train back up performers for important positions. If the routine includes partner work, allow the gymnasts to practice with a variety of partners and ensure they can assume either partner's role. The choreography should be flexible enough to handle unexpected changes in group size.
- Reserve time during practice to view the performance from the spectator seating area to ensure the routine is structured in a way to captivate and sustain audience interest with a balance of unique movements, a variety of formations, surprising skill combinations, without becoming too chaotic.



- Have the team practice facing different sides of the floor or room. If they normally practice in front of a mirror, make sure there is plenty of time to practice without the mirror.
- If a gymnast or group of gymnasts are being highlighted at a point in the routine, the other gymnasts should be strategically positioned to draw the audience attention to the activity being showcased with minimal distractions.
- Use contrasts between structure and free movement for a more visually exciting routine.
- Don't be afraid to "let the music tell you what to do"; if the notes are low consider floor work, if the notes are high consider what can be done in the air, if the chorus or a "catchy" part of the song makes you want to dance consider doing synchronized group work/dance! Does the music lend itself to audience participation (i.e., clapping, stomping, cheering on cue)? If so, consider "teaching" the audience so they can participate as well.

Movement Techniques

Movement techniques can be used individually or sequenced within the routine.

Unison - The easiest to choreograph (everyone does the same thing), but often the hardest to perform well. Deviations are instantly obvious. Unison can be used to create a highlight or climax within the routine. Coaches are cautioned to use this technique in moderation with very young or inexperienced performers.



Sequential Moves - First one group goes and then the next. It is a sort of visual "round". This is a

good technique for new groups.





Waves - A series of sequential movements starting at one defined point and progressing to another. Waves can be very effective when performed precisely or in large groups. Experienced performers

can be placed in key positions to help smoothly execute the wave.



Follow the Leader - A moving version of a wave which less experienced performers can generally execute well. Follow the leader is an effective movement technique to include for groups that do not typically practice together but are required to perform simultaneously. This technique can also be used to move gymnasts around the floor and to reposition them during the routine.

Costumes

Costumes deserve careful consideration. They are an important visual component of a performance and can be considered an exciting and motivating part of being in a performance group.



Performance gymnastics is not restricted by competitive standards for apparel (i.e., a standard competition leotard/uniform is not required). The creative freedom of Gymnastics for All allows performers to wear theatrical make-up, hats/hair accessories, traditional/cultural clothing, etc.

Costuming should enhance the theme, music, and choreography while always considering the safety

of the gymnasts as the top priority. Clothing should not restrict movements, impair vision, or cause any discomfort.



Once the costume has been decided, the gymnasts should be given adequate time to practice in it before their planned performance or event.

Teaching the Routine

Before teaching the routine, it is helpful to introduce the gymnasts to the plan. This approach allows the gymnasts to react, ask questions, contribute ideas, and help evolve/build on the concept. There are many ways to introduce the routine to the gymnasts:

- Play the routine music.
- Describe the theme, story, emotions/feelings behind the routine.
- Outline the apparatus to be included.



- Share visuals including diagrams, floor plans, formations, apparatus placement, etc.
- Discuss ideas about costuming, props, make-up, etc.
- Show video examples (similar routines, basic choreography steps/movements, movie characters or stories, etc.).
- Prepare demonstrators in advance.

Providing the group with a general understanding of the routine will assist in the learning process. Gymnasts can self-correct and monitor progress when they know the plan and objectives of the routine.

Teaching the routine to the group will include:

- Blocking the floor plans, movement patterns and formations;
- Rehearsing the dance steps and choreography (without music first, and then with music);
- Separating the group of gymnasts into different stations/groups;
- Practicing the technical skills (in isolation and then with connecting choreography);
- Running through the apparatus set-up, placement, movements;
- Working out the entry/exit plans;
- Practicing full run-throughs of the routine (with/without music, with/without apparatus, with/without technical skills, etc.).

Creativity

Leaving time during the class for gymnasts to experiment and use their imaginations is one of the greatest strengths of Gymnastics for All. It encourages creativity, expression, and play! Gymnasts should have the opportunity to try out different approaches and expand on their own ideas.

Choreography will evolve as the routine is put together and brought to life by the gymnasts. The original plan for the routine must always remain flexible to account for the creative contributions of the group. Making room for changes, innovations and imagination will uncover the unique abilities and interests of each individual gymnast.



Confidence

Once the routine has been completed, the group must prepare to perform in front of an audience. This will involve practicing the full routine and building the confidence of the group.

One option is to divide the group into two equal parts. One half performs the routine while the other half watches, and then the groups switch places. This strategy allows for positive comments and constructive suggestions to be discussed between group members. It gives gymnasts the chance to experience the routine from the spectator's perspective.

As the performance date approaches, the group should practice under similar conditions. Run through the routine in costume and if possible, use the same venue, with the same lighting, and the same music equipment. This will allow the group to become familiar with the performance environment so they can focus on the routine with fewer distractions, especially on the day of the performance.



Gym for All Events

Please refer to the <u>GymCan Gymnastics for All Event Handbook</u> for details regarding the many exciting opportunities to feature your performance group. There is a stage waiting to welcome your group from the local community level to the provincial, national, and international levels!



References

FIG Gymnastics for All - History. (n.d.). Retrieved from Federation Internationale de Gymnastique: https://www.gymnastics.sport/site/pages/disciplines/hist-gfa.php

FIG Rules - Gymnastics for All Manual. (2019). Retrieved from Federation Internationale de Gymnastique website:

https://www.gymnastics.sport/publicdir/rules/files/en Gymnastics%20for%20All%20Manual,%20Edition%202019.pdf

Purvis, F., Smilie, R. & Fox, R. (1998). Demonstration Gymnastics. Ottawa, ON: Gymnastics Canada.

