

10 Steps to Start a Performance Team

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Let's Go!

Performance Team, Exhibition Troop, Show Team or whatever name you use, it's General Gymnastics (GG) at its best. Group performances can be one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences a gymnast may have. GG Festivals, or GymFests, provide ideal opportunities to showcase group performances. But, how do you start? Follow these simple steps and you'll be on your way.

General Gymnastics, It's For Everyone!

1. Pick a Coach

The main ingredients for your coach is to have a fun-loving attitude, the ability to work with groups, and lots of energy. You need not use a team level coach-he/she can be a recreational level or dance/choreography coach in your program. There is plenty of information published by USA Gymnastics, along with a wide variety of video tapes, to help him/her get started.

2. Select the Group Members

It is important to remember: General Gymnastics, It's for Everyone! You can incorporate team gymnasts with recreational students and even parents. This will get your whole gym involved-building team spirit and providing for an activity that everyone will enjoy. Look at the variety of activities that are part of your program; you can include them all-preschool, recreational, high school, team, dance, cheerleading, trampoline and tumbling, aerobics, sport acrobatics, rhythmic, adults, and seniors.

3. Design Your Routine or "Display"

Keep it simple. The more complex the skills and routine choreography the more difficult it will be to teach and master. Begin by using skills and sequences that group members have already learned-then put the pieces of the puzzle together.

A good routine utilizes all the strengths of your program. Remember that this is a show, not competition, so the rigid structure of competition routines makes for a boring routine. Highlight what you do best and incorporate the elements of Group Performance choreography - Theme + Music and... unity, variations, repetitions, contrasts, and transitions... along with considerations for: space, time, force, emotions, national characteristics, and production. It may be a good idea to send your coach to a group performances lecture or clinic.

Don't forget equipment -- most GymFest events take place on a regular floor exercise area, 42' x 42' (spring floor systems are not required). If you use other apparatus, be prepared to move it on and off the performance area. Common equipment for performance routines includes: panel mats, landing mats, skill cushions, vaulting boards, and mini-trampolines.

Use a variety of activities. If your group includes great tumblers, show them off, but don't let them dominate the show, it most often becomes repetitive and boring. Incorporate a variety of transitions

including dance, pyramids, parachutes, and hand apparatus. A quick change of costume or surprise prop can really spice up your routine. Consider special activities for adults, folk dances, or even popular current dances.

Again, keep it simple. Start with a basic routine. Once the performers have mastered the basic routine you can increase the skill level, complexity of movement patterns, or introduce the use of hand apparatus or props. Remember that high quality doesn't always mean high skill level -- some of the most exciting performances are highlighted by exacting precision and flawless execution of basic skills. Make sure that each performer is working within his/her own skill limitations and abilities.

4. Get Started

An ideal time to start is the summer. In this slow time, GG is an excellent activity to encourage summer attendance in your program. Advertise that in July you will form a GG Performance Group and that everyone is welcome to attend the auditions.

You can start at any time. Use the natural transitions between session in your program to include the new group in your program schedule. Give yourself plenty of time to introduce the activity, schedule try-outs, and identify new group members.

5. Schedule Classes and Practices

You may be busy training the "next generation of Olympic gymnasts" and focus on their training time. Don't forget your other club participants!

A good way to start a GG group is to offer a separate (or additional) class. Students who continue with their regular classes have the opportunity to learn and master skills, while you can focus the GG class on the learning and mastering the performance routine. You may even find that your GG performance group helps create new classes in your program -- gymnastics, dance, tumbling, and adult.

6. Get Your Feet Wet

So, you have a routine and practiced with your group, what next? A good first step is to perform the routine in your own gym. This could be a simple dress rehearsal (with video to record it for posterity) or as exciting as a complete show with ticket sales. Whatever you select as your first performance, be realistic - it's a first for everyone.

Performing in your own gym for your own students and parents will insure that you have a receptive audience, and you may even be able to recruit more members for your group. Next, venture out into your community and perform at a local sports event or school exhibition, city or county fair, or even an amusement park. Take the time to promote your group by providing local newspapers with articles and photographs of your performance.

7. Build Your Dreams

Establish goals for your group. Check the [General Gymnastics Event Schedule](#) on USA Gymnastics Online (www.usa-gymnastics.org/gg/) for GymFests near you. You may even want to set your sights on a performance at the National GymFest. Goals help your group to stay on track and provide important performance incentives. Performing at a regional or national event may prove to be the most exciting event of your gymnasts' career.

8. Travel the World

GG performance opportunities exist the world over. Cities, regions, and nations host GG festivals throughout the year and often include exciting social events. The World Gymnaestrada is conducted by the FIG and is the world-wide GG performance festival. The World Gymnaestrada takes place at four-year intervals, just like the Olympic Games - the next World Gymnaestrada will be in Lisbon, Portugal in 2003. USA Gymnastics selects its official delegation based on participation in the annual National GymFests. If your idea of fun is international travel, go for it!

9. Have Fun!

One important aspect of GG festivals is that they are non-competitive.* Group performances are not judged and there are no scores. Everyone is a winner simply by taking part. Make your routine fun and exciting and the gymnasts will want to perform it again and again. Experienced GG performers will tell you, "This is the most fun I've ever had doing gymnastics!"

*There is a competitive form of General Gymnastics called "TeamGymn". To learn more about this activity, visit the [TeamGymn Rules and Guidelines](#) pages on USA Gymnastics Online.

10. Keep Learning

The USA Gymnastics General Gymnastics Advisory Panel (GGAP) conducts information and activity sessions throughout the country. Take advantage of these lectures and clinics at the USAG National Congress, Regional Congresses, GG Clinics, and GG Youth Camps. Visit the GG pages on USA Gymnastics Online for postings of all GG articles, GGAP minutes, and a schedule of activities. You can email the GGAP directly at gg@usa-gymnastics.org

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