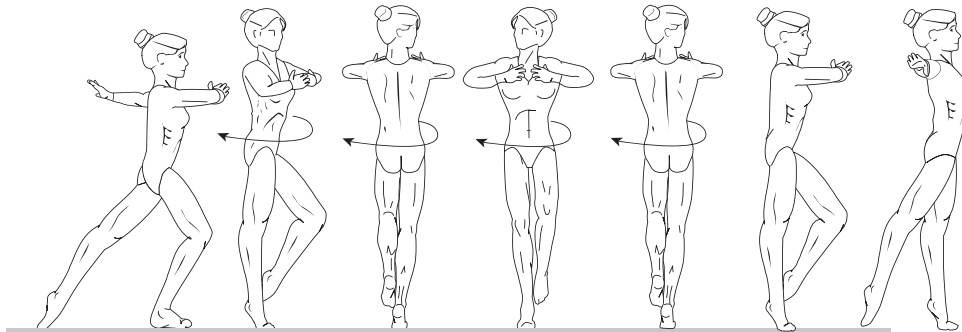


POSTURE AND ALIGNMENT

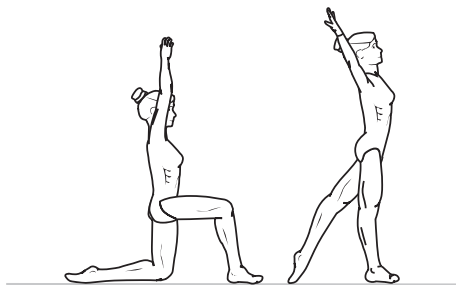
THE NEW COMPULSORY ROUTINES

By Tom Koll, National Junior Olympic Committee Chair



The major theme that continues to run through the new compulsory program is posture and body alignment. As judges and coaches, we often hear people talking about posture and body alignment. What is good posture? How do judges deduct for bad posture? Do judges deduct for incorrect alignment every time they see it or just on major elements? Many specific deductions have been written to help key the eyes of both the coaches and the judges to look for and recognize correct body positioning.

The best explanation that I have heard to describe good posture and body alignment is "Straight is Great." Even when a gymnast is simply standing, there should be a straight line from her head to her feet. One needs to understand that there are different body structures that will stray slightly from that pure line. Powerful buttock muscles will show a more "rounded" buttocks as opposed to gymnasts who have flat buttocks. As a gymnast develops from her "twiggy" figure to that of a young lady, it will be important to realize that a well-developed figure with more curves can still show a straight back and good posture and alignment. Deviations from good posture and alignment often occur for many reasons, including lack of strength, flexibility or many times a lack of body awareness. Let's start from the feet and work up and point out different crucial points that lead to proper alignment and good posture.



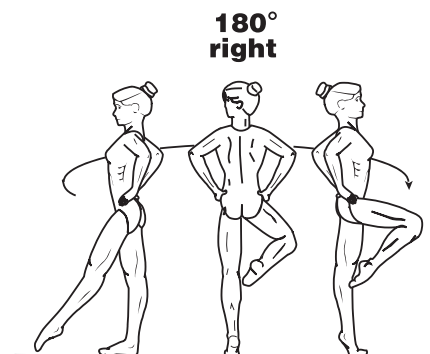
1. The feet

In the new JO Compulsory program, the JO Committee continues to place a great deal of emphasis on a tight relevé (stand high on the toes) position. In this position, coaches and judges should look for a straight line from the ball of the foot up through the ankle. The heel

should be lifted as high as possible, not halfway. There is a general deduction of up to 0.50 for the entire routine when the gymnast does not show this position (high on toe, feet close together) when required. The difference in this set of routines is the description of the "lock" position. In the past, it was required to have the feet touching. This is no longer a requirement.

2. The knees

Unless specified as "in plié" (bend in the knees), the knees should be straight in a standing position. A gymnast's flexibility in the hamstrings (back of the legs) will have a great deal to do with whether or not her legs are completely extended. Tight hamstrings will often lead to bent legs, which leads to deductions.



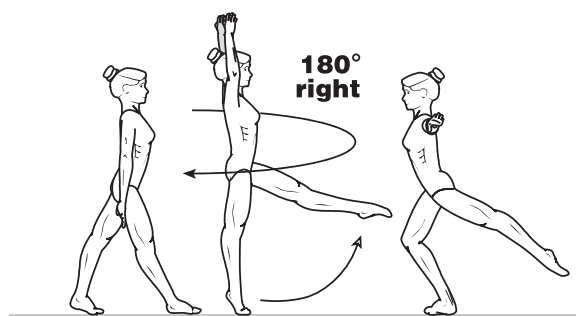
3. The hips, abdominals and pelvis

This is the area of the body where most of the problems occur. After coaching and judging for many years, I'm convinced that many times the gymnasts are not aware that they are standing with their "butts and guts out." This needs to be constantly corrected on a daily basis. You will hear many coaches say "hips flat, pelvis tilted under, etc. In many instances, the hip flexor muscle in the front of the leg is so tight that it causes the pelvis to tilt and consequently pushes the

hips back. A consistent flexibility program of stretching this muscle will help with the problem. The pelvis should be straight with the abdominals pulled in to straighten this line.

4. The rib cage

I really do not understand why pushing the rib cage out (forward), and sticking the buttocks out has become such a popular thing to do. Many top international performers do this every time they present to the judges as well as during their routines. This is NOT correct posture. If they have studied any dance at all, I'm positive that this could not have been taught by a dance teacher. Needless to say, this "fancy little flair" has trickled down to our young athletes and has created nightmare posture problems. In a straight body position, the ribs should be pressed together and down (not sticking out with an arched back) so as to create a flat straight line.



5. The shoulders

The shoulders should be pressed down and wide. They should not be pulled back causing the shoulder blades to pinch together. Nor should they be rounded forward like a "hollow" position on the bars. They need to be wide, open and pressed down. When the shoulders are pressed down, the neck will appear longer and the gymnast will have a taller, lighter, more elegant appearance.

6. The head

Too often a gymnast performs a nice leap with good height and extension but she is staring down at the floor. The chin should be lifted with the neck long. Generally, the focus should be slightly above eye level. There are many times in the new compulsory exercises where there is no mention of focus at all. In these cases, the gymnast is allowed to look wherever she wants. However, good alignment during this optional focus is still required.

Good posture and alignment is essential throughout the entire exercise, from the beginning pose to the finish. There are a few deductions regarding posture to be aware of: incorrect body alignment, position or posture during major elements is up to 0.20, and incorrect body alignment, position or posture during connections is a general deduction of up to 0.30 for the whole exercise. As a judge, during the connections, I would put a "P" on my paper if a gymnast has bad posture during connections. At the end of the routine, I count up all the "Ps" on my paper and decide how great in total were the errors and apply the appropriate deduction.

In closing, I would like to encourage judges to work with the coaches and gymnasts at clinics, workshops, or even visit gyms. Working together to recognize good posture and alignment is what is needed. Only through this collaboration and "meeting of the minds" will our gymnasts benefit.

Judging the New Women's Compulsory Routines....

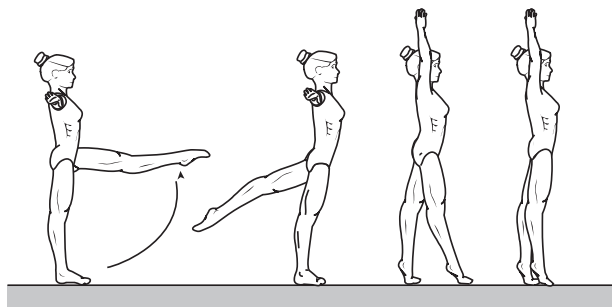
"Do I put a number on my paper or a letter?"

—Tom Koll, National Junior Olympic Committee Chair
—Cheryl Hamilton, National Technical Committee Chair

This article is being written to help both coaches and judges understand some of the "in general" deductions for the compulsory routines and how to apply those deductions. These deductions are NOT listed in the gray boxes, but are listed on pages 161 and 162 in the compulsory book. These are not new deductions. However, after teaching several clinics on the 2005-2013 routines, it has become apparent the application of these deductions needs more education.

Let's start by identifying these deductions.

- Page 161 # Incorrect position of arms, head, feet or legs (text errors) (Deduct in general – not each time – according to small, medium & large errors) *Up to 0.40*



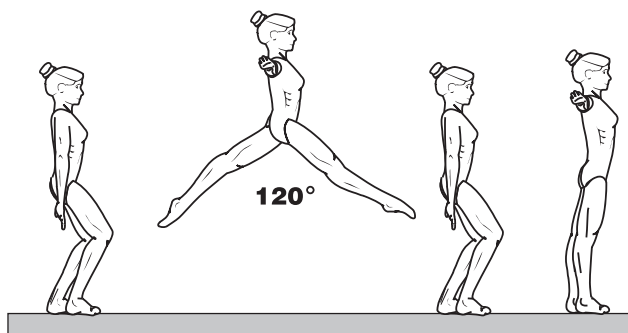
- Page 161 # Incorrect body alignment, position or posture during connections (General deduction for whole exercise) *Up to 0.30*
- Page 162 # Movement lacking artistry of presentation *Up to 0.30*
 - Quality of gymnast's movement to reflect the style of the choreography *Up to 0.15*
 - Quality of expression (i.e. projection, emotion, focus) *Up to 0.15*

Incorrect position of arms, head, feet or legs (text errors) Up to 0.40

Question: What is most important in the compulsory routines?

Answer: The major elements.

Making sure the text is followed is also important as it defines the exactness of the routines and defines the term “compulsory exercise.” However, the main emphasis **MUST** be placed on the evaluation of the major elements listed in the routines. (These are the elements that have a value listed behind the headings. They are also all listed separately in the Penalty pages in the back of the book and the DVD produced by USA Gymnastics.)



This “deduct in general” deduction is applied when the prescribed positions are not performed exactly as specified in the text. What is important to understand is there is **NO** specific deduction if, for instance, a gymnast places her arm in side-middle when the text states crown. In this situation, a “t/T” (depending on how big the text error is) should be written on the judge’s paper indicating the text was not followed correctly. The judge should **NOT** write a deduction (number) if this type of error occurs. When deciding how much to deduct, the judge would count up all the “Ts” and decide how great in total were the errors and apply the appropriate “Up to 0.40” deduction. If the above text error was the only text error in the entire exercise, there should be **NO DEDUCTION**. So the next question you might have is, “How many “t/T’s” should there be before there is a deduction?” The answer to that question is not simple. There is not a set number because some text errors are larger than others. A gymnast who has her arms in the wrong place during the full turn on floor has made a larger text error than the gymnast who forgets to turn her palm out on the fish pose. The judge must use common sense to determine how great the errors were.

Incorrect body alignment, position or posture during connections Up to 0.30

Question: When do I take a specific deduction (number) for a posture/alignment fault and when do I just have a general deduction?

Answer: All major elements (see above for description) can be deducted up to 0.20 EACH for errors in posture/alignment. Faults in poses, connections, etc. fall under the “in general” deduction. It is very important for coaches and judges to make sure they know what the major elements are. Pay close attention as sometimes the same element can either be a connection OR major element depending on the level. (i.e. The V sit on balance beam is a major element in Level 4, but is a connection in Levels 5 and 6).

Just like above in text errors, when there is a posture error in areas other than major elements, the judge should put a “P” on the paper (NOT a number). When deciding how much to deduct, the judge would count up all the “Ps” and decide how great in total were the errors and apply the appropriate “Up to 0.30” deduction. As in evaluating text errors, the judge must use common sense to determine how great the total errors were.

Movement lacking artistry of presentation Up to 0.30

Quality of gymnast’s movement to reflect the style of the choreography (note this is a correction listed on the errata)

Up to 0.15

The choreography of the 2005–2013 routines has incorporated many different styles of choreography. The text in areas is very specific regarding the quality of movement. For example, some movements should be performed supplely, while others should show a dynamic/sharp quality. Areas not specified can reflect the gymnast’s own style.

Quality of expression (i.e. projection, emotion, focus)

Up to 0.15

The gymnast needs to make the beam and floor routines a performance, not just a routine. She needs to perform as if she were “on stage.” Performing with emotion—whether that be happiness (smiling), pride (lifting the head and chin), confidence (finishing each movement to the ultimate)—is a must to develop a good sense of artistry.

Just as with text and posture errors, when there is an artistry error during the exercise, the judge should put an “A” (or “Q” for Quality and “E” for Expression) on the paper (NOT a number). When deciding how much to deduct, the judge would count up all the “A/Q/Es” and decide how great in total were the errors and apply the appropriate “Up to 0.15” deduction for each of the two categories.

In closing, it is strongly encouraged for everyone to work together at clinics, workshops, and especially at practices at a gym. Working together to recognize all the above “in general” deductions along with all other aspects of the routines is what is needed. Only through this collaboration and “meeting of the minds” will our gymnasts benefit.