
POSTURE AND ALIGNMENT-THE NEW COMPULSORY ROUTINES

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 buttocks muscles will show a more "rounded" buttocks as opposed to gymnasts that 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 has placed a great deal of emphasis on a tight relevé (stand high on the toes) position. In an attempt to get a complete understanding of this, we described specifically in the text (too many times to count)... "Relevé with the heel of the front foot pressed against the front of the back foot." 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 0.10 each time the gymnast does not show this position (high on toe and feet touching) when required.

2. The knees

Unless stated 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 the 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**

New deductions have been added to help judges see what the shoulders should be doing when showing good posture. 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. The deduction is listed on page 157 of the new compulsory book, and it states, "Incorrect body alignment, position, or posture-Up to 0.20 each." The WTC clarified deductions regarding this issue. Incorrect body alignment, position, or posture during major elements is up to 0.20. Incorrect body alignment, position, or posture during connections is a general deduction for the whole exercise of up to 0.30. 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 "P"s 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.

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