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How to plan and organize a circus workshop

There are several ways to build a program of circus workshops. The planning, organization and implementation of the workshop will depend on various factors.

First of all: your **pedagogical project**. Consider the goals and aims of your organization. What is their main vision? Is it the personal development of the participants? Their physical development? In some cases you will organize workshop in collaboration with other organization. Also consider the goals and aims of your partners. Are they institutional partners? Etc.

Then you have to think about **yourself**. What do you want to achieve by implementing a circus workshop? What are your pedagogical objectives? And how can you reach them? Do you aim to develop personal and social competences of your participant or do you want them only to have fun? Do you want to create a show with the participants? You will have to adapt your objectives to your capacities, that mean that you will have to think about your technical skills and your teaching skills (group management, organization...).

After that you should think about the **material condition** of the workshop: **The location** of the workshop. How big is it? Is it indoor or outdoor? **The equipment**. What do I need? Do I have enough for every participant? The **duration** of the activity. How long is it going to be? How many sessions?

And then you should think about what we can call **the human factors**: the **size of the group**. How many people will join the activities? The **age of the participants**. How old are they? Their **background** and/or their physical or mental **limitations**. The **consistency of the group**. Will people join and leave throughout the activity or will they all come and go at the same time? For a multisession program, will the participants be the same each time or will they change?...

In the end the answer to all this questions will shape the structure of you workshop: the length, the choice of disciplines, the size of the group...

Basics of acrobalance

How to create an acrobalance workshop

There are several ways to organize an acrobalance workshop depending on the situation. But some rules are common to every workshop. These are the **safety rules**:

1. Acrobalance is a physical activity that can be strenuous. **Always make warm-up** exercise before starting.
2. The trainer **should adapt the acrobatic figures to the age and abilities** of the participants.
3. The trainer should make sure that there is a **spotter** (safety person) at all time next to the one trying, ready to hold and catch in case of a fall!! This is very important!! It doesn't need to be the trainer but the rules are strict: No fooling around when being the spotter, stay focused. If not, change the person or stop the activity.
4. Organize a **clear communication** amongst the participants: If the bottom of the pyramid screams '**down!**', everybody must go down IMMEDIATELY.
5. If any of the participants feel that they are going to fall, they must tell the others by screaming loudly '**I'm falling**'. This way the upper persons can prepare for the fall.
6. When you step on a person, **verify whether it hurts** and adjust the position of your legs, arms, knees ... so it will be painless (participant should not confuse pain with effort though).
7. **Never stand on someone's spine**. You should place your foot on the pelvis, above the legs, not higher up the body.
8. This will sound like evident but at the end of a figure, people should **climb down in the reverse order in which they climbed up**. First the top person climbs down then the middle ones and finally the bottom one.
9. The best way to organize an acrobalance workshop is based on a **step by step method**. For each figure, there is a progression of exercises that can be taught, each one preparing for the next skill level.

Part1

1. Warming up exercises

Warm up the whole body

Make a series of classic warm up exercises

The run of trust

- Participants form two rows that are facing each other. They stretch their arm in front of them so as to block the tunnel they form. One person is standing a few meters before the start of the tunnel.
- At the signal, this person starts to run as fast as possible through the tunnel.
- The people forming the tunnel have to raise their hands just before the passage of the running person.

PURPOSE: Testing self and group confidence.

2. Acrobalance exercises

1. The tunnel

- Four people kneels as shown in the figure.
- Four other people stand on the base's legs a little above the knee and hold hands.
- The base holds the flyer above the knee.

PURPOSE: Getting to know the feeling of what it's like if you stand on someone.



2. Basic pose: The cat

- Position your knees right under your hips and your wrists right under your shoulders.
- Keep your back straight.



Good posture



Bad position (bending the back)



3. The surfer



- The base assumes the position of the cat.
- The flyer stands on the base with one foot on the pelvis and one foot between the shoulder blades.
- The spotter is there at all times and holds the flyer hips.
- **To come down, step down, don't jump.**



PURPOSE: Get to know one of the fundamental elements for setting up pyramids.

WARNING: Each person has a different constitution, it is necessary to be cautious and always check with the base where we stand. If it hurts, come down immediately!

VARIATIONS



4. Pyramid with three person

- One participant assumes the cat position.
- The second step over and position his/her hands on the base's shoulders.
- The third person climbs up on the pelvis of the base and holds the shoulders of the middle one.
- Going down from the pyramid takes place in the reverse order of the assembly.



PURPOSE: The use of cat position in an easy pyramid.

5. The chair



- The base lay down and put his/her hands flat next to his/her ears.
- The flyer lightly steps in the hand of the base and seat on the base's feet.
- The base simultaneously pushes his/her hand and leg so that they are stretched vertically.
- Come down the opposite way you came up. **And do not forget to let go of base's feet so he/she can step down.**

PURPOSE: Feel the balance and be relaxed in the position.

6. The flag with three people



- One person assumes the position of the cat.
- The second lean on the base.
- The flyer steps straight up on the middle person's knees.
- Both lean back and try to find the balance point between the two.

- If they are stable, the base can move away so that the pair stands on their own.

PURPOSE: To learn the principle of counter balance.



7. The flag



- With practice, you can do the flag without the base person in the cat position and keep balance holding only one hand.

8. The Tower



- One person assumes the position of the cat.
- The second person rest his/her hand on the base's shoulder and keep a flat back.
- The third person does the same on the pelvis of the first.
- The fourth also climbs on the pelvis of the second.
- Come down the opposite way you came up.

PURPOSE: Getting used to balance a bit higher.

9. The roof

- Two persons assume the cat position facing each other.
- Two other are placed bottom to bottom in the middle.
- Two other climb on the pelvis of the cat's persons.
- The last one stands on the pelvis of the middle persons.

Anja in Denis Mikič Crovella: Circus pedagogy 2016, Cirkus La Bulle



- To come down, the flyer carefully climbs down in front or back then the others come down the opposite way they came up.

PURPOSE: Strengthen the feeling of togetherness, cooperation, responsibility from the entire group.

10. The double roof



- Follow the building order just as the roof but had two persons in the middle.
- The top person climbs up from the shoulder of an assistant.
- This one is quite high so there must be at least 3 spotters!!!

PURPOSE: Strengthen the feeling of togetherness, cooperation, responsibility from the entire group.

11. Variation of the classic pyramid

- Four persons are placed in the cat position.
- Three persons stand in between.
- Two other climb on top.
- Come down the opposite way you came up.

PURPOSE: Very adjustable pyramid which can include all the participants.



3. Closing exercise

- Everybody lie down on their stomach next to each other very tightly and put their hands over their head.
- The person at the start of the group begins to roll over all the others taking care not to hurt them with his/her elbows.

PURPOSE: Relax, calm through physical touching, fun.

Part 2

1. Warming up exercises

Warm up the whole body

Make a series of classic warm up exercises

I'm falling!

Participants walk around the room and at any time can decide to scream "I'm falling!". At the same time, this person begins to fall backwards. The goal for the other participants is to immediately rush to him and catch him/her.

At the beginning, only one person should be falling at one time but later on it can be more people at once.

Upgrade: The same game can be played but without warning others by screaming 'I'm falling'. Someone just start to fall and the other should jump to help him/her. Somebody can also tell the others: such and such is falling!

PURPOSE: Observing, directing attention to the other members of the group, readiness to react, strengthen confidence.

WARNING: This exercise can be dangerous and the leader has to give very clear guidance.

2. Acrobalance exercises

1. The flower



- Two person seat on the floor as shown.
- Two other sit down and hold their legs together.
- The fifth one steps up on the legs. The middle person holds the flyer a little above the knee.
- Come down the opposite way you came up.

PURPOSE: To realize a simple, visually attractive pyramid.

2. The fan with three people



- The three persons stand next to each other and hold each other's elbows (first figure).
- They slowly lean sideways their arms are stretched (second picture).

PURPOSE: The importance of coordination, sense of balance.

3. The fan with 5 people



- Two persons kneel together.
- Another one climbs on their pelvis.
- All the other stand close and hold hands.
- They slowly lean sideways their arms are stretched so they can reach the persons extremely left and extremely right.

PURPOSE: The importance of coordination, sense of balance, upgrade from the fan

with three people.

4. Preparation exercise for the plane

Lifting boards:

- One partner lies on the floor face up and keep his body as hard as a board, back muscles tight.
- Other grabs him/her by the ankles and lifts him/her into the air.
- You can do the same exercise lying on the side.

PURPOSE: Body tension (the tension of all body muscles is very important in acrobatics). These exercises give a sense of what it means to have whole body tensed.

Exercise for stability on the ground:

- Lying on the floor with your back touching the floor.

- Tighten the pectoral muscles and the muscles under your arm so that you feel the bones on the back that assist in stability.

– Raise your hands in the air to form the letter O

- Ask your partner to lean on your hands to test the stability.

PURPOSE: Obtaining stability on the ground.

5. The plane



- One person is lying on the ground.
- The second stand close and they hold hands (left image).
- The flyer leans down while the base pushes his/her leg straight (right).
- The flyer must keep his/her body tension all the way through.

PURPOSE: Obtaining stability on the ground and maintaining physical tension.

6. The airport



- This is a combination of three or four pairs doing the plane.
- The pairs set up facing head against each other in the form of a cross (if there are four), or in the form of "peace" sign (if there are three).

PURPOSE: Encourage the group to creativity

8. The Galion pyramid



- The lower three persons stand in a circle, in a slightly squatting position, with the torso bended slightly forward and holding each other by the shoulders.
- The flyers put their right foot on the right thigh of the base standing in front of them, close to the hip.
- Together, the flyers step up stabilizing by holding their base shoulders (second image).
- The flyers straighten and take their neighbors hand and lean slowly back (third image).

PURPOSE: Feel the balance and be coordinated.

9. The wall



- The bases stand next to each other and slightly bend their knees.
- The flyers put their right foot on the thigh of the base standing on their right side, close to the hip.
- The flyers stand up simultaneously while the base holds them just above the knee.

PURPOSE: To promote coordination and collective creation.

Upgrade



10. The waterfall



- Two persons assume the cat position facing each other.
- Two other stand facing each other, put their hand on the shoulders of the 'cat people' and maintain a straight back.
- Other two do the same but climbing on the 'cat person' and so on...
- The top persons are brought into position by first sitting or standing on the shoulders of someone.

NOTE: There is a need for at least two spotters for this pyramid.

PURPOSE: To develop a sense of responsibility to the whole group.

11. The mixed pyramid



- Two persons on their back.
- Two other sit down on their knees.
- Two person climb up in a sailor pose.
- Two other make a hand stand.
- The last one lie down on the base's hands.

PURPOSE: Encourage cooperation and coordination between the participants.

IMPORTANT Do not force participant to do hand stand.

3. Closing exercise

The Gordian Knot

- Everybody stand in a circle. Everybody close their eyes and stretch their arm in front of them. The participants have to each grab someone's hand, right and left so that every hand is linked to someone else's. They should not cross their arms and grab their neighbors' hand.
- With open eyes the group has to try to undo the 'knot' without letting go of the hands.

PURPOSE: Group dynamic, cooperation, physical contact.

Basics of circus props

How to create a prop juggling workshops

There are several ways to build a program of workshop to learn the basics of juggling and the use of circus props. The choice of the workshop format will depend on a few factors.

First of all, material factors: **the equipment**. Do I have enough of each prop for every participant? **The location** of the workshop. How big is it? Is it indoor or outdoor? The **duration** of the activity. How long is it going to be? How many sessions?

This consideration leads to other factors, human factors: the **size of the group**. How many people will join the activities? The **age of the participants**. How old are they? Their **background** and/or their physical or mental **limitations**. The **consistency of the group**. Will people join and leave throughout the activity or will they all come and go at the same time? For a multisession program, will the participants be the same each time or will they change?...

Knowing these information, there are few options to create a workshop program that depends also on the **goals and choices of the trainer**: Do you aim to develop personal and social competences of your participant or do you want them only to have fun? Do you want to create a show with the participants?

In any case however, there is a way to lead a circus prop workshop that is flexible and can adapt to most situation:

The trainer disposes all the props he has on a table. There must be at least one for each participant regardless of if it is a diabolo or a Chinese plate. Each participant must be able to have an object in his hand. The trainer then demonstrates how to use each props. He explains how to do the basic moves as he shows to everybody, but until he is done, no participants get to pick the props and try.

The trainer then gives a final rule to his speech: when the participants are done with whatever they are using, they must bring it back to the table and they must not use the props for anything else than what they are intended for (they are not swords or rugby ball...). Props get lost or damaged quite fast if not taken care of (though very rarely get stolen).

Each participant chooses whatever he feels like and gets to try it as long as he wants for the duration of the workshop. The role of the trainer is now to wander around and mingle amongst the participant. He stops regularly to direct, correct and explain individually to each participant how it should be done. He must keep an eye also on the equipment that comes and go from the table.

This format of workshop allows a lot of flexibility: it works for open or closed groups, it works for every age, usually there is enough equipment to share between everybody, it is very dynamic for the participant that gets to try many things and it's fun...

It does mean though, that the trainer should master the basics of each prop he puts on the table.

This format can serve 2 purposes: for a single workshop as a fun thing to do or as a first contact with juggling props to identify the competences of the participant in the frame of a longer project involving a show. During the workshop, the trainer gets to see individually each participant and can recognize the preferences (there is always one) of such and such participant. It becomes clear that this participant or the other is more attracted or talented for this or that prop and therefore should work more on this one.

There is another way to organize and implement a workshop or a whole program about teaching the basics of juggling props: a step by step method. For each discipline like juggling with balls, spinning pois or using flower stick... there is a progression of exercises that can be taught, each one preparing for the next skill level.

Juggling with balls



Juggling with three balls is the ultimate goal of this workshop. But before we reach that, there is a few simple exercises that will give the participant enough confidence and skills to reach that goal. Trying to juggle alone with three balls can be difficult and discouraging but by following the step by step method, the quick reward of each exercise keeps the participant involved and motivated. It is a very special feeling for people to realize that they can indeed juggle and the excitement and pride that they get out of it is a very big boost of self-confidence.

1. Group exercise: Group juggling

This exercise is a very good and fun introduction to juggling. Everybody is involved including the trainer and it is also good to remember the names of the participants. You can do this exercise with large groups. Juggling is about throwing and catching so during this exercise you can check quickly the abilities of the participants.

What do you need?

- Around 10 balls depending on the number of participants

First round of group juggling

- Arrange participants in a circle, not too close, not too far from each other
- The trainer is included in the circle
- The first participant calls the name of someone and throws a ball to him/her.
- The next person calls someone else and throws him/her the ball and so on.
- Everybody gets the ball once and at the end of the circle the ball come back to the first participant.

Second round of group juggling

- Try again to do the same circle. Follow the same order as before and keep calling the name of the next person.
- Keep going like this but try to do it as quickly as possible.

Third round of group juggling: add more balls

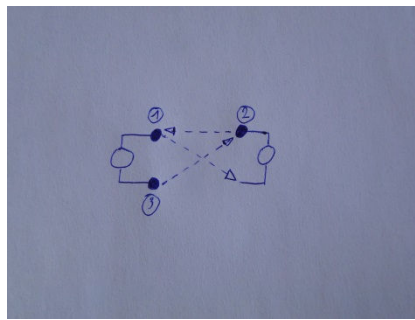
- Again, let's start in the same order

- When the first ball comes to the third participant, add another ball.
- If it works, slowly add more balls
- The game can finish when a certain number of balls are rotating nicely or you can keep adding more and more balls until the participants can no longer handle it.

The beginning of this exercise is a bit slow and requires quite a bit of concentration from the group but as soon as the energy starts to rise, it is very fun and gives a taste of what it feels to be juggling to the participants.

2. Juggling for two: passing

For this exercise, the trainer forms a group of 2 people and gives to each pair 3 balls. The goal is to pass three balls between the 2 participants in a special pattern: One participant will pass his ball in a straight line to the opposite hand of the other participant, on the contrary, the other will pass his balls across to the other.



- The participants stand facing each other, one of them has one ball in each hand, the other only one ball in one of his hand.
- They agree which one will pass straight and which one will cross
- The participant that has two balls starts first. He passes the first ball to the other person aiming for the hand that is free. The second person does the same and so on.
- At first the passes are very slow but soon the participants can try to accelerate the rhythm.

The main mistake beginners do during this exercise is that they pass the ball to themselves, they tend to want to exchange the ball from one of their hand to the other but they must not! They must pass only to the other participant's free hand.

For the younger participants, you can try the same exercise but instead of throwing the ball in the air, you can sit down and roll the balls on the floor.

It is possible to upgrade this exercise by adding 2 more balls to the pattern:

- Same as before, the participants stand facing each other but now, one of them has 2 balls in one hand and one in the other, the other participant has one in each hand.
- The participant that has three balls starts first. He again passes the first ball to the other person aiming for the hand that is free. The second person does the same and so on.
- The second participant must start passing when the first ball is in the middle of its arc.

It is exactly the same exercise as before except that it is twice as fast. The curacy of the throw and the catch is then more important than before but the feeling for the participant when they succeed to keep up the rhythm is very satisfying, it is very close to the actual classical 3 balls juggling but easier.

Another passing exercise is the basic juggling pattern with 3 balls that is called a cascade with 2 people:

- The 2 participants face each other. One has 1 ball in his dominant hand, the other has 2. They will work only with one hand or if they have difficulties to catch they will use both hands.
- The one with 2 ball start by throwing one ball to the other participant. When it reaches the middle of the trajectory, the second participant throws his ball and catches the first ball.
- The movement continue so that at any given time there is always one ball in the air, one in the hand of a participant and the other in the hand of the other participant

3. Solo juggling

This is the ultimate goal of a workshop that teaches the basics of juggling. At this point, each of the participants gets 3 balls and is going to practice alone.

- We start with one ball. At first we just pass it from one hand to the other making sure it fly to about eye level before it fall back in the hand. It is possible to play a bit and try to pass the ball under the leg or behind the back before catching it. Be creative! You can invent as many throws as you like.
- Then each participant gets two balls. Spontaneously the participant will want to through one ball up and simply pass the other to their free hand. They should not do that! Both balls have to be thrown up in the air, even if you don't catch them at first. First, throw the first ball, and when it comes to the highest position throw the other. Try this for a while until you get it right.
- Only then participants can get their third ball in the hand. On one side they have 2, on the other only one. They must start with the hand that has two: first one fly, come to its highest point, then second one fly and so on...

During this exercise you will notice that some participants will get it faster than others. As they practice individually you will have to pay attention and adapt the pace to each participant. To teach this trick, the trainer has many options:

- The square method: tell the participant to imagine a square that is in front of them and get them to throw the balls aiming at the corners of this imaginary square.
- The slowed down cascade with 2 persons: Get the participant to throw the ball as if juggling normally but when the balls reach the summit of their trajectory catch them and put them back in the hand of the participant. This method focus on the throw by deleting the need to catch.

Variant: this can be done with juggling scarfs

4. Closing Exercise

At the end of this workshop participants are working alone all over the space so it is good for the group dynamic to make one last exercise together.

We propose the following one: Participants have to bring one or more balls or objects a certain distance between two lines without using their hand and without letting the ball fall on the ground.

Chinese plate



Spinning a Chinese plate is a relatively easy thing to do provided you get the right technique. A few exercises can help participant to get to know this fun prop.

1. Pass the plate

- The participants form a circle. Only the trainer has a plate and a stick. The trainer explains that everybody will be passing the one rotating plate between each other and of course that the plate should not stop or drop.
- The trainer then spins the plate with his stick and passes it on to his neighbor. The plate is then passed on until it reaches back to the trainer.
- Then, each of the participants gets his/her own stick. This time the participants will be passing only the plate to their neighbor.
- The exercise finishes after a whole round is successfully completed without the plate dropping or stopping.
- -For a bit more fun, the trainer can had more plate to the game.

2. Basic exercise with a Chinese plate

Spinning a Chinese plate is not difficult but it is very important for success that the participant has a very relaxed wrist.

- Grab the stick so that the pointy end looks upwards. It is important to keep the stick strictly vertical and not to tilt it forward.

- Place the plate on the stick as shown here:



- Gently begin to rotate the wrist so that the plate starts to spin and slowly rise to an almost horizontal position. It is important that the stick follows the plate (as if drawing a circle with the pointy end), and not that the plate rotates around the stick.

- Spin the plate as fast as you can and if you stop abruptly, the center of the plate should slide on top of the stick and the plate will start rotating freely without any further action of the participant. This is it! Congratulations!

3. Other tricks

- Instead of spinning the plate on the stick you can start it and when it is ready, that is spinning fast on the point of the stick you can replace the stick by your index finger. Gently raise your straight finger toward the middle of the plate and quickly move the stick away.
- It is possible when the plate is spinning freely to balance the whole thing on a finger or chin
- 2 people can exchange their plate
- Throw the plate in the air and flip the stick upside down

4. Closing Exercise: Find out where I am

Place a player in the middle of the room and make him close his eyes. He must discover where are the other players that are trying to touch him without using only the hearing.

- We need a calm and quiet place where we can safely walk around (gym, meadow ...) and we determine the center of the space and its limits. The game takes place in silence.
- The group selects a person who will first try to identify from where sound comes and settles in the middle.
- Other participants are arranged in a circle around the person who is guessing. Their mission is to touch the one who guess. One by one, they try to get as close as possible.
- The person that guesses listens very carefully and point with his finger in the direction he thinks someone is coming.
- If found, the person should go back to the border (back in the circle) and someone else try.
- If anyone manages to touch the guesser, the one who has touched becomes the one who guesses.

Diabolo



Diabolo is not such an easy prop to handle at first because there are so many things to think and do at the same time. But once you understand the basic principle it is so much fun! It is very popular, especially with boys and simple tricks can be very impressive.

1. Pass the diabolo

- All the participants have a pair of sticks and form a line. Only the trainer has a diabolo. The trainer explains that everybody will be passing the one rotating diabolo between each other and of course that the diabolo should not stop or drop.
- The trainer then spins the diabolo passes it on to his neighbor. It is then passed on until it reaches back to the end of the line.
- The exercise finishes after a whole round is successfully completed without the diabolo dropping or stopping.
- -For a bit more fun, the trainer can had more diabolos to the game.

2. Basic exercise with a diabolo

A diabolo set is composed of a pair of sticks connected with a string and a yoyo looking object. The goal is to spin the diabolo using the stick and the string. Once the diabolo spins fast enough, it become stable and the player can make a lot of tricks.

- To start if you are right handed, follow the instructions. For left handed do the opposite. First hold one stick in each hand, place the diabolo on the string and on the ground in front of your right leg. Gently roll it to your left to start the rotation but if you pull too fast, the diabolo will not roll but only slide and it will not work.
- Once the diabolo rolls past your left leg, lift up the stick to pick up the diabolo from the ground. Now the diabolo is spinning slowly in front of your tibia. It is important to always maintain such a position when you play. If the diabolo moves from this position you have to rotate your body to follow its movement. In any case, the axis of the diabolo must be perpendicular to your knees.
- At this point you have to know that there is an active stick and a passive stick. Basically, the active stick is used to spin the diabolo and the passive one doesn't move. So to keep the momentum of the diabolo, you have to repeatedly move the active stick (right one for right handed) up and down while you just hold the passive one steady. The active stick movement should look as if you would be gently drumming.

- The next step is to keep the diabolo spinning straight on its horizontal axis. Sometimes one side of the diabolo tilts up or down. When this happens, the diabolo loses its balance and falls down from the string. To keep the diabolo straight, push the active stick in front of you or pull it towards you.

3. Throwing and catching a diabolo

- The first trick you can learn is to throw and catch the diabolo: when it is spinning fast enough, stop moving the active stick and pull the sticks quickly apart until the string is fully stretched. This will catapult the diabolo in the air. Do not try to just lift your hands up because this will most likely end up with the diabolo tangled in the string and flying towards your head faster than you think ...
- To catch the diabolo keep the string stretched and lift the end of the active stick, aiming at the middle of the diabolo. As soon as it falls back on the string, bring your hand together to cushion the catch.

4. Other tricks

There are many tricks you can do with a diabolo. They all have colorful names like the lift, the Eiffel tower...

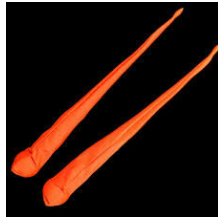
I will only mention here the passing: the two persons stand next to each other and pass the diabolo from one to the other.

5. Closing Exercise: the blind slalom

The trainer creates a short slalom with one or more chairs and the goal for the participant is to go through without looking, without touching any chairs and without any assistance from the others.

- Pick a place where you can safely walk around (gym, meadow ...)
- The participants familiarize themselves with the slalom and then, one by one gets blindfolded to get through. The others are quiet and cannot help the person who goes through the slalom.
- The other participants spread around the room and their task is to protect the blindfolded player: keep him from going straight into a wall, falling ...
- We start with only one chair and when everyone has gone through we can add more chairs.

Poi/Kiwido



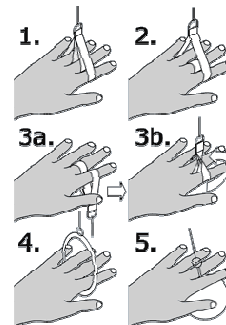
1. Basics of pois

Length of poi:

Poi should be the length of your arm. Hold the handle of the poi and put your arm out. Hold on to the Poi with the other hand. The Poi should only just reach the side of your arm pit. It can be shorter, or you can have it longer but if longer then this can limit the number the moves you will be able to do. If it is too long you can wrap in around your hand.

Holding the poi:

There are many ways of holding onto poi. Here are just a few of them.



Typically you put one finger through each loop. It really does not matter which two fingers. Use the fingers that give you the most comfort and control.

Posture

Keep in mind that most of the moves you make from the wrist. So be relaxed put your elbows close to your waist put the lower part of the arm up (like you would be holding a plate or a book). Hold the poi and try to make the moves from your wrist not with the whole arm.

2. Basic exercise with pois

- Forward swing - Hold poi in each hand facing the palms down and forward. Just spin both pois in front. (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Forward-swing-3_7_8)
- Backward swing - Hold poi in each hand facing the palms up and forward. Just spin both pois backwards. (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Backward-swing-3_7_9)
- Split time swing in front - Start swinging the Poi forward. Now increase the speed slightly on one of the Poi until it swings around the top when the other Poi is swinging at the bottom.

This is "split timing". (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Split-time-swinging-3_7_10)

- Split time swing backwards - Start swinging the Poi backward. Now increase the speed slightly on one of the Poi until it swings around the top when the other Poi is swinging at the bottom. (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Split-time-swinging-3_7_10)
- Turn forward- Spin pois forward once they are above your head and start to fall down put both of them on the right side of your hips let them both pass your body and follow them so that you turn around and start spinning them backwards.
- Turn backward – spin pois backwards and once they start to come from down towards the top of your head put both of them on the right side of your head so they both pass your head and follow them so that you turn around and start spinning them forward.
- Butterfly – Put hands apart start spinning each poi towards each other (so you spin your left poi towards right and your right poi towards left). Important is that you hold one hand above the other. When pois are up (in front of your head) you put both hand on top of each other and keep on spinning. (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Butterfly-3_15_11)
- Giant butterfly – Make a normal butterfly once your pois start to come down stretch your arms and make a big circle in front of you and then join them in a normal butterfly. (http://www.homeofpoi.com/lessons_all/teach/Giant-Butterfly-3_15_129)

YOU WILL FIND LOTS OF TUTORIALS ON <http://www.homeofpoi.com>

Conclusion:

We have seen 4 different juggling disciplines but there are of course many more prop that you can use. This document is a technical guide line for these disciplines but also a pedagogical aid to build a workshop. The method we present here can be applied to any juggling discipline.

- Always start with a warming up exercise. It has multiple purposes: a physical warm up, it provides a first contact with the prop that the participant will be using and it also create a group dynamic. Many times, (but not always) these exercises are based on cooperation. As prop juggling can be a highly individual activity, group warm up provide a nice balance to that.
- Adapt the progression of tricks to your group: too easy and it is boring, too hard and participants get discouraged.
- Again at the end, finish with a collective exercise that will brush off any personal frustration that could be felt by the participants and create the sense of belonging to a group no matter your skill level.

Circus and prop juggling offers an infinite array of possibilities and some disciplines will appeal to some and less to other. We believe that every person can find something attractive and be good at it.

This is why we intend to use the circus disciplines as a non-competitive activity. Specially with prop juggling, the goal is to get better at what you like and not to be better than the other at everything.

And even though juggling with prop is an individual activity and the main benefits are personal (better physical coordination, better concentration...), some exercises involve more people and stimulate a different set of skills (more social skills like mutual trust...). The trainer should play with these various exercise to reach his/her pedagogical objectives. Of course the technical level of the trainer will greatly influence the structure of the workshop but success does not depend entirely on it. Most of the very good jugglers are bad teachers.

One more thing: circus disciplines are creative disciplines! In this document, we only give you the basic skills and principles of each discipline. There is of course a lot more you can learn from others in workshops, on the internet... But don't underestimate the creative power! Trainers and participants should take time to invent new thing and imagine new tricks. Not everything is written and the possibilities are endless...

Balloon twisting

How to create a balloon twisting workshop

Organizing and leading a balloon twisting workshop can present certain challenge.

A balloon twisting workshop obviously involves a public but that public can either be active or passive. In the first case the public just look and collect the sculpture once it is done. In the other, the public are participants, they learn actively to create the sculptures.

In the first case you would not be exactly leading a workshop but more doing a performance.

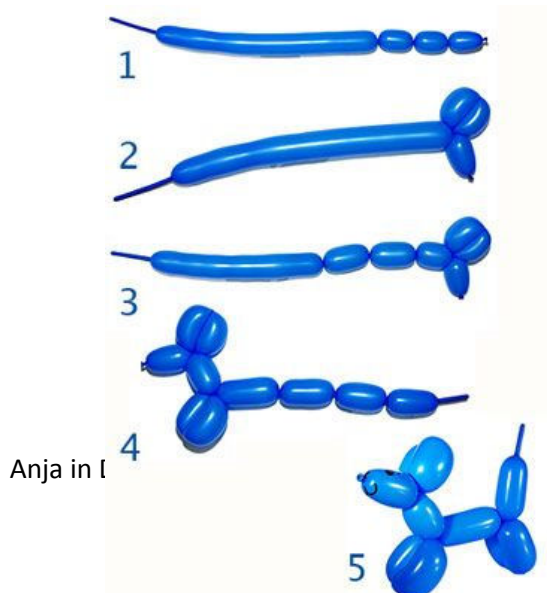
But for the second case you should know that in general, a balloon twisting workshop doesn't work well for big and open groups but is very nice if you have a smaller, closed group.

In any case don't let children take the balloons unsupervised. Have a bag of balloons with you and you give the balloons to the children.

- It is very hard to blow the balloons with your mouth. Trying to do it without knowing the right technique can occasionally lead to fainting so tell the participants **not to blow the balloon with their mouth.**
- Show them **how to use the pump correctly** (not press it on anything as it blocks the air, hold on to the balloon when pumping...)
- **Never pump balloon until the end**, always leave little space so the air can move to it when you twist. If you do have to pump it until the end do it but then just let some air out.
- **Start twisting the balloon on the part where is the knot** so the air can move to the empty part.
- When you twist **hold the part of the balloon where is the knot** (otherwise it will all untwist) and keep on **turning the not twisted part toward you.**
- Tell people not to be afraid to **grab the balloon** and turn it- they are made for it. Sometimes **they do burst and that is ok** so they should not be afraid of that.
- Long nails can be a problem as they make balloon burst☺.
- It is good to be **two leaders** so one can show the figure and the other goes around and helps people. Especially with tightening the knot.
- You can also prepare in advance and **blow some balloons in advance.**

The four following animals are all based on the dog shape. There are only variations in the length of the twists

DOG



Anja in I

2016, Cirk

GIRAFE



ELEPHANT

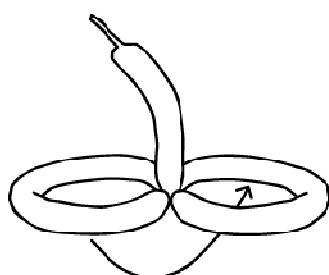
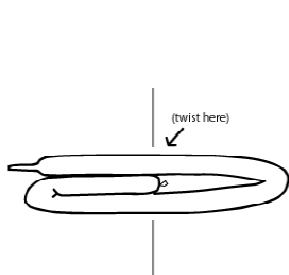


RABBIT

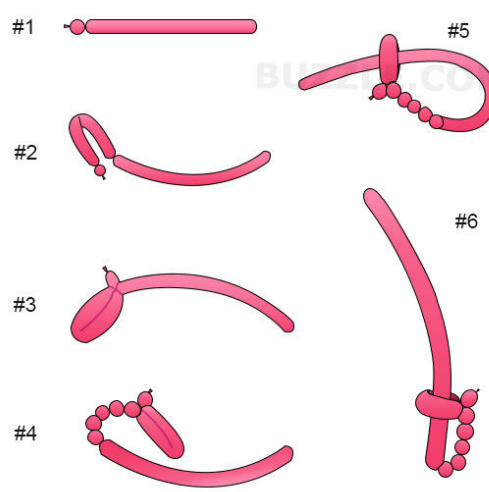
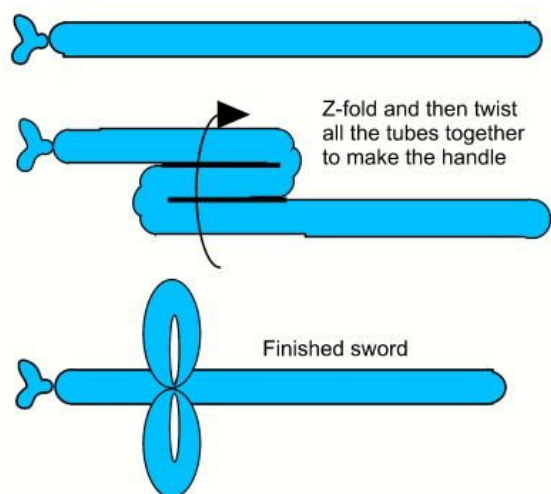


These are two other easy sculptures with one balloon:

SWAN

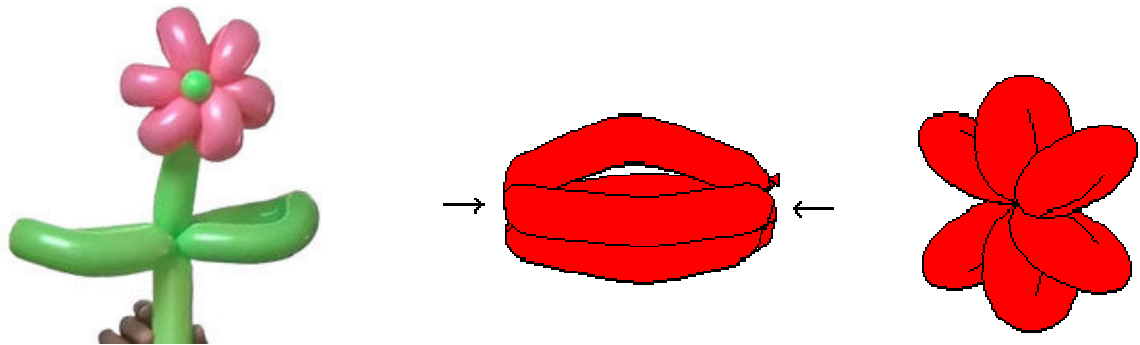


SWORD



And here are some sculptures with two balloons:

Flower



Viking hat



Birds in a heart



How to make your own props

1. Making juggling balls

Material

- Inflatable balloons: For one ball you need 2 or 3 balloons
- Rice, couscous, sand or anything like that.
- Plastic wrapping
- Scissors
- A plastic glass for measuring

Instructions

- Take a piece of plastic wrapping.



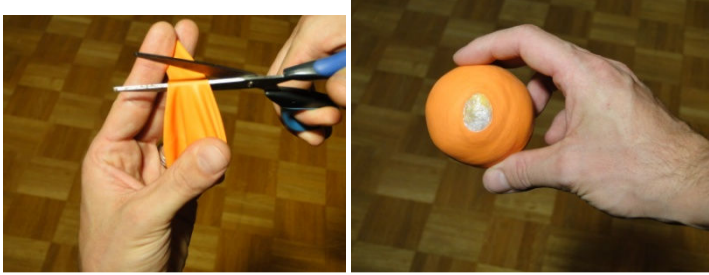
- Fill the measuring glass with your rice, couscous sand.



- Close the wrapping to make a small bag



- Take a balloon and cut the 'tail'



- Push the wrapping bag into the balloon.



- Put 1 or 2 more balloon on top of the other making sure the opening are opposite side and the ball is done.

2. How to make pois

Material

- Long socks
- Tennis balls or juggling balls

Instructions

- Put a ball in each sock and tigh a knot at the end.

How to prepare a show

How to prepare a performance

Preparing a performance at the end of a circus project is always a special experience for children, young people and adult. In our case, we are talking about a very simple presentation that can be assembled in a short time. It is a critical part of the project and managing it is not always easy. The trainer assumes then the role of an artistic director and must manage and combine the skills, personality and wishes of the participants and his own wishes, goal and material requirement. The performance must be treated as a part of the pedagogical process and therefore the outcome should be positive for the participants.

Here are some tips to help in the preparation of such performance.

- The group should first decide what will be shown: who knows what, who wants to show something... We should not set our goals too high! It is better to choose something that we can do well than something that we are not so confident to do!
- We should encourage voluntarism. Nobody should be forced!
- And of course we should practice many time the thing we intend to show...

Some people are confident by nature, some are shy and for them performing in front of an audience can be a traumatic experience if not prepared properly! Therefore, we must take care that nobody is ever "thrown" onto the stage unprepared because it can do more harm than good. Knowing how to do tricks and performing them are two different things but just as learning juggling and other disciplines, there are steps that will get you use to perform on stage.

- The participants should first create a short presentation in small groups and show them to other participants (safe environment). Everybody will be in turn the audience and the performer.
- If it is possible, the next step could be performing short acts in front of outsiders, for example, another class, but in a familiar environment.
- Solo appearances are difficult for many, and only those who wish may it in a safe environment.
- The role of the trainer is to create a pleasant atmosphere. He must ensure that the participants don't find themselves in an embarrassing situation (feeling ridiculous) in front of a group. The trainer is actively involved in creating the show and he is the ultimate decision maker: he must sometimes be firm and impose his decision. So for him there is a fine line between too much control and not enough.

Concretely, the performance itself will most likely look like that: A series of acts performed in small group (or solo) and a few acts involving all the participants.

Apart from their hard skills, the participants should think about their character (costumes?), eventually a little story for their act or the whole show and a way to present it (visual effects like juggling with giant balls, music...)

There are many expression games that can give ideas for the creation of a small act (for example: <http://www.bbbpress.com/dramagames/>).

The trainer can let the participant free or give them special request to help them. For example: all the act should start by a roll entry show some juggling trick and finish with a group acrobatic...

Balance and equilibrium

Basic exercises

1. Stick on the head

The participant move around the space holding a stick balanced on their head.

What do you need?

- Enough space to move around freely without bumping in each other
- Enough sticks for every participant

Instructions :

- Every participant get a stick and try first to balance it horizontally on his finger so as to find the center of gravity
- Then the participants put the stick on their head and try to find the balance point. They must concentrate on what they feel on their skull because they do not see the object.
- When they are comfortable, the participants try to move around the space and can try harder and harder moves, like sitting down, turning around stepping up and down a chair...

2. Balancing on one foot

- The participants stand straight and hold their hand in front of them. They have to imagine that they are holding a ball, a pole or any object, and that this object is stabilizing them. They can close the eyes to visualize what they are holding. They breathe deeply to calm down
- Eyes open, they try to hold their balance on one foot, still imagining their object as an aid to achieving equilibrium. Try on both feet.
- Once they feel comfortable they should try, to do this again but with eyes closed. It is much harder than it seems!

You can try this exercise in many different positions from yoga.



Walking on a rope (slack line)



Walking on a sack line is a safe and fun activity if supervised properly and is relatively easy to organize. There should be two fixed point that are very strong to be able to attach the line (in a gym the metal pole holding the volleyball net are very good).

1. Preparatory exercise

This exercise helps beginners to gain confidence for walking on a rope.

- Draw a line on the ground
- Stand on your toes and walk the line. Make small steps and keep your balance with both hands and foot.

2. Basics of walking on a rope

Safety rules

- It is easier and better to start with a short line (3 to 4 m). Always set up the line **as low as possible** (a little above the knee is good). **Don't be tempted to put it higher!!!** If you do, the risk will be significantly increased if you have to jump and catch yourself from a high point.
- When teaching beginners, the trainer should make sure that **there is a 'safety' person at all time** next to the one trying, **ready to hold and catch in case of a fall!!** This is very important!! It doesn't need to be the trainer but the rules are strict: **No fooling around** when being the 'safety' person, stay focused. If not, change the person or stop the activity.

First steps

- Climb on the line holding hand with your safety person and try to get a feel for it. You will be tempted to look at your feet to see where you step but instead you should look straight and focus on a spot in the distance that you will always look.
- Take a few small steps while your assistant follows you. You will notice that when you get to the middle it start to shake. This is the reason why **you should go slowly and not try to run** across. If you do, this middle section will shake a lot and you will miss a step. Running across is for experienced people...

- Try several times and when you feel more confident, you can try to slowly let go of the hand of your assistant.
- Don't forget to relax!!! It is a concentration exercise so you should breathe deeply and keep cool. If you are too tense, the rope will start shaking and it will be impossible to keep your balance.
- Keep your hands on the side and slightly bend the knees.

Walking alone

Walking on a line is actually a series of standing position more than a succession of steps. Walking is easy but standing is hard. So before you walk on your own you have to learn the correct way of standing balanced on the rope:

- Remember the balancing on one foot exercise? This is it. You have to be able to do just that on the line. So get on the line (with your safety man next to you) and try to stay balanced on one foot. You will notice that one is easier than the other. Keep your knees slightly bent, keep your hands on the side and move your arm sideways over your head when comes the need to catch the balance. Use your free leg too, it is very important.
- Try to stay for 10 seconds like this then change foot.
- If you manage that, you will be able to walk the line alone: first step on one foot as you have practiced before, then slowly transfer your weight on the other foot and assume the standing position. Keep exchanging foot until you get really comfortable and you can walk the whole line.

Walking alone across a slack line is not so easy and demands a lot of practice, so it can be a bit discouraging. But it is doable, and when you start to get it is a very nice activity. For the beginners, it doesn't matter if they can manage alone, the pleasure to go across even assisted is enough. Even during a performance.

Walking on Stilts



Walking with stilts is also a safe and fun activity if supervised properly.

- Again, for beginners select stilts **as low as possible** (20, 30 cm high). No need to impress anybody, we're just training.
- The trainer should make sure that **there is a 'safety' person at all time** next to the one trying, **ready to hold and catch in case of a fall!!** This is very important!! It doesn't need to be the trainer but the rules are strict: No fooling around when being the 'safety' person, stay focused. If not, change the person or stop the activity.

How to walk with stilts

- Take the stilts in your hands, as shown in the picture. The bar of the stilts must be behind your shoulders, not in front.



- Place one foot on the step and climb up. The safety person at this point is behind the participant and holds the upper part of the stilts to steady them. It is important that you hold your body straight and not bended forward when walking on stilts.

- Now we are ready to walk on stilts: when you lift one leg, simultaneously pull with your hand up in order to keep the contact between the foot and the stilt's step. If you do not pull on your hand, only the foot will raise and the stilts will stay in place.

When you walk, raise your legs higher than usual in order to avoid any bumps on the floor. First, go slowly and do small steps. Keep your legs together, just walk normally.

- On stilts, it is almost impossible to stand on the spot without moving your feet. You have to constantly step a bit to chase your balance. The safety person is loosely holding the stilts all the time until he/she feels that the participant is confident enough. Even then he never goes far...

For young kids, there is an alternative to big stilts: mini stilts. It works the same, only it is more stable.

