



TEACHING METHODS

SHAPING

Shaping involves teaching the entire movement, often through imitation. The coach provides a demonstration of the skill and asks the player to imitate the movement. Visual models are very important in learning new skills. Of all the senses, sight is by far the most important and effective for learning. The demonstration or visual representation must be as accurate as possible, either with the coach or a skilled player providing the demonstration or showing a video. By seeing the proper technique, a player will be able to mimic the performance. The coach then provides feedback to that player to adjust one aspect of the skill while still performing the complete motion.

It is usually easier for young players to imitate or copy someone than to absorb a lot of information. It allows the player to develop a feel for the complete motion. It is also used with advanced players to fine tune a technique such as the batting swing.

MANUAL/PHYSICAL GUIDANCE

The coach physically moves the player's body (e.g., arm, leg) to the desired position to help the player understand ("feel") the proper motion through kinesthetic feedback. The coach is teaching players how the movement feels when it is done correctly to develop their ability to concentrate on correct execution. After enough practice, players will correct themselves when their technique doesn't feel right.

Always ask permission from the player before using physical guidance and describe to the player what you will do before doing it.

CHAINING

Chaining is a practice technique where skills are broken down into their component parts. Each part is then taught separately before all parts are added back together. The coach can start at the beginning of the skill or at the end of the skill. Demonstrate the entire movement to the player before breaking it into component parts (Whole-Part-Whole teaching).

A coach's decision to use this technique depends on the complexity of the skill and the age and ability of the player. This technique may not work well with very young children due to their general lack of coordination. It has been shown to be effective with skills that require a high level of accuracy (e.g., pitching).

Backward chaining is where the skill components are grouped in reverse order starting at the end. For example, in windmill pitching, the first movement to be taught would be the wrist snap. Because ball release is the most difficult aspect of pitching to master, a backwards chaining approach can also capitalize on the high level of motivation and focus players typically have at the beginning of practice relative to the end.



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CHUNKING

Chunking involves breaking down a skill into its fundamental components and learning each component separately without distraction or pressure. Chunking may result in faster and more accurate skill acquisition compared to learning the skill in its entirety. Over time, and with increased skill level, players become more efficient with their chunking, allowing previously divided chunks to be grouped together. Chunks should be chosen by coaches based on the player's baseline skill level, age (or stage of development), and overall complexity of the skill being practised.

For example, in softball windmill pitching, the motion itself can be broken into two core components (chunks):

1. Preparation (all phases up to toe touch at landing)
2. Throwing (all phases after toe touch to ball release and finish)

Both of these components can then be further broken down depending on practice goals.