

USA ULTIMATE



INTRODUCTORY SKILLS MANUAL

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We hope this Introductory Skills Manual gives you the basics to teach ultimate to your group! For additional coaching and organizer resources, including videos and more curriculum, check out, usultimate.org/youtheducation.

If you would like to learn more about Girls' Ultimate Movement's programming and curriculum specific to girls, then check out gum.usultimate.org.

To find USA Ultimate youth volunteer contacts in your area, check out usultimate.org/youth-contacts.

For any questions or concerns, please contact USA Ultimate at info@hq.usultimate.org.

Credits

The Basic Skills, Strategy and Drills manual is a revised version of an earlier Skills and Drills handbook compiled by several people, including Catherine Hartely, Kyle Weisbrod, Anne Wescott, Corey Young, Eric Simon, Robin Barney, and Suzanne Fields. The description of the basic throws can be found in Ultimate: Fundamentals of the Sport by Irv Kalb and Tom Kennedy. Thanks to Justin "Juice" Shacklette, coach of Colorado University's Mamabird and Fortunat Mueller, member of the USA Ultimate team for their help in editing this manual and Tony Porter for his illustrations.



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STANDARD THROWS

*From Ultimate: Fundamentals of the Sport by Irv Kalb and Tom Kennedy
All throws are illustrated and described assuming a right-handed thrower.*

Backhand Delivery

In the backhand delivery, the fist grip is used. Grasp the rim of the disc in the palm of the throwing hand. With the thumb on top, make a soft fist curling the fingers under the rim. Adjust the thumb and fingers so there is a firm yet comfortable grip with fingertip control. The standard backhand is thrown so that the rim of the disc farthest away from the hand is lower than the portion of the rim in the hand. Throughout the forward swing and release, the palm of the throwing hand should remain perpendicular to the ground. A very common fault of novice throwers is to rotate the palm during release, causing the disc to turn over sharply to the right.

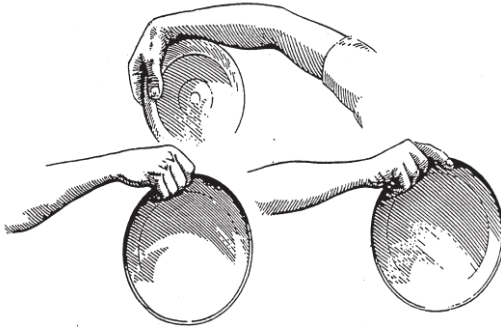


Fig. 1a Backhand: Grip

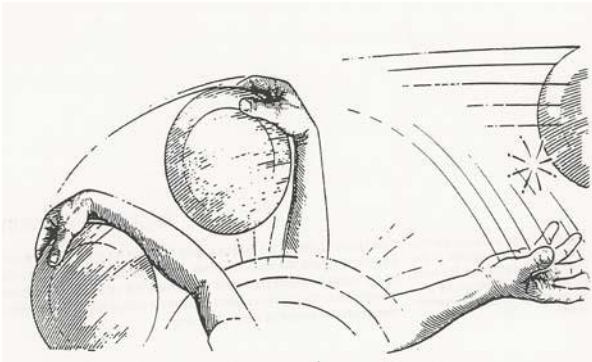


Fig. 1b Backhand: Arm Motion

Forehand Delivery

In the forehand deliver, the two finger grip is used. Grasp the disc in the throwing hand with the thumb on top so that the rim of the disc makes contact with the web between the thumb and index finger. While maintaining contact with the web, rotate the disc clockwise until the pad of the middle finger makes full contact with the inside of the rim. Place the index finger alongside the middle finger for support. Pinch the disc with the thumb in such a manner that the grip is firm yet comfortable. The standard forehand is thrown so that the rim of the disc farthest away from the hand is lower than the portion of the rim in the hand. Throughout the forward swing and release, the palm of the throwing hand must remain facing up. A very common fault of novice throwers is to rotate the palm during the release causing the disc to turn over sharply to the left.

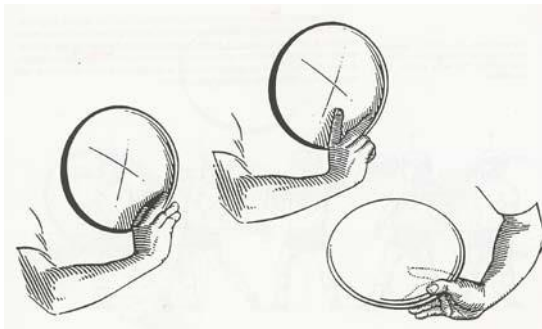


Fig. 2a Forehand: Grip

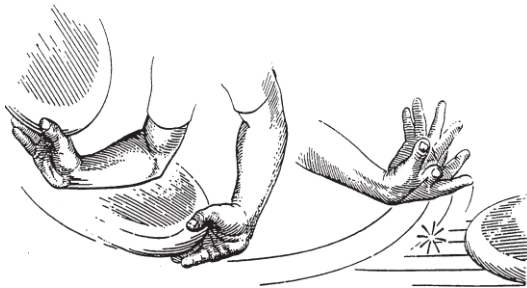


Fig. 2b Forehand: Arm Motion

Drills for Throwing

- Warm-up Toss
- 3-Person Break Mark Drill

CATCHING

Pancake Catch

The Pancake Catch is the safest catch in ultimate. It is best used when the disc is between waist and chin height or when it is possible to jump or slide to catch the disc between waist and chin height. The pancake is the safest catch because it allows for slightly mistimed catches and discs that change height due to wind.

As the disc approaches, extend your arms forward. Your arms should be slightly bent at the elbows. One arm should be below the other arm and the palms of both hands should be facing each other. Clap your hands together around the disc. Ideally the bottom hand should be in the center of the bottom of the disc. Pull the disc into your body as you catch it to soften the impact.



Fig. 3a The Pancake



Fig. 3b The Crab Catch

Two-Handed Rim Grab

The two-handed rim grab is particularly suitable for catches above chin level or below waist level. Because you can extend and catch the disc further from the body while making this catch, it can also be used when a defender has a play at the disc. The two-handed rim grab is not as reliable as the pancake catch and should only be used as necessary.

To make a two-handed rim grab, extend your arms toward the disc. If the disc is above shoulder level, extend your thumbs down. If the disc is below shoulder level, your thumbs should be extended up. Your elbows should be slightly bent. Grab the disc with both hands simultaneously. Pull the disc into your body to soften the impact.

MARKING

All defensive sets start with the mark. As soon as your player gets the disc, set up your mark. Your primary responsibility as the mark is to limit the range of directions that the thrower is able to throw to. While on the mark, you should stay on the balls of your feet. Your knees should be bent and your butt low to the ground. As the thrower pivots and fakes, move with them while maintaining your balance by keeping your feet close to shoulder width apart. The best way to do this is shuffle your feet to get into position.



Fig. 4 The Mark

Arms and Hands

The position of your hands is very important. Your arms should be bent at the elbows because it is easier to move your arms out than it is to move them in. Similarly, your hands should be low because it is easier to move your hands up than it is to move them down.

Distance

The rules require that you maintain a distance of one disc space from the thrower. Sometimes it is advantageous to move even further away than that. Different distances will prevent and allow different throws

Stalling

Remember that as the marker, another job is to stall. As soon as the player you are covering catches the disc, begin the stall count by saying "Stalling 1..." Proceed to count to 10 at one second intervals.

Drills for Catching and Marking:

- Warm-up Toss
- Marking Drill

CUTTING

Cutting is the process of creating space between yourself and your defender. A cut is like a race between two people. As an offensive player, you must remember that you get to decide when the race starts and where the finish line is. There are several different ways to make a cut; most involve a change of direction and/or a change in speed.

Full Cuts

To set up a full cut, run in the opposite direction of where you want your cut to go. You should sell this cut as if it is a real cut and get up to full speed. After five or six steps, or when your defender has reached full speed, plant your outside foot and run in the opposite direction.

This cut takes time to set up and requires good timing and anticipation on the part of the cutter. As you make this cut, you must be aware of where the disc is and where it is going. You must also be aware of where the other receivers are. When done correctly, it will almost surely create a large gap between yourself and your defender.

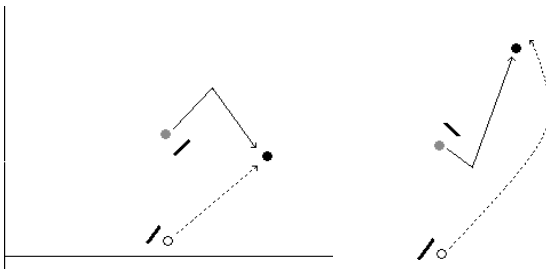


Fig. 5a The Full Cut

Two-Step Juke

To set up the two-step juke, take one or two steps towards or away from your defender. This will cause your defender to either lose balance or turn their hips, committing themselves to covering the direction that you are faking. At this point, plant on your outside foot and cut to where you want to go. It is a great cut for beginning ultimate players. It does not require the same anticipation as a full cut.

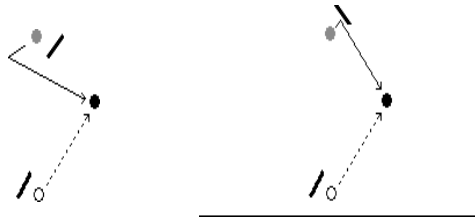


Fig. 5b The Two-Step Juke

Notes on Cutting

- In general, any time you are on the field, your changes of direction should be sharp, not rounded because this makes it more difficult for a defender to keep up.
- Generally, do not make cuts directly toward the sideline (horizontal cuts). Cutting at an angle with respect to an imaginary line of scrimmage allows the thrower to throw the disc to space and the receiver to position themselves in such a way as to prevent the defender from making a play at the disc.
- After each cut, clear hard so that your teammates will have space to make a cut.



Fig. 5c Sharp vs. Rounded Cuts

Drills for Cutting:

- Cutting Line Drill

DOWNFIELD DEFENDING

Good person-to-person defense requires speed, stamina, field awareness and good anticipation. You, the defender, want to stay as close to the person you are covering as possible; try to anticipate their next move. 90% of defense is position. It is essential to know where that position is and where it is going to be soon. The other 10% is the speed, endurance and effort required to get to that position. There are many factors that determine where you should be in relation to the player you are guarding. Be advised that these factors may change from one second to the next, and you must be ready to change your position. Below are the most important factors to consider when determining your position.

The Force

Where the mark is forcing is the first knowledge you need to position yourself well. The force will be covered further in the Defensive Strategy section. Defense should position themselves on the open side of the field.

Receiver Location

This may seem like an obvious one. Of course you want to be near the receiver you are guarding. But how near and in what position changes depending on both the receiver's position on the field and the receiver's location in relation to the thrower. In general, it is a good idea to place yourself between the receiver and the thrower to prevent the receiver from cutting towards the thrower. However, if you are defending the last person in the stack, then you should position yourself more parallel. Try to position yourself so that you can always see both the disc and the person you are defending.

Triangulation

One good basic defensive positioning strategy is to position yourself so that you can always see both the disc and the person you are defending. It is often necessary to work hard to maintain this triangulation, but it allows you to always be aware of what is happening on the field.

DEFENSE

Person-to-Person Defense – The Force

The force is the simplest defensive set used in ultimate, and it is used to great effect to win games from pick-up to the National Championships. A good person-to-person defense is one of the best defenses there is.

The basic idea of the force is that the mark takes away one side of the field by setting a good mark and not allowing the thrower to throw to that side. The downfield defenders are responsible for the other side of the field, positioning themselves to stop all throws to that side. Teams decide at the beginning of the point which way they are going to force, and every player forces the same way.

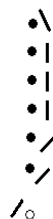
Two common ways to mark the disc that are often used include force forehand and force backhand. It is essential that the rest of the defenders on the field know which way the disc is being forced so that they can guard the receivers accordingly.

Force Forehand

In this defense, the mark sets up on the right side of the thrower (all directional cues are from the mark's perspective, i.e., the mark is on the thrower's left side). When forcing this direction, your goal is to make the thrower throw a forehand. It is important to note that marks force left-handed throwers to the left side of the field as well.



Fig. 6a Force Forehand



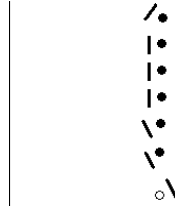
Downfield defenders should be aware that throws to the backhand side of the field will be difficult and should set up on the forehand (force) side of the receiver that they are guarding. This does not mean that they should not cover the receiver to the backhand side of the field, but rather that they do not have to be as close.

Force Backhand

The force backhand set is just a mirror image of the force forehand. The mark sets up on the left side of the thrower and is responsible for preventing forehands.



Fig. 6b Force Backhand



Downfield defenders position themselves on the right side of the receiver that they are guarding. They are responsible for preventing receivers from catching the disc on the backhand side of the field.

OFFENSE

The most important aspect of offense is that everybody on your team is on the same page. Everybody needs to understand their role as well as the full offensive strategy and set. This will help prevent confusion on the field and make your offense look organized.

Person-to-Person Offense

Positions

Many teams and players find it useful to designate positions for the players. This will help everybody stay on the same page, know when to cut, and know their own role. Teams should allow their new players to learn and play all positions – this will help them develop into complete ultimate players. Some positions that can be identified include handlers, middles and longs.

Offensive Sets

The goal of an offensive set is to create space downfield from the disc. This space will be utilized for receivers to cut into and receive the disc. In any offensive set, there is a “dead zone” and a “cutting zone.” Cuts are initiated in the dead zone and terminated in the cutting zone. Throws should not go into the dead zone because there are defenders there ready to get the block. If you cut in the cutting zone and don't receive the disc, clear back to the dead zone.

The Stack

The most basic offensive set is the stack. It is important to not only learn the stack but to also understand why it works. In a stack offense, the dead zone extends in a V shape downfield from the thrower in the middle of the field.

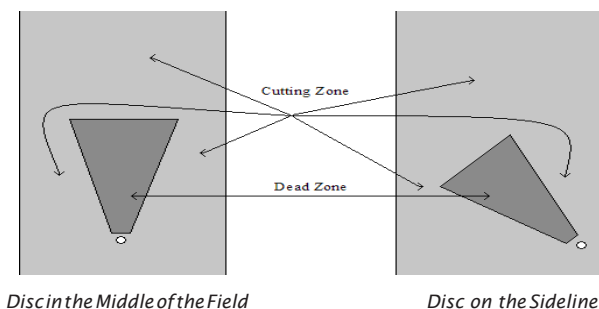


Fig. 7a The Dead Zone and the Cutting Zone

On a stopped disc, all of the receivers should be set up in a line, or stack, in the middle of the dead zone. The closest one to the disc should be no closer than 8 yards away. Each receiver should be 3 – 5 yards away from the next, to avoid picks. The stack should be as narrow as possible in order to prevent defenders from poaching.

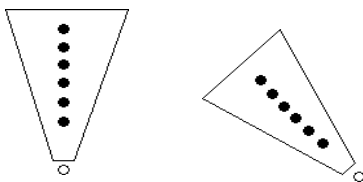


Fig. 7b The Stack

The cutting space is the space on both sides of the disc and the space beyond the stack. This is where receivers should be attempting to get open and receive the disc. Once your cut is done, quickly get back into the dead zone and into the stack so that the next receiver can cut into the cutting space.

A word about clearing

Overall, clearing well is just as hard as cutting well. Nothing slows an offense down more than having the cutters running into people who are being lazy about clearing. Clear as hard as you cut.

DRILLS

Warm-up Toss

Purpose: To warm up and develop disc handling skills.

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Number of Players: 2

Number of Discs: 1

Description: Divide into pairs and line up across from each other approx. 10 yards (10 long strides) apart. Throw with your partner 10 backhands and then 10 forehands in succession. As you get more comfortable with your throws, try to throw as if you were being marked.

More difficult variations:

- Try to throw a certain number of passes with no turnovers

3-Person Break Mark Drill

Purpose: To practice marking and breaking the mark.

Level: Beginner – Advanced

Number of Players: 3

Number of Discs: 1

Description:

- Two players stand facing each other 12 yards apart. (Fig. 8a)
- The third player, the marker, marks the player with the disc straight-up. (Fig. 8a)
- The marker starts the stall at “stalling 5.”
- The thrower fakes and pivots, in order to throw to the receiver. (Fig. 8b)
- The marker attempts to block the throws and stall the thrower. (Fig. 8b)
- Once the throw goes up, the marker sprints to mark the new thrower. (Fig. 8c)
- Continue for 1 ½ minutes.
- Switch markers.

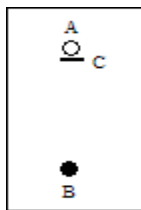


Fig. 8a

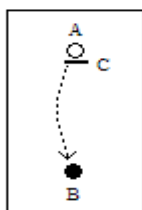


Fig. 8b

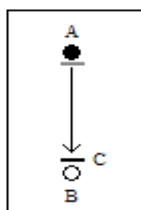


Fig. 8c

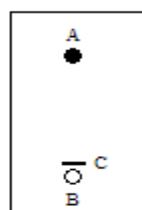


Fig. 8d

Cutting Line Drill

Purpose: To practice throwing a leading pass to a receiver, the two-step juke, and catching while running.

Level: Beginner – Intermediate

Number of Players: 5+

Number of Discs: 3+

Description:

- Establish two single-file lines facing each other at least 50 feet apart. Set cones at the front of each line to help people remember where to start. See Fig. 9a
- A1 makes a two-step juke starting to the left and going to the right. (Fig. 9b)
- B1 throws a leading backhand to A1. (Fig. 9b)
- A1 runs the disc to the first person in line B without a disc. (Fig. 9c)
- B1 makes a two-step juke starting to their left and going to the right. (Fig. 9d)
- A2 throws a leading backhand to B1. (Fig. 9d)
- Continue ad infinitum.
- Switch to forehands so that cutters now juke to the right and cut to the left.



Fig. 9a

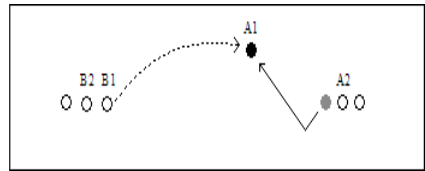


Fig. 9b

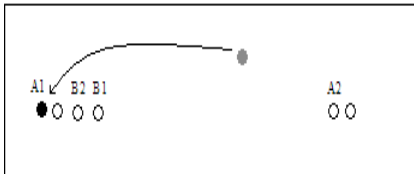


Fig. 9c

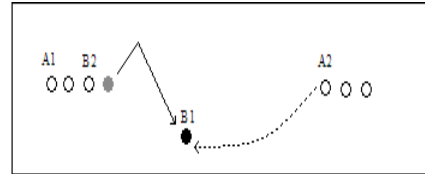


Fig. 9d

Four Line Stack Drill

Purpose: To practice the two-step juke, full cut, double cut, throwing to cutters, timing cuts. To understand the concept of the stack.

Level: Beginner – Intermediate

Number of Players: 8+

Number of Discs: 3+

Description:

- Set up four lines in the middle of the field. (Fig. 10a)
 - The first line should be on the goal line with all of the discs.
 - The next line should be 8-10 yards away.
 - The last two lines should be about 6 yards apart.
- B1 makes a two-step juke starting left and then going right. (Fig. 10b)
- A1 throws a backhand to B1. (Fig. 10b)
- C1 makes a full cut starting away and then coming toward B1. (Fig. 10b)
- B1 throws a backhand to C1. (Fig. 10b)
- D1 makes a full cut coming in toward C1. (Fig. 10b)
- C1 throws to D1. (Fig. 10b)
- D1 runs the disc to line A and hands it to the first person without a disc in that line. (Fig. 10c)
- A1 goes to line B, B1 goes to line C, and C1 goes to line D. (Fig 10c)

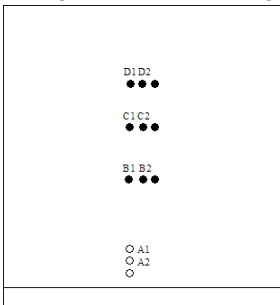


Fig. 10a

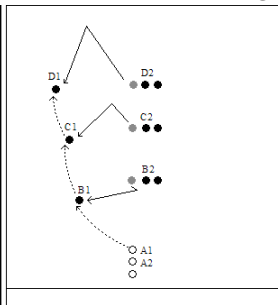


Fig. 10b

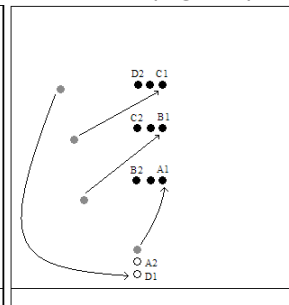


Fig. 10c

Variations:

- Switch the cuts to the forehand side.

Notes:

- Make sure the thrower takes the time to set their feet before making the next pass.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A - DEFINITIONS

Cut – An offensive movement used to get away from the defender, often characterized by a sharp change of direction.

Force – The side of the field that the marker is trying to get the thrower to throw to. A marker does this by positioning themselves on the opposite side.

Foul – The result of physical contact between opposing players that affects the outcome of the play. See rules for details.

Marker – The defensive player who is guarding the thrower. The marker must be positioned at least one disc's diameter (approximately one foot) from the thrower and cannot straddle the thrower's pivot foot (see Rules).

Pick – A violation that occurs when a defensive player cannot cover their opponent because of bodily interference by another player. Generally, it occurs when the offensive player runs so close to another player that the defensive player must stop or slow down to avoid a collision.

Pivot Foot – The foot upon which the thrower pivots. Usually, it is the opposite foot of the throwing hand.

Spirit of the Game – The underlying concept of fair play inherent in all sports, but made explicit in the Rules of Ultimate. For complete text, see the introduction to the Rules of Ultimate.

Stall Count – The amount of time the offensive player with the disc has to throw. The stall count must be called aloud by the marker beginning with "stalling, one, two, three..." at one second intervals, being careful not to speed up towards the end of the count.

Travel – An offensive advantage gained by the thrower when they take a step or pick up or drag their pivot foot during the throw. The disc is brought back to the thrower for a replay, unless the throw resulted in a turnover.

APPENDIX B – 10 SIMPLE RULES

Here are 10 basic rules of ultimate to help you get started.

1. **The Field** - A rectangular shape with end zones at each end. A regulation field is 70 yards long by 40 yards wide, with end zones 20 yards deep.
2. **Starting Play** - Each point begins with both teams lining up on the front of opposite end zone lines. The defense throws ("pulls") the disc to the offense. A regulation game has seven players per team.
3. **Scoring** - Each time the offense catches a pass in the defense's end zone, the offense scores a point. The teams switch direction after every goal, and then the next point begins with a new pull by the team that just scored.
4. **Movement of the Disc** - The disc may be advanced in any direction by completing a pass to a teammate. Players may not run with the disc. The person with the disc ("thrower") has 10 seconds to throw the disc. The defender guarding the thrower ("marker") counts out the stall count.
5. **Change of Possession** - When a pass is not completed (e.g., out of bounds, drop, block, interception, stalled), the defense immediately takes possession of the disc and becomes the offense.
6. **Substitutions** - Players not in the game may replace players in the game after a score and during an injury timeout.
7. **Non-contact** - Players must attempt to avoid physical contact during play. Picks and screens are prohibited.
8. **Fouls** - When a player initiates contact that affects the play, a foul occurs. When a foul causes a player to lose possession, the play resumes as if the possession was retained. If the player that the foul was called against disagrees with the foul call, the play is redone.
9. **Self-Refereeing** - Players are responsible for their own foul and line calls. Players resolve their own disputes.
10. **Spirit of the Game™** - The foundation of the rules in ultimate is Spirit of the Game, which places the responsibility for fair play on the player. Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules, and the basic joy of play.

APPENDIX C – KEY TO DIAGRAMS

Key for Diagrams

○	Thrower
●	Receiver
●	Previous Position of an Offensive Player
—	Defender/Marker
—	Previous position of a Defensive Player
→	Cut
.....→	Throw



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