

Basic Movements for the Beginner Discus Thrower

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Below is a short synopsis of discus throw movements. There are literally hundreds of progressive drills that athletes can do to learn proper discus technique.

The Grip:

Most throwers opt to have the fingers evenly spread and the last joints placed on the rim of the discus.

The thumb should be placed on top of the discus for control. Some throwers prefer to put the middle finger and the index finger closer together while the other fingers stay evenly spread. In any case, the discus should never be “grabbed.”

An additional option places the index finger down the center line of the discus plate with the thumb on top of the discus. Although this can give an athlete the feeling of having gripping only one half of the discus, this is an excellent way to ensure a good release.

The athlete needs to become confident that centrifugal force will keep the discus in the hand while turning. There are a couple of drills to that can help with this. Both of these drills should be performed within the safe confines of a discus cage.

(1) Swinging the throwing arm while keeping the discus flat

Standing in an athletic position, the athlete swings the discus forward and back at a fairly rapid pace while keeping the throwing arm and discus parallel to the ground. To enhance the swing, the athlete should turn the shoulders and hips along with the arm movement. To make the drill easier, “catch” underneath the discus with the non throwing hand each time the throwing arm comes forward.

(2) Run around in circles

Keeping the throwing arm extended with the discus flat and parallel to the ground, run around “in place” while moving in a rapid circle. Do not allow the discus to fall out of the hand. Go in both directions.

The Release:

Generally, the discus should release off of the index finger last imparting a clockwise rotation on the discus for the right handed thrower or counter clockwise rotation for the left hand thrower. The tighter the rotation of the discus, the further it will fly. Throwers at all levels should spend a good deal of time executing proper release mechanics.

Two drills to assist the release:

(1) Bowling drill

While holding the discus in a vertical position at the side, the athlete steps forward, drops to one knee, and simply “bowls” the discus. To do this, the athlete needs to bend the elbow and squeeze the thumb and index finger together as the discus is leaving the hand. The discus rim should be placed on the ground immediately, thereby allowing the discus to roll with the optimum rotation.

(2) Step & release

The athlete rotates the discus arm back while taking a small step forward with the opposite leg. Bring the throwing arm across the body and properly release the discus allowing it to fly parallel to the ground for several feet.

The Stand

(Assume right handed thrower for remainder of article)

During the stand an athlete winds the discus into delivery position and releases it.

From the ground up key areas for the stand are the following:

Feet should be slightly wider than shoulder width with an instep (right foot) to toe relationship (left foot) with the right foot towards the center of the ring.

Line up with the shoulders square to the back of the circle.

The right foot should be turned to a slightly “open” position. This means to have it turned a few degrees to the right of the center line. The toes of the left foot will aim at right instep.

The right leg will be bent with virtually all of the body weight (center of mass) over the right foot. To check for this, the athlete should be able to pick the left foot off of the ground without losing balance or straightening the right leg.

The discus should be wound once and be placed behind the athlete’s right shoulder.

Initiate the action by turning the right foot and dropping the left heel. The right foot should continue to turn through the delivery.

The left arm action will start long and continue until the hand is aiming in the direction of the throw. At this point, bend the arm and bring the elbow to the left side of the body. Ultimately this action should be well timed and occur together with the bracing of the entire left side (foot to shoulder). This is commonly referred to as blocking.

Figure 8 stand drill

Start in the stand throw position but with discus hanging near right leg. Begin moving the discus in a “figure 8” pattern over and under the shoulder. If done correctly the pattern will be vertical. Master this pattern before adding the throw. To add the throw, have the athlete finish winding the upper part of the pattern and deliver as in the stand throw. Proper rhythm and timing are significant parts of this drill.

Step and stand

Begin with the legs bent, both feet near the center of the ring, and with the discus supported by the left hand above the left shoulder. Simultaneously, wind the discus behind the right shoulder and reach to the front of the ring with the left leg. Properly deliver the discus as described above.

Half Turn (commonly referred to as “Mirror Turn”)

As we continue to work our way back to the full throw, the next section is the Half Turn. This is the link between the front and the back of the ring. Facing the throwing direction, begin with the right foot near the center of the ring aiming between the center of the sector and the left sector line. The left foot will be aiming in the same direction and behind the right about shoulder width apart. The body weight should be over a bent right leg. Start the throw by winding the discus behind the right shoulder and raising the left arm. As this action is being completed, begin turning the right foot (never stop the turning of the right foot until the throw is completed). The left foot picks off of the ground, passes close to the right knee, and lands at the front of the circle. If the drill was stopped at this point, the athlete should be in a proper standing throw position, however the movement continues through the release of the discus.

Walking Half Turn

No need for a discus on this one. Place the hands on the hips and walk forward. Every few steps complete a Half Turn by initiating the movement when the right foot is forward.

Sprint Turn

Facing the throwing direction, this drill begins with the left foot aiming a little left of the center of the sector. The right foot will be behind the left, outside the rear of the ring. Most of the weight will be on a bent left leg. Wind the discus behind the right shoulder and lift the left arm so that it is directly over the left leg. “Run” or “Sprint” into the ring with the right leg, keeping the left arm up while the chest runs into it. Become airborne by simultaneously pushing off of the left foot while the right leg is driving. Once airborne, the left foot quickly moves to the front of the ring and the right foot lands in the center

of the ring while continuing to rotate. At this point, a correct standing throw position would be achieved. Continue the movement through the delivery.

Full Throw

Begin in the back of the ring in an athletic position. Wind the discus behind the right shoulder, keeping the arm parallel to the ground. Beginners should keep the body weight centered as the discus is winding back. Once beginning the turn, the body weight transfers from the middle to the left as the right foot comes off of the ground. The left armpit should stay over the left knee. Think of the left side (shoulder to foot) as being a door. It will need to turn together around the left foot until the arm points to the center of the ring.

A couple of cues for proper completion of this part of the throw are to stay low and balanced going around the left side and keep the right foot the same distance away from the left as it was at the start. Once the athlete has reached the "Sprint Turn" position the throw will continue as described in the Sprint Turn.