Exercise: Notice Your Organizational Structure

Take a moment to consider—and to journal or write in a notes file about—what your current organizational structure is for classes. Do you have a few go-to warm-up sequences, and how do you think of them? Do they have names in your head, or are you thinking more discretely about each individual pose? How do you organize the other portions of class, and how does that support your teaching? Could your current classes be divided into chunks?

Exercise: Play with Gravity

1. Look at your current notes and find or devise a standing sequence that covers the Six Moves of the Spine, Four Lines of the Legs, and Two Core Actions.

2. Now change your standing sequence’s relationship to gravity and make it a mat sequence. Does this make it more or less challenging? How can you alter it further to change its effect? Feel free to substitute poses, adding or subtracting to create a complete mat-based chunk. If you’re finding this challenging, flip ahead to the “Dancer, Tree, Pigeon, Eagle” sequences in chapters 5 and 6 to get an example.

3. Collaborate with your planning partner or study group—share your sequences and discuss what was easy and what was challenging.

Exercise: Reflect on Your Current Sequencing

Do an audit of your own current sequences. Look at your class notes—you do keep class notes, right?—and the writing you did about your organizational structure in the previous exercise. Notice whether you rely too much on facing one side of the mat, or on a certain category of movements like forward folds. Begin to sketch out ways to balance these sequences.

Exercise: Slow-Mo Pacing

Experiment with slowing down familiar movements. Start with something you do in almost every practice, like cat-cow or sun salutations. How slow can you go? What feels different? What feels easier? What feels harder? Where are you using momentum to advantage in your usual pacing, and how does it feel to eliminate it? Consider ways to adjust pacing in your own practice and your classes.

Exercise: Try All the Models

Take a familiar sequence and try both practicing on your own and teaching it to your taste testers using each of the models above. Notice the different flavor each offers. If you like to journal, make some notes on your observations.

Exercise: Create Your Own Hybrid

Make up your own hybrids, then brainstorm ways to make them sweeter or spicier. Workshop with your study group! For a bigger challenge, put the names of common poses in a hat or a picker app and choose two or more to combine.

Exercise: Prepare Your Own Warm-up Sequences

1. Think through your standard opening or openings to class. Do you always start in the same position? Why or why not? If you change positions for centering practice to practice, how do you choose?

2. Devise and make notes on four six-moves-of-the-spine routines: supine, prone, seated, and standing. These can be tried-and-true routines you’ve taught for years, or you can play on your mat and innovate. Start to think through how they would prep your students for the next section of class. Are there particular standing-pose routines that each six-moves routine sets up?

3. Collaborative teaching. With your study group, teach at least one of your routines. While it’s always tempting to choose the one you feel most comfortable with, challenge yourself to teach the one you’re least clear on, so that your colleagues can help you focus your sequence.

Exercise: Design Your Own Standing Sequences

1. Design two standing sequences that cover the Six Moves of the Spine, Four Lines of the Legs, and Two Core Actions: one that faces the short side of the mat, and one that faces the long side of the mat. Be playful: try transitions that you hadn’t considered before.

2. Think about ways to alter each of the sequences for various populations. How would you teach it to new students? To tired students? To students looking for a challenge? How can you make it shorter? Longer?

3. Workshop your sequence with your study group.

Exercise: Design Your Own Mat Sequences

1. Design three sequences: one that focuses on core strength while working the 6-4-2, one that focuses on hip flexibility in the same model, and one that does both.

2. Workshop these with your study group.

3. Take a colleague’s sequence and try revising it while keeping the same primary shapes. Can you find new approaches between these primary poses? How does it feel to do the sequence in reverse order, or to change the focus from core to hips—or vice versa?

Exercise: Design Your Own Transitions

Transitions are a chance for you to put your personal stamp on the class. Let your imagination guide you to fun new approaches. Just be sure you’ve practiced articulating them before you unleash them on your students. Or let your students tap in to their own creativity: give them a few minimal instructions, like, “Make your way to standing at the back of the mat. Bonus points if you can freestyle through something you haven’t done before; triple bonus points if you don’t use your hands.” (Be clear with your students, of course, that there aren’t really points in yoga!)

Take each of these home bases and try to find at least one and ideally more ways to move between them.

* standing at the short front edge of the mat
* standing at the short back edge of the mat
* standing facing the long edge of the mat
* half kneeling
* kneeling
* sitting in a chair
* sitting cross-legged
* sitting in a straddle
* sitting sidesaddle (one hip down, legs to the other side)
* hands and knees
* child’s pose
* lying prone (face down)
* reclining supine (on your back)
* lying with legs up the wall

Then challenge yourself to find a transition within one or more of these constraints:

* Don’t let your hands touch the floor.
* Move only one limb at a time.
* Repeat every movement only once.
* Repeat every movement five times.
* Add a balance pose along the way.
* Freeze frame in a challenging shape.
* Move through at least one and ideally more “official” (named or familiar to experienced students) poses en route from one home base to the next.
* Find a way to describe the transition with no visual needed.
* Add a prop.
* Add three props.
* Design your own challenges!

Transitions

* To make this more fun or to turn it into a group exercise, put a slip of paper with each of these home bases—as well as any others you can come up with—in a hat or a bag (or use an app that does the same thing) and draw out a pair or trio. Find multiple ways to move between them. If you’re practicing with a partner or a group, talk your “students” into the transitions.
* + Stand behind them so they can’t see you as you use words to describe the transitions.
* + Don’t use pose names at all.
* + Have your students close their eyes or wear blindfolds.