



## General Principles of Sequencing

These sequencing guidelines are designed to help yoga teachers plan safe classes that will work for the majority of yoga students. These principles are a basic guide map to put cues and poses together in a logical order that will fully prepare your students to safely practice yoga. One of our goals as yoga instructors is to support our students in a safe and well-rounded practice on the mat. By taking the time to create a balanced sequence you can be assured that you are opening and educating your students bodies progressively and logically.

Many students who come to yoga classes do not have a consistent practice. Their bodies can be stiff and/or weak. They also might not have a very good connection to their bodies and their proprioception might be weak. Thus, taking the time to design your classes and prepare your students for the more advanced postures is essential.

### Basic Segments of a Class

#### 1. *Welcome/Opening*

This can be done on a one-on-one basis, to the entire class, or a mixture of both. Although the class technically hasn't started yet this segment should not be overlooked. It is all-important to connect with your students and let them know that you are fully present. It can also work as a centring technique for you, allowing you to fully arrive for your students. You will find your own way of doing this but you do want to make sure you introduce yourself, the class style, and connect with any new students or students with injuries. Maybe take this time to remind students of any important information like resting when they need to or reminding them to turn their cell phones off.

#### 2. *Centring*

As instructors we use this time to draw the students inward. Allowing them to connect mind, body, and spirit. A class theme or peak pose can be introduced at this time. You can also ask your students to set an intention now. Intentions allow us to bring our awareness to a quality or virtue that we want to practice on the mat during our asana. This virtue is something that we would like to cultivate more in our daily life. Practicing it on the mat, in a safe and supported space, makes it easier for us to develop it and bring into our daily lives. By working with an intention we draw the mind and heart into the practice as well, making the practice more holistic. Intentions are most rewarding when they are clear, concise, and they speak to the student personally. It can be helpful to offer a few different suggestions so that your students' may pick one that speaks to them.

The intention of this section is to:

- Centre and focus the students
- Draw the students' attention inward
- Establish breath
- Begin to wake up and warm up the body



- Introduce a theme or intention
- Release stress
- Become fully present
- Mentally prepare for the class
- Release their day

### 3. *General Warm-Up*

Physical therapists and sports medicine specialists agree that not warming up properly is one of the main causes of injury. Therefore, the warm-up is essential.

Starting with general range-of-motion movements is important. Some examples include:

- Wrists and ankle circles
- Cat/Cow
- Sidebends
- Forward folds
- Twists

Surya Namaskaras (Sun Salutations) are perfect for a warm-up at the beginning of class

### 4. *Body of the Class*

#### *Targeted Warm-Up*

In a targeted warm-up you prepare the students' bodies, specific joints, or muscles groups to prepare the body for postures to come. To design this, you need to know what poses work what muscles/joints, the component parts. You also need to know where the class is going. Always starting with the easiest and working towards the hardest poses.

Many poses work more than one muscle group/joint. For example: To prepare your students for Urdhva Dhanurasana you would need to warm up/stretch the shoulders and the hip flexors.

The targeted warm-up is not a separate part of the class; it is infused into the body of the class. Once you decide the hardest poses or exercises for the class the component parts need to be decided in order to design the rest of the class.

#### *Sequencing Categories of Poses*

- Standing poses- These are the safest way to open the body because muscles support the pose and prevent students from going too far. Work from the easiest poses to the hardest poses. In general; externally rotated standing poses, neutrally rotated standing poses, twisting, backbends.
- Heating Inversions
- Backbends



- Cooling Inversions
- Seated Poses

*Additional Guidelines for sequencing within a category of poses*

- Work from the easiest to the hardest. For example: Vira II is easier than Trikonasana and Trikonasana is easier than Ardha Chandrasana, for most people.
- When flowing, sequence poses that have the same or very similar foundations together.
- Adho Mukha Svanasana is a great home base for your students and yourself. You can remind them to reconnect to breath and intention while you prepare for the next part of the class.
- In general, twists can warm-up for backbends. Backbends can also warm-up for twists or be released by doing a twist. Twists neutralize and relieve the back muscles after a sequence of poses or after a more challenging pose.
- Return the body to neutral after asymmetrical poses or poses which take the alignment out of Tadasana (backbends and forward bends). The blueprint poses of Tadasana, Dandasana, and Cat/Cow are perfect for this.
- Inversions are either heating (Headstand, Handstand, and Forearm Stand) or cooling (Shoulder Stand and Plough) depending on the experience of the student. As a general rule, heating ones should precede backbends. Cool ones follow both backbends and active inversions.
- Counter poses are postures that go in the opposite direction and are used to balance us from the work we have just done. They are centring and neutralizing, bringing the body back to balance. They are a great opportunity to remind students to stay present, watch their breath, or reconnect with the theme or intention.
- Transitional poses are asanas that neutralize the effect of another asana. Often intense postures need transitional poses to 'unwind' out of the intense pose. The pose may be a resting posture to enable you to catch your breath, to centre and compose yourself, or to neutralize the spine following a vigorous sequence. For example, after backbends you may do twists before practicing forward bends. Or following Headstand, you may rest in Child's Pose to calm and centre.

5. *Cool down/Ending*

Most of the documented health benefits of yoga fall into these calming categories, thus it is very important to allocate enough time for this part of the class. This can consist of seated postures, relaxing and cooling poses, meditation, Savasana, pranayama. In an hour class this segment will be about 10 - 15 minutes.

**Additional Considerations**

- Level of the class/students (you can assess them in the first few postures)
- Location/type of facility
- Time of day
- Season of the year
- Students' injuries



- Number of variations
- Number of postures
- The importance of rest
- The role of breath
- Heating and cooling poses
- Strengthening a muscle and then stretching it- Golgi Tendon Reflex
- Resting one body part as you work another
- Repeating in order to get more than one set
- Transitions between postures and between groups or sequences of postures
- Accumulation of mental or muscle fatigue
- Efficient use of time
- Risk factors and contraindications are considered in sequencing the class as well as sequencing instructions
- When linking, it is safer and easier to teach two or three poses at a time. In the beginning, consider linking fewer poses together so that you don't get confused or lost. Make a distinction between linking as 'choreography', which may be pretty but does not illuminate, and linking as a tool to help find a fuller, clearer expression or a series of postures.
- Finally, a sequence of poses need not be an endurance test. You can build strength and stamina much more effectively via longer holds and more precise instruction.

## Types of Classes

All types of classes still follow the general format. They will all have a warm-up, a targeting warm-up, an apex where the hardest (most heating) poses are, and then a cool-down.

### *Well-Balanced Class*

- Will move the spine in all directions; forward folding, backbending, twisting, and side bending.
- Includes Sun Salutations, standing postures, balancing, arm balancing, inversions and seated postures.

### *Themed Class*

- Designing the entire class around a theme. The theme can be physical body (i.e. backbending), subtle body (chakras), mental (i.e. focusing the mind with the moving meditation), or spiritual (i.e. focusing on gratitude, kindness etc.) Please note the class must still be well balanced and move the spine in all directions, even though there will be an emphasis on the theme.

### *Peak Pose Class*

- To design a class with a peak pose you must understand the component parts (see below). The entire class is designed around preparing the student for the 1 or 2 peak poses. The component parts are properly warmed-up and taught. The peak pose should go at the apex



of the class, not the end. You will still need a cool-down after the peak pose (s). It can also be beneficial to do the peak pose more than once so that they can go deeper or explore something new each time.

## Breaking Down a Pose into its Component Parts

### Component Parts

Doing an Asana effectively and safely is a complex puzzle of many moving parts. The pieces must fit together to see the full expression of the pose. When all of the moving parts are warm and educated they fit together well and the energy of the Asana is realized. In order to get a student to this place in their practice a good sequence will warm-up all necessary areas on the body and educate the student.

The component parts of a posture are broken down into 3 categories; flexibility, strength, and education. For a student to find their full expression of a pose these 3 areas must be addressed. Component parts might be targeted areas that may need to be warmed-up, or muscles that need to be strengthened, or *actions (internal effort for the pose to move the body into position or maintain a position)* that need to be educated to do the posture safely. They may also be actions that need to be learned or imprinted to realize the full expression of the posture. The poses and stretches used to prepare these component parts do not always look like the final pose. As an instructor, you must learn the muscles and actions used in all poses in order to teach them in your sequence.

**In practice:** In order to educate and properly warm-up the body for Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) you might start with low lunge to open up the hip flexors (flexibility). Then do cobra to warm-up the spine and teach internal rotation of the legs (flexibility, strength, and education). After that, make your way to high lunge, again to further stretch the hip flexors, with the hands interlaced behind the back to open the shoulders and teach the opening of the chest (flexibility, strength, and education). Lastly, take a standing backbend to teach the lengthening of the spine and the reaching of the heart away from the tailbone (flexibility, strength, and education).

To learn and properly execute a pose, at any level, your students need to be fully prepared. To do this, use easier poses (prep poses) in your classes that resemble the more advanced postures in some way. These easier poses will prepare the component parts (flexibility, strength, education) of the body necessary to practice the more advanced postures, making them easier to understand and execute. They will imprint particular instructions/actions or develop specific areas in the body that will ultimately help with the final pose. Knowing what prep poses you need in your class will help you to sequence your classes. This ability is crucial when teaching beginners or a peak pose sequence.

For the education element, explaining in clear and concise terms the component part that you want to teach them will help your students to develop their practice and progress onwards. For

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education, you cannot do all of the component parts in one class. Focus on one or two of them so that your students can really learn and develop their knowledge.

You would first identify the component parts (flexibility, strength, & education) of your peak pose and then decide on your prep poses to target those aspects.

In the beginning, this is a science that needs to be practiced and carefully planned. With years of experience, it will become more intuitive.

*For example:* When teaching how to flow from high lunge to Vira II (Warrior II):

- First teach the foundation carefully, cue them to spin the back heel down. Then teach the tucking under of the front hip so that the knee points forward (component part). Have them press down into their foundation to lengthen spine (component part for the transition).
- Tell them to maintain this alignment when lifting and educate them that when they flow up to Vira II to do it by rooting into the floor and maintaining the length of the spine.
- Once in Vira II, have them check the front hip and knee again.
- Consider teaching the flow several times adding a little new information each time.

*For example:* When teaching Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose):

- First teach Utthita Trikonasana (Triangle Pose), a complementary pose. Accentuate the rotation of the front leg from deep in the hip socket (component part) and the action of using the quads to straighten the leg with this rotation (component part). This set-up prepares their body and teaches about the external rotation and straight leg needed in Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose). These component parts are easier to learn in Trikonasana (Triangle Pose) than while in the more precarious balance of Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose).
- Also in Trikonasana (Triangle Pose), emphasize the rotation of the bottom ribs up to the ceiling (component part). It is easier to do this in Utthita Trikonasana (Triangle Pose), than in Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose).
- Once they are in Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose) remind them of the component parts, from the ground up.

*For example:* When teaching Dhanurasana (Wheel/Upward Facing Bow Pose):

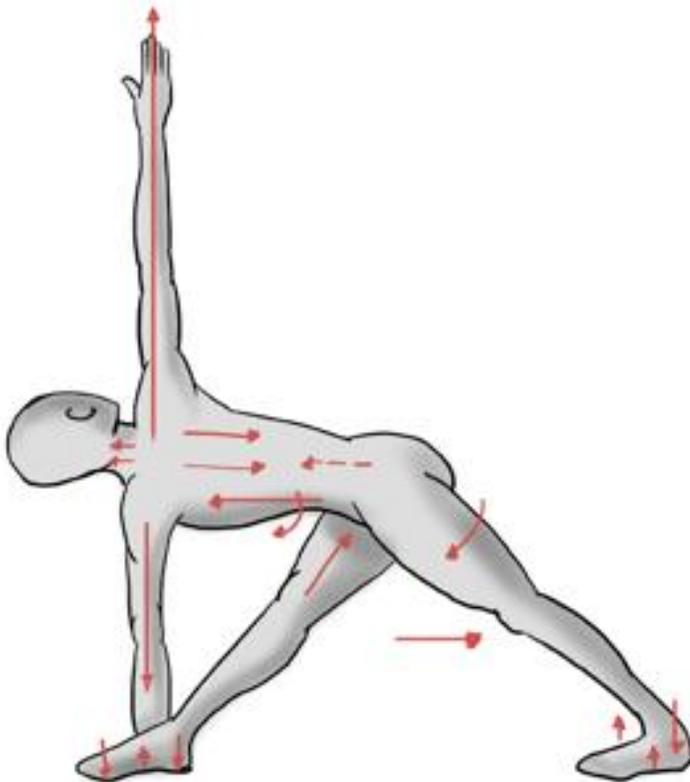
- Stretch out the hip flexors (component part). Have High Crescent lunge in the practice. Cue it specifically to focus on the hip flexors. Example: Draw you belly to spin as you push out through the back heel (counter actions that ensure the student is stretching the hip flexor).
- Stretch out the shoulders; Uttanasana (standing forward fold) with the fingers interlaced behind the back, purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose).
- Have several backbends, building in intensity, to warm-up the muscles of the spine (component part).
- Emphasis on the internal rotation of the legs (component part); Cobra, Tadasana.



- Teach the opening of chest and broadening the collarbones; standing backbend and purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose).  
  
Then begin to put it all together in the mixed level class:
- Salambasana (Locust Pose): Talk about drawing the belly towards spine and the opening of the chest (use the same language you used earlier).
- Salambasana again: Talk about the spinning of the inner thighs (use the same language you used earlier).
- Dhanurasana (Wheel/Upward Facing Bos Pose): Do peak pose 2 times. Touching on the all of the component parts that you taught; Spinning of the inner thighs, drawing belly in, and opening of chest.

### ***Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)***

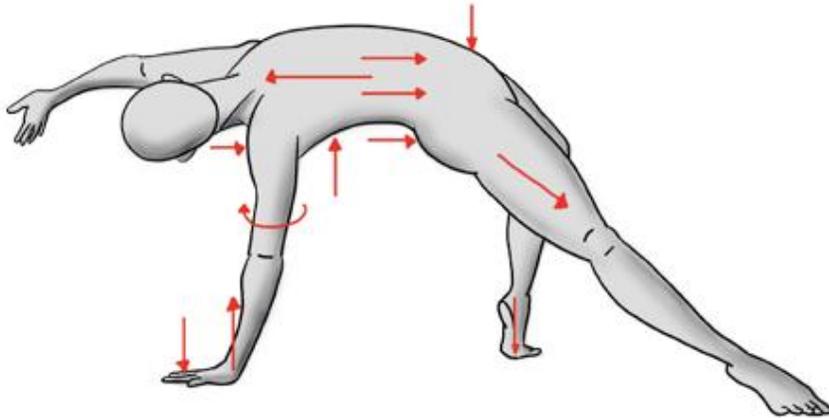
***As I pull energy and vitality into my being I break free of restraints and boundaries.***



### **Camatkarasana (Wild Thing)**

*I expand into the Universe, melting my energy into the healing energy around me.*

*Foundation*



### **Stabilizing Cues**

When flowing, it can be really helpful to use stabilizing cues with challenging transitions or if there are students with less than 2 years of experience.

In your transitions, ask yourself what is at risk in this transition. Then offer a quick cue to stabilize the student against this risk factor as you move them through the movement (from one pose to another).

General examples of stabilizing cues:

- Anchor into all four corners of your foot
- Press down into your foundation
- Scissor your inner thighs towards each other
- Draw your lower belly in and up
- Look at a point that is not moving, find your Drishti

Specific examples:

- Transition: High Lunge --- Virabhadrasana II  
Risk: Front knee  
Cue: "Tuck your right sitting bone under and anchor your knee over the centre of your ankle as you windmill the arms up to Virabhadrasana II."
- Transition: Crescent --- Revolved Crescent  
Risk: Balance  
Cue: "Hug your inner thighs in towards one another as you..."