

## How Do You Learn to Skate?

Learning to skate is quite easy and fun. It requires a little determination, a lot of practice and no fear of falling down! Before you know it, you will be gliding forward and backward, able to show your family and friends what you can do on the ice. Whether your goal is to skate backward, spin really fast or land an Axel, we've got the know-how to help. Remember, every champion had to begin with a few easy lessons, just like you.

### Where do I go?

The U.S. Figure Skating Basic Skills Program is the learn-to-skate program of the national governing body of figure skating. Go to [www.usfigureskating.org](http://www.usfigureskating.org) to find a skating program near you. Then contact your local facility and ask about their Basic Skills group class schedule, registration information and public skating times. With over 900 established skating programs across the country, U.S. Figure Skating is the best place to begin. Start learning to skate, earning colorful badges and having fun with friends and family on the ice!

## Getting Started

### Fitting, Attire and Falling/Recovery Tips

#### Skates

Skates must fit properly! Skates that are uncomfortable or too big will become a frustration to a beginner skater. Please take the time to find a pair that offers adequate support, fits comfortably and take time to practice walking in your skates before taking the ice.

#### Fitting

As a good starting point, find a pair of skates in which your feet do not move around the inside of your boots, especially the heel. Your heel should be as far back into the boot as possible and should feel snug. Support is another important feature in finding the right skates. Skates that lack adequate support can't hold you up and you use a lot of your muscle power just staying upright. The boots should feel snug but your toes shouldn't be pinched. The closer the fit, the more control you will have. Your feet will feel best if you wear one pair of lightweight socks or tights. Bulky or thick socks may limit the support provided by your skates and create 'bumps' inside your boots, making them uncomfortable. Make sure when fitting your skates that your toes can wiggle but your heel does not slide up and down or around once your foot is properly laced in the skate.

Keep trying on skates until you find a pair that fits. Rental skates are made to fit everyone; therefore they fit no one precisely. Finally, be aware that your skate size is not always the same as your shoe size.

#### Lacing

The way your skates look when they are laced up can offer a clue as to how well they fit. To get started with proper lacing, tap your heel back into the boot as far as possible. Pull the tongue completely up, giving it a gentle pull, and try to secure it straight up and down before tucking it beside your foot. Starting with the second or third set of laces from the bottom, begin to pull the laces tightly, one pair at a time, so the boot closes well over the front of your foot. It is important that the laces do not slip. The laces should be snug through the ankle area and the bottom two sets of hooks. The top two can be a little bit looser to allow for some flexibility. If extra lace remains, try to cross it over the hooks neatly. Do not wind the extra lace around the skates if possible.

Beware of loose flying bows as they can cause accidents. When skates are laced effectively there should be enough room, with ankles flexed, to stick a finger down between the back of the boot and your leg. If your foot hurts or doesn't feel right, spend time re-lacing and adjusting.

### **Edges**

All skate blades have two edges – outside and inside – and two directions of travel – forward and backward. You have two feet, so there are eight total edges to learn. Whenever you are skating on a curve, you are gliding on an edge.

### **Proper attire**

Whether skating indoors or outdoors, dress for warmth by layering your clothing. Most indoor arenas are kept between 50 and 60 degrees so jackets are recommended. Comfort and the ability to move freely are also important. We suggest close-fitting but not tight pants. Sweatpants or warm-up pants are ideal. As you get warm, you may wish to discard a layer. Remember gloves or mittens! Learning to fall is an important part of ice skating and your hands will feel much better if you are wearing gloves or mittens. If you forget to bring them, check with the rink's lost and found and borrow a pair.

### **Safety helmets**

Protective head gear is recommended for all children under the age of 6 and all beginner skaters. A hockey, skateboard or ski helmet (multi-sport) will be suitable for using during beginning ice skating lessons. Contact a local sporting goods store for proper fit and information regarding ice approved safety helmets. A helmet should be both comfortable and snug. Be sure that it is level on your head – not tilted back on the top of the head or pulled too low over your forehead. It should not move in any direction. The chin strap should be securely buckled so that the helmet doesn't move or fall off during a fall or collision. The individual that will be wearing the helmet should be present when purchasing a helmet so that it can be tested for good fit.

#### **DO:**

- Wear helmet low in front to protect forehead
- Fasten buckle and check strap adjustment often
- Replace your helmet immediately if it shows any visible signs of damage
- Clean helmet with mild soap/water only
- Store helmet in a cool dry place

### **How to fall and get up**

Even the best skaters in the world fall. Falling is a necessary part of learning and does not need to be scary. Always remember to fall to one side, not forward or back on your tailbone. Begin by practicing a few times off the ice before getting on the ice. Lower your center of gravity, slide onto one hip, relax and collapse all the way to the ice. Protect your head from snapping back and hitting the ice by tucking your chin. Do not use your hands to break your fall. To stand up, roll onto your hands and knees, and place one foot on the ice between your hands. Then, place your other foot on the ice between your hands, and slowly push to a standing position, keeping your knees slightly bent. As you stand, try to maintain your balance.

## **Beginning Skating Skills**

### **Introduction**

Proper control and balance are the key elements in successful gliding. Maintaining your balance, keeping your weight over your skating leg and holding your chest upright are important components.

### **Forward skating**

Proper control and balance are key elements in successful gliding. Skate forward in a stepping or marching action with your toes slightly turned out. Take little steps in the beginning; after three to four steps forward, use a two-foot glide for three counts. Knees and ankles should be slightly bent, toes pointed in direction of travel, and chest and head up with arms held slightly to the front and parallel to the ice for balance. Repeat, pushing harder with each stroke. You will gain confidence and speed as you go.

### **Backward skating/wiggles**

Start with feet parallel – knees bent – and shift your weight between your feet, pushing outward with each. The secret is to maintain your balance on the balls of your feet, keeping knees bent and chest up. You can also try wiggling your hips against your shoulders while shifting your weight and pushing backward off the balls of your feet. If you are wiggling but not going anywhere, try walking backward slowly with your toes turned in, shifting your weight and maintaining your balance just to feel the momentum.

### **Swizzles:**

#### **Forward**

Begin standing in a ‘V’ position with your heels together and your toes slightly turned out. Slowly bend your knees and ankles and press inward. Allow your feet to move forward and separate until they are about one foot apart. Then, straighten your knees and bring your toes together to form an inverted ‘V’ position, making a circular motion with both feet. This will get you into a two-foot glide parallel position. Try six to eight repetitions, gaining speed as you swizzle. Remember to keep your chest and head up and both arms extended to maintain balance.

#### **Backward**

These use the same motion as forward swizzles but going backward. Begin in an inverted ‘V’ position, toes together, knees bent, press on the balls of your feet and using your inside edges, press heels outward and let your skates glide to about a foot apart. Then rise up with your knees bringing your heels together into a two-foot backward glide position. Repeat this down-up rhythmic motion until you can complete six to eight continuous repetitions.

### **The dip**

This is a fun skill that all boys love and it helps to learn to use a deep knee bend while remaining balanced on two feet. To begin, skate forward to gain some momentum, gliding on two feet. Then bend knees in a squat position until thighs are parallel to the ice. The upper body will be held straight, with your head held slightly in front of and over knees. Your arms will be extended forward and parallel to ice. Enjoy the ride.

### **Forward one-foot glide**

Balancing on one foot is very important. After getting a moving start, balance in a two-foot glide position, and then pick up one foot. Hold your free foot close to your skating leg in a toe-to-heel position. The hip on this side of your body should be raised. Your shoulders should be square to the line of travel, with your arms parallel to the ice. A strong glide occurs when a skater balances on one foot for at least three counts or glides the distance of his or her height.

### **Backward half-swizzle pumps**

This is an important developmental skill to learn before backward crossovers. Stand on a painted hockey circle. Your shoulders and arms should be hugging the circle and your head turned back inside the circle so you have a full view behind you. Start moving backward. Your feet will have

different functions – one is the gliding or guiding foot, and the other is the pumping foot. Your gliding foot will remain on a strong back-outside edge. Your pumping foot will be in constant motion, powering the ½ swizzle by pushing outward in a ‘C’ motion and drawing toward your gliding heel in a “swizzling” action. After doing this twice around the circle, turn around and try the other direction.

### **Forward crossovers**

Forward crossovers require a lot of practice to master. To begin, skate in a counterclockwise direction. Hold your upper body strong over the curve, shoulders open and twisted (hugging the circle). Stroke onto a left forward outside edge knee slightly bent. Now cross your right foot over your left foot, stepping inside the circle. Shift your weight to your right foot, gliding onto a right forward inside edge, and tuck your left hip slightly under your right hip. Both feet will cross until your left foot gives a slight push with the outside edge into a full outward extension under the body. Return to the starting position and repeat.

### **Backward crossovers**

The better you get at backward crossovers, the faster you will go. Before you begin, review the backward ½ swizzle pumps that we previously described. Make sure you are leaning into the circle and your upper body is still. While pumping outward, the heel of the pumping foot slides in front of the toe of the skating foot, and the weight transfers from the skating foot to the pumping foot. The most important part of backward crossovers is the weight transfer. This action makes a question-mark pattern. Initially, skaters can simply pick up the foot underneath and place it next to the skating foot. The proper rhythm of a backward crossover is “push, cross, hold, together” or a one-two rhythm, one being the pump and two being the cross. As you get better at the crossing part, work toward pushing out with the undercut, using the outside edge to gain power.

### **Basic Stops**

#### **Snowplow stops – one or two feet**

Begin by skating with a little speed in a two-foot glide position. Bend your knees and ankles, and prepare to stop. Apply pressure to the inside edge(s) of the skates. Your heels should begin angling out. A skidding action (making snow) will begin on the ice, taking you to a complete stop. You might use the words “glide, bend, slide” to help you learn to use the snowplow. It is often best to work on skidding first while holding on to the wall, then while standing still and, finally, with speed. You must press hard to skid and stop. If you press too hard, you won’t be able to shave off any ice. If you don’t press hard enough, not only will you not shave off any ice, but also you might end up doing the splits!

#### **T-stop (R or L)**

Stand in an upside-down ‘T’ position. Your back foot will become your stopping foot. To learn a T-stop, skate forward on a slow one-foot glide, then barely place the free foot on the ice with the pinky toe pressing down toward the ice. Bend the skating knee, put pressure on the stopping foot and draw the stopping foot into the heel of the skating foot. If possible, slightly shift your weight to your stopping foot, pressing down on an outside edge to come to a complete stop. Keep your shoulders square to the line of travel.

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