

FRISBEE 101

HANDBOOK

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ULTIMATE FRISBEE
AUSTRALIA

Equipment list

This is the basic minimal list of equipment you will need to run a coaching session for a group of 24 athletes:

- 13 frisbees (one for each pair, and one for you)
- 8 cones (preferably another 8 of a different colour)
- at least 7 bibs or sashes/braids, preferably 12
- whistle
- watch
- sunscreen
- handouts
- a (cricket) kitbag to put it all into

Most of these items can be bought from a general sports store like Rebel Sport. Information about buying frisbees is available elsewhere in this booklet.

For groups larger than 24, you should seriously consider more presenters, and splitting the group for instructional purposes.

For children less than 12 years old, we recommend using smaller, softer, lighter frisbees (eg the 140g Regent available from Rebel Sport).

Safety & risk management

The main points of risk management to remember when teaching ultimate frisbee are

- 1) before the lesson ensure that there are no obstacles on the field, or major potholing, and avoid cricket pitches
- 2) set up the field to give 5 metres clearance to any fence, wall or other obstacle
- 3) make sure there is access to water or that the students have brought water bottles
- 4) explain the non-contact, friendly, fun nature of the game beforehand
- 5) emphasise to be careful and not throw the frisbee at other people's faces
- 6) if anyone is acting in an unsafe manner, re-emphasise the non-contact nature of ultimate frisbee and if necessary take the student aside and caution them strongly or remove them from the game
- 7) involve teachers in safety management - avoid teaching the group alone.

Discipline

If you are not a teacher, introduce yourself to the supervising teacher and ask them if they can assist with discipline during the session. This will also ensure that they are engaged in the lesson.

Some key pointers:

- Outline your expectations at the start of the session.
- Involve the athletes in decisions about disciplinary rules to give them ownership.
- Apply the rules fairly and consistently.
- Don't let discipline slide, assume if you give them an inch and they will take a mile.
- Avoid physical punishment, shouting or criticism; they don't indicate how their behaviour should be modified.
- Positive reinforcement is the best way to stress desired behaviours.
- If inappropriate behaviour persists, give the athlete a short period of "time out" after which the athlete should be invited to rejoin the group.

Group management

Role model

As their coach, you are a role model for the children. Arrive on time, properly dressed and prepared. Speak to them with respect.

Communicating with the group

The best formation is to have the group face you in a semicircle formation. Make sure everyone can hear you easily. If you are going to talk for more than a minute, get them to sit down so they are comfortable. Make sure there are no distractions behind you, like the sun or other people playing sport.

Try to always meet at the same place on the field during a session.

Avoid frisbees being a distraction. When talking to the group make sure that all of the frisbees are placed at the centre of the circle. Outline this as a rule at the start of the lesson. A frisbee in their hands while you are talking can provide a major distraction.

Using a whistle

A whistle is a useful device for communicating outdoors.

Explain how you are going to use the whistle before the activity.

In practice, you can use the whistle to change the activity, or to finish the activity and get everyone to come back together. In a game, you can use the whistle to pause the game and explain a game situation better.

A suggested use for the whistle:

- Single blow - pause the activity and listen, or change to the next activity
- Double blow - stop the activity and come in to the meeting point

Interacting one-on-one with children

Communicating

Some important points to remember when talking to a child;

- Face the child, and move to their height level.
- Maintain relaxed eye contact.
- Open your posture. Avoid crossed arms or legs.
- Don't talk "down" to them - treat them like an adult.

Active listening

Pay attention to the athlete - stop what you are doing and don't interrupt. Listen to the athlete, give them cues such as nodding, smiling or frowning and encouraging words such as "Uh hum", "I see", "Really?" as appropriate.

Respond by paraphrasing what the athlete has told you. Remain neutral and supportive and ask open questions to get more information than a simple "Yes/No" answer, for example, "What do you think...", "How do you feel..."

Touch

Touch can be an effective way of communicating with a child, but you need to be very careful to ensure it is necessary and appropriate:

- positive reinforcement through a pat on the head or shoulders
- physically guiding them through a skill
- attending to an injury

A good general rule is to ask the child's permission before touching them.

It is generally accepted as OK to touch a child on the head or shoulders, but if they complain or show distress you should not do it again without asking permission.

Teaching skills

Explanation

Your athletes will have a short attention span, avoid talking too much, unless it is in a discussion where the students are engaged in the conversation.

Always have two or three points you want them to remember. If there are more than two or three points then get rid of the less important ones, because they'll forget them anyway. State those points at the start and at the end of your explanation.

Demonstration

If possible, demonstrate the skill while you are explaining it. Tell the athletes what parts of the motion to pay attention to. Get them to mimic the motion, and watch to see that they have understood the basics.

Feedback

Feedback is essential to improvement. Some athletes are able to self-evaluate and improve on their own, but most will need at least some feedback on how to improve.

Ask the athlete their name, if necessary, and use it when giving feedback.

Base your feedback on more than one observation - look for patterns.

Feedback is most effective when it is

- Specific - should only relate to the skills being practised
- Constructive - identify the error and provide solutions
- Immediate - the sooner the better
- Clear - make sure the athlete understands the error and the correction
- Positive - be encouraging, never frustrated

Introductions

Introducing yourself

Tell them your name and where you're from and what you're going to do during the lesson. Let them know the highest level you have played at, eg if you have played at nationals tell them you are on the state team. If you are an Australian representative, wear your Australian jersey and don't be shy about it.

You could tell a (clean!) joke to get everyone relaxed but interested in what you have to say.

Introducing ultimate frisbee

You can also introduce the sport, to sharpen their interest. Give a brief history, explain how big the sport is, and what makes it different from other sports. Try to put it in a context they can relate to.

Be consistent in referring to the game as "ultimate frisbee" rather than just "ultimate".

Something like:

"Today we're going to learn about throwing a frisbee and how to play a sport called ultimate frisbee.

Ultimate frisbee was actually invented by a bunch of kids like you. In 1968, so about 35 years ago, some American high school students started playing frisbee football in their school car park. It's called ultimate because they enjoyed it so much.

Today it's played in over 50 countries by hundreds of thousands of people. About 3,000 people play around Australia. There are national championships and world championships. We send junior boys and junior girls team to world championships every 2 years.

The two most important things to remember about ultimate frisbee, apart from the frisbee, are that it's non-contact and it's played without referees."

How to teach the crocodile catch

There's no need to spend a lot of time explaining catching. It's important to introduce the idea of the crocodile catch as the best way of catching, but most students will be pretty confident catching one or two-handed without much instruction.

The crocodile catch is taught as the basic catch because it allows the greatest margin for error.

The two key points are:

- Start with the hands about 30cm apart, one above the other.
- Watch the frisbee into the hands.
- As the frisbee passes between the hands, clamp down on it with both hands.

Demonstrate the pancake catch, just by tossing it up to yourself.

Practice

Students will practice when they are throwing. Encourage good catching technique in all drills.

Problems

The most common problems to look for are:

- 1) Being scared of the frisbee - tell them to get their body behind it with their head above the frisbee, even to move forward to "attack" the frisbee so they are no longer scared.
- 2) Fumbling - make sure the hands are closing on top of each other



How to teach the backhand throw

In explaining how to throw a backhand, there are four key points you need to cover:

- Grip
- Stance
- Action
- Release

It is best not to overload them with information. Just give them the minimum amount of information to get started, and then let them learn by exploration.

Grip

Explain and demonstrate the grip - "grab the frisbee like a fist, with your thumb on top".

Get the students to pick up the frisbees and show you their grip, there will probably be one frisbee between two, so you'll need to get them to take turns showing you.



Ask them to put the frisbees down, while you explain the rest of the throw.

Explain stance, action and release in quick succession.

Stance

Explain and demonstrate the stance - "stand side-on to the target".

Action

Explain and demonstrate the action - "keep the frisbee below belly-button height".

Release

Explain and demonstrate the release - "release with a snap of the wrist".

This is the most important point to emphasise. Perhaps mention spin when you start to teach throwing and mention it right at the end before they go off to throw. A good analogy is "flicking a towel".

Throw

Demonstrate the whole motion together, if you are presenting on your own, get one of the students to come out and throw with you. Again emphasise the spin. You could also remind them of the crocodile catch at this stage.

Finally, get the students to pick up the frisbees again and show you the grip again. Then have them form pairs and practise their throwing.

Throwing in pairs

Get the students to form pairs (there may be one group of 3), with one frisbee in each pair. Keep within a certain area. You could get them to throw in two lines, which will be easier for you to supervise, but it is recommended with raw beginners to let them spread out and establish their own areas.

Allowing them to spread out means:

- Fewer distractions from other groups.
- Ability to adjust throwing distance to suit confidence.
- Less chance of being hit in the face by other groups' frisbees.

In a more experienced group, throwing in lines can create better discipline and concentration, and allows you to dictate the type of throws that are practiced.

When walking around to help, carry a frisbee around with you so that you can easily demonstrate a skill to a pair without having to borrow their frisbee.

Giving help

When offering help on throws (or catches), observe the player for at least three throws to ensure that the behaviour is consistent.

Only intervene if you think you can help. If you can't think of anything specific to correct, then just observe and encourage the positives "good throw", "nice catch". They will eventually learn by experimentation so don't feel like you have to give intensive advice.

When correcting a skill, explain the symptoms as well as the solution, so that they can self-correct after you leave them to continue practising.

Common problems

The most common problems to look for are:

- The frisbee flies up in the air, rather than flat - throw and release the frisbee at belly-button height.
- Not enough power - shift weight from back to front foot during the throwing motion, throw it harder.
- Not enough spin - concentrate on wrist snap, maybe concentrate on pulling the arm back after release.
- Frisbee wobbles - check their grip, concentrate on wrist snap.
- Frisbee turns over - keep the frisbee below belly-button height, angle the outside edge down more, bend the elbow (watch for straight arm action).
- Poor accuracy - check grip, make sure elbow is bending, get frisbee moving in a straight line, or just tell them to not worry about accuracy at the moment.
- Can't grip the frisbee properly - maybe try a modified grip, or a smaller frisbee.

How to teach the forehand throw

Most of the techniques for throwing a forehand are exactly analogous to a backhand, but it helps to reiterate those points when teaching the forehand. Remember the four key points:

- Grip
- Stance
- Action
- Release

Grip

The grip is probably the hardest aspect of the forehand for students to get right.

The recommended technique for demonstrating the grip is:

- Form a "V" with your hand.
- Place the frisbee in the "V" with the picture facing your thumb.
- Put your first two fingers forward onto the rim of the frisbee.



Get the students to pick up the frisbees and show you their grip, there will probably be one frisbee between two, so you'll need to get them to take turns showing you.

Ask them to put the frisbees down, while you explain the rest of the throw.

Explain stance, action and release in quick succession.

Stance

Explain and demonstrate the stance - "stand side-on to the target".



Some students will face the wrong way and throw it like a backhand so it might help to point out that it is the opposite stance to the backhand throw.

Action

Explain and demonstrate the action - "keep the frisbee below belly-button height".

Release

Explain and demonstrate the release - "release with a snap of the wrist".

This is the most important point to emphasise. Perhaps mention spin when you start to teach throwing and mention it right at the end before they go off to throw. A good analogy is "flicking a towel".

Throw

Demonstrate the whole motion together, if you are presenting on your own, get one of the students to come out and throw with you. Again emphasise the spin. You could also remind them of the crocodile catch at this stage.

Finally, get the students to pick up the frisbees again and show you the grip again. Then have them form pairs and practise their throwing.

How to teach overhead

The overhead is the third basic throw, but of much lesser importance than backhand and forehand. In a beginners' lesson, it can introduce a bit more fun and interest into the session, but don't spend too long on explaining and practising it.

It is best to teach overhead as a follow-on from the forehand. The grip and stance are the same, you just need to show the different action and release.

Stance

Remember to use the same stance as for the forehand, not standing facing the receiver. This will create better weight transfer and balance.

Action

Step forward, and release the frisbee above the head, slightly inverted.

Release

Release with a snap of the wrist, aim up in the air about 30 degrees and a bit to the side of the target.

Practice

It is best to practice it immediately after forehand, maybe use the whistle to signal the transition from practising forehands to practising overheads.

Basic drills

Introducing a basic drill is a good transition between learning the basic skills and applying them to a game situation. It can build on throwing and catching by introducing game-like player movement and the need to lead the receiver. It can be used as a warm-up activity and makes sure that everyone gets to touch the frisbee in a game-like situation.

To teach a drill:

- 1) Set up cones beforehand
- 2) Briefly explain the name and purpose of the drill
- 3) Get the players to break up and stand behind the appropriate cones, with frisbees where they are needed
- 4) Demonstrate by being the first cutter in the drill, showing where to run to, and then where the next cutter needs to go, and which line you join after you have passed the frisbee.
- 5) In a more complicated drill (like the endzone drill), you might need to demonstrate multiple roles.

Drills that are good warm-up activities include:

- diamond drill,
- triangle drill,
- box drill,
- flow drill,
- endzone drill.

These drills all teach basic skill progressions, like joining together catching and throwing, throwing to a moving receiver, and coming to a stop before throwing.

How to set up an ultimate field

The biggest two problems with setting up a field using cones are making the sidelines straight and keeping the sidelines parallel.

If you are on your own, the best way to set up an ultimate frisbee field is to first set up the four cones that form the inner playing field proper, leaving enough room at each end for the end-zones. Then go around and set up the back end-zone cones in line with the sidelines already established.

You will need to walk two lengths of the field, but it is much easier and more efficient than setting up a dodgy field and then having to go around and adjust every cone.

How to explain the rules of ultimate frisbee

It's important to be fairly succinct when explaining the rules. The best way for them to learn the rules is to get out on the field playing the game. Having a field set out first is a good way of giving them a sense of what the field looks like and especially where the endzones are.

The basic rules can be explained in less than a minute:

- you can't run with the frisbee
- you can throw anywhere (forwards, backwards, sideways)
- you score by catching the frisbee in the endzone
- a turnover happens when the frisbee is dropped or hits the ground or goes out of bounds or is knocked down by the defence
- if there's a turnover, the other team picks the frisbee up and has a chance to score
- marker must be at least 1 metre away from the thrower, everyone else must be at least 3 metres away from the thrower
- it's non-contact

For their very first game, it might be a good rule to introduce to have the marker also stand 3 metres from the thrower, to give them freedom to throw their backhand.

Don't mention any rules that they won't need for a 20 minute game of ultimate:

- stall count
- pivot foot or travel rule

Questions

If you wish to allow questions, let the students ask a small number of questions, for example, set a limit of three before allowing questions. You will tend to get a lot of questions about rules that really aren't necessary in order to get the game started.

Remember, you can stop the game to explain rules other than the basic rules, like where to put the frisbee into play after a turnover or when it goes out of bounds.

Modified rules

The rules for Juniors have been modified from the Senior game. If you are familiar with the WFDF Rules of Ultimate, you will need to remember the fundamental modifications in the Juniors game:

- players can substitute at any time during a point
- the receiving team doesn't have to catch the pull, they can knock it down and then pick it up
- markers must stand 1 metre from the thrower
- could be smaller fields and fewer than 7-a-side

Not knowing these rules could cause confusion so please ensure you know the Juniors rules.

How to explain spirit of the game

Spirit of the game is a difficult concept to explain fully, but almost everyone has played sport in a self-refereed style, like backyard cricket or touch football with friends, so you can use that as an example of how it works.

Often when you explain that it is self-refereed, you will be met with incredulity, especially with older students:

- "That won't work!"
- "You mean, I can just cheat?"

The best way of countering this is to say "It's your responsibility to make it work." And explain that even world championships are played without referees, so it does work.

Spirit of the game is an important concept, because it underlines the way they will conduct themselves on the field. Explain spirit of the game immediately before they play, and while supervising games constantly encourage fair and honest play.

A good summary of spirit of the game that you can use is "Play hard, play fair."

You could introduce the idea of spirit scoring after a game and spirit prizes used at tournaments. Even in the short demonstration game you could let them know that they are going to give the other team a score out of 10 for spirit at the end of the game. That allows them to be conscious of their conduct on the field.

Supervising a game

Forming teams

The easiest way to form two teams is to have the athletes stand in front of you and establish the dividing line with your arm - "everyone to this side is on one team."

To form more than two teams, you could

- use a similar method
- choose a captain for each team and get everyone else to form even teams behind them (may end up with stronger and weaker teams)
- choose a captain for each team, assign them a number and then give everyone else a number in turn and have them join that captain (expect that you won't end up with even teams because some people will want to be with their friends and ignore the number you give them)

To even up teams, it is easiest just to ask for volunteers to change teams. Say something like "I need a really good player to help this team."

Getting the game started

Ideally, you will have bibs or sashes that you can give to one team to distinguish them from the other.

Get each team to nominate a captain and organise a toss between them, explaining the choices for the winner and the loser of the toss.

Send a team to each endzone, explaining how substitution works.

Explain how you are going to use the whistle, eg - a single whistle blow means to freeze and listen to your explanation, a double blow means the end of the game.

Stopping play

It is best to stop play and give feedback immediately if you want to modify behaviour.

Practice stopping play to become comfortable with it. Walk onto the field to ensure play stops and to get the students' attention. Talk briefly and loudly.

When to stop play

- to explain a rule
- when someone is playing too physically
- when there is an argument
- when there is a fight

Between points

After each point it is a good idea to go and give some offensive pointers to the team that didn't score. If you can't think of anything constructive to say, just give them some positive encouragement.

If a team is really struggling, you might join them for a point and help them open up their offence and get some flow.

Finishing the game

There is no need to keep score, but if you have a limited amount of time left, like 5 minutes, you might want to keep score at the end. It's best to play to time rather than score, because the last point could take 5 minutes and it means they will need to rush off and you won't get a chance to summarise your lesson. Be very strict about this - they don't know that games are usually played to points rather than time, so resist your desire to finish with a point being scored.

Basic strategy

Introducing some basic strategies can improve the playing experience, even for raw beginners.

Offence

Throw it long

If the offence is bunched up around the thrower, long throws can help them to spread out the receivers around the field. A team that is struggling will also have a better chance of scoring just by getting the frisbee down to the other end of the field, even if it isn't caught.

Throw sideways

Beginners often focus on throwing the frisbee straight down the field, especially against an established defence. Introduce the idea of sideways throws to get the frisbee moving and then try to penetrate upfield.

Dump

When a player doesn't know what to do, get them to throw it backwards. Maybe even designate one of the stronger players to permanently position themselves as the dump receiver and talk to the thrower as needed.

Creating space

Introduce the concept of creating space and cutting and throwing into that space. You can formalise this by getting them to create a stack whenever the frisbee goes out of bounds.

Defence

Man-on-man

At the beginning level, the idea of man-on-man defence will be enough of a concept to get started with. Interestingly man-on-man defence can open up the game a lot more for the offence.

Intermediate strategy

Once a team has the basic strategies worked out, you can start to introduce some more complex ideas. The best source for ideas on strategy is the internet. We will introduce just two here, that can be used very early on.

Offence - Sequence

A simple offensive strategy is called the sequence. Designate someone, player 1, to catch or pick up the pull, they then throw it to player 2, who throws it to player 3, who throws it to player 4, hopefully in the endzone.

The other players can be designated as backups for players 2, 3 and 4 in case they can't get free.

All the other players should get out of the way when the designated receivers are cutting, so it is a good way of encouraging the team to create space.

Defence - One-way Force

Decide on a sideline that the team is going to force towards (eg "home" or "the fence" or the "clubhouse"). The person marking the thrower always stands on the opposite side of the thrower, thereby forcing them to throw towards that sideline.

The people defending cutters then stand on the forced side of the cutters, because they will want to receive the frisbee on that side of the field, and by setting up on that side the defender will be able to get there first.

So the marker tries to stop throws to one side of the field, and the defenders try to stop throws to the other side. Working together, they should put pressure on every throw.

Ultimate Frisbee 101

Ultimate Frisbee 101 is a basic 1-hour introduction to ultimate frisbee for schools. The aim is to take a group of students who have no particular frisbee skills and have them playing in a quality game by the end of the session.

Lesson plan outline for Ultimate Frisbee 101:

Activity	Duration	Start time	Details
Preparation	10 mins	-10 mins	set up field and any cones needed for the drill, introduce yourself to the teacher and discuss discipline
Introduce yourself	1 min	0 mins	name, where you come from, highest level played
Introduce ultimate	1 min	1 min	brief history, how big is it, basic principles of non-contact play and self-refereeing
Explain catching	1 min	2 min	crocodile catch, demonstration
Explain backhand	2 mins	3 min	grip, stance, action, wrist snap, demonstration
Throwing backhand in pairs	5 mins	5 min	walk around and give help
Explain forehand	2 mins	10 min	grip, stance, action, wrist snap, demonstration
Explain overhead	1 min	12 min	stance, action, demonstration
Throwing forehand in pairs	5 mins	13 min	walk around and give help
Throwing overhead in pairs	2 mins	18 min	walk around and give help
Drill	10 mins	20 min	set up, demonstrate and run a simple drill
Rules	3 mins	30 min	explain basic rules and spirit of the game
Game	20 mins	33 min	use the whistle to stop and explain important things, talk to one team after each point - tell them you're going
Debrief	2 mins	53 min	stretch, handout, explain other opportunities to play
Cleanup	5 mins	60 min	collecting cones and frisbees (get the kids to collect them for you)

That adds up to 55 mins of actual lesson time, allowing you to spend a bit more time with a particular item if you think it needs it.

Resources

Web

www.afda.com has more information.

For coaching, select Coaching -> Resources

For tactics, select Skills clinic or Juniors -> Lesson plans

There is also information on the rules, where to buy a disc, gala days and much more.

Email

AFDA Coaching email list: <http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/afda-coaching/>

AFDA Juniors email list: <http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/afda-juniors/>

Recommended Texts

Parinella, J. and Zaslow, E. "Ultimate: Tactics and Techniques", Human Kinetics Publishers
Available at www.amazon.com

Courses

The AFDA runs a Level 1 Coaching Course at least once a year. The course runs for 2 days and is the main part of becoming an accredited Level 1 Coach. The modules include Coaching Communication, Planning for Coaches, Team Offence, Team Defence , and Coaching with Care.

Contacts

National Coaching Co-ordinator:

Piers Truter piers.truter@afda.com

ACTUA Juniors Officer:

Kylie Mulligan act@youth.ultimatefrisbee.org.au