



THE Central Line

2019 ISSUE 4

The Official Publication of the PSIA-AASI Central Division



**TELL IT ON
THE MOUNTAIN**

Skiing Freestyle in One Hour

By Chuck Roberts

So, the ski school director calls you over and assigns you a private lesson. Your student, who is a reasonably good skier but has never been in the terrain park, wants a one-hour freestyle introductory lesson. Typically out West this is a day-long lesson, but in the Midwest we may be asked to teach all that in one hour. Don't panic, here is a progression that has worked in the past:

Break up your lesson into three 20 minute segments:

1. Ground maneuvers (skiing switch, surface 360)
2. Elementary contact feature introduction (50/50 over a small ride on/ride off box, preferably a dance floor)
3. Elementary straight air (over a roller with a few inches of air).

Ground Maneuvers

(Teaching Segment #1: 20 minutes)

Switch skiing (skiing backwards) is an element of freestyle. When performing 180's over a jump or contact feature (box, rail, etc.) landing switch is the proper finish to the maneuver. Taking off switch is another more advanced approach.



Photo 1



Photo 2

Photo 1 shows a student trying switch skiing for the first time. The reverse wedge often develops out of caution as a result of being out of one's comfort zone. The wedge will tend to disappear as more confidence is realized (Photo 2). Ski pole baskets are a little higher to avoid engagement in the snow. It should be noted that twin tip skis are not necessarily required for this basic progression. However, when performing rotary moves onto a feature and landing switch (more advanced lessons), twin tips are highly recommended, along with helmets. The student in Photo 3 is performing relatively well with the exception of not looking in the direction of travel. Looking in the direction of travel cannot be over emphasized.

Even if your student has not quite mastered switch skiing, it is time to move on to the next surface maneuver, as time is limited. Introducing these maneuvers to your students is the main goal, and perfecting the maneuvers may be done on their own or in future lessons.

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Photo 3

The 360 degree surface spin is the next maneuver in your 20 minute ground maneuver teaching segment. This is a great exercise to prepare your beginning terrain park students for more advanced rotary moves. Photo set 4 shows the surface spin 360. From the parallel position, completion phase of the previous turn (Photo 4A), initiate the next turn, keeping more weight on the outside ski (Photo 4B)



Photo 4A



Photo 4B



Photo 4C



Photo 4D

Continue turning uphill with weight on the outside ski (Photo 4C) until the switch skiing position is reached (Photo 4D). Then, shift the weight to the new outside ski (Photo 4E) and continue the rotation to the parallel skiing position (Photo 4F).



Photo 4E

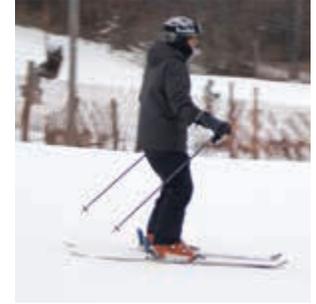


Photo 4F

Skis should be parallel and relatively flat for this maneuver. A typical difficulty encountered by students is depicted in Photo 5: engagement of an edge in the snow during the spin. This can occur from not shifting the weight to the new outside ski when reaching the switch position or not keeping the skis relatively flat. Excessive wide track stance also leads to edge engagement in the snow when skis are wider than shoulder width. Statically position your students to determine if their basic stance allows flat skis.



Photo 5

A great exercise to correct accidental edge engagement is to practice the 360 with the skier's weight totally applied to the outside ski as shown in Photo set 6. From the parallel regular skiing position (Photo 6A), the student places all the weight on the outside ski, lifting the inside ski (Photos 6B and 6C). When reaching the switch position, weight is transferred from the old outside ski to the new outside ski (Photos 6D, 6E, 6F and 6G). Totally weighting one ski and lifting the other makes the 360 easier, reducing the possibility of edge engagement.

References 3 and 4 provide additional information on beginning terrain park surface maneuvers.



Photo 6A



Photo 6B



Photo 6C



Photo 6D



Photo 6E



Photo 6F



Photo 6G

Contact Feature (Teaching Segment #2: 20 minutes)

A ride on/ride off contact feature is the best for your beginning free-stylist. (Gap-on contact features are usually better for your intermediate free-stylists.) A dance floor or low box is recommended since it is easily accommodated when performing the 50/50 (straight run over the feature). It is time to introduce

your student to the PSIA (Reference 6) ATML acronym (approach, take off, maneuver, landing). The approach involves a good line-up with the feature and appropriate speed control.

A wedge is an appropriate method of speed control rather than making short turns. The wedge allows for easy fine adjustment of speed with the upper and lower body facing the direction of travel. Short turns will work, but realignment after a turn requires more time and may result in too much speed reduction or improper alignment. The sequence in photo 7 shows a good 50/50 move over a ride on/ride off feature. Adjust speed with a wedge (Photo 7A), but make sure the wedge disappears before the take-off (Photo 7B.) The takeoff is mounting the feature, the maneuver is skiing with flat skis straight over the feature (Photo 7C) and the landing is exiting the feature at the ride-off end (Photo 7D).



Photo 7A



Photo 7B



Photo 7C



Photo 7D

Performing a wedge on the plastic surface (Reference 5) of a contact feature usually results in the skier doing the splits. Photo 8 shows a student mounting a feature with the wedge, which resulted in, guess what, the splits. Common problems include misalignment with the feature, not keeping the skis parallel, edging and leaning back or forward. Work on these statically, but repetition over the feature usually results in confidence building and improved performance.



Photo 8

Straight Air (Teaching Phase #3: 20 minutes)

The final phase is to introduce the student to jumping: the straight air. A small roller (a non-contact feature, ie. a small jump without a lip) is a good feature to start since the student can feel the lifting force at the ramp without being thrown out of position. Photo 9 is a sequence of a good straight air. In photo 9A, the student's knees and ankles are flexed after adjusting the appropriate speed using a wedge – the approach. In photo 9B, the student is in the take-off phase by extending the legs (pushing down with the legs) and projecting slightly forward to avoid landing in the back seat. In photo 9C, the student gets some air and lands (photo 9D) on the down side of the roller with absorption (landing on egg shells). Even if the student does not get measurable air, the basic dynamics of jumping, compression up the ramp, the lift and absorption at landing are experienced.



Photo 9A



Photo 9B



Photo 9C



Photo 9D

A common problem with beginning jumpers is taking off without projecting forward and landing in the back seat. Static exercises may help by suggesting that the student should push down and lean forward slightly. Emphasize “slightly,” since excessive leaning forward can result in a head first landing. Another problem with beginning jumpers is throwing the upper body in an attempt to get lift. The upper body should be relatively quiet with the pop coming from extension of the legs (pushing down). See Reference 2 for more advanced aerial maneuvers.

This short progression gives your student an introduction to the many aspects of freestyle skiing. Reference 6 is worth getting, if you plan to teach freestyle. Obviously, a discussion can ensue regarding increasing the length of such a lesson, which is a valid endeavor. However, some customers want the one-hour freestyle lesson and this brief progression has been found to deliver.

References:

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6. “Freestyle Technical Manual, Professional Ski Instructors of America, American Association of Snowboard Instructors,” American Snowsports Education Association, Inc., 2016.

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