



THE ULTIMATE PRACTICE

Good cheerleading coaches must teach, guide, train, inspire and motivate.

In order to do all of these tasks, you need to have a daily plan that incorporates all these fundamentals.

Cheerleaders not only work on physical skills but leadership jobs and duties. Because of these many responsibilities, organization is vital to a successful cheer program. As their coach, you must plan for the season, not just the daily practices. Well-defined goals and timelines will make you and your team succeed.

1. Write a list of activities and tasks for each month.
2. Make an outline of what is needed for each of those tasks.
3. Create calendars of all events, games, and practices.
4. Distribute copies of calendars and lists of jobs to every cheerleader.
5. Require each cheerleader to have a notebook to keep all handouts. Instruct them to bring that notebook to all practices.
6. Be prepared each day of practice with a detailed plan of the day or practice schedule. At the end of practice, have every cheerleader sign the back of this plan. This signed document provides you with a written confirmation of when you taught skills and who was there. Remember by being organized, you are teaching this needed skill to your cheerleaders.

HELPFUL HINT - Post outline of the practice schedule on the wall. Having a visual reminder helps keep everyone on task.

An effective practice contains the following components:

1. **Squad meeting** - Start off practice with a 5 to 15 minute overview of what needs to be accomplished. Detail the timeline for each part of practice. You can also use this meeting

time to evaluate past game plans, review and critique films from past game or competitions, open floor for suggestions, and discuss the value of the week and how it applies to cheerleading.

2. **Warm-up** - Key component at every practice is a warm-up. Cheerleaders need to elevate their body temperature to promote blood flow and prepare the body to work. Warming up allows the muscles to contract and relax more efficiently which will help to reduce injuries and soreness. Also work range of motion through the joints. Use any movement that involves large muscles
3. **Conditioning and strength training** - Athletes must engage in a special and continuous conditioning program to prepare and maintain a high level of fitness. These general calisthenics include a variety of exercises aimed at developing coordination, improve body awareness and alignment, strengthen muscles, increase metabolism, and strengthen hearts and lungs. Delegate a couple cheerleaders as “conditioning trainers” to lead the team through a combination of conditioning and strengthening exercises specific to cheerleading. Do these exercises for twenty minutes without a break in between to create an aerobic workout. Mix up the exercise routine to prevent boredom or overuse syndrome. Other options are exercise videos, kickboxing, Pilates and circuit training. Another variation is bonding games like wheelbarrow race, blanket pull, tug of war, and scooter races to develop needed physical skills.
4. **Stretching** - Stretching is needed to develop flexibility which in turn prevents pulling muscles while performing jumps, splits, kicks, dances and cheer motions. Flexibility refers to range of motion possible at a joint. Stretching is the process used to lengthen the muscles and connective tissues. Stretching should be a part of every practice to prepare the muscles for movement, maintain flexibility, develop body awareness, reduce muscle soreness, and improve personal performance. These athletes need to stretch gradually and regularly, using proper technique to avoid injury. Tailor your routine to the needed areas of stretching
5. **Drills** - Use drills to develop proficiency in required skills such as jumping, tumbling, stunting, and motion technique.
6. **Chant/cheer/dance review** - For sideline cheerleading, chants and cheers are the heart of your program. These are the elements that motivate the crowd to yell during a fast paced basketball game or when the football team is about to score from the three-yard line. Review last year’s list of chants. Keep the traditional ones that the crowd always responds to, delete the older chants, and add new ones. Let the cheerleaders make up the words and moves for new ones. They will surprise you with their creativity and will also enjoy performing them at games because of their pride and ownership in them. Don’t

forget to review the freeform chants that get your audience on their feet stomping or using hand motions.

Ask your band director to make a copy of all the band music so dances can be choreographed to them. This is another opportunity to have your cheerleaders be creative and do the choreography. In the beginning of the season, use this choreographing time as a team bonding game. Divide the team into groups of 3 or 4. Each group choreographs a dance, and then teaches it to the rest of the squad. If the team is learning a longer dance to perform at halftime or an assembly, teach small sections of it each day. The mind needs time to absorb the details of a move and by learning it in smaller increments; you will be able to get better precision and synchronizations from them. Remember, you can use your band dances as your warm-up section. It sets an upbeat mood to the start of practice.

OR

Competition routine review – Break it down in parts and work sections. Perfect the sections before having the cheerleaders do the entire routine.

7. **Upcoming game plan** - Make an upcoming game plan that includes time and place to meet, what uniform to wear, warm-up schedule, list of chants and who calls them, stunts that can be used with chants, chants that use signs and spirit items, formations, when to line-up for game, when to be on the field for run-through banner at halftime, when to meet and greet opponent's cheerleaders, who will clean up at the end of the game, what to do if the crowd becomes unruly, the location of the administrators and security, and expectations of cheerleaders at games. Review all these details ahead of time at practice and then again at the game. Often the cheerleaders will have to adapt to quick changes due to the different facilities, a missing cheerleader due to unforeseen circumstances, changes in weather, and the mood of the crowd. Reviewing your game plan at practice will help them to be better cheerleaders and, also, be able to adapt to needed changes.
8. **Leadership tasks** - During practice, set aside 15 to 30 minutes to work on assignments like poster making. Split the cheerleaders into groups in order to accomplish more tasks in a shorter timeframe. Remember to encourage cheerleaders to write an outline of the job and a timeline for completion. Have them keep everything in their cheer notebook.
9. **Team bonding** - Because of the intensity of practice, it is good to break it up with short games that add an element of fun and bonds the team together. Spending time on these bonding games rejuvenates your squad and brings them closer together.
10. **Wrap-up and review** - At the end of every practice do a quick overview. Briefly detail accomplishments of practice. Remind cheerleaders of upcoming deadlines for assigned

tasks. Handout needed paperwork. Thank them for all their hard work and commitment. End with a team motto or saying

11. **Motivation of the week** - Lastly, a coach should build character and self-esteem into their practice plan. A fun and educational way to do this is to have a theme of the week. For example, each week, display a word of value: commitment, honesty, follow-through, teamwork, respect, and sportsmanship. Post the word with the definition. At the beginning of practice, talk about the word, its importance, and its application to cheerleading. Throughout practice, emphasize the theme or word of the week. Use the word often while coaching. At the end of practice during the wrap-up session, tell the cheerleaders how they applied that value to practice

The amount of time distributed between these components will change depending on the activities and tasks that need to be accomplished in a particular week.



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