

Module 5



200 hour

YOGA TEACHER TRAINING MANUAL

Edition 3

TECHNIQUES, TRAINING, PRACTICE



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A person with long dark hair and tattoos on their arms is performing a handstand against a brick wall. They are wearing a dark tank top and leggings. Their right leg is extended straight up, and their left leg is bent at the knee. The floor is made of light-colored wooden planks. The entire image has a teal overlay.

Module 5

Choosing & Arranging Poses

Taking a Longer View

A fundamental sequencing principle is setting a class objective, which forms the basis for choosing poses. Here, we take that a step further by encouraging teachers to adopt a longer-term approach to class planning—what we call a Strategic Teaching Plan, or teaching curriculum.

This high-level view examines your teaching over a period of time, whether a season, month, or week. A Strategic Teaching Plan clarifies your intention for one or multiple time periods and may be designed to balance the effects of seasons, honor holidays and observances, respond to particular conditions, guide students deeper into a topic (philosophical, physical, or otherwise), or progress through a series of related topics.

Consider the expert wisdom below when thinking about how this impacts your pose choices for each class.

Jason Crandell describes this topic well: "We might end up with a really good one-off class, but if we don't have a consistent curriculum and if we don't have clear teaching points and if we are afraid of repetition, then we're not really setting up a true

learning environment where people are going to make efficient progress." He believes yoga teachers, like school teachers, should have well-thought-out short-term and long-term objectives that they clearly communicate to students. Classes need consistency for students to truly learn appropriate technique and poses—something that doesn't happen when teachers feel compelled to continually change their sequences, themes, and focal points. Baxter Bell offers excellent complementary advice: "I always consider what I taught last week in my classes. I typically teach a similar sequence in all my classes in a given week, modifying it a bit depending on the group of students who show up. Lately, I have been writing out my sequences at the start of the week... If you have a long-term goal that you're working on, this can give you a clue about how to plan your practice. For example, if you are working on one of the four essential physical skills (strength, flexibility, balance, and agility)... you could select a pose or poses that focus on the area that you want to concentrate on."

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Promoting Overall Balance

Be mindful of the overall goal: promoting balance in mind, body, and spirit. Meeting such an immensely valuable goal involves intuitive sensibility, which every teacher has and continues to develop over time. Several techniques can help promote this balance: avoid practicing too many poses on one side before the second side, sequence to balance energy, move the spine through all directions, counterposes to neutralize the effects of deep poses, and balance strength with flexibility.



ASANA

Definition & Purpose of Asana

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, we examine the Yoga Sutra's teachings on asana and explore additional wisdom regarding the purpose and benefits of asana.

Objective

Memorize and understand sutras 2.46 to 2.49 and study additional expert teachings regarding the purpose and benefits of asana.

Description

Recite and translate sutras 2.46 to 2.49 from Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, defining asana, explaining what constitutes proper practice of asana, and describing the results of practice. Explain the traditional goals of asana practice and explore words of wisdom from teachers of various lineages regarding the purpose and benefits of asana. Give multiple answers to the question, "What is the purpose (or benefits) of asana?"

Sutras 2.46 to 2.49

Sutras 2.46 to 2.49 in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra define asana, explain what constitutes proper practice of asana, and describe the results of practice.



WISDOM

Ancient yogis defined health and fitness not as being able to hold or master a posture, but rather as being structurally stable, having the ability to move with grace and ease, the elimination of suffering, and the ability to withstand change.

A yoga pose
is a steady
and comfortable position.

A yoga pose is mastered
by relaxation of effort,
to create a lessening
of the natural tendency
for restlessness,
and identification
of oneself as living
within
the infinite stream of life.

From that
perfection of a yoga posture,
duality,
such as praise and criticism ceases
to be a disturbance.

When this is acquired
then naturally follows
a cessation
of the movements
of inspiration and expiration;
this is called
regulation of breath.



ASANA

Traditional Goals of Asana

For yogi, health and fitness were [traditionally] defined in the following terms:

Sthira – *stable structure that can remain upright and balanced within gravitational pull.*

Sukha (which literally means “good space, free of suffering”) can be defined both as ease of movement to enable us to do whatever we want to do, and freedom from physical pain that can be distracting for our energetic and mental pursuits.

Angalaghavam – *feeling of lightness in the body; it could also be described as agility. It allows us to move through the day with fluidity, grace and confidence.*

PURPOSE / BENEFITS OF ASANA

Some of the many reported benefits of ***asana*** include:

1. Release mental and physical tension.
2. Prepare the body for seated meditation.
3. Mobilize and stabilize the body.
4. Promote balance, strength and flexibility.
5. Explore.
6. Release “excess stuff.”
7. Direct attention inward.
8. Feel more deeply connected with all of life.
9. Experience meditation flowing spontaneously.
10. Balance the energies and forces throughout the body.
11. Reduce stress.
12. Increase concentration.
13. Open energy channels.
14. Integrate mind and body. *words*
15. Release impurities.
16. Increase awareness.



MEDITATION FLOWING SPONTANEOUSLY

RICHARD FREEMAN: IT DOES NOT DESTROY HAPPINESS

The great eighth-century yogin and philosopher Shankaracharya said, ‘Yoga asana is that in which meditation flows spontaneously and ceaselessly, not that which destroys happiness.’ In other, when yoga poses are well aligned, they feel so good internally that the mind is practic stunned with awe, and the breath flows right up the front of the spine into the spacious radiance of the body’s central axis.

BALANCE ENERGIES

B.K.S. IYENGAR: MASTERING YOGA

"Mr. Iyengar, what's the key to mastering yoga?" He said, "To master yoga, you must balance the energies and forces throughout the body." To demonstrate, he held up one hand and, with his other pointer finger, indicated the outside of his index finger and then the inside, and so on through all of his fingers and the front and back of his wrist, explaining that the energy should be balanced on both sides. "You have to do this throughout the body in each pose, on each side of each joint, according to the forces needed for each position," he told me. — Ray Long, MD

REDUCE STRESS, INCREASE CONCENTRATION

LARRY PAYNE PHD & RICHARD USATINE MD: DECREASE STRESS & INCREASE IMMUNITY

Many yoga practices counter the fight-or-flight response and invite the body to move in the opposite direction toward peace and calm. Gentle stretching lengthens your muscles, reducing physical tension. Yoga breathing slows your respiration. Inverted postures can help lower your blood pressure by decreasing your heart rate, relaxing your arteries, and reducing levels of the stress hormone noradrenaline. Resting yoga postures allow you to let go of physical and mental effort. Meditative practices help you put fear and anger into perspective. With increased calm and relaxation comes a decrease in your level of cortisol, an adrenal hormone that inhibits immune system function. This keeps your body at optimal alert against disease.

IMPROVE CONCENTRATION & RELATIONSHIPS

Students who practice yoga regularly tell me that they find it much easier to become engrossed in their work and to remain undistracted for extended periods. They also report that their intimate relationships improve because they can stay present and available to partners and friends far more readily than before.

EXPERIENCE PEACE AMID DIFFICULTY

In some cases, the practice of yoga works not to eliminate a disorder completely, but to minimize its physical, mental, and emotional impact. A yoga lifestyle can help heal your heart and mind, bringing you to a state of peace and well-being. This is where the true joy of living comes from, and you can have it even if you're living with chronic illness or disability. — Larry Payne, Ph.D & Richard Usatine, MD

Open Channels, Integrate Mind & Body

SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI: OPEN THE ENERGY CHANNELS & PSYCHIC CENTERS

In raja yoga, asana refers to the sitting position, but in hatha yoga it means something more. Asanas are specific body positions which open the energy channels and psychic centers. They are tools to higher awareness and provide the stable foundation for our exploration of the body, breath, mind and beyond. The hatha yogis also found that by developing control of the body through asana, the mind is also controlled. Therefore, the practice of asana is foremost in hatha yoga... The ultimate purpose of yoga is the awakening of kundalini shakti, the evolutionary energy in man. Practicing asana stimulates the chakras, distributing the generated energy of kundalini all over the body.

Integrate Mind & Body

The mind and body are not separate entities, although there is a tendency to think and act as though they are. The gross form of the mind is the body and the subtle form of the body is the mind. The practice of asana integrates and harmonizes the two. Both the body and the mind harbor tensions or knots. Every mental knot has a corresponding physical, muscular knot and vice versa. The aim of asana is to release these knots. – Swami Satyananda Saraswati

RELEASE IMPURITIES, INCREASE AWARENESS

NICOLAI BACHMAN: IMPURITIES ARE RELEASED, ALLOWING PRANA TO FLOW MORE EASILY

Doing these postures purifies and prepares our body for seated meditation. Our physical health affects our heart-mind and vice versa. As we twist, jump, stretch, and invert all parts of our physique, impurities are churned up and released, allowing our life force (prana) to flow more easily and improving our overall well-being.... The body needs to be strong and pliable to ground the prana flowing through its subtle energy channels. The aim of asana is to reduce any hyperactivity in the nervous system and prepare the body for pranayama. – Nicolai Bachman

LESLIE KAMINOFF: STABILIZE BODY IN SPACE

*Breath is how we mobilize the spaces in our body. Posture is how we stabilize our bodies in space.
 – Leslie Kaminoff*

ERICH SCHIFFMANN: PROMOTE BALANCE, STRENGTH & FLEXIBILITY; AN AWARENESS PROCESS

The physical yoga promotes balance, strength and flexibility. These qualities are invaluable. The more balanced you are, the more centered you will be. The stronger you are, the lighter you will feel. And the more flexible you are, the harder it is for pain and tension to lodge in your body. In becoming balanced, strong and flexible, you actually erase all the tensions and internal conflicts that would otherwise accumulate and eventually erupt as discomfort or pain in your body and life. Pain and tension are forms of blocked energy. Yoga opens these energy blockages and frees your energy circulation. This makes you feel good and your life runs smoother. The physical yoga, however, is essentially an awareness process wherein you attend to subtle shifts in sensation and feeling. In so doing, you exercise your sensitivity and cultivate the ability to 'listen' inwardly. This becomes more and more important as you understand that in listening to your own body and mind you are actually listening to the universe. Listening inwardly allows you to access information you previously had no access to, information that will help you live in a more harmonious and fulfilling way. – Erich Schiffmann

MORE PERSPECTIVES

FOUNDATION FOR A DEEPER PRACTICE

Asana is a foundation for developing a deeper practice, not an end in itself. It helps to balance the body and master the mind preparation for greater awareness and experience. – Lacks attribution



OPPORTUNITY FOR RELEASE

AS STUDENTS MOVE INTO EACH POSTURE, BAPTISTE SUGGESTS THEY CONSIDER THEM AS "JUST TOOLS FOR EXPLORATION" AND AN "OPPORTUNITY FOR RELEASE." HE NOTES THAT POSES MAY BRING UP EMOTION AND:

Though your instinct may be to stuff these back down, they are coming up now so that you can feel them, finally release them and be free. And, ultimately, being free from your excess "stuff" is what this is all about.
– Baron Baptiste

DIRECT ATTENTION INWARD

Connecting the mind, body, and breath helps us to direct our attention inward. Through this process of inward attention, we learn to recognize our habitual thought patterns without labeling them, judging them, or trying to change them. We become more aware of our experiences from moment to moment. The awareness that we cultivate is what makes yoga a practice, rather than a task or a goal to be completed. Your body will most likely become much more flexible by doing yoga, and so will your mind. – Cyndi Lee

LEARN HOW TO FOCUS, LISTEN & SURRENDER

[Yoga asana is] learning how to focus and generate energy into different parts of the body, in listening to the body's messages (feedback), and in surrendering to where the body leads you. – Joel Kramer

FEEL THE BODY AS A MICROCOSM OF THE UNIVERSE

We take the shape of the tree, the fish, the warrior, the turtle, and the sage so that we can begin to understand their essential natures. We can literally feel the wisdom of the sage and the stability of the tree. We can feel the power of the warrior and the steadfastness of the turtle. As a result, we experience ourselves as more deeply connected with all of life around us. Through asana practice we can feel that our body is a microcosm of the universe. – Alanna Kaivalya & Arjuna van der Kooij

Asana Categories & Pose Families:



LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, we explore how and why **asana** is classified into categories and into families.

OBJECTIVE

Understand the importance of function over form and how knowledge of pose categories and families informs teaching.

DESCRIPTION

Reflect on the fundamental fact that poses are chosen by the purpose they intend to serve (function) as opposed to how they look (form). Explain the primary concern when choosing or teaching a pose and how this determines its general classification as a forward bend, backbend, twist and so on. Explore how this categorization provides a general sense for how to sequence and teach the pose. Describe various classification systems and define common pose categories.

Introduction

Here we explore the classification of **asana** into categories and into families. By considering the qualities and characteristics of these groupings, we learn how individual poses relate to — and differ from — others, thus supporting the process of choosing and sequencing **asana**.

Poses are chosen by the purposes they intend to serve (function) as opposed to how they look (form).

Of primary concern is the position of the spine in the pose and, thus, its general classification as a forward bend, backbend, twist and so on. This categorization provides a general sense for the purpose of the pose and therefore, in a general sense, how to sequence and teach it.

FUNCTION PRECEDES FORM

Function always preceded form. Yogis of the past were practical and purpose-driven. They created tools and techniques based on the purposes they were intended to serve, rather than the other way around. — **Kausthub Desikachar**

WHY WE PRACTICE A POSE AND HOW TO TEACH IT

When we describe a pose, we always start by identifying the position of the spine, since the position of the spine gives us immediate clues about what the pose is meant to accomplish... This type of classification is important for understanding the function of individual poses; it is not about the purity of the spinal position itself... Janu Sirsasana has an element of lateral bending, but it is mostly a forward bend; Adho Mukha Svanasana has an element of forward bending, but it is mostly an axial extension posture; and so on. Knowing where the pose belongs classification-wise helps us understand both why we do it and how to teach it. — **Olga Kabel**

DETAILS BELOW

First, you'll see a few expert approaches to categorizing poses. Next is a summary of categories that draws from the expert approaches to organize postures based on their key anatomic actions and energetic functions.

EXPERT APPROACHES TO CATEGORIZING ASANA



T.K.V. DESIKACHAR: MOVEMENTS OF THE SPINE

1. *Samasthiti* – reference point for other postures
2. *Pascimatana* – Forward Bends
3. *Purvataka* – Backbends
4. *Parsva* – Lateral Bends
5. *Parivrtti* – Twists
6. *Viparita* – Inversions
7. *Visesa* – Special (includes arm balances and postures involving some unique action that does not fall within the other types)
8. *Mudra* – Positions with the hands, head and body that are intended to elicit a particular energetic quality

RAY LONG (THE KEY POSES OF YOGA)

1. Preparatory Poses
2. Sun Salutations
3. Standing poses
4. Hip Openers
5. Forward Bends
6. Twists
7. Back bends
8. Arm Balances
9. Inversions
10. Restorative Poses

SILVA MEHTA (YOGA: THE IYENGAR WAY)

1. Standing Poses
2. Sitting Poses
3. Twists
4. Supine & Prone Poses
5. Inverted Poses
6. Balancings
7. Backbends
8. Jumpings
9. Relaxation

JOSEPH LePAGE (YOGA TEACHERS TOOLBOX)

1. Warm Ups
2. Standing
3. Stabilization
4. Hip Openers
5. Twists
6. Back Bends
7. Lateral Bends
8. Forward Bends
9. Balance
10. Inversions

DHARMA MITTRA (ASANA: 608 YOGA POSES)

1. Sun Salutation & Hero Series
2. Standing Poses
3. Inversions
4. Floor & Supine Poses
5. Arm Balancing Poses
6. Twists & Seated Poses

MARK STEPHENS (YOGA SEQUENCING)

1. Standing Asanas
2. Core Awakening
3. Arm Support Asana
4. Back Bends
5. Twists
6. Forward Bends
7. Hip Openers
8. Inversions
9. *Savasana*

WARM UP

- Stretches, gentle dynamic movement, non-traditional **asana** or simple **asana** designed to prepare the body for more demanding postures
- Flows / Mini Vinyasas
- Asana Index – search for “stretch”



STANDING POSES

- Weight of the body is placed primarily on both feet
- Standing Poses



Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutations)

- A set series of postures with transitions accompanied by a particular phase of the breath
- Surya Namaskar



STANDING BALANCE

- Weight of the body is placed primarily on one foot
- Standing Balance



CORE STRENGTHENING

- Focuses on activation of core muscles
- Core Strengthening
- Anatomy of the Core
- Focuses on bringing balance to strength and flexibility
- Anatomy Hub



ARM BALANCING

- Weight of the body is placed primarily on one or both hands or forearms
- Arm Balance



BACKBENDS PURPOSE / BENEFITS OF ASANA

Some of the many reported benefits of *asana* include:

1. Release mental and physical tension.
2. Prepare the body for seated meditation.
3. Mobilize and stabilize the body.
4. Promote balance, strength and flexibility.
5. Explore.
6. Release "excess stuff."
7. Direct attention inward.
8. Feel more deeply connected with all of life.
9. Experience meditation flowing spontaneously.
10. Balance the energies and forces throughout the body.
11. Reduce stress.
12. Increase concentration.
13. Open energy channels.
14. Integrate mind and body.
15. Release impurities.
16. Increase awareness.



- Focus is stretching front of body
- Backbends

TWISTS

- Focus is rotation of the spine
- Twists



FORWARD BENDS

- Focus is stretching back of body
- Forward Bends

HIP STRETCHING

- Focus is on stretching muscles attached to pelvis
- Hip Stretching



INVERSIONS

- Feet are above heart
- The term "Mild Inversion" typically refers to having the head below the heart, such as in ***Adho Mukha Svanasana***
- Inversions



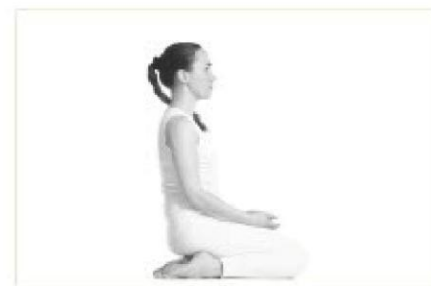
RESTORATIVES

- Intention is not on stretching or strengthening, but on releasing tension
- Restoratives

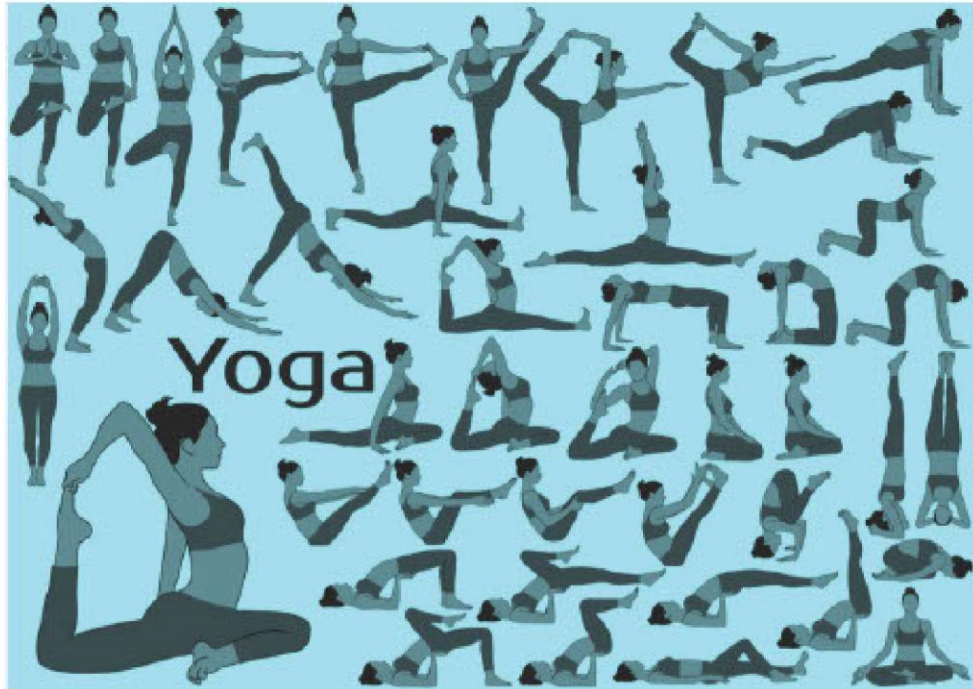


NEUTRAL SPINE & AXIAL EXTENSION

- Some poses have as an objective to have a neutral spine, often serving as neutralizers between poses or as meditation seats, such as Virasana.
- And some poses are intended to lengthen the spine, called "axial extension" such as in Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog).
- See more on spinal extension: Spinal Movement.
- See more on neutralizing: Choosing & Arranging Poses.



Asana Categories Summary & Highlights ^{2.0}



LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, we explore the characteristics of all major pose categories and how this informs sequencing.

OBJECTIVE

Learn the physical and energetic effects of all major pose categories and become proficient in using this knowledge to inform sequencing.

DESCRIPTION

Describe the physical and energetic effects and sequencing considerations for Standing Poses, Forward Bending, Backbends, Twisting Poses, Balancing Poses, Inversions, Core Strengthening Poses, Side Bending Poses and Asymmetrical Poses.

Standing Poses

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

1. Build strength.
2. Develop stamina.
3. Develop heat.
4. Safely warm and open body prior to more complex poses.
5. Can bring awareness to body alignment principles such as noticing feet in relation to legs and pelvis.
6. Bring balance to body with combination of strength-building and opening.
7. Poses with externally rotated femurs such as Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2 Pose) generally stretch inner thigh and groins and strengthen outer hips.
8. Poses with internally rotated femurs such as Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 Pose) generally strengthen inner thighs and internal rotators and stretch outer hips.



ENERGETIC EFFECTS

1. Feel grounded and stable.
2. Increase confidence from "standing on your own two feet."
3. Feel emotionally centered.
4. Establish connection to earth element.
5. Awaken Muladhara (Root) Chakra.
6. Draw awareness into the subtle body.
7. Strengthen lower energy centers.
8. Create a sense of presence.
9. Stimulate central nervous system.
10. Increase alertness.

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

- Standing poses are generally sequenced early in class and can be used to increase circulation, build heat and prepare the body for deeper practice.
- Standing poses are a great place to start for those coming from an active day or from a period of prolonged sitting.
- Poses of this category are an excellent entry point to body awareness as they bring attention to **annamaya kosha**, the outermost physical layer of being. They can then help transition the body and mind from the external to the internal experience.

FORWARD BENDS



INTRODUCTION

- Forward bending is the act of moving the chest and thighs toward one another.
- We can practice forward bends from a variety of foundations, including standing, seated and supine.
- All forward bends stretch the back of the body.
- The anatomical term, "flexion" refers to decreasing a joint angle. "Spinal flexion" is the anatomical term for forward bending.
- As Olga Kabel so clearly explains [here](#), there are four types of Forward Bends: 1) knees bent, 2) legs extended, 3) asymmetrical legs, and 4) chest raised away from hips.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

1. Stretch, lengthen, "open" back side of body.
2. Increase space and circulation between vertebrae.
3. Release tension and improve circulation in ankles, feet, legs, knees, hips, back and neck.
4. "Stimulate" or "massage" abdominal organs, which then stimulates digestion, elimination and reproduction.
5. "Rest...the heart." (Donna Farhi)

Energetic Effects

1. Provide "cooling," calming, quieting effect.
2. Restore nervous system.
3. Turn senses inward.
4. Draw focus to present moment.
5. Awaken and balance lower chakras: muladhara, svadhisthana and manipura.
6. Forward bends may reveal emotions hidden in the body. Holding forward bends and hip opening poses for longer periods (while refining the flow of breath) may "allow students to safely explore these feelings." (Mark Stephens)

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

The intensity of stretch in forward bends can range from relatively mild — in such poses as Apanasana (Knees to Chest) — to quite deep — as in Paschimottasana (Seated Forward Bend). When sequenced earlier in class forward bends tend to be mild, of course, helping to prepare for other poses while providing a gentle energetic arc to class. When sequenced near the end of class, they may be deeper stretches while energetically providing a cooling and quieting effect.

PREPARE MINDFULLY

- It is often advised to sequence standing poses prior to deep seated forward bends because of the hip opening and mobility required to enter these poses safely.
- Hip stretching helps prepare for forward bends.
- Students may find that it helps to soften the knees during forward bends (especially at the beginning of class) in order to gradually create space in the back body as the spine is mobilized
-

Backbends



INTRODUCTION

- Backbends can be practiced from a variety of foundations, including standing, kneeling, supine and prone.
- Backbends stretch the front of the body.
- The secondary effect, present in active (as opposed to passive or restorative) backbends, is a strengthening of the back muscles.
- The term "spinal extension" means reducing the spinal curves or lengthening the entire spine. It refers to the relationship of the spinal curves to each other while the phrases "forward bending" and "backbending" refer to particular movements through space.
- As Olga Kabel so clearly explains [here](#), there are four types of Backbends: 1) prone, 2) downward arch, 3) upward arch, and 4) asymmetrical.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

1. Stretch front body.
2. Strengthen back body.
3. Reverse habitual patterns and improve posture, alleviating the effects of sitting, driving and being hunched over desks and devices.
4. Some poses stabilize relationship between sacrum and pelvis (as noted above).
5. Improve breathing from expanding chest and rib cage.
6. Stimulate kidneys.

ENERGETIC EFFECTS

FUNCTION / BENEFITS

Popular culture presents an overdeveloped rectus abdominis as desirable when in fact this is not representative of core health as a whole and can be a source of "compressed tension." True core strengthening involves a balanced integration of the deeper core muscles.

- Core exercises build heat and strength.
- A strong core can be thought of as "building strength from the inside out" and is often correlated with positive psychological, emotional and spiritual states, including feelings of strength and resilience.
- Core strengthening supports the low back and can eliminate back pain.*
- Strong abdominal muscles support abdominal organs.**
- A healthy core improves posture.



- A healthy core improves digestion and elimination and in yoga is associated with healthy digestive "fire." (See also [Manipura Chakra](#).)
- A strong core improves athletic performance.

CAUTIONS

- Modern lifestyle habits tend to lead to weak abdominals. As a result, many people use back muscles to compensate, which can cause injury.
- If the TA is weak, it can lead to low back stress and an overworked [psoas](#).
- Many teachers have observed students experiencing a psychological connection with the core. You may wish to let students know that core work may cause an emotional release. In such cases, assure students of this connection and suggest they seek qualified support through their healing process. See Ana Forrest's teachings for more support.
- When hearing the cue, "engage your core," many students incorrectly draw in the outer abs and round the spine.

USING ABDOMINALS AS STABILIZERS

- The concept of "stabilizers" and "prime movers" can help with understanding core health and choosing effective strengthening movements.
- Stabilizers are small muscles that keep the back in alignment. Prime movers are large muscles that are not attached directly to the lower back or central spine.
- A balanced approach to core health includes utilizing the abdominals as stabilizers (not prime movers).
- Examples of poses that use abdominals as stabilizers include Opposite Limb Extension, Plank Pose and Side Plank Pose.

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

- Core strengtheners are sometimes sequenced early in class to build heat.
- They can serve as preparation for Arm Balances.
- Sometimes Core Strengthening Poses are placed just after Standing Poses. Or they may be placed with floor poses that involve heat generation.
- They may be sequenced after Backbends to help support the lumbar spine.
- An important part of core work in yoga is to balance strengthening with flexibility. Experts recommend teaching poses such as [Setu Bandhasana \(Bridge Pose\)](#) to lengthen abs after poses that compress the abs. For more information see [Anatomy: The Core](#).

LATERAL & ASYMMETRICAL POSES



INTRODUCTION

- Here we cover two pose categories: Lateral / Side Bends and Asymmetrical Poses.
- While all side bends are asymmetrical, not all asymmetrical poses are side bends, of course.

SIDE BENDING EFFECTS / BENEFITS

1. Alternately stretch and contract each side of the body.
2. Stretch muscles between the ribs and pelvis.
3. Increase spinal flexibility.
4. Open sides of the rib cage.
5. Stretching the intercostals can allow for more expansion of the lungs and improved breathing.
6. Develop strength, especially of the abdominal region.
7. Tone waist.
8. Improve digestion.
9. "In sidebends where an arm stretches overhead to reach for the foot, the latissimus dorsi muscle, which extends from the back waist to the armpit, will also stretch." (Julie Gudmestad)
10. Bring awareness to the side body.

ASYMMETRICAL POSE EFFECTS / BENEFITS

1. Demonstrate differences in strength and flexibility.
2. Help to balance sides.
3. Awaken nervous system.
1. Provide uplifting and stimulating effect.
2. Build courage and stamina.
3. Can also cause feelings of vulnerability and fear.
4. Provide awareness and connection to an unseen area of body.
5. May create a sense of empowerment.
6. Said to open anahata chakra.

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

Most would agree that backbends are critical for students to help counter their habitual movement patterns and correct postural imbalances. However, teachers are advised to sequence carefully, monitor safe alignment, and consider the risks of too many backbends both for inflexible students and for hyperflexible ones.

PREPARATION

- First opening up shoulders, back muscles, quadriceps, psoas and adductors will prepare the body and help lead to deeper backbends.
- In some backbends such as Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose), the arms are stretched overhead (i.e. the shoulders are flexed), requiring one type of shoulder opening. In others such as Ustrasana (Camel Pose), the arms are reaching back (i.e. the shoulders are extended), requiring a different openness.
- Having the ability to extend the shoulders while keeping the chest open is a common issue for students. Practicing the exercise shown above (also used as a readiness test for Shoulderstand) can address this issue. Clasp hands at tailbone, straighten elbows, lift chest. Slowly move hands away from tailbone, while keeping chest lifted. Do not allow shoulders to roll forward or sinking in the low back. Also, practicing Salabhasana (Locust Pose) with palms facing legs can strengthen muscles needed for shoulder extension. (Julie Gudmestad)
- Backbends that require spinal muscles for the action—such as Salabhasana (Locust Pose)—are good preparation for backbends which are leveraged by arms or legs—such as Dhanurasana (Bow Pose).

- Deep backbends are relatively complex poses and therefore an entire class may be sequenced to safely prepare for all the actions of the pose. See more: [Choosing & Arranging Poses: Peak Pose Sequencing](#).

NEUTRALIZE AND COOL DOWN

- Neutralize after active backbends. From neutral, the sequence then progressively cools down in order to bring students to relaxation.
- Amy Ippoliti recommends (in 4-minute video, [Sequencing After Backbends](#)) neutralizing after backbending by simply lying back and letting the breath normalize. Then follow with a symmetrical pose that roots femurs back in sockets, such as [Adho Mukha Svanasana \(Downward Facing Dog Pose\)](#) or [Utthita Balasana \(Extended Child's Pose\)](#) with toes touching, followed after that by twisting.
- A pose to consider after a backbend is Child's Pose with bolster or blankets under torso. "You could then use the bolster or blankets in a supported [Upavistha Konasana \(Seated Wide Angle Pose\)](#) or supported [Janu Sirsasana \(Head to Knee Pose\)](#). The important thing is that it is not skillful to move directly into a deep forward bend directly after active backbends." (Brad Priddy)
- "After a backbend session, light, lengthening twists are good, but you should do no deep twisting and do not hold them for a long time. Also in twists following backbends, do not arch the spine...rather, draw abdomen inward and don't concave low back." (Brad Priddy)
- In keeping with the general rule that counterposes be as gentle as possible to effectively neutralize, deep forward bending is not recommended after deep backbending.
- "[Another pose to] help release your back muscles after backbends is [Ardha Halasana \(Half Plow Pose\)](#) on bolsters or blankets place on seat of a chair...It will help calm and cool the nervous system after active backbends." (Brad Priddy)
- Rather than traditional **Savasana** after backbends, you may wish to prop under knees or place calves on a chair to allow low back to release fully onto floor. "If you have bolster under knees, still make sure heels contact floor (or put them on blocks)." (Brad Priddy)

TWISTS



INTRODUCTION

- We can practice twists from a variety of foundations including standing, seated and supine.
- Twisting poses rotate the spine, increasing spinal range of motion and lubricating spinal discs.
- They also realign the relationship between the shoulder girdle and the spine, and the pelvic girdle and the spine.

- In some twisting **asanas** such as a Reclined Twist, the arms and shoulders are acting separately from the pelvis. In other poses such as **Ardha Matsyendrasna** (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose), the arms are used as leverage, leading to a stronger rotation of the spine and shoulders.
- Judith Lasater and Jason Crandell teach that because the SI Joint is a joint of stability, not mobility, the key to its safety is moving the pelvis and sacrum together.

Physical Effects

1. Increase spinal mobility and range of motion.
2. Increase circulation in spine; lubricate discs, keeping them healthier.
3. Align spine.
4. Stimulate spinal bones to be stronger. (Baxter Bell)
5. Only twists effectively stretch deepest layer of back muscles closest to spine. (Roger Cole)
6. Strengthen muscles alongside spine, leading to improved posture and overall spinal health + good functioning of the nerves. (Baxter Bell)
7. Tone abdominal region, particularly the obliques.
8. Improve digestion.
9. Said to "cleanse" the internal organs via a "squeeze and soak" effect as with the wringing of a sponge.
10. Return spine to neutral alignment after deep forward bends and backbends.
11. Contribute to brain health due to the action of crossing the midline of the body. (Baxter Bell)

ENERGETIC EFFECTS

1. Release tension.
2. Said to balance nervous system – calming when feeling agitated; stimulating when feeling lethargic.
3. Said to provide an overall "cleansing" effect as a result of stimulating the abdominal organs.
4. Bring sense that it's okay to let go.
5. Known to release frustration, anxiety, fear.
6. May cause an initial sense of irritation before a feeling of clarity.

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

PREPARATION

- Preparing with forward bends, backbends and side bends readies deeper layers of spinal muscles for twists.
- "To prepare for twists, it is always useful to open up the backs of your legs and hips, which create a strong but flexible foundation from which to spiral and turn." (Rodney Yee, *Moving Toward Balance* 2004 p 334)
- "Practicing chest openers, such as Sphinx Pose, before you twist is a nice way to expand the chest—a key action while twisting, too." (Ray Long, MD)

MANY POTENTIAL ROLES

- Can be sequenced after backbends to bring body and nervous system back to neutral.
- Can be sequenced after forward bends or restoratives to have a stimulating effect.
- Can serve as transition poses throughout class as well as ending postures.

COUNTERPOSES

- If including an intense twist or twisting sequence, following it with a mild backbend such as Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) or Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose) can stabilize sacrum and integrate effect of twists, or, as Rodney Yee describes it, backbending will "balance the broadening and vulnerability in your back body created by the twists."

- “Try not to end your practice with a twist due to the asymmetric feel it may leave in your spine. Follow any twisting at the end of your session with at least one symmetric forward bend.” (Brad Priddy)

BALANCING POSES



INTRODUCTION

- Balancing postures are generally those that remove an element of support to strengthen and stabilize the body and mind.
- Balancing may be practiced from a variety of foundations including: standing on one leg, balancing on one arm and one leg, arms only, seated balance and head balancing.
- Balancing strengthens, stabilizes and requires integrating various parts of the body.
- Balance poses help students learn to hold and move their body weight.
- Most balancing poses require strong core engagement.
- “Because balance is a learned skill, we must challenge our balance in order to improve it.” (Rachel Land)

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

1. Increase coordination, balance and poise.
2. Build and maintain strength and bone density.
3. Improve reflexes.
4. Help to prevent falls.
5. Improve proprioception which relates not only to balance but also joint health. (Eva Norlyk Smith)
6. When asymmetrical, includes those benefits as well.

MENTAL / ENERGETIC EFFECTS

1. Increase absorption of the mind.
2. Promote calm and centering.
3. Increase presence, alertness and clarity.
4. Increase capacity to “dual task.” [Sequencing Considerations](#)

BALANCE POSES, IN GENERAL

- Balance poses may also be a backbend, forward bend or other type of pose. Therefore, these characteristics are additional considerations when sequencing. (Olga Kabel)
- For best results, plan that over a few classes, you will include a variety of balance poses from the different types (noted in Introduction above).
- Balance poses are often sequenced after standing poses so that students have achieved a level of grounding and stability.

- Balance poses may be used as a transition toward turning the mind inward.
- For beginners or other populations who tire from standing sequences, balance poses may be offered earlier in the sequence for greater accessibility.

PREPARING FOR BALANCING

- Prepare for balance with axial extension postures. Lengthening the spine will help to integrate the whole body and manage it "as a unit." (Olga Kabel)
- Depending upon which type of balance pose you are preparing for, preparation includes strengthening and warm-up of ankles along with warm-up of wrists, shoulders and hips.

ARM BALANCE PREP & ALTERNATIVES

For those who are not ready for arm balances, typical preparatory poses to strengthen upper body and core include:

- Plank Pose
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose)
- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff Pose)
- Navasana (Boat Pose)

SEQUENCING ARM BALANCES

- Arm Balances are often sequenced after Standing Poses.
- Surya Namaskar and Standing Poses are typical preparation for arm balances.
- Malasana (Garland Pose / Yogic Squat) and Pasasana (Noose Pose) serve as preparatory poses for developing flexibility in spine, groin and hips.

INVERSIONS



INTRODUCTION

- To "invert" means to turn upside down.
- Yoga inversions invert the body's relationship to space and gravity.
- In some types of inversions, the heart is higher than the head. In some types, the pelvis, legs and feet are higher than the heart. And in some types of inversions, both conditions are true: the heart is higher than the head and also the pelvis, legs and feet are higher than the heart.

TYPES OF INVERSIONS

CLASSIC INVERSIONS

- "Classic" yoga inversions refer to variations of Headstand (called the king of *asanas*) and Shoulderstand (the queen).
- These are "full" inversions: the heart is higher than the head while also the pelvis, legs and feet are higher than the heart.

MORE FULL INVERSIONS

- In addition to "classic" inversions, other poses are considered "full" inversions when the heart is higher than the head while also the pelvis, legs and feet are higher than the heart.
- Examples are Forearm Balance and Handstand which, in addition to being full inversions are also arm balances.

MILD INVERSIONS

- What some call "mild," "partial" or "half" inversions refer to poses where the head is below the heart.
- Examples include Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose), Dolphin Pose, Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend), Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide Leg Standing Forward Bend).

RESTORATIVE INVERSIONS

- There is another type of pose that may be considered a part of the mild inversion category or it may be deemed a separate type. In these "gentle" or "restorative" inversions, the feet are elevated in a restorative pose.
- Examples include Viparita Karani (Inverted Action / Legs Up the Wall), Legs Up a Chair and Restorative Setu Bandhasana (Restorative Bridge Pose).

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

1. Reverse effects of gravity in the body.
2. Improve blood flow back to heart (venous return).
3. Reduce blood pressure and heart rate.
4. Increase lymphatic circulation.
5. Strengthen upper back muscles.
6. Release tension.
7. Sending more blood to the head is said to stimulate the immune and endocrine systems, and to nourish the brain.
8. Said to provide more efficient oxygen-to-blood exchange and healthier lung tissue (see source).
9. May contribute to better sleep.

ENERGETIC EFFECTS

1. Revitalize.
2. Improve focus and concentration.
3. Improve sleep.
4. Alter mood from agitated to centered and quiet.
5. Poses such as Handstand and Forearm Balance may heighten enthusiasm and bring energetic joy for some.
6. May bring up fear and/or help to face fear and develop courage.
7. May inspire seeing things from a different perspective.
8. Said to bring more energy into the heart.

SEQUENCING CONSIDERATIONS

- Inversions are usually sequenced after shoulder strengtheners and openers.
- Sirsasana (Headstand), Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand), and Pincha Mayurasana (Forearm Balance) are stimulating for mood while also having a settling effect.
- Sirsasana is often done early in class and can be prepared for with Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose) and Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend).
- Sirsasana is usually countered with Balasana (Child's Pose).



- Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand) requires stabilizing from pelvic core including psoas and gluteals, which should be developed and awakened prior. (Ray Long, Anatomy for Arm Balances and Inversions 2010 p 100)

Core Strengthening Poses



Surya Namaskar & Vinyasa Yoga ²



LESSON BUNDLE CONTENTS

Overview & History

0. Inspiration & Devotion
1. Cautions & Alignment
2. Asana & Sequences

3. Variations

LESSON OVERVIEW

Features: Surya Namaskar A (Sun Salutations A), Surya Namaskar B (Sun Salutations B), Classical Surya Namaskar (some call this Surya Namaskar C) and Vinayasa Yoga

Objective: Become knowledgeable about the poses and flows, and review detailed teaching considerations.

Description: Explain the Sanskrit naming; contraindications and cautions; associated benefits and typical effects; instructions and cues for setting up and practicing the poses and flows; variations to meet particular intentions and needs; and more teaching considerations.



Surya Namaskar & Vinyasa Yoga

Overview & History ^{1.5}

Surya Namaskar Classical



Vinyasa



Surya Namaskar A



Surya Namaskar B



Questions Answered Here

1. Translate the Sanskrit name, **Surya Namaskar**.
2. What is **Surya Namaskar**
3. How may **Surya Namaskar** be utilized in an *asana* practice?
4. What is the deeper purpose behind the practice of **Surya Namaskar**?
5. Describe some history and symbolism related to **Surya Namaskar**.
6. What are the origins of Vinyasa Yoga?

Introduction

SANSKRIT

- **"surya" = sun**
- **"namas" = bow to or adore**
- **"namaskar" = greeting of honor and respect to the divinity present in all**
- **Sun Salutation**

OVERVIEW

- **Surya Namaskar** is a particular sequences that features a "marriage of breath and movement," a series of postures and transitions coordinated with a phase of the breath.
- **Surya Namaskar** includes stretching, strengthening and warming poses that energize, revitalize and "wake up" the body. (See more in [Benefits](#).)
- The forms of **Surya Namaskar** are Classical Surya Namaskar (Lunge Salutes), Surya Namaskar A and Surya Namaskar B.
- Each round of the sequences may begin and end with **anjali mudra** (palms together) at the heart. "This placement is no accident; only the heart can know the truth." (Richard Rosen)

PURPOSE

- **Surya Namaskar** is a celebration of the sun, a symbol of spiritual consciousness.
- The practice is designed to awaken one's "inner sun," or vital energy, to support spiritual awakening and growth.
- It is known to serve as a complete physical practice. In addition, it is often used for warm up and heat building sections of class.

Readings

CELEBRATE SUN & STIMULATE INTERNAL SUN

Surya namaskar is a sequence of movements by which the yogi/ni celebrates the return of the sun and stimulates his/her own internal "sun." – **Janita Stenhouse**



INTEGRATED PRACTICE TO AWAKEN INHERENT SOLAR FORCES

In ancient times the sun was worshiped as a daily ritual because it is a powerful symbol of spiritual consciousness... Surya namaskara, meaning "salutation to the sun," can be seen as a form of worship of

the sun, and all that it represents on the micro- and macro-cosmic levels. In yogic terms this indicates that surya namaskara awakens the solar aspects of an individual's nature and releases this vital energy for the development of higher awareness... By awakening our own inherent solar forces through this integrated practice, we can attune ourselves to the cosmic nature and revitalize our lives. – **Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

CAN BE ADAPTED FOR EVENING PRACTICE

Even though they are often used to energize and warm the body, they can be practiced in a way that relaxes and recharges the body instead of raising energy. [The poses] can all be enjoyed in a languorous motion. Sun Salutations, coupled with some long forward-folding gentle twists, and a half or full Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand), can be a wonderful end-of-the day or pre-bedtime repertoire. So my answer is yes, it's fine to practice Sun Salutations in the evening. The outcome of our practice is predicated on how it is approached; the beauty of yoga is in its malleability. – **Tracey Rich**

History & Symbolism

FROM A "TINY KINGDOM" IN THE 1920'S

Historically, the sequence of poses now known as surya namaskar may have developed from an early sunrise practice honoring Surya as the source of energy and light for the world. In the 1920s, the Raja of Aundh introduced a fixed sun salute series into the schools of his tiny kingdom (now part of Maharashtra) and published a small book, urging every man, woman, and child to adopt this practice for the sake of their physical and spiritual health. – **Zo Newell**



THE SUN SYMBOLIZES SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Surya namaskara has been handed down from the enlightened sages of the vedic age. The sun symbolizes spiritual consciousness and in ancient times was worshiped on a daily basis. In yoga the sun is represented by pingala or surya nadi, the pranic channel which carries the vital, life-giving force. – **Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

REPRESENTING THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Surya Namaskar may be seen as representing the cycle of life, the journey (as Swami Anandakapila Saraswati likes to say) from womb to tomb. It symbolizes the non-manifest incarnating as matter, the evolution of consciousness and the return to source. – **Janita Stenhouse**

About Vinyasa Yoga



- **Vinyasas** are “progressive sequences that unfold with an inherent harmony and intelligence.” (Shiva Rea)
- **Vinyasas** are a “marriage of breath and movement.”
- **Surya Namaskar** and **Chandra Namaskar** are **vinyasas**, a particular series of postures with transitions accompanied by a particular phase of the breath.
- “Vinyasa Yoga” or “Vinyasa Flow Yoga” typically refers to a flowing sequence of poses coordinated with the breath. From a teaching perspective, Vinyasa Yoga is designed using methodologies for safe and effective sequencing to meet an intention.

THE ORIGINS OF VINYASA YOGA

The great South Indian master Krishnamacharya, championed the vinyasa approach as central to the transformative process of yoga... He not only taught specific asana sequences like those of Jois’s [ashtanga yoga] system, but he also saw vinyasa as a method that could be applied to all the aspects of yoga. In Krishnamacharya’s teachings, the vinyasa method included assessing the needs of the individual student (or group) and then building a complementary, step-by-step practice to meet those needs. Beyond this, Krishnamacharya also emphasized vinyasa as an artful approach to living, a way of applying the skill and awareness of yoga to all the rhythms and sequences of life, including self-care, relationships, work, and personal evolution. – **Shiva Rea**

Inspiration & Devotion ^{2.5}



Questions Answered Here

1. In addition to physically warming the body, what opportunity does **Surya Namaskar** provide?
2. What are some specific ways to bring a devotional quality to practice?
3. Describe how to incorporate a gratitude practice with **Surya Namaskar** and Vinyasa Yoga.
4. Provide examples of ways to use intention, dedications and affirmations with **Surya Namaskar** and Vinyasa Yoga.
5. What is a **yoga mala**?
6. What is the significance of the number 108?

Introduction & Inspiration

In addition to physically warming the body, **Surya Namaskar** and Vinyasa Yoga (as with any practice) can be approached with devotion, as tools that can be used beyond a physical pursuit.

Here we support you in exploring such practices as the following.

- Focusing on breath as the source of movement can provide a pathway for deepening the experience.
- **Surya Namaskar** can be used as "a gateway to entering your subtle body."
- Specific practices such as invoking gratitude, inspiring visualization or mentally reciting affirmations can bring a devotional quality to the practice.

DEVOTION, RESPECT, PRAYER

See [Namaste / Namaskar](#) for translations that show a much deeper meaning than “greeting.” In the case of “Surya Namaskar,” it is pointing to an embodied experience of genuine offering, a form of deeply devoted, mutual respect.

- When practicing the physical expression of **Surya Namaskar**, we may wish to offer a whole body prayer to the light supporting us all (the sun) as a direct reflection of the divine light that resides within.
- There is an opportunity to unite the microcosm of the inner body with the macrocosm of the entire universe through the vehicle of the breath.
- As Shiva Rea describes with poetic clarity, “‘Namaskar’ means ‘to bow,’ to recognize with your whole being. Reaching up, bowing forward to the earth in prostration—the meaning is inherent in the movement. Eventually, you are going to have an ecstatic experience of the life force entering your body.”

BHAVA: CULTIVATING A FEELING OF WHOLENESS

The idea is to cultivate the **bhava** state, this feeling in your heart of wholeness. The sun gives us circulation, growth, and evolution. Embody the qualities of the sun, such as the feelings of radiance, vitality, humble confidence, luminosity, vision, clarity, empowerment, and fearlessness. Or it can be an emotion, such as compassion or tenderness, that is mounting for you in that moment. You decide. When people are under stress, if they focus on gratitude, you can see their brainwaves and heart rhythms come into a syncopated state pretty quickly. That’s all part of bhava, circulating the healing inside of you through your heart, which you can do through movement. – **Shiva Rea**

IDENTIFY BREATH AS THE SOURCE OF MOVEMENT

Find the rhythm in your breath and allow your body to respond to it. Feel the inhales lift the body into the Upward Dog and the exhales propel the body into Downward Dog. Identify breath as the source of movement and the very core of our existence. Ride it as you would a wave in the ocean or respond to it the way your body responds to music... Feel the air move across your body as you move through space. Be free. Be light. Be joyful in the experience and expression of your personal practice. – **David Swenson**

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Like other classic yoga asanas, the sun salutation is a gateway to entering your subtle body, tapping into your healing power, gaining vitality, and accelerating the process of rejuvenation. To derive all these benefits, however, you must take the practice beyond stretching. The spiritual dimension of surya namaskara is much more profound and fulfilling than the physical level of practice alone. When both the physical and spiritual aspects are strung together, the practice becomes Sutra Yoga—the kind of practice intended by masters like Patanjali, the compiler of the Yoga Sutra. A Sutra Yoga style of the sun salutation strings together (sutra) body, breath, mind, and soul with the healing and nurturing forces of the sun, and infuses life with serenity and inner awakening. In this way, the sun salutation becomes a complete practice of yoga, meditation, and spirituality. – **Pandit Rajmani Tigunait**

Gratitude or Awe

A focus on gratitude or awe is a keyway to inspire a deeper practice.

- Feel gratitude for the sun’s light and energy.
- Focus on gratitude for something else, such as a family member, beloved pet, health, vitality or breath.
- Tap into something that amazes you, whether the light of the sun, the breath that moves you, the awesomeness of a forest, the innocence of a child or the beauty of music.



DRINK THE SUN LIGHT

During my Sun Salutations, I feel I am "drinking" the sun light, just as a plant does. I directly receive this infinite power, this infinite light and wisdom. Everyday, before and during my sun salutations, I keep this mantra in my mind: ***I salute the sun, source of light and knowledge.*** – **Andressa V. da Nóbregais**

GRATITUDE FOR VITALITY RECEIVED FROM THE ELEMENTS

Contemplating the vitality you receive from the elements allows you to go to a deeper level of participation with the movements of the sequence. – **Shiva Rea**

AWAKEN UNIVERSAL AWE

Vital health is linked to spiritual realizations, an awakening of universal awe that doesn't belong to any one religion. Perhaps for several breaths, or as your hands are in Hasta Mudra, contemplate the sun. It's something that helps me. Isn't it incredible that I'm receiving this photon of light that takes about 8 minutes to get here from the surface of the sun? Isn't it amazing that we have this fireball that we've barely begun to use for renewal energy? – **Shiva Rea**

Dedication, Intention, Prayer



INTENTION / DEDICATION IDEAS

You may wish to set an intention for the entire practice or dedicate each round or each pose to a particular focus:

- To someone you love or care about
- To someone going through difficulty
- To your health
- To yourself
- To the collective

Here's a lovely example by Fernanda Grisetti, Teachasana, Teaching the Celebration of Solstice:

Round One: Personal Transformation and Realization

"In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." –**Albert Camus**



Round Two: Dedications to Family and Friends

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."—**Albert Schweitzer**

Round Three: Dedications to the World

"As we become purer channels for god's light, we develop an appetite for the sweetness that is possible in this world. A miracle worker is not geared towards fighting the world that is, but towards creating the world that could be."— **Marianne Williamson**

Round Four: Dedications to Source

"It is through your body that you realize you are a spark of divinity." – **B.K.S. Iyengar**

HUMOROUS & HOPEFUL INSPIRATION

Check out the following reading for a dose of humor and lightness, hope and realness. It might inspire your next teaching!

THE FULL CATASTROPHE SUN SALUTATION

I wanted to expand on the "Angry Yoga," shtick but end on a positive note—hope springs eternal after all. My Full Catastrophe Sun Salutation addresses the complexity of living life as a yogi amid the tangles of today's world and is named after Jon Kabat Zinn's book, Full Catastrophe Living, which deals with stress, mindfulness, meditation and healing. I hope it makes you laugh. – **Beth Gibbs**

Yoga Mala



A Yoga Mala is a practice based upon the number 108, a special number that is said to be auspicious. (Read more below.)

A Yoga Mala is often a practice of 108 consecutive **Surya Namaskar**, but also may be 108 rounds of a **mantra**, 108 minutes of meditation or other practices. It's a way to inspire sacred connection and action and /or to honor a special occasion such as the changing of the seasons.

The purpose of the Global Mala Project is to “bring the global yoga community together from every continent, school and approach to form a “*mala* around the earth” through collective practices based upon the sacred cycle of 108.”

Of course, it isn't appropriate for many students to practice 108 rounds in a row without pause. A common approach is to practice the 108 rounds or minutes in multiples of the “mystical number nine.” You might recall, for example, that the very important Hindu celebration of Navaratri translates as “nine nights.” (*nava* = nine, *ratni* = nights)

- Thus, you might practice 12 rounds of nine, or nine rounds of 12.
- Another common approach is to use the number 18 (twice the number nine) which would be 18 rounds of six or six rounds of 18.
- Further exploring multiples, the number 54 is the number of sounds in Sanskrit and is thus another auspicious number and multiple of nine.
- Perhaps you break nine into multiples of three. There are many options from this framework, such as four waves of nine, repeated three times. For example, each wave could be Classical or Half Surya 3x, Surya A 3x, Surya B 3x.

MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO COME BACK

It is no surprise that doing 108 consecutive Sun Salutations can seem like a daunting task. It can be easy to let the mind run around in thoughts about how many salutations are still left, how you could be having ice-cream instead, or how long it will take before you are done. In fact, there is always only one salutation to finish—the current one. The practice gives 108 (and more!) opportunities to come back to your breath, come back to the present moment, and allow there to be more space without thoughts or expectations. –

Kaisa Kapanen

MORE RESOURCES

For more about *mala* beads used in *mantra* repetition, see Mantras & Chanting: Practice Guidelines.

The Number 108

Renowned mathematicians of Vedic culture viewed 108 as a number of the wholeness of existence. This number also connects the Sun, Moon, and Earth: The average distance of the Sun and the Moon to Earth is 108 times their respective diameters. Such phenomena have given rise to many examples of ritual significance. According to yogic tradition, there are 108 pithas, or sacred sites, throughout India. And there are also 108 Upanishads and 108 marma points, or sacred places of the body. – **Shiva Rea**

- The number 108 is considered a special, mystical, auspicious, sacred number in some traditions.
- There are 108 Upanishads, 108 names for Hindu deities, 108 names for Buddha, 108 beads on a Catholic rosary and (often) 108 beads on the Tibetan mala.
- “And for a little math: 108 is twice the number 54, which is the number of sounds in the sacred Indian language of Sanskrit; it is six times the number 18, which is a Jewish number for good luck; and it is twelve times the number 9, which is the number of *vinayas* (breath and movements) in one Sun Salutation.” – Teaching the Celebration of Solstice, Teachasana.

Having observed and recorded how shadows work over a long period of history, the ancient Greeks had determined that when an object is placed in front of the Sun, the length of a shadow this generates will always be 108 times the diameter of the object itself. So a ball measuring 2.5 cm (1 inch) across and placed

on a stick between the Sun and the ground will create a triangular shadow that extends for 270 cm (108 inches). – **Fraser Cain**

- Sources that give examples to support 108 as sacred often report that the sun's diameter is 108 times that of the earth. Other sources, FYI, say the diameter is "about 109 times."
- "108... is obtained by multiplying the number of planets in our solar system by the number of astrological signs in the zodiac." (Russill Paul)

The number 108 is made up of the numbers one, zero, and eight representing the following:

- *One: Oneness, Divinity, Higher Truth*
- *Zero: Nothing, Emptiness, Circle of life*
- *Eight: Everything, Infinity*
- The number 108 is often broken into 9 sets of 12 or other repetition cycles. In Sun Salutes this means a practice of 9 rounds of 12 Sun Salutations.

Sacred Sound

Initiating movement through sound vibrations can deepen your meditative state, boost your energy, and harmonize your brainwaves and heart rhythm. "It's refreshing for modern practitioners to experience the power of sound, because we're on the vanguard of sound healing. Moving with mantra is really satisfying," says Rea. – **Yoga Journal**

Cautions & Alignment 1.5



Questions Answered Here

1. What is the primary energetic effect of **Surya Namaskar**?
2. What other energy-related benefits are said to arise from practicing **Surya Namaskar**?

3. What are the physical effects of **Surya Namaskar**?
4. How does **Surya Namaskar** benefit the mind?
5. Why do experts describe **Surya Namaskar** as a complete spiritual practice?
6. What characteristics of Vinyasa Yoga may appeal to some students?
7. What is a general risk of flow sequences and Vinyasa Yoga?
8. What risk is associated with the repetition found in many Vinyasa Yoga classes?
9. What are some ways you can help to teach safe practice in Vinyasa Yoga?
10. For what conditions is **Surya Namaskar** contraindicated?
11. What are some common alignment issues you may see in *Tadasana*? In *Urdhva Hastasana*? In *Ardha Uttanasana*? In *Chaturanga Dandasana*? In *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*? During transitions?

Effects / Benefits

FULL PRACTICE ON ITS OWN

One of the unique aspects of **Surya Namaskar** is that it is said to be a full practice on its own.

- Physically, the practice lengthens and strengthens many of the main muscles in the body.
- It affects the body, mind and soul, and experts deem it a “complete spiritual practice.”

BENEFITS BODY, MIND & SOUL

On the physical level, the benefits quickly become apparent as bodily functions improve. On the mental level, **Surya Namaskar** focuses the “grasshopper mind” and calms it. Spiritually, one acknowledges the Creative Force, by whatever name one uses for that. **Surya Namaskar** works to strengthen and balance body, mind and soul. – **Janita Stenhouse**

COMPLETE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Surya namaskara is a complete sadhana, spiritual practice, in itself for it includes asana, pranayama, mantra and meditation techniques. It is an excellent group of asanas with which to start morning practice. **Surya namaskara** has a direct vitalizing effect on the solar energy of the body which flows through pingala nadi. Regular practice of **surya namaskara** regulates pingala nadi, whether it is underactive or overactive. Regulation of pingala nadi leads to a balanced energy system at both mental and physical levels...

It strengthens the back and helps balance the metabolism. It stimulates and balances all the systems of the body, including the reproductive, circulatory, respiratory and digestive systems. Its influence on the endocrine glands helps to balance the transition period between childhood and adolescence in growing children. Synchronizing the breath with the physical movements of **surya namaskara** ensures that the practitioner, at least for a few minutes daily, breathes as deeply and rhythmically as possible, increasing mental clarity by bringing fresh, oxygenated blood to the brain. – **Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

BALANCE PRANIC FLOW & INFLUENCE MOOD

Surya namaskara is one of the most complete practices of hatha yoga. The primary intention of this series of poses is to awaken the energy of the sun that normally lies dormant at the navel center. **Surya namaskara** allows us to reach deep into our solar plexus and awaken and circulate the sun’s healing power to restore a radiant body and cultivate a clear, calm, and tranquil mind. With a couple of cycles of the sun salutation, you can fan your digestive fire, energize your nervous system, balance your pranic flow, activate both the lower and upper extremities, and influence your mood. – **Pandit Rajmani Tigunait**

Energize & Awaken

Surya Namaskar is designed to energize, revitalize and “wake up” the body.

- It is said to awaken one’s internal energy located in the solar plexus.
- The practice is also said to balance the flow of prana, or life force energy, within the body.

BENEFITS MUSCLES & PRANA

These 12 or so poses linked in a series can lengthen and strengthen, flex and extend many of the main muscles of the body while distributing the prana flow throughout the system. – **Sarah Powers**

CENTER, FOCUS, ENERGIZE

The sequence in Surya Namaskar is designed to center you in your heart, to focus your mind, to energize and to give you strength and inner power... Tadasana centers you, brings you back to your breath & gives balance. Uttanasana relaxes you and energizes the spine. Ardha Uttanasana gives you confidence to face whatever the day brings. Chaturanga makes you stronger. Cobra or Upward Facing Dog energizes the spine & opens the chakras. Downward Facing Dog is relaxing and grounding and it helps you connect with your breath. Uttanasana centers you. Tadasana seals the sequence. –**Andressa V. da Nóbregais**

VINYASA YOGA CHARACTERISTICS & BENEFITS

- Continuous movement, instruction, and breath awareness may help students contain a wandering mind.
- The flow of one pose into another based on a teacher’s mindful sequencing can enable students to feel a dance-like grace. For some students, this is unique to their **asana** practice and to some who are drawn to fluidity in motion in such activities as dance or martial arts, it may be a familiar and welcome aspect of their yoga practice.
- The relatively brisk pace of many Vinyasa Yoga classes may draw students who enjoy such physical movement.
- Styles with set sequences, such as Ashtanga Yoga and Baptiste Power Yoga, can help students see differences and variations in their body and mind through the consistent practice. Other Vinyasa Yoga styles tend to incorporate a significant amount of variety, which may appeal to other students.

WHAT BENEFITS ONE MAY NOT BE AS BENEFICIAL TO ANOTHER

While each style of yoga has characteristics that are beneficial to many students, there is also the tendency for people to choose activities based on their existing tendencies rather than what will bring balance to their particular constitution. For example, a **kapha** personality might choose slower-moving **asana** styles when in fact faster-moving could help bring balance while a **vata** might choose Vinyasa Flow when Restorative Yoga may be better apt to calm her tendency toward excessive movement.

For more information, see:

- Styles & Lineages: An Ayurvedic Perspective
- Ayurveda: Doshas



- Hold workshops that break down the sequence in order to take time with each pose and transition.
- Before moving into one-breath-per-movement practice, take more time to teach technique.
- Teach a few rounds using variations so that all students are experienced and comfortable with them. (Be sure to teach under what conditions the variations are recommended to encourage students to make informed choices for their body.)
- Spend more time with newer students while more experienced students are practicing. (You may also choose to have newer students set up in one area of class so you can more easily attend to them.)

SAFE FORM MISSING IN MANY FLOW CLASSES

If you ask Annie Carpenter, not only do most students perform sun salutations incorrectly, but many teachers instruct them poorly as well. The problem is that detail and slow movement are not often tolerated in vinyasa and flow classes, she has found, and students become bored with alignment cues. However, Carpenter believes that taking time to build the “neuromuscular scaffolding”—or template for the muscles, fascia and nerves—is the necessary foundation for a lifetime of practice. She urges teachers to at least take the time to help students perfect Ardha Uttanasana (half forward fold) because “proper neuromuscular scaffolding will hold the pose together throughout the flow.” Carpenter teaches to “keep the spine in neutral, ribs knitted, neck long, shoulders back and down” during every inhalation and exhalation. The result? Solidity, strength and injury prevention. — **Joy Keller**

CONSIDER THIS FOR ALL POSES IN A VINYASA

Have you done 50 headstands today? How about 50 triangle poses? That would seem excessive, wouldn't it? But doing 50 upward-facing dog poses a day can be business as usual if you take a vinyasa class... Don't get me wrong. Doing lots of upward-facing dogs can be a very good thing, provided you do them properly... But if you push beyond your capacity or use bad technique, all that repetition can put a lot of wear and tear on your body, especially your lower back... It's pretty easy to avoid compressing your lower back in Urdhva Mukha Svanasana if you practice good body mechanics, but they're not easy to learn during the rapid flow of a vinyasa series, in which you often strike the pose during a single inhalation and exit as you exhale. Entering the pose more gradually and holding it longer affords you more time to get it right, but that's no panacea, especially if you're unclear about what you're trying to achieve. So whether you practice quickly or slowly, consider setting aside some time to learn how to coax your body and mind into an Upward Dog that opens your heart without wrecking your back. — **Roger Cole**

Contraindications

The typical **Surya Namaskar** sequence is generally not recommended for students with the following conditions. This is not an exhaustive list but rather for the sequence in general. Please see more information below regarding each pose in the sequence.

- Abdominal surgery
- Disc issues
- Heart disease
- Hernia
- Inversions can cause increased pressure in head so are contraindicated for such conditions as glaucoma, detached retina, recent eye surgery and recent stroke
- High blood pressure
- Sciatica
- Stroke



- Tuberculosis

If you have coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis, or have had a stroke, it's probably safer not to practice Surya Namaskar, certainly not without trained supervision, and the authorization of your doctor. If you have a slipped disc, sciatica, or had abdominal surgery in the last twelve months, please check with your doctor before embarking on practice. If you are pregnant, please modify the movements and discontinue immediately if any discomfort is experienced. – **Janita Stenhouse**

CONSIDER EACH POSE

Cautions for each pose need also be considered. Please see the [Asana Index](#) for information on any specific **asana**.

- There are mild inversions in the sequence, so contraindications such as high blood pressure apply to this sequence.
- Moving between poses at the brisk pace of one breath per movement may also bring up additional cautions such as for students with back problems.

Carefully observe the contraindications for the seven component postures and ensure that they can be performed comfortably... The practice of surya namaskar should be immediately discontinued if a fever, acute inflammation, boils or rashes occur due to excess toxins in the body. When the toxins have been eliminated, the practice may be resumed. – **Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

Watch Out For

For more information on any of the poses below, please see the link to the associated Asana Digest to study more about cautions, cues, and adjustments.

TADASANA & PRANAMASANA

- Chin thrust forward
- Overarching low back
- Shoulders rounded forward
- See also: [Asana Digest](#)

URDHVA HASTASANA & HASTA UTTANASANA

- Arms not by ears
- Hips pushed forward
- See also: [Asana Digest](#)

ARDHA UTTANASANA

- Shoulders hunched up
- Neck straining
- Spine not lengthened
- See also: [Asana Digest](#)

CHATURANGA DANDASANA

- Torso dropping lower than shoulder-height
- Legs not engaged, making shoulders over-work
- Chest, head or gaze downward



- See also: [Asana Digest](#)

URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA

- Sinking in low back; not distributing backbend through whole spine
- See also: [Asana Digest](#)
- Not engaging core; exploiting low back when moving into [Adho Mukha Svanasana](#)
- Transitioning into and out of [Uttanasana](#) can be particularly prone to safety and alignment issues; see this [video](#) for alignment cues and considerations
- See also: [Mindful Asana Transitions](#)

ROLLING UP TO STANDING

Rolling up to standing was a ubiquitous movement in classes throughout my teacher training. In fact, this movement—in which the weight of the arms and torso hang passively from a rounded lower back—can be tantamount to loaded lumbar flexion, a dangerous movement for the intervertebral discs of the lower spine. In the course of writing this article, physical therapist Jonina Turzi explained to me that if a student has the refined core strength to be able to lift each vertebra individually—and can do this while keeping her sacrum in nutation (tipped forward), a position in which it is able to transmit the weight of the upper body into the legs—she may be rolling up safely. But just try rolling up one vertebra at a time, as Turzi suggests, with your hips a couple of inches from a wall (without letting your hips actually touch the wall, and while keeping your heels grounded and your legs straight), and you'll get a sense of how challenging it is to master this movement. — **Amber Burke**

Related Resources

See [Asana Index](#) for each pose in the flow to study contraindications, cautions, teaching cues and more.

In addition, Kat Heagberg has written an excellent article: [Seven Tips for Practicing Vinyasa with Safety and Ease](#). The article is clear and to-the-point, and covers these topics:

1. Your heels don't have to touch the floor in Down Dog.
2. Err on the side of lifting your hips in Plank.
3. Make every Chaturanga a well-aligned Chaturanga.
4. Avoid leading with your chin during Cobra and Up Dog.
5. Learn the difference between Cobra and Up Dog and choose wisely.
6. Support your lower back as you transition back to Down Dog.
7. Avoid rocking back onto your wrists in Down Dog.

Asana & Sequences 1.5

Questions Answered Here

1. Name 14 poses found in the traditional sequences of **Surya Namaskar**.
2. What is the difference between **Urdhva Hastasana** (Upward Salute) and **Hasta Uttanasana** (Raised Hands Pose)?
3. In which Salutations do we commonly find **Hasta Uttanasana** and in which is **Urdhva Hastasana** commonly featured?
4. Describe the sequence of poses that makes up Classical Surya Namaskar (Lunge Salutes / Surya Namaskar C). What aspect of the breath is associated with each pose?
5. Describe the sequence of poses that makes up Surya Namaskar A. What aspect of the breath is associated with each pose?
6. Describe the sequence of poses that makes up Surya Namaskar B. What aspect of the breath is associated with each pose?
7. Describe the sequence of poses that makes up Half Sun Salutes. What aspect of the breath is associated with each pose?



Asana Overview

The following poses are included in the traditional **Surya Namaskar** practices of Classical (Lunge Salutes), **Surya Namaskar A** and **Surya Namaskar B**.

1. Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
2. Pranamasana (Mountain Pose) + Anjali Mudra
3. Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute)
4. Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
5. Utkatasana (Chair / Fierce Pose)
6. Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
7. Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Half Lift)
8. Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)
9. Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 Pose)
10. Ashtanga Namaskara (8 Limbed Pose / Knees-Chest-Chin)
11. Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose)
12. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)
13. Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
14. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose)

Poses with Different Conventions

These poses have different naming and usage conventions among various styles and lineages.

PRANAMASANA

Some sources (including Dharma Mittra in *Asanas: 608 Yoga Poses* 2003 p 24) call **Tadasana + Anjali Mudra** (Mountain Pose + Hands at Heart) by the name **Pranamasana**. We have adopted this naming convention here.

URDHVA HASTASANA & HASTA UTTANASANA

The name **Urdhva Hastasana** (Upward Salute) refers to lengthening the spine upward and **Hasta Uttanasana** (Raised Hands Pose) refers to a standing backbend.

Most sources use Hasta Uttanasana in the Classical (Lunge) Salute and Urdhva Hastasana in Surya Namaskar A. Joseph and Lilian LePage clearly use this approach in *Yoga Teachers' Toolbox* 2005 pgs 11-12 (referring to **Hasta Uttanasana** as Extended Tadasana).

Sources that teach **Surya Namaskar** with **Urdhva Hastasana** include:

1. David Swenson, *Ashtanga Yoga: The Practice Manual* 1999 p 17 (Surya Namaskar A – Swenson does not call the pose by name but simply demonstrates it) Silva Mehta, *Yoga: The Iyengar Way* 2009 pgs 146-147 (Surya Namaskar A)
2. Martin Kirk & Brooke Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated* 2006 pgs 210-211 (Both Surya Namaskar A and Classical Sun Salute)
3. Beryl Bender Birch, *Power Yoga* 1995 pgs 63-71 (Urdhva Hastasana with palms together and gaze up, Surya Namaskar A)

Sources that teach **Surya Namaskar** with **Hasta Uttanasana** include:

1. Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* 2008 pgs 162-174 (Classical Sun Salute)
2. Dharma Mittra, *Asanas: 608 Yoga Poses* 2003 pgs 24-35 (Classical Sun Salute)

Inspiration To Begin: Draw Awareness Inward



Try reading this beautiful set of instructions without automatically relaxing!

Before commencing the practice, stand with the feet together or slightly apart, and the arms hanging loosely by the sides of the body. Close the eyes gently and become aware of the whole physical body as one homogeneous unit. Minimize swaying movements and balance the body weight equally on both feet. Take the awareness to the soles of the feet in contact with the floor. Feel that the whole body is being pulled downwards by gravity and that any tensions are being pulled down through the body and into the ground. At the same time, experience the vital forces surging up from the earth and flooding the whole being. Bring the awareness inside the body and mentally begin to relax it. Starting from the top of the head, take the awareness systematically through all the parts, releasing any tension. Intensify, once more, the awareness of the whole physical body and feel in harmony with it. Finally, take the awareness to the heart or eyebrow center and visualize a brilliant, red rising sun infusing the whole body and mind with its vitalizing and healing rays. – **Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

Surya Namaskar Classical

Naming

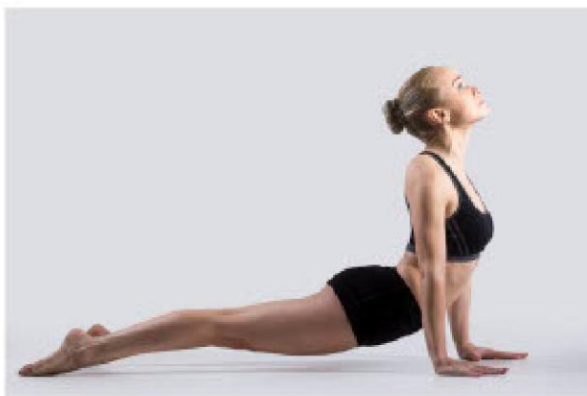
- The most common name for this **vinyasa** is simply **Surya Namaskar**.
- To distinguish it from versions A and B, it is often called Classical **Surya Namaskar**.
- It may be referred by a shorthand name, "Lunge Salutes."
- A few sources call this **Surya Namaskar C**. However, Ashtanga Yoga teacher Tim Miller uses the "C" naming for a Surya Namaskar B variation.

Pose List

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra
2. Inhale – Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Step R Foot Back to Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)
5. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
6. Exhale – Ashtanga Namaskara (Eight Limbed Pose / Knees-Chest-Chin)
7. Inhale – Bhujangasana (Cobra)
8. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
9. Inhale – Step R Foot Forward into Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge) Second Side
10. Exhale – Step Back Foot Forward into Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
11. Inhale – Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
12. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

Practice again, taking left leg back and forward into **Anjaneyasana**.

Surya Namaskar A



Naming

- The most common name for this **vinyasa** is **Surya Namaskar A**.
- However, some call this simply **Surya Namaskar**.

Pose List

A common sequence in Flow classes, Surya Namaskar A is often the particular series referred to when the term "Vinyasa" or "Take a Vinyasa" is used in such classes.

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra
2. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
5. Exhale – Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff / Low Pushup) or Plank and lower to floor
6. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog) or Bhujangasana (Cobra)
7. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog) – 5 breaths
8. Pause or Beginning to Inhale – Transition Feet Forward
9. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
10. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
11. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute)
12. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

Surya Namaskar B



Pose List

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

2. Inhale – Utkatasana (Chair / Fierce)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
5. Exhale – Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff / Low Pushup) or Plank and lower to floor
6. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog) or Bhujangasana (Cobra)
7. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
8. Inhale – Step foot forward into Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1)
9. Exhale – Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff / Low Pushup) or Plank and lower to floor
10. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog) or Bhujangasana (Cobra)
11. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
12. Inhale – Step foot forward into Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1) Second Side
13. Exhale – Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff / Low Pushup) or Plank and lower to floor
14. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog) or Bhujangasana (Cobra)
15. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog) – 5 breaths
16. Pause or Beginning to Inhale – Transition Feet Forward
17. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
18. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
19. Inhale – Utkatasana (Chair / Fierce)
20. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

Half Sun Salutes



Pose List

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra
2. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) or Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
5. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
6. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) or Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
7. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

Variations ^{2.5}



Half Sun Salutes



Pose List

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra
2. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) or Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend / Halfway Lift)
5. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
6. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) or Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands Pose)
7. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain) + Anjali Mudra

Variations ^{2.5}



Questions Answered Here

1. In what **general ways** can you customize *Surya Namaskar* for beginners or other adaptive needs?
2. Describe multiple **specific ways** to adapt *Surya Namaskar for beginners* or other adaptive needs.
3. In what **general ways** can you make *Surya Namaskar* **more challenging**?
4. Describe multiple **specific ways** to make *Surya Namaskar* **more challenging**.
5. Give examples of sequence variations.

General Strategies for Adapting



Adaptive / Beginner / Cooling / Regenerative

General strategies for making *Surya Namaskar* more accessible are:

- Slowing the pace
- Providing variations or alternatives for particular poses
- Providing variations in pose transitions
- Eliminating a pose or poses
- Using props such as blocks, chair or wall

At it's heart, vinyasa—to place in a special way; to move purposefully and with intention—is what makes yoga asana so powerful, regardless of the style and pace of your practice. — **Kat Heagberg**

Adaptive Variations



SLOWER FLOW, EXTRA BREATHS

- Teach a slower flow with extra breaths for students to find proper alignment, particularly in challenging transition points such as Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog) to Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1).

UTTANASANA

- Teach Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend) alignment principles and adaptations for low back safety, such as bending knees.

ARDHA UTTANASANA

- Consider Ardha Uttanasana (Half Lift) variations including bending knees, bringing hands to legs, or coming up so that torso is parallel to floor, drawing arms into "Cactus" or "Goal Post."

ANJANEYASANA

- Classical Lunge Salutes appear to be traditionally taught with hands on floor in Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge). If you practice and teach with arms up, arms down is a less demanding variation.
- Another option: have blocks available for hands to press into.

CHATURANGA DANDASANA

- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff Pose) is a common area of misalignment and unsafe practices.
- Moving into Plank prior to **Chaturanga Dandasana** can give greater opportunity for safe transition and alignment.
- Dropping knees in Plank is another option prior to Bhujangasana (Cobra) and the next step for **Ashtanga Namaskara**.
- Also known as Eight Limbed Pose or Knees-Chest-Chin, Ashtanga Namaskara is traditionally the pose prior to Bhujangasana in Classical (Lunge) Sun Salutes. This could also be an alternative for Chaturanga Dandasana in other flows. *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*
- Bhujangasana (Cobra) is an alternative to Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog).

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA TO UTTANASANA

- Bring shoulders forward, come up on fingertips. Step foot forward as far as it goes. Step back foot forward to meet front, keeping knees bent. Ground into heels, slide hands back to Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend) and then inhale up to continue sequence.

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA TO LUNGE OR VIRA I

An option for any transition into and out of **Adho Mukha Svanasana** (Downward Facing Dog): add one more step of dropping knees into **Marjaryasana** (Table / Cat Pose).

More options for making this transition more accessible include:

- As noted above, drop knees down. Then, come up onto fingertips, before stepping forward to Low Lunge. Next, lift back leg up to High Lunge.
- Come up onto fingertips. As foot steps forward, lift arm on that side of body out to side to make more room for hip and leg.
- Reach hand back to help leg forward.
- See also: Dianne Bondy, Yoga International, Stepping to Lunge From Down Dog: Tips for Yogis With Larger Bodies

WALL VERSION

- Face the wall. Replace Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend) with Half Dog / Standing Wall Press and place hands at wall for Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1).
- Yoga International shows this wonderful wall version here.

CHAIR VERSION

- One option is to face the chair and use it as a prop for Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend) and Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog), as needed.
- Another option is to sit on the edge of the chair. Yoga International shows a complete chair version here.

General Strategies for Adding Challenge

Challenging / Heating / Energizing

General strategies for making **Surya Namaskar** more challenging are:

- Providing more challenging variations for particular poses
- Making pose transitions more challenging
- Adding a pose or poses

Challenging Variations

STANDING BACKBEND

- Replace Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute) with Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Hands) for a standing backbend.
- Or deepen backbend in Hasta Uttanasana. Either take arms by ears or place hands at low back.

JUMP / FLOAT BACK

- Jump/float from Half Lift to Chaturanga Dandasana (Four Limbed Staff Pose)
- For safe shoulder care, experts typically advise ensuring student transitions directly to **Chaturanga Dandasana** (Four Limbed Staff Pose) when jumping back as opposed to jumping back to Plank. Read more: 5 Reasons Basic Physics Says It's Never Wise to Jump Back to Plank Pose
- However, another biomechanics expert, Jenni Rawlings disagrees with the maxim, "Never jump into plank." See more here.



To be clear, I'm certainly not suggesting that all yoga teachers run out and start teaching everyone to jump into plank during every vinyasa. I'm simply questioning the reasoning behind the ubiquitous "never jump into plank" warning... Is this transition necessarily dangerous for everyone, and is jumping into chaturanga somehow innately safer? Where do these beliefs originate? I believe that questioning our biases about these transitions can help us to become more critical-thinking yoga teachers who can serve our individual students better. – **Jenni Rawlings**

Deepen Virabhadrasana I

- Deepen Warrior 1 with more of a backbending effect.

JUMP / FLOAT FORWARD

- Jump/float from Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog) to Ardha Uttanasana (Half Lift)

ADDING HANDSTANDS & HANDSTAND PREP

- From Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog), practice Handstand Hops before jumping forward to Uttanasana.
- Add jump-switches and more: Handstand Variations and Preps to Spice Up Your Sun Salutes **More**

Sequence Variations

Many have created new pose flows to integrate with and sometimes completely transform the traditional Sun Salutes. There are as many different flows as there are creative people practicing yoga!

FOR LOW BACK ISSUES

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain + Hands at Heart)
2. Inhale – Utkatasana (Chair / Fierce)
3. Exhale – Bend knees more & hinge forward until torso is parallel to ground, arms extended forward by ears and then to Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)
5. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
6. Breathe Freely – Utthita Balasana (Child's Pose with arms extended forward)
7. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog)
8. Breathe Freely – Utthita Balasana (Child's Pose with arms extended forward)
9. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
10. Inhale – Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge) second side
11. Exhale – Bend knees more & hinge forward until torso is parallel to ground, arms extended forward by ears and then to Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
12. Inhale – Utkatasana (Chair / Fierce)
13. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain + Hands at Heart)

*From Janita Stenhouse, Sun Yoga: The Book of Surya Namaskar 2001 p 37

ADDED CHALLENGE VINYASA

1. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
2. Inhale – Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana (One Leg Down Dog)
3. Exhale – Step Through & rise up into Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)
4. Inhale – Virabhadrasana II Vary (Exalted Warrior)
5. Exhale – Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle)
6. Inhale – Virabhadrasana II Vary (Exalted Warrior)
7. Exhale – Cartwheel Back to Plank or Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)

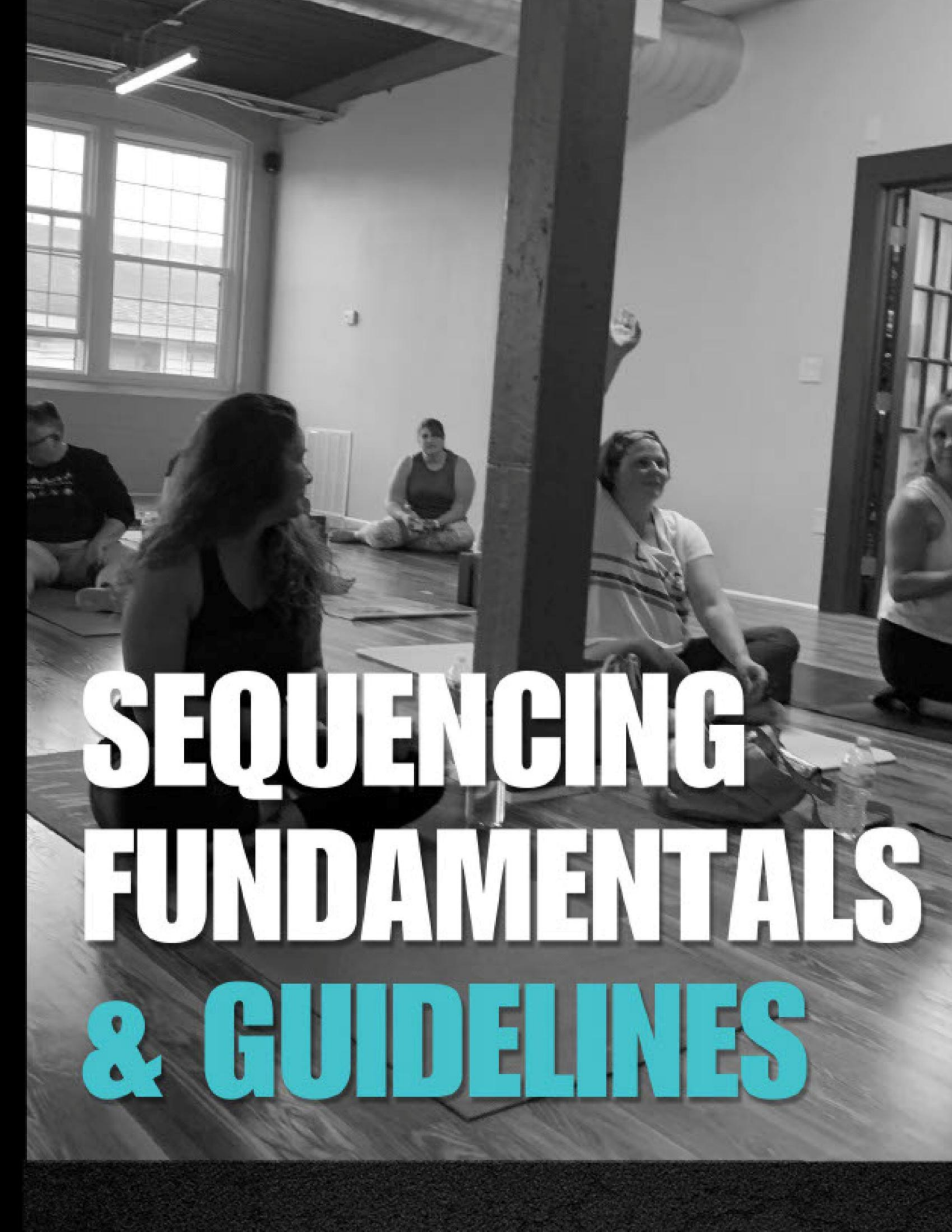
Dancing Warrior / Open-Hip Warrior Flow

1. Exhale – Pranamasana (Mountain + Hands at Heart)
2. Inhale – Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute)
3. Exhale – Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
4. Inhale – Ardha Uttanasana (Half-Way Lift)
5. Exhale – Chaturanga Dandasana
6. Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog)
7. Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
8. Inhale – Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana (One Leg Down Dog)
9. Exhale – Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana + Open Hip
10. Inhale – Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana (One Leg Down Dog)
11. Exhale – Plank Curl
12. Inhale – Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)
13. Exhale – Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)
14. Inhale – Exalted / Reverse Warrior (Exhale here)
15. Inhale – Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)
16. Exhale – Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle)
17. Inhale – Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)
18. Exhale – Plank Pose
19. Vinyasa to Downward Facing Dog
20. Repeat with opposite leg lifted

*From Leah Sugerman, DoYouYoga, 15-Minute Yoga Sequence Guaranteed to Make You Sweat

More Sequences

Andrea Rice, Yoga Journal, A Core-Awakening Sun Salutation for Lower Back Support



SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

Questions Answered Here

- 1. What is involved in sequencing yoga poses?
- 2. Name five aspects of an asana that are utilized in effective sequencing.
- 3. Describe how sequencing takes into account the relationship between poses.
- 4. What is the fundamental step in sequencing?
- 5. What questions can you ask yourself to lead you to setting a class objective?
- 6. Name five general categories of class objectives.
- 7. Describe a basic principle of sequencing related to complexity of poses.
- 8. A sequencing principle relates to moving from simple to complex poses and from gross to subtle. How can teachers guide students' attention in a way that is consistent with this sequencing principle?
- 9. How does the Desikachar lineage sequence dynamic and static poses?
- 10. What are the priorities when moving through the arc of a class?
- 11. What is a caution related to artistic sequencing?



INTRODUCTION

There are few "hard and fast" rules in yoga teaching. Different lineages have different approaches. And even within a single lineage, the response to most questions is, "That depends upon the student, situation and intention."

Still, particularly as a new yoga teacher, it's helpful to have some guidelines from which to begin. So we have gathered guiding principles culled from multiple expert sources for mindful sequencing. Here you'll find the most fundamental principles. Go deeper by selecting from the menu above.

What is Involved in Sequencing?

Sequencing takes into account the intention, the students, the individual poses and the relationship of the poses with each other. This knowledge is used to guide the safe and mindful placement of poses to meet an objective.

Individual Poses

Effective sequencing utilizes knowledge of each asana, such as:

- Its pose category (e.g. standing pose, forward bend, backbend, etc).
- The required physical actions (e.g. engaged core, lengthened hamstrings, warm shoulders, etc).
- The energetic effects (e.g. cooling or heating).
- Its complexity (e.g. simple warm-up, complex backbend, etc).
- Associated cautions.

Relationship Between Poses

Sequencing involves consideration of how one pose helps to prepare for other poses, both physically and energetically. It also takes into account the relationship between families of poses, such as standing poses, backbends, twists, and forward bends.

Judith Lasater on Sequencing

The effect of each pose can be measured, in part, by the pose that came before it and the one that comes after it. For example, if you are focusing on forward bends, then you should practice basic forward bends first and gradually move toward more challenging ones, as your body accommodates the movements necessary to bend forward... Another principle of sequencing is to practice the poses that encourage systemic effects and involve the large muscles first... Finally, an effective sequence of poses never juxtaposes an extreme movement with its opposite extreme movement. – Judith Lasater See much more: [Choosing & Arranging Poses](#)

Have a Clear Objective

Preparatory Questions

The most fundamental aspect of sequencing is setting a clear objective. Your objective will guide your choice of asana, breathing practices, thematic elements and other tools. The objective also helps in deciding against options, thereby narrowing the focus and increasing effectiveness. Questions that will help lead you to your objective include:

- Who are my students?
- What do I want them to learn?

SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

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- Who are my students?
- What do I want them to learn?
- What do I want them to be able to accomplish by the end of class?
- What do I hope they will take away after practice?

SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

Have a Clear Objective (CONTINUED)

Preparatory Questions

Some types of objectives include preparing for teaching a peak pose, repeating a pose as a way to guide students to new aspects or a deeper expression of the pose, responding to a particular condition or energetic state, or teaching an anatomy-related principle. For more thoughts on setting an objective, see *Inviting Inspiration*.

Your objective should be specific and clear. Consider also, the value in clearly communicating the learning objective to students.

Be Specific

Before you show up, make sure you know exactly what you want to teach that day. Be specific: Is it a pose? Is it a movement that happens in the body during the pose? Is it a region of the body? Is it an energetic or philosophical theme? Ask yourself: if my students could walk away learning ONE thing from my class today, what will it be? And let your sequence communicate for you. – Adrienne Kimberley

Avoid “Everything But the Kitchen Sink”

In any yoga practice one element is always dominant. If you want to make it asana, that’s fine, then breath can support it along with meditation and other things. If you want to make the breath a dominant element... then the asana and other things play a supportive role. Otherwise the practice can become an example of “everything but the kitchen sink”. You can organize your yoga practice around an idea, or meditation, or chanting, or ritual, or mudra – whatever you think will help you manifest the intention that you have for the class, as long as it’s one main thing. – Olga Kabel

INTRODUCE THE LEARNING OBJECTIVE

A teacher may hope to help their students find balance in Tree Pose... If that teacher starts class introducing foot anatomy and weight placement in balance poses, they are setting their students up for success when it is time to practice Tree Pose. Starting class with a personal anecdote or discovery, a yoga philosophy lesson, thought-provoking question, etc. are also great ways to develop and introduce a class aim. – Ling Beisecker

Categories of Class Objectives

A class objective may be set around such topics as responding to individual conditions, the natural world or larger society. Or it may be related to asana or anatomy. Another type of objective (which may be related to responding to a condition or teaching a particular asana) is encouraging an energetic or feeling state such as grounding or patience.

1. Individual Conditions

- You may wish to help seniors regain or maintain balance, help athletes bring physical balance or support new mothers in experiencing relaxation and restoration.
- Or perhaps you are volunteering and find the group has exhibited low self-esteem, so your objective becomes to inspire self-confidence.
- See also: Injuries & Conditions

2. The Natural World & Society

- You may use the season as inspiration and intend to bring balance to the active nature of summer or the more sedentary-focus of winter.
- Moon phases, eclipses, and the Wheel of the Year are additional events that can serve as inspiration for setting a class objective.
- A holiday or observance may inspire you to set an intention that supports the themes of the holiday, such as gratitude, independence, surrender or other. See also: Seasons, Moons, Holidays

3. Asana

Prepare to teach a peak pose.

- Choose a pose that would be particularly beneficial to your students.
- Identify the key actions of the peak pose (e.g. open chest and shoulders; lengthen lumbar and hamstrings).
- Create a class sequence to include simpler, preparatory asana that have the same key actions.

Focus on a category of poses.

- Consider such a focus as standing poses, backbends or twists.
- Support asana with other tools and thematic language as appropriate.
- For example, perhaps at a homeless shelter, you find that students seem to lack strength and stability, both physically and emotionally. You might choose to emphasize standing poses and balance work within a well-rounded sequence.
- Additional ways to support the intention include defining and speaking to the concept of grounding, explaining in each pose where and how to find grounding physically and mentally.
- Consider using an affirmation utilizing root chakra teachings such as “I am here, now, in my body” or “Right now, I am here and safe.”
- See also: Asana Categories, Chakras, Affirmations, Themes & Readings, Themed Sequences & Class Planning

Repeat poses.

- Another consideration is repeating some poses more than once, focusing on such aspects as grounding and engaging legs in one round and spinal lengthening or arm placement in another.
- Or repeat poses with the specific intention of allowing students more time, heat, and/or awareness to feel a deepening in the posture with each successive repetition.
- Another angle on this tactic is to specifically show how, say, releasing tension in the feet with a ball impacts the depth of a forward bend.
- Our Asana Digests provide dozens of cues and inspiring quotes to support you in devising specific and varying intentions for aligning and



SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

3. Asana (CONTINUED)

4. Anatomy

- Examples include teaching all movements of the spine, stretching all around the hip joint, focusing on lengthening hip flexors to support backbending, or other.
- See also: Anatomy & Physiology

5. Energetic or Feeling State

- You may wish to set an intention related to grounding, centering or energizing for instance.
- See also: Themed Sequences & Class Planning

More Inspiration

You may also wish to use the Sequence Finder to review intentions associated with our expert-derived sequences.

Move from Simple to Complex

Fundamentals

- The crux of this principle is to begin with the simplest poses first, moving from easy to difficult and simple to complex.
- If the class will include a complex, “peak” pose, the earlier, simpler poses are chosen specifically to prepare for it.
- The most difficult or complex pose(s) occur at the “peak” of class and then students are returned to a balanced state.

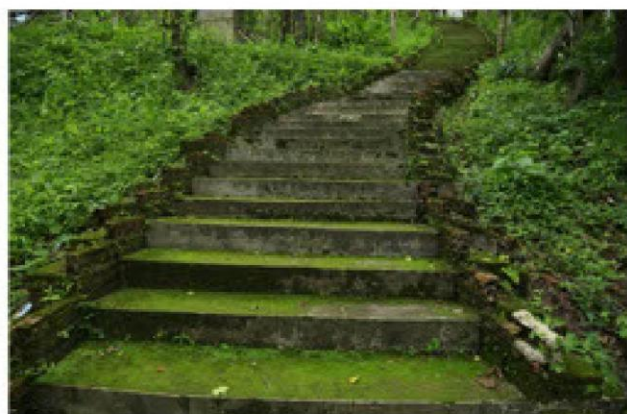
More Subtle Considerations

- It is recommended that teachers guide students’ attention to gross movements and external effects prior to moving to the more subtle and internal ones.
- Similarly, teachers may wish to limit their verbal instruction and in-depth alignment teachings at the beginning of class.



Dynamic Movement before Static Holds

- The Desikachar lineage advocates moving in and out of a pose with the breath before holding the pose. Such dynamic movement allows the body to open more gently and gives the student more time to assimilate the movement. In addition, it sets the tone of working intimately with the breath so that even when a pose is held, the student is prepared to make subtle movements with the breath.



Build Mindfully & Gradually

- This key principle of sequencing states that in moving through the arc of class, from simple to complex and back down again, the steps you take are safe, mindful and gradual.
- In this 2-minute video, Eddie Modestini speaks to the importance of building mindfully and gradually.

Build Gradually

It's a rare human body that is so resilient that all the asanas come easily and safely, even if appropriately warmed. Take Wheel Pose as an example. Yes, there's a small fraction of intermediate level students who can easily and safely explore it after some simple warming. But open the hip flexors and thighs, create space and ease along the spine by warming and stretching the spinal erectors, multifidi, and abdominals, and do a variety of shoulder openers... and I assure you all yoga students will find this asana more accessible, intelligible, and sustainable, and the integrating sequence that follows will take it all a lot deeper. I want teachers to make the practice more accessible to all, to always assume they don't precisely know the conditions of their students, and to make it altogether less likely that they'll be featured in William J. Broad's next New York Times installment on how yoga can wreck your body. – Mark Stephens

SEQUENCING FUNDAMENTALS & GUIDELINES

Be Cautious

Sequencing is one of the fundamental ways that teachers serve their students, and keep them safe. Teachers are advised to be cautious that creativity does not ever overshadow purpose and intelligence in sequencing.



Logic & Purpose

Does this sequence of postures unfold harmoniously and smoothly? How does each pose affect the posture that came before it AND the one that follows it? Am I being creative for creativity's sake or can I back up every posture in this sequence with logic and purpose? – Gina Caputo

Understand the Rules Before Making Changes

Nowadays, most 200-hour teacher trainings give aspiring asana teachers a class outline of some sort, providing a basic sense of when to do what. In general, it's a good idea to follow those rules—and to really understand them—before you decide to change it up and do something different. In other words, don't do anything randomly, and don't sacrifice safe sequencing for creative choreography. Basically, if you're going to deviate from the sequencing guidelines you've been taught, have a legitimate, anatomically sound reason for doing so. Don't set aside the safety and integrity of your class for the sake of throwing in something neat you saw on YouTube. – Kathryn Heagberg

Safety Over Artistry

Leslie Kaminoff brings up an excellent point in his video: yoga sequencing is not the same as choreography. In choreography, the goal is artistic expression and choices are dictated by elegance and aesthetic appeal. Of course, it's nice when a yoga class flows gracefully, but that is not the main goal. We do not practice yoga to look pretty while we are at it, but to get some benefit, whether it's physical, physiological or psycho-emotional. The way we arrange poses and other elements in a yoga practice is determined by what we want to accomplish and how we can get there effectively with minimum risk to the body. – Olga Kabel