



Baseball Curriculum: Progression of Skills for Players

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide coaches, parents, and players with an idea as to what players should be able to do AFTER playing at a particular level and BEFORE entering the next. The items listed are just an approximation and are not to be taken as a definitive list to determine promotion to the next level. Coaches and parents should use this as a general guide to help organize their leagues and practices more efficiently and to help evaluate the progress of their children / players over time.

Tee Ball (Ages 5-6)

<p>General</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect the game – wear their uniform & hat correctly, run on and off the field, etc. - Do not complain about the calls of umpires. - When on a field, keep your eyes on where the ball is. Many injuries occur when kids are hit by the ball when they are not watching - Make sure the ball on the tee is positioned slightly IN FRONT of a home plate for proper contact location - Move the ball around (high, low, inside, outside) each inning. This helps the hitters and also usually gets more fielders involved in the game as well.
<p>Catching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use two hands whenever possible - “High five” the ball when the ball is caught above the waist, “low five” the ball below your waist
<p>Throwing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper grip – try for three fingers on top of the ball and the thumb under the ball as much as possible. Obviously this depends on the size of the hand. As the player gets older, he should strive for two fingers up top and the thumb underneath the ball. - Turn front side towards the target before throwing - Throw with the elbow <u>above</u> the shoulder - Step with the proper foot towards the target before throwing (Right-handers w/left foot; Left-handers w/right foot)

	<p>Develops a comfortable change-up grip and begins to develop a usable change-up</p> <p>Shoots for at least 60% strikes.</p>
Hitting	<p>Continue to develop a better idea of the strike zone</p> <p>Improve their ability to load up prior to the pitch</p> <p>Becomes more efficient in their hitting mechanics</p> <p>Improves bat speed and controlled aggressiveness at the plate</p> <p>Makes more consistent, good contact on the barrel</p> <p>Begins to work on bat control and using all fields</p>
Bunting	<p>Develops consistency in all bunting mechanics (sac & base-hit)</p> <p>Begins to look for opportunities to bunt</p> <p>Begins to identify situations that would call for a bunt and situations that would not (outs, score, inning, etc)</p>
Infield	<p>Begins to understand the concept of reading hops and manage their charging of ground balls accordingly</p> <p>More consistency on fielding mechanics</p> <p>Begins to develop the ability to move through the ball when fielding and throwing</p> <p>More consistency on throwing accuracy</p> <p>Fear of batted balls should be over</p> <p>Begins to read batter's swings</p> <p>Improves their footwork/glovework around the bag on force / tag plays</p>
Outfield	<p>Improve ability to catch the ball on the run</p> <p>Improve jumps and angles on fly-balls and line-drives</p> <p>Continues to quicken their ability to get the ball back to the infield</p> <p>Improves accuracy to all cut-off men</p> <p>Throws in an over-the-top motion</p> <p>More consistent in backing up infield plays/throws</p>
Base-running	<p>Improved running angles, lines, and loops around the bases</p> <p>Improves aggressiveness</p> <p>Begins to show an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses on the basepaths</p> <p>When allowed to steal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learns and uses the mechanics of taking leads - Understands the difference between a primary and secondary leads - Interprets signs given from coaches

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begins to study pitchers for patterns, timing, tendencies, etc for getting better jumps. <p>Can perform multiple types of slides</p>
Other	<p>Begins to “think the game” a bit more in terms of strategy, anticipating plays, etc. Works on his own to improve strengths and weaknesses</p>

7th /8th / 9th Grade (In addition to the above)

General	<p>Players continue to focus on their better positions but should still be open to playing other positions As the level of competition increases, the player works more and more on his own, even in the off-season Continues to develop and improve the mental side of the game which enables them to properly handle the natural ups and downs of performance in a mature way.</p>
Catching/Throwing	<p>Continue making their catching-to-throwing motion more efficient using better, quicker footwork and glove work. More consistent with the cross-seam/4seam grip Continue to develop multiple throwing angles and use them in different situations Become more consistent in finding a cross-seam (4seam) grip in all transitions</p>
Catchers	<p>Use proper form consistently (signals, stances, glove-hand positioning) Continue to improve on the blocking basics Improves fundamentals and times of throwing to bases on steal attempts (footwork, transition, and throws) Perform the home plate pop-up play more consistently Become more efficient in their bunt fielding and throwing mechanics by improving footwork / glovework Consistently frames pitches correctly when able to Begins to cut down body/glove movement when receiving Becomes more vocal and begins to show leadership on the field</p>
Pitching	<p>Use both the 4-seam grip and two-seam grip Use the 2 finger grip Mastered the mechanics of the stretch and wind-up motions. More consistent with the basic fielding responsibilities of a pitcher Improves ability to keep runners close</p>

	<p>Learns and begins to use multiple pick-off moves Throw primarily fastballs and change-ups. Begins to learn the basic grip for a basic off-speed pitch but throws it sparingly Shoots for 60% strikes for fastball and change-up Becoming accustom to running as part of their pitching/recovery responsibilities</p>
Hitting	<p>Walks to strikeout ratio should be even or higher on the walk side Good, efficient mechanics are performed consistently Improved bat speed and controlled aggressiveness at the plate Contact is usually made on the barrel Improved bat control and the using of all fields Begins to study pitchers for pitching patterns and tendencies Begins to develop a game plan prior to the at-bat (what they are looking for, what they want to accomplish, etc.)</p>
Bunting	<p>Consistency in all bunting mechanics (sac & base-hit) Works on bunting in practice and on their own Better consistency in sac & base-hit bunt placements. Shows better judgment in deciding when to bunt</p>
Infield	<p>Reads hops and manages their approach to ground balls more correctly Consistently uses good fielding mechanics More consistently moves through the ball when fielding and throwing Throwing accuracy is pretty consistent, even from longer distances Reads batter's swings better and anticipate where balls will be hit Looks at all catcher's signs and begins to use that information Good, faster footwork/glovework around the bag on force / tag plays Begins to learn the unique responsibilities of their positions (bunt plays, double-relays, 1st & 3rd plays, etc)</p>
Outfield	<p>Catches the ball on the run with more ease and grace Able to catch fly-balls and line-drives not hit directly at them Gets to the ball and gets rid of it more quickly using consistent footwork and body positioning Routinely hits all cut-off men Throws in an over-the-top motion with additional carry on the ball (can throw to the base and not just the cut-off man) Backs up infield plays/throws as needed Begins to recognize that there are times to dive and times to play the ball safely in front</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue moving towards the target after letting go of the ball - Aim for the center of the chest with every throw
Hitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic "athletic position" stance - feet a little wider than shoulders - slight bend in knees - Proper hand position on the bat, elbows down, shoulders level - Proper feet positioning away from home plate - Short step/stride towards the pitcher - Turn hips and back foot when swinging - Swing straight to the ball with eyes looking at the ball - Swing and lay the bat down in front of the tee after hitting - Swing aggressively but under control
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All fielders take one step towards the batter before the swing with both hands out in front - Outfielders look like a tennis player waiting for a serve - Infielders have their glove near the ground with their bare hand ABOVE the glove – palms facing - Move towards a hit ball - Square up feet and shoulders to get in front of the ball - Work on forming a big triangle with the feet and glove when fielding. - Begin to understand the concept of and difference between a "force out" and a "tag play" - Tag runners with two hands when possible
Base-running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand how to run the bases in sequence - Understand the need and legality of running through first base - Understand the rules of when to run (ball hit on the ground) and when to not run (ball caught in the air). - Begin to understand when and how to slide (feet first, one foot out front, land on butt, hands off the ground)
Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasize attending all practices - Organize practices to the minute. Stations work best. Number of stations depend on how much adult help you have. - Attempt to have players throw, hit, run, and catch each practice - Pass on the importance of taking care of the field and equipment - Teach and MODEL great sportsmanship at all times. Point out examples of good and bad sportsmanship. - Never criticize umpires, other coaches, other players, parents, etc in front of your players

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach and show kids how to handle adversity in a positive way and how to “move on.” - Be enthusiastic and positive! - Be PROCESS oriented and not RESULTS driven. Ignore the scoreboard and standings.
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Coach / Machine Pitch - Ages 6-8 (In addition to the above)

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve sportsmanship and the ability to positively handle adversity
Catching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve their ability to catch the ball while moving (football pass drill is great for this)
Throwing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve proper grip as hand size increases - Begin to feel for the seams when gripping a caught ball - Create bigger circles with the arm during throwing motion to increase velocity and distance
Hitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin to understand and demonstrate the importance of “going back before swinging” (“lean”, “load up”, “turn in”) - Improve ability to hit live pitching (underhand, overhand, and/or machine) - Track the ball with eyes/face to the bat (turn the head) - Begin to recognize where the pitch is going before deciding to swing - Differentiate between balls and strikes
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin to understand the concept of thinking ahead – knowing where to be and what to do before the ball is hit. - Understand that every player has a place to go on every play (to a base, backing up throws, etc) - Begin to understand the unique responsibilities of different positions - Continue improving on anticipating where the play will develop and where they need to be.
Base-running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin to emphasize proper lines, angles, and loops when running the bases - Touching the inside corner of each base when rounding - Touch the front part of 1st base when running through the bag - Improve safe sliding techniques
Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involve soft-toss and short-toss whenever possible in practice - Continue to use batting tees in practice - Start teaching the basics of pitching to all players towards the end of the season

Kid-Pitch - Ages 8-9 (In addition to the above)

General	Every player on each team learns and attempts to pitch
Catching	<p>All players: Improve their ability to catch the ball while moving</p> <p>Catchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn and perform the basic signal & receiving stances - Know and perform the basic bare hand and glove positioning while receiving - Begin to work on basic blocking skills (stay square, glove down first, then knees, chin / eyes down, etc) - Learn the proper way to wear catching equipment - Shows less fear of getting hit with a thrown pitch / foul ball
Throwing	Throwing accuracy and strength improves
Pitching	<p>Use the basic 4-seam grip</p> <p>Continue the shift from a 3 to 2 finger grip based on hand size</p> <p>Know the basic foot position on the rubber/mound.</p> <p>Basic mechanics of throwing from the stretch position.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasize the stretch position because it involves less steps, not because of runners <p>Basic fielding responsibilities of a pitcher</p> <p>Throw only fastballs</p> <p>Shoot for at least 50% strikes.</p>
Hitting	<p>Develop a better idea of the strike zone</p> <p>Improve their ability to load up prior to the pitch</p> <p>Make more consistent contact</p>
Bunting	<p>Differentiate between a sacrifice and base-hit bunt</p> <p>Understand why a batter would be asked to sacrifice bunt</p> <p>Begin to demonstrate the basic mechanics of sacrifice bunting</p> <p>Improve their ability to sac-bunt to both sides of the field (1st base side and 3rd base side)</p>
Outfield	<p>Improve ability to catch the ball on the run</p> <p>Quicken their ability to get the ball back to the infield</p> <p>Understand and demonstrate the need for "big circle" arm motion on throws</p> <p>More consistently throw right over the top</p> <p>Begin to recognize the need for outfielders to back up infield plays/throws</p>
Infield	Better understand the unique responsibilities for each position

	<p>More consistency on throwing accuracy Fear of getting hurt by batted balls should be diminishing Quickening their ability to catch and get rid of the ball</p>
Base-running	<p>Improved running angles, lines, and loops around the bases Improved aggressiveness</p>

Kid-Pitch - Ages 9-12 (In addition to the above)

General	<p>Players usually begin to focus on their better positions but should still be open to playing other positions</p>
Catching	<p>Should begin to make their catching-to-throwing motion more efficient using better, quicker footwork and glove work.</p> <p>Catchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use proper form consistently (signals, stances, glove-hand positioning) - Continue to improve on the blocking basics - Begin to learn and develop the proper fundamentals of throwing to bases on steal attempts (footwork, transition, and throws) - Learn why catchers turn their back to the infield on home plate pop-ups and begin to perform it correctly - Perform the basics of fielding bunts and throwing to bases - Begins to "frame" pitches correctly - Shows no signs of being afraid of thrown or foul tipped balls
Throwing	<p>Consistent proper grip on all throws Continue to develop multiple throwing angles and use them in different situations Become more consistent in finding a cross-seam (4seam) grip in all transitions</p>
Pitching	<p>Use the basic 4-seam grip and start to experiment with a two-seam grip Continue the shift from a 3 to 2 finger grip based on hand size Know the basic foot position on the rubber/mound. Mastered the mechanics of throwing from the stretch position. Begins the development of a wind-up motion. More consistent with the basic fielding responsibilities of a pitcher Learns the pitcher's role in keeping runners close Learns a basic pick-off move for each base Throw primarily fastballs</p>

	Begins to recognize strategy in positioning (score, inning, outs, runners, etc)
Base-running	<p>Baserunning angles, lines, and loops around the bases are consistent with proper running mechanics</p> <p>Begins to show initiative in taking the next base when able to</p> <p>Shows better judgment on the basepaths</p> <p>Takes appropriate length of leads</p> <p>Rarely misses signs from coaches</p> <p>Improves their study of pitchers for patterns, timing, tendencies, etc for getting better jumps.</p> <p>Acts on pitcher's tendencies (early jumps, etc)</p> <p>Can perform multiple types of slides in game situations</p>
Other	<p>Continues to "think the game" a bit more in terms of strategy, anticipating plays, etc.</p> <p>Away from practice - Varies drills to fine tune areas of weaknesses and/or current needs</p>

School JV / Junior Legion (In addition to the above)

General	<p>At this point, a player should be ready to make the jump into the varsity level and contribute. Just because a player has been on JV and maybe had some success, doesn't mean the jump to varsity is automatic. A coach needs to see a role for a player or at least the future potential for a role.</p> <p>To make the jump to varsity, a player should be a good all-round player who has shown the work ethic and mental make-up to handle varsity baseball.</p> <p>A player at this level should be maximizing their strengths to fill a needed role on a team. (Ex. If a player's strength is running, he should be putting a lot of attention into the craft of base-running especially stealing)</p> <p>If a player wishes to play beyond high school, he should begin to develop a passion for their development in all facets of the game. Self-practice (away from school and during the off-season) should be routine.</p>
Catching/Throwing	<p>Routine catches / throws are made most of the time.</p> <p>Ability to quickly catch and throw the ball with strength and accuracy needs to be at or above the pace with the varsity speed of play</p> <p>Continues to fine-tune arm angles of throws depending on position and situation</p> <p>Is becoming more successful at diving for thrown and batted balls</p> <p>Arm strength is a point where the player can keep pace with the varsity game.</p>
Catchers	Consistent use of proper form in giving signals, using various stances, and glove-hand positioning

	<p>Is able to block most routine pitches in the dirt Footwork, transitions, and throws are proficient enough to reach every bag with accuracy Consistently handles home plate pop-up plays Makes routine bunt plays with proper footwork / glove work Receives well with a "quiet" body and soft hands Is a very vocal player and shows consistent leadership on the field Shows initiative in dealing with pitchers during games and practices</p>
Pitching	<p>Should have enough high school velocity to overcome occasional mistakes in location Should have fairly good command with the fastball. (60% strikes) 1st pitch strikes should be approaching or above 60% Should be starting to develop a third pitch (curve, slider, cutter, etc) Able to use more than one pick-off move Should be fine tuning their fielding duties (batted balls, bunts, covering 1st, backing up bases, etc) Is more consistent with poise and handling adversity in a positive manner. Begins to show an "air of confidence" in his presence on the field/mound Begins to recognize their own needs with regards to a running program on and off the field. Shows a better ability to make good pitches in tough situations Becoming more aware of their strengths and begins to pitches to those strengths (Ex. If he doesn't throw hard, he doesn't try to) Develops more confidence in throwing inside for strikes and "effect" Begins to show a passion for and a desire to pitch, particularly in bigger games or situations.</p>
Hitting	<p>Hits the ball hard on the good part of the bat more than half the time. Is becoming a "tougher out" especially with 2 strikes Able to hit pitches on both sides of the plate Handles below average to average pitching well Bat speed is consistent with varsity level Mechanics and balance from start to finish are more consistent Recognizing off-speed pitches earlier Can make adjustments from one game to the next Learning more situational hitting and showing some success (moving runners over, hit & run, etc) More walks than strikeouts Learns and begins to understand the unique roles of each position in the batting order</p>
Bunting	<p>More consistent in getting sac bunts down with sound mechanics Can base-hit bunt to 1st and/or 3rd when directed with some success Has learned the timing and mechanics of squeeze-bunting and has some success</p>

<p>Infield</p>	<p>Begins to narrow down a position best suited for their abilities More consistent in making the routine plays Has shown signs of leadership on the infield (announcing outs, etc) Reads swings well and begins to act on the information Showing better maturity in not allowing mistakes in batting to carry over to defense Showing better instincts and awareness of the situation Range is improving with better footwork and anticipation Consistently moves through ground balls Arm strength and accuracy is consistent with their position Knows where to be in most situations</p>
<p>Outfield</p>	<p>Routinely catches the ball on the run with ease Covers basic range of their OF territory Takes correct angles and lines to the ball the majority of the time Footwork and body positioning are sound mechanically Hits the cut-off men with decent carry on the ball Shows a basic knowledge of where to be in most situations Actions indicate a basic knowledge of game strategy Shows all basic communication skills needed for their position</p>
<p>Base-running</p>	<p>Baserunning angles, lines, and loops around the bases are becoming more advanced and consistent Shows more initiative in taking the next base when able to Uses good judgment on the basepaths the majority of the time Shows signs of before-the-pitch information gathering (Ex. checking where the outfielders/infielders are playing) Shows more confidence to go beyond basic leads Does not miss signs from coaches Can recognize basic pitching patterns, timing, tendencies, etc for getting better jumps. Shows a basic understanding of their abilities as base-runners</p>

School Varsity / American Legion (In addition to the above)

<p>General</p>	<p>If a player wishes to play beyond high school, the player should be above average (top 50% of high school players) in every category and be very good (Top 5%) in at least one of the categories. Division I candidates tend to be very good (Top 5%) in every area they are included in.</p>
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	<p>Should have a strong passion for the game, especially practice</p> <p>Strong self-discipline</p> <p>Good overall fitness, health, strength, and body type to handle the rigors of post-high school baseball</p> <p>Should have an accurate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in every area of the game.</p> <p>Improve their understanding of the importance to the mental side of the game and have specific techniques that they can rely on to help themselves in this area.</p> <p>Willing to practice and develop their game on their own time.</p>
Catching/Throwing	<p>In general, all routine catches / throws are made.</p> <p>Very good ability to quickly catch and throw the ball with strength and accuracy</p> <p>Routinely varies arm angle of throws depending on position and situation</p> <p>Is able to properly time dives to catch batted and thrown balls</p> <p>Has the arm strength and accuracy to make the longest throws needed for their position. (Ex. A shortstop needs to make a throw to 1st deep in the hole and make a throw from the outfield relay spot to home plate)</p>
Pitching	<p>Should have enough velocity to overcome occasional mistakes in location</p> <p>Should have very good command with the fastball and at least one other pitch. (very good command could be defined as over 60% strikes in total). If player is wild, he'd better throw very hard to have a chance to play beyond high school</p> <p>1st pitch strikes should be approaching or above 70%</p> <p>Shows a "pitch to contact" mentality</p> <p>Should be able to mix times to home and keep runners close with multiple pick-off moves</p> <p>Should be able to field his position well (batted balls, bunts, covering 1st, backing up bases, etc)</p> <p>Shows good poise and handles adversity in a positive manner.</p> <p>Has an "air of confidence" in his presence on the field/mound</p> <p>Command is consistent even in tough situations during a game</p> <p>Pitches to his strengths (Ex. If he doesn't throw hard, he doesn't try to)</p> <p>Willing to throw inside for strikes and "effect"</p> <p>Wants to be on the mound with the game on the line</p> <p>Uses a well-timed, efficient, and thorough bullpen routine best suited for them prior to starts/appearances</p> <p>Uses a personalized, between-starts/appearances routine for running, lifting, and throwing.</p>
Hitting	<p>Consistently hits the ball hard on the good part of the bat. A "tough out"</p> <p>Rarely strikes out</p> <p>Good bat control and uses all fields</p>

	<p>Has better at-bats in pressure situations Has enough bat speed to handle hard throwers Sound mechanics and balance from start to finish Rarely swings at bad pitches Can make adjustments from one at-bat to the next Good situational hitter (can move runners over, hit & run, etc) Willing to take a walk Wants to be batting with the game on the line</p>
Bunting	<p>Can sac bunt to 1st or 3rd on command with sound mechanics Can base-hit bunt to 1st and 3rd and can initiate them himself Properly performs squeeze-bunts with appropriate timing and mechanics</p>
Infield	<p>Makes the routine play for his position. If the play should be made, he makes it. Occasionally will make outstanding defensive plays Shows leadership in the infield (loudly announces outs, situations, encouragement, etc when needed) Good at reading swings and anticipating where the ball will be hit Does not let his offense effect his defense and vice versa Good sense of awareness (how fast runners are, score, inning, reading cues, etc) Handles errors (his and others) with poise and maturity Good quickness and lateral movement on contact Wants the ball hit to him, especially with the game on the line Overall footwork, approach to balls, and bag-play are very good mechanically Occasionally shows improvisation beyond basic fundamentals</p>
Outfield	<p>Enough arm strength to properly hit cut-off men and bases as needed Good jumps and lateral movement at contact Takes good lines/angles to batted balls Communicates well with fellow outfielders and takes charge on balls hit into his area Catches all fly balls Wants the ball hit to him Good awareness of sun, wind, field conditions, etc and rarely allows them to impact his performance Takes initiative in positioning based on awareness of situations and tendencies.</p>
Base-running	<p>Is a very aggressive runner with a good working knowledge of their own physical limitations. Runs with very good form using maximum efficiency (angles, loops, etc) Runs with their head up, eyes on the ball without losing speed Sees plays develop and uses base coaches only when absolutely necessary.</p>

Uses good judgment on past balls/wild pitches and anticipates them when on base.
Uses proper footwork and timing on primary leads, secondary leads, jumps, delayed steals, hit-and-runs, etc.
Watches pre-game INF/OF to assess opponents strengths and weaknesses and uses that information while on the basepaths.
Uses good judgment on reading the ball off the bat.
Studies pitchers for tendencies and uses that information when able to

