

Hitting

“Baseball is the only field of endeavor where a man can succeed three times out of ten and be considered a good performer.” - *Ted Williams*

“Hitting a big league pitching is the most difficult thing to do in sports. - Ted Williams

Introduction

Hitting a baseball IS hard... and requires patience not only from the hitter but from their coach and parents. Remember that baseball is played with a small, hard round ball, pitched at speed and the hitter attempts to hit the round ball “square” with a round bat.

This guide has been assembled to provide coaches some key points to focus on and to provide a solid foundation for players to begin hitting to and develop older / more experienced players. This guide is not intended to be a fully comprehensive guide, much has been written about the art of hitting and there are many publications that go in depth into the subject. Coaches wishing to go into more depth can certainly find a wealth of books / articles on the subject.

Seeing the ball.

First and most importantly, You Can't Hit It ... If You Can't See It.

When beginning to coach young players one thing that is overlooked is teaching them to see a pitched (or thrown) ball. Considering it is quite difficult to hit a ball when you can clearly see it approaching, it is all but impossible to hit a pitched ball if you can't see it, or see it too late. This applies regardless of whether the hitter is playing little league baseball or a major league player.

Seeing the baseball, pitch recognition, and timing are the most important skills hitters need to develop. Hitting must therefore be taught starting with the head position and eyes.

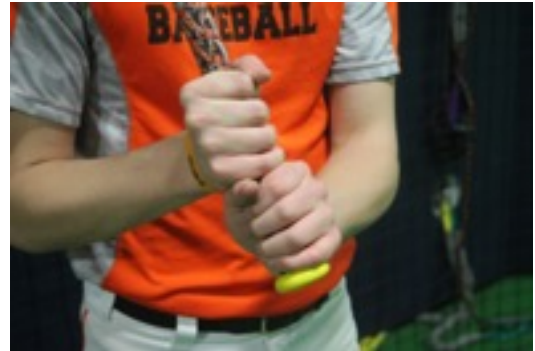
- Hitters should position themselves so they are pointing their face towards the mound and are looking at home plate with both eyes.
- Young hitters often make the mistake of looking out of only one eye, or out the corner of their eyes. Sometimes they tend to cock their head so that one eye is closer to the pitcher than the other. These positions (and stances) alters the depth perception.
- Both eye should be on a parallel plane if the ball is to be seen (and hit) correctly
- Tucking the chin behind the shoulder also limits a hitter's vision.
- Players should keep their head down and eyes on the the ball. If the head moves the body follows, and the swing suffers.



Gripping the bat

To avoid players developing bad habits early in their Little League careers and to promote successful hitting, coaches should show players the correct way to hold their bat and pay close attention on a continuous basis as to how players hold their bat.

- Begin by placing the bat handle at the base of the fingers of both hands.
- Grip the bat with the fingers rather than holding it in the palm, holding it in the palm deprives you of wrist action, flexibility and speed.
- Align the middle knuckles of your top hand with the middle and lower knuckles of your bottom hand
- Hands should touch so they can work as a unit.
- The bottom hand should hold more firmly than the top hand. The bottom hand pulls the bat through the hitting zone.
- Hold the bat firmly but don't squeeze it. Tension slows down the wrists and hands. The grip will automatically tighten as you swing.

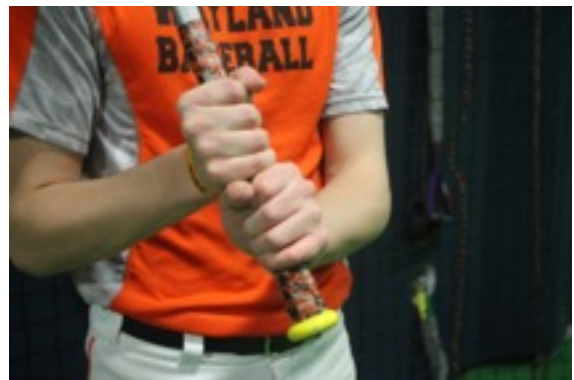


Choking up on the bat

If you have spent any time around youth baseball (or softball) you will have certainly heard a coach tell players to “choke up” on the bat.

Choking up the bat handle in essence makes the bat shorter, which increases the hitter's bat speed and ability to get the bat through the hitting zone and make contact.

- For younger players who may not have yet developed the strength to fully control (a comparatively heavy) bat, choking up on the bat can help.
- Choking up on the bat means the batter will slide their hands above the knob of the bat and inch or two.
- Choking up gives players better control of the bat (especially if they lack the strength at a younger age).
- Some power and plate coverage can be sacrificed, but the advantages outweigh this at a younger age.
- Be careful the batter is not over choking, that is the hands too far up the bat handle, because it will handcuff the hitter making his swing awkward and robot like, essentially taking all bat control away from the hitter.



Correct bat position.

In addition to the importance of gripping the bat correctly, how and where the bat is held (the position of the bat) is extremely important too. Coaches should note and correct the starting bat position for each player on an ongoing and consistent basis. Each player will differ but as a general rule the following points can be followed.



- The player should hold the bat out in front of themselves. Let comfort dictate the players choice but as a general rule of thumb it should be no less than 5 inches and no more than 7 inches from the players torso. The rear arm should remain in the same plane at the rear shoulder. Player should not point their rear elbow up in the air as this will cause the bat to drop as they swing. Elbows should be bent at a position comfortable to the player.

- Holding the hands near the body keeps you on the inside of the ball. If the bat is held out farther than that the swing has too large an arc, the hitter loses leverage and may find it difficult to coordinate their hips and arms into the correct swing.

- Holding the bat too close can restrict the batter's movement and lose bat speed. The swing will have a large loop and requires a long push to get the bat into the hitting zone. In many cases by the time the bat gets into the hitting zone the ball is already in the catchers glove!

- Holding the bat too close can have the effect of upper-cutting the ball which tends to result in fly balls.
- The bat should be held up in an almost vertical position (have the players imagine there is a cup of water on the top of the barrel that cannot be split) not parallel to the ground or hanging behind the players back.

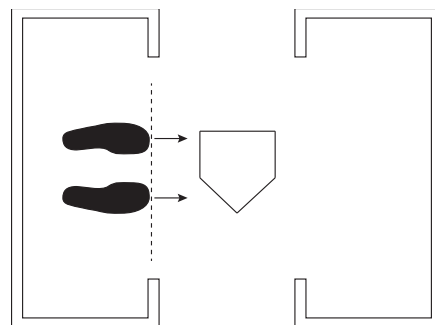
Batting Stance

If you watch baseball players at any level you will see that there are many different styles of batting stances and styles. For sure there isn't one single batting stance that suits all players. Players will learn to bat following an established set of rules that will promote successful hitting which are then adapted over time to suit each individual's style and preference.

For children beginning to play baseball finding a stance that promotes successful hitting is critical. For first time players this guide can be used to get players into a batting stance that works and promotes success. For older players who have been playing for some time, their stance can be tweaked to ensue continuing success at the plate.

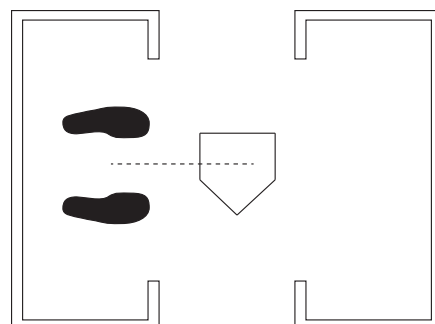
1. Have the player adopt an **even (or parallel) stance**.

Both feet are lined up parallel to each other and feet are square to the plate with the players weight off heels. Feet are spread so they are roughly six to eight inches wider than the shoulders. The player should be evenly balanced with hips and shoulders level. *(When they are balanced they should not be able to be pushed over with a slight push from the coach. Have fun with this. Kids really enjoy trying this.)*



2. **Measure-Up to Home Plate.** There are many theories about where to stand in the batters box.

To make it easy for younger players, keeping it simple is the best option. Have the player position their belly button with the middle of home plate and they should be good to go.



Note:

Younger players will often find it hard to gauge the correct distance from the plate. Often they will be too close or too far from the plate.

An easy method for young players to gauge their distance from the plate is to place the end of the bat on near side (corner) of the plate, (see image) then touch their front knee with the knob of the bat. This will ensure they get good coverage of the plate when they swing.



This can be a good reminder also for the player to ensure that their feet are square to each other and the plate

3. **Knob 2 Knee** A good pointer for the hitter to check their bat position quickly is that the knob of the bat is pointing at the catcher's knee. This will provide an instant reminder to have their bat up and not hanging behind their back.

4. **TV-Up Face:** Two Level Eyes on Pitcher. Players should keep their head eyes and body steady and level.

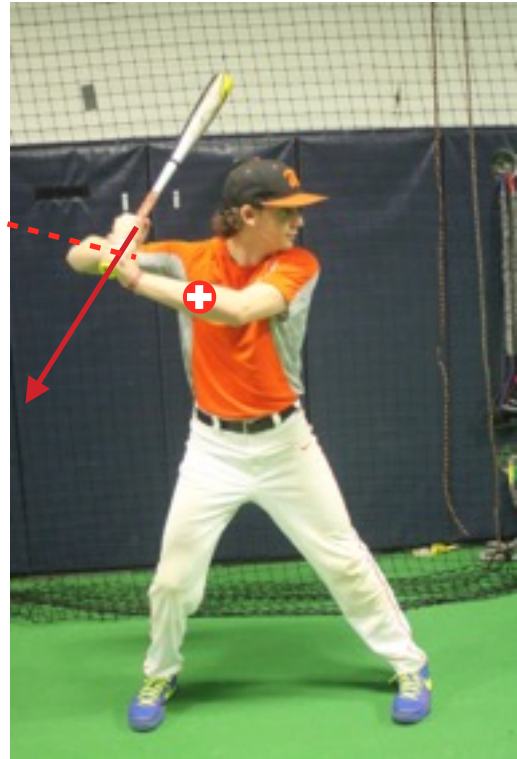
5. **Piano Fingers:** Loose Grip/Forearms. Batters tend to tense up and grip the bat too hard. Remind players to hold the bat firmly but don't squeeze it. Tension slows down the wrists and hands. The grip will automatically tighten as you swing.

6. **Dance in the Stance:** Hitters needs rhythm and should be loose (not a statue) perhaps a little swagger, ready for pitch and be ready to swing. Be ahead of the pitcher (expecting the pitch and prepared to react to it) rather than reacting to late and trying to catch up (as result being late with the swing and giving up a strike)

7. **Breathe!** As well being loose and ready the pitcher should be relaxed, steady breathing will help the hitter focus and see the ball. Slow steady breathing is the best - when players hold their breath it affects their vision and muscle control.

8. **Yes, Yes, Yes...** (or expect a the pitcher to throw a strike). The hitter's approach should be that they are expecting the pitcher will be throwing strikes. As a reminder to themselves If the player says "yes yes yes" to themselves they are looking for the strike. (as soon as a pitch that is not a strike they can easily say no and leave off the pitch). Many players are looking (hoping) for the pitcher to throw balls.... The mentality should be "yes yes yes" as it is easier to say no and not swing at the pitch rather than expect a ball and try to react when it is in fact a strike.

9. The most important part of the batting stance is to make sure the player is comfortable and has a clear view of the pitcher and the ball. It will take time for players to learn the correct stance and a lot more time, trial and error to find what works for them.



Players should be encourage to try playing around with different techniques until they feel the most comfortable in their batting stance.

Note: Coaches should not being advising players to **point their elbow up in the air** as this will cause the bat to drop as they swing.

Elbows should be bent at a position comfortable to the player.

TWO PARTS OF THE SWING:

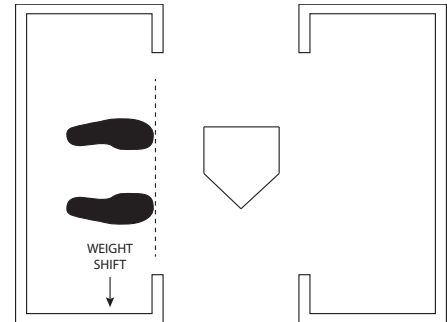
PREPARING TO SWING - Trigger, Shift, Negative Move

All good (successful) hitters have a back (negative move), then forward motion prior to the swing, whether they swing at the pitch or take the pitch. This is the mental and physical trigger for the player to be prepared for the pitch.

The trigger is the cue to the hitter to be ready for the pitch and be prepared to swing.

The hitter will shift is their weight slightly onto their rear foot as the pitcher winds up to deliver the pitch,

The hands will also move slightly to the rear (negative move).



Ask the players to imagine trying to fire a bow and arrow without pulling back on the bow before firing if you don't load the bow it is impossible to fire the arrow - its the same principle with the bat.

Hands loaded back.

Hands move backward ready to

Weight transfer

Slight shift back of the weight on

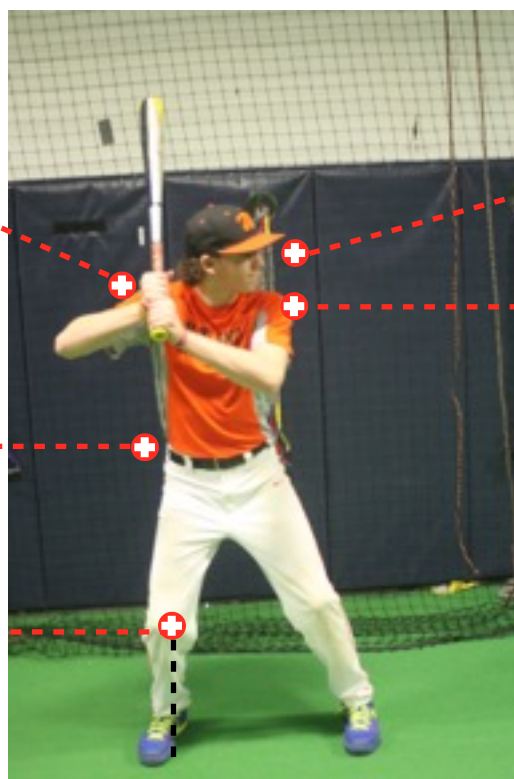
Back knee inside of foot

K2K still in place

Front shoulder slightly below

This backward (or loading) movement is slow - the calm before the storm.

It's the "Kaaah" in Kaaah-Boom!



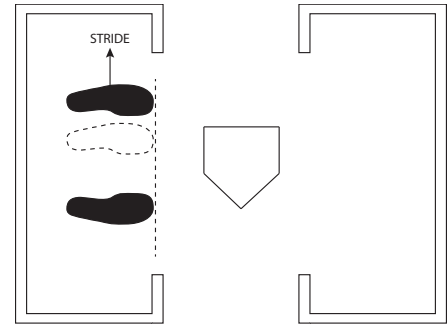
ROTATIONAL: THE SWING PHASE

Once the hitter has made the decision to swing the front foot serves as the igniter for the rest of the swing.

The stride releases energy forward and takes the hitter into the pitch. It helps the player pivot and bring the hips, arms and shoulders into action.

The stride should be side on to the pitcher, it is just pushing the shoe logo towards the pitcher, and planting the foot before swinging the bat.

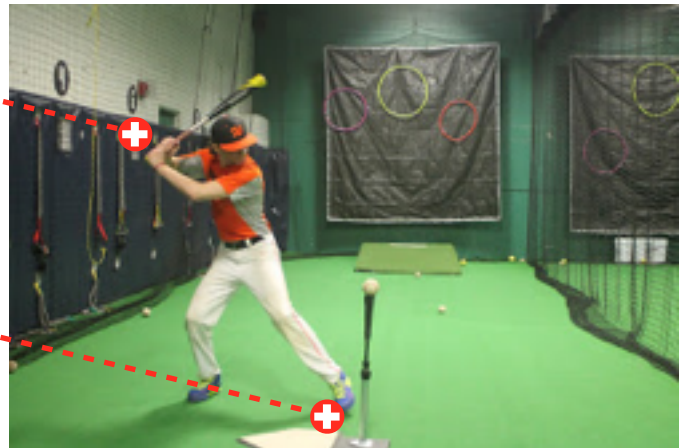
An excessively high step will cause balance and timing issues for younger players. The stride should be straight, closed, short, and the landing should be soft / quiet.



As the front foot lands and hands should still be back.

At this point the rotation part of the swing begins .

The rotational part of the swing begins after the front toe touch / foot plant. The swing is reliant on a solid, stable base provide by the feet being planted.

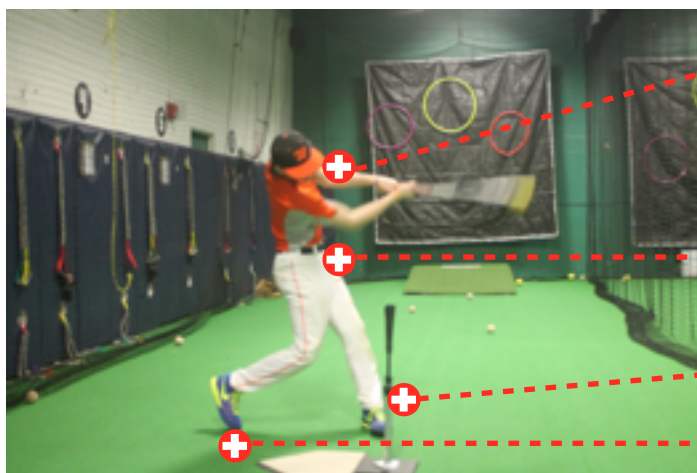


The head and eyes remain on the ball throughout the swing. Moving the head will effect the body position and the swing as a whole.

As the bat begins to swing forward the player will rotate (or snap) their hips. Most of the power a player will generate is though the core of the body not just the arms.

The front foot remains planted.

The rear foot will pivot on the ball of the foot.

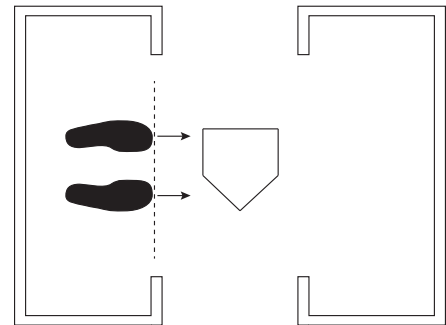


Stepping / Front foot striding to pitcher

Players should be introduced to and taught the **4 S's of hitting**. By introducing and reinforcing the 4 S's of hitting this will help develop good habits and ensure early success in hitting.

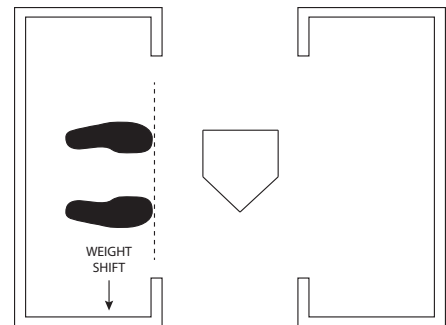
1. Stance (Front foot closed)

Stepping into the batters box players should adopt a comfortable stance. For beginning Little League players, the recommendation is that feet should be a little wider than shoulder width apart, in line with each other and pointing square on to home plate.



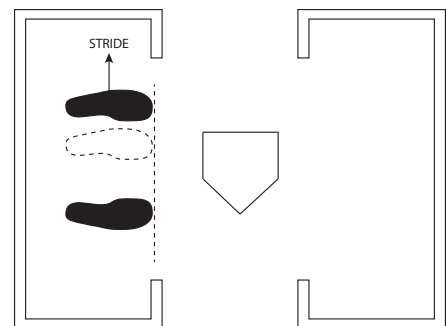
2. Shift (loading the hands and weight ready for the pitch)

As the pitcher winds up to deliver the pitch, the hitter will shift their weight slightly onto their rear foot. The hands will also move slightly to the rear. Ask the players to imagine trying to fire a bow and arrow without pulling back on the bow before firing - it's the same principle with the bat. This ensures the hitter is ready and in a position to hit.

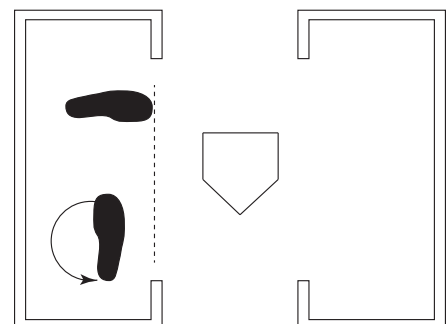


3. Stride ("Nike" sign to pitcher)

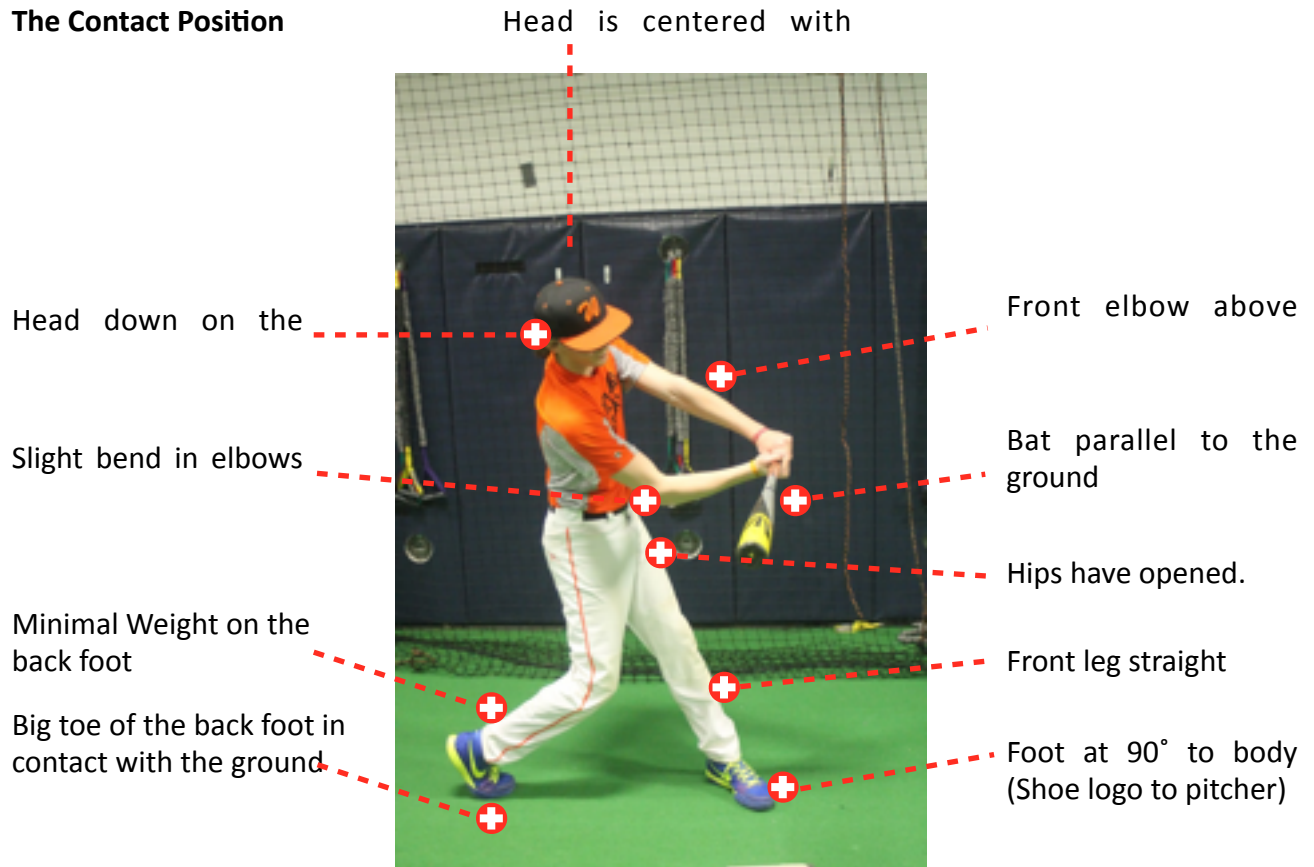
Front foot serves as the igniter for the rest of the swing. The stride releases energy forward and takes the hitter into the pitch. It helps the player pivot and bring the hips, arms and shoulders into action. The stride should be just pushing the shoe logo towards the pitcher, planting the foot before swinging the bat. An excessively high step will cause balance and timing issues for younger players. Stride should be straight, closed, short, and the landing should be soft/quiet. Front foot lands and hands should still be back.



4. Snap. As the front foot lands, the hitter will "snap" their hips. Pivoting on the ball of the rear foot the batter will finish their swing on the toes of their rear most foot. Power is developed through the hips (not just the arms) and will power the bat through the hitting zone. Bat speed is the end result of proper body movements. (10 toes on the ground only one heel) back heel pointing at the catcher.



The Contact Position



The 4 R's of hitting

The 4Rs of hitting can be thought of as defining the sequence of the at bat. All of the 4 R's are as equally important as each other and will dictate the level of success of the at bat. Consistency of carrying out the 4R's will ensure success at the plate when hitting.

1. **Rhythm.** Players need to develop a rhythm when hitting. Rather being mechanical in their approach a fluidity and rhythm will help hitters to react to changing situations and different pitches.
2. **Read.** Reading the ball out of the pitchers hand will provide hitters to decide on what their swing will be and where the ball can be hit. Over time players will be able to see the type of pitch the pitcher is throwing and react accordingly. It is a skill that must be honed over time. Once a hitter can read a pitch they can react accordingly.
3. **React.** The reaction to a pitcher begins on the windup, hands go back so the hitter is ready to come onto the pitch. As the pitch is released and the pitch is read, reacting to the pitch they are thrown is essential. (not the pitch they wanted). Many hitters will change their mechanics (swing) to try to hit a pitch that is out of the strike zone. A good hitter will react by not swinging at a pitch out of the strike zone. If a pitcher is throwing fast balls a hitter may begin their swing a little earlier or later for a slower pitch.
4. **Rotate.** Once the hitter has reacted to the pitch, made a decision on to swing at the pitch they will step towards the pitcher, snapping the hips and developing power to swing through the strike zone and hitting through the ball. Head and eyes on the ball through the hit.

Instructional Hitting Levels

At the little league level there will be many levels a player will progress through as they develop. Aspects of hitting that can be introduced and worked on will include:

- Setup – Everything a hitter must do before the pitcher throws the ball
- Load – Trigger, Shift, Negative Move
- Stride – Not all strides will be the same (that's ok)
- Launch Position – How you take a pitch tells a lot by what kind of a hitter you are
- Hand Path - the path the hands will take with the bat (possibly the hardest aspect)
- Contact Point – The most important part of the swing
- Extension and Finish

Before stepping Into the batters box

An at bat begins when the hitter is next up. The batter will be considered on deck and will be required to prepare in a designated area. Many Little League players are not sure what they are meant to be doing while on deck. Here are some tips to give to hitters to help them make the most of their brief time in the on-deck circle:

- Get Loose - prepare your body to swing the bat.
- “Circle of Champions: On Deck Circle” - There are great opportunities to utilize the on-deck circle. Players can get their timing down when watching the opposing pitcher. Hitting is all about timing after all, so what better way than to get it as perfect as possible while in the on-deck circle? Some players do this, some players stretch and find their comfort zone mentally.



- Players should practice their swing, the swing they have worked on in practice sessions - the one that brings them success. Many players will focus only on a small aspect of their swing or sometimes, a swings look very unorthodox and nothing like their game swing. Changing their swing or swinging in an unorthodox manner while on deck will only cause confusion or problems when the player gets into the batters box.
- As soon as the hitter is on deck or steps into the “on deck circle” the hitter should be READY to hit.
- The hitter should be encouraged to get into an on deck routine. The player must be focused on the game, aware of the game situation, watching the pitcher, taking swings to prepare to hit. The player must not just go through the motions which means they are not talking with or joking around with team mates.

- Pitch Recognition. Watching what the pitcher is throwing and when (fastball on a 2-0 count) changeup - slider etc. Watch for location and speed. Hitter is reading the ball, determining its location, and deciding if he is going to swing and where he is trying to hit it.
 - Practice Swings for Every Pitch Location
 - Timing Mechanism: When do I start? Tailoring the swing to match the pitcher. Is it the starting pitcher throwing 65 mph as opposed to a relief pitcher throwing 45mph?
 - Review the Situation. What do I need to do - what is the coach asking me to do. Am I asked to get a base hit and start the inning off, do I need to drive a run in, bunt sign? Potential to steal to second to get into scoring position?
 - Deep Breath, Relax
 - Jog - Don't walk to Home Plate. "Bring it on" Show that you are excited to bat, show confidence and are ready to go.

Advanced Hitting Topics (Major League onwards)

Older more experienced players will begin to work on more advanced techniques.

Players who can analyze their own at bat and diagnose their own issues will find success. As coaches we can look at a number of issues to help the player address - most of the common problems can be summed up as:

- **L.O.U.E.** (players struggling at the plate will usually be one of the following reasons.)
 - **Late**
 - **Over**
 - **Under**
 - **Early**
- Contact Points and hitting the ball to all fields. Rather than trying to get a hit the ball players with more experience and skill will be trying to place their hits based on a number of criteria including pitch location, game situation etc.
- Hitting in different counts and situations. Changing the approach to game conditions, situations and pitch counts. What should the approach be for example when the pitch count is 2-0 as opposed to being down in the count 0-2. The hitters approach in the first inning last inning (for example)
- Visual Mechanics and In-game routines. Players should develop a routine, how can a player be successful if the technique is different every time. "Act as if you have been there before"
- Hitting different pitches. Train players to look for, recognize and hit different pitches. As players develop they will be exposed to better pitching. Their ability to react to the different pitches should also develop.
- Developing an approach at the bat. "Have a routine that works for you"..... Making adjustments and self-coaching. Players who can analyze their own at bat and diagnose their own issues will find success.



Outside of the plate



Center of the plate



Inside of the plate

Hitting at Practice: Tee Hitting

"For me it's simple. Can our guys take the same swing off the tee that they take in the game. It's their ability to copy this and develop this mind-body repetition that will lead them to greater consistency at the plate." — Major League Hitting Coach Edgar Martinez:

The Tee is not just for the younger kids - even Major League Players regularly use the Tee. The Tee is the number one best way to help players learn and improve their batting skill.



Using it has many advantages:

- Focus on hitting.
- Learn or improve batting mechanics. Practice makes perfect, allows players to hone skills for the "perfect" level swing.
- Allows players to focus on one or on many things.
- Hand / eye co-ordination, players can see the bat hit the ball
- Players can practice on their own
- Practice and repetition produces success.
- Players can take what they learn to live pitching.
- Work on every possible pitch location.
- Multiple players batting at the same time.
- Good method of warm up before live hitting commences.
- You can use any kind of ball.
- Allows players to focus on many things and take their time to perfect their swing
- Hitting off of the tee is one of the best hitting drills around.
- Even Major Leaguers use the tee!!

Some rules of thumb for players hitting off the tee:

- For young players: “If you can touch the ball, you are too close to the tee.”
- Use the “rule of 3” : Every 3 swings change the location and height of the tee.
- Work Short, Look Long: Visualize pitcher on mound
- Remind players - If you can’t have a great swing off a tee, how can you have a great swing when trying to hit a moving ball? Practice makes perfect

Live Hitting



Live hitting is a fun part of any practice that all players look forward to.

Practices not only need to be safe but dynamic and fun.

To include all players and keep them involved and interested, there is a wrong way and a right way to conduct live hitting practices.

The wrong way...

- One hitter, 10+ fielders
- Swinging at every pitch
- 15+ swings per batter
- Having no purpose at the plate and just swinging.
- Fielders congregate together and aren't in real positions.
- Pitching that doesn't resemble game speed.

The right way...

- As part of a series of stations
- Swinging only at strikes
- Five swings and out
- Ask the hitter, “What are you working on this round?”
- Every ball put in play is an opportunity for the defense to make a play.
- Pitch with a purpose. Coach should throw BP as close to game speed as possible.
- Shorten the distance to increase the number of strikes.

Speed Overload



We don't want players to get used to slow off speed pitches as a matter of routine. Hitters need to see faster pitches in order to speed up their reaction time and get used to seeing fast pitches.

- After hitting off the tee/front toss players should be exposed to fast(er) pitching (even if it's a struggle).
- By using a machine or throwing to a player faster than he can initially handle you are forcing the player shorten and quicken their swing, develop better hand-eye coordination, and prepare the player for in-game success.

Front Toss / Wiffle Balls

- When throwing to players get on their level (this may mean getting on a knee) Wiffle balls are thrown from a knee at a distance of 15'-20' from the batter (maybe 25' when throwing to a big 12 year old).

The primary reason for throwing from a short distance is our pitching accuracy. The most important thing for a player working on their swing is to see a high percentage of strikes.



- Throw on a line (not a pop-up) Do not use a full long circle motion with the arm as if we were actually pitching. The throw, from shorter distances is very similar to throwing a dart. Good wiffle ball pitching technique relies a great deal on the wrist snapping through the ball at release. The wrist snap supplies a lot of force and is the key to accuracy.
- Do not lob the ball and/or throw it in an arc.
Often with younger players and players still developing their swinging skills the tendency is to throw the ball slower with a big arc. This type of pitch, in most cases, is more difficult to hit than a ball thrown a bit firmer and more on a line to the strike zone.

- Front toss is a great way to pump in strikes and gets players a lot of swings.
- Wiffle balls decrease the amount of time spent chasing balls and eliminates many safety concerns.
- One coach should be able to throw to multiple batters at once when using wiffle balls.
- Speed is typically not an issue for players as it relates to hitting the ball during front toss. This allows players to focus on areas of their swing they need to correct.