

FUNDAMENTALS

A. Receiving Pitches

1. Feet are at least shoulder-width apart, for good balance.
2. Weight should be evenly distributed on the insides of feet with the right foot slightly open.
3. Knees are bent keeping the back side and body low.
4. Arms slightly bent and relaxed. The elbows point slightly outward and are above the knees. Elbow is never inside the knees when giving a target.
5. Glove is extended out in front. Give the target early (**picture 8-1**).
6. With runners on base, the throwing hand is cupped with thumb inside fingers and behind mitt (**Picture 8-2**). With no one on base, the throwing hand can be placed behind the back or for protection on foul tips if the player is strong enough to catch with one hand. (**picture 8-3**)



8-1: Target



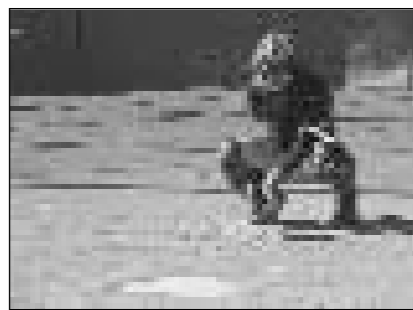
8-2: Runners on base



8-3: No one on base



7. Turn the glove left slightly before the pitcher's release. This will help catch inside pitches and prevent getting handcuffed
8. For depth, set up as close as possible to the hitter, adjusting position depending on where the hitter is standing in the batter's box.
9. For location, set up down the middle of the plate unless well ahead in the count. Then set up on either corner. Strikes are at a premium at the youth level.
10. Receive pitches with soft hands never fully extending the arm and locking the elbow.
11. Receive pitches with your hand outside the baseball and the wrist turned toward the strike zone, or bring all pitches smoothly toward the chest settling to the closest part of the strike zone. This will help make pitches appear to be strikes.
12. On low pitches that could be called strikes, receive the ball palm down and bring the ball up.
13. On low pitches out of the strike zone, catch the ball palm up. **(picture 8-4)**



8-4: Low pitch, palm up

Expert Advice on Where to Set Up Behind the Plate

Many catchers stay in the same spot behind the plate regardless of the batter's position in the box. At all ages watch your catcher's distance from the batter. Too close and a catcher's interference call is probable, receiving too far back will hinder the pitchers. The catchers should adjust up in the box and back in the box according to the batter's position in the box.

B. Giving Signs

1. Set up is the same as receiving pitches except for the following exceptions.
2. Knees are closed up slightly to keep base runners on first and third, and base coaches from getting a view of the signs being given.
3. Glove is draped over the left knee to block view of signs from third base coach and runner at third.
4. Hand position giving signs is directly between the legs. The fingers and hand should not be too low where they can be seen under the legs from the sides or from behind the catcher. **(picture 8-5)**



8-5: Giving signs

C. Blocking Balls in the Dirt

1. Balls inside the body frame: **(picture 8-6)**
 - Drop forward to both knees with weight slightly forward.
 - Keep shoulders rounded and chin tucked down.
 - Drop the mitt to the ground between the knees to block the hole between the legs.
 - The glove pocket is facing the pitcher.
 - Tuck throwing hand behind the mitt and keep palm forward.
 - Attempt to block the ball in the center of the body with the chest.
 - The upper body is relaxed and not tense.



8-6: Blocking position



2. Balls outside the body frame (move in half-circle motion)
 - Take jab step outward with near foot and drop knee. **(picture 8-7)**
 - Drop trailing knee to the ground and drag.
 - Turn near shoulder toward infield so chest is facing the plate.
 - Keep shoulders rounded, and chin tucked.
 - Drop the mitt to the ground between the knees keeping the wrist flexed and the pocket facing the pitcher.
 - Tuck throwing hand behind the mitt and keep palm forward.
 - Attempt to block the ball in the center of the body with the chest.
 - The upper body is relaxed and not tense. **(picture 8-8)**



8-7: Jab step with near foot



8-8: Smoother the ball

D. Throwing to Bases

1. Back side is up and thighs are level to the ground, for quicker release to bases.
2. Receive ball with the throwing hand cupped behind the mitt for quicker glove-to-hand transfer. **(picture 8-9)**
3. As ball is received, throwing hand and glove come together for grip. While securing grip, right foot takes a quick jab step in a half "c" towards second for momentum to throw. **(picture 8-10)**
4. The left foot steps directly toward the target as the hips and shoulders rotate in line to the base. As the left foot moves the mitt moves back across chest during the glove to hand transfer, which helps keep the catcher's weight back. Catcher is square to throw with glove shoulder pointing to the target. **(pictures 8-11 & 8-12)**
5. The catcher should remain in an athletic position while shifting weight from right foot to left foot on throw and follow-through. Do not recoil; throw through the base. **(picture 8-13)**

**Expert Advice on
a Quick Throwing Release**

Quick feet are critical for a quick release when throwing. Work on moving the feet up and down quickly utilizing the momentum of the feet and legs toward the base to make the throw.



8-9: Receiving position



8-10: Block with quick step



8-11: Step directly towards base



8-12: Stay athletic



8-13: Finish the throw



E. Fielding Bunts

1. If time allows remove mask as moving to ball. **(picture 8-14)**
2. Approach ball in slight circle so momentum is moving toward target.
3. Position body so the ball is beneath the chest. **(picture 8-15)**
4. Align hips and shoulders with the target.
5. Keep knees and waist bent.
6. Use the glove as a backstop and pick up the ball with the throwing hand, looking the ball into the mitt. **(picture 8-16)**
7. Once secured, shuffle directly toward the target and throw. **(picture 8-17)**
8. Stay balanced throughout the play and do not panic.



8-14: Remove mask



8-15: Center the ball



8-16: Go down with two hands



8-17: Expect to throw

F. Fielding Pop-ups.

1. Turn to look for the ball in the direction of the pitch location.
2. Once ball is located, determine how high the pop-up is. If it's low, keep the mask on. If it's high, take off the mask with throwing hand and toss it away. **(picture 8-18)**
3. Move to anticipated point of catch while facing the backstop.
4. The ball rotation will cause it to curve toward the field. Allow for the deviation by staying in an athletic position and keeping feet active for an adjustment.
5. If underneath the ball, position the glove with palm up and catch ball directly above forehead **(picture 8-19)**. Otherwise, a one-handed Willie Mays-style basket catch is appropriate.
6. Keep knees flexed with good balance when receiving ball.
7. Cover the glove with throwing hand after catch.
8. Catchers should go for all pop-ups until called off by another player.



8-18: High pop-up



8-19: Receive ball in athletic position



CATCHERS DRILLS AND PRACTICE ROUTINE

The catcher is a pivotal player on the field. For one-on-one time, and to cover all techniques, catchers can come early or stay after practice to work on the skills explained above. When blocking balls, softer balls can be substituted. This will allow work on blocking mechanics without beating up the catcher. **The blocking drills are recommended for ages 10-16.** Ages 9-10 can perform these drills, but some will be a challenge.

1. **Block Balls:** 10 straight, 5 to the right, 5 to the left.
2. **Receiving Pitches:** 20 repetitions.
3. **Borderline Strike (low strike):** 10 repetitions
4. **Throwing to Second Base:** 6 throws.
5. **Fielding Bunts Throwing to First Base:** 3-5 throws. (picture 8-20)
6. **Fielding Pop-ups:** 5 pop-ups.



8-20: Coach's position for drills 5 and 6

Drills 1 through 4 can be performed from a distance of 20 to 30 feet. It is not necessary for the coach throwing the balls to be on the pitcher's mound. Be at a distance where balls can be thrown accurately to the desired locations so the catcher can repetitively work on technique. (picture 8-21)



8-21

DRILLS

1. **Blocking:** From a closer distance than the mound, toss balls in the dirt for the catchers to block. Start directly in front, then toss balls slightly to the left and right of the catcher. Toss 5 balls in each location. Remember, most players who are under 10 years old will have a difficult time blocking to their right and left. Blocking outside the body will be a challenge for any player under 12 years old. Remind catchers to keep their chin tucked down during this drill. Young catchers will have a tendency to look up as they block. When first teaching this drill to a catcher it is recommended to do this drill as a dry drill first allowing the catcher to get a feel for the technique of blocking before using the baseball.

Recommended ages 10-16.

2. **Receiving:** This drill does not have to be performed from the mound. Get to a distance where you can throw the ball firmly to different desired locations. Throw 20 pitches to random locations while having the catcher softly receive the ball. Have the catcher smoothly bring bad pitches back to the closet point of the strike zone. This includes bringing the ball back to the top or bottom as well as the corners of the strike zone. If the pitched ball is well out of the strike do not attempt to frame the pitch.

Recommended ages 8-16.



3. **Receiving Borderline Low Strike:** Follow the same principle as receiving above. Throw 10 pitches to the bottom of the strike zone, some near strikes and some clear balls. Catchers need to decide when to receive the ball palm down for a strike and when to receive it palm up (turning the glove over) for an obvious ball.

Recommended ages 10-16.

4. **Throwing to Second Base:** Get to a distance where you can throw the ball firmly to the desired location. Place a player or coach at 2B to receive the throw. Throw balls to the catcher and have them go through their footwork throwing the ball to 2B. When first teaching this drill, let the catcher walk through the footwork first before introducing the baseball. Once the player can come up out of the crouch with proper footwork and body position in a dry drill it is time to try it using a baseball (refer to photos in fundamental section D, "Throwing to Bases"). Start the catchers in their crouch with a ball in their glove and let them throw to 2B. Finally progress to throwing the ball to the catcher. Remember, whenever a player struggles with technique or consistency you can always go back to a dry drill so the player can get a feel for and have success with the proper technique.

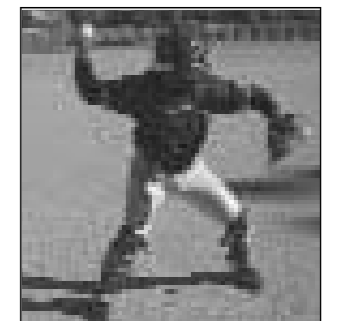


Recommended ages 9-16.

5. **Fielding Bunts:** Place a player or coach at first, second or third base. Start the catcher behind the plate in their crouch as if ready to receive a pitched ball. As shown in picture 8-27, get behind the catcher and roll a ball between the catcher's legs into fair territory at a speed and distance of a bunt. When the ball comes into view to the catcher he then reacts to the simulated bunt by fielding the ball and throwing to the desired base. Make sure the catcher approaches the ball correctly, gets over the bunt and uses the two-hand fielding technique as described in the fundamental section E "Fielding Bunts." When working on throws to first base, which will be the most common play, roll balls to three locations on the field. Roll to the first-base line area, directly in front of home plate and to the third-base line area. The bunt down the third-base line area is the only ball that is approached and fielded differently. The player must move directly to the ball by placing the right foot just to the right of the ball. Once the foot is in position, the catcher reaches down with the throwing hand, grabs the ball, pivots on the right leg and steps directly toward first with the left leg as he throws the ball (pictures 8-22 & 8-23). Work on three to five bunts with each catcher. Players aged 9-10 should practice mostly throwing to first base. Ages 10 and above should work some to all bases. Remember when working on throws to second base that the simulated bunts must not be rolled down either line or too far out onto the field. In a game, the catcher will only have a play at second base on bunted balls or swinging bunts are closer to home plate. For plays working to third base, the ball should be rolled closer to the plate as well and not rolled down the first-base side. **Work on bunts that are common for your age group.**



8-22: Field 3B line bunt



8-23: Turn and throw

Recommended ages 9-16.



6. Pop-up Drill: The most practical way to simulate a pop-up is to throw the ball for ages 9-12. This drill can be done anywhere; at home plate or in the outfield will work just fine. It can be done with the catcher's gear and mask on, which is more game-like, but is also effective to perform without. Place your catcher in their crouch. Stand right behind the catcher and underhand the ball into the air to the desired locations. Toss balls directly over the catcher first, then progress to tosses farther away, which will be more difficult to catch. Once you toss the ball into the air you yell *ball!* That's the cue for the catcher to spring up out of the crouch, turn around back to you looking up into the air for the tossed ball. Once the ball is located, the player attempts to make the catch. Try to simulate pop-ups that your age catchers are seeing in the games. If the ball is high enough, and the time and skill of the catcher allows, the catchers should attempt to catch the ball above the head. Follow fundamentals F "Fielding Pop-ups." Catching the ball Willie Mays style (underhand) is certainly acceptable and will be easier on pop-ups not high into the air. Remember, a lot of youth-league masks are difficult to remove quickly. In this case it will be easier to leave the mask on while making the catch. **For players 13-16, the coach should use a pop-up machine or learn to hit the pop-ups, which is no easy task. Recommended ages 9-12.**

