

OUTRAGEOUS STARTS AND FINISHES:

WARM-UPS
AND TRANSITIONS
FOR BOTH
GROUP EX AND
PERSONAL TRAINING

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START

"CHANGING UP OUR WARM-UPS AND TRANSITIONS WITH OUR CLIENTS ALSO CAN SERVE AS CROSS-TRAINING, BRINGING FRESH, UNEXPECTED APPROACHES."

As group movement and personal training specialists, we have clients who probably feel most comfortable with us during our first and last five minutes together. While they may have no idea what, specifically, we have in store for them during any particular session, they have acquired a familiarity with our general rapport and teaching style, and this usually includes a systematic way we start and finish. Nevertheless, we oftentimes overlook new ways to stimulate and revamp their warm-ups and incorporate innovative approaches to flexibility afterward. Changing up our warm-ups and transitions with our clients also can serve as cross-training, bringing fresh, unexpected approaches.¹ Furthermore, research points to the validity of adding the element of change to the physical starts and finishes of our sessions because more learning—including potential transference of behavior—may actually occur at these particular times.²

The following suggestions all can apply to both group movement and small group personal training where appropriate. Choose what works for you based on your job specifics.

Caveat: Instructors and trainers must choose prudently from the examples in this article based on the specific abilities of the classes and clients at hand. Using the AFAA 5 Questions³ and the Illness-Wellness Continuum can assist with movement selection.

OUTRAGEOUS WARM-UPS

1. Physical Icebreakers

Icebreakers take the attention off of you and use the concept of group dynamics to engage everyone in a full-body, systemic warm-up through nontraditional fitness moves before the actual start of the traditional warm-up pertaining to that class. They can create humor and bonding, as well as increase your overall popularity.⁴ After introducing your session and making any announcements, try the following even before obtaining any needed equipment.

Example: "You all have 30 seconds to line yourselves up across the room, starting by the door with the tallest person. Begin!"

Example: "I am going to give you all 60 seconds to form little groups according to your birth months (or Zodiac signs). Begin!"

Example: "I want you to make human pyramids on all fours with two people on the bottom and one on top and

hold the position for 5 seconds. Begin!"

2. Nontraditional

Classroom Design and Layout

Students come to expect where the "front" of the room has been for years. Introducing an element of change, even if only for the first and last five minutes, can bring refreshing energy into your class without having to change a single move. Additionally, it lets everyone gain perspective into what it is like to experience your class from a different section of the room.

Example: Move to the back of the room, face the students, and say: "Stay where you are, but turn around and face the back of the room. Just for today's warm-up, I'm going to lead you from here."

Example: "Today for our final warm-up stretch, I am going to ask you to stay where you are but face inward, making a huge circle. I'm going to lead you from the center as we finish 'in the round,' and I'll turn around a lot so all of you will get a chance to see my front, side and back." (If the class is too large to form one circle, simply invite them to make 2 or 3 concentric circles from the outer perimeter of the class moving inward.)

Example: "Today we're going to face the back of the room for the entire class and the back is going to be the front of the room, just to see what it's like to focus on your form without the use of mirrors."

Example: "Today instead of using columns and rows for our warm-up like we always do, I invite you to make a huge triangle formation, lining up across the back and then two lines of you angling forward toward me."

Example: "Today for class you can keep the four rows facing forward like you usually do, but for our first and last five minutes I want you to organize yourselves so that you're in the first row if you were born in the spring, in the second if you were born in the summer, and so forth. It's only for the warm-up, and we'll change this up next time."

3. Partner Pair-Down

Having classes and clients work in groups of two can bring in an unexpected element of fun if they are not used to working with a stranger. Getting them into pairs can be half of the fun.

Example: "Before we put out our equipment, I want you to run (or walk) around the room quickly as if you were lost and

trying to catch a departing train. Begin. (Pause). Now I want you to group yourselves so you put" and call out the following:

- "five right knees together!" Pause as they figure out how to group themselves so that, standing, they touch their right knees together in groups of five. Praise them, then have them engage in the room run again. Wait about 15 seconds and then call out in succeeding order:
- "four left shoulders together!" Repeat as above.
- "three left glutei maximi together." Repeat as above.
- "two right hands together!" or "two noses together! This is your new partner so briefly introduce yourself!"

This Partner Pair-Down process makes finding a partner unpredictable, and engages them in active work that serves also as an icebreaker. From here, you can either tell them "remember who your partner is later on in the session," or start the partner work immediately.

4. "Stick It" Plyometric Stability and Mobility Game

Regardless what kind of class you teach or personal training session you have planned for that day, the concepts of stability and mobility prove crucial for safety and all movement.⁴ Having movers explore these two concepts before a more traditional class or workout not only helps them break a sweat, but also find where their own strengths and weaknesses occur. To "stick" the plyometric landing means to land and not move your feet, even though your upper body—including your arms—may wave as you stabilize.

Example (sagittal plane): "Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, facing forward. Jump as far as you can forward and stick the landing. Look over your right and left shoulders to be sure of the area behind you for safety, and repeat the process in reverse—jumping backward."

Repeat the forward jump, starting with feet together to decrease stability.

Repeat the jump, starting on the right leg and jump forward to land

sagittal plane to be consistent with AFAA's Basic Energy Standards & Guidelines (BESG).⁵

OUTRAGEOUS FINISHES

1. Circle of One

Changing the configuration of the group for the final moments can heighten the dynamics of the experience, letting everyone face everyone.

Example: "Just for our final static stretches let's all put our equipment away and then gather in a circle." Consider playing a song that has a "circle" theme such as "Circle of Life," "Circle of One," "Circle of Clowns" or "Circlesong." As you lead movement from the center, be sure to make a quarter-turn every 30 seconds so everyone experiences you from different vantage points.

2. Go Nontraditional

Fitness enthusiasts often grow accustomed to fitness music that usually includes songs with which they are familiar. If your facility allows, play a nontraditional song with a message to heighten listening sense, such as "Beautiful Flower," "There Will Be a Time" or "You Have More Friends Than you Know." Using such songs does not have to pertain just to the final moments of yoga, for example. For more song ideas, ask participants for their favorite inspirational songs and consider using them where appropriate.

3. Make it Glow

Consider finishing a special-event session in the dark with glow stick bracelets, one for each wrist.

"...IMPROVE YOUR JOB SECURITY BY LETTING THEM SEE HOW YOU ARE WILLING TO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF YOUR TRADITIONAL JOB DUTIES."

on the
left leg, forward
and backward.
Repeat as previous with
opposite legs.

Example: Repeat all as above, but in the frontal plane, jumping from side to side. Always begin in the

Teaching an easy Tai Chi or other active flexibility routine with the lights on for the first half of the song allows everyone to learn the moves, and then turn the lights off for the second part of the song. Keep speaking to them in the dark so they understand what you are moving.

Caution: The facility must be in complete darkness when the lights extinguish for the full effect of the glow sticks to work. Light entering from any windows in doors or adjacent studios will spoil the effect.

While glow bracelets are not free, they are available for nominal fees at discount party outlets such as orientaltrading.com.



FINISH

4. Make a Labyrinth

A labyrinth serves as both a physical and metaphorical centering of body and mind. This can act as an effective conclusion to a session that connects everyone momentarily, both physically and emotionally, while adding an introspective element to the class without sacrificing any physical movement.

Example: "As we let our heart rates lower today, we are going to form a circle in the class and walk slowly. At times we will speed up and slow down, but the purpose is to walk in silence and connect to our mind, body and spirit—and each other—before leaving. The only rule is that, whatever happens, you cannot let go of the hands you are holding because we remind ourselves here that we really are connected."

Have everyone form a circle, holding hands with the person next to him or her, facing the center of the room/inward. Start them walking clockwise and then you, as instructor, break the connection with your left hand only. This is the only break in the circle; you are the "lead" and the person whose hand you just released will be the "end." Quicken your pace slightly so that you can pass up this "end" person, on the inside, and continue to pass the rest of the people on your left. You will be forming a spiral, walking alongside of the people forming the outer circle. When you reach a point where you can no longer move forward because you have reached the center of the spiral, slowly turn over your left shoulder and start to "unspiral" the group, slowly walking toward the perimeters of the room. When you finish, the room again is in a circle formation,

but facing outside. Everyone walks constantly without ever coming to a standstill. You can end here, or repeat the process to finish as you started with everyone facing the inside.

SUMMARY

Adding some unconventional components to the warm-up and transitions in group and private classes can bring not only an element of surprise to your students, but improve your job security by letting them see how you are willing to go above and beyond the boundaries of your traditional job duties.

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