

Unit 34: Circus Acrobatics

Unit code:	F/502/5371
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to develop knowledge of the technical and artistic skills required to create and perform circus acrobatics.

● Unit introduction

Learning circus acrobatics is a fun and rewarding challenge that can boost employability within the performing arts sector. Circus skills are increasingly used in television advertisements and theatre directors are often looking for unusual skills that can be incorporated into devised performance. Having circus skills could make the difference at an audition. Acrobatics (acrobalance and tumbling) are an exciting and dynamic element of performance skills that can be used in a variety of performances ranging from stage combat and physical theatre, to a stand-alone acrobatics routine. It is not enough to just carry out the technical skills in a display, so learners will explore how to create a routine that has performance qualities and artistic value.

This unit covers the basic elements of circus acrobatics. Learning about safe practice and developing coordination and spatial awareness skills provides the groundwork for approaching a full range of circus skills techniques. By developing an understanding of how to use the techniques within a performance and how to create such a routine learners will acquire an exciting new range of skills. Circus skills are found to be an appealing challenge as the outcomes are easily measurable. A newly-learned skill is a clear indication of the progress that learners have made.

On completion of this unit, learners should be able to create and maintain a safe rehearsal space and show acrobatic skills through demonstration and through the creation of a performance routine which incorporates a number of manoeuvres. This should aid learners in developing a disciplined approach that will serve them well, increasing their skill levels within both the circus units and a range of other units that require a disciplined approach. In working towards achieving these objectives, learners will develop physically and extend their acrobatic vocabulary.

Learners must demonstrate the ability to put together simple sequences of tumbling and acrobalance manoeuvres into a performance/routine for assessment. Learners should produce a minimum of two short performances to achieve the unit fully.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know the physical requirements of acrobatics
- 2 Be able to show a range of acrobatic skills
- 3 Be able to explore spatial, body and orientational awareness
- 4 Be able to organise acrobatic skills into a performance.

Unit content

1 Know the physical requirements of acrobatics

Strength, suppleness and stamina: develop and maintain an effective training programme for acrobatics

General health: basic anatomy; body maintenance issues (diet and lifestyle)

Physical safety: developing an appropriate warm-up and cool-down routine; physical responsibility for self and to other members of the group; developing effective conditioning routine; ability to work under pressure ie performance

Safe practice: prepare the environment for safe working ie safety matting, identification of hazards within the rehearsal room; responsibility to others when spotting and in pairs work; appropriate clothing and the removal of jewellery

2 Be able to show a range of acrobatic skills

Tumbling: eg forward roll, backward roll, cartwheel, handstand, walk-over, round-off, hand-springs, back-flips, somersaults, trampette work

Acrobalance: pairs work eg base, flyer, front and back balance, counterbalance, front-stool and back-stool, flag, candlestick, teardrop, standing on shoulders; group work eg pyramids

3 Be able to explore spatial, body and orientational awareness

Spatial awareness: orientation; use of space; body in movement

Physical awareness: pace; fluency; dynamics; timing; coordination; tension; posture, strength; balance; flow; tempo; timing

4 Be able to organise acrobatic skills into a performance

Creative process: selection of material; sequencing of movements; application of character and/or theme; response to music; rehearsal, giving and responding to instructions

Performance: focus; communication; interaction; skill setting; audience; other performers

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 show development in strength, suppleness and stamina for acrobatic training [RL, SM]	M1 show sustained development in strength, suppleness and stamina for acrobatics	D1 show sustained developments and a professional approach to developing in strength, suppleness and stamina for acrobatics
P2 apply safe practice with some guidance [IE, TW]	M2 apply safe practice with minimum guidance	D2 apply safe practice with complete independence
P3 demonstrate tumbling and acrobalance skills [EP, TW, EP]	M3 demonstrate tumbling and acrobalance skills showing confidence and control	D3 demonstrate complex tumbling and acrobalance skills with complete confidence and fluidity
P4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of acrobatic skills [RL, SM]	M4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of acrobatic skills with relative ease	D4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of acrobatic skills with ease and a developed artistic sensibility
P5 select acrobatic skills to create and rehearse a performance routine [CT, RL, SM, EP]	M5 select acrobatic skills to create and rehearse a creative performance routine with some character and/or theme	D5 independently select acrobatic skills to create and rehearse an inventive performance piece, with a developed sense of character and/or theme
P6 perform in front of an audience with few errors, maintaining focus at most times. [EP, TW, CT]	M6 perform competently in front of an audience, maintaining control and focus at all times.	D6 perform in front of an audience, demonstrating flow and ease, with complete control of the skills, material and audience.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The learning activities in this unit are wholly practical and should allow learners to develop skills and technical ability.

In order to create a safe environment, it is essential that tutors begin the unit with guidance on safe practice. This should include a warm-up and cool down that will form the start and end of each training session, and a conditioning programme for acrobatics. Learners should also be taught how to assist/spot each other when learning/perfecting moves, and how to create a safe working environment.

In keeping with professional approaches, sessions could be taught on a specific technical area or regarded as 'training', whereby learners are developing skills at their own pace. This will give learners the opportunity to differentiate their work and to develop a disciplined and independent approach.

In order to acquire the necessary knowledge to make progress, it will be important for tutors to demonstrate a full range of skills and communicate the correct terminology for each exercise. Learners will need to be given the opportunity to repeat the acrobatic exercises many times in order to build confidence and increase their ability with the aim of incorporating the skills they are learning into practical performance work.

Learners should be given the time and support to develop performance material where they select and refine acrobatic skills in a creative and expressive format, demonstrating an understanding of context and communicating themes, characters and story to an audience as well as the integration of other performance techniques or skills.

It may be useful to arrange an opportunity for learners to see a range of professional performances that includes tumbling and acrobalance. Seeing the skills in context will motivate learners and make them aware of the professional opportunities that are available and the different approaches used by a variety of companies and performers. This could be through live performance such as visiting a touring circus company or on DVD/video resources. You may also find a wide range of performances on the internet.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Introduction to unit

Assignment 1: Developing Acrobatics Skills – P2, M2, D2 throughout the delivery of the unit

- Safe working.
- Need for repetition/practise.
- Support others in group.

Develop conditioning warm-up – including: tuck jumps, squat thrusts, press-ups, dish and arch holds, shuttle runs, sit-ups, plank hold (on elbows), step-ups, tuck and v sits.

This provides evidence for P1, M1, D1 throughout the year.

Tumbling lessons:

- basic tumbling including: rolls, cartwheels, round-off, headstand, handstand forward roll, back roll to handstand
- connecting moves
- supported and non-supported handstands: tuck, pike, straddle, split
- preps for more advanced moves using; crash mats, lunge, spotting and trampette
- more advanced moves: headspring, handspring, walk over, back-flip, somersaults, tempo and pitched moves
- two person moves/throws: tank rolls, double cartwheel, double backbend, handstand over, back to back over, throw-head through legs
- trampette: take off and landing, straight, tuck, pike, star and straddle jumps, dive forward roll, front somersault with tuck, pike straight, ½ and full twist, round-off, handspring
- trampette over box
- slapstick: falls and trips, safe throws, slaps and hits
- other related topics: Chinese pole, table sliding, hoop diving.

Acrobalance:

- counter balance
- beginners' acrobalance including: front and back stool, front and back angel on feet, flag, two person thigh stand, sit on shoulders, stand on shoulders, sit on feet, teardrop, candlestick, front balance and back balance on shoulder, shoulder stand on feet, front balance in hands
- pyramids including: kneeling, bridge of thighs, block of flats, Samson, clock-face
- advanced acrobalance including: stand in hands, handstand on shoulders, hand to hand (short and long arm), rock and roll, high front and back balance, star on one arm, stand on head
- tempos
- three person moves including: kneeling, bridge of thighs, helicopter, high candlestick, assisted walkover, slate roof.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Assignment 2: Acro and Movement Joint Assignment – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6
Rehearse acrobatic routines for show.
Acrobatics for contemporary text including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific moves • devising • rehearsal.
Acrobatics for devised/stimulus piece including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific moves • rehearsal.
Assignment 3: Technical Acrobatic – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6
Assignment 4: Acrobatics in Performance – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6
Rehearsal and devising of routines for Final Major Project (group and individual): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific moves • devising • process • rehearsal.
Evaluation of performances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feedback verbal, written and peer • watching and analysing videos.
Devising and rehearsing routines for shows and auditions.

Assessment

Throughout the duration of the delivery of this unit, it is essential that learners can prepare and maintain a safe working environment. This should form part of the set up for each session through getting the space ready for the acrobatic class. Learners should also be aware that the safety needs can change during the class and they should be able to respond to this and also be able to support/spot each other during the learning of particular acrobatic movements. This could be achieved by allocating responsibility to a different learner each session to prepare the room and have an awareness of health and safety issues before and during the session. The evidence for this could be a list of the hazards identified and the way in which they were dealt with or video evidence that shows the learner demonstrating these tasks. It will be important for tutors to intervene where necessary in order to guarantee a safe working environment.

Learners could be observed warming-up the group for the start of the session and devising an acrobatic conditioning programme for themselves or for the whole group.

The assessment will have a practical nature through participation in a continuous training programme and demonstration of acrobatic skills. Learners will need to demonstrate progress which will mean video recording a session at the beginning of the unit and one at the end in order to make a comparison. Learners could also have an Individual Learning Plan, which is changing and ongoing, but must have realistic expectations.

Tutors could also evidence this criterion by completing observation notes. Learners should then explore how to place these moves within performance, rather than seeing them in isolation as “tricks”. In pairs or groups, learners will be guided in how to link moves together to create a performance that could contain character/theme/story and/or music. By creating at least two performances there should be room for learners to develop their skills in this area. They will rehearse and refine the performance material before performing to an audience of their peers. Learners must demonstrate the ability to put together simple sequences of tumbling and acrobatic manoeuvres into a performance/routine for a pass criterion. The evidence for this criterion is likely to be video footage as well as tutor notes on the rehearsal process (at least two formal observations).

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3	Developing Acrobatic Skills	This is to cover the acquisition and development of acro-balance and tumbling skills. Learners will be continually assessed through regular observations and application of skills. There will be regular sharings of skills demonstrations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation. • Demonstration. • Question and answer.
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Acro and Movement Assignment	Learners are to work together to create a short piece of performance based on a given title. They should fuse acrobatics and movement skills to develop a smooth flowing performance that aims to communicate meaning and story through the means of physical performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of selection of skills and development of creative process. • Formal observations of rehearsal process (at least twice). Notes should be made during these. • Formal observation of performance (video evidence to support).
P2, M2, D2	Safe Practice	This should be an ongoing observation throughout the delivery of the unit where learners demonstrate an understanding of how to work safely, both for themselves and for others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continual observation, note down good/poor practice.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Technical Acrobatics	Working in pairs or small groups, learners should work to a given theme or task outline to produce a three minute performance that uses a range of acro-balance and tumbling moves. Attention should be paid to why specific moves/skills are selected over others, musicality, character, relationship between the characters, use of space, costume and/or props.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of selection of skills and development of creative process. • Formal observations of rehearsal process (at least twice). Notes should be made during these. • Formal observation of performance (video evidence to support).
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Acrobatics in Performance	This can be assessed during learners' ongoing performance work, eg contemporary text, stimulus or FMP. These can all include acrobatic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of selection of skills and development of creative process. • Observation of rehearsal process. • Observation of performance (video evidence to support).

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Performing Arts Individual Repertoire and Showcase	Performing Dance	Musical Theatre Performance
		Circus Equilibratics
		Circus Manipulation
		Developing Physical Theatre
		Choreographic Principles
		Developing Movement Skills

This unit also has links with the following National Occupational Standards:

Live Events and Promotion

- HS1 – Working safely
- HS5 – Controlling risks.

Essential resources

In order to deliver this unit, centres will need an appropriate rehearsal space with flat tumbling floor mats and crash mats for safety. For the purposes of collecting evidence, centres will require a video recorder and playback equipment. During development of performance material, learners should have access to a CD player in order to rehearse with music. Learners will need to wear appropriate clothing for practical participation.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

There are a number of traditional and contemporary circus companies throughout the UK which the centre may be able to link with to either deliver the unit or offer industry information and/or support such as talks, tours, discounted performances, workshops and possibly work experience.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Bolton R – *New Circus: World-Wide Survey of the Concept of Circus Without Animals* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1987) ISBN 9780903319379

Readhead L – *Men's Gymnastics Coaching Manual, 2nd Edition* (The Crowood Press, 1997) ISBN 9781861260765

Still C – *BAGA Women's Gymnastics Manual* (Springfield Books, 1990) ISBN 9780947655280

Ward P – *Teaching Tumbling* (Human Kinetics, 1997) ISBN 9780873224970

Journals

British Gymnastics Magazine

King Pole Magazine

The World's Fair

Websites

www.british-gymnastics.org

British Gymnastiques

www.circusarts.org.uk

Circus Arts

www.cirquebijou.co.uk

Cirque Bijou

www.giffordscircus.com

Giffords Circus

www.les7doigtsdelamain.com/menu.html

The 7 fingers

www.nofitstate.org

No Fit State

www.swampcircus.com

Swamp Circus

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	applying safe practice within the practice/performance space
Creative thinkers	selecting skills and developing material for performance rehearsing for performance performing to an audience
Reflective learners	applying the acrobatics skills they have been taught selecting skills for performance material – demonstrating the ability to reflect on what effect certain skills can have rehearsing for performance – critically reflecting and analysing what works/doesn't work
Team workers	ensuring the space is safe to use supporting/spotting other learners to ensure the safe execution of new/ongoing learning carrying out acro-balance moves with a partner working in a pair or small group to create performance material performing to an audience
Self-managers	developing of strength, suppleness and stamina through warm-ups and own practise demonstrating acrobatics skills applying spatial and physical awareness to skills and performance work demonstrating structure and work within a rehearsal process
Effective participators	making contributions and being an active member of a pair or small working group contributing to the development and rehearsal process performing to an audience.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	undertaking extra research into ideas and themes
Creative thinkers	using a creative approach to how a theme can be applied to acrobalance and tumbling performance work.
Reflective learners	evaluate their own skills and performance work on a regular, informal basis through discussion
Team workers	being supportive to their peers through constructive comments and feedback.
Self-managers	practising and rehearsing in own time to improve their skills and development.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	watching video performances as part of their research into performance ideas and/or approaches on the internet through sites such as youtube.com
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	<p>learning new moves and skills</p> <p>developing ideas for performance material</p> <p>evaluating their own and others' work, reflecting on strengths and weaknesses.</p>