

Unit 35: Circus Aerial

Unit code:	Y/502/5375
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop the technical and artistic skills required to create and perform circus aerial skills; learners will explore how to create a routine that has performance qualities and artistic value.

● Unit introduction

Learning circus aerial 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. Aerial (such as trapeze, hoop, corde lisse and silks) is an exciting aspect of circus performance. Audiences are thrilled by seeing performers working in the air as the manoeuvres often give the appearance that the performer is taking a dangerous risk. This form of performance is also appealing to watch because of the elegant shapes and graceful transitions.

This unit covers the basic elements of aerial skills. Learning about safe practice, working at height 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 show a range of aerial skills through demonstration and through the creation of a performance routine which incorporates a number of manoeuvres and transitions. They should also be able to prepare and manage their rehearsal time safely and effectively. 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 aerial vocabulary. Learners may have to face their fears of heights and thus will find the unit challenging, but the outcomes are guaranteed to be rewarding when they experience the satisfaction of learning skills that will thrill their audience.

There should be at least two performances lasting at least three minutes each. Each performance should contain at least six manoeuvres.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to demonstrate the physical requirements of aerial skills
- 2 Be able to demonstrate skills in a selection of aerial disciplines
- 3 Be able to explore spatial, body and orientational awareness
- 4 Be able to organise aerial skills into a performance.

Unit content

1 Be able to demonstrate the physical requirements of aerial skills

Strength, suppleness and stamina: develop and maintain an effective training programme for aerial work; develop sufficient stamina to link a number of moves into a sequence

Physical abilities: strength to work on aerial equipment; awareness of body in the air; developing effective conditioning routine; ability to work under pressure ie performance

Physical safety: developing an appropriate warm-up and cool-down routine; physical responsibility for self and to other members of the group

Safe practice: prepare the environment for safe working ie safety matting, identification of hazards within the rehearsal room, equipment checks, responsibility to others when doing doubles work, appropriate clothing and the removal of jewellery.

Personal management: time management; rehearsal programmes; physical preparation; response to direction and discipline

2 Be able to demonstrate skills in a selection of aerial disciplines

Static trapeze: basics to include rope climb and transfer to bar, hanging beats, pike, hocks beats, sitting, one foot and pull to stand; moves under the bar could include: birds nest, front and back angel, candlestick, ankles, catcher's hang; moves on the bar could include: mermaid, star, gazelle, back and front balance; standing moves could include: star, lean-out, lamppost, eagle

Doubles trapeze: could include moves with base sitting; candlestick, layout on feet, leg to leg; moves with base in catchers: birds nest, ankles, back balance, mermaid, angel; mirror moves: double mermaid, double gazelle, double nest

Basic swinging trapeze/cloudswing: get swing going from standing, sit direct, hocks hang, ankle hang, crucifix, front balance, back balance, one hock hang, full swing under bar

Corde lisse (rope): basic climb with hands and feet, foot lock, hip lock, catchers, progression onto eg washing line, straddle climb, star, stag, Isle of Man, upside down descent, front balance

Silks (tissu): basic climb with hands and feet, foot lock, hip lock, splits, cocoon, catchers; progression eg on to upside down descent, straddle climb, star, double ankle hang, crucifix from double foot wrap cross silk

3 Be able to explore spatial, body and orientational awareness

Space: relate to environment and setting; levels dynamics; point of command and exploration of equipment

Physical qualities: strength; fluency; pace; balance; flow; tempo; timing; turning; flexibility; coordination and posture

Orientalional: positioning; dynamics; tension; precision

4 Be able to organise aerial 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 aerial training [RL, SM]	M1 show sustained development in strength, suppleness and stamina for aerial training	D1 show sustained developments and a professional approach to developing in strength, suppleness and stamina for aerial training
P2 apply safe practice with some guidance [IE, TW, SM]	M2 apply safe practice with minimum guidance	D2 apply safe practise with complete independence
P3 demonstrate aerial skills on a range of aerial equipment [TW, EP]	M3 demonstrate aerial skills on a range of aerial equipment showing confidence and control	D3 demonstrate complex aerial skills on a range of aerial equipment with complete confidence and fluidity
P4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of aerial skills in a competent manner [RL]	M4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of aerial skills with relative ease	D4 explore spatial and physical awareness in application of aerial skills with ease and a developed artistic sensibility
P5 select aerial skills to create and rehearse a performance routine [CT, RL]	M5 select aerial skills to create and rehearse a creative performance routine with some character and/or theme	D5 independently select aerial 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 basic guidelines on safe practice. This should include a warm-up and cool down that will form the start and end of each training session, and should include the development of a thorough training programme for aerial. Learners should also be taught how to create a safe working environment.

In keeping with professional approaches, sessions could be taught on a specific technical area or could be 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 aerial 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 aerial skills in a creative and expressive format, demonstrating an understanding of context and communicating themes, characters and story to an audience

It may be useful to arrange an opportunity for learners to see a range of professional performances that are either purely aerial acts (such as trapeze, corde lisse or silks) or include aerial skills within a wider performance context. 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 – whole group.

Launch **Assignment 1: Developing Aerial Skills.**

- Safe working – **This will provide grounding for P2, M2 and D2 which will be continuously assessed through the duration of the unit delivery.**
- Need for repetition/practice.
- Support others in group – **This will provide grounding for P2, M2 and D2 which will be continuously assessed through the duration of the unit delivery.**

Conditioning – (All done on trapeze) including: hocks roll-ups, hocks beats, hanging beats, pull-ups, sit pull-ups, ankle reaches, ankle beats, leg lifts, skinning the cats, one arm hang. (On rope) rope climbs, straddle-ups.
Delivered throughout the unit, as part of warm-up/preparation.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Aerial lessons – these are carried out throughout the year and assessed continuously:

- static trapeze
- connecting moves
- working with music
- preps for more advanced moves using lunge and spotting
- corde lisse/rope
- doubles trapeze
- hoop
- web rope (spinning rope)
- silks
- taster on swinging trapeze/cloudswing
- taster on flying trapeze
- working with themes/stimulus
- aerial choreography.

Offers opportunity for coverage of P3, M3, D3.

Assignment 2: Creating a Solo Static Trapeze Routine – P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6

Rehearse aerial routines for show.

Aerial for contemporary text, including:

- specific moves
- devising
- rehearsal.

Offers opportunity for coverage of P3, M3, D3.

Aerial for devised/stimulus piece, including:

- specific moves
- rehearsal.

Assignment 3: Technical Aerial – P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6

Assignment 4: Aerial in Performance – P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6

Rehearsal and devising of routines for Final Major Project (group and individual):

- specific moves
- devising
- process
- rehearsal.

Evaluation of performances (at various points in the year):

- feedback, verbal, written and peer
- watching and analysing videos of own performance work.

Devising and rehearsing routines for shows and auditions.

Assessment

Learners will be assessed on criterion 1 through participation in a suitable training programme which is likely to focus on building upper body and core strength, as well as increasing flexibility. 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. Tutors could also evidence this criterion by completing observation notes. Criterion 2 will be covered through continual observation and assessment. Distinction level would be achieved by learners not only ensuring that they were working in a safe manner and their own space/equipment were safe without any prompting; but also that their peers are were safe too, ie if they observed someone doing something dangerous they told them or a member of staff immediately.

Learners will be expected to demonstrate a range of manoeuvres on a variety of aerial equipment (there should be the opportunity to try out at least three different pieces of equipment such as static trapeze, corde lisse (also known as rope) and silks (also known as tissú). The evidence for these criteria is likely to take the form of video footage. Learners must show appropriate technique by getting on to the bar/equipment and demonstrating a minimum of six manoeuvres. To achieve distinction level for criterion 3, it is likely that learners will be able to demonstrate ten or more manoeuvres. For criterion 3, the learners are being assessed on their physical ability to complete the manoeuvre, not their performance qualities. The focus of criteria 4 and 5 is the decision making and rehearsal process of learners: the selection of manoeuvres, how they decide to link them, what images they can create and application of spatial awareness in relation to their chosen piece of equipment. Criterion 6 is focused on the performance qualities that learners adopt in demonstrating their manoeuvres. To achieve distinction level, learners must show a complete awareness of the way in which pace, fluency, coordination and posture affect the overall impact of the manoeuvre on the audience's understanding of the performance.

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 Aerial 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.
P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Creating a Solo Static Trapeze Routine	This is the first opportunity for learners to explore linking moves on the trapeze to create a short performance (no more than three minutes). They should select a theme/context for the performance, find appropriate music and identify any additional requirements as necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of selection of moves 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).

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
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.
P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Technical Aerial	Learners are to select a piece of aerial equipment on which to create a performance which has a theme or context. Learners should aim to include at least six manoeuvres within their routine. They should be aware of musicality, relationship with the audience and costume but above all, the focus is on the technical execution of the moves within a rounded 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).
P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Aerial in Performance	This can be assessed during learners' ongoing performance work, eg contemporary text, stimulus or Final Major Project. These can all include aerial 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 Manipulation
		Circus Acrobatics
		Circus Equilibristics
		Developing Physical Theatre
		Choreographic Principles

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

Live Events and Promotion

- HSI – Working safely
- HS5 – Controlling risks.

Essential resources

In order to deliver this unit, centres will need an appropriate rehearsal space, crash mats for safety and a minimum of one trapeze bar, one corde lisse (rope) and a pair of silks (tissú) per four learners. Centres will also need to consider carefully the suitability of their room in terms of the ceiling height and must carry out a full health and safety check of the weight-bearing capabilities of the rigging points.

The person delivering the unit should be trained in aerial performance skills and be fully capable of rigging and checking the appropriate equipment. 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

Keen S – *Learning to Fly: Trapeze – Reflections on Fear, Trust and the Joy of Letting Go* (Broadway Books, 1999)
ISBN 9780767901765

Schreiber M – *Dreams of the Solo Trapeze: Offstage with the Cirque du Soleil* (Canal House, 2005)
ISBN 9780975466407

Journals

King Pole Magazine

The World's Fair

Video/DVD

Cirque du Soleil – *We Reinvent The Circus* (ASIN B00004CXXZ)

Websites

www.circusarts.org.uk

Circus Development Agency

www.cirquebijou.co.uk

Cirque Bijou

www.giffordscircus.com

Giffords Circus

www.les7doigtsdelamain.com/menu.html

The Seven 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	understanding and applying safe practice in the training and rehearsal space
Creative thinkers	selecting aerial manoeuvres to create a routine applying a theme or context to their performance material selecting appropriate music/costume for their performance performing their routine
Reflective learners	participating in a training programme demonstrating a development of their strength and stamina applying spatial and physical awareness when carrying out manoeuvres selecting manoeuvres from those previously learnt when creating a performance routine
Team workers	applying safe practice in the training and rehearsal space, ie spotting for a peer, helping set out/put away mats working on with another learner on a routine on trapeze, hoop or web rope working on a group piece with two or more learners on separate pieces of equipment working on the ground but in relationship to someone in the air, ie with character or choreography
Self-managers	working on their own to develop their training programme demonstrating a development of their strength and stamina applying safe practice in the training and rehearsal space, ie ensuring they are wearing correct clothing, have put out correct safety mat
Effective participators	learning new skills in class performing a range of routines, both individual acts and within a larger performance.

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
Reflective learners	evaluating 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>