

Unit 36: Circus Equilibristics

Unit code:	L/502/5373
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop learners' technical and artistic skills that are required to create and perform equilibristics skills.

● Unit introduction

Learning equilibristics skills, which include stilt walking, unicycling, free standing ladder and walking globe, is a fun and rewarding challenge, and some people find them so gripping that they become completely absorbed in the activities and the challenges they pose. This is an excellent opportunity to improve balance and movement control which are skills that apply to most performing arts techniques. 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 equilibristics. Audiences are thrilled by seeing performers demonstrating these skills, as they know how difficult they are to master and cannot imagine how performers can do what they are doing. This form of performance is also appealing to watch because of the way performers appear to be putting themselves in danger. As well as using these skills to create stand-alone acts, they can be incorporated into dance, musical and physical theatre performances. By developing an understanding of how to use the techniques within a performance and how to create such a routine learners will have acquired 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.

As well as learning new skills within this unit, learners will experiment with applying these skills within performance material and will develop an understanding of the equipment that is used. Due to the nature of the unit, health and safety also forms an important part of the learning. On completion of this unit, learners should be able to create and maintain a safe rehearsal space and show equilibristics skills through demonstration and the creation of a performance routine which incorporates a number of tricks. 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.

There should be at least two creative performances in which each learner contributes approximately three minutes of performance time using at least two pieces of equilibristics equipment.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to demonstrate safe practice when using equilibristic equipment
- 2 Be able to demonstrate equilibristic skills
- 3 Be able to organise equilibristic skills into a performance.

Unit content

1 Be able to demonstrate safe practice when using equilibristic equipment

Set-up and maintenance: selection of correct size stilts and fitting; checking equipment prior to use; safe storage; unicycle correct sizing

Risk assessment and management: identification of hazards within the rehearsal room; management of risks; responsibility to others when spotting; wearing appropriate clothing; removal of jewellery

Technique: correct use of the equipment to minimise risks; an awareness of physical limitations

2 Be able to demonstrate equilibristic skills

Walking globe: mounting; walking; standing still; dismount

Unicycling: mounting; cycling forwards and backwards; turning; idling

Stilts: strap-on stilts; walking; running; dancing

Free-standing ladder: mounting; walking; dismount

3 Be able to organise equilibristic skills into a performance

Process: selection of material; sequencing of movements; application of character or theme; response to music; rehearsal; giving and responding to instructions

Presentation: focus; communication; interaction; skill

There should be at least two creative performances in which each learner contributes approximately three minutes of performance time using at least two pieces of equilibristics equipment.

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 apply safe practice when selecting and using equilibristic equipment with guidance [IE, SM, TW]	M1 apply safe practice when selecting and using equilibristic equipment, with minimum guidance	P1 apply safe practice when selecting and using equilibristic equipment, with complete independence
P2 demonstrate equilibristic skills, maintaining balance at most times, with guidance [RL, SM, EP]	M2 demonstrate equilibristic skills with a degree of confidence and control by sustaining balance, with minimum guidance	P2 demonstrate complex equilibristic skills independently with complete confidence, showing a sense of ease and control
P3 select equilibristic equipment and skills to create and rehearse a performance with guidance [CT, RL, SM, TW, EP]	M3 select equilibristic equipment and skills to develop a creative performance piece with minimum guidance	P3 independently select equilibristic equipment and skills in the development of an inventive performance piece, with a sense of character or theme
P4 perform in front of an audience using equilibristic equipment and skills with few errors, maintaining focus at most times. [EP, TW, CT]	M4 perform competently in front of an audience using equilibristic equipment and skills, maintaining control and focus at all times.	P4 perform in front of an audience using equilibristic equipment and skills, 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 must include detailed information on each piece of equipment and clear demonstrations of the way the equipment should be set up, stored and maintained. Learners must 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 regarded as 'training', whereby learners are developing skills at their own pace. This will give them 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 is important for tutors to demonstrate a full range of skills and communicate the correct terminology for each exercise. During demonstrations, tutors should also identify potential risks and important safety considerations. Learners will also need to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their exercises in order to build confidence and move towards incorporating the skills they are learning into practical performance work.

It may be useful to arrange an opportunity for learners to see a range of professional performances that are either purely equilibristic acts (such as unicycling or stilts) or include these 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, local carnival or festival with street performers or on DVD/video resources. There is 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 and structure of the programme – whole group. Health and safety (GC 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping a learning diary.• What is equilibristics?
Launch Assignment 1: Developing Equilibristics Skills – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2 Introduction to equilibristic skills.
Progressions of equilibristic skills (done throughout the unit). (P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3) Learners choose a couple of pieces of equipment to focus on developing their skills during practice time in classes.
Discussion/breakdown of the unit: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• clarify terminology• how best to approach skills learning• keeping notes.
Assignment 2: 1 Skill/1 Minute – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss criteria; perform one skill for exactly one minute.• Discuss use of space and levels.• Devise and rehearse.• Present to tutor and peers for evaluation and verbal feedback.
Assignment 3: Expectation – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss criteria.• Discuss use of other skills (dance, acro etc).• Inclusion of entrance/exit, space, levels.• Devise and rehearse.• Present to tutor and peers for evaluation and verbal feedback.
Assignment 4: Preparation for Final Performance – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss final assignment brief.• Clarify grading criteria.• Set pared down version of main assignment – 1 equilibristic and 1 manipulation skill.• Devise and rehearse.• Present to tutor and peers for evaluation and verbal feedback.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Assignment 5: Final Performance – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4

- Discuss final assignment brief.
- Clarify grading criteria.
- Devise and rehearse.
- Present to tutor for evaluation.

Feedback to and from learners.

Assessment

Learners will be expected to demonstrate their ability to safely prepare the rehearsal room and carrying out safety checks on the equilibristics equipment before use. In addition to this, they must identify potential risks during the rehearsal and resolve any hazards that they uncover. This could be achieved by allocating responsibility to a different learner each session to set up the equipment and be aware of health and safety issues. The evidence for this criterion is likely to be observation notes and/or video footage of learners completing the task. It will be important for tutors to intervene where necessary in order to guarantee a safe working environment.

Learners must demonstrate their equilibristic skills in a minimum of two areas (choosing from free-standing ladder, walking globe, stilt walking and unicycling) through at least two performances. Learners who are working at a pass level may still come off the equipment during performances and should be able to demonstrate one basic trick in each skill area but may still need some support and spotting. The merit level learner is competent and avoids errors and support; there is a sense of confidence with balance and performing the tricks. Learners working at distinction level will demonstrate a high level of confidence and remain well balanced throughout and should be able to demonstrate at least two tricks in each skill area with confidence and independence. Learners should self-assess throughout the unit to aid in their development and regular tutor formative feedback, either verbally or through notes, will be essential to aid this process. The evidence for this criterion is likely to take the form of video footage and observation notes.

Learners must create and perform at least two short performances that incorporate the equilibristic skills they have learned. They have the option to create a solo or group performance and its length should reflect the number of learners in the group. A basic guideline would be a minimum of three minutes per performer. The final performance must be shown to an audience. The evidence for these criteria is likely to take the form of video footage.

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	Developing Equilibristic Skills	This would form the early part of delivery where learners would be introduced to the different equipment and guidance on preparing and using a safe practice space emphasised. Learners would be introduced to a wide variety of equipment where the expectation is that they try everything out and try and develop some skills in them all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion. • Q&A. • Observation (video at stages throughout the unit for reflection and assessment purposes).
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3	1 Skill/1 Minute	Learners are to select one piece of equipment and create a one-minute performance using it. This can be done in collaboration with the Manipulation unit. The tutor should cover the use of levels, performance devices, music, props and costume. The focus will not be on the final performance but the development process. There will be time for reflection and evaluation at the end.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A. • Observation (video process at least twice for reflection and assessment purposes). • Reflective discussion to evaluate own and peers work at the end.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3	Expectation	This is an opportunity to introduce the concept of developing a rounded performance by learners exploring integrating different performance skills with Equilibristics, ie dance, acting, acrobatics, manipulation. The focus will not be on the final performance but the development process. There will be time for reflection and evaluation at the end.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A. • Observation (video process at least twice for reflection and assessment purposes). • Reflective discussion to evaluate own and peers' work at the end.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4	Preparation for Final Performance	The focus should now be shifting to creating more polished performances as learners' abilities and confidence have grown. Learners are to integrate equilibristics and manipulation skills to create a full performance lasting at least three minutes. They can work in pairs or even a small group. They should focus on the clarity of skills, integration within a theme or context, costumes, music, character and the use of any other performance skills. There will be reflective discussion at the end where tutor and peers will offer constructive criticism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A. • Observation (video process at least twice for reflection and assessment purposes). • Discussion. • Formal summative feedback to be provided to learners.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4	Final Performance	Learners are to create a final performance building on what they developed and/or learnt in the previous assignment. Learners should choose a theme or context and should create a polished performance. They can perform in a pair or small group but they must ensure that they perform using at least two pieces of equilibristics equipment for at least three minutes. There will be time to reflect and evaluate at the end of the performances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A. • Observation (video process at least twice for reflection and assessment purposes). • Discussion. • Learners could keep a logbook detailing how they developed their performance but it is not essential. • Formal summative feedback to be provided to learners.

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 Aerial
		Circus Manipulation
		Circus Acrobatics
		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 and equipment. Centres will need a minimum of one walking globe, a pair of strap-on stilts, a pair of non-strap stilts, one unicycle and one free-standing ladder. Centres will also need to consider carefully the suitability of the rehearsal space in terms of the ceiling height for stilt walking and globe walking. For the purposes of collecting evidence, centres will require a video recorder and playback equipment. Learners 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 either to deliver the unit or to offer industry information and/or support such as talks, tours, discounted performances, workshops and possibly work experience.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Burgess H – *Circus Techniques: Juggling, Equilibristics, Vaulting* (Dube, 1989) ISBN 9780917643064

Dancey C – *How to Ride your Unicycle* (Butterfingers, 1998) ISBN 978-1898591184

Hoher S – *Unicycling: from Beginner to Expert* (Butterfingers, 1994) ISBN 9780951324059

Journals

Kaskade – European Juggling Magazine

King Pole Magazine

The World's Fair

Websites

www.circusarts.org.uk

www.cirquebijou.co.uk

www.giffordscircus.com

www.juggling.tv

www.les7doigtsdelamain.com/menu.html

www.nofitstate.org

www.swampcircus.com

www.unicycle.uk.com

Circus Development Agency

Cirque Bijou

Gifford Circus

Depository for juggling videos

The Seven Fingers

Nofitstate

Swamp Circus

Unicycle shop and resources

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	preparing the space and equipment for use, noticing any health and safety issues and dealing with them
Creative thinkers	selecting equilibristic equipment and tricks 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	undertaking their own practice and rehearsal to develop their skill levels selecting equipment and tricks 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 in a pair or small group to create performance material
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
Creative thinkers	evaluating their own skills and performance work on a regular, informal basis through discussion
Reflective learners	being supportive to their peers through constructive comments and feedback
Team workers	practicing and rehearsing in own time to improve their skills and development
Self-managers	undertaking extra research into ideas and themes.

● 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/juggle.tv
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>