

Asana 103

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500 hr Teacher Training



Asana 103

Foundations of Sequencing

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Teach what is inside you, not as it applies to you, but as it applies to the other.

- T Krishnamachararya

INTRODUCTION

Sequencing is a word we frequently hear in yoga asana practice. It is also a term that is equally frequently misunderstood. Sequencing helps one experience the benefits of an asana practice on multiple levels: musculoskeletal, organic, pranic, etc. Sequencing is first and foremost determined by the theme one sets for a personal practice or class (e.g. to experience the breath in a particular area, to release the shoulders, to see the effects of twists). In some yoga traditions, such as Ashtanga, the practice is arranged into a vinyasa or a “flowing” sequence linked by sun salutations.

“Yoga in the Iyengar tradition does not have scripted sequences that are practiced by everyone,” states Brad Priddy, a senior Iyengar teacher. “Sequencing of poses is a complex and advanced topic that requires extensive study and experience with the effects of asana sequences from your own practice. You should learn from personal experience what effect doing Adho Mukha Svanasana prior to Urdhva Danurasana has on your own body and mind and vice versa. This is the experiential way of understanding asana sequencing.”

Two things are key in this statement:

1) There are not scripted sequences practiced by everyone, which means the practice is individualized (as much as it can be in a group teaching scenario). Often the best place to become familiar with sequencing and its effects is in your own practice. This brings us to point number two.

2) Before teaching any sequence, intimately understand its effects on your body at multiple levels, in particular the breath and how you feel pre- and post- practice. It is not just what is sequenced, but how it is sequenced that will have an overall effect in how one's body opens or not to the whole practice.

KEY PRINCIPLES

No one sequence will be appropriate for every person, for every mindset, for every energy level, for every level of experience, every day. In the Iyengar tradition, many factors are considered in how asanas are sequenced: one's experience, age, the weather, how one feels mentally and physically on a certain day, etc.

There are also different types of sequencing:

- 1) sequencing movements within a pose
- 2) sequencing from one pose to another within a family
- 3) sequencing from one family of poses to another.

Different families of asanas have different effects not only on one's body, but also one's overall state. Standing poses promote emotional stability and strength. Forward bends are calming; even the deepest forward bend should have a cooling effect, not a straining, feeling. Backbends energize the body. Twists (particularly when combined with backbends) help in "detoxing" the body. Inversions rebalance energy at all levels.

Not every practice need include all types of poses. Sometimes devoting a few days or a week to exploring the effects of single pose or family of poses offers deep insight that informs your practice and your teaching.

"Within the topic of sequencing asanas, there are a few more or less strict rules that we try to follow essentially all the time, and then there are some more or less general rules which can be broken in order to achieve specific effects," says Piddy. For example, a strict rule in the Iyengar system is that Sirsasana should be followed at some point in the sequence either by Sarvangasana, or by a similar pose to lengthen the neck (e.g. Setu Bandha Sarvangasana or Halasana). Also Salamba Sarvangasana is not followed by Sirsasana as is some other systems of yoga.

The following basic sequencing guidelines are from Brad Priddy's text and have helped form the basis for much of Naada Yoga's sequencing:

1. Standing poses are a good preparation for forward bends and also for back bends.
2. Adho Mukha Svanasana is a good preparation for all poses and also a good warm down after both forward bends and back bends. There is almost never a bad time to do Adho Mukha Svanasana. If you are doing Adho Mukha Svanasana near the beginning of a session, it is an active time, a time when you are moving into a working mode, so don't lower yourself into Adho Mukha Virasana (Child's Pose); rather step up into Uttanasana to maintain the energy of the session. Conversely, if you are doing the pose as a warm down, it can be relaxing to rest in Child's Pose afterward.

3. Don't alternate back and forth between deep forward bends and deep back bends. It is true that one good way to wind down from a session of back bends is to use a few gentle forward bends to recover and refresh the spine. However, one way that yoga was taught in the West, especially in the early days of yoga in the West, was that you should alternate "pose and counter-pose," moving back and forth between a deep forward bend and a deep back bend to move the spine in both directions. Generally this is not a good practice. Generally, we devote entire sessions to a particular theme — standing poses, forward bends, or back bends, for instance. Even if the theme of the session includes poses from multiple classes of asanas, a strict arrangement of "pose and counter-pose" is not a skillful way of sequencing. Generally one pose should lead you into the next pose by means of its similarity with the next pose, not by means of opposition.

4. It is not good to sequence active or heating poses after cooling poses. Once you have warmed-up and begun to engage in the heart of your yoga session, if it is an active session, you will generate a certain amount of heat. You want to maintain this heat for the duration of the active part of your session because it lends to the flexibility of your spine and body in general and keeps you mentally prepared for engaging in active asana work. Once you begin to cool down from your session, it is not good to have any more heating or active poses. Rather, you should gently move your body into preparation for Savasana. That being said, it can be initially confusing as to which poses are heating and which ones are cooling. Ultimately whether a pose is heating (active) or cooling (passive) may depend not on the pose itself, but on the level of the practitioner. For instance, in general Sirsasana is heating and Sarvangasana is cooling, however someone with a regular, lengthy Sirsasana practice may find Sirsasana very relaxing and cooling, especially brief periods in the pose.

In general, heating poses include: standing poses, inversions (which are cooling when done supported), arm balances, back bends (cooling when done supported), and active twists. Examples of cooling poses include: forward bends in general (especially seated forward bends), Supta Padangusthasana (especially cooling after back bends), Supta Baddha Konasana, and twists done gently. Almost all poses with a Jalandhara Bandha-type chin lock (e.g. Sarvangasana, Halasana, Setu Bandha, and Viparita Karani) are cooling to the brain and body. After doing poses in which the chin is in Jalandhara Bandha, no more active poses should be done because these are definitely cooling for the body and brain. Progress from these poses on to Savasana.

5. Generally after a deep forward bend sequence consider doing a few twists to balance and release your spinal muscles. However, try not to end your practice with a twist due to the asymmetric feel it may leave in your spine. Follow any twisting at the end of your session with at least one symmetric forward bend like Paschimottanasana to resolve the tension in your spine before relaxing in Savasana.

6. It is especially important to warm-down skillfully from an active back bend session. Active back bends exert strong work on your body and you need a plan to bring your body back into a neutral mode and then down from there to the point of relaxing in Savasana. A good pose to begin warming down from active back bends with is Adho Mukha Svanasana with your hands and feet placed wider than you usually have them. A wide Adho Mukha Svanasana after backbends fills out your back and softens your kidney area. However, remember to keep your low back relatively convex now in Adho Mukha Svanasana to relax

it – you don’t want to accentuate any concave curve there as you might do in this pose under other circumstances – you are recovering from back bends and you need to respect the work your back has done. A next good choice for back bend warm down is Adho Mukha Virasana (Child’s Pose) done on the support of bolsters or blankets under your torso. (You could also then use the bolsters or blankets and do a supported Upavistha Konasana or supported Janu Sirsasana). The important thing is that it is not skillful to move directly into a deep forward bend directly after active back bends. Try these other poses first. Then, you might try some gentle Uttanasana to place some stretch into your low back muscles. After a backbend session, light, lengthening twists are good, but you should do no deep twisting and do not hold them for a long time. (Also in twists following back bends, do not arch your spine, because that is what you’ve been doing all along in the back bends. Rather draw your abdomen inward and don’t concave your low back.)

Other poses that help release your back muscles after back bends are Supta Padangusthasana and Halasana on bolsters or blankets placed on the seat of a chair. Halasana especially will help calm and cool your nervous system after active backbends. Finally after backbends, regular Savasana is often not the best choice for a final resting pose. In Savasana after back bends, it is often better for your back to do have your legs (calves) up on a chair or to put a bolster under your knees to allow your low back to release fully onto the floor and be supported by the floor. If you have a bolster under your knees, still make sure your heels contact the floor, if not place the heels on blocks. After back bends, you might even consider doing prone Savasana, lying on your abdomen instead of your back with your heels pointed out to the sides.

NAADA YOGA SEQUENCING OUTLINE

I. Introduction and Theme Outline

This introduction is an opportunity to personally interact with your students. Here, you can introduce yourself to new students and acknowledge each member of your on-going community and their commitment to practice. Once you have acknowledged your audience, briefly explain the theme of your class and its significance in the overall practice (e.g. open shoulders can help create a stable and safe support for exploring backbends or arm balances) or why it is important to work in this way (e.g. to protect the shoulder girdle, to help focus breath/attention). It is important to use this moment effectively and efficiently.

Here are a few examples of themes for beginners to advanced students.

Grounding the femurs (beginners)
 Hip-opening (groins and internal rotation of the upper inner thighs) (beginners)
 Shoulder-opening (beginners)
 Vinyasa (beginners-intermediate-advanced)
 Backbends (beginners-advanced)
 Inversions (intermediate/advanced)
 Pranayama (intermediate/advanced)
 Meditation (advanced)
 Asymmetrical backbending (advanced)

2. Body/Breath Awareness (beginner-intermediate-advanced)

Breath-awareness is the foundation for any asana practice, and it should be the first area of focus for the class. It is practiced reclined so the body has maximum support and the inner experience of Yoga can be developed. Never rush this moment as it sets the pace of the entire class. Keep your instructions simple so that you do not overwhelm students with too many details. Bring them into the experience of their body and of being in the class, away from the busyness of their daily life. Regardless of the level of class, keep your instruction clear and concise. Set up the pose anatomically. Instruct students to close their eyes so they are drawing their attention inwards. Guide them into deeper breathing as a body experience by referring to how the breath can feel in various parts of the body.

3. Vocalization (advanced)

The voice is a natural extension of the breath. In fact, it is an excellent practice to develop more breath awareness (pranayama). This practice is done reclined so the body has ample support. This experience focuses more on listening from an internal perspective as opposed to an external one, so the student learns to experience sound at a deep level and notice its effects on the body-mind.

4. Spinal Mobility (beginner-advanced)

Here, introduce students to feeling breath and movement in the lumbar region of the body and spine. This area is commonly held with muscular tension patterns. Mobilizing this area of the body and spine are crucial to then freeing higher areas of the spine as preparation for more complex movement sequencing. Ensure that first breath is established and felt in the lumbar region. Movement of the spine and muscles should be slow and concise. It is a good reminder here that no movement should ever be forced. This is also an introduction to vinyasa as it is traditionally referred to as “movement with breath”.

5. Pelvic Stability (beginner-advanced)

Here, introduce one or two poses that clarify the importance of a stable pelvis. These poses will also simultaneously warm up the body. Emphasize the action of grounding the femurs, which releases the groins/psoas and supports the lumbar spine and diaphragm attachments, all of which help create both stability ensure deeper breathing with less muscular contraction. The sense should be one of opening and releasing into stability versus contracting and holding onto a pose.

6. Warm-up (beginner-advanced)

Here is where the concept of Vinyasa is implemented. With beginner students, moving from one pose to another several times is a great introduction to this concept and a simple and effective way of warming up the body. This can be emphasized easily by repeating a particular set of “flowing” poses (e.g. moving with the breath, resting in Uttanasana) throughout the entire class, not only just in the warm-up. With intermediate and advanced students, stringing together several poses linked by one core element (e.g. Surya Namaskara), provides a variety of challenges that requires a committed practice. Surya Namaskara is considered an intermediate/advanced practice and something that takes years to refine. It is not an appropriate sequence for beginners as it could potentially develop muscular imbalances due to poor

technique. However, it is recommended for beginners to deconstruct the sequence and teach each element on its own.

7. Inversions (advanced)

For advanced students, this is a suitable time to practice Sirsasana (headstand) ; or more advanced, would be a forearm balance such as Pincha Mayurasana (peacock). For the advanced student, the previously mentioned poses have focused more on the lower body, so now would be an opportune moment to open and strengthen the upper body.

8. Standing Poses (beginner-advanced)

These poses provide the strength and endurance necessary to support healthy alignment and deeper breathing. These are excellent poses for all levels and offer both dramatic and subtle sensations that deepen the practice experience. Emphasis is placed on the support of the legs, which sets up the pelvis as a more solid base for the torso to rest on.

9. Balancing (beginner-advanced)

Once a strong base is established, it can be challenged by narrowing it. This is the foundation of balancing. By narrowing the stance, the rising energy/effort is concentrated more deeply along the body's central axis, which requires more internal awareness of alignment and breath in order to sustain balance without tensing the muscles.

10. Backbends (beginner-advanced)

An important reminder here is the versatility of backbending within Yoga. Instead of moving directly into a deep backbend, try instead several poses to open the shoulders, groins, and front body (heart-area) gradually. Try not to think in terms of “backbending” but more “heart-opening”. Take the time to focus on different elements of the pose so that the sequencing feels progressive. This way, students will enjoy backbending as opposed to feeling like they are no good at it.

11. Inversions (beginner-advanced)

This is an appropriate time for Salamba Sarvangasana (shoulderstand). Beginners can practice Viparta Karani (legs up the wall). Intermediate students can practice with the support of the wall and props. Advanced students can attempt without the wall (blankets are recommended to support the shoulders and ensure the proper alignment of the cervical spine to prevent over-strain and/or injury).

12. Cool-down: Twists (beginner to advanced)

These are excellent poses to follow backbends as they help release excessive tension in the spine. For beginners, have them twist reclined so the breathing stays supported and deep. Many advanced twists are bound so ensure that the student(s) move from the inner body before binding the pose.

13. Cool-down: Forward Bends (beginner-advanced)

An excellent choice to follow twists after backbending. Forward bends are also an excellent preparation for Savasana as they calm the nervous system.

14. Naada meditation (advanced)

This portion of the class is meant for advanced students and is taught closer to the end of class before students lay down for Savasana. Emphasize good posture in either a seated or reclined position. Have students focus more on breath awareness as a way to develop concentration.

15. Savasana

Always leave 10-15 minutes at the end of class for this pose. This pose begins guided and ends in silence.

16. Vocalization

This is the final portion of the class. Together as a group students chant together the sound of OM. Vocalization is an extension of the breath and breath is the underlining force of Hatha Yoga. Acknowledge the relationship between the alignment of the physical body and the alignment of the voice. This last section not only emphasizes the importance of breath awareness, but draws in on the power of community. It is important to remind students to listen as they chant and try to match the tone of their voice with the tone of the accompanying instruments. Have students strive for a balance where they can hear both themselves as well as those around them.

APPENDIX

Sequences for your Teaching

By Richard Rosen

Yoga class sequences come in different shapes and sizes. Every contemporary school, such as Iyengar, Viniyoga, Bikram, Ashtanga, and Vinyasa to name a few, has its own ideas about how to sequence a practice, so you may have already been trained to sequence your classes in a particular way. Most sequences are linear, that is one posture follows another in a logical step-by-step direction, moving from less challenging to more challenging and back to less challenging. In general, a sequence like this opens with simple warm-ups that set a theme for the practice, intensifies to more challenging postures, slows to cooling postures and ends with relaxation (Corpse Pose).

But this is just one way to sequence. Typically each posture in the sequence is performed just once but you could also have your students perform each posture two to three times, focusing on a different aspect of the posture each time. Take, for example, Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)--you can first teach the pose focusing on the feet or legs, then repeat it while focusing on the spine or arms.

You can also build the entire sequence around just one posture, like Triangle, returning to it again and again, and use the other postures in the sequence to teach aspects of the main posture.

Here's an example of a general linear sequence (based on the Iyengar tradition of yoga):

- 1. Centering**
Begin the class with either a simple meditation or breathing exercise (in a seated or reclining position) so your students can collect and concentrate their awareness.
- 2. Preparation**
Teach a few simple exercises (such as hip or groin openers) that warm up the body in preparation for the theme or focus of the practice.
- 3. Sun Salute (Surya Namaskar)**
Instruct them through three to ten rounds.
- 4. Standing postures**
- 5. Arm balances**
- 6. Inversions**
- 7. Abdominal and/or arm strength postures**
- 8. Backbends**
- 9. Shoulderstand**
- 10. Twists and/or forward bends**
- 11. Corpse (Savasana)**

A full practice sequence like this would take at least 90 minutes to finish, but not all classes go quite that long. Here are two possible sequences--one for beginners and one for advanced beginners--that would fit nicely into a shorter timeframe.

FOR BEGINNERS:

Sukhasana (Easy Pose)
 Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)
 Surya Namaskar -- 3 Rounds (Sun salutations)
 Vrksasana (Tree Pose)
 Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)
 Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)
 Dandasana (Staff Pose)
 Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
 Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
 Upavishta Konasana (Wide Angle Pose)
 Navasana (Boat Pose)

Salabhasana (Locust Pose)
 Setu Bandha Sarangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)
 Viparita Karani (Legs up the Wall)
 Reclining Twist
 Savasana (Corpse Pose)

FOR ADVANCED BEGINNERS

Virasana (Hero Pose)
 Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)
 Surya Namaskar (Sun salutations)
 Vrksasana (Tree Pose)
 Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)
 Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)
 Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
 Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)
 Ardha Navasana (Half Boat Pose)
 Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
 Salabhasana (Locust Pose)
 Makrasana (Crocodile Pose)
 Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)
 Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
 Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)
 Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
 Marichyasana III (Marichi's Pose)
 Savasana (Corpse Pose)

HEADACHE SEQUENCE

There are many different kinds of headaches, some (like tension headaches and migraines) are fairly common, others (like sinus headaches or headaches caused by brain tumors) are relatively rare. Various treatments—including drugs, acupuncture, chiropractic and massage, and stress-relief techniques—are recommended for dealing with headaches. Yoga asanas and breathing can help too, though mostly with tension-type headaches.

Here's a sequence you can teach to a student who is suffering from a tension headache. Whenever possible, get the student practicing soon after she starts to feel the pain. Once the headache is established it will be very difficult to alleviate.

HEADACHE SEQUENCE *(minimum time 25 minutes, maximum time 45 minutes)*

Balasana (Child's Pose)
 Have the student place her head on the floor, or support her torso and head on a bolster positioned between her thighs. The bolster's long axis should be parallel to her torso. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)*

Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)

Support her head either on a bolster laid across her extended leg, or, if she's less flexible, on the front edge of a padded chair seat. Hold each side for 1 to 3 minutes; total time 2 to 6 minutes.

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)

Support her head on a bolster or block. *(Total time 1 to 2 minutes.)*

Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Place her head and crossed forearms supported on a padded chair seat. *(Total time 1 to 3 minutes.)*

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

Support the torso on a rolled blanket underneath and parallel to her spine. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)*

Setu Bandha Sarangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

Support the torso on a bolster, and instruct her to let her shoulders and head rest lightly on the floor. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)*

Viparita Karani (Legs up the Wall)

Let her pelvis be supported either on a bolster or rolled blanket. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)* To protect her back when exiting, make sure she doesn't twist off the support. Either instruct her to 1) slide off the support first before turning to her side, or 2) bend her knees, press her feet against the wall, and with an inhalation lift her pelvis off the support; then slide the support off to one side, lower her pelvis to the floor, and turn onto her side.

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

Ask her to take normal inhalations but lengthen the exhalations as much as is comfortable. If she normally takes 5 counts on an exhalation, extend it to 7 or 8 counts if possible. At the end of the first 10 or so exhalations, pause for 2 to 5 seconds before drawing the next inhalation. *(Total time 10 to 15 minutes.)* When in Corpse Pose she might also want to lay a weighted sandbag on her forehead. Have her lie in Corpse and position a block so that it's touching the top of her head. Its long axis should be perpendicular to her head. Lay the weighted bag half on the block and half on her forehead. The pressure of the weight on her head helps release the tension.

MENSTRUATION

Exercise during menstruation is generally highly recommended. It's believed that exercise can ease the discomfort of dysmenorrhea; quell mood swings, anxiety, and depression; and reduce bloating.

Most contemporary yoga teachers advise a fairly conservative approach toward asana practice during menstruation. These menstrual sequences generally consist of prop-supported poses—mostly forward bends. This makes perfect sense for women who feel sluggish during their cycle. However, many other women don't feel the need to change anything about their practice during menstruation, except maybe to limit strenuous inverted poses. Each student should decide for herself what kind of asana sequence is most appropriate for her body during menstruation, but here are some poses you can offer as a start.

Menstruation Sequence (*minimum time 45 minutes, maximum time 60 minutes*)

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

Support the torso on a bolster. (Total time 5 minutes.)

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Use a strap to hold the raised leg in place. *Hold each side for 2 minutes; total time 4 minutes.*

Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)

(Total time 2 minutes.)

Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)

Support the head either on a bolster laid across her extended leg, or if she's less flexible, on the front edge of a padded chair seat. *Hold each side for 3 to 5 minutes; total time 6 to 10 minutes.*

Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

With her torso and head supported on a bolster laid along her legs. (Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)

Upavistha Konasana (Seated Wide Angle Pose)

Rest the torso on a bolster positioned between her legs with its long axis parallel to her torso. (Total time 3 to 5 minutes). Then have her come up and twist to each side for 30 seconds to 1 minute, holding the shin or the inside of the foot. (Total time 1 to 2 minutes.)

Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Facing Bow)

Supported on a chair. Pad the chair seat with either a sticky mat or a folded blanket. Then ask her to slide her legs through the space between the chair back and seat, and sit on the back edge of the seat facing the chair back. Have her grip the chair legs just below the chair back and, with an exhalation, lean into a backbend. The front edge of the seat should cross her back torso just under her shoulder blades. Instruct her to keep her knees bent and feet on the floor. Support the back of her head, either on a bolster or a block. She can continue to hold the chair legs, stretch her arms overhead, or slip her arms underneath the seat between the chair legs and grip the back rung. Make sure she is breathing smoothly. To come up, ask her to grip the chair legs just below the chair back, and pull herself up with an exhalation. Ask her to lead the movement of her torso with her chest, not her head. (Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)

Seated Twist

Still sitting reversed through the chair, ask her to twist to the right with an exhalation, hold for 30 seconds, then twist to the left for 30 seconds. Repeat three times to each side, each time holding for 30 seconds. (Total time 3 minutes.)

Viparita Karani (Legs up the Wall)

Support her pelvis on a bolster or rolled blanket. (Total time 5 to 10 minutes.) Make sure she slides off the support before turning to her side.

Savasana (Corpse Pose)
(Total time 8 to 10 minutes.)

DEPRESSION

The word "depression" covers a wide range of conditions, from long-standing and severe clinical or major depression to shorter-term and episodic mild depression, also called dysthymic disorder, to situational depression brought on by a major life change, such as the death of a spouse, job loss, divorce.

Many different therapies are available for depression, including anti-depressants and psychotherapy. Studies indicate that regular exercise too, including yoga asanas and breathing, can help some people ease the symptoms of mild to moderate forms of depression. Here is a sequence you can try with students suffering from this condition.

DEPRESSION SEQUENCE *(minimum time 40 minutes, maximum time 70 minutes)*

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)
 with her back torso supported on a rolled blanket positioned below and parallel to her spine.
(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)
 Ask her to use a strap to hold the raised leg in place. *Hold each side for 1 to 2 minutes; total time 2 to 4 minutes.*

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)
 Use a bolster or block to support the head. *(Total time 1 to 2 minutes.)*

Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
 Support her head and crossed forearms on a padded chair seat. *(Total time 1 to 3 minutes.)*

Sirasana (Headstand)
 Intermediate students should perform the full pose for a total time of 3 to 5 minutes. Ask them to bring their feet back to the floor slowly together if possible, either with straight knees or bent, with an exhalation, and stand in Standing Forward Bend for 30 seconds before coming up. *(Total time 3 minutes.)*

Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose)
 Supported on a chair. Pad the chair seat either with a sticky mat or folded blanket. Then ask her to slide her legs through the space between the chair back and seat, and sit on the back edge of the seat facing the chair back. Instruct her to grip the chair legs just below the chair back and, with an exhalation, lean into a backbend. The front edge of the seat should cross her back torso just under her shoulder blades. Have her keep her knees bent and feet on the floor. Support the back of her head, either on a bolster or a block. She can continue to hold the chair legs, stretch her arms overhead, or slip her arms underneath the seat between the chair legs and grip the back rung. Make sure she is breathing smoothly. To come up, ask her to grip the chair legs just below

the chair back, and pull herself up with an exhalation. Make sure she leads the movement of her torso with her chest, not her head. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)*

Seated Twist

Continue to sit reversed through the chair, then ask her to twist to the right with an exhalation, hold for 30 seconds, then twist to the left for 30 seconds. Repeat three times to each side, each time holding for 30 seconds. *(Total time 3 minutes.)*

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

Place a blank under the shoulders for support. Repeat three times, each time for 30 seconds to 1 minute. *(Total time 2 to 3 minutes.)*

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)

(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.) Follow Shoulderstand with Halasana (Plow Pose). Intermediate students should do full Plow with their feet on the floor, beginners can do Plow with their feet resting on a chair seat. *(Total time 1 to 2 minutes.)*

Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)

Support the head either on a bolster laid across her extended leg, or if she's less flexible, on the front edge of a padded chair seat. *Hold each side for 1 to 3 minutes; total time 2 to 6 minutes.*

Viparita Karani (Legs up the Wall)

Pelvis is supported on a bolster or rolled blanket. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)* Ask her to slide off the support before she turns to her side.

Reclining Conqueror Ujjayi

Instruct her to lie on a blanket support to open her chest, with long, smooth, full inhalations and exhalations. *(Total time 3 to 5 minutes.)*

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

Instruct her to come off her blanket support and lay her back torso flat on the floor. Support her bent knees on a bolster. *(Total time 8 to 10 minutes.)*

Groins

My dictionary notes that the English word groin "perhaps" derives from the Old English grynde, which means "hollow." The groins are indeed hollows, located at the junctions between the thighs and pelvis. For the purposes of yoga instruction (though this is not technically correct according to anatomy textbooks), we can distinguish between the front groins and the inner groins. The front groins refer to the creases running from the hip points (the two little bony knobs a few inches to either side of the navel) diagonally down and into the pubic bone (the front bottom of the pelvis), which together form a "V" shape. The inner groins extend from the creases between the inner thighs and the perineum (the fleshy base of the pelvis). Any groin sequence should work with both these pairs of groins.

GROIN SEQUENCE: *(Total time 45 to 55 minutes)*

The groin sequence begins with three (*supta*) reclining poses.

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

Ask her to start in Supta Baddha Konasana with the back of her pelvis flat on the floor. Then after a minute or so, place a block underneath her sacrum. She will eventually place the block at its highest height, but if the sensation is too intense, she can lower it. *(Total time two to three minutes).*

Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)

If she can't recline comfortably on the floor, make sure that her back torso is well-supported on a bolster. Place a heavy sandbag on the front groin of the bent leg, right over the head of the thighbone. Keep each leg in position for two to three minutes *(Total time four to six minutes).*

Alternative: If Supta Virasana is painful for her knees, review the instructions in our Poses section. If she still finds the pose uncomfortable, have her take a low lunge at the wall as follows: Start by facing the wall. Place her right big toe at the wall and slide her left knee back into a low lunge. (The top of her foot and left knee will rest on the floor.) Press her hands into the wall for support. Repeat on the other side.

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Hold each leg vertical for one to two minutes, then open the leg out to the side (resting the outer thigh on a block) for the same length of time. *(Total time four to eight minutes).*

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)

Keep her in the pose for one minute. Then ask her to step the right leg forward into the leg position for:

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One legged King Pigeon Pose)

Ask her to lay her torso down on the inner front thigh for one to two minutes. Then have her step lightly back into Adho Mukha Svanasana, hold for 30 seconds, and repeat with the left leg forward for the same length of time. *(Total time of steps four and five: five to seven minutes).*

Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide legged Standing Forward Bend) with a variation

With the legs wide, have her bend her right knee and shift her torso to the right, snugging it against the inner thigh. Instruct her to keep the left leg strong, pressing the inner thigh out to the left. Hold for one minute. Inhale back to center, then repeat to the left for the same length of time. Finally, perform the full pose for two minutes. *(Total time four minutes) .*

Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)

Perform with the bottom arm pressing against the inner thigh. Hold each side for one to two minutes *(Total time two to four minutes).*

Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

Hold each side for minute *(Total time two minutes).*

Upavistha Konasana (Seated Wide Angle Pose) with a variation

First have her twist to the right for one minute, then to the left for the same length of time. Return to center and fold forward for one to three minutes (*Total time three to five minutes*).

Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)

Fold forward for two minutes on a side (*Total time four minutes*).

Malasana (Garland Pose)

(*Total time two minutes*).

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

Place a block underneath her sacrum for support. (*Total time two to three minutes*).

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand) with a variation

Instruct her to come into Shoulderstand and then bend the knees and press the soles of the feet together in Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose). (*Total time three minutes*).

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

(*Total time 10 minutes*).

Shoulders

One giveaway of poor posture, often the result of the stresses and strains of daily life, is rounded shoulders. When we hold ourselves this way, our upper back hunches, lifting the shoulders toward the ears, and our chest collapses, narrowing the space between the collarbones. All of this can lead to the head jutting forward, which creates compression and tightening in the neck. This condition creates the potential for any number of physical ailments, including chronic headaches, back pain, and breathing difficulties. A shoulder sequence should include stretches that open and lift the heart area, and exercises that draw the shoulder blades down the back and return the head to a neutral position, perched lightly on the top of the spine.

SHOULDER SEQUENCE (*Total time 45 to 55 minutes*).

Sukhasana (Easy Pose) or Virasana (Hero Pose)

Ask her to find a seated position that is comfortable for her, and make sure you have a strap nearby. Keeping the hands well apart, have her hold the strap in both hands with the arms stretched forward and parallel to the floor. Ask her to inhale and sweep the strap above her head, then exhale as she brings it down behind her torso. Next, have her inhale the strap up again above her head, then down in front of her torso on the exhalation. Be sure she keeps her elbows straight and her shoulders away from her ears. Repeat 10 to 15 times (*Total time three minutes*).

Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)

Have her take the right arm on top first. Hold for one minute. Then perform the arm position for Garudasana (Eagle Pose)

right arm above the left, for the same length of time. Repeat with the left arm superior for the same length of time (*Total time four minutes*).

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)

Ask her to come into Downward Dog with her fingertips grazing the edge of a wall. Hold for 30 seconds to two minutes. When she inhales, instruct her to swing her torso forward until the crown of her head presses against the wall in a variation of Plank Pose. Hold for one to two minutes, spreading the shoulder blades wide. Return to Adho Mukha Svanasana for 30 seconds to two minutes, then Plank again for one to two minutes. Finally release her knees to the floor (*Total time three to four minutes*) .

Pincha Mayurasana (Forearm Balance)

Perform at the wall for one minute. If you'd like, you can ask her to repeat for the same length of time, kicking up with her non-habitual leg.

Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)

Take Handstand at the wall for one minute. As in Forearm Balance, you can repeat for the same length of time, asking her to kick up with her non-habitual leg. If she is not yet working on Handstand, try Half Handstand at the wall. Measure off a leg's distance from the wall by sitting in Dandasana (Staff Pose) with the heels pressing against the wall. Have her turn around so that she is facing away from the wall and take Downward-Facing Dog. Ask her to place her hands where her hips were in Dandasana. Have her slowly walk her feet up the wall so until they are parallel with her hips.

Tadasana (Mountain Pose) with Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal)

Spread and press the palms in Anjali Mudra. Use these actions to create a similar spreading and firmness of the shoulder blades on the back torso. (*Total time two minutes*) .

Utthita Parshvottanasana (Extended Side Stretch Pose)

Place the hands in reverse Anjali Mudra, pressing behind the back. Or you can cross the forearms behind the back and clasp hold of the elbows. Be sure to reverse the cross on the other side. Ask her to hold for one minute on each side. In between each side, and at the conclusion of the second side, put her in Prasrita Padottanasana II (with the hands on the waist) for one minute. (*Total time four minutes*) .

Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)

One minute on each side. (*Total time two minutes*) .

Vasisthasana (Pose dedicated to Sage Vasistha)

One minute on each side (*Total time two minutes*) .

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

Ask her to sit with her knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hips distance apart. Then have her place a strap around the ankles and lie back. Instruct her to come into Bridge Pose with the hands on the strap. Have her hold it and walk the hands up the strap, toward the feet. Make sure she keeps the shoulder blades drawing down the back. Repeat three times, each time for one minute. (*Total time three minutes*) .

Purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose)

Two to three times, holding for 30 seconds to one minute each time. *(Total time one to three minutes)* . Alternative: Tabletop the pose with the knees bent and feet flat on the floor.

Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)

Two to three times, holding for 30 seconds to one minute each time. *(Total time one to three minutes)* .

Bhardvajasana (Bharadvaja's Twist)

One minute on each side *(Total time two minutes)* .

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)

Work up to five minutes. Finish with Halasana (Plow Pose) for one to two minutes. *(Total time six to seven minutes)*.

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

(Total time 10 minutes).

FORWARD BENDS

Forward bends are typically thought of as poses that direct our awareness away from the outside world and toward the inner world. While the back of the body is being stretched in forward bends, particularly the backs of the legs, our attention should continually be focused on the front torso. Always tip into a forward bend from the groins, being sure to maintain the length of the front torso, especially the lower belly between the pubic bone (the front bottom of the pelvis) and the navel. As soon as you begin to feel this area shorten, you should stop the forward movement, lift out of the pose slightly, reestablish the length of the lower belly, and then try to bend forward again.

FORWARD BEND SEQUENCE *(Total time 50 to 70 minutes)*

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Right leg vertical for one to two minutes, then leg out to the side, resting the outer thigh on a block for the same length of time. Repeat with the left leg for the same length of time. *(Total time two to four minutes)*.

Dandasana (Staff Pose)

One minute, then, with an exhalation, draw the legs into:

Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)

Hold for one minute, then with an inhalation, lightly extend the legs back into Dandasana. *(Total time for steps two and three: two minutes)* .

Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)

Hold for two to three minutes on a side. *(Total time four to six minutes)* .

Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana (Half Bound Half Lotus Forward Bend)

Hold for two to three minutes on each side. *(Total time four to six minutes)* .

Trinaga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana (Three limbed Forward bend)
Hold for two to three minutes on each side. *(Total time four to six minutes)* .

Krouchasana (Heron Pose)
Hold for one to two minutes on each side. *(Total time four to six minutes)* .

Marichyasana I (Pose dedicated to Sage Marichi)
Hold for one to two minutes on each side. *(Total time four to six minutes)* .

Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
(Total time two to three minutes).

Upavistha Konasana (Seated Wide Angle Pose)
First have her twist to the right for one minute, then to the left for the same length of time. Ask her to return to center and fold forward for two minutes. *(Total time four minutes)* .

Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
(Total time one minute).

Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
(Total time one to two minutes).

Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)
For one minute on each side. *(Total time two minutes)* .

Utthita Parshvottanasana (Extended Side Stretch Pose)
Ask her to place the hands on the floor on either side of the front foot. Hold for one minute on each side. *(Total time two minutes)* .

Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide legged Standing Forward Bend)
(Total time one to two minutes).

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)
(Total time three to five minutes).

Halasana (Plow Pose)
(Total time one to three minutes).

Savasana (Corpse Pose)
(Total time 10 minutes).

BACKBENDS

Backbends are thought of as poses that open our awareness to the outside world. While the front of the body is being stretched in backbends (specifically the thighs, front groins, belly, chest and armpits), we should continue to focus our students' attention on the back torso. As they come into a backbend, ask them to lift the pubic bone toward the navel and rotate the thighs strongly inward. Make sure they keep the buttocks firm (but not tight or squeezed) and keep the tailbone pressed forward, which helps keep the lower back long and protects it from compression.

BACKBEND SEQUENCE *(Total time 40 to 50 minutes)*

Virasana (Hero Pose)

Ask her to clasp her hands and stretch the arms straight out in front of her with the palms facing away from you. Then as she inhales have her stretch the arms up alongside the ears. Hold for one minute. Allow her to release, reverse the clasp of the hands (do the non-habitual clasp) and again raise her arms for one minute. Release on an exhalation. *(Total time two minutes)* .

Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)

(Total time two to three minutes).

Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)

For one to two minutes on each side *(Total time two to four minutes)* .

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog)

(Total time one minute).

Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)

Have her perform this pose very close to the wall. Once she has kicked up, ask her to press the buttocks and the backs of the legs into the wall, and lift the chest away from the wall. Hold her in the posture for 30 seconds, then ask her to press through the arms and reach through heels into the full pose for 30 seconds. *(Total time one minute)* .

Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

(Total time one minute). Then feet apart for:

Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)

Guide her into the pose, then ask her to walk the bottom hand a few inches behind her so that she has space to come into a backbend in the upper-back. Hold each side for one minute. *(Total time two minutes)* .

Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)

One minute on each side *(Total time two minutes)* .

Purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose)

Repeat three times, holding for 30 seconds to one minute each time. *(Total time two to three minutes)* .

Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)

Repeat three times, holding for 30 seconds to one minute each time. (*Total time two to three minutes*) .

Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

Repeat three times, holding for 30 seconds to one minute each time. (*Total time two to three minutes*) .

Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)

(*Total time one minute*).

Ustrasana (Camel Pose)

(*Total time one minute*).

Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose)

Repeat three to five times, holding for 15 to 30 seconds each time. (*Total time one to three minutes*) .

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)

Hold for three to five minutes, then have her drop to:

Setu Bandha Sarangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

(*Total time one minute*).

Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

(*Total time 30 seconds to one minute*).

Marichyasana III (Pose dedicated to Sage Marichi)

Ask her to twist to each side three times, holding each twist for 30 seconds. (*Total time three minutes*) .

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

(*Total time 10 minutes*).

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