



## Intro to Ultimate

### A Few Words About Ultimate

Ultimate is a non-contact disc sport, which combines elements of soccer, basketball and American Football. It is played seven on seven, on a field with two end zones. It is recommended that younger students play five on five on a smaller field instead of seven per side. Players cannot run with the disc. Teams advance the disc down the field by passing it to one another and score if one of their teammates catches the disc in the end zone. This may be achieved through one very long pass, or many shorter passes. If a pass is intercepted or hits the ground (i.e. dropped, knocked down, or simply errant), the result is a turnover—the other team immediately takes possession and starts to pass the disc in the other direction.

One of the most unique aspects of Ultimate is that the principle of "Spirit of the Game™" is written into the official rules of the sport. Spirit of the Game is a code of sportsmanship and respect, which all players agree to uphold whenever they play Ultimate. Even at the highest levels of competitive Ultimate, there is no referee—players call their own fouls and officiate themselves in this spirit of fair competition and respect for the rules. Thus, Ultimate is a great character-building sport for kids, teaching them that their "spirit" and the way they conduct themselves is more important than winning. We suggest that teachers and playground coaches give special emphasis to this aspect when introducing the sport.

The first games of Ultimate may be a bit frustrating (many turnovers and stopped play to explain the rules), but we have found that most kids love to learn to play Ultimate. Kids have fun the first time they play and as they develop their skills through this curriculum, their enjoyment increases exponentially.

## Catching

- The best way to catch a disc is between two hands in what is called the "pancake," "clap," or "alligator" catch (your arms are like the jaws of the gator).
- A more advanced technique called a "claw" catch can be used, wherein the thumbs go on top or bottom of the disc, while the other four fingers go on the other side, grasping it like two separate ends of a claw.
- As students progress it is valuable to challenge them to catch the disc with one hand. **Each of the following exercises can be practiced with both the pancake and claw catches.**
- It is important that students be allowed to experiment and play with the Frisbee on their own, without feeling that they are being watched or assessed.
- We recommend that at least five minutes be spent with some of these exercises on the first day of the course. They are also a great way to begin any class.
- In an ideal case, each student would have his or her own disc for these exercises. The exercises can also be practiced with one disc per group of two, three, or four students.

## Throwing

### The Backhand

This is the most basic throw and the one with which most people are familiar.

#### Grip

While there are many possible ways to grip the disc for this throw, we suggest the following for teaching kids: Grip the side of the disc, as if shaking hands with it. Extend the index finger along the side rim of the Frisbee and then drop the tip of the finger off of the rim, just to the first joint. The thumb should be on top of the Frisbee, and the three smallest fingers should be underneath it, on the inside rim. According to personal comfort, you may choose to keep the pinky uninvolved.

#### Stance/Pivoting

- Plant a pivot foot. Righties should plant their left foot and lefties should plant their right foot.
- Practice pivoting around the pivot foot and stepping with the non-planted foot. Pivot around in a complete circle, and then try to accomplish this with just two steps. Now pivot one way and then back the other way.



- Later in the curriculum, we will be teaching basic Ultimate Frisbee. In Ultimate, like basketball, players must plant a pivot foot. These pivoting moves will be especially helpful when you begin to play Ultimate.
- With your pivot foot planted, step towards your target with your front foot. (It doesn't need to be a giant step, just step comfortably.) The side of your body should be aligned with the direction you wish to throw. You should be facing 90 degrees from your target.

### **First Throws**

- Students should gather into partners or small groups, depending on the number of Frisbees available. Partners or group-mates should start just a few feet from one another.
- Gripping the disc correctly, the thrower steps towards their partner and tosses the disc by flicking the wrist. The disc should spin off of the index finger, and the hand should wind up pointing at the target, with the arm extended.
- If thrown correctly, the Frisbee should have some spin as it travels through the air. The flick or snap of the wrist is what makes the disc spin, and gives it control and accuracy.
- **Make sure to look at your target!**
- Throw the disc back and forth with your partner at this close range. Encourage pancake catches.
- See how many throws you can make in a row without dropping the disc.
- Try moving a few steps farther away from your partner. To make farther throws, you will likely get your arm involved. This is fine, but make sure that the release is accomplished with a snap of the wrist.

### **The Forehand or "Flick"**

This is a fantastic throw to teach. It's easier than it looks (and it looks very cool). It can be thrown as far as a backhand with much less arm movement and physical exertion. It's crucial for ultimate.

### **Stance/Pivoting**

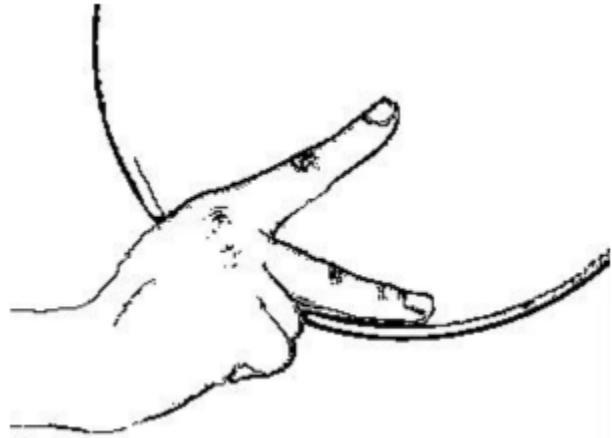
- As in the backhand, players must establish a pivot foot. (Righties pivot on their left foot, Lefties pivot on their right.)
- The step is to the same side as your throwing hand. Do not step across the body!
- Unlike the backhand (where the step is made towards the target), the flick is thrown by stepping to the side of the target. Thus, both shoulders are open, facing the target when the throw is made.
- It is very common for beginners to step with the wrong foot. Make sure to step with the same foot as the throwing arm. Stepping this way may be counter-intuitive, as it is different from throwing a baseball. With practice, it will become second nature.

## Grip

There are two basic forehand grips:

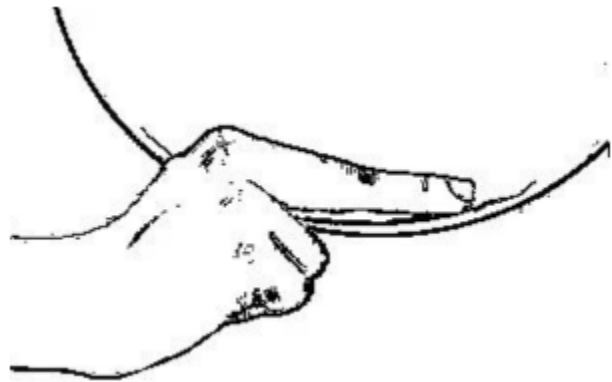
### *Beginner's Grip*

- Make a "gun" with your thumb and index finger. The thumb is placed on the top of the Frisbee and the index finger is in the center of the underside.
- Extend the middle finger 90 degrees from the index finger and place it against the rim of the Frisbee.
- Adjust the Frisbee so that it is snug in the crease of the thumb.
- **The grip should be fairly tight.**
- This can be especially useful for children with smaller hands.



### *Power Grip*

- Let the Frisbee hang off of the index and middle fingers.
- Keeping these fingertips on the rim, snugly grip the disc in the crease of the thumb, with the thumb on top.
- Both the index and middle fingers should be "scrunched" together against the inside rim of the Frisbee.
- **The grip should also be fairly tight.**



In both grips, the Frisbee should be held so that as much of it as possible is on the outside of the hand (away from the palm).

## First Flicks

- Grip the disc, set a pivot foot and step (to the side of the target with the same foot as the throwing hand).
- Unlike the backhand, there is no weight shift during this throw. Weight should be either evenly distributed or more on the stepped (non-pivot) foot throughout the throw.
- Cock the wrist to the outside of the body. This movement is similar to the set-up for a forehand in tennis or ping-pong.
- **Dip the outside edge of the Frisbee.** This is crucial. The Frisbee should be held so that if a marble were placed on it, it would roll off to the side, away from the body. **This angle should be maintained throughout the release of the throw.**
- **Hold the elbow against the body.** Keep it here all through the throw!

- Snap the wrist forward towards the target. At the end of the snap, the Frisbee should be sent spinning off of the index finger.
- The two most important rules for throwing the flick are as follows:
- Drop the outside edge. Lifting the outside edge at any point during the throw will result in a vertical Frisbee that takes a wicked curve (to the left for righties, to the right for lefties).

*The two most important rules for throwing the flick are as follows:*

- **Drop the outside edge.** Lifting the outside edge at any point during the throw will result in a vertical Frisbee that takes a wicked curve (to the left for righties, to the right for lefties).
- **It's all wrist.** Especially at first, arm involvement should be minimized. The key to this throw is the wrist snap. **It is essentially a wrist throw, not an arm throw.** Keeping the elbow "glued" to the body can help you to get this feeling. Once you get a good snap on the release, you can unglue the elbow and start to involve a little more arm.

When first practicing the flick, focus on a snappy release that produces a throw with lots of spin. This is much more important than accuracy at this point.

## **Troubleshooting/Corrections**

*The disc is wobbly or dies before reaching the target.*

There probably wasn't enough spin put onto the disc. First make sure the receiver is very close to the thrower. Check the grip, making sure that the index finger is extended along the rim. Then have the student throw using a strong snap of the wrist and having the disc spin off of the index finger.

*The disc goes straight up in the air, and then comes back towards the thrower.*

Here the motion of the arm is surely going from low to high, with the hand finishing up in the air upon release. Have the student make sure that their arm moves horizontally, and that they finish the throw with their hand pointing directly at the target.

*The disc goes a hundred miles an hour, nearly decapitating the poor receiver.*

This student needs to use a lot less arm and more wrist. Have them focus on putting as much spin on the disc as possible, snapping the wrist but hardly moving the arm at all. Remind them that they are making a pass, not just a throw.

*Instead of flying straight, the disc curves one way or the other.*

The angle of the disc upon release will determine the trajectory with which it flies. To throw the disc level, it should be pretty much flat upon release. Chances are this child is either lifting or dropping the outside edge (edge farthest from the body) of the disc prior to the release. Have them make sure that the disc is flat before they begin their throwing motion, and then make sure that wrist and arm move straight at the target. For more on how to curve throws on purpose, see this document on ["Curving Your Throws"](#).

### **Forehand/Backhand Pivot**

- Have the students once again practice pivoting around their pivot foot, as they did when first learning the backhand. This time, they can change their grip from backhand to forehand, depending upon which side they are stepping to.
- Righties will pivot off of their left foot (stepping with their right). When they step to the right they should throw a forehand. When they step to the left, they will throw a backhand.
- Lefties will pivot off of their right foot (stepping with their left). When they step to the left they should throw a forehand. When they step to the right, they will throw a backhand.
- Apply this pivoting and throwing off of the correct foot (alternating between forehands and backhands while playing catch) either in pairs or groups.
- Start to mix in some fakes (i.e. pivot, step and make the arm motion of throwing a backhand but then quickly pivot, step the other way and (changing the grip) throw a forehand, etc.).

## **Playing Ultimate**

We have found that students as young as the 3rd grade can be successful playing Ultimate. However, teachers with students who have very rudimentary disc skills may wish to play Ultimate with a beanbag or ball first instead of a disc to give them a feel for the game.

Depending on class size, teachers may wish to organize one or more games at a time. While regulation ultimate games have seven players per team, kids in 5th to 8th grade would do well to play 5v5, and younger students may even play with as few as 3 players per team. Players of all levels often play games of “mini” to help develop their skills, but it is especially useful for younger players to reduce the number of variables on the field.

10-12 students - 1 game

13-24 students - 2 games

25-36 students - 3 games

### **Setup**

Set up the field(s) with two end zones, as in football. Competitive Ultimate is played on a 70 x 40

yard field with two 25 yard end zones. For your classes, we recommend that you set up shorter fields of around 50 x 30 yards with 10-15 yard end zones for games of 5v5. Games of 3v3 can be played on fields even smaller.

### **Explain the Basic Rules of the Game**

- No running with the disc. Teammates pass the disc to each other to advance it down the field and score when a pass is caught in the end zone.

- If the disc hits the ground, the defense intercepts the disc, or the offense commits a receiving foul, it results in a turnover. The other team immediately takes possession and begins to pass the disc the other way.
- After a score, both teams line up facing each other on the opposite goal lines. The team that scored restarts play with a long throw called a "pull," which is the Ultimate equivalent of a football kickoff.
- Ultimate is a non-contact sport. Unlike basketball and football, there is no shoving, boxing out with contact, setting picks, or other deliberate physical contact allowed in Ultimate.
- Players call their own fouls. The system works as follows: If a player feels that they have been fouled (i.e. got their arm slapped when trying to catch a disc), they call out "Foul!" Play stops, and the accused player can then acknowledge that they committed a foul (in the official lingo, they'd say "No contest," pronounced with the emphasis on "test"), which would result in the receiver being awarded the disc at the spot they would have caught it. If the accused player disagrees with the call, they would say "Contest" and the disc would return to whoever threw it, in what is essentially a "do-over." The two involved players are allowed and encouraged to succinctly and respectfully discuss their points of view if they are not immediately in agreement. What makes this system work is the concept of Spirit of the Game, which is essential to the sport of Ultimate and should be emphasized.

## **Spirit of the Game**

Spirit of the Game is especially important in ultimate frisbee. In a sport where the players also act as the referees, integrity is of the utmost importance. Due to this importance, it is written into the rulebook.

### **From Section 2, Spirit of the Game, Item A:**

"Spirit of the Game is a set of principles which places the responsibility for fair play on the player. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the three core tenets of Spirit of the Game: mutual respect among competitors, adherence to the agreed upon rules, and the basic joy of play. "

### **Item C:**

"It is assumed that no player will intentionally violate the rules; thus there are no harsh penalties for inadvertent infractions, but rather a method for resuming play in a manner that simulates what most likely would have occurred absent the infraction. An intentional infraction is cheating and considered a gross offense against the Spirit of the Game. Players are obligated to abide by the rules and not gain advantage by knowingly committing an infraction, or calling one where none exists."

Although the full [USAU Rulebook](#) is available for review on USA Ultimate's website, students should not be expected to be rulebook experts by the end of a unit. However, they should be able to adjudicate the basic rules of the game in a respectful manner. [USA Ultimate's 10 Simple Rules](#) are a quick and easy way to learn how to play ultimate frisbee.

1. **THE FIELD:** A rectangular shape with end zones at each end. A regulation field is 70 yards long by 40 yards wide, with end zones 20 yards deep.
2. **STARTING PLAY:** Each point begins with both teams lining up on the front of opposite end zone lines. The defense throws ("pulls") the disc to the offense. A regulation game has seven players per team.
3. **SCORING:** Each time the offense catches a pass in the defense's end zone, the offense scores a point. The teams switch direction after every goal, and the next point begins with a new pull by the team that just scored.
4. **MOVEMENT OF THE DISC:** The disc may be advanced in any direction by completing a pass to a teammate. Players may not run with the disc. The person with the disc ("thrower") has ten seconds to throw the disc. The defender guarding the thrower ("marker") counts out the stall count.
5. **CHANGE OF POSSESSION:** When a pass is not completed (e.g., out of bounds, drop, block, interception, stalled), the defense immediately takes possession of the disc and becomes the offense.
6. **SUBSTITUTIONS:** Players not in the game may replace players in the game after a score and during an injury timeout.
7. **NON-CONTACT:** Players must attempt to avoid physical contact during play. Picks and screens are also prohibited.
8. **FOULS:** When a player initiates contact that affects the play, a foul occurs. When a foul causes a player to lose possession, the play resumes as if the possession was retained. If the player that the foul was called against disagrees with the foul call, the play is redone.
9. **SELF-OFFICIATING:** Players are responsible for their own foul and line calls. Players resolve their own disputes.
10. **SPIRIT OF THE GAME:** The foundation of the rules in ultimate is Spirit of the Game, which places the responsibility for fair play on the player. Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules, and the basic joy of play.