



Yoga Teacher Training

The Art of Sequencing

**By Nancy Wile
Yoga Education Institute**

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Introduction

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 pace or style for the practice, intensifies to more challenging postures, slows to cooling postures and ends with relaxation in savasana.

But this is just one way to sequence. Typically each posture in the sequence is performed just once or twice, but you could also have your students perform each posture three or more 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, using different variations of the posture.

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.

In this session, we will first focus on elements that are common to most any asana practice, regardless of style of hatha yoga, and then look at general principles of sequencing. After that we will examine the sequencing within each section of a hatha yoga class. We will look at ways to incorporate pranayama in a hatha yoga class, and then examine sequences within specific styles of hatha yoga.

Common Elements of Asana Practice

There are some elements and aspects of yoga practice that remain the same regardless of the particular style of hatha yoga – breath awareness, relaxing into the practice (finding ease), shifting to mindfulness, and having a rhythm of effort and relaxation, to name a few. While these elements are not specific guides to sequencing, they each have an effect on how you may sequence a class. This section elaborates on the elements common to any hatha yoga practice beyond the particular postures.

Connecting with breath

In hatha yoga, connecting with the breath is key to an effective practice. By tuning into the breath and breathing fully through the nose, students can tune into the present moment and develop a greater sense of internal awareness. They also learn to use their breath to release muscular and mental tension, and to improve the quality and mindfulness of their movements, both on and off the mat.

To truly practice yoga asanas requires that we are present and that we connect our body, breath and mind, in the moment. Feeding the physical body with consciousness awareness allows the release of the physical, mental and emotional tensions that we often hold in our bodies. It is important to give our students a

chance to expand their internal awareness during any asana practice, and allowing the breath to become a source of guidance for the movement.

Activity: Start with a simple movement (example: inhaling as you reach your arms overhead, and exhaling as you fold forward). Try connecting your breath with movement in two different ways: 1) Let the movement guide your breath – begin your movement just before you inhale or exhale, then 2) Let your breath guide your movement – begin your inhale or exhale just before you begin your movement. Notice the way that works best for you. Is there more ease of movement or ease of breath in one way or another?

Notice and observations from this activity: _____

Incorporating both ease and effort

Finding a sense of ease in each movement, even in the most challenging of movements, is another essential element of practicing hatha yoga. When we muscle our way through more challenging postures, holding our breath and straining our bodies, we lose many of the benefits of yoga. We want to have an integration of effort and ease. Encourage your students to maintain a slow deep breath through their nose and to relax the muscles in their faces, even in the most challenging of postures. By continually remaining calm while practicing new and difficult postures, we learn to remain calm and at ease in any situation in life. We learn that, by remaining calm, we can better focus and experience a better outcome, whether it's on the mat or off.

Increasing energy through grounding

In daily life, we tend to connect passively with the ground. This causes the body to collapse and slump into itself. When we consciously root down into whichever body part is connecting with the floor, we are able to immediately create space in the body. The reason for this can be found in Newton's Third Law of Motion, which states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. When you root down through your feet when standing, there is a lifting and energizing effect on the rest of the body. Give it a try now and notice the effect that rooting into the earth has on the rest of your body.

Having a rhythm to our practice

In any hatha yoga practice, it's also important to have a rhythm to our effort. We may put forth tremendous effort in a challenging posture, and then it is just as important to allow for rest, whether in child's pose, an easy forward fold, or lying on the back or belly. This rest time allows the body and brain to synthesize what it has done, to learn and to come back to a state of balance before putting forth effort once again. It prevents students from over doing in their practice or injuring themselves, as it gives them time to reflect on what they have just done. It gives them time to be in a state of mindfulness rather than always rushing onto the next thing.

Thinking about the energy of the practice

In any hatha yoga class, you want to think about the intention of the class, especially in terms of energy levels. Do you want to increase the energy level among your students for that practice, or calm them down? Pay attention to energy levels throughout the practice. To raise the energy levels, it's best to choose standing postures, arm balances, heart opening or chest expanding postures, or upward moving postures. To calm the energy, it's best to choose forward folding postures, prone (belly lying) postures, and gentle inverted postures.

Engaging all the major muscle groups

In any form of hatha yoga, whether it is gentle or power yoga, it is important to incorporate each of the major muscle groups without overemphasizing one group in particular. This means to provide movements and postures that warm-up, strengthen, and stretch muscles in each of the following areas: feet/lower legs, thighs, hips, front of the torso, back, chest/shoulders, and neck.

It is also important to equally engage the right and left sides. If you practice something on one side, make sure to practice it for the same duration and intensity on the other side. Encourage students to notice any differences between their right and left sides, and to increase their practice on the side that may have less strength or flexibility, in order to bring balance to the body and prevent any muscular imbalances.

Incorporating a variety of spinal movements

During any type of hatha yoga class, it is beneficial to move the spine in all four directions (flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation). By including a balance of these four types of spinal movements, you ensure that the muscles that support the spinal column and the discs between each vertebrae remain strong, flexible and in balance. If we spend too much time on one type of spinal movement, imbalances can occur. For example, if we spend too much time flexing the spine (rounding the back), it can lead to weaker erector spinae and poor posture (kyphosis). When teaching students, pay attention to how you are asking them to move their spines, and take care to create a balance in the directions the spine is moved throughout the practice.

Moving slowly

Even in the most physically active and challenging hatha yoga classes, it is important to move slowly and mindfully, connecting movement with deep, slow breathing. Moving slowly with awareness is actually more physically and mentally challenging than quickly moving about. Taking time in sun salutations or in postures often requires much more strength and endurance than quickly bouncing from one thing to the next.

Self study

Finally, a hatha yoga class encourages a process of self study. Encourage students to tune into the mental reactions they have during asana practice, noticing how different asanas stimulate different mental reactions. Emphasis the process of noticing and observing the mental reactions rather than getting caught up in those reactions.

Can you think of any other elements that are common to all forms of hatha yoga practice?

General Principles of Sequencing

For any hatha yoga class, there are some general sequencing techniques that are common to all forms.

In most styles of hatha yoga, you may think of the practice like the experience of walking over a series of hills. At the beginning of a practice, the intensity level is low as you begin to focus on your breath and take time to center yourself before practice. The intensity slowly builds from warm-ups or sun salutations, to more challenging standing postures. Though you are still moving slowly and mindfully, your muscles will be working more at this point. However, between each group of postures, there is a valley (time to rest and reflect). Most hatha yoga practices tend to reach the highest intensity levels during the most active standing postures. The intensity level then usually begins to slowly come down as you move back to the floor for seated and lying postures, before moving into the peacefulness of savasana and mediation.

As you may do when walking up a steep hill, a yoga practice gives you the opportunity to stop and refocus throughout the climb up the hill, and to stop and notice the view on the way down. You can think of these breaks as valleys. In yoga, although the breath is always the main focus, we stop and refocus on the breath between sets of postures. This focus on the breath and small breaks between sets of postures, allows the breath to stay deep and slow throughout any style of hatha yoga. Maintaining a deep, slow, continuous breath helps students to remain calm and feel a sense of ease, even when practicing the most physically challenging postures. By learning to remain calm and breathe deeply through challenging postures in a yoga practice, we learn to remain calm and breathe slowly when faced with challenging situations outside of our practice.

The following ideas are general techniques to keep in mind when thinking about the sequence of a class.

Let the starting position be determined by the type of practice

The starting position for students should be determined by the larger objectives of the class and based on the students in front of you. Starting in cross leg position is accessible for most student (especially when done with props), and can be a good starting point for general hatha or basic hatha yoga classes. Starting in a kneeling position, or in child's pose often works well as a starting point for vinyasa or hatha flow classes. In restorative, gentle hatha, or therapeutic yoga classes, starting out by lying on the back provides a more calming introduction to the practice. Starting in tadasana can be useful for power yoga or other very physically active forms of hatha yoga. Regardless of the position in which you have students begin, it is important to observe students in this starting point as you guide them through some quiet focused breathing. Let this observation inform the beginning of the class.

Move from dynamic to static movements

After beginning with focused breathing, you'll typically want to provide some type of dynamic movement through warm ups and/or sun salutations. Even in a restorative yoga practice, gentle warm ups help to release muscular tension and prepare the body for finding more stillness in when practicing the gentle postures. During dynamic movement, it is important to connect breath and movement. An easy way to think of connecting breath and movement is to inhale when the front of the body is opening, or the spine is lengthening, and exhale when the front of body is folding, closing or twisting. For example, as you reach your arm overhead and look up, you inhale, and when you fold forward you exhale. During a twisting posture, you inhale to lengthen the spine prior to the twist, and then exhale as you twist. By connecting the breath to movement, you not only make your breath more deep and efficient, you also begin to connect your mind and body. You are using your mind to think about when to breathe, and connecting that to the movements of your body. It helps you develop the mind body connection, and helps you stay centered in the present moment.

After dynamic movement, it is helpful to hold certain asanas for a longer duration to allow for deeper exploration in the practice. Even in a vinyasa or flow class, it can be useful to make time for stillness. This can be achieved by flowing through a posture a few times before holding that posture for four to six breaths. Holding a posture with conscious breathing and subtle awareness of the movement of energy can release deeply held tension, bring greater awareness to all parts of the body, and develop insight into the workings of the mind and body.

It can be most helpful to offer students more dynamic movements in and out of a posture a few times in rhythm with their breath before holding the posture. Moving in and out of a posture, allows students to gradually feel the requirements and effects of a posture before exploring that posture in stillness. It also teaches them how to connect breath and movement in a way that creates more mindful movement.

Move from simple to complex

Rather than creating a random sequence of postures, it is important to think about the relationship of one asana to the next, so that an asana helps make the next one more attainable. When practicing more challenging or complex postures, it is important to begin with more simple movements or postures and build up the complexity from there, until each person reaches their peak movement or posture. This allows each student to notice when the posture becomes more challenging and when his or her edge is reached. It allows each person to find his or her stopping point that day and to have an individual practice.

A simple example involves teaching down dog to students who are new to yoga. You might start your students on all fours and have them extend their arm forward in the puppy dog variation of down dog. It is less complicated and more supported

form of the posture, you can bring more awareness to the hand, arm, and shoulder girdle alignment issues of the full posture. In the puppy dog posture, students can feel more at ease, and focus more deeply on specific alignment cues without the added challenge of opening through the hips and legs.

Another example of moving from simple to complex would be teaching headstands using the following steps:

- Start on all fours (hands and knees)
- Place forearms on the floor, so they are parallel and no wider than shoulder width apart
- Bring hands together on the floor, interlacing fingers
- Bring the top of the head to the floor with hands wrapped around the back of the head (see step 1). Students could stop at this point and
- Check that elbows are still in close (no wider than shoulder width apart)
- Students could stay at this point and simply get used to, and observe the effects of being in this position. They could notice how it feels to place a bit more weight onto their arms.
- Those who feel that they want to go further could then, curl their toes under
- Inhale, straighten legs and lift hips straight up (see step 2)
- Again, students could stay in this position.
- Lift one leg up towards the ceiling. Students could just lift one leg up and then switch legs, getting more comfortable bringing each leg into the air
- For those who feel ready at that time, they could then lift the other leg up, coming into headstand
- Breathe slowly and deeply, focusing on your breath for 4-6 breaths
- To come down, drop one foot to the floor and then the other
- Counter with child's pose

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



When moving from simple to more complex during asana practice, break down the final posture into the following elements:

- What areas of the body need to be open to practice the full posture?
- Which postures that are more simple would be useful in opening these same areas?
- Which areas of the body need to be stable and strong to practice the full posture?
- Which postures that are simpler would be useful in strengthening these same areas?
- Which simpler asanas have the same or similar alignment principles

Activity:

Choose two advanced asanas. Then make a list of simpler postures that could be considered preparation postures (similar areas of opening and strengthening, and similar principles of alignment). Practice teaching the preparation postures and then focus on how you would offer the more complex posture.

Posture 1: _____

Simpler / Preparation Postures: _____

Posture 2: _____

Similar / Preparation Postures: _____

Once your students reach the most challenging or complex posture within any group of postures, it is important to give them time to explore that posture more fully.

Provide Counter Postures or Neutralizing postures

Yoga is about bringing balance to the mind and body. Through yoga, breath is connected with movement to balance the mind, while each major muscle group is both stretched and strengthened to balance the body. Counter poses or neutralizing poses help maintain the balance in the body, while also preventing injury. For example, after Camel (Ustrasana), which is a backbend that requires muscles in the back to contract, we follow with Child's Pose – a gentle forward bend that gently stretches the back, allowing the muscles that were contracted to then relax, preventing muscle spasms, and bringing the body back into balance. Child's pose would be considered a neutralizing posture. Another example is plow and fish. Plow pose increases the stretch on the neck and upper spine, bending the spine forward, bringing the feet to rest behind the head. Fish pose acts as a counter pose, compressing instead of stretching the back of the neck and upper spine, relieving local stiffness. The active nature of fish makes it a counter pose, instead of a neutralizing pose.

Camel



Childs Pose



Activity:

Make a chart of five postures and their counter poses. Can you flow easily from the posture into the counter pose?

Posture	Complementary Counter or Neutralizing Posture

Give space for rest and mindfulness at specific times

Creating space for mindfulness is an important part of any yoga practice. In yoga practice, you want to make sure that you have a constant mix between effort and ease. After practicing a challenging standing posture, give student a few moments to close their eyes and relax their breath. Offer them this space to go inward and notice the energy within their bodies and how it changes with their efforts. The rhythm of yoga practice is typically to begin slowly and build intensity. But even within those periods of intensity there is time for rest and reflection. And, even when we are in the most challenging postures, it is a good time to slow down the breath and notice how you can allow the body to ease into the most challenging of postures. After we go through the most intense part of the practice, we typically begin to ease the intensity of the practice, and allow for more quieting postures and even more time to develop that inner awareness during deep stretching postures.

We often rush through much of our day. Yoga provides us practice in slowing down and creating space, even when we are in the most challenging positions. It can be a great way to learn to turn inward to find the calm and peace we seek, even during the most chaotic or stressful times in our lives.

Offer careful transitions out of asanas

Students are typically more at risk when they are transitioning out of a posture than when they are holding the posture. This is especially true for standing and balancing postures. It is important to give very specific physical directions to safely come out of a posture. Instruct students to be careful of their spines and any other vulnerable joints. It is a good idea to maintain a stable base as they begin to release other parts of their bodies out of a posture. Encourage students to feel what begins to occur as they start the transitional movement. This way they can gradually relax the muscles that were active in supporting the asana and begin to activate the muscles needed during the release.

Activity:

Pick one or two balance postures (tree, eagle, dancer, etc). Practice the posture and try different sequencing of actions to transition out of the posture. For example, in Dancer, transition out of the posture by first bringing the upper body back in a straight line with the lower body and then dropping the foot to the floor and the arms to the sides. Next, try transitioning out of Dancer by first releasing the foot and then coming back to standing. Notice which way gives you more control and makes for an easier transition.

Observations:

Make time for meditation at the end of practice

One of the main purposes of hatha yoga is to prepare the mind and body to sit in meditation. Although you may be short on time, take a minute to capitalize on the mental state your students have created for themselves through their practice, by offering meditation. Even if you only have time for brief meditation, this practice can provide significant positive effects for your students.

Basic Structure of a Yoga Class

Most hatha yoga classes can use the following general sequence:

- Focused breathing - Provide a mental space for yoga
- Warm ups – properly warm up the body through dynamic movements that warm up all the major muscle groups and move the spine in all directions (may include sun salutations)
- Active Standing postures (Warrior and lunging sequences)
- (Rest in forward fold, down dog)
- Quieting Standing Postures (balancing)
- (Rest)
- Kneeling postures / Prone postures (face down lying)/ Forward facing Arm Balances / Forward Facing Inversions (these could be in any order and may not include all these subcategories)
- (Rest and resting in between each)
- Seated Postures
- Back facing inversions / Supine (back facing lying postures)
- Quieting Supine postures
- Savasana
- Meditation

General energy levels throughout a hatha yoga class

If you think of the energy levels on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 indicating complete rest with mind and body completely relaxed, and 10 indicating the maximum physical effort and concentration), a typical class would reach the following energy during each section:

Focused breathing (1-2)

Warm ups (5)

Active standing postures (9)

Rest (forward fold, tadasana, etc) (5)

Quieting standing balancing postures (7)

Rest (3-4)

Kneeling, prone, forward facing arm balances or inversions (6)

Rest (2)

Seated postures (4-5)

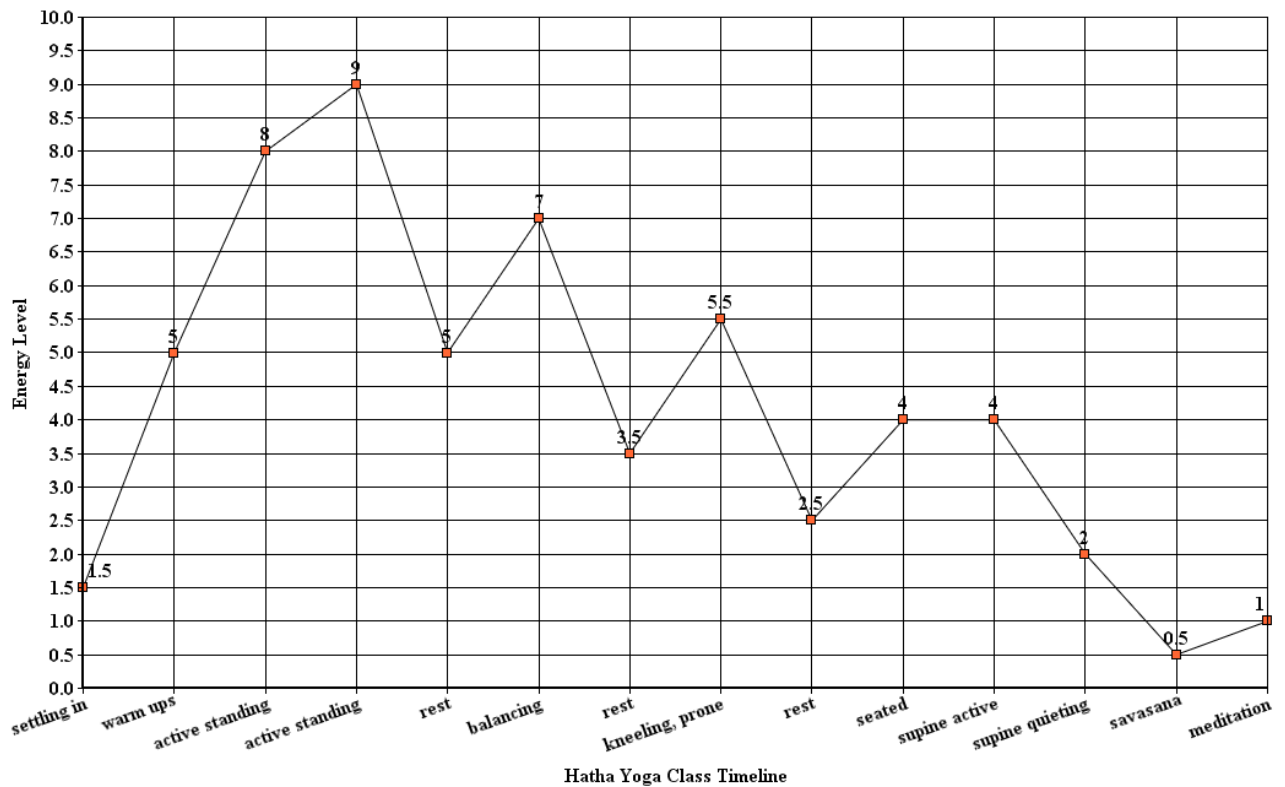
Back facing inversions (4-5)

Quieting supine postures (2-3)

Savasana (1)

Meditation (1-2)

This chart provides a rough visual of the energy levels throughout a typical hatha yoga class.



You'll notice that although the energy levels drop during the rest periods, they don't go down as much as you might expect. At the end of a sequence of active postures, we typically take a rest, but it is usually not long enough for the body to cool down much or for the overall energy level to drop very low.

Activity:

During your next yoga practice, pay special attention to the flow of energy and your energy level throughout the practice. If you like, using the 1-10 scale and make quick notes of your energy level at different times during the practice.

Focused Breathing/Beginning of Class

Focused breathing at the beginning of practice provides an important transition in moving from the outward focus that characterizes much of our daily activities to the inward focus that is necessary for an effective yoga practice.

If students are sitting or standing during focused breathing, bring their attention to their posture. Have them lengthen through the spine to create a straight line of energy through the top of their head. Encourage students to fully focus on their breath and on the present moment, setting aside anything else that was on their mind before coming to class.

The way you start class is dependent on the type of class you are teaching and the students who are attending the class.

The chart below gives examples of positions in which to start class and the types of classes for which they work best.

Starting position	Type of Class best suited
Seated	General hatha, basic hatha, hatha flow, anusara, yin
Kneeling or Child's Pose	Vinyasa, hatha flow, heated
Standing	Heated, power yoga, ashtanga
Lying face up (lying on back)	Gentle hatha, restorative

Warm Ups and Sun Salutations

Warm-ups get the muscles ready for the action by increasing the speed at which they contract and relax and by mobilizing a greater number of motor units within the muscles. Warming up the body raises the body temperature which improves the oxygen supply to the muscles, making muscles more elastic and flexible.

Experts agree that the main purpose of a warm-up is to increase the blood circulation in order to raise both the general body and the deep muscle temperatures. This in turn helps to heat up the muscles, ligaments and tendons in preparation for more vigorous activity or for static stretching. A proper warm-up provides many benefits due to the elevated temperatures associated with it. After warming up, the likelihood of injury is reduced, muscle efficiency is increased, the potential for muscle pulls is reduced and ease of movement improves. Proper warm-ups can also help reduce the severity of post-exercise muscle soreness. The higher temperatures and increased blood flow resulting from warm-up are important for delivery of oxygen to the muscles and for prevention of build-up of unwanted waste products which can lead to muscle soreness.

Warm ups and sun salutations are valuable because they reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during a yoga practice by increasing circulation and loosening up the major muscle groups. Warm-ups prepare our bodies for the stress of activity. They help prevent or reduce muscle soreness, muscle strains, and the tearing of muscle fibers or tendons. It's important to warm up each major muscle group before beginning a yoga practice, since you use all your major muscle groups in a well-conceived yoga program. Sun Salutations can provide the bulk of an excellent warm-up for most yoga practices. However, for a restorative practice, beginning hatha yoga class, or prenatal yoga class, sun salutations may not be appropriate. In this case, it's important to utilize other warm-ups in place of sun salutations to ensure that students properly warm-up their muscles before practicing any deeper postures or stretches.

Besides preparing you physically for yoga, warm-ups can also help you prepare mentally for your yoga practice. To get the mental benefits of warm-ups, first start by taking a few moments to focus on your breath, breathing slowly and deeply through your nose. Then, begin your warm-up exercises, focusing on your breath and on your movements and connecting the two together. Done with mindful awareness, warm-up exercises provide you with rhythmic movements that helps to focus your attention on your body and your breath, letting go of the thoughts or concerns from your daily life. It helps you shift gears and bring your thoughts more fully to your yoga practice. Also, once you are warmed up, it is important to begin a major activity while still warmed-up, so you reap the benefits of warm muscles.

Sample warm up sequence for a general hatha yoga class:

- Starting on all fours
- Cat/cow (spinal flexes)
- Spinal balance (extending opposite arm and leg from all fours)
- Warm up down dog (pumping heels, shaking head, lifting one leg then the other)
- Lunge/runner's stretch/twist to side (right leg forward)
- Down Dog
- Lunge/runner's stretch/twist to side (left leg forward)
- Down Dog
- Forward Fold
- Up to standing
- Flowing crescent stretch (lateral flexion)
- Sun Salutations

Example of Warm Ups and Sun Salutations



Start Seated
(focused breathing)



Neck Stretches



Seated Arms Side to Side



Sun worshipping warm up



Spinal Flexes (Cat/Cow)



Spinal Balance Flow



Warm Up Down Dog



Easy Forward Fold



Tadasana

Sun Salutation A

Step 1



Step 2-inhale



Step 3-exhale



Step 4-inhale



Step 5-hold breath



Step 6-exhale



Step 7 - inhale



Step 8- exhale
(then take 3 breaths)



Step 9-inhale



Step 10-exhale



Step 11-inhale



Step 12-inhale



Step 13-exhale



Repeat Sun Salutation 3 times, and then end in down dog



Activity:

Create your own warm up sequence. Share it with your group (verbally and by giving a quick walk through) to demonstrate how the exercises flow together.

Would your sequence provide a sufficient warm up for all the major muscle groups?

Sequencing for Standing Postures

Standing poses are best practiced after warm-ups and sun salutations and before seated or lying down postures. It's important to have your students warm-up before practicing standing postures to prevent any pulled or strained muscles. Unlike warm-ups and sun salutations, standing postures are typically held in one position while focusing on the breath. As a teacher, you can remind your students to focus on their breath as they hold a standing posture.

To maintain the rhythm of your yoga practice, it's important to order your standing postures in a sequence that flows together. This means that once you complete one posture, you can easily flow into the next posture. This flow is especially helpful for the warrior sequences that are usually done before any standing balancing postures. As part of this flow, you can also think about postures that build on one another – moving from simple to more complex. And, you can think about counter postures and moving the spine in different directions. For many postures, it's helpful to create a sequence of 3 to 4 postures that flow together, then rest in down dog before doing that same sequence of 3 to 4 postures on the other side (i.e. right or left side). For certain postures (i.e. Tree, Dancer), which require more balance, sequencing directly from one posture to another is not as important, but can still be practiced.

Example of Warrior Sequences for Hatha Yoga Classes



1) Start in Warrior 1
With right leg forward



2) Open arms and chest to side for Warrior 2.
Look over right fingers.



3) Reach right hand up, and
left hand down back leg
for reverse warrior.



4) Drop right hand to floor, next to right foot.
Bring left arm next to ear for extended angle.



5) Come back to Warrior 2.



6) Straighten both legs and come into Triangle.

Come back to standing and repeat on the left side.

Sample standing sequence:

- Starting from Down Dog.
- Prepare for Warrior 1 (from down dog, step right foot forward to a lunge)
- Warrior 1 (lift arms and chest, coming into Warrior 1)
- Warrior 2 (turn chest to side to move into Warrior 2)
- Reverse Warrior (slide left hand down back leg, reach right arm up)
- Triangle (come back up, straightening both legs, then slide right hand down right leg)
- Bring both hands to floor (drop hands to floor on either side of front leg)
- Step back to Down Dog
- Repeat on the left side

Sample standing balancing sequence:

- Starting from tadasana
- Dancer (holding onto right foot)
- Eagle (release foot from dancer and wrap around the left leg without touching floor)
- Warrior 3 (unwrap right leg and kick it back without touching the floor)
- Standing split (right leg up)
- Forward Fold
- Come back up to tadasana and repeat on the other side

Use the space below to create two of your own sequences for a series of standing postures.

Sequence:

Sequencing of Arm Balances, Inversions and Front Lying Postures

When sequencing your arm balances, inversions and lying postures, use this general guide:

- 1) Start with arm balances, if you are including them (i.e. side arm balance, crow, spider). Arm balances are typically practiced after standing postures, but can be practiced within standing sequences from down dog.
- 2) Prone postures (i.e. locust, cobra, bow).
- 3) When starting prone postures, start with less challenging postures or with modifications (locust). This way your students can continue to do those postures instead of more challenging ones (such as bow), if necessary.
- 4) Counter the prone postures with postures that gently flex the spine (i.e. child's pose, hare/rabbit), so the muscles that were contracted in the prone postures are then stretched and relaxed.
- 5) Do more active, forward facing (prone) inversions (rabbit, prep for headstand, headstand, handstand, etc.) – starting with the less challenging postures.
- 6) If including seated postures, add them at this point.
- 7) Move onto supine (back lying) postures and back lying inversions (i.e. bridge, plow)
- 8) In supine sequence, include both back facing inversions (i.e. bridge, plow) and supine postures (reclined spinal twist).
- 9) Do more relaxing/restorative back lying postures towards the end of the sequence to prepare for savasana.

Arm balances and front lying postures are usually done shortly after standing and kneeling poses, while the muscles are still warm. Prone (front lying) poses generally work on strengthening the muscles of the back and developing greater spinal flexibility. Some prone poses are quite challenging, so it is best to have students try the modification first, before progressing to the full pose. Arm balances are also often challenging and require a strong core, so again it is best to offer modification and alternatives to some of the postures.

Sample sequence for arm balances, forward facing inversions and front lying postures:

- Starting this sequence from a squatting position
- Crow
- Child's Pose (rotate wrists)
- Rabbit (gentle forward facing inversion)
- Come onto belly
- Locust (1st variation)
- Locust (2nd variation)
- Bow
- Child's Pose

Activity:

Create your own sequence of arm balances, forward facing inversions and front lying postures.

Share your sequence with the rest of the group.

Sequence:

Sequencing Seated Postures

Seated postures are generally more calming and nurturing than standing and kneeling postures, although some are fairly active, requiring a stronger engagement of certain muscles. Sitting poses usually fall into four categories: 1) forward bends (or otherwise flexing the hips), whereby the trunk and legs come towards each other; 2) spinal twists, in which the spine rotates to both the left and right, 3) spinal extensions, in which the back is arched while the legs are on the ground, and 4) lateral flexion or side bending of the spine. When planning seated postures for a class, try to incorporate as many types of postures so that the spinal column is moved in many different directions.

When practiced with proper alignment of the spine and pelvis, seated postures promote vitality, improve circulation, reduce fatigue and soothe the nervous system. Forward bending seated postures stretch the entire back, creating more flexibility. The stable base created by sitting frees you from the concerns of balancing or supporting the body, leaving you more energy to devote to the stretching. However, due to such habits as slouching in chairs for long periods of time and not being in the habit of sitting cross legged, there is often some basic work to be done before students can fully enjoy these asanas. For example, when practicing forward bending seated postures, it is important for students to maintain a flat back (or lengthen the spine) by pressing back through the tailbone and reaching forward with the chest. This helps to strengthen and properly stretch the muscles of the back. Rounding the upper back during a seated forward fold can weaken and strain back muscles.

Seated forward bends stretch the hamstrings and engage the abdominal muscles. Seated twists massage the abdominal organs and aid the digestive process. They also improve lateral flexion (side bending) of the spine and remove stiffness in the neck and upper back. Seated spinal extensions help to open the chest and stretch the muscles across the front of the chest and shoulders.

Sitting poses are best done midway or later in a yoga practice, once the muscles are sufficiently warm.

Sample seated sequence

- Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Janu Sirsasana, Seated Twist (right leg straight for both)
- Janu Sirsasana, Seated Twist (left leg straight for both)
- Table Top
- Cobbler's Pose
- Turtle

Activity:

Create Your Own Seated Sequence

Back Facing and Back Lying Postures

Back lying and reclined positions are generally done towards the end of a practice. They reduce fatigue, increase mental clarity and open spaces within the body that are generally closed by tension. Back facing inversions, such as plow, shoulder stand, or bridge are generally more active, and are usually best to practice at the beginning of the back lying postures. Quieting supine (back lying) postures, such as supine twisting postures or happy baby, provide a good way to slow and calm the body in preparation for savasana.

Sample Supine Sequence:

- Bridge pose, counter with knees to chest
- Bridge pose (or wheel), counter with knees to chest
- Legs in the air
- Plow
- Shoulderstand
- Fish
- Right knee to chest and supine twist (crossing right knee to the left)
- Left knee to chest and supine twist (crossing left knee to the right)
- Savasana

Activity:

Create a sample back lying sequence. Remember to start with the more active back lying/back facing postures and finish with the more quieting and relaxing postures before going into savasana.

When to teach pranayama within a practice

The timing of pranayama within a yoga class varies by the specific pranayama being taught. Below is a guide listing specific pranayama and suggestions of when each one would fit best within a class.

The chart below provides suggestion for the timing of specific pranayama.

Pranayama	When to include
Slow belly breathing (Diaphragmatic breathing)	Beginning of class (during focused breathing), during rest periods, or just before savasana
Kapalabhati (shining skull breath)	During warm-ups, and can also be done in conjunction with specific abdominal working postures (such as boat)
Bhastrika/Bhastriki (bellows breath)	During warm-ups
Ujjayi	During warm ups and in conjunction with active postures
Lion's Breath	During warm ups
Alternate Nostril Breathing	Beginning of class (as part of focused breathing), after savasana (before meditation)

Sequencing Based on the Style of Hatha Yoga

Hatha (general)

Focus:

The focus is on helping students learn standard yoga postures and learn proper alignment and proper breathing techniques.

General Sequencing:

- Start lying on the back or sitting. Start with focused breathing either lying on back or sitting in easy seated position.
- Warm-Ups. Do some general warm up, then move into a modified vinyasa (modified plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog) to prepare for Sun Salutations.
- Pranayama: May incorporate ujjayi breathing or three part yogic breath in warm ups or during some of the standing postures
- Sun Salutations (or a modified version of sun salutations)
- Warrior Postures/Standing Postures. After completing sun salutations, come back to standing and do standing postures starting with Warrior Posture sequences then moving into standing balancing postures.
- Example of Warrior sequence: From standing, step left foot back and go into Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Extended Angle, and Warrior 2 all on one side and then coming back to standing (tadasana) before doing the same on the other side.
- Balancing/Standing Postures. After warrior series, come back to standing and do standing balancing postures (i.e. dancer, eagle, pyramid, tree). After completing standing balancing postures, fold forward, and step back to down dog.
- Forward Lying Postures (Prone Postures). From down dog come forward into prone postures (i.e. lying pigeon, cobra, locust, bow)
- Push back to child's pose or rabbit as a counter pose, then bring legs in front of you for seated postures
- Seated Postures. Do seated postures, such as seated forward fold, boat, seated twist, etc.
- Reclined Lying Postures (Supine Postures). After seated posture, recline back for supine postures such as knee to chest, plow, fish, reclined twist.
- Savasana. Take time to get students to relax each part of their body as they prepare for savasana.
- Meditation/Focused Breathing. After savasana, you can do a brief meditation or spend a few minutes of focused breathing.
- Namaste. Close class with "Namaste."

Hatha Flow/Vinyasa

Focus: The focus is on connecting breath and movement and creating seamless transitions from one posture to the next. Standing postures are not held long and typically flow from one to the next. Seated and lying postures towards the end of the practice are held longer and focus is on using the breath to stretch deeper in each posture. Vinyasas are done between many of the sequences.

General Sequencing:

- Start in Child's Pose or Standing. Do focused breathing in child's pose or standing in tadasana.
- Warm-Ups. After general warm-ups and down dog, move into vinyasa (plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog – and add in lunge. Do a few rounds, then step forward to standing forward fold and come up to tadasana.
- Sun Salutations
- Warrior series. Do warrior series with Vinyasa in between each posture (i.e. plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog). For example, from down dog, step right foot forward, windmill arms up to warrior 2, then reverse warrior, extended angle, and warrior 2, then windmill hands back to floor, step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog. Repeat on the left side. Example – From down dog, step right foot forward and come up to warrior 1, humble warrior, and lunge with twist, then step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, and repeat on left side.
- Step forward to standing forward fold and come back up to standing.
- Connected balancing postures. Do a sequence of standing balancing postures that can be connected together on one side and then do the entire sequence on the other side. For example, you could do Eagle then without touching the foot down, kick back to warrior 3, then go into half moon, and into standing split. Then do the same on the other side.
- Fold forward
- Step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog
- Prone Postures. Do prone postures with vinyasa in between. For example, locust, cobra, plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, then another prone posture.
- Come into child's pose or rabbit after prone postures series
- Seated postures
- Reclined (supine) postures
- Savasana

Example of Sequence for Hatha Flow

- Start in Child's Pose
- Focused Breathing
- Hip Hinges
- Down Dog – Warm Up
- Walk the Dog
- Vinyasa (plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog)
- Step forward and Fold Forward
- Come up to Tadasana
- Sun Salutations (3 or 4 rounds)
- Down Dog
- Step right foot forward – Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Extended Angle, Warrior 2
- Bring hands back to floor, step right foot back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog (vinyasa)
- Step left foot forward-Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Extended Angle, Warrior 2
- Bring hands to floor, step left foot back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog (vinyasa)
- Step right foot forward – Warrior 1, Warrior 2, Triangle, Warrior 2
- Vinyasa to Down Dog
- Step left foot forward – Warrior 1, Warrior 2, Triangle, Warrior 2
- Vinyasa to Down Dog
- Step right foot forward – Lunge, then add twist
- Vinyasa to Down Dog
- Step left foot forward – Lunge, then add twist
- Vinyasa to Down Dog
- Walk feet forward and fold forward
- Come up to standing
- Eagle (with right foot up), then keeping right foot off the floor, move into Warrior 3, then standing split (one leg forward fold).
- Forward fold and come back to standing
- Eagle (with left foot up), then keeping the left foot off the floor, move into Warrior 3, then standing split (one leg forward fold).
- Step feet out a little wider than the mat. Turn to the right for pyramid, then revolved triangle. Turn to the left for pyramid, then revolved triangle. Turn forward for straddle back bend, then straddle forward fold.
- Step back to down dog
- Come into plank, then drop down (so lying on belly)
- Locust, Bow, push back to child's pose
- Bring feet forward for one leg seated forward fold, reach back arm for counter pose, cross foot over for seated twist. Then repeat on the other side.
- Lie on back
- Extend leg for hamstring stretch, knee to chest, one leg twist (other side)
- Plow, fish, twist, Prepare for savasana

Ashtanga/Power Yoga

Focus: Postures are held for a predefined number of breaths. The focus is on the breath and the movement between postures, rather than having perfect alignment in a pose. Ujjayi breath is used for most of the practice in Ashtanga or Power Yoga. In Ujjayi breath, you slightly constrict the back of the throat while breathing through the nose, which creates a slight hissing sound. The steady cycle of inhales and exhales is meant to provide the student with a calming, mental focal point. Ashtanga yoga also incorporates bandhas (muscle locks), which focus the energy of the body.

General Sequencing:

- Start Standing. Do focused breathing standing in tadasana.
- Warm-Ups. After a couple standing warm-ups, fold forward and move into vinyasa (plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog – and add in lunge. Do a few rounds, then step forward to standing forward fold and come up to tadasana.
- Sun Salutations. Include Sun Salutation B or other more vigorous forms of salutations.
- Warrior series. Do warrior sequences with Vinyasa in between each sequence (i.e. plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog). For example, from down dog, step right foot forward, windmill arms up to warrior 2, then reverse warrior, extended angle, and warrior 2, then windmill hands back to floor, step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog. Repeat on the left side. Example 2 – From down dog, step right foot forward and come up to warrior 1, humble warrior, and lunge with twist, then step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, and repeat on left side. Do at least three different warrior sequences. Often a double chaturanga is included as part of the vinyasa.
- Step forward to standing forward fold and come back up to standing.
- Connected balancing postures. Do a sequence of standing balancing postures that can be connected together on one side and then do the entire sequence on the other side. For example, you could do Eagle then without touching the foot down, kick back to warrior 3, then go into half moon, and into standing split. Do a vinyasa (fold forward, jump back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, jump forward, fold forward and come back to standing). Then do the same on the other side.
- Fold forward
- Step back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog
- Prone Postures. Do prone postures with vinyasa in between. For example, do locust, then come to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, then another prone posture.
- Come into child's pose or rabbit after prone postures series
- Seated postures. Do a seated posture, then do a vinyasa (place hands down at sides and jump back to plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog, jump feet through back to sitting).
- Reclined (supine) postures
- Savasana

Gentle Hatha or Basics Class

Focus:

The focus of gentle hatha yoga is to gently stretch and move the body. After the muscles are warmed-up and stretched, you can more fully relax.

General Sequencing

- Start lying on back. Do focused deep breathing lying on your back.
- Warm Ups. Do gentle warm ups lying on your back. Then roll onto side and come up to sitting.
- Seated Warm Ups. Do seated warm-ups, such as arms side to side, or sun worshipper.
- All Fours Warm Ups. Come onto all fours and do warm-ups such as spinal flexes, spinal balance, hip hinges.
- Down Dog. Do warm up down dog and a modified vinyasa or easy lunges.
- Forward Fold. Step forward to forward fold.
- Tadasana
- Standing Postures. Do less active standing postures, such as triangle, modified pyramid, tree, and hand to knee.
- Fold Forward
- Down Dog. Step back to down dog
- Prone (forward facing lying) postures. Do simple prone postures such as sphinx, crocodile.
- Child's Pose
- Seated Postures. Bring feet forward to seated position and do quieting seated postures, such as cobbler's pose, butterfly.
- Restorative Posture. Bring bolster onto mat and do some restorative postures.
- Lying Postures. Move bolster and do gentle supine (back lying) postures, such as bridge, knee to chest, reclined twist.
- Savasana

Restorative

Focus:

The focus of restorative yoga is to completely relax the muscles of the body, which will then help the student relax their mind. Props are used, so the body can be fully supported, while lying in a posture that gently stretches muscles or opens joints. Restorative yoga is used to completely calm the nervous system and relax the mind.

General Sequencing:

- Start lying on back. Do focused deep breathing lying on your back.
- Gentle Warm Ups. Do gentle warm ups lying on your back. Then roll onto side and come up to sitting.
- Seated Warm Ups. Do seated warm-ups, such as arms side to side, or sun worshipper.
- All Fours Warm Ups. Come onto all fours and do gentle warm-ups and stretches such as spinal flexes or thread the needle.
- Child's Pose
- Gentle Prone (forward facing lying) postures. Do relaxing prone postures such as sphinx or crocodile or prone twist.
- Child's Pose
- Seated Postures. Bring feet forward to seated position and do quieting seated postures, such as cobbler's pose, butterfly, or a simple twist.
- Restorative Posture. Bring bolster onto mat and do some restorative postures, such as reclined cobbler's, supported twist, or supported bridge.
- Lying Postures. Move bolster and do gentle supine (back lying) postures, such as knee to chest, legs in the air, and reclined twist.
- Savasana

Heated Yoga

Focus:

The focus of heated yoga is to increase the body temperature, so that the student can sweat more and eliminate toxins, and to warm the muscles more so you can stretch further and get more from the practice. Bikram yoga is one form of heated yoga that includes the same 26 postures each time and follows a specific script. Other forms of heated yoga can follow any sequencing, but tend to follow the general sequencing listed below. **Remember that heated yoga is not advised for pregnant women, children, or anyone with a heart condition.

General Sequencing:

- Start Standing or in Child's Pose. Do some focused breathing
- Active Warm Ups (vinyasa). From standing, fold forward and move into vinyasa (plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog). From child's pose, push back into down dog and move into vinyasa.
- Sun Salutations. From down dog, walk feet forward to a forward fold, then come up to standing and prepare for sun salutations.
- Warrior Series (with vinyasa in between) After sun salutations, end a round in down dog. From down dog, step one foot forward and do a warrior series (i.e. warrior 1, warrior 2, reverse warrior, extended angle) on one side. Then bring hands back to mat on either side of front foot and do vinyasa (plank, chaturanga, up dog, down dog). Repeat the warrior series on the other side. Do 2-3 variations of warrior/lunge series).
- Standing/Balancing Postures. After warrior series, end in down dog, walk feet forward to forward fold, and come up to standing. Do a series of standing postures (i.e. Eagle, Warrior 3, Dancer).
- Lie on back, feet towards the back. After completing a series of standing balancing postures, have student lie on their back with their feet towards the back of the room. Do some gentle reclined postures (i.e. reclined legs in the air, knee to chest, etc.)
- Prone Postures. Roll over onto the belly facing towards the front of the room and do a series of prone postures, such as cobra, locust and bow.
- Child's Pose
- Down Dog
- Any kneeling or kneeling balancing postures (i.e. pigeon, arm balances, camel)
- Child's Pose
- Seated Postures. Do deep stretching seated postures such as one leg seated forward fold, turtle, seated straddle, seated twist with a bind, etc.
- Reclined Postures. Lie on back and do some deep stretching, such as reclined hamstring stretch, happy baby (or half happy baby), reclined twist (etc).
- Savasana

Activity:

Pick a style of hatha yoga, or your own blend of styles, and create a sample class sequence. Share your sequence with your group.

You can quickly walk through your sequence with the group to demonstrate how the postures flow together. Discuss your sequence with your group. Is there a balance between the major muscle groups that are engaged? Is the spine moved in all four directions (flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation) during the practice? Do you give space for rest and reflection between sequences?