

Elements of Asana Sequencing

Elements of Power Yoga
Bali, 2020





Sequencing a **SAFE**, strong class.

A Power Yoga class is a physical experience. It is designed to build strength in the body, and to challenge the practitioner. First and foremost, though, the teacher **MUST** create a pattern of movements that are intelligently strung together. The teacher has to take into account the muscles, joints and connective tissues responsible for each asana and piece them together very specifically.

A “strong” class should **NEVER** be unsafe. A teacher guides slowly and specifically, encouraging the student to move to their edge, but never beyond it. Combining intelligent sequencing with proper alignment cues will give the student the ability to protect their own body, while at the same time giving them the room they need to challenge themselves.



Have a theme, an intention for **EVERY** class and/or a peak pose...examples

1. External Hip Rotation
2. Internal Hip Rotation
3. Hamstrings
4. Upper body Strength
5. Shoulder Openers
6. Twists
7. Backbends
8. Balance
9. Core
10. Breath/Flow

1. Eka Pada Koundinyasana II
2. Eka Pada Koundinyasana I
3. Titibasana
4. Mayurasana
5. Pincha Mayurasana
6. Parivrtta Trikonasana
7. Urdhva Dhanurasana
8. Handstand
9. Bakasana
10. The Warrior Dance



These themes can also correlate to different chakras

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2. Internal Hip Rotation
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4. Upper body Strength
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1. Sacral Chakra
2. Root Chakra
3. Root Chakra
4. Solar Plexus Chakra
5. Heart Chakra
6. Root Chakra
7. Heart/Throat Chakra
8. Third Eye Chakra
9. Solar Plexus Chakra
10. Crown Chakra



The Chakra focus can give you a philosophical/spiritual theme

For example, a backbends class is also a focus on the heart and throat chakras.

During the experience the teacher can really focus on directing the breath to these areas, and also include language encouraging energetic openings of these areas.

The teacher can have something inspirational to say involving speaking your Truth, Forgiveness, Gratitude etc.

A “Core” class can focus on the Solar Plexus Chakra.

The teacher can encourage the student to be in their power, to visualize themselves in a leadership position etc...

Or...you could have them visualizing the color YELLOW in the beginning and end of class in moments of stillness and rest.



Power Yoga Sequencing Template

1. Opening pose(s)/ Meditation
2. Sun A warm up with targeted area
3. Sun A or variation
4. Targeted strength building poses/Sun B Prep
5. Sun B or Variation
6. Core or balancing postures/beginner arm balances (crow)
7. Externals
8. Deep Twists
9. Peak Pose/ Inversion
10. Backbends
11. Cool Down/ Targeted area
12. Savasana



Do's and Don't of Sequencing

DO-- Start the class in stillness

DO-- Establish the breath

DO-- Leave time for savasana

DO-- Warm up the front body before UMS

DO-- Warm up the hips before Vira I

DO-- Offer modifications for beginners

DON'T-- Link more than 3 standing poses

DON'T-- Stand on one leg for more than 2 minutes

DON'T-- Offer deep backbends or twists early in class

DON'T-- Go from an External to a Twist

DON'T-- Teach any pose with pressure on the neck to beginners.



Do's and Don't Cont...

DO-- Establish Alignment in Down Dog

DO-- Establish Alignment in Up Dog/Cobra

DO-- Build up your twists, small to large

DO-- Hold backbends for 5-8 breaths min

DO-- Come back to the awareness of
breath

DON'T-- Offer deep binds until the
shoulders are open

DON'T-- Move too fast in flows

DON'T-- Be too complicated. Simplicity!

DON'T-- Teach any pose that you can't do

DON'T-- Skip Savasana. Save room for it



1. Opening-- 1st asana, establish breath and stillness (Integration)

The opening posture should be a resting posture that allows the student to ground in stillness and establish the breath. The opening posture can also begin to target a specific area of the body that is relative to the theme of the class.

For example, Supta Baddha Konasana is a resting pose that allows the student to establish the breath and lie in stillness. This pose is also a small backbend, and emphasizes external hip rotation. It can be used as an opening asana for either theme in a sequence.

Other examples of opening asanas: Savasana, Tadasana, Sukhasana, Vajrasana, Balasana



2. Targeted warm-up/ Sun A Prep

After the first posture, the emphasis is to introduce gentle asanas that target areas of the body that will be utilized for the peak pose. At this point in class, the asanas are introduced very slowly, with plenty of time to establish alignment and breath.

The asanas will also prepare the body for Surya Namaskar A, recognizing that chaturanga and upward facing dog are deceptively challenging poses that require a warm-up for both flexibility and stability. An Example of an opening sequence for twists:

Sukhasana--Seated Twist--Cat/Cow--Low Lunge--Lunge Twist--Plank--Cobra--AMS

AMS--Step to Uttanasana--Ardha Uttanasana--Uttanasana--Tadasana--Sun Salutation A



3. Sun Salutation A- Or Variation

Power Yoga is rooted in traditional Ashtanga Yoga, where Sun Salutation A is a foundation of the practice. Sun A is a fantastic way to begin to warm up the entire body, and develops a breath and movement rhythm that creates a moving meditation.

Most Power Yoga sequences include the traditional Sun A sequence, practiced three to five times. In certain instances, it may make sense to add a side body bend, or standing twist, or chair pose if it fits within your targeted theme for the entire practice.

A traditional Sun A finishes in Tadasana, but you can also guide your students to finish in Downward Facing Dog, or Child's Pose after the 3-5 rounds are completed.



4. Targeted Strength Building Asanas/ Sun B Preparation

This portion of the sequencing can include asanas designed to build strength and stability throughout the targeted area. They also need to open up the hips enough to prepare the students for the upcoming Sun Salutation B flow.

During this portion of the class, the teacher can focus on some long holds in postures that require some but not a lot of openness in the body. For example, holding plank, Vira II, or Parsvakonasana are all great ways to build strength and stability. In any longer hold, the teacher must place equal emphasis on alignment and breath, always encouraging the student to do to their edge but never beyond it.

This is also a nice place to begin to offer a few more shoulder opening shapes.



4. Continued...

During this section of the sequence, the postures should be building towards the theme/peak pose of the class. In a class emphasizing hamstrings, for example, you can have the students partially straighten the front leg in a high lunge position, holding that shape for 5 deep breaths.

This sequence must also prepare the students for Vira I, which requires a large degree of openness in the hips. Postures that can be used to prep the body for Warrior I include:

Low lunge, High Lunge, Crescent Lunge, Side Angle, Vira II, Reverse Vira II

Vira I should always be held and broken down for 5 breaths on each side before flowing through Surya Namaskar B



4. Continued...

Here's an Example of the sequencing for a hamstrings targeted class leading up to a peak pose of Eka Pada Koundinyasana II:

AMS--Lift the right Leg--Knee to right elbow--High Lunge--Straighten front leg--Crescent

Crescent--Standing Splits--Crescent--Vinyasa (Do this on the left side, too)

AMS--Plank--Vashistasana A--Plank--Knee to Nose--Warrior I--Vinyasa (Left side too)

AMS--Uttanasana--Ardha Uttanasana--Utkatasana--Samasthiti-- SUN B



5. Sun Salutation B or Variation

This portion of the class is a traditional Surya Namaskar B, or a variation of the teacher's choosing that suits the theme and level of the class. A Power Yoga class typically goes through this sequence 3-5 times.

It is customary in more advanced classes for the teacher to lead the students through 1-2 rounds, and then to give room for the students to practice on their own for the remainder of the Sun B flow.



6. Core/Balancing Postures/ Arm balances

This section of the class is right after the rigorous flow sequence of Sun B. It is a good idea to offer a child's pose or some sort of resting asana. This point in class is a great time to reconnect the students to their breath/intention.

After that, you can use this time in class to do core strengthening work, or introduce your first arm balance, usually bakasana. It's also a great time to shift the energy from lots of flow to stillness in some balancing postures, such as vrksasana.

You could also use this time in class to introduce smaller twists, such as Twisting Chair Pose.

Core--Tadasana--Toe Balancing Pose--Bakasana/Malasana--Tadasana--Parvritta
Utkatasana--Parvritta Bakasana--Tadasana



7. Externals/Deep holds

In this portion of the sequencing, the teacher takes the students into some longer holds of externally rotated standing postures, such as Parsvakonasana or Ardha Chandrasana.

During these holds, there is an equal amount of emphasis placed, on alignment, breath, and silence as the teacher holds space in the room during these deep holds.

If the teacher is teaching a full-bind parsvakonasana, it is necessary to open the shoulders FIRST as this is a DEEP shoulder opener and requires warm-up. For example:

Goddess pose w/ Gomukhasana arms--Prasarita D--Trikonasana--Bound Parsvakonasana



A quick note...

6 and 7 can be interchangeable. You can go through the externally rotated postures first, and then move on to balancing postures. This is a portion of the sequencing template that can be changed to suit the teacher's intentions for the class.

Portion 6 in a backbends class could also include some lower back strengthening movements and perhaps a camel pose, or another intermediate difficulty backbend. As long as the teacher had been opening up the front body during portions 1-5, that would be a safe asana to offer.



8. Deep Twists

We are approaching the end of the standing postures, and the students bodies are quite warm and open. Just before the peak poses, it is time to offer some deeper standing twists. These postures require multiple muscle groups, balance, proprioception, and coordination. They also require a teacher that is versed in proper alignment and action cues.

Parivrtta Trikonasana, Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana, and Parivrtta Parsvakonasana are all very DEEP poses that should not be performed until the teacher has warmed-up the students bodies extensively. It is customary to link 1-2 of them together and to hold the students for 5-8 deeps breaths. Examples:

Tadasana--Vira III--Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana

AMS--Vira I--Parsvottanasana--Parivrtta Trikonasana



9. Peak Pose

The standing postures are finished, and it's time to offer your peak posture!! All of the targeted sequencing has led up to this pose. In an intermediate level or advanced level class, this posture is usually an arm balance or inversion. It can also be a sequence including an arm balance or inversion. An example of this for a “twists” class would be:

Side Crow--Eka Pada I--Vinyasa

This peak sequence will allow the beginners to work on crow/side crow and the more advanced students can work the transitions. ALWAYS be mindful of the experience level of the class, and never teach something you can't do yourself.



Another note...

Before the peak pose, it is also a nice time to do some core work. All arm balances and inversions require core strength and stability, and some core work is a nice way to prepare the students to float.



10. Backbends

After the peak pose/inversions there needs to be a resting counterpose to bring the student back into equilibrium. A nice example would be a child's pose after pincha mayurasana. After a minute or so in child's pose, proceed to backbends.

It is recommended to ALWAYS teach at least one smaller backbend before moving on to more advanced ones. The most common example would be always taking a bridge pose before upward facing bow pose.

Each backbend needs to be performed slowly and safely, and the teacher encourages the students to hold their backbends for 5-8 deep breaths. A deep backbend should be offered 2-3 times.



10. Backbends Continued...

After the deep backbends are completed, a gentle releasing posture is necessary to allow the body to come back to a more relaxed form. THEN you can proceed to a counter pose, such as happy baby. For Example:

Urdhva Dhanurasana--Supta Badakonasa--Ananda Balasana--Supine Twist

Many sequences skip the supta badakonasa...leave it in as a more gentle transition into a hip opener.



11. Cool Down

These seated or lying down postures can be used in two ways, to continue with the theme, or to fill in any of the gaps that might be left in the sequencing thus far.

For example, in a hamstrings class, it would make sense to have a cool down posture emphasizing an opening in the FRONT of the hip/leg area, to balance out all of the back body work done in the earlier portions of the class.

It would also make sense to continue to offer postures targeting the hamstring area, as that was the emphasis of the class.

A typical cool down will include 1-2 deep hip openers, a shoulder opener, a forward fold/inversion, and a gentle twist.



Savasana/Meditation

Allow at least 5 minutes for students to lie in stillness or in seated meditation. 10 minute Savasanas are few and far between for most people and you will notice how much people appreciate your class just by letting them be.