13 Drills To Help You Master The Round Off & Make It Less Terrible

by Coach Sahil

Welcome to the one tumbling skill every gymnast, cheerleader or acrobat *thinks* they can do well, yet reality proves them otherwise.

And believe me, I'm not making this statement as if I'm the best round offer in the World. Far from it actually; when I first joined Power Tumbling back in the day, I was sentenced to 6 months of pure round off (RO) training.

And even after all that work, I'd say my RO became decent at best. But hey, considering my starting point was something that looked like dumpster fire, I guess I should be pretty proud of myself. It's also a testament to my coaches at the time. And so my goal is to pay it forward, and make sure my athletes perform round offs that are at least 10x better than I ever could.

As if it wasn't glaringly obvious by now, the RO is literally the most important tumbling skill you'll learn. It's also one that will take you the *longest* to master, so be prepared to spend lots of time on it.

No drill listed on this page should be considered as temporary. Go back to them, and train them as often as possible, regardless of how much tumbling experience you have.

In fact, I tell athletes that when it comes to the RO, there will never be an "end" to the journey. There will always be something they can do to make it better and thus, they should always be working it. Athletes that I personally work with generally don't have a choice; every tumbling clinic, class or private lesson of mine usually has some sort of mandatory RO work embedded in there. There's no

escape.

Trust me, your tumbling pass will live and die by the quality of your round off. So let's see how we can make it a little less terrible.

Please watch the drill animations for their theory and mechanics, not execution. Most of my videos are captured during an athlete's learning phase so they can benefit by watching their own corrections. Also, please do not perform any of the drills on this website unless you're in the company of a certified coach and have their permission to do so. The information on this website is presented purely for entertainment purposes only. You are solely liable for any injuries that may occur.

Prerequisites Needed

Before we jump into the main drills, below are a list of prerequisites that I recommend you perfect before progressing. I also want to point out that the prerequisites aren't listed in any particular order because they can be worked simultaneously. Coaches: this means you can set up a circuit which works all four at once.

#1 – Powerhurdle Lunge



Besides the RO itself, this is one of the most challenging skills to teach effectively

to new athletes. I've seen coaches lose their soul trying to get their little gymnasts and cheerleaders to power hurdle (PH) properly. If you know athletes that hate doing the PH into tumbling passes, it's because they haven't been taught this skill properly, and don't see it as an asset.

Truth is, it doesn't have to be that complicated. Coaches, here are a few tips to make your life easier:

- First things first, make sure all 12 shapes are mastered (it makes their learning process so much easier).
- Next, ensure that their long jump is adequate. Most athletes *should* be able to jump the width of one strip on a standard sprung floor.
- Look for the common problem of lunging too early. In the animation above, I asked my athlete to really exaggerate getting her back foot under, then **pushing** into the lunge. This is where a significant portion of the "power" comes from. Remember Newton's 3rd law? For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. So if an athlete isn't pushing against the floor, the floor isn't going to be giving anything back.
- Finally, ensure they have a neutral chin position and eyes are looking forward. If you watch closely you'll notice she's holding something between her chin to keep her C-Spine neutral. That device is called the **ChinBloc**. Click Here if you'd like to see a video of how it helps eliminate bad technique for nearly all tumbling skills.

#2 – Needle Kicks



You can have an amazing PowerHurdle, but if your needle kick is weak, your RO will lose power and/or go in a direction you don't want. Every time an athlete shows up with a RO with legs that kick in all sorts of weird directions, I ask them to show me their needle kick. And at least 8 out of 10 times the problem can be spotted instantly. Strong needle kicks are essential to cartwheels, round offs and front handsprings… so work them often.

Coaches, if you have my progression and conditioning posters, then you know this prerequisite is already part of the warm up. For the rest of you, simply make the decision today to make the needle kick a mandatory skill which needs to be practiced every time you tumble. You'll notice a significant improvement in the quality and speed of your RO.

#3 – Cartwheel

I hope this doesn't need much of an explanation. If you can't do a near perfect cartwheel with straight legs on a straight line, and finish with straight arms up by your ears, then don't start throwing round offs just yet.

#4 – Handstand Pop To Fall



If your power hurdle still needs work, you can simply do this from a passe or a static lunge position. The key here is to have the strength to do an adequate block off the shoulders. Because if this shoulder block is missing from your RO, then you will have trouble getting your chest up. And if the chest can't come up fast enough, it'll be near impossible to connect skills to your RO.

And a round off that doesn't let you connect into skills is about as useful as wet toilet paper.

If you have a keen eye, I'm sure you noticed that this is also a fantastic drill if you're starting work on the front handspring. Speaking of which, I highly suggest you start working front handsprings (FHS) and the RO at the **same time**. Because if you think about it, that's essentially what a RO is: a FHS with a half turn. Their mechanics are so similar that I know some coaches who teach the FHS *before* the RO. This isn't necessarily wrong, so if you want to go that route, all the power to you. However, I think working them together is just more efficient.

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remains in its original format without editing or tampering.

Time For The Main Drills

Now that we've handled the prerequisites, it's time to jump into the main drills (yes I know, you've been waiting patiently).

I've listed them in order so you can see how I would go about teaching a round-of from scratch. I'm not going to claim that my method is the only way, but it's definitely a process that I've found produces great results while giving me minimal headaches.

And unlike my other tumbling guides, you'll notice I haven't listed any specific number of reps to perform. This is because the round off is so important, that perfection could mean 50 reps for one athlete, while a 100 reps for another. You need to go into this with the mentality of **whatever it takes.**

Ready to get stared? Let's get to it then.

The Main Round Off Drills

Drill #1: HS Half Turn Stomach Drop

This drill is a double-edged sword; get it right and you (or your athlete) will develop a tremendous understanding of how tight and pretty a round off *should feel*. Get it wrong though, and they'll end up confused. In fact, when it comes to this drill I see junior coaches getting more confused than the athletes, more than half of the time.

The tricky part comes down to the upper body rotation, and the logic behind it. Most think that the leg which you use to RO is the direction you'll be turning while in the RO.

Wrong!

If you watch the animation below, you'll notice that my lovely junior coach Sarah, is a **righty**. In other words, she round-offs with her right leg leading.



However, pay careful attention to which direction her belly button turns to face before she lands on her stomach. Go ahead, watch it again. It's on an infinite loop, so I'll wait till you figure it out.

Did you catch it?

She's turning **left**!

Well how can that be? Shouldn't someone with a righty RO be a right twister? Yes, they should. And Sarah most definitely fulls and doubles to the right. However, the RO always twists in the **opposite** direction in order to make it around. Think about what arm drops first. For someone who's a righty, they will drop their right arm causing the torso to rotate left. Try this right now; you don't have to throw the RO, but just pretend to walk out a righty RO, and notice how your upper body rotates. If you walked it out correctly, you should have noticed a lift in the left shoulder, causing your torso to rotate to the left.

This is also why it is **incorrect** to call a Barani (front half) a "round off with no arms." Because if Sarah's Barani looked the same as her round off, it **wouldn't** be twisting to the right — which is her natural twisting direction. And that's just wrong.

Bottom Line:

- A round off that leads with the **right leg** twists to the **left**
- A round off that leads with the **left leg** twists to the **right**

Use the belly button analogy to make sure you (or your athletes) are turning correctly. One way I'd make sure Sarah was doing it right, is I would stand to her left as she did the drill. If I didn't see her belly button before she did the stomach drop, I'd know she twisted in the wrong direction, and this wouldn't translate well to when she was ready to try an actual RO on floor.

If any of the above didn't make sense, read it again. Then read it one more time to make sure you've really got a handle on it. It's absolutely crucial that you understand this, otherwise you will set yourself (or your athletes) up for a RO that looks like a sloppy mess.

Drill #2: Cartwheel With Feet Together

While I've placed this drill second in the order, you can still work it simultaneously with drill #1. The reason I prefer to teach the HS half turn first, is because I want to eliminate landings on the floor so the athlete can instead focus on the entry and the turn. With that said, the version you see below is probably the most challenging: it removes the Power Hurdle (starts in Passe) and is going on to a slightly elevated surface, requiring a strong needle kick.



Here are the progressions I'd use to make things a little smoother:

- Downhill from Passe (cheese mat, off a block, or into resi pit)
- Flat surface from Power Hurdle
- Flat surface from Passe
- On to an elevated surface (Power Hurdle entry)
- On to an elevated surface (Passe shape entry)

During each phase, you'll get less time to bring your feet together, thus the challenge. Now you may not need the downhill variation if your CW is elite. In that case, start on the flat surface. I'll leave it up to your judgement. If you're a coach however, do the downhill variation anyway to teach your athletes the expected amount of speed they should be getting.

Drill #3: Round Off To Stomach Drop

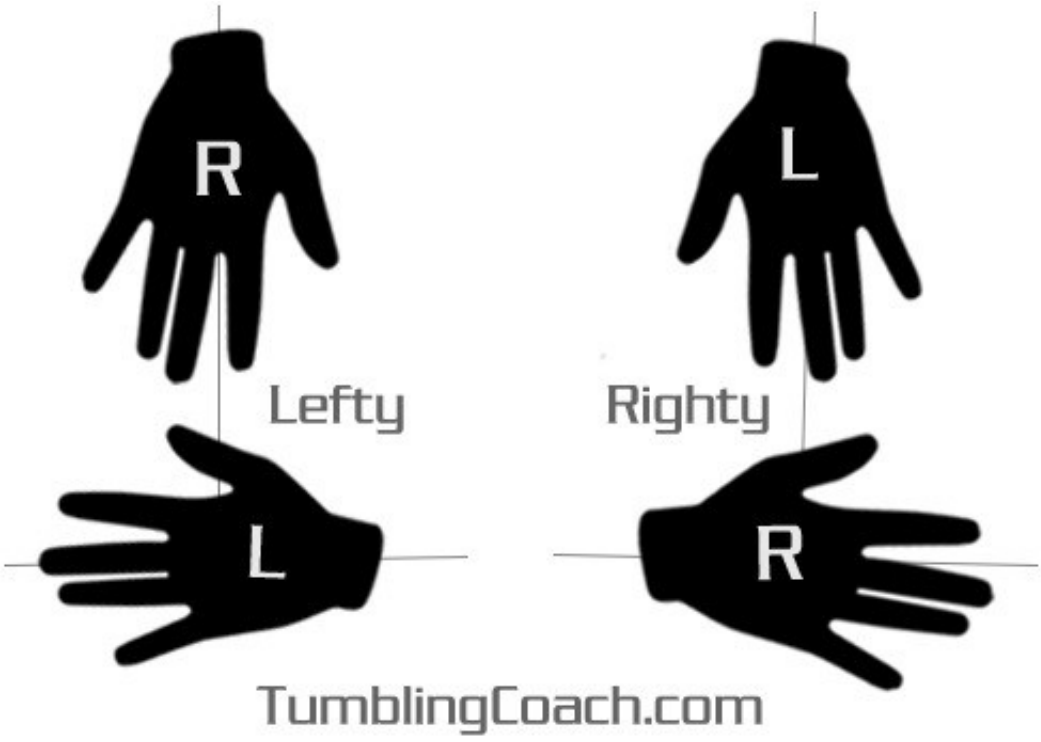
Now we start putting the round off together in a more realistic fashion. This is basically like the first drill but with the proper hand placement thrown in.



A Few Words On Where To Place Your Hands

Technically speaking, you (or anyone else working round offs) *should* have already learned proper arm placement when learning cartwheels. But for the sake

of completeness, take a look at the image below for what I recommend.



This is the famous "upside down T" method. It isn't the only way, but I do find that it's the most efficient way. That's because it allows each arm to do a specific job; the one on the same side as leading leg acts as the **stability** arm, while the arm opposite to the leading leg acts as the **turning** arm (e.g, the right arm for an athlete with a "righty" RO will be the stability arm which bears most of the weight).

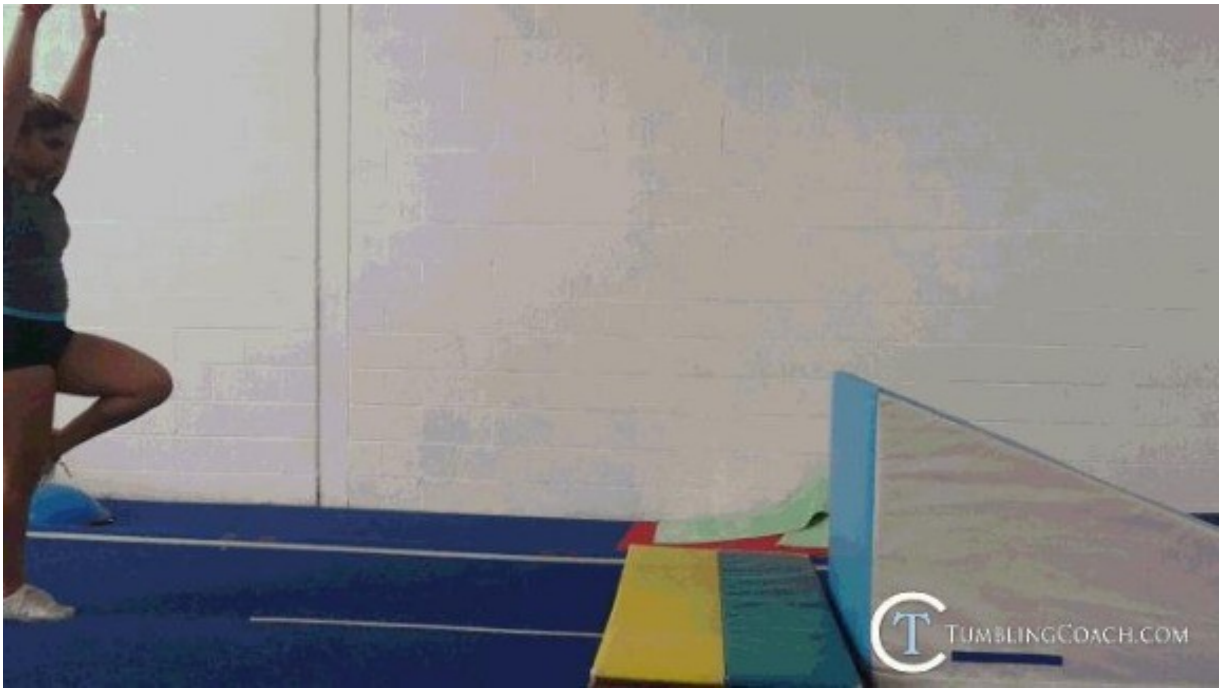
Few things to keep in mind:

- Make sure you (or your athletes) are landing straight down the middle. If not, fix this issue **now** otherwise you'll have trouble tumbling straight later on.
- One way to keep yourself straight is to "foolproof" the drill. This is done by changing the environment in such a manner that the body has **no choice** but move in the way it's supposed to. As you can see from the animation above, I've put different blocks in her way to force her into the proper, tight body position.
- Be sure the head is tucked in-between the shoulders.
- Focus on getting the feet together as quickly as possible. Ideally at 12-o-

clock (near the handstand position). Later on, you won't have to worry about this too much, but for now, it's worth the effort due to the tightness it promotes.

Drill #4: Round Off Elevated Stomach Drop

If you do not have a taller cheese/wedge mat, you can still simulate this drill by putting a folded panel mat under the thick side of a regular cheese mat, giving it some elevation. While this drill technically isn't much different that the previous one, it does require is a more aggressive block off the shoulders to get the chest high enough. So if your handstand pop is weak, you'll find this drill more challenging than it should be.



Notice how I've used a colored mat so my athlete knows *exactly* where to place her stability and turning hands? If you don't have access to a mat such as this, there are plenty of other options at your disposal. Here are some alternatives I've relied on in the past:

- Drawing with chalk (be sure to have the gym's permission before you unleash your art skills on the carpet)
- Velcro strips. Most gyms have extra strips lying around. I'd simply take two and create the upside down T shape on the floor
- Yoga mat. Not only are these thin and unobtrusive, they stick to the floor

quite well

Finally, I don't recommend doing this from a Power Hurdle as there's too much momentum and the athlete may end up slamming their toes into the floor when least expected. Passe or Lunge entry only.

Drill #5: Round Off to Knee Drop

At this point, the RO is really starting to come together. Before I go into more details, watch the animation below with **extra care** — I'm asking my athlete to do a few specific things that will ensure her long term success. See if you can spot what they are.



Did you catch the tiny red ball that she has to jump over? I'm also getting her to pause in the passe shape. There are two reasons for this:

1. To show me that she has control over her tumbling
2. To slow down her speed, as most athletes new to the RO need time to think and process all the movements. Rushing it at this stage won't help. You can already see that even with the pause her shaping still needs work… and that will come with time.

Also, you'll notice she **doesn't** land in a kneeling sit position (butt touching heels).

She's landing with her hips, glutes and core are engaged. This will mean when she finally starts landing her RO, I won't have to worry about her piking much (unless I'm asking her to go into an LSit, which we'll talk about in a moment).

Once an athlete shows me proper shaping, control and tightness, I'll allow them to speed this up until it's one smooth motion.

Drill #6: Round Off To Front Support / Pushup

This drill may seem like a distant cousin to #4, but the reason I've put it after the knee drop is because landing in a front support requires a certain level of conditioning and shaping proficiency so the athlete doesn't injure their ankles. Take a look at the animation below…



Now initially, your front support may look like the one you see above; piked. While this may hurt our eyeballs, it's acceptable in the beginning. It's a natural reaction to soften the blow of the landing. But the more reps you (or your athletes) can do, the cleaner and tighter it should get.

Eventually, you can even do this to a front support that lands so tight, that it allows you to rebound back up into a HS. It's one of my favorite ways to check and see if an athlete will buckle in their RO BHS connection (even before Drill #9… but more on that later).

Just like the previous drill, I wouldn't do a Power Hurdle entry *unless* it was paused in order to allow the athlete to maintain complete control, and not put too much stress on the ankles.

Drill #7: Downhill Round Off To L-Sit (+ Optional Arm Slam)

Once an athlete can show me the ability to squeeze their legs and stay tight, now we start working on getting their toes in **front** of their hips. This is the only RO rebound angle I teach for beginners since it's the only one they should need (in order for a successful BHS connection).



If you aren't familiar with my 12 Tumbling Shapes, the L-Sit is basically a 90 degree pike. Now obviously, we don't want our RO to pike down. So why do this drill?

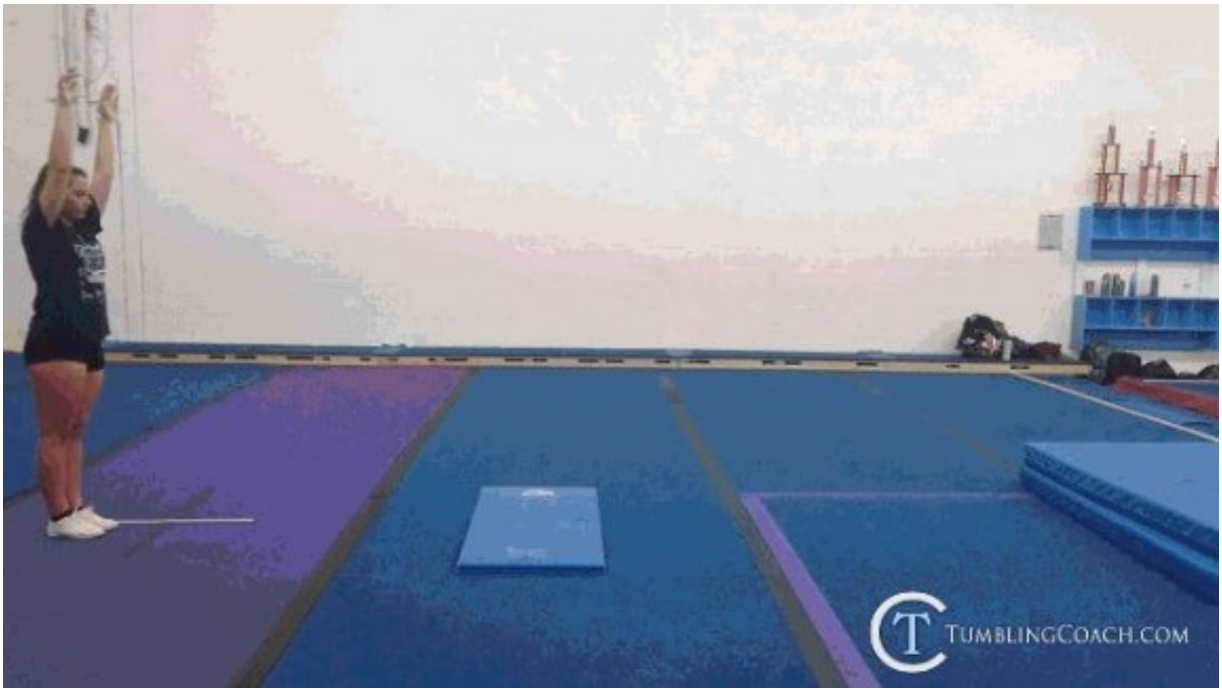
Because before I can have an athlete do a jump back that goes, you know, **back,** I need them to learn **how** to get their toes in front of their hips. This is generally the hardest part. I've worked with plenty of cheerleaders and gymansts that have a fantastic rebound coming out of the RO, but they couldn't hit the proper angle to save their life. Hence their BHS ends up going in the same direction as a back tuck (upwards).

Bottom Line: Work the toes angle first, worry about the hips later.

*Side Note: The optional arm slam my athlete is performing is something I **highly** recommend. Just remember to add the hip drive at the same time (i.e the butt should come off the mat by engaging the glutes). Not only does this contribute to good habits when it comes to the BHS, but when the athlete tries the RO jump back — where hip tightness is needed — it'll feel normal and natural. See Drill #9 for more on that.*

Drill #8: Round Off L-Sit + Fall

Like any good progression, once the downhill variation is mastered, it's time to take it to a level surface to ensure that body tightness remains. Most athletes will generally miss the angle or have soft knees when they first attempt this drill after coming from the previous one. But it won't take long for it to look like what you see below.



If you (or your athletes) are having issues with getting the toes in, add a panel mat for the hand placement. This extra bit of height will provide just enough extra time to pull the feet in. Then unfold it one panel at a time until it's no longer needed.

You may also add the arm slam here, provided that the mat you (or your athletes) fall back on is soft enough. Just make sure your arm slam includes the hip-drive (butt should be elevated).

Drill #9: Roundoff Rebound Jump Back (RRJB)

This is where it all comes together. If you take everything you've learned from the previous drills, add power along with a tight hip drive, you'll end up with a beautiful RO Jump back. This is a drill that should almost always be worked, regardless of what level you (or your athletes) are currently at. No one can do enough RRJB's in my humble opinion.



A Few Points Worth Mentioning:

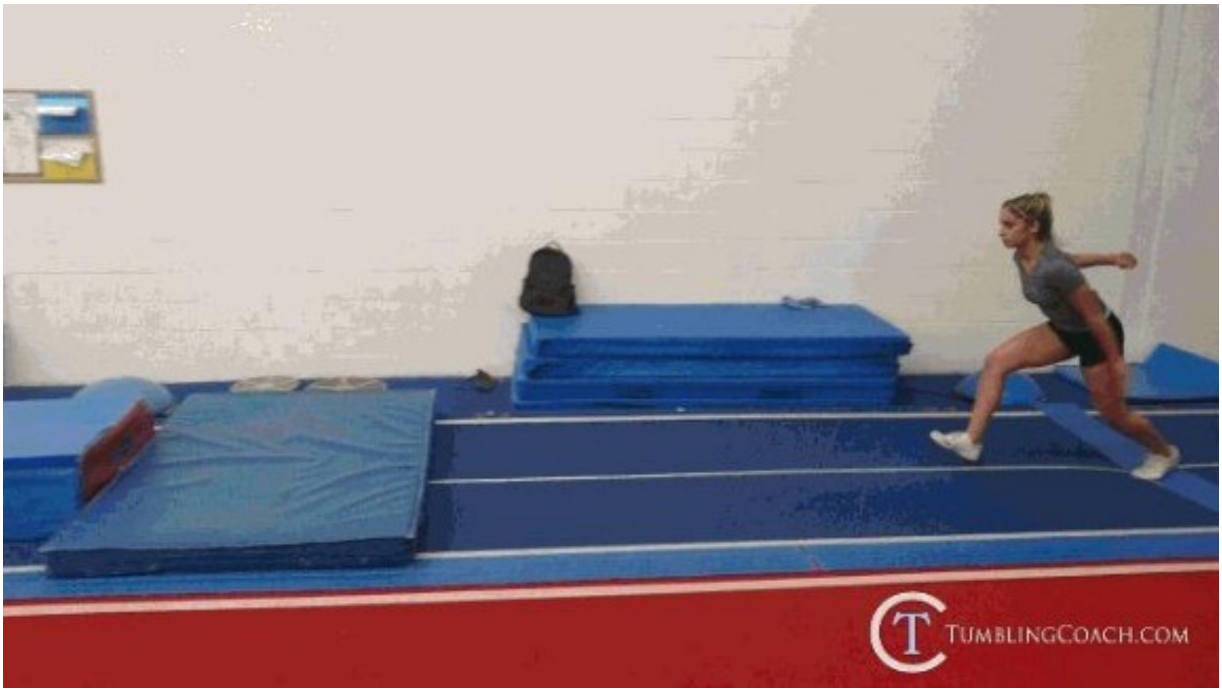
- The minimum jump back height should be at your hip level. I prefer belly button.
- Make sure the jump back also has distance. The perfect angle of take off would be at 45 degrees (if 90 were straight up)
- If possible, throw in a panel or crash mat like I have done in order to give yourself (or your athletes) some extra time to snap their toes in.
- Cheerleaders: If you don't have access to a big mat or a collection of stacked crash mats, ask your bases (or one really strong base) to catch you in a cradle position.
- Gym owners and coaches: There is nothing that quite replaces the feel and importance of tumbling on to an elevated surface. So do whatever it takes (fundraising, donations, bake sale etc.) to either get a deck mat, or enough

crash mats to make a pile that's high enough. It's worth every penny.

- **Don't make this boring.** If you're a coach, challenge your athletes with jump back games. Easiest way to do this is to gather a group and ask them to do a jump backs one at a time. Mark their distance based on how far their hips are relative to the **edge of the mat.** This way, taller athletes with longer arms don't get an unfair advantage over those who are young and/or vertically challenged.

Drill #10: Round Off Up Hill

There is no better way to transform a decent round off into a great round off than by **forcing** it land on an elevated surface. This is because it requires every phase to cleaner, faster and tighter. Unlike some of the earlier drills, this is one where the Power Hurdle (or slight running) entry should be a **minimum** requirement. A stationary RO going uphill is for advanced tumblers only.



Some DOs and DON'Ts Of The Uphill Round Off

DO use different elevations to keep the athlete engaged and challenged (panel mats, blocks etc.)

DON'T elevate the surface higher than the athlete's knee height

DO start off small (on something like an unfolded panel mat) and allow athletes to work their way up

DON'T ask athletes to simply "try it" if they're uncomfortable. While the drill is beneficial, it can also result in rolled ankles if progressions are ignored

DO ask athletes to do complete passes while going up hill (provided you have the mats for the set up)

DON'T force athletes to tumble uphill for complete passes until it has been absolutely mastered on a level surface

DO use an elevated set up on Air Track and Tumbl Traks

DON'T ignore your athlete if they ask for a spot (if you've never experienced it, then take my word for it: uphill tumbling can be a little scary)

A Few Closing Thoughts

While this guide was focused on a singular RO connection (intended for BHS or whips), you can start applying the block angle (toes behind hips) provided you've mastered the end skill coming out of the RO BHS.

For example, once your RO BHS T (back tuck) pass is solid, you may start working RO BT. This isn't a rule written in stone, but just a damn good tumbling habit to build.

Because I do tumbling clinics all around the World, I've had the pleasure of working with hundreds of athletes. And the one common theme I've found is that those who can do a RO BHS entry into a pass have a much easier time connecting their RO to an end skill then those who try and go about it the other way round.

So while I urge coaches to adopt this good habit, it's something you can control as well.

I hope you enjoyed the BONUS drills and the extra goodies that came with the Premium Edition of the guide. Thank you again for your continued support.

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