

A Short Guide to Table Tennis

Part 7: Structured Practice

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How to Structure a Practice Session

So, you're off on your own, you have a great practice partner, you have rackets, balls and a table, and you want to have a great practice. What do you do??¹

Pre-Warm Up

This is to try to ensure that you don't pull any muscles or hurt yourself in any way.

- 1) Always begin by getting your blood pumping. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The best way is to jog around for a few minutes. Or you can do some sidestepping and crossovers. Or even jump in place. Just do some sort of non-table tennis activity until you feel your body is warmed up.
- 2) Now stretch all your major muscles. Your quads, hamstrings, calves, biceps, triceps, etc. And don't forget your ankles, neck, and waist!

Stroke Warm Up

One important thing to remember when warming up your strokes is *not to hit the ball too hard*. The purpose of the warm up is to *warm up your strokes*, and you can't accomplish that if you are continually picking up the ball off the ground. So, hit at such a speed that you and your partner can exchange at least 10 balls back and forth without missing. There's no need to smash back and forth. ☺ Each step in the warm up should take **2-4 minutes**. Beginner players should try to hit at least 30 back and forth in each step without missing before moving on to the next step.

- 1) *Forehand counterdrive*. Begin by hitting some forehand drives back and forth to warm up your forehand. Try getting used to the angles by aiming your counterdrives so that they bounce off the side of the table instead of the end.
- 2) * *Forehand loop and block*. You warm up your forehand loop and your partner blocks. Begin by looping slowly with more arc and spin. As you get more warmed up, you can decrease the arc and increase the speed. Once you feel comfortable with your loop, switch roles with your partner. So now you block and your partner loops.
- 3) *Backhand counterdrive*. Hit some backhand drives back and forth to warm up your backhand. Again try getting used to the angles by aiming your counterdrives so that they bounce off the side of the table instead of the end.
- 4) ** *Backhand loop and block*. You warm up your backhand loop and your partner blocks. Begin by looping slowly with more arc and spin. As you get more warmed up, you can decrease the arc and increase the speed. Once you feel comfortable with your loop, switch roles with your partner. So now you block and your partner loops.
- 5) * *Step-around Forehand loop and backhand block*. Warm up your forehand loop from your backhand corner while your partner blocks with her backhand. Once you feel comfortable, switch roles.
- 6) *Down-the-line*. Use your forehand and hit down the line to your partner's backhand. You can either counterdrive or loop with your forehand. After a few minutes, switch roles.

Footwork Warmup

Now that you've warmed up your strokes, it's time to warm up your footwork. I would recommend doing 2-3 footwork warmup drills, depending on how much time you have. Each drill should be done for at least **5 minutes** (ideally 7 or more) by each player. These are great drills for beginners to learn footwork because the ball placement is pre-determined and expected – there is no element of surprise. Here are a couple of drills that I would recommend. Of course, there are many other possibilities and variations as well.

- 1) One Forehand, One Backhand.
- 2) N Forehands, N Backhands.
- 3) Two Forehands – One Middle, One Wide
- 4) * Two Forehands – One Forehand side, One Backhand side

¹ (*) Denotes intermediate drills. (**) Denotes advanced drills.

- 5) * One Forehand, One Backhand on the Backhand corner
- 6) * Envelope

Advanced Footwork Drills

These are some more footwork drills whose ball placement is pre-determined and expected. However, they are more difficult and work just as much on strokes and rallies as on footwork. Again, these should be performed at least **5 minutes** (ideally 7 or more) for each player.

- 1) * Falkenberg
- 2) ** Falkenberg with Forehand Block
- 3) * Forehand, Middle, Forehand, Backhand
- 4) ** Backhand, Middle, Backhand, Forehand
- 5) * FH Loop to FH Block and Middle Block
- 6) * FH Loop to FH Block, Middle Block and BH Block
- 7) * Backhand block to BH corner and middle (Loop)
- 8) Down the line FH loop, BH loop to FH block

Advanced Random Footwork Drills

These drills are more advanced in the sense that they include an element of randomization and thus surprise. Again, these should be performed at least **5 minutes** (ideally 7 or more) for each player.

- 1) * Random to BH block
- 2) One or two FH, one or two BH
- 3) * BH middle or BH forehand
- 4) ** BH, FH on backhand corner and then down the line when feel like it
- 5) * Down the line rally, switch when want, down the line, switch, etc.
- 6)

Service Drills

While the previous footwork drills focused primarily on counterdriving, looping and blocking, these drills incorporate service, and thus you work on your pushes, flips and service as well. These service drills should be performed at least **7 minutes** per player.

- 1) Two Forehand loops, Two Backhand loops – effective for warming up before matches (warm up loops)
- 2) Serve short, flip cross court, do envelope drill.

Service Practice

It is always a good idea to set aside some time to work on your own serves. If possible, you and your partner can both grab a bucket of balls and alternate serving at each other. The player who receives the serve can tell the other player what sort of spin she has managed to put on the ball.

Multi-ball

Multi-ball is a whole new topic by itself, but essentially one player gets a bucket of balls, places it on the table and feeds balls to the other player like a machine. This type of drilling is widely popular especially in China and is the major form of training for many top players.

Footwork Drills

There are a few drills that can be done that focus solely on footwork. They are “shadow-stroking” drills that are performed with only a racket, with neither a ball nor a partner. See Part 6 for more details.

Games

It is always fun and effective to play a few practice games after training hard through all the drills. Besides playing the regular games to 11, it is also very helpful to begin from certain scores and to play the games out from there. Good scores to start at include 5-5, 8-9, 7-7, 8-8 and 10-10. It is important to be able to squeeze out the tight matches when necessary.