

**Sequencing Asana**

Whilst we need to bear in mind that asana often belong to more than one category for our purposes we can catageorise asana as follows:

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| Base | Movement @ spine | Special areas of interest |
| * Standing
* Prone/Supine
* Kneeling
* Seated
 | * Forward Bends
* Backward Bends
* Twists
* Side Bends
* Inversions
* Balances

  | * Sequences
* Core strength & awareness
* Hips internal/external rotation
* Arm balances
* Savasana
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**General characteristics of each Base:**

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| Standing Asana: |
| Very warming, with less restrictions as we move, so great to start a class; wakes up the body, getting energy moving; brings steadiness; raises awareness of creating space in the body creating lightness; focuses the mind as we link with the breath & inner experience; activates lower chakras. |
| Kneeling asana: |
| A simple short kneeling sequence can be useful as an initial warm up; we should avoid spending extensive periods of time on the knees however and use lots of padding as needed. |
| Prone/Supine asana: |
| Supine poses are often used as a warm up but they need to be dynamic with several repetitions; then having practiced between 3 and 5 repetitions we can stay for a few breaths. It is not ideal to start with stationary asana in a general hatha yoga class other than perhaps a relaxing savasana if it is warm enough. |
| Seated asana: |
| Generally the body needs to be warmed up prior to practicing seated asana as it is more exacting to practice asana on the ground where movement is more constricted. This is especially true of cross-legged seated asana where if the hips are stiff & immobile it may mean the lower back and knees are placed under undue pressure, so it preferable to practice this after an initial standing or supine warm up – kneeling movements are not ideal as preparation for seated as the knees will have been bent and under some pressure.  |

**General Characteristics of Movements of Spine:**

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| Forward bends |
| For beginners supine hamstring stretches are more accessible and safe; best to practice standing/supine poses, including standing forward bends before seated forward bends which are more confining; start seated forward bends from dandasana to gauge the need for padding beneath buttocks; avoid moving between strong or held backbends & forward bends; after asymmetrical forward bend practice a symmetrical forward bend to realign; for a sequence of forward bends juxtapose with twists or hip openers. |
| Backward bends |
| Twists, groin and hip flexor stretches (lunges, warrior 1), quad stretches, chest and shoulder stretches are great preparation; raise awareness of need for slight internal hip rotatation; move from simpler to stronger back bends; can practice a series of backbends gradually increasing intensity; the most intense backbends to be practiced at the peak of the class when body is warmest; avoid practicing core strengtheners just prior as they tighten abdominals; often best to practice backbends where contract the spinal muscles to lift into backbend (locust) before those where we lower against gravity; practice symmetrical backbends before asymmetrical bends e.g. cobra before pigeon pose; avoid moving between forward and backward bends; when counterposing backbend(s) spend a little while in neutral before counterposing, especially with a forward bend & ensure the immediate counterpose is gentle. |
| Twists: |
| Practice easier twists earlier in class; use twists during warm up and as counterposes to alleviate tension; start with supine, kneeling or standing twists prior to seated twists where the seated position makes them more inaccessible; dynamic twists followed by static twists is more effective; twists are very useful for counterposing backbends & forward bends; to counterpose a sequence of twists a gentle forward bend or backward bend works well. |
| Side Bends: |
| We should include sidebending within the practice. |
| Balances: |
| Ideally taught before students are tired; avoid moving between external to internal hip rotation when the weight is on a standing leg in a balance as this exerts excessive pressure on femur head e.g. between half moon standing and reverse half moon standing; It can be good to practice tree pose in amongst a few standing asana where there is external hip rotation; eagle pose can be useful just before practicng some standing asana where there is internal hip movement e.g. uttanasana, parsvottanasana etc. |
| Inversions |
| Long term preparation is needed for inversions in general; headstands to be taught in the middle of the class whilst students are still quite fresh; shoulderstand can be taught later in t class, just prior to quiet practices as it is calming and does not require as much strength and co-ordination. |

**Special Areas:**

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| Sequences: |
| Simple sequences are good at the start of class; generally for beginners only 2 or 3 asana linked and perhaps up to 5 for more experienced students; ensure that all elements of the sequence are familiar and that the transitions between poses are thoroughly examined; can build up to a sequence over a class. |
| Core strength/awareness |
| Used to provide stability but focus on how that stability radiates out into the body not on compression; not ideal before backbends but good afterwards; good prior to balances especially arm balances. |
| Hips internal/external rotation: |
| Maintain awareness of the comfort of knees for hip opening poses; standing poses warm and mobilise hips before moving to deeper seated or supine hip openers; ideally juxtapose poses with the same hip rotation rather than moving from one to the other e.g. warrior 2, triangle, lateral side stretch (external) and warrior 1, flank stretch and reverse triangle (internal); hip openers are good within the cooling down period of the class. |
| Arm balances: |
| Always have the body well warmed up beforehand; allocate enough time to explore without any rush; core exercise before is useful; practice simpler forms for an extended period of a year or so (down dog, plank, side plank, crow, dolphin etc.); differentiate in mixed ability/experience classes offering alternatives for stronger balances; for intermediates can practice arm balances between standing poses; counterpose with wrist stretches.  |
| Savasana: |
| It is very important that we conclude our practice with savasana so we can integrate the practice, so if a student leaves early we need to give them the nod to spend a few minutes in savasana before leaving. |

Generally:

* Give students the opportunity to experience the effects of a more intense asana before moving on to another pose or a counterpose. Can always ask students to stay linked to their breathing as they do so.
* Prior to practicing a more complex asana take a moment to recentre and release any accumulated tension.
* Take more time to explore more challenging or unfamilar practices, especially the peak pose.
* Teach more restorative asana as cooling down towards the final quiet practices.

Remember:

* We can choose when to teach breathing techniques so that they may be useful at the start of the class prior to the asana (especially heating pranayama such as bhastrika or kapalabhati) or to help to attune to the breath (e.g. yogic breathing or ujjayi); later balancing or calming techniques are good just before meditation/relaxation (e.g viloma, nadi sodhana, brahmari etc.); it is always good to spend a few minutes attuning to the breath at the start of the class so this continues into the asana practice and this can often be done via a few repetitions of a simple movement whether standing or supine etc.
* We can incorporate simple meditations earlier in the practice but must make sure that once we have already warmed up the body we do not allow the body to cool too much so it is often best to teach them as part of our asana practice, for instance spinal breathing in staff pose or a seated forward bend.

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