

Catcher Fundamentals

- Stance
 - Signal stance
 - Primary stance (no runners)
 - Chest up, square to pitcher
 - Foot position – even
 - Shifting – shift late
 - Glove position – Near glove side knee (elbow in FRONT of knee)
 - Off hand position – needs to be behind something – knee, ankle, back
 - Secondary stance (runners, drag bunt, 2 strikes)
 - Weight on balls of feet, butt back and up, chest forward still square to pitcher
 - Foot position – right toe to left instep (feet slightly staggered, chest square)
 - Glove position – Near glove side knee (elbow in FRONT of knee)
 - Off hand position – needs to be behind something – knee, ankle, back
- Receiving
 - Do not sway to pitch and try to center – keep body quiet
 - Glove should not move when ball hits – beat the ball to the spot!
 - Catch the ball between index finger and thumb (use tennis balls or incrediballs to practice)
 - Make every pitch look the same by keeping your glove at the same angle. Avoid getting around the ball.
 - Catch a low pitch further out in front of you to try and get the strike
 - Drop glove side ONLY on an inside pitch (avoids handcuff) or low pitch (allows you to get lower).
- Blocking
 - Anticipate the ball in the dirt – know the pitcher, know the pitch
 - To keep the ball close to the body, beat the ball to the spot so you can minimize movement as ball makes contact.
 - Direct the ball beneath you, not back to the plate.
 - Body position
 - Glove and legs must close the “5 hole.”
 - Chest leaned **slightly** forward (deadlift position)
 - Elbows bent and tucked to the sides to keep your body wider.
 - Shoulders rounded forward.
 - Chin tucked
 - How to get to position
 - Fall forward (moves you toward ball)
 - Replace feet with knees (keeps you deep)
 - Balls to the side
 - Push with offside leg
 - Angle slightly (not around, not perpendicular)
- Throwing
 - Mechanics to 2B
 - Footwork
 - Replacement technique
 - Jab step – right foot lands first in front 6 inches along midline, then left foot (left foot not completely closed or completely open—45 degrees)
 - Pivot technique – when ball is moving down and away from RH hitter. Hips can’t be too closed or too open.
 - Transfer
 - Chest level
 - Turn the glove to the hand
 - If you have trouble bobbling ball or finding the seams, try transferring more out in front to give yourself more time.
 - Knee throws

- Throwing to 3B
 - Always throw behind RH hitter
 - Right foot behind the left. Stay close to the hitter, work toward the bag, not backwards.
- Throwing to 1B
 - Footwork
 - Pivot off right foot
 - Jab step with right foot to the right
 - Knee throws
 - Drop right knee to the right just like jab step, then drive left knee to the target, getting shoulders perpendicular to the bag.
- Plays at the plate – Tag Plays
 - Keep mask on
 - Evaluate from behind home plate (3B coach, runner, fielder, cut-off)
 - Step in front of plate to receive. Keep a lane open. Left foot at front left corner. Good athletic position.
 - Use throwing hand to protect ball when applying tag.
 - Keep left foot pointed toward 3B when moving to block the lane. Do not open the foot (injury risk).
 - Work on different
 - Long hop
 - Short hop
 - Middle hop
 - Backhand hops (3)
- Plays at the plate – Force plays
- Pop-ups
- Fielding bunts
- Passed balls/wild pitches

CATCHING SKILLS & DRILLS

Skills to work on:

- Primary/Secondary stance
- Hand-eye coordination
- Footwork
- Transfer/Release time
- Receiving
- Throwing
- Blocking
- Framing

Receiving Drills

- Tennis balls
- Catch balls from the machine

Blocking Drills

- Machine blocks
- Quick block (5)
- Block and “stop”
- Block and recover
- 3 balls on ground, move into position
- “Hands down” – on knees, move glove down, bounce into chest, watch ball, pump fake

Framing Drills

- Catch ball out front with flexed arm
- Ball faces middle of plate
- Tennis balls

Transfer Drills

- Catch ball with thumb pointed up
- Feet stationary, quick transfer
- Paddle drills
- Short throws into net
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Throwing Drills

- Throw from knee – 11 to 5 o'clock (throwing side knee down, also work on transfer)
- Coach in the middle
- Square or triangle

Catcher Everyday

Long Toss with intention (heavy balls as needed)

84' throws from a semi-crouch

Paddle throws

Dry Blocks - 3x each spot

Drop & Pop passed ball flips

Drop & Pop throw 2

Bunt footwork with throw to all bases

Tennis ball receiving/Low ball receiving

Short hop tags with partner (follow with a throw)

Ladder/T with a med ball (jab step)

Skill Work

Tags – OF, IF, flips

Pop-ups

4 to 1 turns

Receiving flips

Blocking

Blocking knee throws

Receiving with runner on – stance, recognition, transfer, footwork

Bunts with throws to bases

Pick-offs to all bases

Cuts and relays

Receiving throws (force outs)

Plays at plate with a follow-up throw to another base

Receiving from machine

Receiving with paddle (add blocks)

Receiving from machine with a transfer

Receiving unexpected pitches

Short hop throws from infield locations

Tanner Swanson DVD drills

2 person tennis ball receiving

Half blocks – glove already down

Distracted receiving

2 ball receiving from machine

Block and tag/throw on 3rd strike

Half block walk up – working on chest angle

Knee receiving with 25' throw from machine (45 degree angle)

CATCHER FUNDAMENTALS (modified from the Catching Camp website)

Stance and Set-up

The catcher should be in a balanced powerful position with the weight evenly displaced across the feet. The heels are in contact with the ground but his weight is balanced. The thighs are flat to the ground and the throwing hand is behind the glove in a fist. The catcher can powerfully block or throw from this stance. Also, the glove is set much lower as a target. The wristband of the glove should be set below the knee cap.

Blocking Balls

1. The purpose of blocking is NOT to catch the ball with the glove. While some balls may very well go directly into the glove, the goal should be to use the glove to block the ball from going between the legs. Any balls that would be higher than that should be allowed to hit them and be blocked to the ground.

2. This block involves technique that keeps the block very deep in the catcher's box instead of blocking forward. We want to block in a way that draws the energy out of a pitch and causes it to drop directly in front of the catcher, rather than blocking forward into a pitch and adding energy to the ball. This will cause it to bounce much farther away from the catcher.

Correct blocking position.

Draw a line on the ground. Have the player get down on their knees, knees up to the line and get into the blocking position. They spread their knees apart so the glove can be set between their knees, pocket facing the pitcher. The throwing hand is behind the glove being protected. The glove and throwing hand should be pulled back as deep between the legs as possible. The tip of the glove should just be touching the ground. Do not squash the glove into the ground.

It is at this point I really stress that the glove must stay between the legs and is no longer used to catch the ball.

The legs are positioned in such a way the player is sitting on their calves. Their feet should be almost touching behind them. This will keep any ball that does manage to get between the legs from going on through. Many players position their calves outside their legs and sit down between their legs. This has their legs in a "W" sit position. While this position allows the legs to be wider and cover more ground it is much slower to get up from and traps the player on the ground.

The upper body is leaning so the chin is out over the glove and knees. The back is flat, chest over top of ball. Their arms have an elbow bend that makes the arms flare out to the side. Many players keep their arms straight when they block. This causes much more wear and tear on the forearms than necessary. With the arms flared the chest protector will take more of the hits. The chin is down, but the eyes are up to watch the ball.

What to do when the ball hits them.

When the ball hits, a few things all happen at once. We exhale hard, suck in the abs, and roll the shoulders in. All of these are designed to further cushion the impact and pull the energy out of the pitch. Our goal is to have the ball stay between us and the back of the plate. Once the player is able to get up and down and return to this position we begin the drills.

The first drill is a No-Flinch drill.

In this drill the player assumes the blocking position but looks up and straight at the coach who is kneeling 3-4ft in front of them. The coach then throws atec balls directly at the facemask of the player. The player must take the hit without any

flinching other than eye blink. For players who turn their heads or flinch backwards this drill should be a regular event until they have learned to relax and take the hit without flinching.

The next drill is called Sit-n-Hit.

In this drill the player assumes the blocking position and the coach get 8-10 feet in front of them and throws balls directly at the ground in front of them. Varying the impact point to have some hit low on the catcher and some to bounce high and hit the chest protector. Again we are using this drill to get the player used to getting hit and not flinching.

Many of the poor blocks I see are a result of the player blending correct blocking movements with ill-timed survival flinches. Get rid of the flinches and the effectiveness of the blocks improve.

How to get from our receiving position to this blocking position.

We have the player get in their receiving position with runners on base, their toes on the line on the ground. The move to the ground is explosive. The first thing that moves is the throwing hand then the glove. The throwing hand moves downward and back first to ensure that it will end up behind the glove. The glove follows right after. Do not allow the glove to be on the ground blocking the opening between the legs and the knees haven't hit the ground yet.

Right after the hands move the legs will also move. I teach a method where the player will have their knees replace their feet. Their feet will explode backwards and come together behind them. Their knees will end up right on the line where their toes were. Remember our goal is to not add energy to the ball. This is why we block deep, staying back. If we fall forward onto our knees we will be adding energy to the ball when it hits us and cause a longer bounce away from us.

After they make the block they need to hold their position and make any corrections to their position needed. They do not get up until the position is correct. Then they get back up into their receiving position and repeat. I never begin using real balls until they are correctly executing the blocking maneuver correctly. **Once they can do this correctly I begin to throw real balls at them.** I slowly get them used to taking the hit, and more importantly NOT trying to catch the ball.

Once this skill is correct I begin to work up with the pitches coming in faster. I now begin letting the pitch be a little to the sides. Since they are set up with their toes pointed up the lines it is very easy for them to block slightly to either side by shifting weight over that foot.

Throwing Footwork

Proper Stance:

1. Receiving position with runners on base has feet slightly wider than with no runners on.
2. Heels are on the ground, toes pointed up the lines
3. Throwing hand is behind glove.
 1. Proper position for throwing hand is as follows. Player extends hand as if to offer handshake. Drop thumb to palm, wrap fingers around to protect thumb. Then the hand is placed behind glove with the middle finger knuckles touching glove.
4. Catcher has come up in crouch so thighs are parallel to ground. This is approx. Goal is to get out of deep crouch and "unlock hips" to allow for a quick explosive move towards second. Staying in deep crouch requires first move to be "up" and that will waste time.

By having the hand behind the glove this will help keep the throwing hand from taking a downward path to the throwing position.

Throwing mechanics (modified replacement footwork):

I will start with describing the footwork I teach and then the glove and arm motion separately. This footwork would be for a 0-2 count where catcher will hold strike.

One of the things that happens early in the mechanics is a very subtle weight shift. When just receiving pitches I instruct catchers to have weight spread with 60% on heels, 40% on balls of feet. As soon as they are aware the runner is moving that shifts to 60-40 the other way. This will only happen after MUCH practice and will have to become almost an unconscious shift.

The footwork begins with the catcher beginning to rise up out of the crouch. Since they are slightly pitched forward this movement is up-and-out-toward second. The first foot to move is the right foot. It slides straight across towards the left foot. It is planted at a spot that would be ½ way between where it was and where the left foot is. This means directly under the chin. DO NOT have the right foot replace the left. This is taught, but creates way too much momentum in the wrong direction. The goal here is to get turned so the left hip is pointed towards second as fast as possible.

The right foot then rotates as the left hip turns so that the right instep is now facing 2nd base. The left foot follows quickly after the right. The target for the left foot is to land basically directly in front of the right foot. This will put the body in a straight alignment to 2nd. We want this foot as close to the midline as possible. However we do not want this foot to cross the midline. Ideally this foot should touch the midline and be pointed at 2:00.

With the slight lean forward at the beginning and a strong push off the back leg we should avoid the problem of having all weight sitting on the back leg that results in throws totally dependent on arm strength and throws that often tend to go high and right.

Mechanics for the upper half of the body.

Once the ball makes contact with the glove the first move the player makes is to turn the glove so the pocket is now facing them. Continue to move the hand back to meet the throwing hand. Once the glove and throwing hand meet, the throwing hand retrieves the ball and immediately begins its path back through the throwing slot. The back of the throwing hand leads the hand back. Do not lead with the elbow. The glove stays out in front of the player. It does not travel back toward the throwing shoulder after the ball is removed.

Many catchers are taught to draw the glove back with the ball and remove the ball when the glove is back to the right ear. I believe that technique causes 2 problems that need to be eliminated.

- By drawing the glove back to the ear you cause the front (left) shoulders to close off the front side. Some girls rotate that shoulder so far that their left shoulder is pointed towards the 1st base dugout. Obviously this causes alignment problems that almost surely will result in an erratic throw.
- The 2nd problem this causes is the sideways movement that will be created by the glove side arm when the throw is executed. As we throw, the glove side arm should be driving down to the left side to help pull the right side forward to get the release point out in front. With the glove back so deep on the right side of the catchers face, the first moves that arm will make is a radical sideways motion just to get back on the left side of the body. Then, and only then, can that left elbow bend and the left arm drive down where it belongs. All of this sideways torque is counter productive to a throw that's should be headed toward 2nd base.

From this point the left elbow moves up to a point where the elbow is bent at a 90-degree and the left elbow is pointed directly at 2nd. I tell the catchers to use this elbow as their sight. The upper arm should be shoulder height, level to the ground. The glove hand is allowed to bend down at wrist in relaxed position.

When the ball was removed it began its path back the throwing slot. The grip we are working for here is a 4-seam. With practice a player can come out of the glove with a 4-seam grip nearly every time. The biggest issue from this point is that the entire throwing arm, shoulder, elbow, hand and ball NEVER go any lower then when they remove the ball from the glove. As soon as the arm starts back it should begin to track in an upward direction, the back of the hand leading the arm back. Our "target" is to end up with our right elbow shoulder high with the upper arm parallel to the ground. Yes, just like the glove side arm. The elbow should be at a 90-degree angle up. The ball should face the backstop, hand slightly on top of the ball. If the ball is not all the way facing the back stop the impending rotation of the hips and arm will almost always create a wrist roll. This will result in a throw that will act like a curve ball and tail away to the left.

At this point the actual throw begins with a simultaneous rotation of the right side. I tell my catchers that the pinky on your right hand starts the throw. As it rotates the elbow, shoulder, hip, knee and right foot all rotate towards 2nd. At the same time the left elbow begins to drive the left arm down and back towards the left hip. This driving helps "pull" the right side through the throw and moves the release point out in front of the body. It is important to keep the head up and looking at target all the way through. Too often the head follows the left shoulder and drops the left side down. This will almost always result in a high to the left throw. After the release the right foot and leg are allowed to release from the ground to release the remaining energy that is stored on the right side.

Throw to 3rd

Throwing mechanics

For this analysis we will assume the batter is right handed.

The purpose of this footwork is to accomplish 2 things.

1. Get us clear of the batter so we have an unobstructed throw to 3rd.
2. Set us up so our momentum will be directed towards 3rd base when we throw, not towards the 3rd base dugout.

I teach a technique that has the catcher moving behind the batter to get a clear lane to throw to third. The biggest problem with many catchers is they have too much momentum going to their left created as they clear the batter. They are never able to get their momentum turned and powerfully drive towards 3rd. This is caused by a toe-to-heel slide step to the left with their right foot. The player slides their right foot to the left and just behind their left heel to slide behind the batter. When they then try to redirect their momentum towards third they have generated too much lateral motion and cannot get their left hip turned back towards third to begin the throwing motion. This will usually result in throws that are on the foul territory side of third.

The correction for this is a simple change in the angle the right foot takes to clear behind the runner. I have the players take a deeper drop step back-and-towards third. The angle of this drop step is very close to the angle of the back side of the plate. You follow the same line created by the back right edge of the plate (The edge that comes to the point in the back).

The right foot is dropped back and stays in the same alignment that it was when catcher was in his receiving position. To clear most batters this foot must be slid behind and past the left heel.

At this point the hips turn and the left foot steps and drives towards third.

Mechanics for the upper half of the body.

Once the ball makes contact with the glove the first move the player makes is to turn the glove so the pocket is now facing them. Continue to move the hand back to meet the throwing hand. Once the glove and throwing hand meet, the throwing hand retrieves the ball and immediately begins its path back through the throwing slot. The glove stays out in front of the player. It does not travel back toward the throwing shoulder after the ball is removed. The glove stays out front. The glove elbow stays bent and is drawn back toward the left side in the same angle as the right foot. They travel parallel paths. This

will put the left elbow and the glove right over the left hip ready to pull down when the right side turns and begins the throw.

At this point the left elbow is up at point where the elbow is bent at a 90-degree. The upper arm should be shoulder height. Level to the ground. Glove hand is allowed to bend down at wrist in relaxed position.

When the ball was removed it began its path back the throwing slot. The grip we are working for here is a 4-seam. With practice a player can come out of the glove with a 4-seam grip nearly every time. The biggest issue from this point is this. The entire throwing arm, shoulder, elbow, hand and ball NEVER go any lower than when they remove the ball from the glove. As soon as the arm starts back it should begin to track in an upward direction, the back of the throwing hand leading the arm.

Our "target" is to end up with our right elbow shoulder high with the upper arm parallel to the ground. Yes, just like the glove side arm. The elbow should be at a 90-degree angle up. The ball should face away from the catcher, hand slightly on top of the ball. If the ball is not all the way facing away the impending rotation of the hips and arm will almost always create a wrist roll that will result in a throw that will act like a curve ball and tail away to the left.

At this point the actual throw begins with a simultaneous rotation of the right side and the stepping and driving towards 3rd with the left foot and leg. I tell my students that the rotation of your right hand starts the throw. As it rotates the elbow, shoulder, hip, knee and right foot all rotate towards 3rd. At the same time the left elbow begins to drive the left arm down and back towards the left hip. This driving helps "pull" the right side through the throw and moves the release point out in front of the body. It is important to keep the head up and looking at target all the way through. Too often the head follows the left shoulder and drops the left side down. This will almost always result in a high to the left throw. After the release the right foot and leg are allowed to release from the ground to release the remaining energy that is stored on the right side.

Framing

I advocate using techniques that keep strikes looking like strikes. I will explain my position on "Framing" by explaining the **4 Laws of Good Receiving**.

Law #1 "The Catcher Must View Each Pitch Through the Umpire's Eyes"

For a catcher to excel behind the plate they must view each pitch as the umpire sees it. I teach a 2nd view on the game in their minds eye. The first is of course the view of the whole field. The 2nd is the view that the umpire sees when he looks down toward home plate to make the call. He sees the back of the catcher as well as the ball, plate, and batter.

When a catcher develops this view of the game, they will realize how much they can affect the "look" the umpire gets at the pitch as it crosses the plate. They will also understand how they can make a close strike look like a pitch that is off the plate and not worthy of being called a strike.

A catcher needs to learn that there is a short period of time that while the umpire is tracking the ball with his eyes that the catcher is out of his direct line of sight. This occurs when the umpire has his eyes focused on the ball leaving the pitchers hands and continues tracking it until just in front of the plate. For that brief moment the catcher is below the umpire's direct line of sight. It is during this short time that the catcher needs to get properly positioned to receive the pitch.

Law #2 "It's a Catcher's Job to Keep Strikes Looking like Strikes"

I do not want to see my catchers catching a pitch that clearly is a ball and pulling, pushing, or somehow moving the glove to try and reposition the pitch at a spot they feel will get them a strike call. I don't want them trying to "Make a ball look like a strike". The best way to keep a strike looking like a strike is to never do anything that would make it look like a ball. The next 2 Laws discuss ways to accomplish that.

Law# 3 “Beat the Ball to The Spot”

My goal for my catchers is that their movements behind the plate when they receive are smooth, “quiet”, quick, but not hurried. They set the target with their glove in the middle of their body. The goal is to have adjusted their position so that their glove is in position to catch the ball before the ball gets there. They want their glove to “Beat the Ball to the Spot.” This is accomplished as follows.

- Their feet are turned up the lines.
- Their heels are in contact with the ground as well as the balls of their feet.

This makes it easy for them to receive any pitch that catches even the edge of the plate by shifting their weight that direction. They still keep the glove in the middle of their body. They can avoid “reaching” for pitches using this technique. When shifting their weight toward the ball they are able to keep their shoulders level at all times. The look they present to the umpire is one of control, and one that says that this pitch is being caught on the catcher’s midline, it must be a strike.

Often times a catcher doesn’t shift their weight and reaches for the ball on the outside of the plate, even though it may be a close strike. By reaching at the last minute, the message sent is that this pitch is not where the catcher wanted it and you may lose the strike call. Have the catcher get the glove to the contact point ahead of the ball. If a catcher’s glove shoots out and meets a fastball while both objects are moving the ball will usually win the battle and pull the glove off the plate.

This technique is done in addition to proper handling of the glove to assure that all parts of the glove are in the strike zone when the ball is caught. Imagine a catcher catches a ball on the inside edge to a right-hander, and has the thumb in the 6-o’clock position when the ball hits it. To make that catch they will have to allow the left elbow to go to the left to get the glove in position. The elbow will now be nearly a foot left of the edge of the strike zone. Also, over half of the glove will be to the left of the strike zone. So even if the ball is clearly a strike, all kinds of signals are being sent that this pitch is too far inside.

If the catcher makes a few subtle changes they will ensure that they aren’t doing anything to make this strike look like a ball.

First, set up with the thumb set at 3-o’clock. This positions the elbow to bend down, not out to the left. Then, shift the weight to the left, and position the glove to catch the left half of the ball. The hand rotates slightly so that the thumb is between 12 and 1 o’clock. The ball flies past the front edge of the glove and is caught in the back half of the pocket. The back edge of the glove is vertical, so no part of the glove is out of the strike zone. Since the elbow bent down, no part of the left arm is out of the strike zone. We have caught a close strike and did nothing to make it look like a ball.

Law#4 “The Glove Never Moves After the Ball Hits It”

One of the main techniques that many players think is part of good receiving is moving the glove after the ball hits it to a spot that will more likely get them the strike call. I have always felt that most of this technique is insulting to the umpire. He can hear the ball hit the glove, so what’s the point to drag or pull the ball somewhere it wasn’t. If the technique I have described above is employed, then you will maximize your strike calls and build a better relationship with the umpire by not trying to move a pitch after it hits the glove.

Force Play at Home

This play should be the front end of a double play. The out at first is often lost due to a late throw by the catcher. To follow is the techniques is the fastest way to get the out at the plate and get the ball to first for the second out.

Here is what most catchers are taught: They step in front of the plate and set up as if they were a 1st baseman. They then stretch for the throw, and then have to reset the feet to make a throw to 1st for the DP.

Problems with this are:

1. It requires a pretty good look down to properly get your foot on the corner of the base to avoid getting run over by the person coming home if the throw is late.
2. Presents a high risk of appearing that you were pulled off by an errant throw.
3. If the throw is off target and you do get pulled off pretty tough to look behind you to find the plate to even get the lead runner.

Proper technique

Once ball is hit, catcher sets up about one foot BEHIND home plate. They are positioned such that if they moved one foot forward they would be straddling the plate. They get their hips and feet set square to the fielder that is making the throw.

They get into a low ready position with their glove up at chest height. As the thrown ball approaches, they step directly at the ball with the glove side foot. This step should carry them OVER home plate. This foot never touches the plate. Then as the ball is making contact with their glove they are sliding their back foot forward and dragging it across home plate. Then, continuing toward 1st, they make a cross step to begin their throw to first without any breaks in the movement. If done properly, it will look like a middle infielder turning a DP at 2nd.

If the ball was NOT handled properly by the infielder and their throw may be arriving at the same time as the runner, I suggest that they move in front of the plate and assume a 1st baseman's stretch position. Get the out at the plate for sure.

I prefer this to the previous technique because:

1. By staying behind plate till ball is in the air, if the throw is off mark catcher will still be able to see where home plate is and if necessary just make catch and touch home for the 1 out.
2. This technique creates a faster release since the tag on the plate is done "on the way" to making the throw to first. All one fluid motion.