



## ***The Importance of Practice Plans***

*By: Kerry Wall*

*Kerry Wall is originally from Algonquin, Illinois and has been a UDA instructor for several years. Kerry holds Bachelor of Science degrees in Dance and English literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is currently working toward her K-12 licensure in dance education. Kerry has coached for several high school and all star dance teams.*

A teacher would not come into a classroom without a lesson plan, and neither should a dance team coach when coming into a practice. Practice plans are crucial to running an effective and productive practice. With a practice plan, not only will you feel more organized and on the ball, but your team will also feel a change in production and structure. Without a plan of attack, your practice can get off track easily and time will be wasted. In order to provide your team with an effective practice plan schedule, know what you want to accomplish. Go over your team's goals, both ones that you have set as well as ones that your dancers have set for the team and for themselves. By focusing your practices toward these goals, you and your dancers will be rewarded at the end the year by knowing how hard they worked to accomplish what was set out to be done. Goals are an important motivation tool, and if your dancers know that what they are doing during practice is working toward those goals, they will stay engaged and motivated throughout the practice.

To make a practice plan, first figure out how much time you have. Divide up the time realistically. A warm-up may seem like it takes a lot of valuable time, but it is a very important part of practice for your dancers. You may feel that a lot of time needs to be spent on learning choreography or cleaning, but remember that dancers—especially new team members—can get overwhelmed easily, and sometimes it is better to take things slow. Encourage your choreographers to teach slowly and cleanly, so that it takes less time to make corrections and clarifications at later practices. Start everything early, do not wait to learn routines, it will only stress out your team! Know what you want to accomplish monthly and break it down into goals for every practice. This will keep you on schedule and will keep your team stress-free and productive. It is easy to feel overwhelmed as a coach when you realize that you have too much to get done and not enough time to do it. Usually the first thing to go is technique. Instead of dropping that part of practice altogether, spend a little bit of time each day on something different. For example, Mondays work on conditioning, Tuesday's core work, Wednesday's pirouettes, and Thursday's leaps and jumps. Your team will be able to focus on one aspect of their dancing at a time and will come prepared for that particular activity. While planning, remember to leave time for announcements at the end of practice. Doing them at the end of practice ensures that you accomplish all that you wanted to get done that day, and it also gives your dancers a chance to cool down and stretch while you are talking.

The most important thing about practice plans is letting your dancers know what your plan is for each practice. Share the plan with them, especially officers and captains, at the beginning of every practice. This way, your dancers will know the goal they are trying to reach and are reminded of their own individual goals. Also, if you have team members lead certain activities, they know exactly how much time they have to do so. Sharing your practice plans will also help your team get into a routine schedule. If they know that they are going to begin every practice with a warm-up and then core work, they will be more prepared mentally and physically. If they know that they have five minutes for announcements at the end of every practice, they know that if they waste time at practice, they may have to stay after and will then be less inclined to waste time at the next practice. Overall, remember that practice plans are only

plans. They are guides. You are allowed to change them throughout the practice if you feel your team needs a different plan. Some days your team might be having a rough day, might be coping with a situation, or might be stressing out over classes. Some days you need to throw your plan out the window and do what is best for your team. The way to be an effective coach is to not only have an effective practice plan, but also to have a plan for these types of days too. Your team can greatly benefit from a practice plan, and it will also give you a greater sense of where your team is at the moment and where they can go in the future.