

# Practice Drills – Examples

## *Hitting Drills*

When you practice it is important to keep the team actively engaged. Standing around should be kept to a minimum. We recommend the use of “stations” or the team divided into small groups that rotate through various practice drills. This will allow for each player to practice key baseball fundamentals throughout each scheduled practice time. Additionally, coaches may try group competitions to facilitate a drill in a fun, yet competitive way. Coaches should use the Practice Template to design specific drills needed prior to a scheduled practice.

1. Bomber Drill

To teach how to avoid inside pitches, line up the entire team on the grass in batting stances. No helmets or bats are needed. Coach calls “Down!” and all the players practice turning their lead shoulder in, ducking their heads and dropping to their stomachs. Coaches can later take hitters aside on the grass in full batting gear and practice throwing tennis balls high and inside to help develop batter confidence in their ability to not get hurt by pitches.

2. 1,2,3

To ingrain proper hitting mechanics, Coach calls “1”: Batters take proper batting stance, bat in hand, flashlight in proper position. Coach calls “2”: Batters take small stride forward, hands go back. Coach calls “3”: Batters trigger swing, focusing on turning the hips (squishing the bug with the rear foot), swinging level and following through with proper balance. Can be done singly or as a team.

3. Batting Tee

When players hit off of a batting tee, the focus should not be on how hard the ball is hit but on proper torso mechanics, specifically a focus on the weight shift. To generate more power the key is to “go back to go forward” – meaning a batter’s hands should go back before the hip turn triggers a weight shift forward. Batter should finish with a full follow through and end the swing in a balanced position. For a more advanced variation, the batter starts several steps behind the tee, and walks up to the tee, striding into their swing. This variation will help build a more fluid, natural weight shift and swing.

4. Soft Toss

Soft toss has a batter lined up in front of a hitting net or backstop, with a coach 4-6 feet to the side, tossing balls into the strike zone. For soft toss the catch phrase is, “loose grip, quick bat.” Gripping the bat loosely in the fingers allows the wrists to unlock and creates more bat speed.

5. Hit Down

Batter faces back stop. Teammate stands to the side and lobs underhand pitches from six to eight feet away into all parts of the strike zone. The batter focuses on hitting the middle or top half of the ball to produce line drives and ground balls.

6. Short Toss

Short toss has a coach behind an L screen, 12-15 feet in front of the batter. The coach makes underhand throws to the batter. This is a great drill for working the outside part of the plate and teaching the hitters to hit to the opposite field (the big part of the field). Focus on keeping the front shoulder in, striding toward the pitcher, and hitting hard line drives.

7. Speed Soft Toss

To ingrain proper hitting mechanics through concentration and repetition. Set up as with any soft-toss drill, in front of a fence or pop-up screen. Prepare for the drill by placing five balls in your glove or where they can be reached quickly. Toss the balls consecutively on a four or five count, allowing just enough time for the batter to reset for each swing. As skill increases, reduce time between tosses. Limit the number of tosses to five, since the batter’s arms will tire quickly after a few sets of these. Pay attention to mechanics as the swings occur. Don’t let the batter compromise them. Variation: Intersperse “pop-up” tosses to the batter that require him/her to wait an additional second until the ball falls into the hitting zone. This variation requires the batter to concentrate on the ball during his swing motion. This drill can be varied by changing positions from which the balls are delivered: From slightly in front of the batter on his open side to directly beside him, to slightly behind, to almost directly behind him, to make it more difficult. This drill will improve bat speed as well as enhance hand-eye coordination.

8. Group Bunting

To teach proper bunting positioning and technique. Players with bats line up in normal batting stances in front of a coach. Coach simulates delivery of a pitch and players square to assume a bunting position. Coach quickly checks for errors. A variation on this drill has the coach also calling out the location of the pitch and or the direction of the bunt. Emphasize proper positioning, timing of the square, and bat angle.

9. Three Man Push/Sacrifice

- a. To quickly develop proper techniques for push/sacrifice bunts. Three players form a triangle, about 25-45 feet apart (depending on skill level). Two players have gloves, and assume the position of a pitcher (with the ball) and a first or third baseman; one, the designated bunter, has a bat. The pitcher gently throws the ball to the hitter, who bunts it to the other fielder. This fielder then becomes the new pitcher; he throws the ball, and the hitter bunts it to the first pitcher. Lefties can practice drag bunts during this drill as well. Emphasize technique and accuracy.

10. Ripken Sacrifice/For Hits/Knock Out

The purpose of this drill is to have players practice the mechanics of the sacrifice bunt and develop an understanding of what the word sacrifice means – giving yourself up to move a runner over. A coach sets up on or near the mound with a bucket of balls, and one player steps in to the batter's box to bunt. A marker is placed about 10 feet down the first-base line toward first base and 3 to 4 feet inside the baseline in fair territory. A second marker is placed about 4-5 feet farther into fair territory, parallel to the first. A third should be placed in a similar location to the first one but down the third-base line, with a fourth located 4-5 feet farther into fair territory and also parallel to the cone located down the third-base line. The coach acts like he is pitching from the wind-up or stretch and begins his motion. The batters pivots, shows bunt early and attempts to bunt the pitch either between the two markers on the first-base side or the two on the third-base side. It is okay for the coach to ask the player to alternate from third to first base with each pitch or to bunt a few to the first-base side and then a few to the third-base side. A perfect bunt would stop about even with the cones. The coach should stress to the hitter that the bunt doesn't have to be "perfect." As long as it is pushed between the two cones located on either side of the mound it most likely will be successful. The batter wants to try to avoid placing the bunt too close to either baseline, where it can roll foul, or bunting the ball right at the pitcher.

- a. This drill can be used to allow players to practice bunting for a hit as well. Again, if a player has decent speed, the bunt doesn't have to stop on the foul line for it to be a hit. Disguising the bunt and making the fielders go a long way to field it are what allow a player to successfully bunt for a hit. Instead of getting too complicated, stress the same basic mechanics we discuss for the sacrifice bunt, just have the players see how long they can wait before showing bunt and still be successful. This will differ for each player.
- b. Turn this drill into a game. There are a couple of ways to do this. First you can give the players five pitches each and tell them to bunt the ball between the cones down the first-base line. See who has the highest score. Then do the same on the third-base side before having them but for a hit to either side. You can have a winner for each type of bunt (first- and third-base sac bunts as well as first- and third-base bunts for a hit). There also can be an overall winner. Another variation is to play knock out. Each player gets one chance to execute a sacrifice bunt or a bunt for a hit. Those who do it successfully stay in while those who don't are knocked out and have to sit down. As the contest progresses you can have the players focus on bunting to one side of the field or the other with each pitch. The last one standing wins.