

Passing Keys

Passing is the most fundamental skill to learn in volleyball. It is also one of the hardest to do well. The concept of “bumping” a ball into the air seems simple enough, but there are many facets to it that require mastery if one wants to play competitively. The good news is that players can get started passing with just a few simple pointers.

When introducing or reviewing any skill in volleyball, it helps to break the skill down into small chunks, introduce the various parts with as much simplicity as possible, then start honing each facet of the whole as the player starts getting the hang of it. We suggest providing 1-3 keyword phrases for each chunk to make it easy to remember, reference, and correct.

It also helps to reduce the number of keys or chunks to 3 in any one lesson, even though the entire skill has many more. You can customize the lesson and keys based on the level of your players.

Here are the key phrases we use when introducing or reviewing the passing skill:

1. Ready Position
2. Wrists and Hands
3. Straight and Simple
4. Face the Ball
5. Angle to Target
6. Shuffle
7. See and Connect

BEGINNERS

You can get beginners started with just the first 3 keys above.

1. **Ready Position.** The Ready Position is what we call the stance a player takes when they are “ready” to move quickly to pass a ball. Knees are bent, feet wide, torso parallel with shins, hands relaxed in front of the body with arms and hands ready to extend into the passing platform (Keys 2 and 3).



2. **Wrist and Hands** (Alternative keyword: **Pancake**). There are several ways to hold your hands, but we recommend the “pancake” style where you lay the fingers of one hand over the fingers of the other, palms up, then fold your thumbs in to lay beside each other from thumbnails all the way up to your wrists.



3. **Straight and Simple** (Alternative keyword for simple: **Quiet**). Show your players the “straight” platform by extending the arms and bending the thumbs down slightly. The ball should be passed on the “straight” platform of your forearms between the wrists and elbows. “Simple” or “Quiet” means to have very little movement of your arms. Just put them straight out in front of you for the pass.



Note that when passing a soft toss, players will need to use their legs and add a slight lift to their platform to pass the ball. When they start taking harder balls from a serve or overhand hit, the lift will not be needed as the ball will simply bounce off of their stationary arms. At all ages, you will have to stress “simple” or “quiet” because there is a tendency to add extra unnecessary movement that reduces speed and precision. For instance, some players will pull their arms toward their body before making the platform. Others will swing their platform above their shoulders when passing, or swing their platform down between their legs and then swing up.

READY TO RECEIVE SERVE

After your players understand and can demonstrate the first 3 keys, teach them keys 4 and 5 in preparation to receive service in a game.

4. **Face the Ball.** There are a number of approaches to passing a ball, but we have found the simplest approach is to face the path of the ball and pass it straight on, using the next key (Angle to Target) to “bounce” the ball in the direction you want it to go. By facing the ball and passing it straight on, it is easier to redirect the ball to a target in front of you. Players passing the ball sideways will more often experience the ball deflecting off of their platform and continuing out of back court, or being redirected off the side of the court where the player’s body is facing.

5. **Angle to Target.** In order to redirect the path of a ball, the player’s platform must be angled toward the intended target (usually the setter spot between middle and right front). Angling the platform is done with the shoulders as shown in the picture. Notice the left shoulder has dropped lower than the right shoulder in order to redirect the ball to a position in front of and to the left of the player. The arms themselves should not twist because we need to maintain a straight and simple platform to pass the ball with precision.



ADVANCED PASSING

Once your players start demonstrating ball control, you can challenge them with speed to the ball and attention to external factors.

6. **Shuffle.** Players must learn to “shuffle” their feet side to side quickly to get themselves lined up in the path of the ball. The distance is short, so turning to run will actually take longer, plus you can get your feet tangled up and lose sight of the ball.
7. **See and Connect.** Players must begin evaluating the serve, the hit, and the pass before it is even made. They need to watch the server, for instance, to take in a plethora of small details that will tell them where the ball is going. Where is the player standing? Where are they looking? Which way are their feet and shoulders facing? How fast are they moving? What direction and how fast does the ball leave their hand? Is the ball spinning? Is it high? Is it low? The player must watch, pay attention, and adjust their own position from the moment the server gets the ball until the ball connects with their arms and then continue to watch to see how well they redirected the ball to target.