



# Developing co-ordination for under 10 players

Peter Farrell(Tennis Ireland, Ireland) & Merlin van de Braam(LTA, UK)  
 ITF Coaching and Sport Science Review 2015; 65 (23): 9-11

## ABSTRACT

*Co-ordination is a key physical skill in tennis along with others such as speed, agility and the ability to produce power. Whilst some of these attributes are essential to play tennis well, good co-ordination is necessary to play tennis at all. This article takes a closer look at co-ordination and the five sub-components that underpin it; orientation, differentiation, balance, reaction and rhythm. The aim of this article is to provide coaches with ideas for exercises and drill variations to help develop capable and co-ordinated athletes for the future. The exercises in this article are taken from the book "Tennis Co-ordination Exercises", written by the first author.*

**Key words:** coordination, drills, under 10, variation  
**Received:** 1 January 2015  
**Accepted:** 21 February 2015  
**Corresponding author:**  
 Peter Farrell  
**Email:**  
 peter.farrell@tennisireland.ie

## INTRODUCTION

In the past children developed co-ordination skills as a by-product of "play". However, in today's sedentary society it is much rarer to see children playing on the street, taking part in chasing games, skipping, or even just kicking or throwing a ball around. Safety concerns keep them indoors, and the ever growing digital and computer gaming market further reduces the likelihood of free play. It is therefore essential that a coach integrates co-ordination based exercises into their lessons and programme to help children develop the skills that will allow them to cope with the demands of tennis.

A point in tennis requires a player to make multi-directional movements toward the path of an incoming ball. The ball can be approaching at different speeds and trajectories and with varying types and levels of spin. Every shot in tennis therefore puts co-ordination skills under the microscope due to the small margin for error. Good co-ordination means that the player can control their body parts in space and time, in such a way as to achieve a desired result during stroke production. For young children, that means hitting the incoming ball back over the net and into court, ideally with enough accuracy to make the next shot difficult for the opponent.

As stated before it is imperative to develop basic co-ordination skills early on to ensure children continue as participants of tennis. Without the ability to bounce, catch or throw a ball in a controlled manner, children will find it very difficult to learn or enjoy tennis and are likely to choose a sport that is less demanding from a co-ordination perspective. The following sections aim to explain what the underlying components of co-ordination are, give an example of each component in action, and then how they can be developed using on-court exercises.

### Co-ordination: A closer look

Co-ordination can be broken down into five separate skills or sub-components. These are orientation, differentiation,

balance, reaction and rhythm (Crespo, Reid & Quinn, 2003).

Skill	Definition	Example
Orientation	The ability to determine and modify the body's position and movements according to the oncoming ball.	When a child receives a ball that comes directly at their chest they are able to recognise the shot will not be possible and move to one side.
Differentiation	The ability to adapt a learned stroke or movement to a new situation.	A more compact backswing in reaction to a very fast oncoming ball i.e. improvising to the needs of each ball. A player that is "robotic" lacks the ability to differentiate.
Balance	The ability to maintain your head above the base of support (i.e. legs) when stationary or moving - or quickly return to a position of balance when put off-balance.	When returning a wide shot, the child can hit a stroke and recover with just one step after the shot i.e. they do not fall out of the court.
Reaction	The ability to respond quickly and appropriately to external stimuli.	Quick recognition of the sudden change in a balls speed and trajectory after a net chord.
Rhythm	The harmonious use of sequential parts of the body i.e. the right part of the body is used at the right time, with speed and acceleration applied when appropriate.	A groundstroke with a continuous action (i.e. no long pause). The forward swing is significantly faster than the backswing.

Table 1. The five sub-components that make up co-ordination (from Reid, Quinn & Crespo, 2004.)

### On-court exercises

Armed with a better understanding of what makes a co-ordinated player, this section will now explore practical exercises to develop the individual skills or areas. The exercises below are well known to every coach of young children. They address either eye-hand or eye-foot co-ordination and use a combination of ball only or racket and ball exercises within an individual or group setting. The purpose of these exercise explanations is not to provide new or innovative drills, but rather to present a list of variations of well-known drills. The key message is that the variations are designed around the sub-

components of co-ordination mentioned above. For example, a coach may notice that their young players often miss when the ball comes directly at them. Whilst most co-ordination exercises will help a player for an issue like this, it is possible to vary an exercise to focus more specifically on this issue (orientation) and hence get better results. Examples of how to do this for all five sub components are given below using some well-known co-ordination exercises.





<p>Bounce two balls down, one with each hand, keep them going.</p> <p>Adaptations: Differentiation: Substitute harder or softer balls in every time the exercise breaks down, or after several successful attempts.</p> <p>Rhythm: Use tennis balls of two different types simultaneously e.g. red and green</p> <p>Orientation: Move from point A to point B while performing the exercise and maintain bounces whilst dodging other group members</p>	
<p>Standing at the doubles sideline or service line, roll a ball so that it stops between opposite the singles and doubles sidelines.</p> <p>Adaptations: Differentiation: Increase or decrease the distance from the end target</p> <p>Reaction: Similar to above, vary the distance however do not notify players of the target until they are actually executing the throwing action.</p> <p>Balance: Throw the ball to the target area whilst standing on one leg</p>	
<p>Toss a ball into the air, let it bounce once, then trap it under your foot.</p> <p>Adaptations: Differentiation: Use different types of tennis balls (e.g. red, orange), which have different bounce characteristics</p> <p>Orientation: Toss the ball over your head, turn and move towards it then trap it.</p> <p>Rhythm: Trap the ball after a specified number of bounces under your foot (e.g. 3)</p>	
<p>Place a tennis ball on the racquet strings, move from Point A to Point B while keeping the ball in place.</p> <p>Adaptations:</p> <p>Balance: Hop on one leg from A to B, while keeping the ball on the strings</p> <p>Orientation: Move through a 'slalom' course made from a number of ball cans</p> <p>Differentiation: Hold the racquet at various heights or using different grips e.g. shoulder height, chopper, semi-western grip.</p>	

Table 2. Examples of co-ordination exercises.

**Fun and enjoyment**

If children are enjoying an activity they will concentrate and remain motivated. When implementing coordination exercises a coach should be guided by the participants – they should pick up clues from rising noise levels or negative body language. These indicate that it is time for a new exercise or at least a variation of the current exercise. This will refocus players and regenerate motivation.

**Maximum involvement**

To get the most out of a session and the pupils, coaches should seek maximum involvement when working on co-ordination. Simply put, this means that;

- All students are engaged all the time
- No dead time or waiting
- Inclusive scoring and competition structures

Elimination should be avoided where possible because those who most need the practice are usually the first to be knocked out. Consider inclusive alternatives to the scoring system e.g. a player who makes a mistake gains a point or 'yellow card', but stays in the game. The player with the least points or yellow cards at the end is the winner.

**CONCLUSION**

A lack of co-ordination will have a significant impact on a child's enjoyment of the game. Conversely, strong co-ordination skills can form the foundation for success in tennis and sport in general. Coaches will see more improvement when they challenge their pupils across all facets of co-ordination, and ensure variation and fun is ever present. It is hoped that the present article provides food for thought so that coaches can design their own drill variations that place emphasis on all areas of co-ordination, from reaction and rhythm to differentiation and orientation.

**REFERENCES**

Reid, M., Quinn, A., & Crespo, M. (2004). Physical conditioning for tennis. International Tennis Federation; London.

NOTES: This article is based on the book "Tennis Co-ordination Exercises" by Peter Farrell, published in 2014 by Tennis Coach Ireland (available at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)).

[RECOMMENDED ITF TENNIS ICOACH CONTENT \(CLICK BELOW\)](#)



[RECOMMENDED ITF TENNIS ACADEMY CONTENT \(CLICK BELOW\)](#)



Copyright (c) Peter Farrell & Merlin van de Braam 2015



This text is under a [Creative Commons BY 4.0 license](#)

You are free to Share - copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format - and Adapt the content - remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially under the following terms:

Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

[CC BY 4.0 license terms summary](#) [CC BY 4.0 license terms](#)