

Reformer Progressions: The Series as a Progression Tool

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Course Description: Using the Reformer Series', explore how to progress students from a modified or building block form of the exercise, to its full advanced expression. Specific Reformer Series' are broken down and built back up in order to discover what a body needs to understand in each exercise before an advanced version can be mastered.

Centering Work

Pilates Stance/Centerline: Pilates Stance is not just the feet with the heels pressed together and toes a fist-distance apart. Imagine that Pilates Stance begins 6 inches below the heels, travels up the body through the Centerline, and keeps going past the head 6 inches. Pilates Stance is actively lengthening into this long space both below and above the body. The Centerline is not just the middle of the body, it is an active pulling of the sides of the body in towards the middle and into Pilates Stance. The trick is to find Pilates Stance and Centerline in any position; supine, prone, sitting, kneeling, standing, as well as in movement.

"Golden Triangle": Critical connections of the pelvis that provide a foundation for the Powerhouse, as well as an anchoring for the legs. Squeeze the top of the inner thighs (close to the pubic bone) together, pinch the sitz bones towards each other, draw the right inner thigh and right sitz bones together, repeat with the left, and pull all of that up and into the pelvis above the pubic bone. This should provide you with a gentle "lift off" of the pelvis, as if you just sat on a hot car seat in a bikini.

Footwork Progressions: Beginners will press the carriage out for 3 counts and pull in for 1 count to build understanding of the lengthening of the legs/body on the out move, and contraction/pull of the legs/powerhouse on the in move. Then switch the focus to 1 count out, 3 counts in to emphasize the strong seat/powerhouse on the out move, and heel to seat connection on the in move. Intermediate students can add a small ball to between the heels, or a pad or towel between the knees/upper innerthighs and perform the movements emphasizing the centerline connection in the movement, without losing the connections previously established. Advanced students will keep all the connections and move with strong, flowing, rhythmic movements quickly moving through the reps without losing any of the length of the legs, and returning the carriage all the way to the stopper with a "kiss", adding bridging to the extension and rolling down on the return.

Armwork Progressions: Beginners will have a small squooshy ball between knees, holding legs in table top position, with abdominals engaged firmly. Vary the breath patterning to bring awareness to how powerhouse stabilizes in both inhalation and exhalation. Begin inhaling down, exhaling up to emphasize control/deceleration and then exhale down/ inhale up to emphasize arm strengthening. Work toward smooth and controlled movements for Reach & Pull, Angel Arms, triceps press, circles in both directions. Intermediate students can progress to legs straight up to 90* with a pad between the heels to facilitate centerline/heel to seat connection with the arm movements. Advanced students can bring legs out to 45* and/or vary leg movements such as bicycle, scissors, frogs, reach & pull along with the arm movements.

Feet in Straps Progressions: Beginners: Reach & Pull, Open & Zip, 2 count Rectangles, frogs Intermediates add: small ovals, Up the Wall, Short Spine Massage, Advanced add: larger circles with stabilization of the pelvis, Stag, Long Spine Massage. Beginners will perform the movements slowly and with a limited range of motion. Intermediate students will refine the movement adding challenge variables that will facilitate connections: small ball/pad between heels. Advanced students will further refine and add more difficult exercises maintaining control of the Powerhouse and pelvis.

Rowing Progressions: Facing Back (rowing 1 & 2): can start beginners sitting on the longbox with their feet on the headrest if they aren't able to sit up tall with the legs extended through the headrest. Beginners will perform basic movements of bicep curls, low rows, chest rows, chest expansion in Position #1 (sitting up tall on sitbones). Intermediates will perform those basic movements in Position #2 and #3 emphasizing Powerhouse connection/initiation. Advanced students will perform the full expression of the back facing rowing. Advanced students can be further challenged by sitting on a balance pad (like a small BOSU) or a half-blown up Bender ball to challenge pelvic stability.

Facing Front (rowing 3 & 4): Beginners can start sitting on longbox, straddling and squeezing the box with their shins, or they can turn the box to shortbox and sit with a ball between the knees. Arm movements are broken down to reaching on a diagonal from the chest and returning with control, and from the hips forward with spinal flexion and returning with control. Intermediate students move to sitting on the carriage to learn sitting up and out of the hips and perform the basic movements. Advanced students will perform the full expression of the exercises with the large circular motions to return back to position. Facing Front 5 & 6: Beginners sit on long or short box as above. Intermediates progress to sitting cross legged on carriage. Advanced can be challenged further by sitting on ball and adding additional arm movements.

Long Box Series: Hamstring Curls: Beginners arms wrap around front of box, lighter springs, perform basic ham curls. Intermediates can progress to hands stacked under forehead with head aligned with spine, 2 springs and adding a hip extension to movement. Advanced students can set up as above, add a power circle between ankles and perform ham curls/hip extensions with the circle squeeze from the upper thighs. Pulling Straps 1 & 2: Beginners perform basic

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movements in small range of motion, with head aligned with neck. Intermediates will progress to larger range of motion with a upper back extension. Advanced will perform as Intermediates adding holds of the extended position and triceps kickbacks to each rep. Backstroke: Beginners will learn/pattern the exercise on the carriage (without the box). Intermediates can perform the exercise on the box with the head just on the box in a supported position, no lifting. Advanced will perform the full expression of the exercise, set up further back on the box with the shoulders, neck, and head curled up unsupported. Teaser: Beginners: teach sitting on the box facing back with feet in the headrest, hands holding ropes at first. Roll back to Position #3 in table top position and get them to understand that they will be supporting themselves in this position, not the ropes. Move the arms around and get the feeling of holding while moving the arms. Intermediates: Sit facing the front with legs in table top position, moving the arms forward and back and circles to get the feeling of holding this position. Do small rolls back and up to get the feeling of articulation without support. Progress to lying on the box with shoulders, neck and head off, knees in table top position and rolling up to modified Teaser. Advanced students can progress to the full expression of the exercise.

Long Stretch Series: Long Stretch: hold the set up position, limit range of motion with incremental increases, to variations. Down Stretch and Up Stretch are added as strength and flexibility increases. Elephant variations and range of motion increases/decreases, Arabesque variations, to step downs, to Long Back Stretch.

Stomach Massage: Beginners will set up further back on the carriage, with the footbar in the medium position, and with a Bender ball behind their back for support. Teach the various positions of the exercise series without moving the carriage at first, then progress to moving in slow, controlled movements. Intermediates: move closer to the footbar on the carriage, remove the Bender ball and sit in proper position unaided. Slow and controlled movements. Advanced: move as close to the end of the carriage as possible, move the footbar up to top position, quick, springy movements emphasizing length of torso and legs.

Connie Borho, Master Trainer of Mind/Body Exercise Teacher Education, specializes in creative class composition and programming in yoga, pilates, and fitness fusion formats. For more information about other teacher training workshops or to schedule Master Classes, visit her websites.