

Figure Skating Basics

Each performance has specific parts. What are they?

The following feature is designed to break down the four essentials of the figure skater's craft: jumps, spins, footwork and presentation.

Together these basics comprise the judges' criteria in scoring athletes' performances.

JUMPS

The jumps is skating's basic element. Jump moves appear in single, double, triple and quadruple rotations.

But skatings' most visually impressive aspect will take a slightly diminished role with the new rule changes. Moves like "quad-triple" and "triple-triple" are still part of championship performances, but aren't emphasized in scoring.

Double tow loop: A toe pick-assisted jump with two revolutions. The skater takes off and lands on the same back outside edge. The tow loop is similar to the loop, except the skater uses the toe pick of the free leg upon takeoff. This jump usually is executed as the latter half of a combination.

Triple lutz: A toe pick-assisted jump, with the skater launching from a back outside edge, making three revolutions and landing on the back outside edge of the opposite foot. Most skaters begin by gliding backward on a wide curve, then tap the toe pick into the ice and rotate in the opposite direction of the curve.

Quadruple salchow: An edge jump in which the skater launches from the back inside edge of one foot, makes four revolutions and lands on the back outside edge of the opposite foot.

Triple-triple combination: This element links two jumps – triple Salchow and triple loop. The triple Salchow is an edge jump in which the skater launches from the back inside edge of one foot, makes three revolutions and lands on the back outside edge of the opposite foot. The triple loop is an edge jump in which the skater launches from a back outside edge, makes three revolutions and lands on the same back outside edge of the foot used for takeoff.

JUMPs glossary:

AXEL: Named for its Norwegian inventor, Axel Paulsen, this is the only jump (with the rare exception of the inside Axel) that takes off with the skater facing forward. He or she launches from the forward outside edge of one foot, makes 2 revolutions (double Axel) or 3 revolutions (triple Axel), and lands on the back outside edge of the opposite foot.

FLIP: A toe pick-assisted double or triple jump launched from the back inside edge of one foot. The skater makes two or three revolutions and lands on the back outside edge of the opposite foot.

LOOP: An edge jump in which the skater takes off from the back outside edge of one foot, makes two or three revolutions, and lands on the same back outside edge.

LUTZ: A toe pick-assisted double or triple jump launched from the back outside edge of one foot and landing on the back outside edge of the opposite foot. Most skaters begin by gliding backward on a while curve, then tapping their toe pick into the ice. Rotating the jump in the opposite direction of the curve, and making two or three revolutions before landing. The jump is named for its inventor, Austria's Alois Lutz.

SALCHOW: An edge jump launched from the back inside edge of one foot. The skater makes two, three or four revolutions and lands on the back outside edge of the opposite foot. Named for its originator, Ulrich Salchow, who won 10 World Championships titles from 1901-1911.

SPINS

Spins are among figure skating's most difficult elements and require a high degree of precision and concentration.

Despite the appeal of jumps, spins figure to play a more prominent role thanks to the scoring changes, much to the delight of figure skating persists. A well-executed spin is a subtle and more refined way to separate a strong performance compared to the most athletic jump. In the end, victory by a tenth of a point might well be traced to the precision, speed and grace of a skater in full whirl.

Layback spin: A spin performed in an upright position with the head and shoulders dropped backward and the back arched.

Spin glossary:

BIELLMANN: In this spin, invented by Switzerland's Denise Biellmann, the skater drops her shoulders backward, arches her back, and grabs her blade and lifts her leg above her head from behind. The maneuver typically is performed by women, but Russia's Evgeni Plushenko also does one.

CAMEL: A spin performed on one leg, with the non-skating, or "free", leg extended in the air parallel to the ice. The body remains in this "spiral" position while spinning. A flying camel is a jump spin ending in the camel position.

COMBINATION: A sequence of several spins in which the skater changes feet and positions while maintaining speed.

FLYING SIT: A jump spin in which the skater leaps off the ice and assumes a sitting position at the peak of the jump. The skater lands in a similar sitting position on the same or opposite foot.

SIT SPIN: A spin in a sitting position low to the ice with the skating (spinning) leg bent in the knee and the free leg extended.

FOOTWORK

There's a lot of ice out there. Skaters are required to maximize the full surface. A performance has its high points – jumps and spins popping, one after the other, like so much popcorn. But can an athlete find a way to string it? Judges need proof.

The interconnectedness and flow of every skater's program are essential to his or her presentation and technical merit. The skater's ability to perform a specific step

sequence comes into play here. This is a linkage of steps that immediately follow one another, executed in time to the music and choreographically related to each other.

In the end, footwork is the punctuation that holds the substance of a skater's program together.

Footwork: A sequence of step maneuvers carrying the skater across the ice in patterns – generally straight, circular or serpentine – and intended to show the skater's precision and dexterity.

PRESENTATION

Scoring system changes have been lauded for their fairness, though it is more complicated than before. Beautiful skating still matters, but judges have set criteria. They consider technical elements and specific program components - skating, skills, transitions, choreography and interpretation. After scoring both, the technical and program component scores are combined, with the highest score as the winner. "They are going to have to score in each element and how well you do it, not if they like how you do it", U.S. skater Johnny Weir said.

Technical: The 6.0 scoring system is gone. Now, each element of a performance is given a base value depending on it's difficulty, with an execution scale of +3 to -3. More difficult jumps or spins score higher. A triple axel, for example has a base value of 7.5 points. Nine out of 12 judges award scores, with the highest and lowest dropped.

Skating skills: Rewards overall skating quality, multi-directional skating, speed and poser, glide and cleanness, in which 2005 World Champions Stephane Lambiel thrives.

Transitions: The footwork element. Judges weigh skater's steps, giving more importance to difficulty, quality, creativity and originality. When it comes to Sasha Cohen, the smoother she makes hard steps appear, the better she'll rate.

Performance: An experienced skater like Johnny Weir makes sure that his posture, style and body alignment are perfect, all done with a varying of speed and grace. Call it the one that incorporates finishing touches.

Choreography: Skaters want their moves to be in harmony with the music. Someone like 2005 World champ Irina Slutskaya knows her moves must be creative and original, and also ensure her program's elements, steps and movements conform to the music and that her program's pattern does the same.

Interpretation: Consider this element the most open to interpretation. If Timothy Goebel appears sure and confident, displays finesse, understands the music's style, character and nuances, while at the same showing imagination. Yes, it's as difficult as it sounds.