

How to Teach Throwing

from A to Z



by Dave Grossman

CoachingYouthBaseball.com

This free report is a chapter from
my complete book:

Coaching Youth Baseball 101

Pick it up [HERE](#)

Copyright & Disclaimers

This publication is given to you **FREE OF CHARGE**.

Yes, you CAN give this away to others; however, you may not alter the contents in ANY way.

You may NOT charge for this report in any way. If you received this publication after paying for it, please report this violation to dave@coachingyouthbaseball.com.

The copyright for this publication belongs to Dave Grossman.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, mechanical or electronic, including photocopying or recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, or transmitted by email without permission in writing from the publisher.

While all attempts have been made to verify the information provided in this publication, neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions, or contrary interpretations of the subject matter herein.

This book is for entertainment purposes only. The views expressed are those of the author alone, and should not be taken as expert instruction or commands. The reader is responsible for his or her own actions. The advice in this book is meant for responsible adults, age 18 and over, and is not meant for minors.

Adherence to all applicable laws and regulations, including international, federal, state and local governing professional licensing, business practices, advertising, and all other aspects of doing business in the US, Canada or any other jurisdiction is the sole responsibility of the purchaser or reader.

Any perceived slight of any individual or organization is purely unintentional.

Picture This ...

Picture this game situation: There are two outs, with the opposing team batting in the bottom of the sixth inning, and your team leads by one run. With runners on second and third, the batter hits a weak grounder back to the mound.

You've been nervous all game, but finally, you see hope. All of the hard work, the practices, and the speeches have come together and your team is about to win a game.

The pitcher picks up the ball, sets his feet, takes his time—just as you taught him—and then, he calmly throws it six feet over the head of the first baseman. The opponents' fans cheer loudly, and your win has just turned into a heartbreaking loss.

Why? That one bad throw.

Throwing is such a simple action, yet one hard to do consistently while under pressure. This chapter describes the mechanics required to throw well. In addition, I focus on how to teach throwing and finally, I offer some suggestions on how to diagnose problems and I suggest drills that address those problems.

Throwing errors comprise most of the errors in baseball. Eliminate them and you dramatically improve your defense. The problem is that you can't eliminate them. Why? Because the human body is not a perfect machine.

This is borne out by the truth that major league ballplayers, who are paid millions of dollars to play the game, commit throwing errors, too! They practice throwing several hours a day, they watch tapes of the practice, and then go have a beer and talk baseball. They're competitive professionals and they're immersed in the game. There's a lot of money riding on their abilities. Yet they still make bad throws from time to time. Thus, it follows that 10-year-olds are going to make plenty.

Because of its fundamental importance to the game, all coaching books have a section on throwing. Here, I'll try to set the record for the longest discussion on throwing a ball. I believe that teaching the art and science of throwing is a central concern in coaching baseball.

All of my practices start with kids just throwing and catching. So before anyone can hope to learn to catch, he has to learn to throw.

The challenging part about teaching throwing is that none of us can recall what we were taught, if indeed, we were taught. I used to throw poorly. Coaching Little League has improved my own

throwing technique. When I start throwing casually with my team's parents to warm up before a practice, I see tons of mechanical flaws.

You frequently have to work hard to break deeply entrenched habits. This is difficult, but with persistence, you can have some success. A real problem is that kids have short attention spans while they are being supervised and even shorter ones when they are left on their own.

When you work on throwing for 20 minutes, kids concentrate and make progress, but the moment they begin to throw on their own, they revert to bad habits. You have to be attentive and encourage them not to regress.

In this chapter, we will present throwing drills and point out common errors in throwing technique. One important point is this: If a player can throw accurately, odds are he can pitch. Pitching is the great secret of Little League. You can get away with quite a bit as long as you have stellar pitching. Therefore, teaching throwing not only yields good fielders, but also it can beef up and refine your bullpen.

Mechanics

Here are the steps that a player must master to throw a ball accurately to a target:

Step 1: Grip the ball correctly.

Step 2: Stand correctly before the throw.

Step 3: Bring the ball back before the throw.

Step 4: Step toward the target with the lead foot.

Step 5: Turn the rear foot.

Step 6: Release the ball while bending the back forward.

Step 7: Follow through.

Teaching

To teach the steps listed above you must understand that the first three steps represent preparation for throwing the ball. In addition, you'll need to quickly diagnose throwing problems and design drills to remedy them.

Realize that throwing a ball is a complicated dance. Timing is everything. Throwing became almost intuitive for you long ago. Now, you are a teacher. You must be capable of learning to break down the throwing motion and reassemble it for your students. You also must be a throwing doctor—able to diagnose throwing problems before they become nasty habits. Finally, you must be an observer.

Alas, miniscule, yet important, errors are difficult to identify when you watch a player. Look for problems that identify telltale cues. Does the ball always loop skyward before it comes down? Does the player throw as if he is a shot putter? Does he properly reach back before the throw?

To gain a sense of the nature of timing problems, let's try doing it incorrectly in a variety of ways. For example, take a short step and hold the ball far behind you. We call this foot-ahead-of-arm disease.

Feels wrong, doesn't it?

How do you know it feels wrong?

Because you've been throwing forever and your body has ingrained the correct, timed sequence of motions that comprise a good throw.

Let's do another one.

Try this: bring your arm back, start to throw, but don't move your feet. Now while your arm is moving forward, step toward the target.

Feels wrong again, doesn't it?

Now you are experiencing arm-ahead-of-foot disease. Next, try doing the timing right and step a few inches to the right or left of the straight line between you and the target. Whether you go left or right, you'll note that either feels wrong. So now, you have another cue to look for. The players should be stepping directly towards the target.

I find it useful to go over each step with players, nice and slow. First, you must break the steps down in your mind and think about what you haven't thought about for many years. I will give you a boost by listing the steps comprising the throwing motion below.

Step 1: Grip the Ball Correctly

This one is very hard to teach. My kids learn it initially, but later, after a few practices, I'll stop a kid and ask to see how he is holding the ball. You guessed it! He is right back to how he's held it all his life. Little League players' hands are small, so it is not comfortable to hold the ball the way I

want them to hold it, and they think they have better things to do than to concentrate on something silly like how to hold a ball.



How a player holds the ball can affect the spin and the spin affects where the ball goes.

When I discovered this, I realized that by only half-teaching how to hold the ball, I was essentially creating a situation in which balls would be flying all over the place. This is as much a scourge in Little League as it is in the pros.

You want the ball to go straight and true! There are no two ways about that. You do not want your third baseman throwing tailing, sinking fastballs to the first baseman.

For a pitcher, a four-seam fastball goes straight, whereas a two-seam fastball has movement. Thus, fielders should grip the ball as if they're throwing a four-seam fastball, which I'll explain below.

Turn the ball so the seams make the shape of a horseshoe on its side, where the open end of the horseshoe is on the left. The player should place his index and middle fingers on the top seam and then allow his other fingers to wrap naturally around the seam at the bottom. A ball thrown using this grip is called a four-seam fastball because the four parallel seams spin towards the recipient of the throw.

So how do you teach this? You take each player aside and you say, "Let me show you how to hold the ball." Show him how to rotate the ball so the horseshoe is in place. You will want to do this a couple times to ensure that it sinks in. Then, using your fingers, show the player where his

fingers should go. Then take the ball from his hand, spin the ball, then hand him the ball and see if he can put his fingers on the right place.

The hard part is that your fingers are big and they fit around the ball, while his little fingers barely manage.

When I first discovered this, I realized that players were going to have a very hard time throwing balls. If life and baseball were fair, we'd let them play with a smaller ball until their fingers grew. However, this is not going to happen, so you are stuck teaching something that for many players is almost physically impossible.

Recognizing this should lead to some sympathy when your players make bad throws.

If the kid has tiny fingers, you can say, "I know this is not easy for you because your fingers are small, but it'll get easier as you grow." If the kid is having too hard a time, it is okay to tell him to use his third finger (ring finger) alongside the first two fingers on that top seam to enhance his grip. This three-fingered, compromise grip enables a kid with small hands to throw the baseball. While coaching clinics and even special baseball schools condone three finger grips, I hate the notion of using three fingers.



I feel as if the kids are acquiring habits for life here and I am afraid that if they fall in love with three fingers on the ball, they will continue to use it after the need for it has passed.

I feel that they lose control when they are throwing with three fingers. If throwing with a three-finger grip is such a great idea, every major-leaguer would be doing it! So, while two fingers is by far the better way to go, if you have a kid with very small fingers, you'd rather live with a three-finger grip than watch him continually dropping the ball as he is about to throw it.

Always bear in mind that with growing bodies, compromises will be necessary. When they develop bigger hands, you can constrain them to a two-finger grip.

In teaching ball holding, you have to drill it. Have your players pick up a ball, find the seams, and show you how they are holding it. Run a drill where you roll a ball to each of them, then tell them to grab it, bring their arm back, and stop. At this point, run around and check to see how they are holding the ball. Do this ten times. Switch to something else for a while, then repeat the drill and see how many of them are still holding the ball correctly.

You will find that a lot of them will need to work on this throughout the season. That is why you're there.

Step 2: Stand Correctly before Throwing

Once the players can hold a ball, teach them how to stand in the right position when they throw.

Have the players stand on the third-base foul line with feet about shoulder-width apart, and their knees slightly bent. The balls of their feet should be on the foul line, with toes hanging over the line. In one hand is the ball; in the other is the glove. Instruct the kids to bring their hands together about four inches in front of their chest, putting the ball in the glove. This is the basic setup for this drill.

Now we have some sub-steps to work on:

Substep 1: Put ball in throwing hand and grip correctly.

Substep 2: Hands at chest level, a few inches from the chest.

Substep 3: Feet slightly more than shoulder width apart.

Substep 4: Knees bent slightly.

Drill this repeatedly. Count out, “One!” and have players pick up a ball and freeze. Check the grip. Now say, “Two!” The players should put hands at the chest and freeze. It is imperative to get this into long-term memory. To accomplish this, do a couple of repetitions of the steps and then have the kids take a break.

After the break, return to the drill. Drop a ball and yell, “One!” When the kid picks up the ball and freezes, stop and look to see whether he is holding the right seams. If not, be patient, fix it and, drop the ball again, and go back to, “One!” Once substep one works, start evaluating substep two.

Yell, “Two!” When the player raises his hands to his chest, his hands will most likely touch his chest – even though you told him to keep them away from his body. In remedying this, a technique that sometimes works is to turn the player into a coach. Tell the player, “Hey, buddy, teach me what I’m doing wrong!” Now hold your hands so they touch your chest. Some kids will say, “Looks good to me!” Others will pick up the error right away.

You can expand on this concept by dividing the drill group in half, pairing up one “coach” with one player. Have the kid who is the coach tell the player what he is doing right and what he is doing wrong. They all have fun and everybody learns in the process.

When they can call out these errors, they are really starting to get it. Furthermore, the role reversal of coaching a coach is entertaining for the kids. Have the kid yell, “One!” and watch you

move. Have the kid yell, “Two!” and so on, following the drill. Kids get a kick out of this. Now you are taking something utterly boring and making it kind of fun. That’s your job.

The next substep is “Three!” where players spread their feet to shoulder width apart. Take a look at the feet. They should both be pointed facing the direction that the rest of the body is facing. Weight should be more towards the ball of the feet than the heels.

Now say, “Four!” and have players players bend their knees into an athletic stance. Not too much bend, but some bend must exist. You should be able to lightly shove a players chest and they should not move if their knees are bent correctly. They should look balanced and comfortable with their knees bent. Repeat substeps one to four until they are a habit.

Step 3: Bring Throwing Arm Back

This one is tricky. When throwing, most people tend to move the throwing arm straight back. However, a better way to cock the arm involves making a small semi-circle, starting in a downward direction.

The key here is to make sure the arm is straight back behind the player. If straight back is 12:00 on the hands of a clock, then just make sure it doesn’t go too far (1:00 or beyond) or too short (11:00 or shorter). At this point, if properly done, the player has reached back squarely, with his hand about at ear height.



If the fingers were not holding the ball – they would make the old Nixon victory sign.

To teach this you have to give the players the ball and take them through the previously discussed steps.

To drill it, shout: “Down and back.” Players will bring arms down and back, and then freeze. Practice this by saying, “Ready,” to get their hands together and then, “Break,” to get them to separate, come down, and pull back. A few thousand reps would be great.

Down and Back

Most kids can do the drill for about five to ten minutes before they start losing focus. Stand behind them and see if each of their throwing arms comes back on a line. If the arm does not, correct it. Again, as before, get them to correct you as you show them different incorrect postures.

When their arm is all the way back, make sure that the elbow is not bent too much. If it is bent significantly, it is called short arming, which will prevent good extension. Some players will completely straighten the arm. This is bad technique. A slight bend is preferable.

Cock the Throwing Arm

Let me quote from a well-known pitching bible, *Coaching Pitchers*, by Joe “Spanky” McFarland. His book is well respected by college coaches. He goes into very intimate detail on every aspect of pitching. He says:

“Even the slightest bend in the elbow is considered short-arming, because full extension constitutes a straight arm. Whether short-arming is acceptable is a controversial topic among coaches. However most coaches agree that a slight bend of the elbow is acceptable.”

Clearly, McFarland directs this comment toward pitchers, but it applies equally to all throwing.

This is why coaching is hard. Even a major wizard says that the amount a player should bend his elbow is controversial. Other books try to find “things in common” among good pitchers. Thus, there are many opinions about the mechanics necessary to succeed at throwing.

If the experts disagree, how can you, as a Little League coach, know that you are teaching the optimal technique? My advice is to encourage a slight bend in the elbow, as players generally find it a little more comfortable. However, if some players insist on using a straight arm they might have learned at a baseball camp, leave them alone. It is not worth the battle if a player wants to keep his arm completely straight.

Make sure the elbow is above the shoulder. Many players drop the elbow and push the ball upwards. Others sort of “throw darts” and bring the ball right to their ear.

Raising the elbow above the shoulder and pivoting the rear foot enable the throwing hand to move to a point about 12-18 inches from the ear. Thus, the player uses the entire arm instead of just the forearm in making the throw.

Furthermore, when initiating the throw from a position with the elbow above the shoulder, the ball is more likely to travel in a downward or level trajectory instead of a high arc when released.

Step 4: Step with Lead Foot



While the player is cocking his throwing arm, he steps toward the target with his opposite foot. The step must be exactly in the direction of the throw, precisely on an imaginary line between the player and the target.

Make sure that the player bends his knee when he hits the strike point. This is the point at which the lead foot hits the ground.

A step somewhere between one and two feet is comfortable for a Little League-sized body.

Step 5: Throw

At the instant the front foot lands at the strike point, the throwing arm must begin to propel the ball forward. To use the lower half of the body in the throw, it is vital that the rear foot pivots, turning from 12:00 to 3:00, the very instant the front foot lands. This is the only way to allow the strength of the lower body to be applied to the throw. If you see a player who throws without turning this foot, you can rest assured that he is only using his upper body to throw the ball and that he'll always have problems throwing with any kind of velocity. He'll also have trouble throwing for distance.

Throwing

Throwing has more to do with feet than with hands. Major League pitcher Pedro Martinez, one of the best pitchers over the last few years, while doing rehabilitation for an injury, opined, “without legs, there is no arm.”

We will continue with a couple of steps here, but for young kids feel free to just go with:

- **Bend Knees**
- **AIMER** — point lead arm to target
- **Peace Sign** — Bring throwing arm back and make a peace sign to center field (since kids usually don't think of the nice Nixon-like two finger sign as a sign of peace — just tell them two fingers pointing up to center field)
- **STEP and THROW**

Step 6: Bend Back as Ball is Thrown

Continuing for more advanced or older kids — figure ages 8-10. Bending the back while throwing maintains balance. Young players seem to want to throw standing straight. This causes problems with balance. In order to get players into the habit of bending their backs, I tell them to throw the ball, lean forward, touch a blade of grass, and hold that position, for a count of three.

Step 7: Follow Through

A player's arm must not stop abruptly after the throw. Instead, the arm must continue to move smoothly along the established target line. This allows the arm to slow down and avoid stress from throwing.

Throwing Problems & Drills

I believe that if you have a kid throw every day to a person who will catch for him, the thrower will eventually figure out how to throw. Thus, you should encourage kids to throw every day. It is the same story every season.

On the first day of spring, new players can barely throw, but by the last day, the kids are firing the ball around the infield. I am not convinced that my teaching has nearly as much impact as the time a player devotes to throwing. Nevertheless, as an observant coach, you can identify problem areas and institute drills that will enhance the learning process. Here are a few that have worked for me.

Here are some things that can go wrong and some ideas for drills that might help.

Problem: Bad Grip

Observation:

You see some balls not rotating as they are thrown and you see players with a lot of control problems. Typically, this stems from either a poor grip or a poor release.

Drill:

To isolate this, remove the legs and weight transfer from the process by watching players throw to each other while on their knees. You can now focus on how they grip the ball before they throw and on watching the rotation of the ball when they release it. To see the rotation more clearly, color the sides of the ball.

Problem: Throwing from Knees

Observation:

As they get set to throw, some players bring the ball back by their ear and therefore do not get good arm extension.

Drill:

Again, isolate the upper body. Have players kneel on the ground, extend their stride leg, and throw to a player on his knees a few feet away. You can now work on the “break” (where the hands separate), the path of the ball, and the release without having to deal with lost balance. Make sure they reach back before they throw by having them touch the glove of a coach standing behind them before they start their throwing arm forward.



Problem: Throws are Not Straight

Observation:

Some players reach more to the side than straight back. You will notice that their throws are often very inaccurate and that they are pulling themselves off balance as they reach back before the throw.

Drill:

Without giving them a ball, stand the players on the foul line as if they are going to throw. When you say, “Break!” players should separate their hands, and bring their throwing arm back along the foul line. At the same time, they should be striding towards the target. Once the players reach the point where their arms are far enough back to throw the ball, tell them to freeze. Now, look at the position of the arms, checking to ensure that their arms are directly over the foul line. Check to see that the knees remain bent slightly. Check to see that the stride foot is on line with the

target. Then hand each player a ball, and say, “Turn and throw!” They should then pivot their back foot, throw, bend their back, and follow through correctly.

Problem: Ball Thrown with Large Arc

Observation:

Players throw the ball with a large arc in the air on the way to the target—a blooper.

They tend to lean back as they throw the ball skyward.

Drill:

Tell the blooper boy that you want him to throw the ball so that it bounces once before it hits the target. This forces the player to make mechanical changes such that the ball heads downward instead of upward when it leaves his hand instead. I find that I rarely have players who naturally bounce the ball, but I have lots of players who throw it high into the air.

Problem: Throw Does Not Travel Very Far

Observation:

Many players lack good arm strength. Throws fall short of the mark.

Drill:

To build arm strength, have the players perform a drill called long toss. After warming up throwing at the usual distance, have them gradually back up until they are two-and-a-half times their normal throwing distance. All the fundamentals of a good throw are in play here. Your students must throw harder, yet accurately. They cannot throw bloopers. About ten to twenty long throws are sufficient.

Summary

I have described basic throwing mechanics. Players should throw the ball about thirty to fifty times at every practice. Keep an eye on their technique and make corrections as necessary. All this drilling builds arm strength and ingrains basic mechanics. You'll want to spend lots of time on throwing.

Now that we have discussed throwing, let's move to what happens on the other side of the ball. When someone hits a ball, someone has to catch it. When a pitcher pitches the ball, someone has to catch it. When a shortstop throws a ball across the infield, someone has to catch it. You get the picture. That's where we're going next: teaching kids how to catch.

This free report is a chapter from
my complete book:
Coaching Youth Baseball 101

Pick it up [HERE](#)