

Acquisition of Skills

Skaters and parents often inquire about how long it will take to reach specific milestones. This is a very difficult question to answer because of the multiple factors influencing the learning progress and thus, affecting the outcome.

Test and competitive skaters usually acquire skating skills more quickly because they tend to skate more often. A regular training schedule plays a large part in skill acquisition; however, the skater's age, skating skill level, muscle coordination, mental focus, and the skater's personality are equally important so only very general guidelines can be suggested.

A practice schedule is best viewed for a typical total weekly sessions in hours, during the school year, with a separate and a more intensive schedule of a summer training program. Some parents and skaters like to measure how many months it took them to acquire the axel - 1.5 revolutions.

A major problem is that not all individuals who perform an axel are performing the jump with the same quality as measured by a clean entry and exit (landing) edge, height of the jump, the speed into and exiting the jump, plus the performance/presentation of the jump.

The Average of Skill Acquisition chart assumes there is a separate Beginning Phase that starts with the skater's first day on the ice. The second phase of the training starts with joining the USFS and starting to prepare for Moves In The Field (MITF) and Free Skating tests.

The jumps on this chart are assumed to be fully rotated, performed correctly, and of a fairly consistent quality.

The middle of the chart is a general schedule of skill acquisition based on total training volume shown in hours. It is meant to be a very general frame of reference and not a hard and fast schedule.

Progress in mastering jumps does not move forward on an even schedule – a new jump every six months. If that were the case, more skaters would be doing triple jumps. It takes longer to master certain jumps. For example, there is usually a large gap between mastering a double flip and a double Lutz and an even greater gap in achieving the double axel.

The double axel, because of its forward takeoff, is exceptionally difficult to master. This is not unexpected and reflects the need to create increased rotational speed, more speed into the jump, and increased thrust or spring that results in more airtime in which to rotate the 2 and half rotations.

A double Axel is the bridge between doubles and triples. There are relatively few competitive skaters who master it and go on to learn triple revolutions required to be successful in the Junior and Senior level events at the USFS National Championships.

Average of Skill Acquisition chart

All jumps are assumed cleanly landed on a running edge with speed

Total hours	Jump Progression	On and Off Ice Practice	
		Years	*Hours
5500>	Quads	11>	1000
5000	Triple Axel	10	900
4750		9.5	900
4500	Triple Lutz	9	800
4250		8.5	800
4000	Triple Flip	8	800
3750	Triple Loop	7.5	700
3500		7	700
3250	Triple Toe	6.5	700
3000	Triple Salchow	6	600
2750		5.5	600
2500	Double Axel	5	500
2250		4.5	500
2000	Double Lutz	4	250-500
1750		3.5	250-500
1500	Double Flip	3	250-500
1250	Double Loop	2.5	250-500
1000	Double Toe	2	250-500
750	Double Salchow	1.5	250-500
500	Axel	1	250-500
250	all single revolution jumps, except Axel	0.5	250-500

*The assumption is that there is a transition to the morning before school practice sessions. Afternoon practice is gradually eliminated.

Allocation of time is divided in practicing jumps, spins, step sequences, and presentation components, etc.

***Transition to USFS Tests and Competitions**

	Basic Skating Skills Badge Program	On and Off Ice Practice	
		Years	#Hours
750	Free Skating 1-4	3	250-500
500	Beginner 5-8	2	250-350
250	Beginner 1-4	1	250-350

#The assumption is that the skater will take group classes in the afternoon and practice in the afternoon

*Skaters who practice more hours and have the benefit of private lessons can be expected to progress more rapidly

The actual practice times may vary widely with test track skaters training from one to six or more hours a week and for six to twelve months per year. Skaters who are involved as a competitive skater will average twelve to twenty-four hours per week.

The most intense skaters will add off-ice training to their on-ice practice sessions. Answering in hours per week provides a snapshot of what the skater and parents consider appropriate training volume for the goals they have established. Skaters who consistently practice can expect to progress quicker than those who practice sporadically.

To determine a skater's annual training volume please refer to the next chart. You may calculate the actual amount of practice by changing the data in the excel file CalcPracticeHours.xls

The number of competitive track skaters in the USA, at all levels, who can

consistently perform clean Double Axels is quite small – 100 to 300 skaters.

Skaters and parents need to understand that the rotations in all jumps must be fully completed and landed on one foot with a running edge on the jump's landing exit to receive credit on tests and in competitions.

Skaters need to understand that learning to do a double axel is a major milestone. All skaters should expect a developmental delay while attempting to learn the double axel and perform it consistently under the stress of test and competition conditions.

All skaters experience anxiety and frustration at this stage. Parents need to be especially supportive when their skaters are experiencing difficulties learning the double axel and triple revolution jumps.