



**CER**

CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Course Title:

# CONSTRUCTING A PROGRAM

Authored by:  
PSA Education Department

CER Topic Area:  
**RULES OF SPORT**

CER Course Number:  
**CER ROS 304**

*This course is presented by the*  
**PROFESSIONAL SKATERS ASSOCIATION**

# COURSE INTRODUCTION

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## Notice:

By signing on to take the course/exam, you certify that you are the person signing on and personally completing this course/exam. False statements made by anyone taking this course/exam may result in disciplinary action, up to and including, expulsion from the PSA both for the person taking the course/exam and the person listed as the taker of the course/exam. Successful completion of this course/exam is worth 1 credit towards the U.S. Figure Skating Continuing Education Requirement (CERs).

## Course Objective:

Coaches will be introduced to the process of selecting music suitable for the age, maturity, and skill level of their skaters, applying basic musical rules when selecting and editing music for programs, creating simple choreography and highlights with a connection between skater and music, selecting choreographic elements which address both the skater's present ability and future potential. The course includes content addressing appropriate music selection for the individual skater, musical structure, tempo, styles, and phrasing, selecting, and editing music, developing a base for creative moves and choreographic highlights, and working with a choreographer.

## Course Outline:

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: The Skater
- Part 3: The Music
- Part 4: The Design Process
- Part 5: Connecting the Movements to the Music
- Part 6: Working With a Choreographer
- Part 7: The Total Package
- Part 8: Feedback

## PART 1: Introduction

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Constructing a program requires pre-planning, research, dedication, discipline, and attention to *many* distinct aspects. Coaches need to consider music, when and where to put each jump, the rules, the costume, the hair and even the make-up when designing a program.

For each discipline and program, there are many specifications and rules to follow. While it is critical to have every required element incorporated into the program, the skater also has the space to be creative and let their unique personality shine. The aspect of uniqueness is to be encouraged from the outset.

There are some skills and attributes that the coach or choreographer needs to have or develop in the skater, to be able to design a winning program.

When constructing a program, the coach or choreographer needs to utilize:	
PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS	The ability to work through details of a problem to reach a solution by defining the problem which may occur as a result of the program design, generating evaluation. Selecting alternatives and implementing solutions is paramount.
CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKING	The ability to use critical thinking and reasoning skills. Critical thinking is the process of independently analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information as a guide to behavior and beliefs.
ENTHUSIASM & CONFIDENCE	The ability to demonstrate a whole-hearted sense of eagerness and passion for his/her work and show enthusiasm and confidence in the skater.
PROFESSIONALISM	The possession of the highest level of honor, integrity, responsibility, towards the coaching team involved in producing the final result.
CREATIVE PROCESS AND MOVEMENT QUALITY	The ability to create programs with vision. Movement quality refers to the coach's awareness and ability to teach and show strong lines, good extension, posture, and carriage when demonstrating body movements.
METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS	The understanding of a set of practices with a clear explanation of "WHAT" is done, "WHY" it is done, and "HOW" something is taught a particular way. The ability to communicate a clear vision and understanding of the systemic development of skills. The ability to use their (and their skater's) time, energy, and resources in an effective manner to achieve the goal.

## PART 2: The Skater

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When constructing a program for and with your skater, it is essential, before you begin, to take the time to really know and understand the skater, where they are in their all-round development and their vision for the program. Here are some of the first considerations to ponder as the process begins:

- The vision of the skater: How do they see themselves “in” this program?
- What is the age, skating experience, and maturity level of the skater?
- At which stage of development is the skater's ability to perform? Do they have experience in music, dance, or theater?
- What is the skater's personality, and can it be a launching point for a particular type of music selection?
- What makes the skater unique and special?
- Which type of music might lend itself best to the skater's physique and development?
- What are the skater's main goals for the season?
- What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the skater, and of the skater's previous programs?
- Who does the skater aspire to be like?
- Which programs of other skaters have resonated with this skater?

## PART 3: The Music

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### Selection Considerations

When the time comes to design a program, the next item on the list is to select the music. Most skaters choose something that has definite crescendos and identifiable changes for specific jumps and spins. The program is laced together with different combinations of connecting moves (transitions) that lead from one element to another.

Making use of the entire ice surface is an important aspect to consider, as well as, balancing the number of jumps and spins on each area of the rink, highlighting the skater's best elements in places that showcase them, as well placing all elements, so the judges can clearly see them. Especially as skaters get older and more mature, they should have a voice in program creation. Many coaches and choreographers ask the skater to put together a playlist of music they like or that triggers their emotions. Other sources of music are TV, movies, Instagram videos and dance performances.

Selecting music is highly personal and is the foundation upon which the choreography is built. It is important not only for the content of the program, but also for its potential performance value.

The music should be there to challenge, excite, stimulate, and inspire. The selection should complement the skater's style and be unique enough to allow for creativity. The musical choice can be used as a tool to develop the skater. A cautious skater can be challenged to skate faster. A skater that lacks flow can learn to be more graceful, and the inhibited skater can discover how to add a new flavor or flair to the program.

When considering music, the selection, the coach, and choreographer will have three major things to think about:

- The skater
- The type of program (short program or free skate, etc., and the technical requirements)
- The message or mood to be conveyed or story to be told

Whether it is the coach, the choreographer, or the skater (and parent depending on the skater's age) that is involved in the process, collaboration is the key to success in finding the potential for that skater. There are a few key points to consider when selecting the music:

- Does the skater actually like the music?
  - Does the music have a wide audience appeal?
  - Is the music over-used? If the piece has been widely used, researching an unknown version might be a good compromise.
  - How does this piece sound in an ice rink? Some music sounds great at home but awful in a huge arena and vice versa.
  - The recording or course should be of excellent quality. Hiring a professional music editor is really the best practice for assuring the quality of the recording.
  - Do the musical sections and phrases provide ample time for performing each element?
  - The music should be a good match for the skater's body type and rhythm patterns so that the skater's movements can more easily match the musical structure.
  - The music should be simple enough for the skater to be able to develop an understanding of the counts, phrasing and structure and should be within the range of the skater's underlying and previously learned movement patterns.
  - Do the short program and free skate program (if at that level) music choices highlight the versatility of the skater?
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## PART 4: The Process

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### Layering and Building

The coach will usually direct the order of elements and their placement on the ice surface and will be able to inform the choreographer about preferences that are most helpful for the skater. This is the first layer of the program design.

The next layer would be the precise directions of, and transitions between elements. After this is achieved then creativity of types of transitions and other performance aspects can be added. At this point, you will wish to consider priorities as the program will be seen from four sides. Do you build for the whole audience or for the view the judges will have?

### The Process

The process for designing a program may start by outlining the most essential elements like jumps and spins. It's important to note that jumps happen in a fraction of a second, and these foundational elements might in reality only account for a mere ten seconds of the entire program.

Spins, meanwhile, might be allotted 15 - 20 seconds per spin, or more depending on the spin in question. Step Sequences can take between 25 - 40 seconds to complete. The coach or choreographer plays a pivotal role in keeping the remainder of the routine from becoming, well, boring.

Suggestions for the connecting steps and moves may come from the coach, choreographer, or skater, and it should be a collaborative process. Most skaters (and some coaches) get busy just trying to nail the elements, and the rest of the program can get neglected. The important thing to keep in mind is that each program should be tailored to each skater's strengths and weaknesses and take account of the skater's prior habits and technique. Weaknesses can often be difficult to overcome in the short term. When designing a particular program, the coach or choreographer's main goal should be to display the skater optimally, at that point of the skater's development. The coach however should also be taking a broader view of the bigger picture at the same time. This can be challenging but important for the long term development of the skater and their ultimate goals.

Interdisciplinary influences like ballet, dance, music, and costuming become paramount to the rest of the performance, for showcasing the skater optimally. Visual and performing arts of all types can be a source of inspiration and creativity for the coach and the skater. It can be immensely beneficial to take the time to explore art in all its forms and structures to gain insight into the vision of the artists and bring it to the ice.

When designing a program, think of all the required elements. The music must show off each element and there must be sufficient time for each element to be completed well.

Some points to consider when starting to plan technical elements in the design and layout process:

- It can be useful to time the execution of those elements that are to be included in the program. Ask the skater to perform the elements separately using their usual timing and entry approaches. The musical phrases and editing should match this timing, so that the skater is relaxed and able to concentrate on the elements without being stressed about running out of “musical” time. This is also part of the editing during music selection and should be thought about at that point, so it’s best to do the timing of elements before the music is finally edited.
- Placement of required elements on the ice surface, to highlight them optimally and place them where the judges can see them, without judges having to stand up or lean over the barrier.
- Spins are best placed on the long axis of the rink. Jumps are best kept away from corners, and not placed too close to the barrier, where they can affect the takeoff direction thus affecting the outcome.

Direction of skating is an important aspect when building the program. This is not only whether the skater is skating clockwise or counterclockwise and varying that aspect, but also whether the skater places the blade correctly to go in the desired direction when leaving one element and going towards the next. Attention to this can minimize effort and energy and prepares the buildup of transitions that support the correct balance point when arriving at the next element.

Some coaches and choreographers like to draw and map out the program plan on paper in the process. This can be a useful tool when working with younger skaters, giving them a visual overview. Musical sections can be drawn in assorted colors too.

## PART 5: Connecting the Movements to the Music

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It can be a fun idea to take the play list into a dance studio and explore body movements. Off the ice, the skaters can hear all the nuances of the music and experiment with diverse types of movement. Not everything they do will get put into the program of course, but the experimentation of moving to the music and the thoughts about what emotion they want to put forward can be very enjoyable and connect them to the music better. This can also give pointers to the coach and choreographer as to the movement patterns and styles that suit the skater. Skaters can use the emotions they feel to that particular piece of music and match them with a type of movement or style. They need to find music that moves them so they can feel connected to it from the very beginning.

The choreographic process is really driven by the music. Some skaters set a storyline, some just let the music speak to them, and each has its own process. Whether that's universal to the public or something more personal, the music can channel the emotion that the audience and judges see. Skaters are often highly creative people, so often when they hear music, they have a vision of sorts that makes music come to life on the ice. They should be encouraged to improvise to various pieces of music on the ice before the final choice is made. Ultimately, the choreography and body movements should relate to the music style.

### **The Connection to the Music**

Connecting the skater to the music can take a little work on their part. It may be helpful to assign the skater some homework after the music selection has been made. Give the skater this list with a deadline of doing their own research and ask them to bring the homework to a lesson

- What is the name of each piece of music?
- Who is the composer?
- What artist(s) or orchestra played this piece?
- What is the genre of this music?
- During what time/music period was this piece created?
- List any history and/or additional information about the piece(s) of music?
- List any history and/or additional information about the composer?
- When you listen to the music and close your eyes, do you see a particular color?
- What style of costume do you envision with this music or character?

Many times, the skater won't have any ideas for color or costuming, but just the question can get the creative juices flowing. This is an effective way for the skater to take some real ownership in the program.

The goal of a skating performance is seamless and meaningful movement, with properly integrated and successful fulfillment of required elements to music. These elements form the important backbone of the program, but the programs as a whole cannot be fully evaluated without consideration of the music.

The audience (judges and spectators) have only two points of input when a skater is presenting their program - seeing and hearing. When the music they hear fits in perfect unison to what they are seeing the choreographic effect will be complete, no matter how simple the movement or the music. The essential element here is the timing. This effect can be explored by going back and watching successful programs from the past. "Less is more" really does apply here and the effects can be simple and rewarding.

### **Use of Repetition**

Repetition in movements and steps can give a favorable effect and underline certain moves that either the skater does well and/or fit well to the music. These can be done in quick succession in groups of two or three repetitions to give the best effect.



## Time, Energy and Space

**Time:** Time encompasses rhythm, speed, and syncopation of movements. Using time in different combinations to music can create intricate visual effects. Using ideas such as quick, quick, slow or stop movements are examples.

**Energy:** Energy relates to the quality of movement. This concept is recognizable when comparing ballet and tap in the dance world. Some types of choreography are soft, sustained, and smooth, while others are sharp, explosive, and energetic.

**Space:** Space is the area the skater is performing in. Space has levels; low moves, medium standing moves and high leaping and lifting moves. Space also refers to how the skater moves through the area. Direction of movement can be straight, curved, diagonal or changing. Skaters may focus their movement and attention outwardly to the space or inwardly, into themselves.

Put it all together: By using these three elements in combinations, many variations in movements can be created. Variety will keep the audience engaged. Define the energy of movements. Articulate when movements are meant to be slow, fast, in a wave or hit. Use rhythm to change movements. Stop and start; use movements to emphasize elements in the music. Use levels of space in combinations, skaters doing movements high, medium, and low at various times in different combinations.

## Shape and Variation of Body Movements

Shape and variation of body movement can also be used to balance the performance as a whole and creating high points that correspond with the theme and the music can give great effect.

## PART 6: Working With a Choreographer

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For a sport that is relatively solitary in nature, there are a remarkable number of people involved in the design and delivery of a program. For most skaters in their early years, the coach will function as the choreographer, but the need for a choreographer may usually present itself around the novice competition level. At this point, the roles of coach and choreographer become defined in a new way with each working side by side to collaborate for the benefit of the skater. Not every coach collaborates with a choreographer but if this stage is introduced, there are some basic considerations to be made.

### Division of Duties

The common goal of the team must be to display the qualities of the skater optimally. A discussion should be held, and an agreement should be reached at the onset of the program

project of who is responsible for each aspect of the program. Some of these aspects will also involve the parent with regard to the budget and the parental preferences. Ideally, all of the considerations should be a collaboration between coach, choreographer, skater with parents consulted in areas where that is appropriate. Here are some suggestions as to how these responsibilities may be divided but these depend on the individuals involved and how the work tasks can be most efficiently and comfortably divided.

### **The Coach: (typically)**

- Together with the skater and the choreographer, finds the most suitable music
- Selects musical sections with the choreographer
- Arranges for professional editing of the musical sections
- Decides on the elements to be performed and the order in which they are to be performed
- Advises the choreographer on the best technical setups for the elements, including the time taken for their execution
- Gives feedback to the choreographer and skater during the construction of the program
- Follows up the work of the choreographer and ensures the skater remains true to the choreography
- Takes the lead in the team of choreographer, skater, and parent regarding costume design
- Is responsible for development, adjustment and refinement of the program and returning to the choreographer if that is part of the skater's training plan and budget

### **The Choreographer: (typically)**

- Together with the skater and the coach, finds the most suitable music and concept
- Includes the skater's vision, ideas, and feelings in the choreography
- Expands and develops the concept and vision
- Designs the program according to the concept and the music chosen
- Selection, approval, editing of music in collaboration with the coach (and skater)
- Lays out the program elements according to the rule requirements
- Presents the elements in the most creative way possible
- Ensures the choreography does not prevent the skater from executing the required elements optimally
- Showcases the skater at their absolute best

### **The Skater:**

- Commits fully to the concept and vision of the program
- Gives feedback during the process of creating the program
- Does their best to stay true to the choreography
- Prepares between sessions

## PART 7: The Total Package

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Style plays a crucial role in the world of figure skating, and costumes are an important part of the style piece. Decisions made concerning style often complete the expression started with the movement and choreography. With each piece of music, skaters play different characters or express different emotions inspired by the music and demonstrated through the movements chosen for the choreography. How they move, what they are wearing, and how they present themselves, makes for the total “package”—and the “packaging” of your skater makes a lasting impact on the audience and the judges.

Music choice & editing, costuming (hair & makeup included), and choreography are all aspects of the skater’s packaging. The coach and/or choreographer of a well-packaged skater considers all four of these aspects.

### Costumes

There’s a lot that goes into creating costumes for figure skaters. It’s important for the garment to balance comfort and functionality, and a wardrobe malfunction can cost the skater valuable points. To create appropriate costumes, the process begins by identifying the music choice, working with the choreographers, and then enlisting the respective costume designers to create sketches around the programs.

Choreography and music play a huge role in the choice and design of the costume. For some skaters, costuming is an opportunity for self-expression. That said, figure skating is a sport, and at the end of the day, what the skater does technically and artistically on the ice are the most important things. The costuming and choreography must allow for the technical aspects and the artistic expression to be successfully executed.

### Make-up and Hair

Typically, make-up and hair are styled at the discretion of the skater, (their parent), and the primary coach with input from the choreographer. However, if the make-up or hair style are distracting for the judges, they may offer some feedback to modify it. Anything used to secure the hair must not fall onto the ice or the skater risks losing valuable points. The choice of the amount of make-up should be age-appropriate and compliment the costume and the choreography, not distract from it.

### Other

Being “put together” is part of the package being presented to the audience and the judges. As such, the coach should watch for things that make their skater appear unprepared. Examples: Tights with holes, hair that flies in the face, skate laces hanging out of the boot, dirty boots or dirty laces, and shirt tails hanging out of trousers, etc.

## PART 8: Feedback

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Once the program has been “aired” in a few competitions, coaches will inevitably want to gather feedback from officials and other coaches they trust. If you’re interested in how these individuals view your and your skater’s work, you need to make it easy for them to give you and your skater feedback. You’ll get much more information if you receive feedback graciously:

- **Be open and approachable:** People avoid giving feedback to those who are grumpy and dismissive. Your openness to feedback is evident through your body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. You as the coach are in the best position to ask for feedback and use it to the benefit of your skater.
- **Be prepared:** Bring a notebook and pen to the feedback session and write down what you hear.
- **Listen to understand:** Practice all the skills of an active and effective listener including body language and facial expressions that encourage the other person to talk.
- **Control your natural human instinct to get defensive:** Once rebuffed, argued with, or subjected to defensive behavior (anger, justifying, and excuse-making), officials and other coaches are less likely to give helpful feedback again.
- **Try to suspend judgment:** Understand that this one person’s opinion does not require a change in the program – it only requires consideration of change.
- **Check with others:** If only one person believes what you heard in the feedback, it may be just their perception. Asking other officials if they share the perception, is a good tactic.
- **Ask questions to clarify:** Focus on questions to make sure that you understand the feedback. Focus on understanding the feedback you are receiving, not on your next response. Your most appropriate response will frequently be a simple "thank you for letting me know."
- **Ask for examples:** If needed to help you understand their points, ask for specifics.
- **Summarize and reflect on what you heard:** Your feedback provider will appreciate that you are really listening to what they are saying. Focus on making sure that you understand the point of view you are receiving. You are also determining the validity of what you are hearing.
- **Keep things in perspective:** Just because a person gives you feedback, doesn't mean that their perception is right or even widely shared by other officials.
- **Show your appreciation:** The person providing the feedback will feel encouraged and you *do* want to encourage feedback.

Thoughtful feedback helps you grow both personally and professionally. Accurate feedback helps you with your coaching development. It's a gift that people who care about your personal and professional success (and your skater’s success) can provide for you. Forging positive relationships with officials and other coaches is one of the most important things you will do for

yourself and for your skaters. Officials and coaches are long-lived in the figure skating world, and good relationships with them will last you the life of your coaching career.

## Revisiting Choreography and Developing the Presentation of the Program

Every coach and choreographer have a method to reflect on their work. Some examples are drawing the program as a diagram and checking for ice coverage and equal distribution of the elements. Video is a wonderful way to check the program from different angles in the rink. Think about ways to help the skater “reach” the audience. Taking the time to analyze the outcome of your work on a program will be time well-spent and have an impact on the success of the skater.

When reflecting on any piece of work, there is a straightforward way to approach it. Make a list of:

- What is working and should be kept?
- What isn't working and needs to go?
- What isn't working but can be changed?

This will guide your reflection and guarantee a better outcome.