Modern gymnastics as an artistic/sport competition involves physical skills such as body control, coordination, dexterity, gracefulness, and strength, as exhibited in tumbling and acrobatic skills on a limited exercise area or specially designed apparatus.

History

The art of gymnastic exercises goes back to the early Greeks. Modern gymnastic competition began in the Olympic games of 1896, though some forms of gymnastics exercises were widespread in Europe all during the 1800s, especially in Germany (which is why the names of many gymnastics stunts (also called moves), especially on the pommel horse, are German).

Gymnastic exercises were once a basic part of military cavalry training, which explains why the pommel "horse" has two "pommels" (the front and back of the saddle) and the vaulting "table" was once called the "vaulting horse." (The early pommel horses even had a sort of head and a tail.) In competition the judge salutes the gymnast when they are ready to watch the gymnasts routine and the gymnast then salutes the judge before beginning and upon completion of the routine. This “salute” may also come from this military history.

Gymnastics competition for women began at the 1936 Olympic games. The European countries Germany, Sweden, Italy and Switzerland were responsible for developing the sport. Beginning in about 1950, Japan, the USSR, East and West Germany, and some other Eastern European countries began to promote gymnastics, followed later by the United States and China. Japanese gymnasts dominated the sport between 1960 and 1976, succeeded by the USSR, the Chinese, and now the Japanese again. U.S. gymnasts do often place high in the rankings and awards in international competition.

For many years, the sport in the United States was governed by the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union); competition then included such events as the swinging rings, the rope climb (not part of Olympic competition), and trampoline, as well as free exercise, the pommel horse, the parallel bars, the horizontal bar, and vaulting. In 1970, the United States Gymnastics Federation (USGF) became the governing body of the sport in the U.S., and it is in turn governed at the international level by the Fédération Gymnastique Internationale (Federation of International Gymnastics—FIG).

In 1962, FIG recognized rhythmic gymnastics as a sport; it was accepted in Olympic competition in 1984. Women perform dancelike movements to music while holding a ball, hoop, ribbon, or set of clubs. It may well be the most graceful (but challenging) of sports performed by humans.

At one time, some 175 U.S. colleges and universities fielded men's intercollegiate teams; now, only 16 schools compete nationally. By contrast, women's collegiate competition is alive and well—83 schools (one men's and one women's program will be added in 2015). Few high schools in the U.S. are involved in any competitive gymnastics; training for younger boys and girls occurs largely in local clubs; training in men's and women's gymnastics at the high
competitive level also generally takes place in the club setting, though the few men's university programs still produce world-class gymnasts.

Gymnastics is a men's minor sport, not popular among young boys. The sport also requires expensive equipment and a large single-purpose area, as well as a professional coach. Another reason for the disappearance of gymnastics programs is the application of Title IX laws to collegiate sports programs. In order to support more women's sports programs, many schools eliminated some minor men's sports, such as wrestling and gymnastics. BYU dropped its men's gymnastics program (along with wrestling) in the year 2000.

In Olympic competition, young women usually peak between the ages of 15 and 18; very few female collegiate competitors remain active internationally. By contrast, young men peak in performance between the ages of 18 and 25, as a result of training in the few collegiate teams and in leading clubs.

Gymnastics as a sport in the U.S. gained popularity thanks to the performances of the Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut (1972), and more especially the Romanian gymnast Nadia Comăneci, the first gymnast to receive perfect scores of 10.0 in Olympic competition (1976).

U.S. gymnasts began to win Olympic medals in the late 1960s. The first gold medalist to a U.S. female gymnast came to Cathy Rigby in 1968. U.S. women have since often placed high in international competition. In the 2012 Olympics, the all-around woman's gold medalist was Gabby Douglas. US men now also rank among the finalists in Olympic competition

Gymnastics for Adults
It is never too late to enjoy the benefits of gymnastics training. In fact, gymnastics will benefit you in whatever other athletic activity you engage in: greater strength, improved health of the joints, greater flexibility and maintenance of flexibility, improved cardiovascular fitness, and general protection from injuries.

Yes, an adult may be more prone to injury in gymnastics activities than a child, because of larger body size, slower progression in skills, and slower recovery from injuries. That is why any gymnastic activity should be under the supervision of a knowledgeable coach.

One of the main benefits from learning gymnastics skills as an adult is that learning new skills is not only simply fun, it is deeply satisfying. Even an adult can look forward to polishing and maintaining gymnastics skills, and learning new skills from week to week.

Gymnastics Events
Men perform in six events: floor exercise (FX), pommel horse (PH), still rings (SR), vaulting horse (V), parallel bars (PB), and horizontal bar (HB).

Women perform in four events: floor exercise, uneven parallel bars, vault, and balance beam.
The floor routine must be completed between 60 and 70 seconds; the women compete to a personal choice of music, however in class music is optional. The vault runway for both men and women is 25m long. The floor exercise area, 12m x 12m, consists of a carpet, supported by a layer of hard foam, over 4' x 8' plywood sheets, underlain by hundreds of 2" springs. This modified floor has lowered the injury to the wrist and ankle due to repeated impact, however there has been a marked increase in the difficulty of floor skills.

For years, both men and women vaulted on the "long horse" (the pommel horse without pommels): the men with the vaulting horse lengthwise; the women with the horse crosswise. In 2001, the vaulting *table* was introduced and is the vault we will be using in class.

Because the *table* greatly enlarged the landing area (to 1 meter by 1 meter) for the hands (and hence reduced risk and created a greater "blocking" surface), the complexity and difficulty of optional vaults has greatly increased. Advanced gymnasts, especially women, often perform the "Yerchenko" approach to the vaulting table (round off, back handspring off a springboard). A gymnast who first performs a new stunt in international competition has the stunt named after him or her. In men's competition, some 100 stunts are so named; in women's competition, maybe half that many.

At one time, the bars on the women's uneven parallel bars were much closer together than they now are. The increased distance between the bars permits movements more like those men perform on the horizontal bar.

In collegiate competition, a men's team consists of 12 gymnasts, of whom 6 compete at a given meet: some men compete on all events ("all-around"), and some specialize in only one or a few events ("specialists"). An Olympic team consists of six men—some all-around, some specialists. In competition, medals are awarded in each event, as well as in the coveted all-around championship.

A college or university woman's team consists of up to a dozen gymnasts, of whom only six compete in an intercollegiate meet: some women compete on all events, others specialize. A women's Olympic team (usually six women) may also consist of all-around competitors, along with some event specialists.

At one time, it was required that all men and women compete all-around; also, competition included a compulsory routine on each event (all gymnasts performing a prescribed routine.)

**Boys and Girls Gymnastics**

The boys' gymnastics program is called the "Boys Olympic Program," for boys ages 6 through 18, and levels 4 through 10. Boys at levels 4 through 7 all perform a compulsory routine of ten stunts in each of the six gymnastics events. At levels 8 through 10, boys and their coaches construct optional routines on each event: 8 stunts per routine at levels 8 and 9; 10 stunts per routine at level 10 (very similar to men's elite competition).

The girls' gymnastics program is called "Junior Olympic" and has a similar structure of competitive compulsory and optional levels.
Men's Routines
A collegiate or international men's routine consists of 9 "parts" (stunts) of the gymnast's choice (though only 1 or 2 vaults), plus a dismount (thus 10 "parts"). A part from each of five categories of stunts, called "elements," must be performed on each event. On the floor exercise, for example, the competitor must do a 1) "non-acrobatic" element (of which there are many), 2) an aerial element "forward" ("salto"), 3) an element "backward" ("salto"); 4) an aerial element with at least a half turn, and 5) an acrobatic dismount. (The competitor receives .5 points for each element performed; see below.)

Judging Men's Gymnastics (see the terms "compulsory, optional" under "Terminology")
A score of 10.0 on men's routines was for many decades considered perfect, providing the gymnast did a minimal number of parts (stunts) of required difficulty (10 parts to a routine). In an effort to reward gymnasts who performed more difficult, and hence challenging, stunts, the scoring system was revised in 2006.

10.0 - the starting score for "execution"
+ .5 - for each of five required elements performed
+ x - .1 for every stunt of "A" difficulty performed; .2 for every "B"; .3 for every "C";
and so on up to .6 for every "G" stunt performed.
+ x for "connections"—stunts of great difficulty that are performed in succession

From that score, execution "errors" are subtracted:

.1 for a small error
.3 an medium error
.5 for a large error
1.0 for a fall on or off the floor or apparatus (.5 for women)

"Errors" in execution are numerous. The most common errors are as follows:

- Bent arms, bent legs, legs apart (.1, .3, .5)
- Poor posture (.1, .3, .5)
- Loss of balance (.1 or .3)
- Unsteadiness, minor adjustments (.1 each time)
- Multiple attempts to perform a movement (.1 - .5)
- Walking or hopping during the exercise (each step or hop = .1)
- Deviations in prescribed angles of arms, legs, body (15º, 30º, 45º) (.1, .3, .5)
- Extra swings (.3 - .5) (.3 - .6 for women)
- Stops or interruptions in the exercise (.5)
- Hitting the apparatus (.5) (.3 for women)
- Falling onto or off the apparatus (1.0) (.5 for women)
- Movement of feet on dismount (.1, .3, .5)

Each vault is given a "difficulty" score, which is added to 10.0, and from which errors are deducted.
Judging Boy's Gymnastics

Levels 4 - 7

A different potential score is possible at each level:

- 10.0 base score,
- + .5 for each "bonus" stunt
- + .5 (up to .5) for stunts performed with "virtuosity"
- + .2 for "sticking" the landing (that is, not moving the feet on the dismount)

In this gymnastics class, routines you perform will be judged: 10.0 + up to 1.5 for each bonus stunt, + up to .5 for extremely well performed stunts ("virtuosity"), + .2 for a stuck landing.

Your start score in this class thus will have a potential of 12.2. Your final score will be 10.0, minus execution errors, plus the number of bonus stunts, plus virtuosity, plus any stuck landing.

The straddle or squat vault will start at 10.0; the handspring at 10.2. Variations of the handspring will add .5 to your start score.

Levels 8 - 9, 10

The base execution score is 10.0, but what happens beyond that becomes very complicated. The level 10 routine is judged very much like men's routines, with some exceptions.

Judging Women's Gymnastics

Junior Olympic competitive gymnastics is divided into levels: 2 – 5 compulsory routines, and 6 – 10 optional routines. Deductions are from a potential score of 10.0. Then it gets very complicated, or as a local judge said, "You have to keep a lot of details in your head!"

An optional routine consists of value parts, special requirements and connections.

Judging in women's gymnastics at the elite level resembles the judging pattern for men's gymnastics, where competitors are rewarded for parts of high value, ranging from A to E in difficulty. The base score for execution is 10.0, to which value parts, special requirements, and special connections of movements are added. Errors are then deducted from execution.

The potential score of 10.0 is still in use in collegiate competition, so that spectators better understand scoring.

In this class, your start score will be 9.0, plus .3 bonus for up to three bonus parts (see the list of bonuses for each event), plus .1 for "virtuosity" (an extremely well done part), or for sticking your landing: possible start score of 10.0. (Ordinarily, bonus points or “stick” points are not awarded in women's gymnastics.)

Gymnastics Terminology
As in any sport, competitors and judges (referees, etc.) use a specialized vocabulary ("jargon"), some of which is listed and defined below.

All around – a gymnast who competes on all six men's events, or all four women's events
Specialist – a gymnast who competes on selective events, not all events
Amplitude – greater height and extension of body parts in gymnastics stunts
Block – the rapid rebounding of the feet or hands off the floor, beat board, or vaulting table
Bridge – an arched position—the legs and hands on the floor, the stomach extended upward
Candlestick – "standing" on the back of the shoulders, feet pointed straight toward the ceiling
Center of gravity – the point at which the body rotates around a gymnastics apparatus
Compulsory routine – a routine in which all gymnasts must perform specified skills in a specific order, as determined by an official gymnastics organization
Optional routine – a routine in which gymnasts perform skills of their own choice and order
Elements – required categories of parts in a given routine (see "Judging Gymnastics")
Flexibility – the wide range of motion in a joint, such as in the splits
Flip/Salto/somersault – rotation around an axis: forward, backward, or other angle
Grips – leather straps worn to help keep a grip on the bars or rings (they can help prevent rips of the skin, though that is not their main purpose); bar and ring grips feature a small wooden "dowel" that enhances the grip.
Heel drive – the leading/kicking of one's heels to carry the gymnast's legs in the direction of the gymnast's back
Hold – a specific movement maintained (held) for a pre-set time, usually two seconds
Hollow – a straight-body position, the chest slightly rounded inward and the stomach muscles pulled in (there should be no arching of the back or bending of the knees at any point; toes pointed throughout!)
Hurdle – the transitional movement from a run to another surface: from the floor or a beat board; from one foot of both feet
Tuck – bending of the hips so that the knees are close to the chest, and the feet close to the body
Pike – the bending of the body only at the hips, the knees locked
Layout – a rotating skill in which the gymnast's body is essentially straight, not bent at the hips, knees or ankles
Lunge – extending the body forward, the forward knee bent slightly, the back leg straight, the body leaning forward (the position prior to beginning a scale or a running movement), the arms extended upwards
Momentary hold – the showing of a controlled, while not held, position for not more than a second
Mount – the first skill a gymnast performs on an apparatus
Dismount – the last skill a gymnast performs on an apparatus
Over grip – a gripping of the bar so that the palms face away from the face
Under grip – a gripping of the bar so that the palms face toward the face, the fingers pointing toward the gymnast
Mixed grip – gripping with the fingers of each hand facing differently
Part – the name given to a specifically defined gymnastic stunt or movement
Peeling – the involuntary release of the hands from an apparatus
Pointing of the toes – straightening of the foot and toes so there is no bending at the ankle
Punching – bouncing, rather than jumping, off the floor exercise mat, with power
Range of motion – the extent to which body parts can be extended

Range of motion (ROM) – the capacity of arms, legs, back, etc., to extend themselves; ROM allows longer periods of applied force, improvement in technique, increase in biomechanical advantage, and reduction in joint strain

Routine – the totality of moves/stunts a gymnast performs in a specific event

Salto (see flip, salto, somersault) – rotations of the body in the air, that is, aerials, such as front and back tucks, and layouts, accompanied by twists and other variations of position

Straddle – a movement that features a wide separation of the legs

Split – one leg extended forward and straight, or to the side; the other leg extended straight back, or to the side

Stick – dismounting from an apparatus with no movement or wide separation of the feet

Stretching – exercises in which parts of the body (shoulders, back, legs, arms, etc.) are slowly extended or held for up to 30 seconds

Some General Principles of Gymnastics Performance in BYU Beginning Classes

- Dress during gymnastics training at BYU should be modest yet not excessively loose, and also clean and properly mended.

- One of the rewards of doing gymnastics is that it is simply a fun activity: learning new parts/stunts ("tricks") is personally satisfying. The beginning classes in gymnastics at BYU have the reputation of being the most "fun" class on campus.

- Instruction in gymnastics skills for men and women of any age is a fun and rewarding challenge.

- Cooperation with other students in demonstrating or encouraging skill learning builds confidence and increases enjoyment of the learning experience.

- The trampoline (an Olympic event separate from gymnastics) is the highest-risk apparatus in the gymnastics gym. Serious gymnasts use it to learn and polish aerial movements.

- A major objective of gymnastics performance is to make even extremely difficult movements appear effortless.

- Gymnastics is a high-risk sport! Training and performance should occur under professional supervision. Gymnasts are nevertheless responsible for their own safety and are advised to seek "spotting" help when learning new stunts. The trampoline is the highest risk apparatus in a gymnastics gym, which is why virtually U.S. high schools no longer have trampolines (though backyard trampolines, as well as commercial "trampoline gyms," are rising in popularity). In 2013, there were some 32,000 visits to hospital emergency rooms for treatment of trampoline injuries.

- Note that there are four landing surfaces in the gymnastics gym:
1. The foam-block pit (about five feet deep—but injuries can still occur)
2. The "mush mats"—thick, very soft-mats
3. "Sting mats"—thin, flexible mats placed on harder mats to absorb some of the shock of landing
4. Somewhat absorbent mats (four to six inches thick), used in serious practice and allowed in some levels of competition

- The floor exercise surfaces consists of 1) an overlay of carpet, 2) an inch layer of absorbent foam, 3) 4x8 slabs of 1/2 inch interlocking pieces of plywood; 40 hundreds of small (2-inch) springs fastened to the plywood, over 5) a regular wood or concrete surface.

- In a gymnastics setting, students should be aware of themselves and others in order to prevent collisions or injuries.

- A person of any age can learn some gymnastics skills, though adults will find learning skills more difficult than when they were children. Gymnasts who eventually perform high-level skills usually begin training before the age of ten, often as early as three.

- The larger muscle mass of adults does not guarantee less injury.

- Flexibility exercises are an integral part of all gymnastics training.

- The maintenance of or increase in flexibility can occur at any age, though aging does require a higher degree of discipline.

- A person can make stretching more effective by relaxing, or "shaking out," the muscles between sets of stretching.

- Working with a partner when engaged in stretching exercises is very helpful.

- The best times to do stretching exercises in gymnastics are often and regularly; in the class, both before and after a workout. Stretching in gymnastics is different from stretching in other sports, because most gymnastics injuries occur during workouts, not during competition. Stretching helps prevent muscle injury. Strength training without flexibility training will result in loss of flexibility.

Relax and breathe normally as you stretch. Enter the stretch gradually. Repeat a stretch for 5 seconds, relax, repeat 3 times; then stretch for 15 seconds. Relax and contract muscles in the stretch position. Length of the stretching hold may vary from 5 to 60 seconds. "Shake out" muscles between stretches.

Combine stretching with other daily activities, such as sitting in a straddle pike, elbows on the floor, when you are studying; reaching to the toes while you are watching TV; bending over slowly to retrieve an object on the floor or ground; bending only at the
waist when you are leaning over a desk or counter. Enroll in the stretching class at BYU for more extensive instruction.