



**Passing and Catching**  
are a very important part of a Basketball game! A successful team makes strong and accurate passes, and always catches the ball. Coaches must ensure that their players understand the fundamentals and mechanics of passing and catching – and then “drill” them into them during practices.

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**How to teach and coach basketball players to pass and catch a basketball**





## Catching the Ball

A pass is only good if it can be caught. Therefore, your players should always be ready to catch the ball. They need to anticipate both when and where the pass will be thrown. In order to catch the ball they should: Get as open as possible and present a good target to the passer.

To receive the ball:

- Keep hands out from the chest.

- Keep fingers pointed up and spread comfortably, with the thumbs almost touching each other. This position enables them to immediately get a good hold on the ball.

- Between the passer and the receiver there is an unspoken signal to pass the ball: the raised and open hands of the receiver. This tells the passer, "I'm open! Give me the ball!"

Not every pass will be perfect. They must be ready to move from side to side for a poorly thrown or deflected pass.

Keep eyes on the ball from the time it leaves the passer's hands until they actually touch the ball. Taking eyes off the ball for only a split-second can cause a fumbled pass.

Step toward the ball as it comes with arms out to decrease the length of the pass. Also, this prevents the defense from stepping in front and stealing the ball.

After the ball hits their fingers, bend elbows slightly and bring the ball in toward their chest. This cushions the impact of the pass and gives better control of the ball.

Now, that they have the ball at chest level, they are in a position to pass or shoot quickly.



**a)** The receiver must be ready to catch the ball by showing a “target” (have their hands up and ready to receive the ball at all times).



**b)** Players should not let the ball hit their body, they must always catch the ball with their hands.

**c)** Players must “look the ball” into their hands each and every time they catch the ball. The younger players tend to turn their heads when they are about to receive the pass.

**d)** When catching the ball a player must firmly grab and hold the ball – be strong when holding the basketball.

**e)** Players should “step” towards the ball to catch it (never step backwards). Meet the pass, come to the pass, step to the pass!



## **Passing Sets Up Winning Shots**

Passing is the quickest and most effective way to get the ball from player to player and move it around the court. The more passes that are made by the offense, the more you will challenge the defense. It keeps them scrambling, frustrated, and tired. The perfect end result of a series of well-executed passes will be to an open man close to the basket. He can take the ball and easily score.



### **The Five Passing Lanes**

Each game situation presents the possibility for one perfect pass. Imagine yourself faced by a defender crouched over in good defensive position. What you should now see is not just this player, but actually, five possible passing lanes. These five lanes are:

1. Over the top of the defender's head.
2. Near the left side of his head.
3. Near the right side of his head.
4. Near his right leg.
5. Near his left leg.

If you are well guarded by your man you won't be able to pass the ball immediately where you want to. In cases like this, fake with the ball. Fake with your body; or, fake with your body and the ball. Once the defender goes for the fake, pass through one of the five lanes.



## **Principles of Passing the Basketball:**

**Passing the basketball is an “offensive” skill that requires lots of practice. Ensure that the players practice proper passing techniques / mechanics at all times.**

- a)** Players should try to make the “shortest” pass, usually a coach will refer to this as “make the easiest” pass. The longer passes are not as accurate and tend to get “stolen” by the defense.
- b)** Players should pass the ball to the “receivers” hands (the target).
- c)** Teach your players to pass with their thumbs starting behind the ball and ending with their thumbs pointing downwards.
- d)** Players should always make “strong” passes, “soft” passes will get stolen or deflected by the defense.
- e)** When passing the ball, the pass should be thrown to the “opposite” side of the receivers defender (don’t make it easy for the defender to steal the pass).



## Passing Mechanics:

Teach your players to pass with their thumbs starting behind the ball and ending with their thumbs pointing downwards – see pictures below. This is a very basic, but important skill to learn, coaches need to just “drill” it into your players until they are comfortable with it.



**Notice how the thumbs are pointing downward after the ball is passed.**

**Player has a firm grip on the ball and is ready to pass the ball...**

**Player steps towards the teammate they are passing to...**

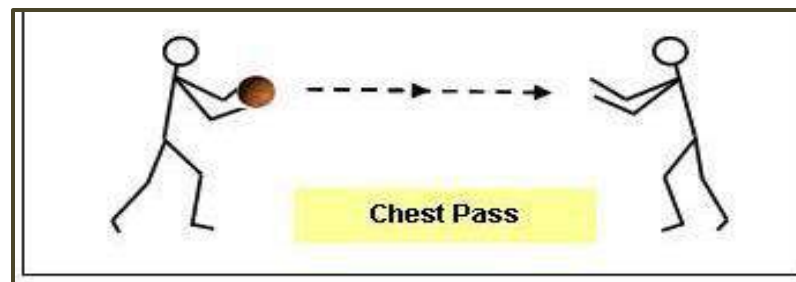
**Thumbs are downward after the ball is released...**



## The Two-Handed Chest Pass

The chest pass is the most common pass they will throw in a game when there isn't a defensive player between them and a teammate. To execute this pass, start with the ball held in two hands chest-high and close to the body. Elbows should be tucked in and fingers spread around the ball with thumbs up. Don't spread your fingers out too far because this positioning will prevent you from making a quick pass. As they hold the ball, wrists should be pointed upward. Holding them downward will force them, first, to turn them up before the pass. This is an unnecessary extra movement that only delays the pass. When they are about to make the pass, step in the direction of their pass. Moving like this gives body balance and gives the pass more power and speed. Don't overextend the step, because this tends to take away some balance.

As their arms stretch out to their full length, rotate elbows and wrists outward so that the hands end up in a thumbs-downward, palms-out position. Release the ball with a snap of your wrist. Spin the ball with the index fingers, middle fingers, and thumbs as it leaves the hands. This spin on the ball causes it to travel in a straighter line. This type of pass is easier to catch than a "flat spinless" pass.

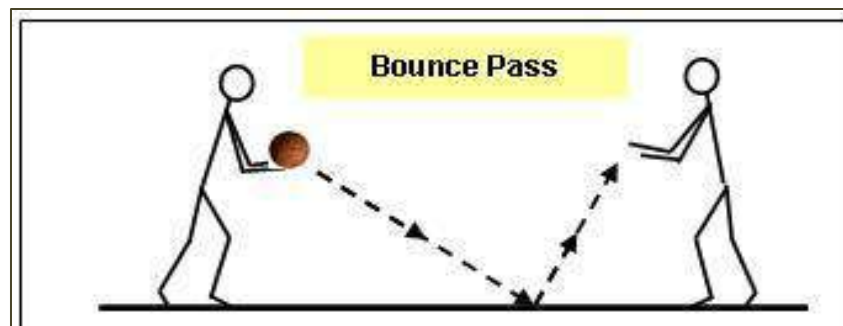






## The Two-Handed Bounce Pass

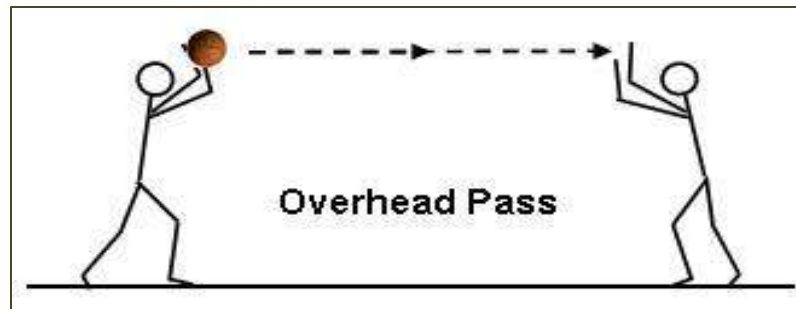
The basic mechanics of the bounce pass are the same as those of the chest pass; however, the game situation for each of the passes are different. A bounce pass is a good one to use on a back-door play. It is also the pass to use when passing to a teammate, guarded from behind in the low post, or in other situations when a defender is between the passer and the receiver. Starting with the same position as the two-handed chest pass, take a strong step in the direction of the receiver. Quickly extend the arms and palms outward. Backspin is put on the ball as it goes from thumbs up to a thumbs down release position. This backspin makes the ball easier to catch. The ball must hit the floor at least three-quarters of the distance to your receiver. It should come up to him/her at the thighs and waist.





## The Two-Handed Overhead Pass

The overhead pass is commonly used for moving the ball around the perimeter, as a skip pass, a pass into the post area, and as an outlet pass. When they make this pass, always aim the ball a little over the head of the receiver. To make an overhead pass, hold the ball over the head and slightly back of the center of the head. Don't hold the ball BEHIND the head. This wastes movement and time. Fingers should be spread firmly around the ball, thumbs a couple of inches apart at the bottom of the ball. This pass gets its power from the flick of the wrists and fingers. As the passer steps toward the receiver, snap the wrists and rotate both arms and palms outward. Hands should end with the fingers pointing upward.





### **The Lateral Pass**

The starting position is the same as the two-handed chest pass. With the defender standing in front of the passer, the passer steps across his/her body with the foot opposite the ball. This protects the ball. Bring the ball to their side and extend arms. Quickly cock the outside wrist, drop the helper hand, and snap the ball to the receiver. A variation of this pass is the lateral bounce pass made with one or both hands. If this pass is used, the ball must be bounced to a spot, at least, three-quarters of the distance to the receiver.

### **The Push Pass**

The push pass is a quick pass made with one hand. The pass originates near the ear and relies on the elbow being bent for its power. It can either be a straight or a lob pass. This depends upon the defensive alignment.

### **The Behind-The-Back Pass**

This pass used to be considered a "show-off" pass; however, it now has become a normal offensive weapon. Still, it MUST NOT be abused. To make the pass, hold the ball with two hands. As the ball is brought back around the hip, the helping hand drops off. The passing hand is on the side of the ball and must thrust the ball behind the back. The movement ends with the passing hand near the opposite hip, with the fingers pointing in the direction of the pass.



### **The Baseball Pass**

This is a long-distance pass, usually thrown more than half-court. Generally, one baseball pass to a player headed down-court ahead of anyone else, is all that's needed for a quick two points. To make the baseball pass, keep both hands on the ball as long as possible. This gives better control and will help enable to stop the pass at the last moment, if needed.

Plant back foot and bring the ball back above the shoulder and near the ear on the throwing side. The arm must be bent at a 45-degree angle. The upper arm should be parallel to the floor. This position will enable the passer to throw a quick, straight, and hard pass. Step toward the direction of the intended pass with the foot opposite the throwing arm. Make an overhead throw, snapping the wrist, and follow through with the arm fully extended. Remember to put a backward rotation on the ball to make it go straight.

### **The Hand-Off Pass**

This is a pass that doesn't require an extension of the arm. It is used to give the ball to a teammate who is either cutting or circling behind the passer. Have one arm up and the ball laying on the palm of the other hand. Simply toss or flip it to the receiver. Another variation of this is to turn the body toward the receiver, or else, make a complete turn, face the receiver and give him/her the ball.

### **The Hook Pass**

When closely guarded, hold the ball at shoulder level, elbows flared outward to protect the ball. Start to lift the ball up with two hands, with the wrist of the outside hand flexed. Drop the helping hand to face level. Extend your passing arm over your head with the ball. When you have stretched this arm out completely, flick the ball by snapping your wrist forward.



## **The Off-The-Dribble Pass**

This is becoming a pass that is popping up at all levels of basketball. To make this pass work, on the last dribble, move the dribbling hand to the top quarter of the ball. Combine a lateral movement of the hand and arm, and push the ball forward with a snap of the wrist toward the receiver. This pass is quick and deceptive. It will usually catch the defensive man by surprise.

## **Passing Drills**

Passing, like shooting, requires constant practice. If you will regularly work on the fundamentals of passing, your team's passing mechanics will improve. However, it's only through team practice sessions and games, with coaches watching, that your players will really learn WHEN to pass and HOW to get the pass over, under, or through the defender.

Such situations will develop and sharpen passing skills the most, turning passing mechanics into valuable on-court skills



## Notes / Teaching Points:

1. Stress to the players that all passes should be “strong” and “accurate.” No “soft” passes allowed.
2. Passers should always find a target to pass to before passing (which is usually the receiver’s hands).
3. When getting ready to catch a pass, players should “look” the ball into their hands, and never lose eye contact with the ball. Coaches should demonstrate how the ball could hit a player in the nose or face when the player that is attempting to catch a pass takes their eye off the ball.
4. Coaches should always ensure that the players are practicing the correct techniques / mechanics and not forming bad habits that will be hard to break later.
5. Keep the passing drills interesting and fun! It’s always better when the players come to practices excited about the drills you are running. **There are tons of passing drills available, but the one that helps the younger players the most is the “Weave” drill.** It helps with catching, passing, coordination, accuracy, and coordination (plus it is a lot of fun for the players).



### Basic 3-Player Weave Shooting

Pass and go behind the person you passed to. Shooter retrieves the ball and players return running outside the court and the next group of 3 runs the weave.

OR

(After they become proficient)

Pass and go behind the person you passed to. Shooter retrieves the ball, becomes the center person and the same group runs the weave back to the other end of the court

