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Skating School Semesters: Exploring the Options

by Tiffany Mayes

There are a multitude of ways to set up skating school semesters. Your arena has unique variables, but some of the things you want to take into consideration are the flow of new business into your facility and the economic climate of the area surrounding the facility. The following are different ways you can set up your semesters and some of the pros and cons of each method.

One of the most common arrangements for skating schools is the eight-week semester. Eight-week semesters keep the cost of classes down, making them more attractive to customers. All classes start the same week and end eight weeks later. Semester dates can be the same year after year. This method is very neat and tidy from an administrative point of view. Your Alpha class can always be on Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. and your Freestyle 2 class can always be on Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. You can always run a "bring a friend" promotion in week six. However, as skaters move up through the levels they usually have to changes days and times. The new level may conflict with other activities like soccer or Girl Scouts.

Another problem is that it is almost impossible for a skater to accomplish an entire level in eight weeks. How often have you seen a skater perfect the Alpha forward crossovers in only eight weeks? This means that you either need to have skaters repeat a level until they've accomplished the maneuvers, which isn't usually good on a child's self-esteem, or you have to create additional levels, i.e. Alpha 1, Alpha 2 and maybe even Alpha 3.

If the economic climate of your facility can support longer semesters such as four 12-week or 13-week semesters instead of six eight-week semesters, you may not have to have as many levels. One of the problems with longer semesters is that skaters, especially beginners, may have to wait too long before the next semester begins. They could easily loose interest and choose another activity while waiting a couple of months for your next semester to begin.

There are a couple of ways around this problem of skaters having to wait for a semester to begin. You could let beginners start at any time and just prorate them for the remaining weeks of your semester. However, this can make your beginner class difficult to teach. Just when you think you have everyone moving across the ice alone, along comes another child who has never skated. If you allow beginners to enroll at anytime during the semester, you should always have at least one assistant in the beginner class whose job is to work with the new skaters each week.

The other way around the long wait for a semester to begin is to start new beginner classes every month. When the beginner class ends, the skaters can be appropriately promoted to the Pre-Alpha class and prorated for the remaining weeks of the regular semester. This means that an interested skater never has to wait longer than a month to start learning to skate.

Another method for setting up your skating school is continuous enrollment. With this method, you can start classes whenever you want to. When the beginner class ends, you start a Pre-Alpha class the following week on the same day and time. When the Pre-Alpha class ends, you start an Alpha class the following week on the same day and time. Skaters get to keep their schedule and probably their teacher until enrollment becomes too small to economically maintain the class. At that point, the class has to be merged with another appropriate class. This method is usually very customer friendly because it keeps their schedule consistent. However, it can be much more difficult to maintain administratively, because classes are starting and ending at different times. If a skater

transfers classes, a price adjustment will likely be necessary.

Whichever method you choose to set up your semesters, make sure your office personnel thoroughly understand the system and that your flyers are concise and customer friendly. Be clear in your policies. How are skaters evaluated and advanced? What is your refund policy? May skaters make up or receive credit for missed classes? Do you prorate tuition? Can skaters pay as they go? Do you offer a split payment plan? Does tuition include skate rental, practice time, and/or ISI membership, or are there separate fees for these services? Consistency is very important, but don't be afraid to change your system. Economic climates and customer bases change and sometimes necessitate program adjustments.