

# 6 STEPS

## TO MASTERING HOCKEY TACTICS

AND A 20 WEEKS PLAN TO GET YOU THERE



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# 6 Steps to Mastering Hockey Tactics

*And a 20-week plan to get you there*



## Introduction:

The game of hockey is, in theory, quite simple. Score more than the other team and play hard in both ends of the rink. What makes the game so incredible to play, coach and watch are the subtleties that separate the good from the great players and coaches. It's at this point I must admit, the idea of 'mastering' the game in 20 weeks seems a little unlikely, considering the best minds in hockey spend their entire lives dedicated to learning the small nuances in search of a slight competitive advantage over their opponents.

However, by following this step-by-step guide:

- i. You will expand your hockey vocabulary
- ii. You will improve your game understanding in every zone of the ice, with, and without the puck.
- iii. Your knowledge of the game will be more complete and more detailed.
- iv. Your ability to share your message and teach the game will significantly increase.

Whether the terms and tactics in this guide are new to you, or on a dusty shelf somewhere in your hockey archive, putting them together in a curriculum you can comprehend, and share, **will make you a better 'hockey mind.'**

## 6 Steps to Mastering Hockey Tactics:

### Step 1: Speak Hockey:

Learn the language of hockey. Know the terms, tactical expressions, and names of common systems used. Imagine walking into a chemistry lab with only grade 10 science education and being asked to conduct a high level experiment. You likely would think the professor was speaking a foreign language. Sports are no different. I have lost track of the number of times I have explained a tactic to a young or recreational hockey player and quickly realized they had no idea what I was talking about. This is because the teaching of terminology used in hockey is often overlooked along the youth hockey journey. If you want to live in Germany, learn German. If you want to be a better hockey player or coach, learn the language of hockey.

### Step 2: Mastery of the Defensive Zone:

Study the role of all positions in the defensive zone, first without, then with puck possession, ie. learn defensive zone coverage options, then breakout options. There is an expression that “Every offensive chance starts with great defense”. If you don’t have the puck, it’s tough to score. Make sure all positions, including goalies, understand the roles of every position in the defensive zone. There are varying levels of pressure defense you can implement, and even different moments of a shift require an adjustment in pressure and positional play. Will you play man-on-man at all cost? Will you learn to communicate well enough to play more of a zone defense? Will you run a high pressure ‘collapsed’ defense, or learn the newly adopted ‘swarm’ defense currently being implemented by many NHL, pro, and college teams? Next, learn what every position needs to know in the event you gain possession of the puck. This is the breakout every minor hockey coach loves to complain about. “We can’t breakout!” It’s likely because there is a disconnect between players at the verbal, and nonverbal levels of communication, and very likely a lack of physical skills to execute properly. Make sure all positions know their options, and encourage interchanging positions so that each player knows what it *feels* like to play every position (perhaps with the exception of the goalie for obvious reasons).

### Step 3: Mastery of the Neutral Zone:

Learn to articulate the difference between having, and not having, puck possession in the neutral zone. First, master different ways to force the opposition to turn over the puck in the neutral zone. Next, figure out what to do with it once you win possession, and translate that into an offensive zone entry/attack. Keep in mind this observation. Over my 10+ years of Junior and professional hockey, I can recall countless hours of skating specific routes in neutral zone regroup drills. However in real game play, it never seemed to transpire the same way that it did in practice. Learn the difference between centerman mirroring the puck vs. peeling away from it. Weigh the pros and cons of the strong side winger posting up near the defenseman as an outlet vs. posting up high to stretch the pass and the defensive team. However, remember that in the course of a real game, all of these situations will likely occur, and players need to read and react quickly to each new situation. Some coaches believe they can create robots out of

their players. Most players perform their best when given freedom to play within a structure, but be allowed to use their instincts that have made them great in the first place. Don't over-coach!

#### **Step 4: Mastery of the Offensive Zone:**

Learn a number of ways to enter the zone with puck possession that can result in an offensive scoring chance. The more creative ways you can cohesively attack the opposition in the offensive zone, the harder you will make it for the opposition to defend against you. Although creativity is an essential component of a great hockey player, having some concrete principles of attack will help keep your team on the same page. Next make sure you learn how to attack in the offensive zone when your team loses possession of the puck. Pursuing the puck on the forecheck requires all players to work together under the same system to prevent chinks in the armour so to speak. If one player is out of position, your forecheck can fall to pieces. Depending on your level of competition, your team should know at least one active high pressure forecheck, and one passive forechecking system. Higher levels can jump between 3 or 4 different forechecking systems in the same game.

#### **Step 5: Mastery of Special Teams: Power Play and Penalty Killing:**

Nearly every Junior, College, and Professional coach believes games are won and lost on special team play. A team that kills penalties well, and scores on the power play, wins more games than it loses. I agree. Getting every player on the same page in both situations will lead to greater execution and team success. I believe that 'compete level', skills, and understanding of key principles will set the stage for success. Over-analysis of systems and too many set plays on the power play can lead to 'paralysis by analysis,' and lack of successful execution. Decide on a general structure, try to identify trends and tactics of the other team, then focus on your own intensity, execution, communication, and creativity. Decide on your system, and get every player to buy in, or special teams fall apart like an old barn in a wind storm.

#### **Step 6: Over-communicate Clarity: Review and Review Again**

Once the foundations of steps 1-5 are in place, commit to reviewing and communicating the tactics and systems you have chosen to implement on a regular basis. Over-communicating clarity is a major characteristic of high performance teams. Remember that once the principles you have learned, and taught, become instinct, you can move your team towards the liberating ideology that 'instinct trumps systems.' I heard that term from Glen Gulutzan of the Vancouver Canucks coaching staff and I love it. A well coached player must be given the freedom to trust his/her instincts within the boundaries of your chosen systems and tactical style. The alternative to that instinctual freedom is again 'paralysis by analysis.'

### **How to Learn and Implement These Six Steps:**

We recommend, tongue in cheek, one of the two following options:

1) Take these terms and concepts and research/Google them yourself. This option is free, but may take you ages, and you'll be sidetracked on Youtube quicker than the time it takes to type "forechecking systems for youth hockey teams" into the search bar.

2) Let us walk you through the complete process, term by term, zone by zone, system by system as a member of [How to Play Hockey](#).

## 20 Week Guide to Mastering the Game: [How to Play Hockey](#)

*The following pages are a 20 week (full hockey season) guide to mastering the concepts required in steps 1 through 5.*

### ***Feel free to jump ahead, a little or a lot, but...***

Every great architect looks forward to seeing his/her completed work of perfection. Every artist wants to see his/her painting finished on the wall. However, they also accept the process that leads to mastery. (Actually I bet many artists never feel their works are ever complete, and that analogy applies here too.) We recognize you likely won't want to wait until the end of the season to work on special teams, or forechecks, or regrouping, for example, but this guide will give you points of focus each week for the course of the season. Touch on multiple tactics each week, and address play in every zone, but resist the urge to build the city of Rome in an entire day. Accept it is going to take a while. Instead, dive head first into a given topic each week. Remember that team goals usually include peaking at playoff time, and making the best run to the league final as possible. Remember as a coach, you are a teacher. Rome wasn't built in a day, neither is a hockey player, or a team. It's going to take considerable time to cover the mountain of terms, tactics, theories, and systems required to truly understand the game. In fact it might take a lifetime. Follow this guide, and we'll see how far we can get you in 20 weeks.

### **20 Week Progression:**

- Weeks 1-3: Terminology
- Weeks 4-7: Defensive Zone
- Weeks 8-11: Neutral Zone
- Weeks 12-16: Offensive Zone
- Weeks 17-20: Special Teams

## Step 1: Tactical and Theoretical Terminology:

### Week 1:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

Intro	Whiteboard Symbols
1.1 Areas of the Ice	Areas of the Ice
	House-Fort-Castle-Prime Scoring Area
	Lanes
	Seams
	Quiet Zones

Your Notes:

### Week 2:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

1.2 Tactical Terminology	Transition
	Defensive and Offensive Support
	Puck Protection
	Pinch and Stagger
	Active Stick-Shoulder Checks-Head on a Swivel
	Flat Skating
	Timing

Your Notes:



**Week 3:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

1.4 Passing Tactics	Headman Pass
	Back Pass
	Overlap-Follow your Pass
	Drop Pass in all 3 zones
	Give and Go
	Cycling
1.5 Passing Videos	Skill Tip: How to Receive a Rim Pass
	Skill Tip: How to Saucer Pass

Your Notes:

## Step 2: Defensive Zone

### Week 4:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

2.1 Defensive Pressure	Steering, Angling, Tracking
	Gap Control
	Holding the Line
	Close Coverage, Closing Gap, Commit, Contain
	Forcing to the Outside
	Inside Out

Your Notes:

### Week 5:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

2.2 Defensive Coverage	Balanced Defence
	Defensive Zone Coverage
	Advanced Defensive Zone Coverage
	Defensive Controlled Skating
	Defensive Side Positioning
	Man on Man Coverage
	Switching
	Backchecking
	Skill Tip: How to Take a Faceoff

Your Notes:



**Week 6 & 7:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

2.3: Breakouts	Breakout Overview
	Breakouts-All Positions D-Zone Puck Possession Responsibilities
	Breakout: Quick Up
	Breakout: Rim Pass
	Skill Tip: How to Receive a Rim Pass
	Breakout: Wheel
	Skill Tip: Defensive Escape: Hang 'Em on the Post
	Breakout: Three Quarter Round
	Breakout: Reverse
	Breakout: D to D, Over, Partner
	Breakout: Controlled, Power Play

Your Notes:

## Step 3: Neutral Zone

### Week 8 & 9:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

Module 3: Neutral Zone	
	Neutral Zone Forechecking-Overview
	Neutral Zone Transition Overview
3.1 Neutral Zone Forecheck	Neutral Zone Forecheck-1-2-2 Wide
	Neutral Zone Forecheck-1-3-1
	Neutral Zone Forecheck-2-1-2
	Neutral Zone Forecheck-1-2-2 Mid Ice Lock
	Neutral Zone Forecheck-Retreating 1-2-2

Your Notes:

### Week 10:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

3.2 Transition & Counter Attack	Neutral Zone Transition-Reading Pressure
	Neutral Zone Transition-Regroup
	Neutral Zone Transition-Counter Attack

Your Notes:

**Week 11:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

3.3 Offensive Zone Entry	Neutral Zone Transitions-Offensive Zone Entries
	Neutral Zone Transitions-Offensive Zone Entry Options
	Neutral Zone Transition-Offensive Rush, 1on1, 2on1, 2on2, 3on2

## Step 4: Offensive Zone

### Week 12 & 13:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

Module 4: Offensive Zone	
4.1 Skill Tip Videos	Skill Tip: Basic Stickhandling
	Skill Tip: Stickhandling in Chaos Drill
	Skill Tip: 2 Puck Stickhandling Drill
	Skill Tip: How to Scoop a Puck Trick
4.2 Shooting Tip Videos	Skill Tip: How to Roof a Puck
	Skill Tip: How to Set Up a One Timer
	Skill Tip: How to Take a One Timer
4.3 Offensive Zone Forechecking	Forechecking Overview
	Forecheck- 1-2-2 Against all Breakouts
	Forecheck- 2-1-2 Against all Breakouts
	Forecheck- 2-3 or Left Lane Lock Against all Breakouts
	Forecheck-Torpedo
	Forecheck-Controlled-Deep Trap+Swing with Speed

Your Notes:

**Week 14:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

4.4 Offensive Principles	Grey Zones
	Stretch Skating
	Offensive Controlled Skating

Your Notes:

**Week 15:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

4.5 Offensive Zone Entry	Possession on Entry
	1-2-3 Attack Triangle
	Numerical Advantage on Attack
	Drive and Delay
	Net Drive
	Skill Tip: How to Go to the Net
	Applying Offensive Pressure

Your Notes:

**Week 16:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

4.6 Offensive Zone Tactics	Offensive Tactics in the Zone Overview
	Offensive Tactics-Cycling Variations
	Offensive Tactics-Attacking the Net from the Point
	Walkouts
	Offensive Tactics-Plays in Tight

Your Notes:

## Step 5: Special Teams: Power Play and Penalty Killing

### Week 17 & 18:

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Online Module:

#### Video Tutorial:

Module 5: Special Teams	
	Power Play Overview
	Penalty Kill Overview
5.1 Power Play	Power Play-Overload
	Power Play-Umbrella
	Power Play- 1-3-1
	Power Play- 5 vs 3 Box+1
	Power Play-4on3-Box & Umbrella
	Power Play Breakout: AKA Controlled

Your Notes:



**Week 19 & 20:**

Your calendar Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Online Module:****Video Tutorial:**

	Power Play Breakout: AKA Controlled
5.2 Penalty Kill Forechecking	Penalty Kill-Forecheck 1-1-2 Passive, Aggressive
	Penalty Kill-Forecheck 1-3 Passive
	Penalty Kill-Forecheck-Forwards Pressure and Replace
	Penalty Kill-Forecheck-Trackback
5.3 Penalty Kill Defensive Zone	Penalty Kill-Defensive Zone Overview
	Penalty Kill-Passive and Aggressive Box
	Penalty Kill-Passive and Aggressive Diamond

**Step 6: Congratulations! Celebrate, then review!**

Have you watched every video in this course?! Wow, as a student of the game myself, I can assure you all your efforts will payoff. Please share our site, [www.howtoplayhockey.ca](http://www.howtoplayhockey.ca) with 3 friends you think would benefit. Do you have feedback for us? Please visit us at [www.lgsports.ca/contact-us](http://www.lgsports.ca/contact-us) and let us know what you think.

The learning never stops. I encourage you to go back to earlier videos and see if concepts make more sense to you now then they did the first time you watched the tutorial.

Sincerely,

Nate Leslie  
Founder  
Leslie Global Sports & How to Play Hockey