

# On the Order of the Pilates Mat Exercises

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Article by **Andrea Maida**, view the original article here:

<http://www.pilatesandrea.com/on-the-order-of-the-pilates-mat-exercises/>

I thought I would articulate why I think the Mat exercises are arranged in the order presented in JP's [Return to Life Through Contrology](#). It will be a good exercise to attempt this 'out loud', shall we say, and hopefully I just might learn something.

Who doesn't want to be a genius?

Please note that this examination is solely about the order and the exercises themselves...not about who should be doing them or if one is ready to do them, etc... That's a subject for another post. I'll be lucky if I can finish this one 😊

My experience of the Pilates exercises in my own body will of course differ from every other person. But Joe Pilates has a way of distilling us into the humanity that we are: the same body systems and parts that probably need a similar kind of maintenance.

Am I the only sway-backed, blogger with a weaker side out there?

Bueller?

### 1. The Hundred

No matter how much you dislike this exercise, you cannot dispute its effectiveness as a warmup. It gets the blood and the air moving. Boom. You have arrived.

### 2. The Roll Up, The Roll Over, Single Leg Circles

These 3 exercises I am grouping together as they are the first stretches of your entire system that you get in the Mat repertoire. The Roll Up gives you a top-to-toe stretch of the entire back of the body, The Roll Over gives the opposite – a toe-to-top stretch of the very same thing. The Single Leg Circles is my favorite 'stomach exercise in disguise' exercise and I believe it is a stretch of the entire system again now one side at a time...in any case, it's not really about your leg. We are a human! Not just a leg.

After all these initial stretches of our system – and hang on, cause they're gonna happen for a while, we are only 4 exercises in and still climbing in our intensity – we get something nice:

### 3. Rolling Like a Ball

A nice massage of all the stuff we just stretched out. Now back to work.

### 4. Single Leg Pull and Double Leg Pull

These are the 2 exercises in the famed "Series of 5" that come from Joe Pilates. Romana added the other 3 (to which Jay Grimes says: "Because they're good") in my understanding because she saw too many poochy bellies and Romana did not like poochy bellies.

And they *are* good. They never disappoint.

Single Leg Pull and Double Leg Pull are in my opinion 'wind-relieving' exercises to help to stimulate digestion and ultimately rid the body of toxins. They are a great strengthener of the entire trunk and the deep breaths of the Double Leg Pull again lead to a stretch and a wringing out of the entire system: stretch out and lengthen, and then fold up completely. Just what we need to be doing.

TMI?

## 5. Spine Stretch Forward

We now return to the stretching out of the entire system in a seated position, lengthening in both a Rounded and Tall position. I know, don't forget about the Tall. It's not easy to sit up tall. We are preparing for another massage of the entire system which will come next and take Roll Like a Ball to a whole new level.

## 6. The Rocker with Open Legs

A more challenging massage – if you can get it – requiring even more length along the entire back of the body. Oh and some balance and control aspects upping the ante as well.

## 7. The Corkscrew and The Saw

These 2 exercises I combine as they are the same exercise for both the lower and upper body. Stretching the back of the body in a new way, along the sides and with rotation. In a sense I feel that every exercise up to and including the Saw is warming up, stretching out and preparing the back of the body for the next 3 extension exercises. Soon the back must fight to keep it's length and integrity while it's made to do some hard work.

## 8. The Swan Dive, Single Leg Kicks and Double Leg Kicks

Now we have arrived at the extension exercises – a lot of tough work for the back – but now it's all ready to go, thanks to the previous 11-14 exercises. The Swan Dive is a big full move to get the juices flowing, followed by the Single Leg Kicks and Double Leg Kicks which aid in the stretching of the front of the lower body – and furthermore strengthen the buttocks and hamstrings for the tasks ahead.

## 9. Thigh Stretch

This is the first 'task ahead' for which you strengthened the buttocks and entire lower body in the previous 3 exercises. Thigh Stretch is a hard exercise to do well and the name pretty much says it all.

## 10. The Neck Pull

Now we return to where we started with the Roll Up, but some rules have changed: Legs apart and arms all tied up behind the head. I see the Neck Pull as a counter stretch after the extension exercises as well as a test of the stability of the lower body which was strengthened with the Single and Double Leg Kicks and Thigh Stretch.

## 11. High Scissors, High Bicycle and Shoulder Bridge

An advancement of the extension exercises, these 3 exercises build upon what was started with the Single and Double Leg Kicks. Now the front of the entire body gets a stretch, but it's gonna cost you. Try not to topple over. Aren't you glad you got in all that strengthening of the upper stomach earlier in the workout?

The use of the seat and the back of the lower body will also be a help in the exercises that follow.

## 12. Spine Twist and Jackknife

These 2 exercises prepare the sides of the body and the entire back line of the body for the challenge of the Side Kick Series. In the Spine Twist the back is striving to stay tall in a seated position, nearly as hard a feat as staying 'tall' and not getting lounge-y when you lie on your side for the Side Kicks.

The Jackknife warms up the entire lower body system in a straightforward way before you get to do it one side at a time in the Side Kick Series. Can you connect your lower body into the trunk? Great!

Now can you do it one side at a time?

## 13. Side Kick Series

*No sexy on the Beach!*

*~Romana Kryzanowska*

Time for some multitasking! You must control one side as an anchor while you control the other side as it moves in various patterns. So much to keep track of. Ready? Switch!

## 14. The Teaser and the Hip Twist (Hip Circles)

Lower Body? Check.

Remember way back at the top of the workout from the Roll up to the Spine Stretch and Rocker with Open Legs when we lengthened the Upper Body primarily? Good.

Let's put it together with the lower body skills you learned in all the exercises thus far.

It's the Teaser and it's most infamous variation, The Hip Twist (Hip Circles). Basically these 2 exercises are a lengthening and stretching of the entire system, including a challenging spin at the end. Another shot at multitasking and a concept prevalent (relentless) throughout the Pilates system: Something anchoring combined with something else moving.

Not the first or last time this is gonna cross our paths, why aren't we used to it by now?

#### 15. **Swimming**

And now we bend the other way...oh and let's do it one side at a time while we're at it, cause we've been here before, right?

#### 16. **Leg Pull and Leg Pull Front**

We've done our stretches of the front of the body before we get to this exercise, but now there's a little more at stake. Gone is the luxury of lying down, and my God, we still have to work each side separately.

Joe Pilates, have you no mercy??!

#### 17. **Side Kicks Kneeling**

Evidently the answer to our plea is a big fat **NO** in the form of the Side Kicks Kneeling.

JP could not be reached for comment. Frownie face...

So we had our fun lying down in the Side Kick Series for some sexy on the beach...well evidently there is more to be had now that we'll be doing the same work of the lower body AGAIN and we have to hold ourselves up while we do it. *Gaaawwwwd, FINE!*

#### 18. **The Side Bend**

As much as I personally struggle with this exercise, it is a nice big stretch like a cat. Joe Pilates' version of a treat after all that precedes it. A big wringing out of the sides that you just trashed in the Side Kicks Kneeling. And some time to breathe and collect yourselves for the big finish.

#### 19. **Boomerang, Seal, Crab**

Initially I did not learn these exercises in this order. So 3 rolling exercises in a row was news to me. But I have come to adore it and I'm gonna tell you why. Pilates builds integrity in motion and 3 rolling exercises in a row really puts that to the test. Each of the 3 has their own rhythm and shape to the body. In the midst of tackling these exercises you can clearly see when you are a rolling stone and when you're not. By the time you get to The Crab you can challenge yourself to be a solid rolling machine.

#### 20. **The Rocking**

The ultimate in front-of-the-body stretching and why not take a cue from the previous rolling exercises and rock around on the front of you for a while? You'll need all that strength of the back and buttocks for the next exercises anyway.

## 21. Control Balance

Is it not the ultimate goal? Control. And what do you have when you are in control? Balance. I think of this exercise as an extremely challenging lower body exercise. You are working against gravity, your greatest foe in the workout, and odds are in its favor. Reminiscent of The Hundred, Double Leg Pull (of course) and the Jackknife amongst others, this exercise is clearly all those exercises put together and more.

## 22. The Push Ups

I am sure Joe Pilates did not invent the Push Up, but at the end of the workout it is a perfect example of stretch and strength and control. You must roll down and place your hands onto the mat in front of your feet, you must take 4 precise steps out with your hands to your push up position and you must lower and lift the entire weight of your body several times.

Oh, and then you've got to walk back in, hands to feet, roll yourself up and do it all over again.

**Stretch+Strength+Control.**

*You can say what Pilates is in 3 words: stretch with strength and control. And the control part is the most important because that makes you use your mind.*

~Romana Kryzanowska