

PSIA Level 3: Clinic for Ski Instructors – Pole Usage

Instructors in a skiing clinic

A week ago, I gave a clinic for other instructors here (as we do on Saturday mornings) and I felt like doing that clinic was my start to PSIA Level 3. The topic was pole usage for short radius turns. I got a bunch of ski instructors to attend by announcing that this will help them ski tougher runs out West and that did the trick – they came!

Here's the structure of my lesson – let me know what you think:

INTRODUCTION: We're ski instructors or intermediate skiers who want to have some fun on big mountain runs where we will most likely run into bumps. By using our poles, we can keep our center of mass moving downhill while making shorter turns and creating a rhythm in the process. We'll start on flatter terrain, then move to blue runs and then a narrower black run to finish.

STATIC: I explained pole usage and we walked the S-line down a slope just in our boots. When touching a pole on the snow, imagine that your elbow is connected with your hip, pulling it in the direction your arm goes. The pole touch should be downhill between 2 and 3 o'clock so that it helps move your center of mass down the slope. We placed a pole in the snow and then shuffled around it, tipping our feet, mimicking how our skis will be on edge.

We had a slope coming down from a lift that wasn't being used, which was perfect and also safe since there was no traffic.

FIRST EXERCISE: We got back into our skis and then did one downhill turn on a shallow slope with a pole touch. I did a demo, of course.

SECOND EXERCISE: We then did the same thing but we did two downhill turns. I did a demo here, too.

THIRD EXERCISE: Next, I had them ski toward me and past me once at a time (looking uphill, watching for traffic) and I had them stop at the top of some blue terrain. I was able to watch them and give them feedback. One person was moving their arms too much, another didn't get the pole in the snow and two of them were doing hockey stops ("Z-turns") so I suggested they move more progressively instead of suddenly to help them round out their turns.

I had another instructor there who was doing these turns well, so I had someone having a problem ski right behind them as we went down.

FOURTH EXERCISE: We took this down the blue terrain where we had more slope. Their focus was on the feedback I gave them. We then met back at the top.

FIFTH EXERCISE: I asked them what they thought so far and if this was helping them move downhill. I then shared how I feel using poles to turn helps me. What I feel is like I'm using the poles to crawl down the hill as I ski. I then walked in my boots forward using the poles to help me crawl (a standing crawl). Some of them were throwing in hockey stops because of fear – something our beginning students feel but we also feel when the slope increases. If they were feeling that, they should practice this on green and blue terrain some more and make sure they do progressive turns.

We then skied up to some more narrow, black terrain. We hardly ever do clinics on this run, so it was pretty fun to be there as a group.

I had them ski to the bottom of the run. I, again, had someone having trouble ski behind the instructor that was doing these turns near perfectly. I gave them a place to stop and I came down last so I could see everyone's skiing.

WRAP UP: I gave everyone some feedback. It was tough finding something for the guy who was a better skier than I something to work on but I encouraged him to strive to make perfect "Ss" in the snow, like you see in ski magazines.

We only had about 40 minutes to work but getting 2 runs in while keeping things moving worked out fine. We ended on black terrain, which I think is good. Also, everyone had a focus and something to work on as they worked on using poles in their own skiing. We didn't have any bumps or moguls to use but going to that narrow run was the closest we could probably get to what they might experience with big mountain skiing.

If we would have had bumps to use, I would have explained more about the different ways to ski a bump using our poles.