Planning Guidelines for Constant, Variable, or Random Practice

Type of Practice	Definition	Examples	Most Effective For or When …	Not Recommended For or When …
Constant Practice	❑ A practice sequence in which the same tasks or movements are repeated under the same conditions from one repetition to another	❑ Serving a ball 10 times at the same speed, from the same spot, to the same target	❑ The athlete is in the initiation or acquisition stage of skill development ❑ Massed practice is an effective method	❑ The athlete is beyond the initiation or acquisition stages of skill development, in particular, for discrete or open skills
Variable Practice	❑ A practice sequence in which the same tasks or movements are repeated but where one aspect of the execution is changed from one repetition to another	❑ Serving a ball 10 times, but varying **one** of the following each time: speed, distance, velocity, target	❑ The athlete is in the consolidation stage of skill development ❑ Massed practice is an effective method ❑ Distinct skills or movements are performed during the same practice	❑ The athlete is in the initiation stage of skill development
Random Practice*	❑ A practice schedule in which various discrete or serial skills that are required for performance in the sport are practised in random order, and where the learner does not practise the same task on two consecutive attempts	❑ Passing, then hitting then serving, then diving ❑ Practicing non-repeating types of attacks- line, cross, line, sharp-cross, off the block, line… etc.	❑ Serial skills that are already acquired ❑ Skills that are both discrete and open ❑ The athlete is in the consolidation stage of skill development, or is beyond this stage ❑ When distinct skills or movements are scheduled to be performed during the same practice	❑ The athlete is in the initiation or acquisition stage of skill development

* There is strong evidence that random practice, while sometimes associated with inferior performance in the short term, results in superior performance in the long term. In other words, when constant practice is used to learn a skill or task, the performance during the session is often better compared to random practice, but the latter promotes better skill retention and overall performance in the long run. This suggests that random practice may be a very effective approach for both discrete and serial skills, as well as for open skills. The reasons for this may be that random practice causes athletes to forget short-term solutions to the task at hand; this could engage them actively in the learning process, by eliminating automatic repetitions.