Footwork

Designing a Program

- Drill three to five times **daily** if at all possible. This may seem excessive, but the more you drill, the better the results.
- Whenever possible drill while “fresh”, yet warm. Warm, relaxed muscles perform better, and drilling while still “fresh” helps with proper technique.
- Total drill time should be about 15 minutes per drill, depending on the drill and your skill level. More is ok in moderation.
- Allow sufficient rest between drills so that quality is maintained. **Learn proper technique**, and speed will follow in time.

Important notes when executing footwork drills

- Drill as fast as you **Can**, not as fast as you **Can’t**. Quick execution of improper technique only leads to learning bad footwork, quickly. **Focus on proper technique. Speed will come with practice. This cannot be stressed enough.**
- Stay on the balls of your feet.
- Develop and stick to a rhythm / metric when drilling. Especially true of the ladder drills.
- Ladder drills specifically:
  - Do not rush! Speed will come. If you try to rush through the drill, you’ll likely fall, or at least make an error. Again: as fast as you **Can**, not as fast as you **Can’t**. If you find you’re making lots of mistakes, **slow down**.
  - Bring your knees high. Lift each knee as high as your hip-bone with each step. This helps to slow the pace, keeps the feet well above the rungs, improves running posture, and promotes better technique and faster overall leg speed. Leaning back helps. Don’t “drag” your feel across the ladder at any time.
  - Stay on the balls of your feet. When using a proper agility ladder, if your heels touch the rungs of the ladder, you need to stay “on your toes” more.
  - Keep to a rhythm / metric when running ladder drills. Many participants find it helpful to give a numeric or named “pattern” to some of the drills, and then repeat that pattern to themselves when running the drill. When having difficulty, try saying the pattern out loud. “Left, Left, Right, Right”, etc. It can help significantly. The saying goes: “Your feet have ears.”
  - Touching the rungs or the ladder constitutes an error, and should be noted.
  - When drilling a single ladder with others, wait until the person before you is at least half way through the ladder before beginning. Try not to crowd others. (Adjust as necessary based on the specific drill and the others drilling).
Specific Footwork Drills

- **Jump Rope** – this is the very simplest thing you can do to help improve your footwork (and incidentally – your coordination as well). Jump rope every day you possibly can. When it becomes boring (and it will), change things up. Jump backwards. Try walking jump rope (jumping while walking forward slowly), then walking backwards, then double-jumps, crossing the rope, etc. Just get to jumping. This needs to be done regularly to see results. Jumping rope once every few weeks isn’t going to help, it must be consistent. It will take months of this before any appreciable change takes place, and the change will be gradual.
  - You can find a quality rope at most sporting good stores.
    - Any rope will do n a pinch, but a good jump rope will work better for you in all cases.
    - Common rope lengths range from 8 to 10 feet. Most ropes that you find on store shelves will be 9 feet. A 9-foot rope will be long enough for most athletes who are 6 feet tall or shorter. Athletes over 6 feet tall may require a 10-foot rope.
    - Jumping surface: If possible, jump rope on an absorbent, but smooth, surface. Gym mat, outdoor track, tennis court, even a wood floor is better than concrete or the like. Avoid grass as it drags upon the rope and slows things down. There are a number of more comprehensive resources on jumping rope online.
  
- **Carioca step/ Grape-vine / sidesteps** – Whatever you wish to call it, it’s a drill of moving sideways by crossing your steps at a constant speed. Moving laterally, the left foot crosses in front of your right, your right foot steps right, your left then crosses behind your right, then your right steps to the right, and it continues in repetition. (This drill will be demonstrated and practiced in the Footwork class).

- **Ladder Drills** – See the section on Ladder Drills for diagrams and specifics.

- **5-Dot Drill** – The 5-Dot drill is a somewhat complicated footwork drill that is quite difficult to describe via text alone. Please see the accompanying 5-dot drill section for a more helpful diagram.
  - As you improve in your execution of the drill, focus on staying on the balls of your feet, and placing only that part of your foot on / within each circle.
  - Do not get sloppy. As people get faster with this drill there is a tendency to start placing the feet in a warped 5-dot pattern. Focus on proper foot placement. Like all drills – speed comes with time and practice.
1. Straight Run
- Run through the ladder alternating feet in each square as numbered.

2. Two foot run
- Run through the ladder one square at a time, placing both feet into each square before proceeding to the next. (Not simultaneously, but with alternating steps).
- Make sure the leading foot is changed with each repetition. I.e. lead with he left and when repeating the drill lead with the right.
- Don't let your body get ahead of your feet.

3. Lateral run
- Stand sideways to the ladder and run through each rung laterally, placing both feet in each square. Lead with the corresponding “forward” foot. (Note the sequence below)
- Alternate the direction with each repetition. I.e. move laterally right the first time, then left the next.
- Keep square and do not cross the feet over
4. Outside the Box alternating
- Start with two feet in the first square, and then run the ladder by placing each foot outside the ladder in sequence. You will be straddling the ladder at this point.
- Then place both feet, in sequence, back inside the next square. Continue until you’ve completed the ladder.

This is generally as far as the Footwork class is able to progress in the time allotted at SKBC. However, there are countless ladder drills one can find online, in existing publications, and even develop on your own. Feel free to try and make a few of your own drills.

Having an actual ladder is certainly the best way to drill. But if that just isn’t an option a low-cost alternative is to use field-paint to spray a makeshift ladder pattern on the ground somewhere. Obviously this has its limitations, but it better than nothing.

That said – I strongly recommend either purchasing an agility ladder of your own (you can easily find them online at Amazon.com for example), or building one. If you’re going to build your own ladder, I strongly recommend using something like thick walled pvc pipe for the rungs themselves, so as to provide a raised surface that you can feel when using the ladder for agility & footwork training. This provides a raised surface to make contact with, yet strong so it won’t easily break when it is stomped on (and I assure you - it will be stomped on during regular use). At the same time, you may want to avoid circular rungs, as they could roll when stepped upon, and that’s not going to lead to anything good (not for the person running the ladder, at any rate). The choice is yours to make.

The ladder used at SKBC is a total of 14 feet long, and the rungs are spaced 15 inches apart. The ladder is 15 inches wide, making the squares uniform in width and length. Ladders can be purchased / made to any length desired, and even linked for drilling purposes.
5-Dot Drill

1. Begin by envisioning the pips on the number 5 face of a 6-sided die. Draw 5 circles on the ground (using field-paint, chalk, marking the dirt, whatever) in the same layout as the 5 pips. The encompassing square should be no wider than shoulder width on each face. Now number them (in your head) 1 through 5 as indicated in the diagram.

2. Place your feet on circles 1 and 2 as indicated. Keep your shoulders parallel to the line created by circles 1 and 4.

3. Move your left foot to number 3, always keeping your shoulders parallel to the 1-4 line. This typically feels slightly uncomfortable. Keep your knees bent.

4. Now move your right foot to the number 5 circle. Again – shoulders parallel, knees bent.
5. Move your left foot to circle 4.

6. Right foot to circle 3.

7. Now left foot to 2.

8. And the right returns to circle number 1, thus completing the cycle.

Repeat this pattern several more times. As with other drills - slow and steady. Focus on placing your feet squarely in the correct circles while keeping your knees bent and your shoulders parallel to the 1-4 line at all times. After completing at least a dozen repetitions of this drill, reverse direction. Start in the same 1, 2 circles, but reverse the flow - right to 3, left to 4, right to 5, and so on. *Technique is more important than speed!*