

THE GYMNASTICS XCEL PROGRAM EXPLAINED

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The Xcel Program is a national USA Gymnastics program of gymnastics levels that runs alongside the Junior Olympic (JO) program. The Xcel program is a completely separate, alternate program. I was talking to a gymnastics mom last week that wanted my help deciding whether her gymnast should compete in the Xcel program or switch to a gym that would have her compete in the traditional JO program. There are advantages and disadvantages to both programs, and some gyms choose to compete in it, while others don't.



Some gyms see the Xcel program as an avenue for their less serious gymnasts to compete. Other gyms supplement their JO program with the Xcel program. While even other gyms focus on the Xcel program to produce well-rounded gymnasts, and then mobilize them through the compulsory levels.

This mom was confused about why her current gym would want her daughter to compete in the Xcel program. After talking to her, I realized that it can be confusing why USA Gymnastics created the Xcel program, but there are some definite advantages to it, along with some considerations.

WHAT IS THE XCEL PROGRAM?

The Xcel Program was created as a national program in 2013; some states had a similar program known as the Prep Optional program. However, the national Xcel program has more levels and spans a much greater level of ability than most states' Prep Optional program. You can start competing at a lower skill level in the Xcel program, than you could previously.

There are five divisions in the Xcel program: **Bronze**, **Silver**, **Gold**, **Platinum** and **Diamond**. All of the Xcel divisions have optional rules. You can read more about [the difference between optional and compulsory](#) here, but basically optional rules mean that there are only 4-5 routine requirements and each gymnast can have her routine choreographed for her personality and individual strengths and weaknesses. Whereas, in compulsory levels the routine is already choreographed and every gymnast must perform the routine exactly the same. Because of that the judging can be more strict and produce lower scores than what the gymnast may have in Xcel. With higher scores your gymnast may feel better and be more motivated to stick with the sport.

In the Junior Olympic program the first Optional level is **level 6**, which is comparable in skill level to the hardest division in the Xcel program, the **Diamond** division. So without the Xcel program a gymnast could be involved in the sport for years, without ever getting to compete an individual, customized routine.

THE XCEL PROGRAM WAS BORN

The Xcel program was created as a way to keep gymnasts involved and excited about the sport. If you think about most other sports, like for example soccer, as soon as kids join the sport they almost immediately start competing in games and tournaments. With gymnastics it wasn't this way. Kids would join gymnastics and have to take classes for several years before they were invited to join a team program. The Xcel program allows gymnasts to start competing almost right away, by lowering the skill requirements for the entry levels. However, the Xcel program doesn't just have basic entry levels. It also has more advanced levels that allow gymnasts to keep competing in the Xcel program as they learn more skills, but without the same pressure as competing in the JO program. The Xcel program is ideal for not only entry-level gymnasts, but also older gymnasts that are looking for a fun way to stay in shape and be involved in the sport. And since high school gymnastics programs sometimes use similar rules as Xcel it can be a way to prepare gymnasts to try out for a high school gymnastics team.

The Xcel program is also for gymnasts that compete in the compulsory Jr. Olympic levels and would like to compete in an optional program during their "off" season. Compulsory meets are often in the fall, and there are usually some Xcel meets in the optional spring season.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of the Xcel Program.

ADVANTAGES

- **Gymnasts get to have fun competing sooner.** Gymnasts get to have fun competing with the Xcel program as soon as they join an Xcel team. They don't have to wait to be invited to a JO team.
- **Gymnasts compete individual, personalized routines.** Most athletes would rather compete routines that are customized to their age, strengths, taste, and personality. Is it more fun to do a floor routine to stuffy, instrumental music like in the compulsory program, or cute, fun music the gymnast has picked out? For example, an older gymnast could use a current hit song (without lyrics of course) as her floor music.
- **The Xcel Program can be less of a time commitment.** The compulsory program can be unforgiving, with it's routines that require gymnasts to learn an exact set of skills regardless of their strengths. Gymnasts can spend less time in the gym but still be able to learn skills that allow them to compete.
- **Gymnasts are not required to compete all four events.** With the Xcel program gymnasts are not required to compete all of the events. Gymnasts can specialize in one or two events and choose to not compete the others.
- **Entry fees are capped at Xcel meets to make it more affordable.**

DISADVANTAGES

- **There is no direct mobility from Xcel levels into the Jr Olympic Levels.** Even if a gymnast has competed all the way through Diamond in the Xcel divisions, which would be similar to a **level 7**, in order to compete at level 7 she must pass out of levels 4 (the lowest required competitive level), 5 and 6. She can just compete in one meet at each level to **mobilize**, as long as she earns a minimum mobility score.
- **The Xcel Program doesn't emphasize progressions the same way that the compulsory routines in the Jr Olympic program do.** The JO compulsory program was created the way it was partly because it's a system that has been proven to create great gymnasts. If your goal is to **obtain a college scholarship**,

then the compulsory program is probably the best way to learn the proper progressions and discipline you need.

XCEL GYMNASTICS SKILL REQUIREMENTS:

I've linked to the Xcel Gymnastics Skill Requirements for each Xcel level below. You can also check out [GymnasticsHQ's Skill Progression Checklists](#) for Xcel Bronze & Silver, and Xcel Gold, Platinum and Diamond.

[Xcel Bronze Requirements](#)

[Xcel Silver Requirements](#)

[Xcel Gold Requirements](#)

[Xcel Platinum Requirements](#)

[Xcel Diamond Requirements](#)

Each gym and coach uses the Xcel program in their own way, and the program offers the flexibility to do so. Hopefully this information about the Xcel program can help you decide whether it is the right program for your gymnast.