PHASE LANDMARKS FOR CHANGING A PLAYER'S SHOT

KNOWING WHEN TO PROGRESS

A framework that helps coaches decide when to move to more challenging practice as a player learns a new shooting habit. It answers one question: how stable is the new pattern, and when can training shift from coordination work to adaptability work?

INTRODUCTION

Changing a player's shot happens in steps. Push to game-like practice too soon and the old habit takes back over; stay in simple drills too long and the new habit never learns to adapt. This framework lays out four phases, what to look for in each, and the signs a player is ready to move on.

Three ideas guide those decisions. First, a new habit is **stable** when it shows up reliably, bounces back after a mistake, holds under pressure and fatigue, and is still there after time off. Second, while the shot is changing, **judge the movement first, but keep the ball going in**: a rep counts as a success if the new movement happened. Early on, simplify so makes stay high and the player sees the ball go in; as the habit stabilizes, makes should settle at game-like percentages for the shot. Third, players learn best when practice is **challenging, but doable**, with the new pattern showing up on roughly 80–85% of reps. If it's easier than that, add challenge; if it's harder, take some away.

PHASES AND LANDMARKS

PHASE	FOCUS	CHALLENGE POINT	MOVE ON WHEN
1 DESTABILIZE & EXPLORE Old pattern still dominates	Weaken the old pattern and find the new one. Low constraints: close range, no time pressure, lots of reps.	PATTERN SUCCESS **~60–70% at first** Simplify until it climbs toward 80–85%, and keep makes high.	◆ New pattern produced on demand in simple conditions ◆ Variability in the key feature visibly shrinking
2 EMERGING PATTERN Reliable but fragile	Make the pattern reproducible. Add small disruptions: distance, catch, spot on the floor.	PATTERN SUCCESS **~85%** Above ~90%? Add a small disruption.	◆ Holds through small disruptions ◆ Returns within 1–2 reps after a slip ◆ Still there after 24–48 h off
3 STABILIZE UNDER LOAD Testing robustness	Add stress: fatigue, quicker trigger, closeouts, a second task like calling a number or reading a cue.	PATTERN SUCCESS **~85% under load** Adjust the amount of load to stay near this zone.	GATE TO ADAPTABILITY ◆ No meaningful slide back to the old pattern under load ◆ Happens without conscious attention
4 ADAPTABILITY Mechanics flex, accuracy holds	Varied, game-like shooting. Some variation in mechanics is now a good sign.	MAKE SUCCESS **vs. own baseline** At game-realistic difficulty, not a flat 85%.	◆ Carries over to new shot types and contexts ◆ Variation serves the outcome

CAVEATS

Progress isn't linear. Regressions are normal, especially when a brand-new pattern must be built (the bifurcation route). Rising variability there can signal a coming transition.

Thresholds are judgment calls. Research supports the markers, not the percentages. Refine them from your own player data.

Phases overlap. Some adaptability work can appear early, but gate decisions follow the landmarks.

KEY SOURCES

Guadagnoli & Lee (2004) · Challenge point
Wilson et al. (2019) · The 85% rule
Kostrubiec, Zanone, Fuchs & Kelso (2012)
Zanone & Kelso (1992) · Attractor layout
Carson & Collins (2011) · Five-A model