

How to Run a 4X100 Relay

The 4 x 100 relay, also called the 400-meter relay, is a sprint relay with four runners. Each runner runs approximately 100 meters before handing off a baton to the next runner. Before running the 4 x 100 relay, make sure that you and your teammates are experienced with sprint running and have practiced the baton exchange. This will help you to decide the order of your team, and ensure that you run your best race possible!

Part
1

Choosing Runner Order



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- 1 Place your best starter first.** The ideal first runner has an explosive takeoff and never gets disqualified for false starts. This position also requires fast running around the bend of the oval track.^[1]



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- 2 Choose the second runner.** The second runner should perfect their baton handling skills, as the second leg involves both receiving and passing the baton. This is a straight leg, so this is a good spot for a fast sprinter who is not really good at bends/curves.^[2]
 - This is a great spot for your fastest runner if they are much faster than the other three.^[3] This is especially true if your fastest runner is also great at baton handoffs.



3 Pick a good bend runner for the third leg. In general, shorter runners are best around curves because they can accelerate faster than taller runners. This position also benefits from good baton handoff skills, and from the ability to compete under the pressure.^[4]

- Although unorthodox, it could be smart to put your fastest runner here if they are also good on bends. A 200m specialist could do well on this leg.^[5]



4 End with an eager finisher. Many teams place their fastest runner last, perhaps so they can claim the glory! In fact, psychology may be more important than raw speed. This runner cannot get discouraged if they start the fourth leg behind the other teams. Choose a competitor who thrives under end of race pressure.^[6]

- If your two fastest runners are much faster than the other two, place them second and fourth. This allows you to maximize the distance they run.^[7]
- At high levels of competition, choose a runner with advanced finishing techniques.^[8] This includes "lifting," a running form with light ground contact and rapid knee lifts, and lunging, a carefully timed forward fall so the chest crosses the finish line sooner.^{[9][10]}

Part
2

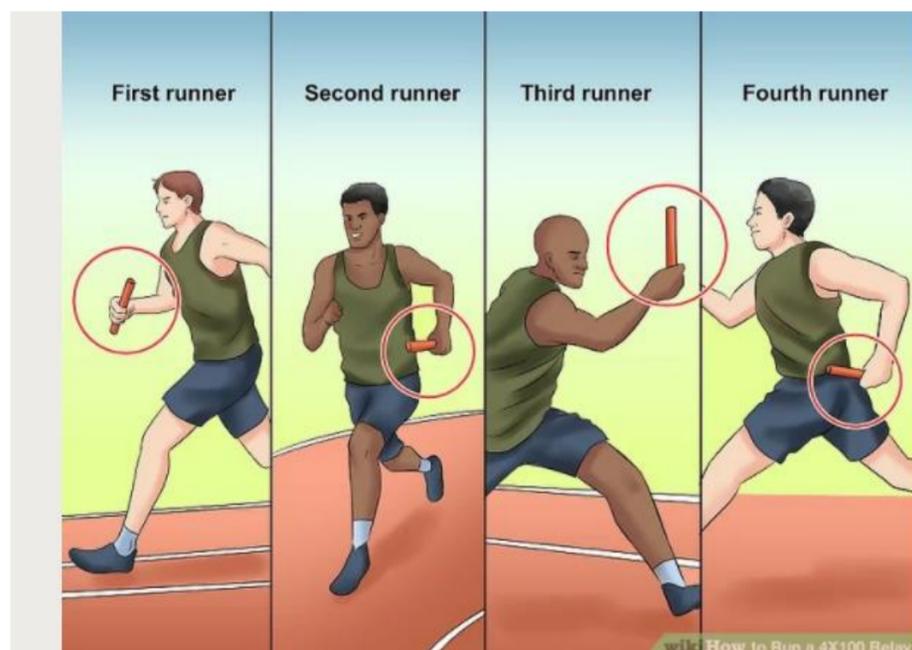
Practicing the Relay



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1 Pick the baton exchange method. There are generally three methods of passing the baton: the upsweep, the down sweep, and the push pass. Try all three and see which your teammates prefer.^[12]

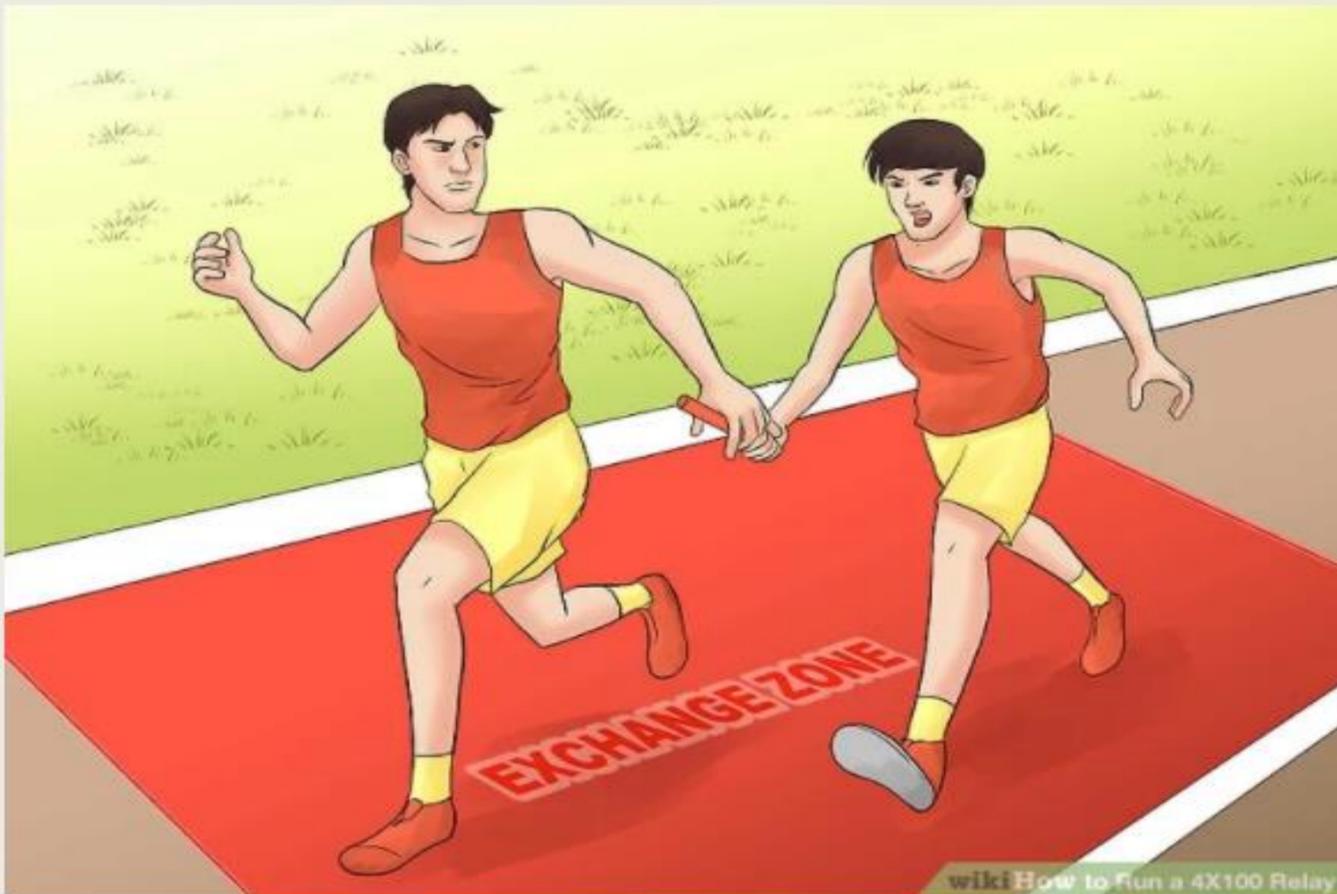
- Upsweep: the outgoing runner runs with their hand behind them at hip level, palm down and thumb outstretched to form a V shape. The incoming runner inserts the baton upward between the thumb and fingers.
- Downsweep: similar to the upsweep, but the outgoing runner's hand is palm up and receives the baton in a downward motion.
- Push pass: the outgoing runner holds their arm high up behind them, with the palm sideways and the thumb pointing down. The incoming runner holds the baton vertically and pushes it into the palm.



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2 Stay on the correct side of the lane. When all goes well, the relay race is a smooth series of transfers, with no awkward jerks across the lane or switching from an athlete's left hand to the right. Practice this pattern until all four runners find it automatic.^[13]

- First runner holds baton in right hand and runs on the inside edge of the lane.
- Second runner holds baton in left hand and stays on the outside.
- Third runner holds baton in right hand and stays on the inside.
- Fourth runner holds baton in left hand and receives on the outside.



3 Decide where to relay the baton. Each baton handoff must occur inside a 20-meter changeover zone, between two yellow marks. The outgoing runner can start running up to 10 meters ahead of the changeover zone, but can only receive the baton within the zone. Use tactics as well as trial and error to find an exchange position that maximizes speed and smooth handoffs:

- Ideally, you can exchange the baton about 5 meters from the end of the zone.^[14] This gives the outgoing runner more time to accelerate before receiving.^[15]
- If the athletes have trouble with a quick handoff, or if they get nervous and slow down while waiting, exchange the baton just past the middle of the zone.^[16]
- If one athlete is significantly faster than the others, they can receive earlier in the zone, carrying the baton for more than 100 meters.



4 Keep running after you release the baton. A huge mistake in relay racing is to slow down before you release the baton. The best way to prevent this is to form the habit of "running through the zone." Keep up a full sprint until you're about halfway through the next leg.^[17] If both runners have positioned themselves well (on opposite sides of the lane), the incoming runner should be able to run close behind without fearing a collision.

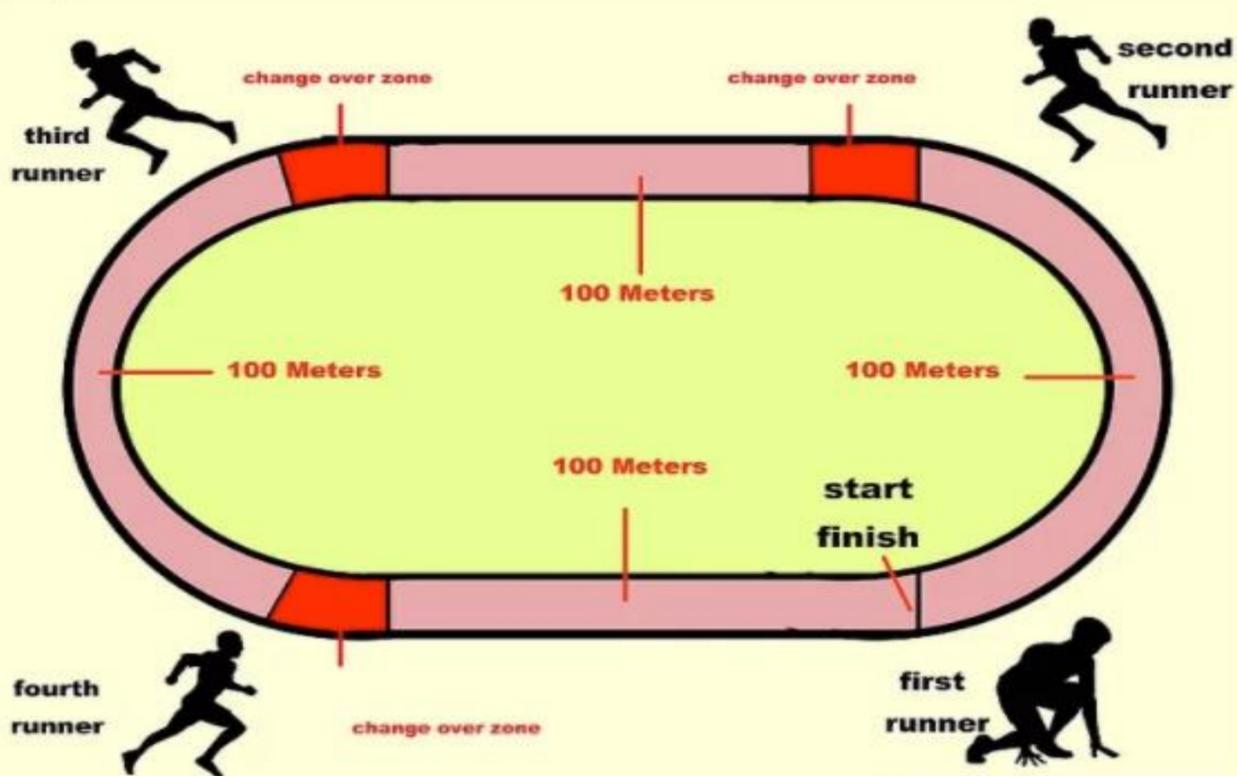


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- 5** Do speed drills. The 4x100 is all about speed. To prepare for the race, do drills such as hill sprints, suicides, and sprinting around cones to work on your agility and speed. Hill sprints are especially good for improving acceleration.^[18]

Part
3

Running the Race



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- 1** Position each runner. After doing warm ups, make sure that every runner is in position. The first runner should be positioned on the starting blocks, holding the baton in his or her right hand.^[20]
- The second runner should be positioned at the acceleration zone 10 meters before the first exchange zone. Each exchange zone is marked on most tracks by large, usually red, triangles. There should be a smaller triangle that marks the acceleration zone, which is where the second runner should be positioned.
 - The third runner should be at the second acceleration zone before the exchange zone, and the fourth runner should be at the last acceleration zone.



2 **start at the whistle.** As soon as the whistle is blown, the first runner should start sprinting. Make sure that they lean in and accelerate through the bend in the track. They will run slightly more than 100 meters to the first exchange zone.

- Make sure that the runner runs on the inside of their lane, on the left-hand side, so that they can pass the baton to the next runner's left hand.



3 **Do the first baton exchange.** The first runner, with the baton in their right hand, will approach the exchange zone. The second runner should have their head turned, watching the incoming runner. When the incoming runner is about 7 meters from the outgoing runner, the outgoing runner should turn their head back and start running with their hand out. The first runner will hand the baton over to the second runner, who will take the baton in their left hand if the first runner hold it at his/her right hand.^[21]

- Make sure that the baton exchange happens within the exchange zone because your team will be disqualified if it happens before or after the zone.



4 Do the second baton exchange. The second runner will run a straight leg of the track for another 100 meters. Make sure they are running on the right side of their lane. Meanwhile, the third runner will start running as soon as the second runner approaches the exchange zone. The second runner will pass the baton from his or her left hand into the right hand of the third runner.

- Again, be sure that the baton exchange happens within the exchange zone.



5 Do the final exchange. The third runner will run around the bend on the track, the baton in their right hand. As they approach the last exchange zone, the fourth runner will start running with their hand out, and the incoming runner will put the baton in their left hand, making sure the exchange happens within the exchange zone.^[22]



Bibliography

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