



## **GRIPPING THE BASEBALL- Don't underestimate the importance of your fingers!**

As you start to advance in baseball, it's important to know how to hold the ball to make your pitches and your throws the most effective and consistent. It's also important to hold the ball correctly to protect the joints in your arm. So grab a ball and let's get to work---

### **Your Bread and Butter- THE FOUR-SEAM FASTBALL**

The four-seam fastball is THE most important grip for you. It makes for the highest velocity, straightest, most-predictable throws. You should get in the habit of throwing a four-seam when playing catch and with virtually every play on the field. Practice rolling the ball in your hand, feeling the seams, and getting it into the proper four seam alignment without looking at it (use a GOOD ball with tall seams).

#### **How to Grip and Throw a Four Seam Fastball**



To grip the four seam fastball, place your index and middle fingertips directly on the perpendicular seam of the baseball. The "horseshoe seam" should face into your ring finger of your throwing hand (as shown in the picture on the left). I call it the horseshoe seam simply because the seam itself looks like the shape of a horseshoe.

Next, place your thumb directly beneath the baseball, resting on the smooth leather (as shown in the picture on the right). Ideally, you should rest your thumb in the center of the horseshoe seam on the bottom part of the baseball.

Grip this pitch softly, like an egg, in your fingertips. There should be a "gap" or space between the ball and your palm (as shown in the middle picture). This is the key to throwing a good, hard four-seam fastball with maximal backspin and velocity: A loose grip minimizes "friction" between your hand and the baseball. The less friction, of course, the quicker the baseball can leave your hand.

Right-handed pitchers have best success throwing the four-seam "away"—outside—for right handed hitters.

### **A Little Movement to Shake Things Up- THE TWO-SEAM STBALL**

The next grip for the pitchers on the team or for those of you that want to learn to pitch is the Two-Seam Fastball. A two seam fastball, much like a sinker or cutter (cut fastball), is gripped slightly tighter and deeper in the throwing-hand than the four-seam fastball. This pitch generally is thought of as a "movement pitch" (as opposed to the four-seam fastball, which is primarily thought of as a "straight pitch").

## How to Grip and Throw a Two-Seam Fastball



When throwing a two-seam fastball, your index and middle fingers are placed directly on top of the narrow seams of the baseball (as shown in the picture on the left). Next, place your thumb directly on the bottom side of the baseball and on the smooth leather in between the narrow seams (as shown in the picture on the right).

Again, a two seamer is gripped a little firmer than the four seamer. A firm grip causes friction, which causes the baseball to change direction, usually "backing up" - or running in - to the throwing hand side of the plate. It also slightly reduces the speed of the pitch, which is why most two-seamers register about 1 to 3 mph slower than four-seam fastballs.

You're all right handers, so unlike the four-seam which righties tend to throw "away" from right-handed hitters, you will likely favor throwing the two-seam fastball to the inside on right handed hitters.

## The Only Other Tool You Need in Your Box- THE CHANGEUP

The changeup- the dreaded "off-speed" pitch that gets hitters lunging out of their cleats, is a great pitch once a hitter finds and times your fastball. A young player's changeup might be 10mph slower than the four-seam fastball. Even 5 or 6 mph is enough to disconnect the hitter's eyes from his brain, once they've seen the fastball.

There are different varieties of changeup grips- some better suited for small hands, others for big; some suited for high-velocity arms, others for more subdued arms. The only way you can figure out what works for you and what you're comfortable with is to try and to practice!

A three-finger changeup is a good off-speed pitch for younger baseball pitchers.

## How to Grip and Throw a Three Finger Changeup



To throw an effective three-finger changeup, center your ring, middle, and index fingers on top of the baseball (as shown in the third picture at right). Your thumb and pinky finger should be placed on the smooth leather directly underneath the baseball (as shown in the middle picture).

A lot of pitchers like to "touch" their pinky and thumb when gripping this pitch (as shown in the middle picture). It helps to develop a good "feel" for the pitch, which is important since the changeup is a finesse pitch.

OK, now that you've got your grip, hold the baseball deep in the palm of your hand to maximize friction and to "de-centralize" the force of the baseball when the pitch is released. This helps take speed off of the pitch. **Throw it like you would a fastball: Same mechanics. Same arm speed. Same everything.**

One way to develop "fastball mechanics" but changeup speed is to practice throwing your changeup as you long toss (throwing beyond 90 feet). Alternate fastballs and changeups at 90-or-more feet for about 20 throws a couple of times a week.

### How to Grip and Throw a Circle Changeup



If your hand is large enough, you can try the circle changeup. To throw a circle change, make - quite literally - a circle or an "OK" gesture with your throwing hand (using your thumb and index fingers). You then center the baseball between your three other fingers (as shown in the middle picture above right). The baseball should be tucked comfortably against the circle.

Throw this pitch with the same arm speed and body mechanics as a fastball, only slightly turn the ball over by throwing the circle to the target. This is called pronating your hand (Think about this as giving someone standing directly in front of you a "thumbs down" sign with your throwing hand.) This reduces speed and gives you that nice, fading movement to your throwing-arm side of the plate.

A great way to develop the "fastball mechanics" but changeup speed is to practice throwing your changeup as you long toss (throwing beyond 90 feet). Alternate fastballs and changeups at 90-or-more feet for about 20 throws a couple of times a week.

### Play but don't pay the price: THE SLIDER

A slider is the third fastest pitch in baseball. It's important for pitchers, parents and coaches to learn a proper slider grip and to learn correct throwing technique of a slider to ensure and promote arm-health. Ted Williams once said that a slider was "the best pitch in baseball."

The slider IS NOT A BEGINNER PITCH! You shouldn't even experiment with it until you have mastered the three pitches above- the four-seam fastball, two-seam fastball and the changeup. Very much like a curve ball, this pitch can hurt you and can absolutely ruin a young arm, SO BE CAREFUL WITH IT!

### How to Grip and Throw a Slider



A slider is gripped like a two-seam fastball, but held slightly off-center. Place the long seam of the ball in between the index- and middle-fingers, and put your thumb on the opposite seam underneath the baseball. Some baseball pitchers may find it more helpful to place their index finger along the seam of the baseball since the index finger is the one from which the slider is thrown.

The key with the slider is to hold the ball slightly off-center (on the outer third of the baseball). Remember to slightly cock your wrist, but don't stiffen it; that way, you can still get good wrist-snap upon release. If your wrist is slightly cocked to the throwing hand's thumb side, your wrist-snap will enable you to have the pitch come off of the thumb-side of your index finger, which, in turn, promotes good spin on the ball.

When thrown, try to manipulate the pitch to come off of the thumb-side of your index finger – NOT your index- and middle-fingers, as with a two-seam fastball – because a two-finger release will cause the pitch to balance out, which reduces the spin that you are looking for. Most good slider pitchers grip the outer-third of the baseball and cock their wrist slightly, but not stiffly, to their throwing hand's thumb-side upon release of the pitch. This enables a pitcher to apply pressure to the outer-half of the ball with the index finger. ***Avoid any twisting of the wrist upon release.*** The movement on this pitch comes from the baseball spinning off of the index finger from the outside of the baseball – NOT from twisting your hand underneath the ball.

The rest is simple. This pitch should work for itself.