

## What are compulsory figures?

The USFS structure of Compulsory Figures is based on variations of performing the basic figure 8 that evolved from skaters performing free form combinations of circles and turns on outdoor natural ice.

Figures require the skater to skate a round circle on a clean edge on the both the right and left foot. The skater would perform three tracings on each foot without the assistance of any marks on a clean sheet of ice.

There are four basic circles to learn: forward and backward edges on both inside and outside edges. Figures are skated on circles roughly three times the height of the skaters or 12 to 15 feet in diameter except for the group of figures called loops which are skated on smaller circles, slightly smaller than the height of the skater.

The structure of the figure tests was based on introducing new skills and modifications of old skills with new features. For example, learning to put a perfectly placed and executed turn at the top of each circle with the turn on the long axis and performed without changes or flats. Performing a circle with a double set of three turns on one foot increased the skills required.

A serpentine pattern (three-lobed figure) required the skater to change edge on one foot. Single and double three turns were added to the serpentine. Besides three turns, loop, bracket, rocker and counter turns were incorporated as the skater progressed through the test structure.

The most difficult figures include the paragraph figures that were skated on two circles with on one foot with one push, then take another push and retrace the figure on the other foot.

Adding various turns to the paragraph circles subsequently increased the difficulty and strength necessary to perform and closely trace the figures.

When the skaters finished each figure, the judges came out on the ice and closely examined the tracings to see if the circles are perfectly round, the turns are properly placed, if there were sub-curves, wobbles, or flats anywhere on the figure or other faults like scraping the turns, performing them on the wrong edges or making their shape too deep or too shallow or pointed off axis.

Figures require body control and strength to learn to achieve test quality. Extra practice and perseverance was required to master figures to compete at a level that allowed the skater to qualify for the free skating round.

Skaters used to practice their figures every day before they free skated. Figure practice is called "patch" because each skater was assigned his or her own patch of ice on the rink to skate on.

Compulsory figures used to be worth 60% of the score in figure skating. In 1968 figures were progressively devalued and finally eliminated completely from international competition after the 1990 season.

In the US, figures competitions were held as separate events between 1991 and 1999, but those, too, have now been phased out as few skaters take the time to learn figures any more and it is hard to find rinks that offer patch sessions.

The MITF were intended to provide skaters with the skills that they previously had acquired skating figures, but at a lower cost to practice, conduct tests, and host competitions.