

# YOGA TRACK

## Using Blocks

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### Context

One of the characterising features of Iyengar yoga is the use of props. Blocks are used quite often and this handout should act as a reminder or clarification of their correct use.

### Reasons for Using Blocks

There are several modes in which blocks can be used (these principles apply to most props):

- **access/alignment/creating space** – if a pose is not possible (or possible only by dropping/compressing) without props, often adding in a block to decrease reaching distances allows access to the pose. Consider utthita parsvakonasana for example – if the top chest and hip crest tend to roll down towards the floor, a block under the bottom hand can help create lift and space in the trunk, freeing it up to revolve upwards and come into correct alignment.
- **support** – blocks can provide support, particularly in the more quiet, supine poses (so-called “passive” poses). For example, supporting the sacrum in setu bandha sarvangasana or the upper spine in paryankasana.
- **biofeedback** – often in yoga it is difficult to “feel” the pose, or at least, a particular focal aspect of it. Lifting the inner knees in adho mukha svanasana is a good example (at least, it is for me!). In this case, a block placed between the knees in dog pose helps to bring more awareness to the region. It also serves as a basic biofeedback mechanism - I may not notice my inner knee dropping dog pose, but I can certainly tell when the block is dropping. Try it with a wooden block for extra motivation...

### How to Use Blocks

The practice of yoga entails a constant shift and adjustment according to where your body or indeed, mind, may be at a given moment ie: being present. Blocks can be used to create a support in one of three positions (height, length or breadth). Blocks may also be stacked to adjust their height in various configurations. When stacking blocks (for example, if you need a breadth and height set up in ustrasana) be sure to use safe configurations ie: the broader base at the bottom, the block on the tall side on top.

Just like a floor or wall, don't simply rest on the block(s) in active poses like standing poses, but use the hand to press the block, creating both an anchor point and a resistance out of which to lengthen. The more you lift away from the block in such poses, the more stable the block becomes. In the supine poses, allow the body to be heavy on the blocks.

## **Example Setups**