

# On your marks...

the start of a (sprint) race at the ancient and modern Olympic Games

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Target group:** Ages 12 and upwards

**Equipment**

- Images of sprint starts today and in Ancient Greece (reconstruction)
- Information sheet on races at the ancient Games
- If you can, get hold of some starting blocks (optional)

**Activity leaders:** 1 or 2

## Description

What are the similarities and differences between the starting position of a runner in the ancient Olympic Games and one today? Can you copy the athletes' positions?

## Preparation (activity leader)

- Print or photocopy the attached images.
- If you want to know more about the ancient Olympic Games, read the "Olympic Games in Antiquity" text from the document set (download here: [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/FR/fr\\_report\\_658.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/FR/fr_report_658.pdf))

## Instructions

- Ask the group if and why the starting position for a 200m (position, reaction time) is important (*open discussion*).
- Quickly introduce the Olympic Games of Antiquity (*see information sheet*) and explain that, among the various competitions of the time, there were also sprint races (including a 192m-sprint – equivalent to the length of a stadium).
- Ask if the participants think that the athletes' positions at the start of a race at the time were similar to those of today (discussion). Show the images and identify the similarities and differences.
- Ask the participants to copy the positions (Antiquity & today). Who is the best imitator in the group?
- Organise a real race with the two starting positions (with or without starting blocks for modern races), so that the children can directly "test" the different positions.

## Annex: information sheet

### Sprint races at the Ancient Olympic Games

- Like today, the ancient Olympic Games comprised a wide variety of athletics events, such as long-distance running races, a race in armour and a pentathlon made up of a stadium race, a long jump, a discus throw, javelin throw and a wrestling event.
- All races were held in the Olympic Stadium.
- There were several types of race:
  - The *stade* or *stadion* covered one length of the stadium, roughly 192 m.
  - The *dioulos* two lengths, or a double stadium.
  - The *dolichos* was a long-distance race (from 7 to 24 laps).
  - The race in armour (in Olympia it was a *dioulos*), where the athletes wore a helmet and greaves, and carried a shield.
- The competitors took their place on a starting line marked out by white limestone slabs.
- Their position was standing, feet together, knees slightly bent and arms extended in front of them.
- A barrier was lowered to signal the start. The race was run in a straight line.
- For the longer races, the runners ran around a marker or post at each end of the stadium.
- The athletes always trained and competed naked – indeed, they had to reflect the ideal of a harmonious balance between the body and mind.



Starting position of a race from Antiquity (reconstruction)

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## Sprinting at the Modern Olympic Games

- Modern athletics is made up of a variety of races, jumps, throws, walks and combined events.
- Athletics was on the programme of the Games of the I Olympiad in Athens in 1896 and has featured on the programme ever since.
- The short and medium distance running races (up to 10,000m) are held in the stadium.
- For the start of the 100m, 200m and 400m races, the athlete is in a crouching position. He pushes off from a starting block, a piece of adjustable equipment made up of two blocks for the feet.



Modern Games – race starting position (sprint)

Carline Muir (Canada), Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, Athletics, women's 400m