Name: _____ Date: _____

How Gymnastics Is Scored

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 908 words

One night in August 2024, in Paris, Simone Biles, an American gymnast, ran down a runway. She hit a springboard and flipped twice in the air with her legs straight. She won the Olympic all-around that night. Through 2023 she had won 30 World Championships medals, more than anyone else. This book follows that night. It shows how judges turn what an athlete does into a score.

The all-around is four events in a row. Women do the vault, the uneven bars, the balance beam and the floor. The beam is about four inches wide and four feet off the ground. Each event gets its own score. The four scores are added up, and the highest total wins.

Every score has two parts. The first part is how hard the moves are. One group of judges counts each move and gives it a value. The second part is how well she does them. Another group of judges decides that. The two parts are added together. That sum is the score for the event.

Each move has a letter from A to J. An A move is worth 0.1 of a point. Every letter after that adds 0.1 more, so a J move is worth a full point. On the bars, beam and floor, the judges start with the eight hardest moves. A vault is simpler. The whole vault has one fixed value.

The second part starts at 10. For each mistake, the judges deduct points. Bent knees lose points. So does a landing with the feet apart. Small mistakes cost a tenth of a point. Bigger ones cost three or five tenths. Judges compare each try with a perfect one, and only a perfect one keeps all ten points.

A fall is the biggest mistake. If a gymnast falls to her knees or hips, or falls onto the apparatus, the judges take a full point. If she only grabs the beam to steady herself, it costs half a point. One fall can cost as much as ten small mistakes.

Here is the rule book's own example. The first part of the score is 5.700. The second part is 8.666. Add them, and the total is 14.366. This is a worked example, not a real event. Scores are shown to three places after the point, so even a tiny gap shows up.

In Paris, Biles began on the vault with the Yurchenko double pike. She runs, does a round-off onto the springboard, and flips onto the table with her hands. Then she pushes into the air, folds at the hips with straight legs, and flips twice before she lands. This vault has the highest fixed value in the women's rule book: 6.4.

That vault gave her an early lead of 0.666 of a point over Rebeca Andrade of Brazil. Then came the uneven bars. Biles let go of the high bar too late. She veered through the air and bent her legs. She still caught the low bar, so she did not fall. But the judges took a big

deduction, and she dropped to third place.

Next was the balance beam. Biles scored 14.566, and the sport's governing body called it arguably the routine of the night. That put her back in front. Her last event was the floor. She scored 15.066, the top floor mark of the night. Floor is done to music, and the judges look at how the dance fits it.

Her total for the four events was 59.131. Rebeca Andrade finished second, 1.199 points behind. That is more than a whole point in a sport where many contests are settled by tenths. It was Biles's second Olympic all-around title. Her first had come eight years earlier, in Rio de Janeiro.

Why does Biles usually win by so much? Mostly it is her hard moves. The governing body's report on that night said they all but assured her the title if she made no mistakes. Most athletes in this sport fight over tenths of a point. Her moves are hard enough that she can win by whole points.

Her road to Paris was not smooth. At the Tokyo Games, held in 2021, she planned a vault with two and a half twists in the team final. In the air she lost track of where she was and finished only one and a half. "I had no idea where I was in the air," she said. Gymnasts call this the twisties.

She left the team final to stay safe, and she skipped four more finals. But she came back for the balance beam and won a bronze medal. That was her seventh Olympic medal. By the end of the Paris Games she had eleven, seven of them gold.

A move can carry an athlete's name. A gymnast must first do a new move at an official international meet, and the committee must rate it at least C. As of July 2024, Biles had five moves named for her: two vaults, two on the floor and a beam dismount. Only Nellie Kim, with seven, had more in the women's rule book.

As of October 2026, Biles was not competing. On October 24, 2026, she made a surprise visit to the World Championships in Rotterdam. The governing body wrote that she had not said whether she will return. Whether she competes again is not known. If she does, you now know how to read the number on the screen.

Questions

1. What number does the second part of a score start from?

A. 0
B. 10
C. 5

2. Why did Biles drop to third place after the uneven bars even though she did not fall?

A. She missed the low bar
B. The judges gave her a low difficulty score
C. Her late release cost a big deduction

3. In the sentence 'For each mistake, the judges deduct points,' what does deduct mean?

A. Take away
B. Add on
C. Count aloud

4. How is the score for one event made?

A. The judges choose the better of two numbers
B. The two parts are added together
C. The second part is doubled

5. Why can one fall hurt a score more than a few small mistakes?

A. Small mistakes are not counted
B. The judges stop the event at a fall
C. A fall costs a full point, as much as ten small mistakes

Words to know

springboard: jumping board
dismount: last move
deduct: take away
apparatus: the equipment
veered: swerved

Answer key: How Gymnastics Is Scored

1. B. 10
2. C. Her late release cost a big deduction
3. A. Take away
4. B. The two parts are added together
5. C. A fall costs a full point, as much as ten small mistakes