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Escape from the Rock age-group winner (Alcatraz, 2007)



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Before getting into open water, learn basic swimming skills.

- Relaxation – work with the water
- Posture – shape and align your body
- Breathing – controlled
- Whole-body swimming
- Flow – even, economical stroking

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Check Your Technique



If you swim like the **before** clips...
Get some help and start swimming like the **after** clips!

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Elements of Efficient Freestyle



- Relaxation
- Posture
- Breathing
- Whole-body stroking
- Flow

These are iron-distance swimmers, swimming at iron-distance pace.

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Safety Considerations

- Never swim alone
- Use a high visibility cap (white or yellow)
- Never dive without knowing the depth
- Know the bottom conditions
 - Good rule of thumb: Don't put your foot down if you cannot see what you are stepping on.
- Water quality
- Surf and current conditions
- Water temperature (50-50-50 rule)

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Wetsuits

- You need one to be:
 - Warmer
 - Faster
- Selection (try several)
 - Styles: Full, Farmer John or Jane, Shorty
 - Sizing: you will need to breathe; you will need flexibility around shoulders



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Wetsuit Use Tips

- Practice and become comfortable with your wetsuit(s)
- Use a lubricant to avoid chafing
 - Keep it off hands if wearing rings
 - Do not use Vaseline (dissolves glue)
(Avoid catastrophic wetsuit failure!)
 - Caution on using vegetable oil (PAM)
(How to grow things on the inside of your wetsuit...)

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Goggles



- Bring two pair
- Larger models provide more warmth in cold open water
- Tinted usually best for outdoors
- Use clear for late-in-the-day outdoor swims or pre-dawn iron-distance starts
- Will fog more readily in cold water
- Defogging tip
Drops from dive shop or Baby Shampoo

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Caps

80% of body heat loss is from the head

- Lycra – no warmth
- Latex – a little warmth
- Silicone – better warmth
- Neoprene – lots of warmth, maybe too warm for some conditions
- Double up when cold



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Caps to Avoid

Avoid caps with flowers, foliage or fruit.



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Neoprene Gloves & Socks

- Improve comfort while training
- Extend training season
- Cannot race with anything on hands or feet
- Select models that fit snugly and will not scoop water



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Know the Course

- Distance of each leg, how to sight
- Type of start – mass or waves
- Water temperature
- Sea conditions: surf, swell, chop, current (seaweed, jelly fish, etc.)
- Swim once before the race
- Ask paddlers about conditions

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Open Water Warm-Up

- Especially important in cold water or for short course races if you will be swimming hard
- Short, easy jog to elevate heart rate
 - Do this before or after putting on wetsuit
 - Reduces shock effect of cold water
- Easy 5-minute swim to:
 - Get a feel for water conditions
 - Collect thoughts and get relaxed
 - Get stroke into a groove
- Avoid warming up too early: At a race, if there is a long wait before your wave starts, you may get cold.

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Starting

Where to start: Middle? Side? Front? Back?



Mark Allen's advice for Iron distance starts:
"Swim the first 400 yards slower than you ever thought possible."

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Starting Skills

- Ankeling
- Dolphining
- Running Dives

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Ankeling



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Even a sandy bottom may not be soft...



Running Dive



In the US, there are 800 spinal cord injuries caused by swimming dives annually.

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Dolphining

- Series of dives until it is too deep
- Push off bottom, dive forward
- Looks cool at the pool, but in most events you will not get to do more than one or two of these, and the dangers outweigh the benefits.
- See pool clip...

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Dolphining



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Starting: One last thing...



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Starting: One last thing...



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Surf Entries

- Know what the bottom is like.
- Be aware that some waves break on sandbars – you may go from knee deep to ankle deep where the waves are breaking.
- In deeper water, dive or duck under the waves.

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Diving through Breaking Waves



Water is heavy! Pierce the wave on entry.
Duck under oncoming breaking wave when swimming.

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Sighting – Why it's Important



On a .90 mi course, this "good" swimmer swam 1.02 mi.
or about 180 yards extra (about 7 lengths in a 25-yard pool)

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Sighting Frequency

- Sight frequently while learning what frequency is right for you.
- Then KEEP sighting a little more frequently than that!
- Practice sighting in the pool.
- Practice sighting in open water.

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Sighting Technique

- Forward sighting is best.
- Disrupt balance and momentum as little as possible.
- Like breathing – sighting should disrupt your stroke as little as possible.
- Look-back sighting useful on long swim legs or in strong currents
- Practice sighting in the pool.
- Practice sighting in open water.

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Non-Sighting Strategies

- Go with the pack
 - Try to keep as many bodies to your left as to your right
- Draft a faster swimmer
 - Let that swimmer do the sighting for you

Caution when using these strategies:
You may be led off course. You still need to sight for yourself once in a while.

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Forward Sighting



- KNOW what you are looking for.
- Lift eyes just enough to see target.
- Adjust course if necessary and get head down.

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Look-Back Sighting



Look back towards feet, or roll over completely for a longer look (do one stroke of "backstroke").

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Sighting – Know which way you veer...



Close your eyes and swim a length in the pool...

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Sighting Practice in the Pool



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Drafting

- Legal in triathlon swim leg
- Practice with a friend
- Some people resent
- Best candidate is an experienced swimmer slightly faster than you
- Finding a person to draft in a multiple-wave-start event can be tricky

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Drafting – Who Uses It?



The better the swimmer, the better the drafting skills. This is the pro start at Kona.

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Drafting Positions

- On toes of leader – best draft effect
- At hip (your head at leader's hip)
- Between two swimmers
- Practice in the pool...

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Drafting Practice in Pool



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Alternative Drafting Strategy: Don't Draft!

This is the advice of Alex Kostich, U.S. Open Water Swimming Champion. Search for his article on Active.com.

- Discomfort factor
- Hinders technique
- Visibility problems
- False sense of speed

In shorter races or multiple-wave-start races, it may be best not to draft.

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Turns

- Turn close to the buoy (go wide if you are uncomfortable with crowds – turns are a bottleneck)
- Rolling 90-degree turn
- Do not sight too often approaching the turn
- Practice in the pool, and practice in open water...

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Turn Video Clip



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Deal with Race Conditions

- Adverse winds
- Currents
- Aggressive swimmers
- Nausea or sea sickness
- Debris, seaweed & creatures (jellyfish)
- Stay in control of your emotions
- Stay in control of your race

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Panic?

- Happens even to some experienced swimmers
- Can be triggered by cold, adrenaline, unexpected bump, etc.
- Roll onto back
- Practice deep breathing, focusing on exhaling (we tend not to exhale)
- Better to take a minute and restart when you are more relaxed.

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Finishing

- Don't get too excited and work too hard.
- Know beach conditions at exit.
- If not kicking, wake up your legs during the last 100 yards.
- Don't stand and run in deep water.
- Swim until your hand hits bottom.
- Flex hands if fingers numb.



- Body surf if you can ...



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Exiting the Water

- **Before** removing goggles and cap, get started on wetsuit removal. (You will need your hands.)
- Balance problems? Ear plugs help some. Neoprene cap helps others. (Balance is an inner-ear thing.)
- Most importantly: **SMILE!** This is where most pictures get taken...



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Transition #1

- Be calm & in control. It's easy not to be!
- Take positives with you.
- Leave negatives in the water.
- Don't focus on what went wrong in the swim. (There will be of time for that later!)
- Practice! Even pros sometimes make mistakes in transitions.
- Be aware of post-swim hypothermia.

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Practice often in open water,
in all (reasonable) conditions

Be prepared for:

- Adverse winds
- Currents
- Discomforts (nausea or sea sickness)
- Debris, seaweed & creatures (jellyfish)

Work out in the open water, varying

- Duration
- Intensity
- Intervals

Do not just swim the same distance, at the same speed every day.

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Jump in and have fun!



Any questions?

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