

Fundamentals of Posture, Kicking and Breathing

Before Getting Wet

Program Introduction: Efficient freestyle is a complex, whole-body movement art. It requires movement patterns that are very unnatural for land-based, vertical creatures like us. It is easiest to learn these movement patterns in small steps. Most work will be done in the water, but you can speed the process by performing many exercises out of the water. During the program we will be cycling through progressions of drills for all aspects of the stroke. When drilling, ignore all of the swimmers around you and focus all of your attention on the task at hand.

Swimming Posture: Belly in, neck long, head neutral on spine with eyes straight ahead. Try this standing up. Realize that you will need to maintain this posture all the time you are swimming.

Rug Kicking and Ankle Stretching: Perform these drills on land, on a warm, comfortable surface. Remove your shoes.

- **Rug Kicking Backstroke:** Lie on your back. Assume good swimming posture: belly in, neck long, eyes straight up. Perform a compact flutter kick. Keep your knees straight, but not locked – they will flex very slightly while kicking in the water. Kick from the tops of your thighs and hips. Point your toes away, but keep your feet loose on your ankles. Maintain the kick for as long as possible. Rest and repeat.
- **Rug Kicking Freestyle:** On your belly. Support your head with your forearms or hands – however it is comfortable so that you are not driving your nose into the floor! Assume good swimming posture: belly in, neck long, eyes straight down. Perform a compact flutter kick. Maintain the kick for as long as possible. Rest and repeat.
- **Ankle Stretching:** Do not force this stretch too quickly. If it hurts, ease off. Eventually you will be able to sit on your heels. Kneel on the floor with the tops of your feet flat on the floor. Sit back gently and hold the stretch for 30 seconds to one minute. Repeat.

In the Pool

Initial Video: Optionally, each swimmer will be filmed underwater from the side. At the end of the lesson the coach will provide a brief assessment of each swimmer's stroke.

Float Your Boat!

- **Bottom Float:** Exhale all of your breath. Sink to the bottom and relax. Delay standing and returning to a standing position for as long as possible. Try to quiet your body's natural instincts to flee the water. Trust your ability to get out comfortably.
- **Dead Man's Float:** Take a deep breath and hold it. Float face down, arms and legs dangling in the water. Release all tension, everywhere.
- **Front Balance:** Take a deep breath and hold it. From a dead man's float, extend your arms forward just below the surface, lean on your chest, and allow your legs and feet to rise to the surface. Initially you may need to support your feet using a noodle, pull-buoy, or a friend! Relax and work on this exercise until no support is needed.

Kicking Drills

These drills are performed in the pool. You can use fins, but do not kick hard – the emphasis is on good posture and a compact kick. Begin every length with good swimming posture: belly in, neck tall, eyes straight ahead.

- **Back Balance:** Press back and head into the water keeping head neutral on the spine (do not tilt chin up in the air or down toward the chest); water at edges of goggles, chin and forehead; shoulders relaxed – release shoulder blades and lean “between” them. Kick gently (from the hips) for one length. Count your kicks in 3s – the first of each three

kicks is just a little harder than the other two. (More on this later.) Thighs and feet should roil the surface. Stop and collect your thoughts at the end of each length. Begin every length with good swimming posture.

- **Back Rotation:** Start as above. While keeping head rock-solid still – always facing the ceiling, rotate the torso as far as possible onto one side. Swim several kicks, then rotate completely onto the other side. Your belly button should go wall-to-wall.
- **Vertical Kicking:** Optional – This drill can be done in a pool with a deep end only. This is both a kicking *and a posture* drill. Stay tall! In the deep end of the pool, with your body vertical in the water, arms crossed over chest, kick from the hips with as little knee bend as possible. Keep your head out of the water – eyes forward, head neutral on the spine. Do not drop the back of your head into the water. Keep the kick small and breathe deeply and comfortably.

Breathing: Begin exhaling through your nose immediately as your face goes into the water. Keep your breathing pattern as relaxed and regular as possible for the speed you are swimming. Use “Bobs” between lengths to rest, and to practice maintaining a steady breathing pattern. To do a Bob: Hold the wall, take a breath, dip your head below the surface (still holding the wall), and exhale evenly while relaxing every muscle in your body. Repeat three or more times to recover and relax between lengths.

Note: *Bobs* are named for their originator Bob Busby, former U.S. Olympic coach, who used this breathing/relaxation method with all of his athletes (beginners or Olympians).

Sample Practice Session Following Lesson 1

At Home: Practice rug kicking and ankle stretching once or twice a day, for five minutes.

At the Pool: As often as possible, go to the pool and work through the following once or twice:

- **Bottom Float:** Relax on the bottom – get your body *and your mind* into the water.
- **Vertical Kicking or Back Balance:** Five minutes: Vertical kicking if your pool has a deep end, otherwise back balance. For vertical kicking, each minute kick for 30 seconds and rest for 30 seconds. For back balance, rest 30 seconds at each wall. Regardless, perform bobs when resting.
- **Front Float:** Five minutes. Take a deep breath and hold, and extend to Front Float position. At first, use a foam noodle to support your feet. Once the front float becomes comfortable, challenge your balance by moving arms apart and back together, then legs apart and back together. Try to relax every muscle in your body that you are not using to balance in the front float position.
- **Back Balance:** Five minutes. Rest for several breaths at the end of each length.
- **Back Rotation:** Five minutes. Rest for several breaths at the end of each length.

Lesson Plans Online

Lesson plans are available online from the following webpage:

<http://www.breakwatersportstraining.com/handouts.html>