

Supplements

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Plan Your Workouts

Learn to structure your practice sessions.

Have a Plan: Know what you are going to do before getting into the water. If you don't have a plan, you have no way to evaluate your progress, no map to follow. Ideally, you should write out a complete plan before going to the pool. It should contain warm-up, main set, and cool-down segments as described below. In addition, relaxation and loosening up at the start, and stretching at the end, should be part of every workout – you will not need to write those components down.

In the real world, you may not always have time to write out a workout. When that happens, get in the water with a single technique focus in mind, and stick with it for the duration of your swim. For example, you might decide that today you are going to focus on keeping your head down – swim every length with that focus – don't worry about any of the other stuff.

Loosen Up: Before getting into the pool, loosen up and lubricate your joints one at a time by moving your ankles, knees, hips, torso, shoulders, and hands in small circles. I do not recommend stretching cold muscles – that can cause injury.

Relax: Put all of your non-swimming problems in the locker, then close it and lock it. They will still be there when you are done. (Or maybe not!) Relax by lying face-down on the bottom of the pool or by balancing (kicking gently if necessary) at the surface. Let go of all of the stress of the day and become completely involved in your swimming practice.

Warm Up: Start slowly, become calm, establish a normal breathing pattern. Work on getting relaxed and loose. Start with long, slow strokes. Continually lengthen your stroke or do whatever helps you to feel that you are gradually getting your whole body involved in the stroke. Allow at least five minutes for this.

Main Sets: Use a variety of drills and swimming sets. Try to have a single technique focus for the main sets, regardless of drills and swimming you include in this segment. Note that all technique focus points will not be appropriate for all drills. When planning the main sets, be sure to leave at least ten minutes for cooling down and stretching at the end of your workout.

Very Important Note: Spend at least half of your time doing drills. You know what you need to work on – focus on one drill until you feel it is mastered. Keep cycling through all of the drills you have learned, beginning with the drills in the first lesson. Each time you work on a drill you will begin to understand it at a deeper level. All of the drills you have worked on in this program are used by elite swimmers, not just by newer swimmers.

Cool Down: Swim slowly – flush out the lactic acid. Do not skimp on this part of the workout. Try taking a stroke off your stroke count on successive laps. Swim quietly. Swim compactly.

Stretch: Out of the pool. Stretch all of your major muscle groups, using the following guidelines: No extreme or painful movements. No bouncing or sudden movements. On each stretch, apply gentle pressure and then ease off. Repeat each stretch at least three times, stretching a little further each time.

Take Notes: What worked or didn't work? Maybe sketch out the next workout while this one is fresh in your mind.

Pool Tools

Pool tools can provide assistance in one area, allowing you to focus more intensely on other aspects of stroke technique. Breakwater Sports does not sell the recommended tools, and receives no consideration for promoting them. We use these tools because in our experience virtually all swimmers who use them progress at a much faster rate than swimmers who do not use them.

Fins will teach you to kick stronger, better, sooner. Also, when working on technique, fins allow you to focus on almost any aspect of the stroke without having to worry about stalling. For example, the body dolphin (for butterfly) or side balance (for freestyle) can be very difficult to master if you can't provide adequate propulsion.

For freestyle and backstroke, we recommend short fins, for example **BLUE (not red) Zoomers** from Finis (top, right), or Zura Alpha fins (not shown), which float and keep your feet near the surface. For butterfly you should use longer fins (like those illustrated below, right). If you want to learn all strokes, and only want to invest in one pair of fins, go for the longer ones. If you will only be doing freestyle, go for the shorter ones.

Several odd-looking fins have been made for breaststroke, but currently none are recommended.

Do not use scuba or snorkeling fins, which are too long and heavy to use with the standard strokes.



A **front-mount snorkel** removes breathing as an issue when mastering other essential skills. It allows you to perform virtually all of the basic posture and stroking drills without worrying about how to get that next breath of air. The **Freestyle Snorkel** and the **Swimmer's Snorkel** (both from Finis) are the only front-mount snorkels we have used. For triathletes, other endurance swimmers, and freestyleers, the Freestyle Snorkel is OK, but if you want to do butterfly, you need the more expensive Swimmer's Snorkel, which allows a deeper head position before you start sucking water.



Freestyler Hand Paddles help to learn good hand placement, movement and anchoring. **Never** use paddles to pull really hard – you may yank your shoulders out of their sockets! These paddles from Finis have a nice feature: a skeg that helps to keep your hand moving forward, which can help you to overcome or avoid altogether the slipping and sliding about of the hands that often happens when working on freestyle technique.

OK. I'm balanced in the water. I'm relaxed. My body parts are all moving pretty much the right way, so how come I'm so slow? Well, to quote Duke Ellington, "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing." So put a **Tempo Trainer** from Finis in your hat, and start doing the right things *AT THE RIGHT TIME*. Which is to say, with rhythm. This is basically a waterproof metronome that you put in your cap or under your goggles strap. We also use the Tempo Trainer when running (so don't throw away that clip-on holder).



Test Sets Answer the Question: Are you improving?

Repeat *the same* test set once a month (same prep, same circumstances, etc.)

Example: After a warm-up and a short rest, swim 800 yards at *race pace*, record your time, ending heart rate, SPL, and rating of perceived exertion.

Building to 800 Yards at Cruising Pace

This is a progression done over multiple workouts. It is not your entire workout. You can use this progression as your main set for a series of workouts. Before starting, determine the pace at which you can swim a single lap quickly and efficiently. Note your time for the lap and your stroke count per length. Beginning with Step 1, try to maintain that pace and stroke count for all 16 repeats in the set. Between each repeat you should rest for about 30 seconds or 5 bobs. When you can complete all 16 repeats at the same pace and stroke count, move on to Step 2. The distance for each repeat doubles. Your time should double, and your stroke count should remain the same for each length of the repeat. When you can complete all steps at the same pace and stroke count, lower your pace by one or two seconds (or more if the last step was too easy!), or lower your stroke count by one, and begin over with Step 1.

| Step | Repeat x Distance |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 16 x 50 |
| 2 | 8 x 100 |
| 3 | 4 x 200 |
| 4 | 2 x 400 |
| 5 | 1 x 800 |

Optional Step 6: 1650 Yards

After completing Step 5, try an optional Step 6: 1 x 1650 (33 Laps). See if you can complete all 33 laps at the same pace and stroke count. Why 1650 yards? In swim racing, It's the "mile" event in a SCY (short course yards) pool. Or if you are doing an Olympic-distance triathlon, 1650 yards is about 10 yards more than the 1500-meter swim leg. (But don't slack off on that last 10 yards!).

Regardless of whether you do 800 or 1650 yards, the point is not just to get faster and become more efficient – you should be learning to swim at **your race pace**.

Remember to always select a focus point – it can vary from repeat to repeat, but don't swim any laps without focusing on some aspect of your stroke. This can be a physical focus point (elbow high, head down, etc.) or a conceptual focus point (glide from side to side like a cross-country skier, swim through a small pipe, etc.).

Swimming Pace Table

| Swimming Pace for 25-Yard Pool | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Laps | 1 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 16 | 33 | 36 | 43 | 85 |
| Yards | 50 | 100 | 200 | 400 | 800 | 1650 | 1800 | 2150 | 4250 |
| Time | 1:10 | 2:20 | 4:40 | 9:20 | 18:40 | 38:30 | 42:00 | 50:10 | 1:39:10 |
| | 1:09 | 2:18 | 4:36 | 9:12 | 18:24 | 37:57 | 41:24 | 49:27 | 1:37:45 |
| | 1:08 | 2:16 | 4:32 | 9:04 | 18:08 | 37:24 | 40:48 | 48:44 | 1:36:20 |
| | 1:07 | 2:14 | 4:28 | 8:56 | 17:52 | 36:51 | 40:12 | 48:01 | 1:34:55 |
| | 1:06 | 2:12 | 4:24 | 8:48 | 17:36 | 36:18 | 39:36 | 47:18 | 1:33:30 |
| | 1:05 | 2:10 | 4:20 | 8:40 | 17:20 | 35:45 | 39:00 | 46:35 | 1:32:05 |
| | 1:04 | 2:08 | 4:16 | 8:32 | 17:04 | 35:12 | 38:24 | 45:52 | 1:30:40 |
| | 1:03 | 2:06 | 4:12 | 8:24 | 16:48 | 34:39 | 37:48 | 45:09 | 1:29:15 |
| | 1:02 | 2:04 | 4:08 | 8:16 | 16:32 | 34:06 | 37:12 | 44:26 | 1:27:50 |
| | 1:01 | 2:02 | 4:04 | 8:08 | 16:16 | 33:33 | 36:36 | 43:43 | 1:26:25 |
| | 1:00 | 2:00 | 4:00 | 8:00 | 16:00 | 33:00 | 36:00 | 43:00 | 1:25:00 |
| | :59 | 1:58 | 3:56 | 7:52 | 15:44 | 32:27 | 35:24 | 42:17 | 1:23:35 |
| | :58 | 1:56 | 3:52 | 7:44 | 15:28 | 31:54 | 34:48 | 41:34 | 1:22:10 |
| | :57 | 1:54 | 3:48 | 7:36 | 15:12 | 31:21 | 34:12 | 40:51 | 1:20:45 |
| | :56 | 1:52 | 3:44 | 7:28 | 14:56 | 30:48 | 33:36 | 40:08 | 1:19:20 |
| | :55 | 1:50 | 3:40 | 7:20 | 14:40 | 30:15 | 33:00 | 39:25 | 1:17:55 |
| | :54 | 1:48 | 3:36 | 7:12 | 14:24 | 29:42 | 32:24 | 38:42 | 1:16:30 |
| | :53 | 1:46 | 3:32 | 7:04 | 14:08 | 29:09 | 31:48 | 37:59 | 1:15:05 |
| | :52 | 1:44 | 3:28 | 6:56 | 13:52 | 28:36 | 31:12 | 37:16 | 1:13:40 |
| | :51 | 1:42 | 3:24 | 6:48 | 13:36 | 28:03 | 30:36 | 36:33 | 1:12:15 |
| | :50 | 1:40 | 3:20 | 6:40 | 13:20 | 27:30 | 30:00 | 35:50 | 1:10:50 |
| | :49 | 1:38 | 3:16 | 6:32 | 13:04 | 26:57 | 29:24 | 35:07 | 1:09:25 |
| | :48 | 1:36 | 3:12 | 6:24 | 12:48 | 26:24 | 28:48 | 34:24 | 1:08:00 |
| | :47 | 1:34 | 3:08 | 6:16 | 12:32 | 25:51 | 28:12 | 33:41 | 1:06:35 |
| | :46 | 1:32 | 3:04 | 6:08 | 12:16 | 25:18 | 27:36 | 32:58 | 1:05:10 |
| | :45 | 1:30 | 3:00 | 6:00 | 12:00 | 24:45 | 27:00 | 32:15 | 1:03:45 |
| | :44 | 1:28 | 2:56 | 5:52 | 11:44 | 24:12 | 26:24 | 31:32 | 1:02:20 |
| | :43 | 1:26 | 2:52 | 5:44 | 11:28 | 23:39 | 25:48 | 30:49 | 1:00:55 |
| | :42 | 1:24 | 2:48 | 5:36 | 11:12 | 23:06 | 25:12 | 30:06 | :59:30 |
| | :41 | 1:22 | 2:44 | 5:28 | 10:56 | 22:33 | 24:36 | 29:23 | :58:05 |
| | :40 | 1:20 | 2:40 | 5:20 | 10:40 | 22:00 | 24:00 | 28:40 | :56:40 |
| | :39 | 1:18 | 2:36 | 5:12 | 10:24 | 21:27 | 23:24 | 27:57 | :55:15 |
| | :38 | 1:16 | 2:32 | 5:04 | 10:08 | 20:54 | 22:48 | 27:14 | :53:50 |
| | :37 | 1:14 | 2:28 | 4:56 | 9:52 | 20:21 | 22:12 | 26:31 | :52:25 |
| | :36 | 1:12 | 2:24 | 4:48 | 9:36 | 19:48 | 21:36 | 25:48 | :51:00 |
| | :35 | 1:10 | 2:20 | 4:40 | 9:20 | 19:15 | 21:00 | 25:05 | :49:35 |
| Yards | Approximate Distances for Triathlon Swim Legs | | | | | | | | |
| 400-800 | 1/4 to 1/2 mile - common sprint distances | | | | | | | | |
| 1650 | Olympic distance (1500 meters = 1640.42 yards) | | | | | | | | |
| 2150 | Half Iron Distance (1.2 miles = 2112 yards) | | | | | | | | |
| 4250 | Iron Distance (2.4 miles = 4224 yards) | | | | | | | | |