Flip turn guide

**Brief Introduction**

The goals for this swim clinic are to help participants refine their flip turns or introduce them to the world of flip turns. Participants are expected to be able to meet the prerequisites of the clinic which is to be able to swim at least 50 yards of freestyle with rotary breathing. Flip turns are the gateway to consistent lap swimming where an individual does not need to stop at every wall before progressing with their set. It helps to develop their breath control, lung capacity, and core strength as they need to be quick in order to have a successful turn. For this clinic, I will be walking you through the steps that have worked the best for me when it comes to teaching someone with no prior experience how to do flip turns. For this clinic, it is recommended to begin in the shallow part of the pool where participants can stand; a large area is also preferred as some of the drills that we will be performing will require a lot of space for minimal collisions and to maximize a participants feel for a flip turn. Part I breaks the turn down into steps that can be done in the shallow end, Part II puts it into practice using a wall, and Part III we will be discussing common mistakes, things to look out for, and ways to improve a turn. Additionally, a section dedicated to other strokes and their turns will be included, simply as a resource should participants want to learn a little more.

**Part I – Breaking it down.**

For the first part, we will be breaking down the turn into different steps that will essentially walk someone through the theoretical idea of a flip turn. The steps are a progression; and each step is adding onto the last. For example, you can see that Step 1 has a participant do a flip and then Step 2 adds onto that by bringing in a push off the floor. Step 3 then adds onto that by having an individual start off in a float position before performing Step 1 and 2. Only progress on to the next step when you feel that all the participants fully understand the current step and are comfortable performing it.

1. Breath control. As we will be on our back right after the turn, there’s an extremely likely chance of water getting into our nose. For some, they may not be used to this feeling and will feel discomfort when performing a turn for the first time. To counteract this, we will try and give them some tips to focus on. I like to mention blowing bubbles out of my nose when turning if you’re not used to the feeling. So as you’re going through the motion of turning, blow bubbles out at the same time until you’re back on your front. Practice blowing bubbles out of your nose with participants.
2. Push offs from back to front. This drill focuses on the last part of the turn, during the push off when going from front to back. Have participants start on the wall on their back. As they’re pushing off, have them try to immediately flip onto their front. To do this, they may need to engage their core or use their legs to kick themselves into position. I find underwater dolphin kicks to be extremely useful in this scenario as they provide leverage and power needed to flip from back to front.
3. Somersaults in the water. The first step of turning is being able to do a flip in the water. Have participants stand in the shallow end and try to do a front flip without worrying about how they end up or where they will be going. We will fix the body position later on. The purpose is to get them comfortable with doing a flip as it is an action that they will be performing numerous times during a long swim. Have them start off with a single flip, then progress to doing two flips before stopping. Keep increasing the count until a participant can do numerous flips at once without feeling any sorts of discomfort. It may take a while to get used to it so do note that we should not be forcing participants to do something that they may not feel comfortable doing. Two to three flips at once may be enough for an individual before they begin to feel extremely dizzy and queasy. When performing the flips, ask participants to use their arms and hands to move their body, seeing if they are able to use them to propel the body forward into the flip. This will be useful later on as it will provide us with additional momentum when we go into a turn. If it helps, when performing the flip, try to tuck your head and knees into your chest, curling up into as tight a ball as possible. This makes it easier to move as there is less surface are so less resistance.
4. Adding a push off the floor. This mimics the push off the wall after performing a turn and brings to light how someone should position themselves to maximize the push off. For this step, we want to be able to push off straight in a streamline, trying to jump straight out of the water. To help with the body positioning, see if they are able to jump higher; the straighter their body after completing the turn, the easier and higher they will jump. The only difference between this step and Step 1 is we are adding the push off the floor and not having the participants try multiple flips. Just one flip and one push.
5. Adding on two strokes. This is the first part where we begin incorporating the idea of swimming into a wall and doing a flip turn instead of a touch turn. To perform this, have participants start in a float position, swim two strokes of freestyle, flip and then do the push off in Step 2. When performing this skill, try and have participants use their strokes as a way of increasing their momentum as they progress into the turn. They may find it easier to turn if they have all the drive and power behind them when they flip. Essentially, it should look like you are grabbing the water and pushing it behind you. Keep in mind to use the same body position as discussed in Step 1 where you are tucking yourself into a tight ball. For more experienced swimmers, I like to help them begin thinking about how to best transfer the momentum from the swim, through the turn, and bring it back out for the push off. Add more strokes once comfortable with two strokes.

**Part II – On the wall.**

Now we bring what we have learned and apply it on the wall. For our specific pool, we have the opportunity to practice turns in the shallow end. Do understand that this is a long course turn set up, so the ‘T’ will be 2 meters from the wall instead of 2 yards. There shouldn’t be much of a difference, however, do mention that so participants are aware of the changes when going from a long course turn to a short course turn. Before turning on the wall, understand or make a mental note that a lot of people are going to be afraid of turning on the wall. This is a valid concern and one that should not be taken lightly. I recall my first time learning to turn, I was scared of hitting my head or any parts of my body on the wall, and rightfully so. Therefore, if a participant informs you that they are scared of turning for fear of hitting their heads, reassure them and talk them through the following information: When turning on the wall, I like to use the ‘T’ at the bottom of the pool as a gauging point. Typically, a general rule of thumb is to take two strokes after the ‘T' and then turn; however, I like to use a different method before the trial-and-error stage to find an appropriate number of strokes to take before turning. To begin doing this, first have them swim into the wall, no turning, and count the number of strokes it takes for them to touch the wall. Then take that number of strokes and minus one. That should be the number of strokes that they may need before they should turn. For example, I personally need 2 strokes to touch the wall with my hand counting after the ‘T’, therefore, I’ll use just 1 stroke after the ‘T’ to turn. The whole idea is to find out how many strokes you need to take before turning. There isn’t much of a need to worry about technique or speed or power in this part just yet. We are simply getting everyone comfortable with the idea of turning on a wall. This part of the clinic should take up a sizeable chunk of time as you are helping participants experiment with what works best for them. It will take a lot of trial and error for them to feel comfortable approaching a wall and turning.

To summarize for turns on the wall, three possible methods:

1. Two-stroke rule: two strokes after the T.
2. Minus-one-stroke rule: Count number of strokes needed to touch the wall with a hand and take one away.
3. One arm away from the wall. Stay one arm length away from the wall before turning.

**Part III – Improving the turn.**

The last part of the clinic involves common mistakes or ways to improve the turn by making it more efficient, quick, and so forth. This part should not be the main focus of the clinic, rather as additional information for those who would like to improve their turns further.

Common mistakes.

A common mistake that I have noticed in a lot of people when they turn is that they often go into the wall with power, use the wall as a resting point, taking a few seconds before pushing off. The whole idea of a flip turn is to keep the momentum and speed going throughout the swim. Walls aren’t exactly a resting point, rather a continuation point. We try not to spend too much time on the wall, keeping it between 1-2 seconds in order to conserve momentum. Your speed coming off the wall should be greater than the speed going into the wall as you not only should have the same speed going into the wall, but you should have additional power from the push off. Therefore, try and emphasize quickness when attempting to improve a turn. The moment your feet touch the wall, they should already be leaving it.

The second common mistake involves how people turn. Most swimmers swing their legs over when turning and this can cause their body to go to the side; instead try to bring the legs right over the head. Swinging the legs to the side may cause the body to go out of position. When turning the idea is to stay compact and turn in as small an area as possible so that you almost end up on the same side as before you turned, again the idea being to conserve momentum and keep the flow going so that instead of using the wall as a resting point, it’s being used to rejuvenate the swim.

Ways to improve

There are a few drills that I like to do that optimize the efficiency and quickness of the turn, capitalizing on the purpose of the turn which is to continue the swim while preserving the momentum or even adding onto it.

The first drill is the somersaults in the water we did earlier. I find that doing that drill helps engage the idea of tucking your body into as tight a ball as possible while trying to perform as many flips as you can. The tighter the ball, the easier it is to flip.

The second drill is a little more dangerous and should be performed with extreme caution. This is due to the setup of the drill which will be on the board then progressed to the wall. Start on your front with both arms straight at shoulder length, this will give you the maximum amount of distance from the held object and reduce your head hitting said object when turning. Begin kicking till you have reached a desired speed. Then immediately tuck in your head to your chest and flip. On the board you will have traveled a distance before turning. Ensure that participants are given enough distance to build momentum before turning. On the wall, watch the head to ensure they won’t hit it on the wall. The purpose of this drill is to gain familiarity with building momentum and heading into the wall strong as well as not trying to spend too much time on the wall, something I call the light touch.

The third drill that I have for you involves a standard practice for trying out turns. We begin somewhere between 10 and 15 yards from the wall. Have participants swim into the wall at their desired speed, turn, push off, and swim back to their starting position. This is intended to mimic what a turn would look like when swimming regularly.

**Additional Content**

Back and open turns

When teaching back turns it is critical to note that this is a massive trial and error phase, similar to other turns and dives, with the sole difference being on our backs, limiting us to visual cues before and after turning to assure that one is in the right spot or has performed the turn correctly and efficiently to the best of their ability. The sole visual cue we do have when on our back is the 5-meter (or yard) flag present at every pool approved for commercial use (I think). Recall the two rules I had previously mentioned when trying to find how many strokes you would need before turning, with the ‘T’ as our visual cue. Similarly, the flag would be our visual cue to count our strokes before turning. To do this, we must first find how many strokes we would need before touching the wall with a hand. Then, take away 1-2 strokes; this should be the number of strokes you would need before flipping over onto your front and performing a flip turn. Again, emphasis on the trial and error as this will take some getting used to and may require additional visual aid from above. Truly the difficult part is figuring out the right number of strokes or finding a sweet spot that can be referred back to time and time again. For myself, I may need anywhere from 3-4 strokes to touch the wall with my hand, depending on the speed I’m approaching the wall at. To turn, I consistently find myself needing about 2 strokes after the flag before flipping over onto my stomach and executing a flip turn. Do consider the speed of approach as this may have an effect on the number of strokes needed, to control this variable, have participants swim at a pace that they find comfortable to maintain for longer periods of swimming. As always, trial and error will provide the best outcomes so keep trying and don’t get discouraged.

Open turns are the type of turns we refer to for the two-hand strokes: breaststroke and butterfly, since they, unlike freestyle and backstroke, have the arms moving simultaneously as opposed to opposite of one another. This means we need a different approach when turning as we are unable to generate enough momentum to safely perform a flip turn. It can be done, it’s just not a legal term per FINA rules, and I would prefer teaching someone the correct way to carry out a technique in the event they choose to branch out and try their hand at competitive swimming. Plus it just feels more comfortable to do an open turn for fly and breast, personal preference but my background is also in competitive swimming so who am I to comment. Open turns are generally uncomplicated and there is a very high chance that participants have performed some version of an open turn when swimming freestyle before they have learned how to do a flip turn. I’ll try to break it down into steps as follows:

1. Approach the wall and touch with two hands (critical as otherwise it’ll be an illegal turn).
2. Bring both legs in a tucking motion towards the chest. Think of curling up into a tight ball.
3. Once the legs have been tucked into the chest, drop a hand down to the side of the body.
4. Angle your body to where you’re almost on your side and looking straight up.
5. Then throw the hand that is on the wall over your head and push off with both feet.
6. You should be at an angle where once you’ve pushed off, you’ll naturally come onto your front.

As always, practice reduces error so try it out with varying speeds. Do change up strokes as well, so try with both breast and fly if they know how to swim both strokes to a certain degree.

**Summary**

Hopefully this has been helpful as a guide for flip turns with some open and back turns sprinkled in at the end. Flip turns are extremely useful to ensure continuous swimming as swimming for longer periods of time help to build lung capacity, endurance, and stamina, and improve health in general. For more competitive swimmers, the drills listed are a good way to help preserve their momentum or create that light touch that one needs when turning. Turns in general aren’t too difficult to teach or learn, however, the drawback lies in the trial-and-error phase, figuring out when to turn, how close to the wall to turn, etc. Practice makes perfect and the only way to practice is to try it out and swim consistently with turns. Don’t be afraid of the wall, it’s a tool not a roadblock and should be used as such.