Triathlon Swim Training – Drills

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# Drills Common to All Strokes

## Distance Per Stroke (DPS)

Swimming all strokes getting maximum distance per stroke. With free and back, emphasize a long body line, hip and shoulder rotation, minimizing resistance. With breast and fly, keep the body line long in the front of your stroke. Steady the rhythm, and swim in the front quadrant of all strokes.

## Fist Swimming

Swimming with hands completely in a fist. No "karate-chop" hands allowed! Concentrate on body position, using your forearm in the catch and optimum elbow bend through the stroke. When you return to swimming with an open palm, your hands will feel as large as kickboards! Have fun and think Distance Per Stroke!

## Sculling

Sculling is performed by sweeping your hands through the water, holding your elbows still. Your hands are acting like propeller blades, and subtle changes in hand pitch and speed will change your body position and speed. There is no recovery motion. When you are treading water, you are sculling your hands through the water to hold yourself up and counteract gravity. To propel yourself down the pool, simply change your hand and forearm angle to be perpendicular to the pool bottom and parallel with the pool walls. Keep your elbows high at the surface of the water, and sweep your hands underneath (this is known as the "windshield wiper" drill). Note that your swimming strokes are a combination of sculling motions that allow you to hold the water as your large body core muscles act as the engine.

## Kicking

Kicking without a kickboard will allow you to perform your kick in the same body position of the stroke. Kicking with a kickboard will allow you to get to know your lane mates.

For freestyle, kick on your side with your bottom arm (the one closer to the bottom of the pool) extended straight out of your shoulder line before your head. Keep your palm facing down and your extended hand about 8 inches under water. The top arm (the one on the surface of the water) should be relaxed at your side with your had on your hip and out of the water. Maintain a head position as though you were swimming freestyle, with your head in line with your spine. Press your arm pit toward the pool bottom to get your hip at the surface of the water. Your extended arm should feel weightless.

For backstroke, kick on your side as described above with your head facing up in the position for backstroke. You may also kick in a streamlined position with both hands over your head.

Breaststrokers, kick only with a soft kickboard that will allow you to maintain a good body position for breaststroke. Without a board, keep your hands extended, at your side. Try to maintain the same "dolphining" undulation when you kick as you should ave when swimming the full stroke. You may also do breaststroke kick on your back.

Butterflyers, go for it either on your side, on your back, or in butterfly position. Kick from the hips and torso. This is a great "ab" workout.

## Golf

While swimming 50's repeats, calculate your "score" for each 50 by counting your strokes in both directions (one arm equals one stroke) and adding it to your time. For example: If you swim 50 freestyle with 20 strokes per 25 in a time of :40, you would have a score of 80 (20 + 20 + 40). Descend your score by taking less strokes and/or completing the 50 in less seconds with each successive 50.

# Freestyle and Backstroke Overview

Freestyle and backstroke are referred to the **long-axis strokes**, as you are rotating on the long-axis of your body (head-to-toe) while swimming. Hence, many of the same drills can be used for both strokes and/or combined into one drill. Backstrokers, IM'ers, and all "novelty stroke" specialists are encouraged to mix backstroke into freestyle sets. Backstroke and freestyle mix sets can make great low heart rate aerobic training sets.

## Long-Axis Combo Drill

This drill allows you to feel the similar rotation of backstroke and freestyle. Alternate four strokes of backstroke with four strokes of freestyle. Drive the rotation of your stroke with your hips. Keep a light easy rhythm: don't muscle the water.

## 4/6/8-Count Drill

This can be done for both Freestyle and Backstroke. Kick on your side for a count of 4, 6 or 8 kicks (or counts). Take one full arm stroke to rotate to your other side for another 4, 6, or 8 kicks, and continue through the swim. While on your side, focus on correct body position. When executing the switch, begin by lifting the elbow of the arm on the water surface (top arm) and recovering it over the line of your body. The extended arm (bottom arm) stays extended to maintain a streamlined body position, until the elbow of the recovery arm has passed over your head. Then execute a quick switch to your opposite side. Use core body muscles to rotate, while maintaining a hold of the water with your bottom arm.

# Freestyle Drills

## Catch-Up Drill

When swimming *Full Catchup* freestyle, pull with one arm at a time and touch your hands in a streamlined position out front between each alternating arm stroke. Keep your extended hands about 8 inches under the surface of the water for improved body position. Concentrate on swimming in the front quadrant and keep a long, streamlined body line.

You can progress to simply exchanging hands in the "passing zone" extended in front. We call this the "Ear Catch-Up" Drill, wherein you begin your pull as your opposite arm passes by your ear near the completion of the recovery.

## Fingertip Drag Drill

This drill is swimming normal Freestyle while dragging your fingertips along the surface of the water on the recovery. Focus on a high elbow recovery, which ensures proper hand and elbow position at your hand entry. You should also check your body position during this drill, focusing on good side-to-side rotation.

An alternate version of this drill involves dragging the entire hand, wrist-deep, through the water. This helps build strength and speed of the arm recovery motion.

## Gallop Drill

This is the same as the 6-Count Drill above, but you take three strokes as you switch from side to side. Focus on long strokes and quick hips in these three strokes, completely rotating from one side to the other. Maintain great body position while kicking on your side!

## Single Arm (R, L) Drill

Single arm freestyle swimming can be done in one of two ways.

*Preferred*: With the opposite (nonworking arm) at your side. Breathe to the side of the nonworking arm. The secret to success with this drill is to complete your breath before stroking. Concentrate on the catch, initiating body rotation with the core body muscles. Take this drill slowly: technique is more important than speed.

*Old-School*: With the opposite (nonworking arm) extended in front. Breathe to the side of the working arm. Focus on high elbow recovery, hand entry, and hand acceleration.

## Rhythm Drill

Single Arm freestyle with opposite arm at your side (see description above), executing 2 right arms and then 2 left arms. This takes some practice, but may very well become your favorite freestyle drill once you master it. Focus on rhythm and timing from the hips. Remember to take your breath with an arm extended out front (on the opposite side of the extended arm). If you swim this drill easily and

# Backstroke Drills

## Single Arm (R, L) Drill

Single arm backstroke is always done with the opposite (nonworking) arm at your side. Allow the opposite arm to be completely relaxed, and do a half-recovery if it feels natural. Concentrate on full hip and shoulder rotation and great body position.

## Rhythm Drill

Single arm backstroke alternating 2 right arms and 2 left arms. Do a half recovery with the non-stroking arm. Focus on rhythm (early hips) and body position.

## Hesitation Drill

Swim normal backstroke, except as your arm begins the recovery, pause and hold the recovery arm at a 30-degree angle out of the water. You should already be rotated to your other side, and your opposite arm should be in the perfect "catch" position (hand 8-inches underwater, palm turned out and downward slightly, elbow high) if your timing is right. Make sure you are still holding your hips up near the surface of the water in this position. After holding for 3 seconds, complete the stroke and pause on the other side.

## Catch-Up Drill

As with the Freestyle version, pull with one arm at a time all the way through the stroke. The non-moving arm should be extended out front in a good streamline position. You should not actually touch hands when switching strokes from one side to the other, but allow your arm to complete its recovery through the hand entry before pulling with the opposite arm. Again, this drill is great for working on body position (hips up, full side-to-side rotation).

## Gallop Drill

This drill for backstroke is a little different than the Freestyle version; it focuses on arm speed. Kick on your side for a count of 6-8 seconds, holding the recovery hand not at your hip but about 6 inches up (30 degrees) out of the water. Lower the recovery hand back into the water by your hip and then explode with 3 quick, powerful strokes. Snap your hip rotation and maintain good body position. After 3 strokes, repeat.

# Breaststroke and Butterfly Overview

Breaststroke and butterfly, the **short axis strokes**, are called such because you are rotating on the short axis of your body. Like free and back, the core of the body is the engine. Your arms and legs serve the dual purpose of acting as extensions to apply the force and lengthen your body as it passes through the water.

## Short-Axis Combo Drill

This is a drill that allows you to feel the "short-axis" rhythm that is similar between breast and fly. Alternate three strokes butterfly with three strokes breaststroke. Concentrate on "landing in front", and exaggerate the press in front that allows the hips to rise. Keep the "dolphining" undulation pace constant.

# Breaststroke Drills

## Two-Count Glide Drill

Hold the streamlined (*stretched*) position of the stroke for a full count of two (one aligator-two aligator). Keep your head down and neck straight. In the breaststroke, be sure not to stop your hands under your body, but only in the extended position. Then, start the pull *slowly*, pitching the hands outward until they are shoulder width apart, and then accelerate your hands through the power phase (the in sweep), continuing all the way through to the recovery.

It's a good idea to combine this drill with double underwater pull-outs to increase the feel of gliding in the streamline position.

## Two-Kick / One-Pull Drill

Hold the streamline for a second kick in each stroke. While doing the second kick, allow your hands to separate slowly to press your head and chest lower in the water. Keep your chin down, and look down at the bottom of the pool. This will prepare you for a more powerful in-sweep and recovery.

## Two-Pull / One-Kick Drill

Take a powerful pull swinging the hips forward and under your torso and then throw your hands into the recovery / streamline while making an exaggerated dolphin kick. Repeat the powerful pull but kick a breastroke kick. Alternate between the two kicks. Notice that the hip motion should be identical between the dolphin kick and breastroke kick.

## One-Pull / Dolphin-Kick / One-Kick Drill

As with the drill above, take one powerful pull and throw the hands into the recovery while executing a strong dolphin kick. Then, hold the streamline position with the upper body and arms as you execute a powerful breastroke kick. This drill also emphasizes the undulation of the hips, streamline position of the arm recovery, and power of the kick.

## Opposite Hand / Foot Drill

Pull with your left hand only, keeping your right arm extended out front, and kick with your right leg only, keeping your left leg extended out back. Repeat this drill using the right hand and left leg. This drill takes practice, but you will gain a better feel for the "short-axis" nature of the breastroke.

# Butterfly Drills

## Single Arm Fly Drills

This drill traditionally has been performed with one arm extended and one arm stroking. Focus on the kick timing of "kick your hands into the water" and "kick your hands out of the water". Accelerate the pull, and snap the hands through the finish and into the recovery. For the recovery portion of the stroke, you can do one of three drill options:

# Thumb-Tip Drag:

Bend your elbow and keep it high. WIth your palm facing behind you towards your feet, stick your thumb down and draft is along the surface of the water. This drill helps keep your hands and elbows in the proper position at the hand entry.

## Super-Dolphin:

Over-emphasize the "dolphining" undulation of the stroke. During the recovery, reach up straight to the sky with your arm, and look up at your hand, Drive your upper body upwards as high as possible, and then dive forward as your hand enters out front, driving your hips upward. Feel the rhythm of the arms with the kick.

Standard Recovery: Keep the elbows slightly bent, and sweep the hands low over the water during the recovery. Drive your head more forward than upward, and breathe facing forward. Practicing this drill simulates the stroke without tiring the swimmer as quickly.

An alternate way of swimming the single arm fly drill is to leave the nonworking arm at your side. This drill works on connecting the finish of the butterfly stroke with the recovery. You will have the feeling of "throwing your arm away." Always concentrate on "getting in front" for an effortless butterfly stroke.

## Three-Kick / One-Pull

Extend the arms out in front in streamline position and take three full kicks. After the third kick, take one strong pull in time with the kicking. Recover the arms to the streamline position and repeat.