

# Teaching Back Crawl

Back Crawl is an ancient style of swimming who owes most of what it has to Harry Hebner, an American competition swimmer who won the 1912 Olympic 100 metre back crawl. The first Olympic back crawl competition was the Paris Olympics men's '200 metre.

The Back crawl or Backstroke has a similar speed to butterfly and is the only regulated style by FINA that is swum on the back. The advantage of swimming back crawl is that it is easy to breath, but the disadvantage is that the swimmer is unable to see where they are going. Back crawl is the only competitive style that has a different start. Back crawl is a long-axis stroke. It is the first style swum in a team medley.

## FINA Rules and regulations for Back Crawl

- **SW 6.1** Prior to the starting signal, the swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands holding the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter is prohibited.
- **SW 6.2** At the signal for starting and after turning the swimmer shall push off and swim upon his back throughout the race except when executing a turn as set forth in SW 6.4. The normal position on the back can include a roll movement of the body up to, but not including 90 degrees from horizontal. The position of the head is not relevant.
- **SW 6.3** Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race. It is permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn, at the finish and for a distance of not more than 15 metres after the start and each turn. By that point the head must have broken the surface.
- **SW 6.4** When executing the turn there must be a touch of the wall with some part of the swimmer's body in his/her respective lane. During the turn the shoulders may be turned over the vertical to the breast after which a continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. The swimmer must have returned to the position on the back upon leaving the wall.
- **SW 6.5** Upon the finish of the race the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back in his/her respective lane.



## Teaching Back Crawl Body Position

The body position should be as streamlined as possible with the ears in the water. The body lies at a slight angle from head to foot. The tummy, hips and knees should be close to the water surface. During the stroke the body will naturally roll around the long axis. The head should remain still.

Teaching the learners to float confidently on their back may be the starting position for achieving correct body position

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push and Glide Beginners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long and narrow, like an arrow</li> <li>• Stretch back</li> <li>• Ears in water</li> <li>• Tummy up</li> <li>• Arms under water by sides</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push and Glide Advanced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long and narrow , like an arrow</li> <li>• Arms stretched above head</li> </ul>



## Back Crawl Leg Action

The leg action assists with stabilizing the body as well as contributing to forward speed. The legs perform an alternating action going to a depth of around 30 -45 cms. The leg bends slightly on the downward movement and then stretches towards the water surface to provide the powerful upbeat kick. The toes are pointed and in-toeing occurs as the body rolls on its axis. There are normally 6 leg beats to one arm cycle, but a 4 beat or 2 beat is possible.

Teaching Practices - Beginners	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking while sitting on poolside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ears / hair in water</li> <li>Tummy up</li> <li>Toes up</li> <li>Speedboat legs</li> <li>Shoulders back</li> <li>Eyes to ceiling</li> <li>Up and down kicks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking using a woggle behind the back or across the chest</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking using two floats held into the body or out at the side</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking using one float held across the chest</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking with arms held wide at the side (aeroplane)</li> </ul>	
Teaching Practices - Advanced	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking with arms held by the sides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Straight legs</li> <li>Pointed toes</li> <li>Stretched legs</li> <li>Flick water upward</li> <li>Make the water bubble</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicking with a float held above the head</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kick with arms held above the head</li> </ul>	



## Back Crawl Arm Action

The arms contribute to most of the forward movement. Back crawl uses an alternating arm action. One arm is under the water moving through the propulsive phase as the other is lifted over the water in recovery. Beginner learners may use a straight arm throughout the stroke – often referred to as a windmill action. This produces a slower stroke as most of the energy is spent on pushing the body up and down instead of forwards. Once the learner has a straight arm action for entry and has gained more flexibility in the shoulder area then the more advanced “Bent arm” action may be introduced. Both arms may be used in a simultaneous movement, like an upside down butterfly. This arm movement is easier to co-ordinate and also stabilises the stroke making its use suitable for adult beginners or people with disabilities.

Teaching Practices - Beginners	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners copy swimming teacher's demonstration on poolside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Back of hand out of water</li> <li>Little finger in</li> <li>Pull down to touch side</li> <li>Paint a rainbow</li> <li>Arm straight as lift</li> <li>Brush ear</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners attempt arm action while standing in shallow water</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold one float across the chest or over the knee and practice using a single arm action</li> </ul>	
Teaching Practices - Intermediate	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold one float above the head and practice single arm action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thumb out – little finger in</li> <li>Pull down to touch side</li> <li>Arm straight as lift</li> <li>Brush ear</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single arm with other arm by side</li> </ul>	
Teaching Practices – Advanced: Introduce shoulder roll	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single arm action while holding a float on chest or tucked under armpit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thumb out – little finger in</li> <li>Palm faces outwards on entry</li> <li>Dip shoulder</li> <li>Keep hand close to body line</li> <li>Palm faces feet</li> <li>Keep elbow bent as arm moves towards feet</li> <li>Flick hand when by side</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Figure of eight focusing on the elbows acting as “paddles”</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single arm with no float focusing on dipping shoulder</li> </ul>	



## Back Crawl Breathing

Breathing as in all strokes should take place so as not to interrupt the flow of the stroke. Back crawl is an easy stroke to teach breathing as the face is out of the water throughout the stroke cycle. Beginner learners do; however tend to hold their breath, as they are concentrating on other movements.

Breathing in should take place through the mouth and breathing out through the nose and mouth. Water may run down the arm as it is lifted and onto the face during the arm stroke action, exhaling through the nose will help to clear the nasal passages. Breathing should be taught alongside the arm action. When using one float and a single arm action the beginner learner may be taught to breathe IN as the arm lifts and OUT as the arm pulls down. This then sets the breathing rhythm of breathing IN on one arm and OUT on the other. Breathing may be trickle as the stroke is being learnt but may change to being explosive later. Explosive breathing allows the body to rise slightly higher in the water.

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using one float</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breathe in as arm lifts</li> <li>Breathe out as arm pulls down</li> <li>Breath in with one arm and out with the other</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole stroke</li> </ul>	

## Back Crawl Timing

The timing of back crawl is usually 6 leg beats to one arm cycle, with a regular breathing pattern.

Note:

- A straight arm action throughout this stroke adds a greater strain to the shoulder cuff and may lead to injuries
- Ensure learners do not bang heads or swim into a wall. Safety of the learners is the swimming teacher's responsibility.

Enjoy your teaching!

