

City of Coventry Swimming Club

Swimmers Core Skills

October 2012

The following is designed as a template and check-list to work from when coaching Junior Performance swimmers and younger. That said, everything included here is relevant for swimmers right up to and including Elite 1.

This document will lay out a core bank of skills and disciplines that swimmers right the way throughout the club can be held to, no matter which group they are in or how young/old the swimmer is.

Core Skills and Disciplines:

1. Every time the swimmer leaves the wall from a start or turn make sure that they are streamlined - one hand on top of the other with arms fully extended and pressing against the ears, fingers inter-locked and with no gap between their arms and head.
2. Finish at least the last five metres without breathing on each repeat for butterfly and freestyle.
3. Always finish onto the wall before stopping.
4. Never break stroke or put feet down in the length.
5. When starting from a push, swimmers should always have one hand on the wall and leave on their side.
6. No breath on the last stroke into turns on freestyle.
7. Breathe bilaterally on freestyle.
8. During butterfly breathe every second stroke.
9. No breath until at least the second stroke from starts and turns on butterfly and freestyle.
10. Always touch with two hands on breaststroke and butterfly when turning or finishing.
11. A minimum of 3 fly kicks off the wall at all times for starts and turns on butterfly, backstroke and freestyle.
12. Always use a six beat kick in backstroke or freestyle.

These points need to be enforced at all times in every session. None of them are too hard or arduous – it just needs the coach to keep on top of the swimmers all the time.

Listed below are some basic drills that can be introduced to swimmers as they become competent enough to understand the basic stroke requirements and mechanics.

Freestyle Drills

Single Arm

Spare arm out to the front not moving, one arm pulling with continuous leg kick. Focus on hand entering in line with shoulder, high elbow during pulling phase, pushing hand right out to the back and high elbow recovery.

This allows the swimmer time to think and concentrate on one arm at a time. It also allows them to watch their hand pull during the first phase of the pull if they keep their head down for a few arm pulls each breath.

Catch Up

Basically alternating arms. Spare arm out in front in line with shoulder and arm doesn't start to pull until other hand touches the spare one at front of stroke.

Same teaching points as single arm drill. It allows the swimmer time to think about each arm pull. It can also be used to emphasize stretching forward, rotating and getting the most out of each stroke.

6 Kick On Side

Swimmer takes a stroke and pauses with their one arm extended at the front of the stroke and the other at the back end of the stroke. Hand to pause in line with the shoulder – do not let the hand move around. While the stroke is paused the swimmer counts for 6 leg kicks, then continue with the stroke and pause again on the other side with the other arm extended. Maintain a high elbow while pulling and kicking should be continuous throughout.

This drill primarily teaches hip and shoulder rotation, to extend and get the most from each stroke. It is quite a complicated drill but well worth it if done well. Good swimmers can also think and 'feel' the best place for their hand to be to start the stroke. Encourage the swimmers to 'feel' the best place for the hands to pull – their pull will feel more powerful with their hand in certain places.

Backstroke Drills

Single Arm

Very similar to freestyle single arm but with spare arm down by the side of body. This is so the shoulders can still rotate from side to side – they can't if arm is above the head. Hand to enter in line with the shoulder, with little finger first and as smooth as possible. Shoulders and body to 'roll' into each stroke so hand can obtain a deeper catch and pull, but head must stay perfectly still. High elbow during pull – try to open the armpit up.

Water is moving around a lot less deep down and so a better purchase on the water (and therefore a more powerful pull) can be obtained if the swimmer rolls into each stroke. The body should rotate from the hips not just the shoulders, head should be perfectly still and kicking should be continuous.

Double Arm

Both arms to recover together and hands to enter at the same time in line with shoulders. Head to be kept back looking up at the ceiling. Kicking to be continuous.

This drill is to be used for teaching entry, acceleration through the stroke and getting as much out of each stroke as possible. Swimmers will feel powerful doing it and will shoot

forward with each pull. Encourage them to get their hands as deep as possible and ensure their hands don't break the surface of the water during the up sweep of the pull.

6 Kick On Side

(See the freestyle drill of the same name)

Breaststroke Drills

2 Kicks To 1 Pull

Swimmer does first pull and kick but pauses with hands extended in front of the body ready to start next arm pull - they then do another leg kick. Emphasize to the swimmer to try and get their feet outside of their knees during the kick, to squeeze their feet and ankles together at the end of the kick and for them not to pause their hands underneath their chin before recovering their arms to the front. Swimmer can be encouraged to look at the bottom of the pool on second kick, maximising streamlining.

This drill teaches the swimmer to glide as far as possible with each leg kick and pull. It also highlights if a swimmers leg kick is weak or ineffective. Swimmers can be challenged to do as a few strokes per length as possible which they enjoy.

Breaststroke Arms, Freestyle Legs

Swimmers to do breaststroke arms and freestyle legs, their hands pulling continuously with the only pause coming at the front end of the stroke with their arms extended. Legs to be kicking continuously.

This allows the swimmer to concentrate solely on arms and any teaching point can be highlighted to them. It is also a common fault for swimmers to pause with their hands underneath their chin (while they recover their legs) after the in-sweep has been completed. They must finish the in-sweep and recover the hands without pausing. This can quite hard and tiring, so limit the amount of distance per repeat.

Butterfly Drills

Single Arm

One arm pulls while spare arm is in front of shoulder at start of stroke. Breathing is preferably to the front, but if swimmers struggle then can go to the side.

It is tough to get both arms out of the water on butterfly for younger/weaker swimmers so this drill allows them to concentrate on getting their arm action right without it being too hard. Encourage swimmers to keep their hand as close to the surface of the water as they recover and for them to push their chin forward to breath, rather than lifting their head. This will keep the swimmer flat and more streamlined in the water.

Catch Up

One arm pulls while spare arm is in front of shoulder at start of the stroke. As one arm recovers the next arm can start to pull when the hands 'catch up' with the next one.

This is a progression on from single arm drill and allows a bit more undulation and rhythm in the stroke while still focusing on correct arm recovery and pull.

I wouldn't advocate a lot of drills on fly – nothing feels like swimming fly full stroke so it is difficult to replicate with lots of different drills.