

4 STEPS TO OPEN WATER SWIMMING FOR BEGGINERS



For beginners, OW swimming can be daunting. Swimming in the sea, lakes and rivers have extra challenges with elements of the environment. Swimmers can transition successfully from the pool to the sea. Acclimatisation to cool sea water can be achieved within a few weeks. You don't need fancy wetsuits and gear to have a go. Your body will begin to get used to the water after ten minutes so anyone with a standard swim-suit or shorts can get in and go for it.

There is the PREP WORK then the four (4) basic steps to feeling confident at swimming in open water:

- 1) BREATHING
- 2) BODY POSITION - (FLOATING AND KICKING)
- 3) EFFICIENT FREESTYLE STROKING
- 4) SIGHTING AND SWIMMING STRAIGHT

Enter the water slowly with hands down in the water. When your hands feel good with the water temperature you are ready to go. This might take a few minutes so be prepared to stand around in the shallows for a few minutes.

STEP 1: BREATHING

- Good swimming requires you to be in charge of your breathing. Inhale more often to ensure you are never short of a breath.
- Stand in the waist deep water and take a BIG breath in and fill your lungs.
- Sit down with your head in the water, slowly exhale air (from your nose mainly) in a constant stream of little bubbles and relax.
- Count to 10 and make your exhale last for the full ten seconds.
- Do this a few times and feel yourself sink as the air leaves your lungs.
- Generally, in open water you need to be exhale mainly from your nose and inhale with your mouth. This keeps the water from coming in your nose while your head is submerged.
- A long slow exhale will help you relax as well.

HINT: A quick inhale from the mouth, followed by a long slow exhale from the nose is what you need to master.



STEP 2: BODY POSITION

Open water - the sea freshwater lakes and rivers all have different buoyancy. The water temperature can affect this and of course the waves and chop will make a difference too.

FLOATING ON YOUR TUMMY

In waist deep water, lean forward until horizontal, bring feet up and float in a star shape. Head down. Your chin needs to be close to your chest. Breathe out for 10 seconds under water.

Push hips up and spread your arms to help you float on the surface of the water. Floating head down in the water is a key skill to practice and master. Your head is a very heavy part of your body and needs to be in the water for you to float.

HINT: Float face down, chin near chest, exhaling at least three times of ten seconds each.

FLOATING ON YOUR BACK

Float on your back with head back and chin high in the air. Head needs to be 90 per cent in the water with mouth and nose out of the water. Arms spread wide with palms facing down. The idea here is to be able to lie on your back and be relaxed in the water.

Water might get in your eyes. You can wear goggles for this but it's better to get used to the feeling of being in the water.

HINT: All these little breathing and floating skills are the building blocks of confident swimming. You can't rush straight to long powerful arm strokes before you get on top of these important but not so obvious skills.

KICKING

Kicking keeps your legs at the top of the water. Kicking keeps your hips relatively solid and firm so you have a base for moving your arms. Without kicking, your legs can drag behind you and sink, leaving you struggling to stay afloat and moving forward.

Without kicking your body can start to 'fishtail' or wiggle through the water adding to resistance and making your task harder than it needs to be.

HINT: You don't need to kick very much when swimming freestyle in the open water but you do need to kick a little bit.

STEP 3: EFFICIENT FREESTYLE STROKING

Break down good freestyle stroking. This is an all-over strength and cardio exercise.

1) THE HAND ENTRY

Hand enters the water in front of you, your fingers should enter first, with your elbow still high in the air. Your hand entry is not the start of your freestyle stroke. It is the 'start of the start' of your stroke.



2) THE FREESTYLE CATCH

Hand enters the water then continues to push forward under the water with your palm facing down. Your palm is feeling the rush of the water as you move forward. When your arm is fully stretched forward and completely straight, you can cock your wrist and catch the rushing water and begin to pull.

3) THE PULL

The first half of the underwater section of your 360-degree arm stroke is the pull. This pull phase uses your wrist and your elbow and lasts until your hand is passing under your face. The pull should be shallow. 'Grab' the water firmly by cocking your wrist down so your fingers are pointing directly down. Then use your elbow to continue the pull. Hand should be travelling in a straight line, in line with your shoulder. Get your forearm as vertical as possible, as soon as possible. Your whole forearm is your paddle for pushing water back behind you, not just your hand. Don't push down in this first stage of the underwater stroke. Make sure you are pushing water back behind you by getting your forearm vertical as soon as you can.



4) THE PUSH

The push phase of the freestyle stroke starts when your hand is passing underneath your face and continues until your hand exits the water. This begins using the shoulder to push your arm back below your head and shoulder all the way to your hips or even thigh. Your thumb should flick your thigh or hips upon exiting the water. By this stage, your other arm should be back in front of you and holding the catch position. This long straight position will help you stay streamlined, reaching forward and at the top of the water.

5) THE RECOVERY:

Recovering your arm from the hand exit position back to the hand entry in front of you is called the recovery phase. Your elbows need to be high and well clear of the water. Your hand and fingers should drag behind your high elbows if possible.

STEP 4: SWIMMING STRAIGHT & SIGHTING

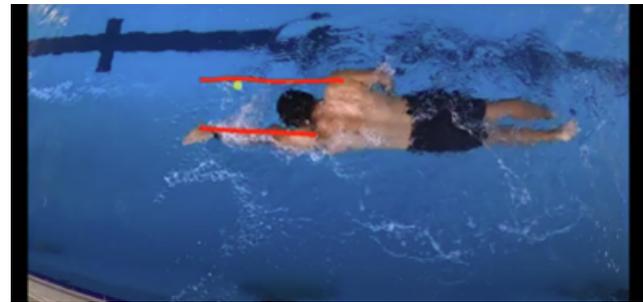
You need to have a quick look where you are heading every so often and swim as straight as possible.

SWIMMING STRAIGHT

There are three (3) elements to work on to avoid swimming in circles or going off course.

1) STRAIGHT ARM STROKES

Your hands and arms need to come straight back during your freestyle stroke without making any s-shaped curved pathways underneath the water. Your arm stroke should start with a straight arm in front of your shoulder and your hand should pull back in a straight line until your thumb flicks your thigh. Your palm should be facing behind you as it exits the water. When your hand enters the water stretch out in front and point to where you are heading.



2) FIRM CORE AND BODY

Your body's centreline, from nose to bellybutton should stay straight and not fishtail through the water. A good freestyle twists on their centreline, using their abs to power their stroke, but doesn't bend the body.

3) HEAD STILL

Your head position should not move too much. Your chin should be near your chest and you should be looking straight down. When you breathe in and your head is looking to the side, you should be looking 90 degrees to the side, not forward or back behind you.

SIGHTING

When you want to lift your head and have a look where you are going, you need to:

- 1) Only ever lift your head to have a quick look while you are exhaling.
- 2) Never lift your head to look around when you are breathing in or after you have exhaled all your air. Only lift your head to the level of your goggles, keeping your nose and mouth in the water, blowing out bubbles.
- 3) Arch your back so your legs don't sink.
- 4) Kick a bit more so you keep that good high body position near the top of the water.



Swimming in the sea is a step up from swimming in the pool. The distances are greater, and you are in nature, an uncontrolled environment with waves, cold water and weather. Find a coach, a swimming group and work on your skills.

Open water swimming is a social activity so don't try it alone.

Source: Coach Jason Bryce

www.WilliamstownOpenWaterSwimCoaching.com.au