

FOUR MAIN STROKES

COACHING OR TEACHING POINTS

Introduction

Coaching or teaching points are what we say to a swimmer as they practice and as we 'manage' their improvement and steer them towards greater success. Start with **WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR!**

Combined with accurate demonstrations that swimmers can see and understand, we can develop an effective communication strategy for working in the pool environment.

We use them for explanations, instructions and for giving feedback following practices.

It is worth remembering that one of the unique aspects of learning swimming skills and techniques is that the swimmer can only very rarely SEE what they are doing!

Swimmers therefore rely on teachers and coaches as **INFORMED AND TRUSTED 'EYES'** at the same time as 'tuning' their own developing **KINAESTHETIC** sense, **Spatial** and **Body Awareness**.

The nature of swimming is such that coach/teacher demonstrations need to be repeated over time – *basically until the swimmer no longer needs the 'reminders' and has developed many independent learner skills.* For many swimmers that is a long time. For many younger swimmers such reliance on coaches and teachers is of course a phase they are passing through- hopefully – towards becoming more independent learners.

General Notes:

ARM ACTIONS HAVE COMMON PHASES and 'reference' POINTS (which also apply to Breaststroke LEGS.)

- **'Clean*' Entry:** reposition the hand ~ 'fix' or 'catch'** to 'hold' the water...
- **PROPULSION:** press, sweep, accelerate, push, thrust powerfully and forcefully, 'front – back'....'let go'
- **'Clean*' Exit:** follows the moment when the swimmer 'lets go' their 'grip' on the water
- **RECOVERY:** the path the arm and hand take as they are 'recovered', relaxed, even 'loose' to where the propulsive phase can be repeated following 'Entry'

For all propulsive arm actions in FC BCK and FLY the swimmer should start with a '**long lever**', then **shorten the lever** with a bent/high elbow ..**then lengthen the lever again** before recovery...

Strokes must be built and developed upon a solid foundation – see **BLABT**; Body Position

The hips 'drive' or initiate the rotation in FC and BCK **but** the hips and body core are involved in the stabilising leg kick AND delivering the 'power' of the arms/shoulders as they apply **propulsive forces**...

Talk a lot about an accelerating drive through from when the hand 'catches' to when it exits- the action should 'thrust' the body forward; teachers and coaches see the swimmer 'surge' with every stroke..

**Creating as little disturbance or splash as possible swimming at an 'easy' warm up-type pace.*

******Fix or catch is when the swimmer first applies pressure on the water preparatory to starting the propulsive phase; we talk about getting a 'grip' or a 'hold' on the water. In fact, it is when, whatever friction and resistance exists in the water, works in favour of the swimmer. The position of the hand- 'sculls' as a paddle is significant.

Notes:

- Stick to '**First Principles**'. By that I mean focus on the things we cannot change, eg the properties of water and the way it 'behaves' when the body of an adult or a child moves through it, 'resistance, drag, buoyancy; Newton's Laws of Motion*children's physical and emotional development stages. Children adolescents GROW, so their bodies change in lots of ways
- **Revisit the principles and movements involved in different SCULLING actions...** *the changing pitch or angle of attack of the hand/palms as they sweep through the water. (See Sculled out their skulls)*
- **Talk about AND DEMONSTRATE the changing pitch of the hand throughout the propulsive phase of all strokes**
- **A simple but easily understood concept ...is** the idea that to go forwards our paddles must apply their power or forces in the opposite* direction. So, we are always pressing and sweeping pulling and pushing from head to toe...
- *Intoe-ing* is a useful position for the extended and loose floppy feet in all strokes other than BREASTSTROKE...
- See **Variations** from the stroke 'blueprints' as found in the textbooks. These are usually evident later, as the growing and developing swimmer begins to demonstrate strong preferences which arise often from their own physical 'profiles'...

The task of a good coach is not to insist that the swimmer perform over-precise textbook instructions, written down as "how it should be". "Coach the swimmer not the stroke" (Wayne Goldsmith)

Instead, especially in a club/competitive context, ask yourself:

- Does what the swimmer is doing contravene the laws of the sport?
- Does the action 'hamper' and slow the swimmer down and create more 'work' with little return?

If the answer to both questions is "no" it may not need changing. (See First Principles)

FRONT CRAWL – ‘FREESTYLE’

| B L A B T | Teaching or Coaching Points to support improvement and development |
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| BODY POSITION | <p>Keep ‘long’.....horizontal - aligned, streamlined, body just below surface Roll around your long centre line (axis) use your hips to drive rotation...” the hips put the hand in position” ready to apply powerful backward forces. Let the water flow over and around your body...<i>think</i> sleek and smooth and splashless.... Head position...steady and central, rolling with the stroke</p> |
| LEG ACTION (Develop the much stronger kick later once the stroke is established) | <p>‘long’ legs, kick from the seat.... Kick up as well as down.....don’t let knees bend much..‘don’t pedal’ or ‘cycle’ ‘Vigorous’... small splash...heels may break the surface...‘<i>boiling water</i>’ Brush big toes together..(to check legs are in line and together) Continuous, not erratic/ rhythmic...steady It is called a ‘flutter’ kick... ‘Loose’ ankles and extended feet..let toes trail behind (relaxed not tense) Kick from the seat Slight intoeing is effective..</p> |
| ARM ACTION | <p>Entry: ‘soft’ –no slap n splash - enter in line with shoulder...loose fingertips first (“<i>elbow higher than wrist- wrist higher than fingers</i>”) <i>slide the hand in...Arm extends because body rolls..</i>not because they push it forwards !! Propulsion: Fingers together but not too tightly.... think PADDLES From arm extended in front after entry, hand sweeps/repositions to catch or fix on water; hand repositions, elbow bends (‘shorten the lever’) one big sweep in and under the body along the centre line ; press/sweep/ push back to thigh (brush thigh with thumb to check)- exit. Accelerate powerfully after ‘fix’ or ‘catch’ to exit – “<i>thrust your body forward</i>” Exit: loose, elbow before wrist/fingers/hand...<i>body rolling will assist</i> Recovery: ‘go with’ the natural roll or rotation...let the elbow ‘carry’ the hand relaxed and loose, to the front/entry. Keep elbow bent and high, arm loose and the hand relaxed and low towards the water. Continuous...alternating</p> |
| BREATHING / TIMING | <p>Breathing is to the side every two or three strokes. When three strokes it means breathing on both sides and is known as ‘bilateral’ breathing. There is little independent twisting or turning of the head to breath- part of the body roll... Get rid of air by blowing out explosively as or just before the face clears the water so that the in-breath can be taken quickly and the head returned to the water in alignment with the body as soon as possible. See ‘trickle’ and ‘explosive’</p> |
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BACKSTROKE - BACKCRAWL

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| B L A B T | Teaching or Coaching Points to support improvement and development |
| BODY POSITION | <p>Keep 'long'.....horizontal - aligned, streamlined, Rest or 'pillow' back of head on water... face up...ear lobes skimming the surface Torso rotation or body roll around the long axis ... driven by the hips...with alternating stroke Roll towards the pulling (or propulsive) arm Head stays still, 'central' and in line with spine... As the swimmer and stroke mature, then <i>the head position is up</i> fractionally so that the hips are dropped slightly. Keep hips close to the surface let the water flow over and around your body... think sleek and smooth....</p> |
| LEG ACTION | <p>'long' legs, kick from the seat... Brush big toes together from time to time - to check legs are in line and together Kick up as well as down... Keep knees under the water.. Small splash...like 'boiling water' Continuous....it is called a 'flutter' kick... Loose ankles and extended feet Kick from the seat Slight intoeing is effective</p> |
| ARM ACTION | <p>Entry in line with shoulder, which rolls toward entering arm as it 'catches' ... 'soft' slice the hand in -little finger entry first. (textbook stroke*). 'Clean' entry not slap'n' splash. Slip it in... arm is straight/ extended Propulsion: Fingers together but not too tightly.... think PADDLE. Novice swimmers often use a straight arm movement. Progress to : <i>From arm extended entry, hand seeks 'catch' or fix on water, elbow gradually bends as hand sweeps round with palm facing back and then briefly down at the end as the grip is 'released'... press/sweep/ push back to thigh (brush thigh with thumb to check) Don't let arm and hand drop too deep- hand is close to surface (Think rowing in a small boat)</i> Accelerate powerfully after 'fix' or 'catch' to exit – "<i>thrust your body forward</i>" Exit thumb first**.....body rolling to assist it Recovery; 'go with' the natural roll or rotation... 'Brush your ears' with top of the arm Arm stays straight – like a laser – as it travels in an arc from thigh to entry.</p> |
| BREATHING / TIMING | <p>Usually breathe in on one stroke and out on the other... Arm action is continuous, use '<i>one in one out</i>' for early development swimmers...</p> |
| <p>*variations include fingernail entry with back of the hand ** variations include back of the wrist with fingers dropped and relaxed, still 'slipped' out AND simply exiting little finger first after rotating hand at the end of propulsion so that the back of the hand 'faces' the thigh...</p> | |

BUTTERFLY

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| BODY POSITION | <p>Keep 'long'.....aligned, streamlined, rising, and falling slightly with the stroke 'Lead with the top of your head; keep head 'still' and central -in line with spine ...rises and falls with the stroke.</p> <p>Shoulders level/parallel to surface, 'square on' to the direction of travel. Body 'skims' like a skimming stone, rather than 'porpoising' high over and deep under...hips stay close to the surface</p> <p>Keep chin low during the intake of breath- eyes looking forward and slightly downwards and top of the head facing forward</p> <p>Hips rise and fall with the stroke but keep close to the surface</p> |
| LEG ACTION | <p>Think whip crack; 'long' legs, kick from the seat....knees will bend to whip down and drive the body forward on downbeat (Hips remain close to surface)</p> <p>Brush big toes together to check legs are in line and together (Not stiff and 'tightly' held together though- slightly apart is useful for intoeing)</p> <p>Kick up as well as down..." <i>Down up Down up ...</i>" – it is a double beat-two 'kicks' per arm cycle (see timing) "flick the water up to the surface" <i>Simultaneous and Continuous!!!</i>..there are no pauses in the kick rhythm. Especially not to take a breath!</p> <p>Shallow rather than deep</p> <p>Loose ankles and extended feet- heels and soles may just reach the surface but it is not necessary to break the surface</p> <p>Known as the dolphin kick, and as the FIFTH STROKE when swum underwater especially from a dive and after a turn...</p> |
| ARM ACTION | <p>Entry: in line and level with shoulder...arm is straight/extended- "a comfortable stretch/reach forward"– palms slightly outwards so thumbs more or less enter first.....'soft' not slap'n' splash..</p> <p>The face/head must be returned back in the water (following the breath) and aligned with the body, BEFORE the hands enter...</p> <p>Propulsion: Fingers together but not too tightly.... think PADDLES</p> <p>From arms extended, hands scull out slightly to 'fix; or 'catch': elbows bend gradually - keep them 'high' – palms facing backwards – let them sweep inwards fingers pointing towards each other – then sweep backwards under the body.. close to the centre line at first - and then out past the hips back to the thighs. (Traditionally taught as a 'keyhole' pull- but increasingly now as a simpler 'V' action from just wide of shoulders in towards centre-line and back...)</p> |

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| | <p><i>Accelerate/speed up powerfully after 'fix' or 'catch' through to exit at the thigh – "thrust your body forward"</i></p> <p>Exit as a "slice-out"- little finger first at a point back past the hips towards the thigh; much easier to throw them forward now if the arms have accelerated back towards thighs with great power/force and not been 'buried' too deep under the body.</p> <p>Recovery: lead with the wrists (hands swept back and relaxed); arms wide and flung or 'thrown' loosely and low over the water- rather than 'lifted heavily'...</p> |
| <p>BREATHING / TIMING</p> | <p>Try to breathe every two arm strokes. 'Snatch' the in- breath as the hands pass under the shoulders and are sweeping back. Get the face and head back in the water – in line - <i>during recovery</i> BEFORE the hands enter at the front. The head and shoulders – with arms out wide - should not be up out of the water facing forwards 'square on' at the same time...(JCB / bulldozer/snow plough!!)</p> <p>Keep the chin low and tucked in - eyes looking down and slightly forward (?)(as if hold a tennis ball) To be able to 'snatch' the breath quickly - <i>blow out explosively and hard as the face clears the water-</i> then breathe in quickly before you</p> <p>Return head- face down smoothly and before hand entry.... Try '<i>kick your hands out and kick your hands in</i>' Two leg beats (down up down up) to every single arm cycle</p> |

In the early stages in the development of timing and the whole stroke I encourage swimmers not to breathe for as many strokes as possible ...fins can enhance this learning/training...

BREASTSTROKE

Note that leg kick is primarily PROPULSIVE and so has propulsion and recovery phases

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| B L A B T | Teaching or Coaching Points to support improvement and development |
| BODY POSITION | <p>Shoulders and hips level/parallel to the surface throughout... Keep 'long'.....streamlined whenever possible in the stroke, momentarily in the competitive stroke; hips and shoulders rising and falling as required with the stroke</p> <p>Head central -in line with spine ...also rises and falls with the stroke (rather than independent lifting and 'nodding'.) See timing: Pull~ Breathe~ Kick... and 'Glide' or reach/stretch.... face down during the glide; we practice 'holding the glide" ; in the speed stroke the glide is really just a momentary full body extension.</p> <p>Hips will 'drop' lower as shoulders lift during the stroke cycle...and rise with the kick;</p> <p>Keep chin low during the intake of breath (imagine holding a tennis ball* under your chin - eyes looking forward and slightly downwards.</p> <p>As the speed stroke develops the body may be completely submerged at one point and the shoulders or upper body may lift higher...</p> |
| LEG ACTION | <p>In the developed stroke: Continuous without pause or interruption..."a minimum of delay"</p> <p>Recovery: From a long narrow, streamlined stretched extended position.....(like a 'glide')</p> <p>Draw both heels to seat "feet to seat" "heels to butt(ocks)" (not knees pulled forward) both together -level – <i>simultaneously</i> ...</p> <p>"Hip width" ...knees just wider than hips and pause behind the hip line and both pointing down as it were (a screw kick occurs often if one knee points out and or is not level with the other...).</p> <p>Turn both feet out (everted) with soles** flat. (we use 'happy feet' for beginners or 'hook toes'; also emphasise the heels as part of the flat foot. (Traditionally, frogs legs!)</p> <p>Propulsion: Sweep/thrust/ kick backwards, both feet flat. <i>Simultaneously</i>... Think - Out Back Down and In*** sweep both feet out 'narrowly' and backwards..kick back hard and smoothly to full extension - until legs are straight again and feet are extended and brought together for streamlining , as if for the 'glide' in a 'push and glide'...</p> |
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| <p>ARM ACTION</p> | <p>Continuous...no pauses....."a minimum of delay"</p> <p>Recovery: (in early development of stroke this is all underwater) 'reach forward smoothly and quickly with both hands together - palms close (praying') or thumbs close/palms down... until arms are extended/straight and together-streamlined into the 'glide' position. Streamlined....and narrow...not too far apart</p> <p>Propulsion: Think Circles and 'heart shape' ; Fingers together but not too tightly.... think PADDLE</p> <p>Hands scull/sweep out to catch/fix "little finger up"; not much wider than shoulders- imagine swimming through a narrow tube: hands change pitch. ...elbows bend- keep them 'high', don't let them drop – <i>palms facing backwards, fingers point to bottom</i>; – let them sweep inwards "thumb leads" <i>fingers pointing briefly towards each other</i>; path of elbows follows the hands inwards towards chest and under the chin.</p> <p>As speed stroke develops- elbows and hands accelerate inwards and forwards as one movement.</p> <p>Beginners: "cut the enormous pizza through the centre with both hands together, [recovery] tear off a chunk with both hands, bring them round and stuff your face" ...or "...make the shape of a shield/heart"..?</p> |
| <p>BREATHING / TIMING</p> | <p>Breathe every stroke (Pull -Breathe – Kick- Glide)</p> <p>Novices who try to kick and pull at the same time need to be taken back developmentally...</p> <p>Blow out explosively before face comes out to breathe in; 'snatch'- take a breath as the hands sweep under the shoulders and return the head face down before the hands reach and recover to the front.</p> <p>Try 'kick your arms forward at the front'</p> <p>In the development stage: <i>"Arms propel while/with legs streamlined Legs propel while/with arms streamlined"</i></p> |
| <p>*Re head position as it rises with the stroke to breathe – we use the concept of keeping a small egg tennis ball tucked under the chin</p> | |

**as a shorthand with KS1 children I began calling them the " 'palms' of your feet"actually it helps generally to think like this when it comes to Breaststroke because the feet actually 'scull' around as they sweep back and then extend with toes pointed...(ballet toes to beginners)

*** Joe Dixon, a colleague and an elder statesman amongst coaches and Tutors used to just refer to '**OBDI**' (**Out, Back, Down, and In**); it was a marvellous shorthand and pretty much works in the bigger picture of the propulsive pathway for the leg kick.