

BEGINNERS' SWIM BOOSTER COURSE

To make progress in swimming you need to do more than simply plod up and down.

Rick Kiddle explains how to construct a decent training programme.

Follow his four-part plan and excel in your big summer swims

PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

▶▶ If you're reading this magazine, there's a safe chance you love to swim outside. I certainly do. There's nothing like it. However, most elite open water swimmers do the bulk of their training in the pool, and there's a strong argument that you should, too – especially if you're training for a big event.

A swimming pool provides warmth, clear water and a consistent environment with precise distances, which we need for effective training. Spending time in the pool during the cold season will give your open water swimming a real boost once the racing season starts.

The question of what you should do in the pool, however, is a difficult one. The answer depends on a range of factors, from your existing fitness and ability to what you want to achieve. Do you simply want to get to the finish line or are you aiming to take home a prize? Perhaps you can swim slow breaststroke for miles, but want to learn front crawl?

SAMPLE SWIMMING WORKOUT, PHASE ONE

A swimming workout should be specific and individual but, if you don't have access to a coach, you could try the following rookie swim session designed as part of last year's programme for British Gas Great Swim Series swimmers.

Note that this session comes from the first phase of a three-phase programme, and each phase has at least six workouts. It is for a 25m pool.

WARM UP

Swim 6x2 lengths – count strokes and record time per length
Two lengths KICK with float
One minute rest

MAIN SET

3x4 lengths front crawl or breaststroke: record time and strokes per length and take 60s rest between each set

SECOND SET

Six lengths non-stop: record time and strokes per length

SWIM DOWN

Three lengths mixed strokes at a relaxed easy pace

TOTAL: 32 lengths (800m in a 25m pool), approx 25 mins

Whatever your ambitions, there are several errors that can easily be made by the uninitiated when attempting challenging events. Follow the guidance below to steer clear of common pitfalls and ensure you arrive fully prepared at the start line.

DO THE DISTANCE, BUT DO IT RIGHT

The biggest mistake many people make is to attempt to swim the race distance in a pool as soon as they physically can.

Agreed, the confidence boost you will achieve from this is great, but that confidence can also be gained in other more pro-active ways, such as technical drills and interval training.

You often see swimmers piling on the laps to cover the distance but doing nothing about their poor technique and lack of efficiency. If you aim to swim faster, training with poor technique, without thinking, and without knowing how to swim better, is wasted effort.

With the athletes I coach I use the following six point plan:

1. Know what you are supposed to be doing
2. Know when you are doing it wrong
3. Know when you have made a positive change
4. Reinforce the positive change with practice
5. Stop if you are slowing down
6. Work on your flexibility

Swimming is a technical sport. This means beginners can make massive performance gains through improving their technique. Conversely, even the hyper-fit will never swim fast unless they have mastered stroke mechanics. The principle underpinning all my coaching is that you need to know what you are supposed to be doing.

While it is possible to improve your knowledge through watching great swimmers or reading books, I believe there is no substitute for hiring the services of a coach, even if it's just for a day's worth of analysis. A good coach should then provide you with specific drills and suggested training sessions to match your individual strengths and weaknesses.

Joining a masters swimming club or a triathlon club is often a good way to access coached sessions, but make sure they are going to spend time helping you with technique rather than just writing sessions on a board and shouting at you to work harder. ▶▶



**SPENDING TIME IN THE
POOL DURING THE COLD
SEASON WILL GIVE YOUR
SWIMMING A BOOST**



How we think we look while swimming can be radically different to the reality

A key tool to knowing when you are doing something wrong (and when you have made a positive change) is video analysis, especially if you can have an underwater review. Many people struggle to recognise themselves on these videos, as how we actually swim can look radically different to what we think we are doing with our stroke.

Once you've made a change to your stroke, you need to repeat the movement hundreds – if not thousands – of times to engrain it in your muscle memory. The danger here is that fatigue can cause you to slip back into old habits, so remember to stop any time you find yourself slowing down. Again, at this stage, a good coach will be useful to monitor your swimming and provide you with the necessary feedback. If not a coach, at least consider asking a friend to watch you swim a couple of lengths, after pointing out what you want them to look out for.

Finally, swimming efficiently requires flexibility, especially through your shoulders, which you can increase with exercises. This is a topic we will return to in a future issue.

GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

While improving your technique is a priority, you'll also need to build your fitness up to see the full benefits of your newly developed skills.

This is where a structured, progressive training programme comes in, of which interval training forms a core component. Interval training involves swimming a fixed distance repeatedly in a given time.

For example, '10x100m off go seconds' means you swim 100m 10 times, starting each set of 100m go seconds after the previous one. If you swim the 100m in 80 seconds, you

TRAINING UP

Sophie Jordan was one beginner who trained with Rick Kiddle to up her skills for competition. She says:



"After my return from a 100km walk in Namibia last year, I figured that there must be other challenges I could put on my list. My aim is to compile a list of 100 things to do before I die, but I've only reached number two so far and I'm over the half-century hilltop!

"I spotted the opportunity to take part in a British Gas sponsored, one-mile open water swim back in April 2010 and decided to give it a go. I turned up on 3 July at the Royal Victoria Docks in London, having only swum the equivalent of one mile (64 lengths of a 25m pool) once, on the Thursday before. I would say I was a fairly average, to below-average, swimmer who learnt as a child, but only ever did breaststroke. I wasn't great, but I could keep going for ages – or so I thought.

"This was the first time I had ever swum in open water (apart from splashing about in the sea), so had no idea what

to expect. I'm also extremely short-sighted and hadn't thought of using prescription goggles to help me judge distances. I'm happy to say I completed the course, despite occasionally being bashed on the head by professional-looking front crawlers who seemed surprised to see me there. On the other hand, it took me a laughable hour and 37 minutes to complete the mile-long race.

"While I was there, I met a colleague who recommended I take lessons with Rick Kiddle. I went along to Staines pool the following Tuesday, and Rick asked me to show him how I swim crawl, as I had decided that was the only way to go. He told me that I was doing about five things wrong. I didn't know there were as many as five different things involved in the stroke! I had thought the fact it was referred to as 'freestyle' meant that I could do it as I pleased.

"Joking apart, I found it a real struggle for the first three or four weeks, particularly the breathing and getting the right rhythm. Rick was very encouraging whenever I did anything right (which wasn't often!) I spoke to another colleague who assured me that the breathing would suddenly fall into place one day, so I put my faith into that and found that she was absolutely right! It was a completely unexpected

can have 10 seconds rest; if you swim the 100m in 70 seconds you can have 20 seconds rest, and so on. Intervals must be set according to your current fitness and what you are training for, and so will change as you improve.

The surest way to improve your swimming technique and fitness is to swim frequently and regularly. Consistency is key. Swim as many times a week as you can, but don't try to swim long sessions until you have the fitness to swim properly throughout. It is better to swim five times a week for 20-30 minutes than twice for an hour or more.

Don't do the same workout every time you swim. Again, a well-designed programme will split your time between technique work, endurance and speed.

As well as consistency, you need patience. Improvements rarely materialise overnight but need to be refined over months or even years. There's no swimming equivalent to the saying: 'don't try to run before you can walk', but the sentiment holds. You have to spend time on the foundations.

Everyone is different. If someone comes to me who has a fear of water, it may take five minutes or five weeks to get over this fear. If you are not ready to move on, there is no point struggling with something too far beyond your current level.

WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE

Measure and monitor everything. Time the intervals, count your strokes, and always know how far you are swimming and have swum. I cannot emphasise enough the benefits you will see if you maintain a strict regime of measuring. The feedback will teach you when you are swimming well with good technique, and help you to judge when you are tired and should stop and rest. A super tool to help you measure is the aptly named 'Pool-Mate' watch, which can record laps, strokes per length, time and give you an 'efficiency rating' for instantaneous feedback*.

surprise when I suddenly realised that I had surpassed my own expectations. From then on there was no stopping me, and the next session couldn't come quickly enough for me to prove I could keep on improving.

"There were also early morning and evening open-water sessions at Heron Lake, Wraysbury, Middlesex, that some of us took part in for practice. To be so close to work geographically, and yet be swimming in such a calm beautiful lake was quite unreal.

"Later that summer I did the British Gas Great Salford swim in one hour and 12 seconds, which was just 12 seconds over my target but I wasn't disappointed.

"Along the way I had encouraged yet another work colleague to swim, and he couldn't believe how much he improved during the two months we trained together. He actually managed the swim in 38 minutes.

"My next Great Swim is in June 2011 and I aim to take another 15 minutes off my time. I would seriously encourage anyone who has the slightest desire to do one of these events to just do it, and certainly to get on with some training.

"The sense of achievement is indescribable and helps put other things into perspective. I always tell my 16-year-old daughter that she mustn't think there is anything she can't do, and I've proved it still holds true at my age."

IT'S BETTER TO SWIM FIVE TIMES A WEEK FOR 20-30 MINUTES THAN TWICE FOR AN HOUR OR MORE

Measuring and monitoring will also help keep you motivated, another vital component of success. Set goals to maintain your enthusiasm and to help you focus on the correct volumes and intensities of training.

Monitor your progress against your goals. These can be short term, such as finding a coach, getting a programme to follow, completing your weekly sessions or setting some bench marks from which to gauge progress. Medium-term goals might be to achieve new speed or distance targets. Long-term goals might be to achieve a certain time or age-group position in a race, or to complete a specific swimming challenge.

Finally, remember to swim because you love it. While pool swimming may not be to everyone's taste, putting in the hours now will enhance your experience when you move back outside.

Don't forget to look out for the April issue of H₂Open, for part two of Rick's training guide to conquering your fears, phobias and anxieties about open water swimming. ●

***10% OFF POOL-MATE OFFER**

Buy Swimovate's PoolMate swimming watch through Rick's website (rickkiddle.com) using the code RKCPM001 and claim a 10 percent discount or write us a letter and have a chance to win one (see page 27)

