

## **7 Ways to Build Confidence and Experience in Open Water Swimming**

### **1. Navigation**

When swimming in an open water situation, it is very difficult to **navigate** your point of direction. The water may often be murky or in the case of the ocean, there is the surf and waves to contend with. The swim start is one big washing machine, with many people fighting, kicking and making quite a splash. Often there is little out there to help you to navigate your way, this is where the swim buoys come in handy. It is important to know where the buoys are, how many there are and which way to go around them.

For the majority of swims, there are **land markers** that can help you to navigate. It is important to familiarize yourself with landmarks, buoys and the course before you start the swim. Don't ever follow the swimmer in front of you and think they know where they are going; very often they will take you on a circular trip of the swim course. Following on the feet of someone in front of you can save energy as you follow in their slip stream, but make sure they are going the right way.

How do we look for the swim buoys, land markers and the direction of our swim?

By **lifting your head** up out the water and swimming a few strokes with your head up. Lifting your head in the water can be very tiring and demands a lot of energy. This should be practiced in the pool as well as in open water situations. When lifting your head, you should kick your legs faster than usual to prevent your legs from sinking. Don't stop swimming when lifting your head; water polo swim tactic comes in handy here. Keep your chin close to the water level, but open your mouth to get some O<sub>2</sub>, keep your eyes looking in the direction of travel. Do not lift your head and chest right out of the water; this will waste a lot of energy. Lift your head as few times as possible, this will help to conserve energy and help you to settle down into a comfortable swim.

### **2. Open Water Technique**

**Mass Start** – There may be as few as 30 people and as many as 100 people in your swim start. Imagine swimming in your washing machine on spin cycle??? (Please do not practice this at home). It is important to plan where you stand in the pack in relation to your swimming ability and the swim course direction. It is always better to stand on the side furthest from the buoy turnaround.

If you are not a very good swimmer, you are better off starting at the back of the pack, so as to avoid the "lawn mower" effect from happening. If you are a strong swimmer, stand at the front and "go for it". It wastes a lot of energy trying to weave your way around swimmers. Remember one thing; you are ladies; so don't bash your fellow lady friend on the head please.

### **3. Types of Starts –**

- a) Deep-water start:** Floating on your stomach, sculling your hands and floating your legs behind you. As the siren goes, put your head down, arms out in front and kick your legs like crazy. Start to swim with your arms once you have got up some speed.

**b) Land Start:** Make sure that you have familiarized yourself with the terrain and bank structure. It may be a long, gradual decline, in which case you will have to run through the water before you dolphin head first into the water. It may be a sudden drop, in which case you will dolphin dive straight in. No face plants into the mud please!!

**4. The Start** – Once the starting siren has gone, there is a mad frenzy of legs, arms and some fairly ferocious ladies. Be prepared for a fast start and get away from the mad pack as soon as possible. The aim is to get into a free space and a comfortable rhythm as quickly as possible. The first few hundred metres should be swum fairly quickly and will demand a lot of energy; some people may panic or suffer an anxiety attack. Make sure you are well warmed up and ready to go.

#### **5. Bilateral Breathing and Efficiency**

Learning to breathe on both sides is very difficult and can be very demanding of both energy and co-ordination. This should be practiced in the pool. You will need to be able to breathe on both sides for a few reasons: To see your opponents on both sides, to navigate and depending on which way you swim, you will need to be able to see the waves coming.

An efficient and economical stroke practiced in the pool will save you time and energy.

#### **6. Bashed, Bruised\*\*^^% and Abused!!!**

Avoid stopping at all costs. If you are bashed in the head and kicked in the guts, you may swallow water or lose your goggles. Try not to panic and keep your arms turning over even if you have to lift your head out of the water.

You may swim any stroke that you like, so if you have to catch your breath or swear at someone, swim breaststroke or roll over onto your back and float.

#### **7. The swim finish – Yeehaa!!!**

Make sure that you know where the swim finish is and what type of exit it is. What is the gradient and structure of the embankment? Should you try to swim most of the way, or will it be better to dolphin and run in. There is no need to sprint to the finish, as you are about to hop on a bike. Think about your next move to the transition area, and plan your next stage of the race.

Swim to the finish for as long as possible and then dolphin out of the water until you can stand up and run. Lift your feet up high and out to the sides to straddle the water. Run towards the transition area taking off your goggles and cap. If you are wearing a wet suit, take your wetsuit down to your hips and then remove your cap and goggles whilst running.



I hope that some of these tips will help you with your next open water swim. Certainly practice and experience will help you gain the confidence to perform more effectively in open water swimming.

**Cheers Shelley Taylor-Smith**

For more articles on how to achieve peak performance go to:

<http://www.thinklikeachampionclub.com/Articles.htm> Achieve Your Goals in 2009 with the **'Get Tough Coaching Program'** 1on1 with Shelley Taylor-Smith begins 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Call Shelley directly on 0414 594 245 if you're keen!

*7 time World Champion creating Champion Mindsets® with Taylor-Made Solutions!*

PO BOX 254 HARBORD NSW 2096 AUSTRALIA T: +612 9939 0048 F: +612 9939 0078 E: [champion@championmindset.com.au](mailto:champion@championmindset.com.au)

[www.championmindset.com.au](http://www.championmindset.com.au) • DANGEROUS WHEN WET PTY LTD TRADING AS CHAMPION MINDSET® CONSULTING ABN 50 084 623 941