



Future Dreams

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To make technical improvements in your stroke, everything depends on you, as the swimmer, having a crystal clear understanding of the "model" of perfect freestyle you are aiming to achieve.

But swimming technique is often very abstract. And that not only makes communication for the coach difficult, but means that your interpretation of, and also trying to outwork a required technique is fraught with potential error – you may unwittingly be trying to do something completely wrong...

Luckily though, swimming improvement does tend to progress in the same sequential way that any other movement-based skill will – it is often just a factor of time and consistently motivated efforts to learn.

To assist your learning you'll need to avoid over-thinking. And the way we can effectively do this is to summarise absolutely everything swim-related in your head into TWO simple headings...

Drag: Where you are causing turbulence in your swimming actions? If you can identify these areas and then refine your movements, you'll move faster through the water using the same amount of effort

Propulsion: Are you producing as much propulsion as you could be? If you can learn how to increase your "reach", then "catch" more water, and continue to "hold" that water when pulling, while doing it all "fluently" then you are guaranteed to swim faster.

DRAG:

The most fundamental skill that can be taught at any level of our sport involves learning how to slide through the water instead of creating disturbances when you move. The body shape that achieves this best is called your streamline position, and is termed as such because it creates the cleanest lines of water (stream lines) around your body when moving, creating a minimum of disturbance.

One example of drag occurring happens in the entry phase; many swimmers drop their elbow as they reach forward into the water, which results in an arm movement that reaches across the body. Disturbance of the water then occurs simply because the arm is not going straight forwards – it is "over-reaching" the centreline because when the elbow drops, it sticks out to the side.



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Flexibility is also exceptionally important for eliminating drag, just as an effective kicking action is.

High levels of shoulder flexibility allow you to get into shapes that minimise drag regardless of what movement you are making in the water. So if you know you cannot get into all drag-eliminating swim positions, then you'll instantly impose a lower potential on yourself than another swimmer who has excellent range of movement. And that problem won't go away unless you are proactive and actually do something about it which does have results. Remember that the energy you use in the water environment should generate forward movement, not merely disturbances that slow you down.

With respect to Kicking, many people who are slower than 1.50min/sec per 100m are the not-so-proud owners of a "scissor" kick. This kicking action tends to STOP all forward movement every time it occurs. So if you are in this situation then you need to get onto it straight away - learn how to keep your kicking action small, continuous, and together! Even if you don't initially learn to kick effectively, at least you will be causing less drag than normal and that is going to help. At the end of the day you must develop a mental realisation that this game of swimming is not all about power but often simple fluencies and efficiencies. It should be quite obvious that speed can't be improved if there is constant turbulence in the water. So your goal under the heading of 'Drag' must be to perpetuate 'streamline' in every movement you make. Learning finesse at all arm speeds is crucial!

PROPULSION

Given that you have first looked at your ability to move with minimum disturbance in the water, your focus can then be turned to creating a more useful and greater force to move you through the water further and faster.

Propulsion can be quickly be looked at as a blend of 4 aspects...

1. Reach – to stretch the entering arm through the water as far as possible
2. Catch – to press down on the point that you just reached out to, to Hold it
3. Pull – to create a useful force by accelerating the arm backwards but continuing to Hold water at the same time, and all the way back to the hip (complete that pull!)
4. Fluency – whatever movements you make through the above sequence must be continuous and fluent; non-stop, non-jerky, but also without being rushed

The arm movements that you use to create propulsion in the water are usually the most abstract of all – there is a lot of misunderstanding with what it all means and this is why the word "feel" is often substituted by coaches



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instead of a long winded explanations of what the technique actually is.

So forgetting all the 'stuff' that a lot of us get bogged down in, just keep asking...

- a. Do you feel like you are stretching into the reach phase a couple of inches further each week?
- b. Does that point that you are reaching out to continue to get more solid before you pull backwards?
- c. And then, when you are pulling, does that feeling on the palm of your hand continue to remain solid – all the way to your hip?
- d. If so, and you can successfully keep your arms moving without rushing at any point (ie, gradual but continuous movements) then you should discover your times dropping.
- e. If not, then try slowing all your movements down from time to time until you do feel it starting to happen. Then speed your movements back up again and feel if those changes are going to stick.

Swimming well has never be something that can be fully taught in one session or even a whole 12 months. It has to be a journey, but that should be part of the fun – there's always something to get a kick out of doing better.

Remember that no matter how fast your arms move, or how much energy you put into your swimming, unless you have developed the ability to keep the water solid on your hand while pulling AND you can project that energy forwards through a continuously streamlined body shape, then you won't be going anywhere fast.

So, always keep your head clear of tiny refinements unless you know you've mastered these fundamentals first. They're the areas that will make the biggest difference and are easiest to remember and picture. Enjoy that journey!

Cheers,
Haydn



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