

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR SWIMMING PRACTICES

or... how to figure out what Coach wants you to do

Listen up! This is what Coach means when he/she uses shorthand to write a practice. If you've still got questions, or if you have shorthand notations that you'd like to add to this list, contact barbara@goswim.tv.

Active Recovery. Rather than rest at the wall for a prescribed rest interval, your recovery is done with easy swimming. This provides a continuing aerobic effect, while muscles and cardiovascular system recover.

Assisted/Resisted Swimming. Resisted swimming usually refers to swimming against the force exerted by a tether, parachute, or bucket attached to the swimmer's waist. Assisted swimming usually refers to swimming *with* the force of a tether and *toward* the place where the tether is attached to a stationary object. Often, a person on deck will add to the assistance by pulling hand over hand on the tether to "reel in" the swimmer and add to his or her speed. The idea behind assisted swimming is to help swimmers achieve speeds that they could not attain on their own, thus helping them feel what it's like to move through the water at a high rate of speed.

Balance. The ability to maintain a nearly horizontal body position in the water. Once a swimmer learns this vital skill, and is able to use the buoyancy of the lungs to keep the hips and body near the surface, he is "through the door," and ready to become a faster, more efficient swimmer.

Bilateral Breathing. Typically, this means breathing every 3 strokes, but it can refer to any breathing pattern in which you breathe to the left AND to the right.

BK or bk. Backstroke

BR or br or brst. Breaststroke

Breakout. How you reach the surface after a start or pushoff.

Brisk. A pace that feels similar to the speed, intensity, and tempo you use while racing, but maintained for distances short enough that it's non-fatiguing. You could swim brisk rehearsals of 100- to 200-yard race pace for 25 yards or less. For 400- to 500-yard races, you could swim briskly for 25 to 50 yards. For longer races, brisk repeats of 50 to 100 yards will prepare you well. This pace instruction is usually used in fartlek or speedplay sets, alternating with cruise speed for recovery.

Build. Increase speed throughout a swim. Easy at the beginning, building to fast at the end while still maintaining good technique.

By 25... or by 50... or by 100. This refers to how often you should do a particular thing. A typical instruction would be 1 X 400 pull, breathing every 3-5-7-9 by 100. This means that you breathe every 3 strokes on the first 100, every 5 strokes on the second 100, etc. If the same set was written as 1 X 400 pull, breathing every 3-5-7-9 by 25, you would switch your breathing pattern on every length on the first 100, then go back to breathing every 3 on the 5th length, etc.

Cruise. Easy, relaxed, fully controlled swimming. A pace that you can maintain over a fairly long distance (400 to 1,000 yards or meters) and still remain aerobic (as opposed to anaerobic).

Cycle. In LA strokes, this signifies one complete (left arm and right arm) stroke cycle. In SA strokes, this signifies one complete stroke (kick, pull, and recovery of the arms).

Cycle Burst. A form of speed work in which you swim 2, 3, 4, 5, or more stroke cycles at your highest possible Stroke Rate but without losing control or losing form.

Descend Set. This is a set in which you are asked to swim faster on each successive repeat. For example, you might see "4 X 50 descend" and you would swim #1 in 43 seconds, #2 in 42 seconds, #3 in 41 seconds, and #4 in 40 seconds. Another example might be 8 X 100, descend 1 to 4, 5 to 8. This means that each of the first four swims is faster than the last. On the 5th swim, you go back to an easier pace and then get faster on 6, 7, and 8. Generally, you need to start easy on the first repeat of a descend set, and progress to faster and faster swimming.

Descending Interval. This refers to a set in which the sendoff gets tighter as the set progresses. For example, you might see 6 X 100 pull (2 @ 2:00, 2 @ 1:55, 2 @ 1:50). On a set like this, you typically try to start with an easy effort and try maintain your speed (or increase it), even as you are getting less rest.

DPS or dps. Distance per stroke. The distance that you travel during one stroke.

dr. Drill

dr/swim or dr/s. Drill one length and swim the next length (usually).

Even Split or Even Pace. Swim at the same speed on the first and second half of a repeat.

EZ. Easy. Swimming or drilling in a relaxed manner but with good technique.

Easy. Easy means to swim without expending a lot of effort. It does not mean SLOW. It is possible to swim easy without swimming slow. Swimming easy means that you are swimming at a pace that allows you to think clearly and swim with great stroke technique. This is a pace that gives you plenty of oxygen, that doesn't cause fatigue or panic, and that enables you to think about your stroke, your approach to the wall, your turn, breakout, finish, etc. Most swimmers should spend a lot of time swimming easy so that they can burn into muscle memory the things they want to happen automatically with they swim fast. Swimming easy means swimming at a pace that you can concentrate on "execution" and good form.

Fast. Fast does not mean hard. Just as it is possible to swim easy without swimming slow, it's possible to swim fast without swimming hard. Easy speed is the goal. Frantic movements usually equal hard swimming rather than fast swimming.

fistglove® stroke trainer (FG). A tight latex mitt that wraps your hand in a fist. Used to improve balance and to teach you to use the hands and arms more effectively in stroking.

FL or fl. Butterfly

FR or fr. Freestyle

FRIM. IM, with freestyle substituted for butterfly

Head Lead. Keep both arms at your sides and lead with the top of your head, in any position: on your stomach, back, side, or between any two of these positions.

Hand Lead. On long-axis (LA) strokes (freestyle and backstroke): Keep one arm extended overhead, with the other arm at your side, while doing flutter kick on your side. On short-axis (SA) strokes (breaststroke and butterfly): Keep both arms extended above your head, while doing dolphin or breaststroke kick.

HR or hr. Heart rate

IM or IMO. IM order (Fly, Back, Breast, Free)

K or k. Kick

KOB or kob. Kick on your back.

KOS or kos. Kick on your stomach.

LCM or lcm. Long-course meters.

L/R. Left arm/right arm You might see something such as 2L/2R backstroke. This means that you alternate 2 strokes of backstroke with your left arm and 2 strokes with your right arm.

Lap/Length. “Length” refers to one trip down the pool, from one end to the other. “Lap” refers to a round trip, from one end to the other and back again to your starting point.

Long Axis (LA). The axis that runs along your spine from the top of your head to your tailbone. When you swim the long-axis strokes (freestyle and backstroke), your body rotates from side to side around this long axis.

Lungbuster. Pull set in which the breathing pattern changes from less strenuous (e.g., breathe every 3 strokes) to more strenuous (e.g., breathe every 7 or 9 or 11 strokes). A typical lungbuster might be 1 X 400 pull, lungbuster by 100 (meaning that you breathe every 3 strokes on the first 100, every 5 on the next 100, every 7 on the next 100, and every 9 on the final 100). **Interval.** The sendoff time for a given number of repeats. For example, you might see 6 X 50 @ 1:00 interval (or sendoff). This means that you swim six 50s, leaving from the wall every sixty seconds. Another way of thinking of this is that you have sixty seconds in which to swim a 50 and to rest before your next 50. If it takes you 45 seconds to swim the 50, you get 15 seconds to rest. If it takes you 50 seconds to swim the 50, you get 10 seconds rest.

Max. At or above race pace. In practice, max efforts are typically one-half to one-quarter (or less) of actual race distance. Often, above-race-pace efforts are achieved with the use of fins or tethers .

Minus-Cycle Swimming. If your usual number of S/L is N, then minus-cycle swimming means swimming at either one, two, or three fewer strokes per length than N. The shorthand for this is N - 1 (N minus 1 S/L), N - 2 (N minus 2 S/L), and N - 3 (N minus 3 S/L). You may occasionally see the shorthand notation N+1, N+2, or N+3. This would signify that a repeat or set is a rehearsal for racing.

Negative Split. Swim faster on the second half of a repeat than on the first half.

Neutral Head. Describes the position your head is in when you are standing erect. This is the most natural position for your body -- head, neck, and spine are all aligned.

Pace. Depending on what the “assignment” is, this can mean your race pace or the pace at which you normally swim repeats of a particular distance.

PB or pb. Pull buoy

Pd or pd. Paddles

Pullout. The underwater pull (and kick) in breaststroke.

Recovery. Same as EZ swimming. Used between more challenging intervals or sets to recover and prepare mentally and physically for the next challenge.

Repeat. The distance that you will swim between rest intervals.

Repeat Time. The time it takes you to swim a given distance, repeatedly, and at an aerobic, less-than-maximum effort. On many swim teams, your lane assignment is based on your repeat time for a set of, say, 5 or 7 X 100 freestyle. If you can swim this set on a 1:45 sendoff, and hit 1:30 or thereabouts on every swim, then 1:30 is your repeat time for 100 free. If you were able to hold times of 1:45 for 7 X 100 on a 2:00 sendoff, then your repeat time would be 1:45. When the 1:30 swimmer is given a set of 7 X 100 on a 2:00 sendoff, he should be able to hold a repeat time that is slightly faster than 1:30 because he's getting more rest. Likewise, when the 1:30 swimmer is asked to go 7 X 100 on a 1:40 sendoff, his repeat time might slip to 1:33 or 1:35. But for figuring out which lane to swim in, you should use your repeat time for an aerobic, less-than-max-effort set of 100s.

Rest Interval (@RI). Designates the rest interval in minutes and seconds to be taken after completing one swim and before beginning the next. For example, if you see “8 X 50 @ : 15 RI” it means you swim eight 50s, and you take 15 seconds rest after each 50.

Round. A series of repeats within a set.

For example:

4 X (4 X 75) on 1:30

#1 (Round #1): 4 X 75 drill

#2 (Round #2): 4X 75 pull

#3 (Round #3): 4 X 75 swim

#4 (Round #4): 4 X 75 with fins

SCM or scm. Short-course meters

SCY or scy. Short-course yards

Set. A practice “assignment” consisting of a series of rounds and/or repeats with a specific purpose, task, or challenge to be met by the swimmer.

Short Axis (SA). The axis that runs across your pelvic region from left hip to right hip. When you swim the short-axis strokes (breaststroke and butterfly), your body undulates up and down across this short axis.

Speedplay or Fartlek. A form of race-rehearsal training that calls for continuous swimming but with faster swimming interspersed with easier swimming. The faster swimming can be measured in stroke cycles or lengths. The easier swimming between the harder efforts is active rest. Rather than rest at the wall for a prescribed rest interval, your recovery is done with easy swimming. Provides a continuing aerobic effect, while muscles recover.

Stroke. When not referring to how many strokes you take per length (see next entry), this usually means a stroke other than freestyle. A typical set might be 6 X 50 on 1:00 sendoff...odds are freestyle...evens are stroke. You might also see something like 8 X 100 stroke or IM on 2:00 sendoff. This means you can swim the 100s as IM or as fly, back or breast... but not freestyle.

Strokes per Length (S/L). The number of strokes you take per length of the pool. For freestyle, backstroke, and butterfly, count each hand hit as one stroke. For breaststroke, do not count the pullout as a stroke. Start counting with the first regular stroke, and you can count either pulls or kicks. For purposes of minus-cycle swimming (see next entry), your usual number of S/L is “N.” Many swimmers ask: How many strokes should I take per length? This depends on many things including technique, strength, height, and aerobic fitness. Elite swimmers can cruise length after length of a 25-yard pool in 8 to 11 strokes per length. Newbies might take 30+ strokes per length. Experienced but inefficient swimmers will be in the 20- to 24-stroke range. A good goal is to consistently swim at fewer than 20 strokes per 25-yard length. Most swimmers will develop a stroke-count “range” of 12 to 18 strokes per length, depending on what type of swimming they are doing. At 12 s/l they might be drilling or paying great attention to technique. At 18 s/l they might be practicing race-day speed. The goal is not to get down to the lowest possible count. The goal is to find a count that is optimal for you and your type of swimming.

Backstroke counts will be very similar to your freestyle counts. Breast and fly stroke counts will be approximately half of your freestyle count, and you should develop a stroke-count “range” for these strokes as well.

Counting strokes is one of the best ways to get feedback on your technique and efficiency. If your stroke count starts to climb on particular set, it’s often because your efficiency is faltering, and it’s time to focus harder on such technique points as pushoffs, streamline, catch, head position, foot position, etc. Counting will seem difficult and almost overwhelming at first, but if you keep at it, counting will become almost automatic, and will become one of your most valuable training tools.

Stroke Rate or SR. This is also known as turnover rate or cadence or how fast your arms are moving. Generally, a high turnover rate is reserved for short distances and racing, and in those cases it must be accompanied by great technique in order to be effective. Many swimmers believe that the only way to achieve speed is with a high stroke rate. What coaches know, and see every day, is that great technique almost always trumps high turnover.

Swimming Golf (SG). For a given distance (usually 50 yards or meters), count your strokes and add that number to your time in seconds. This is your “score.” Then play swimming golf in one of three ways:

1. Lower your score by holding the same time, but taking fewer strokes on each repeat.
2. Hold your stroke count but lower your time on each repeat.
3. Hold your score but see how fast you can go on succeeding repeats.

Tempo Trainer. A small electronic device that slips inside your swim cap or under the strap of your goggles. It transmits an audible beep, and you can adjust the frequency of the beep, making it like a water proof metronome. Made by Finis.

Up..Down. Above water... Under water. You might see a drill written as 1 Up/3 Down Breaststroke. This means that you alternate 1 stroke above water and 3 strokes under water.

Vertical Kicking. Stationary, vertical kicking done for several seconds just before pushing off on a new repeat... or done as its own “set.”

Whole-Stroke or ws. Refers to swimming (as opposed to kicking, pulling, or drilling).

2-Beat Kick. In freestyle, this means that you kick twice (2 downkicks) for every complete stroke cycle. This is a kick pattern often used by triathletes and open-water swimmers and distance freestylers.

6-Beat Kick. In backstroke or freestyle, this means that you kick 6 times (6 downkicks) for every complete stroke cycle.

-->. Change to... or switch to... or lead in to. You might see an instruction such as 3 strokes fly --> freestyle. This means to start the length with 3 stroke of fly, then switch to freestyle to finish the length.