

WALNUT CREEK AQUABEARS

GOAL SETTING FOR CONFIDENT SWIMMING

Swimmers always have a number in their head. For some, it's in glowing neon lights: **You know exactly what time you need.**

Maybe you have your sights on national level competition, or a local meet your friends all have cuts for. Maybe you're just sick of not getting any best times. Either way, you know what number you're aiming for.

Why do some swimmers keep getting faster while some stay stuck? There are a lot of factors at play, but one key factor is **the way you set goals**. *The best way to destroy your chances of getting that time is to obsess about it to the point of freezing up and freaking out.*

There's a systematic way to set goals that will not only move you forward, but also build confidence. That way if you get stuck on the plateau, you can still feel good about your forward motion and have faith in the process.

"What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals."
-Goethe

THREE TYPES OF GOALS

OUTCOME GOALS

These are the "gold medal" goals. They are usually **comparisons to other athletes or teams**.

Examples:

- Win my heat
- Beat the guy next to me
- Be in the top 5 for our relay

Pros: For some people, outcome goals are very **motivating**. The glory of winning can be a huge factor in putting the pedal to the medal on race day.

Cons: For most people, these can be mentally **distracting**. When you focus on things you don't have complete control over (like the person you're swimming against), it can cause more stress than it's worth.

PERFORMANCE GOALS

These goals focus on **personal improvement**. This is the "best time" goal. For the purposes of swimming, this **is the most common and important type of goal**.

Examples:

- Get a personal best in my 50 free
- Make a hard interval in practice
- Maintain a specific tempo

Pros: Setting and completing performance goals **builds confidence** and your chances of reaching outcome goals.

Cons: Again, these can be **distracting** on race day. If you focus too heavily on the time at the meet, it can sabotage mental toughness.

PROCESS GOALS

These are the tiny little **steps you take along the way** to your performance and outcome goals.

Examples:

- Specific changes in technique
- Breathing pattern
- Number of dolphin kicks

Pros: These are what **make or break** your big goals. These also **build confidence** better than either of the other types. When you add them to your strategy, you can feel confident that you are moving forward, even if your performance and outcome goals haven't manifested yet.

Cons: It **takes mental discipline** to set and track these. They're not as exciting or glamorous as the other types of goals.

WHICH GOALS SHOULD YOU SET?

That's a trick question. All athletes can benefit from setting all three types of goals. That being said, consider outcome goals optional. If you're a highly competitive person, you might really benefit from aiming to set a pool record, or to win your heat, but if that stresses you out, move straight to the performance and process goals.

HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE SHOULD YOU LOOK?

Again, this depends on you. For those of you who are on the drive toward collegiate or Olympic aspirations, you might be looking a few years into the future, or more. For most young athletes, 90 days (or **one training block**) is a great place to start.

Once you're clear on your outcome and/or performance goals, think about three or four process goals that will help you achieve them.

Be a student of yourself during this process. After each training block, look back and reflect: what worked for you? What didn't? What did you learn along the way? Adjust your goal-setting accordingly for the next training block.

THE NECESSARY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE GOAL

Now that the foundation has been laid, here are concrete **steps you must** take in order to set goals that will truly move you toward what you want. **SMART** is a goal-setting acronym that stands for: **Specific, Measurable, Adjustable, Realistic, and Timed.**

SPECIFIC

When goals are overly general, they don't work.

Example: I want to get faster at freestyle.

Specific: I want to drop time in my 100 free.

MEASURABLE

You must be able to tell if you reached your goal or not.

Example: I want to drop time in my 100 free

Measured by: I want to break 52.99 in my 100 free

ADJUSTABLE

Life happens. If you get in the habit of scrapping goals when things don't go your way, goals won't mean anything. When you get a curveball, or if you find that your goal is too easy, adjust accordingly so you can stay motivated.

Example: I want to break 52.99 in my 100 free, and I was on track to do it, but when I was on vacation I broke my hand skateboarding and I couldn't train for 6 weeks.

Adjusted goal: Swim 100 free in 54.99 or faster

REALISTIC

The flow state has been proven to happen more often when the challenge is perfectly difficult for the athlete's skill level. Set goals that are within your reach, but that you will have to work for. Setting goals that are too easy or too hard won't take you to your maximum potential.

Example: I want to break 52.99 in my 100 free, but I've never done it faster than 57.9 in my life.

Realistic goal: Break 55.99 in 100 free

TIMED

If you don't have a deadline, you may never get it done. If you get your goal when you're 60, that might be cool, but I'm guessing you want it sooner.

Example: I want to break 55.99 in my 100 free.

Timed: I want to break 55.99 by December 8, 2019.

FINISHING TOUCHES

Finally, make sure to state them confidently and in present tense... like it's already a fact: **By December 8, 2019, I will swim 100 free in 55.99 or less.**

ACCOUNTABILITY

Now you know exactly what you will do, and when you will do it by. Next, add the accountability piece. Tell your coach. Tell your teammates. Tell your parents. Shout it from the rooftops. Write it on a huge piece of paper and hang it in your room. Put it where you will see it. This will help you remember to work on the process goals necessary to make this goal a reality. This will help you to push a little harder in practice and get out of bed when you don't feel like it. If nobody knows about this goal, it's easy to let yourself off the hook when things get hard.

WHEN SHOULD I THINK ABOUT MY GOALS?

THIS IS SO IMPORTANT!! Pretty much every minute is a great time to think about your goals... EXCEPT at the meet.

When you wake up on race day, there is no more effort you can put in. You can't train any harder, you already did everything you can, so it's time to just trust your training and swim. That goal time can float around in your head during practice, at dryland, before you fall asleep, but on meet day, the time is no longer useful. Thinking about it will just stress you out and put unnecessary pressure on your mental state. Scratch it from your mind and just swim like there is no clock.

CONCLUSION

Setting effective goals can be the difference between getting stalled out with frustration and trusting the process. If you're down on yourself and feel like you'll never get any faster, there are some simple mindset adjustments that can make all the difference. Take action on what you've learned and write your own **SMART** goal, then tell someone about it, and write it where you can see it.