

Aquatics



Swimming a 200m individual medley (IM) is not an easy thing to do. There are many different skills and training involved such as four different strokes to learn, different rules for each stroke, flip turns, strength, aerobic and anaerobic requirements. Most serious generic swimmers are able to swim a 200m IM. Some are better in specific strokes than others, but in general a 200m IM is a normal event to compete in.

Although the 200m IM is part of SO competitions, only a handful of athletes have the skills and training to compete in this event. Most SO athletes can swim freestyle and backstroke, the easier strokes to learn, with less strength and technical demands than the butterfly and breaststroke.

A typical SO aquatics program first teaches basic swimming skills. Many athletes first learn how to swim at SO programs. Freestyle followed by backstroke is the usual teaching plan once athletes can swim. Training once a week allows SO swimmers to learn lane etiquette and progress to a level where swimming many freestyle lengths is possible, but few can block start, flip-turn and swim four different strokes. In good SO programs, basic gliding (streamlining), leg kick, breathing, rolls and arm strokes are the focus of training sessions while in others just being able to swim the length of the pool is expected.

SO competitions don't usually have time limits for distances under 100m. A large number of SO swimmers can freestyle and backstroke shorter distances but have a difficult time with longer distances. This is mainly due to lack of adequate training. Most SO swimming programs train once (or twice for a few) a week compared to many hours daily for generic clubs. It is easy to see why SO athletes have trouble with long distances and competing in multiple stroke events. SO swimmers are capable of accomplishing much more, but are limited by training and expectations of what is "normal" for them.

Changing Expectations in Special Olympics

Generic swimmers are usually beyond basic swimming level and that's why they swim everyday. Acquiring basic swimming skills for freestyle and backstroke does not require swimming everyday but demands focused sessions and more training than 1 session per week. Home training (during open pool time) with a parent or caregiver is often a great advantage.

Basic swimming skills are listed in the swimming basic skill (next page). These sheets can be used as a guide, and when all skills are marked "yes", and athletes can consistently swim 200m freestyle and backstroke with flip turns and block starts, they are now ready for breaststroke and butterfly.

Guidelines for using the skill sheets for aquatics

1. Swimmers learn freestyle first working their way toward swimming 200m at their own pace.
2. When this is achieved (this could take 20 hours), it is then time to start on backstroke working also toward 200m non-stop.
3. When the first 2 strokes are acquired, general skills such as block start and flip turns are trained.
4. Follow each step of the skill sheet (next page) until all basic skills are acquired. Progress will be mostly dependent on how many focused training sessions an athlete does.

Aquatics Basic Skills

Basic Skill: Freestyle **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Sub Skills

Leg kick (water splash)

Arm pull (elbows up)

Breathing both sides

Swimming 200 m
Non-stop

Basic Skill: Backstroke **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Sub Skills

Leg kick (splash)

Swimming 200 m
Non-stop

Basic Skill: General (all strokes) **YES** **NO** **Comment**

Block Starts

Turns (legal)

Using pace clock

Using fins - paddles (50m)
Pull buoys - kick boards

Changing Expectations in Special Olympics

Basic Skill: Breaststroke	YES	NO	Comments
Sub Skills			
Swimming 100 m With turns non-stop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Leg Kick 70% of total stroke	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Arms 30% of total stroke	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Complete stretch and glide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Basic Skill: Butterfly	YES	NO	Comments
Sub Skills			
Swimming 100 m With turns non-stop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2 dolphin kicks for each Arm cycle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Arms: "S" shape pull pattern With acceleration throughout The arm cycle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Breathing: exhale looking down Inhale looking forward	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Shoulders near water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**When athletes achieve all "YES", they have acquired basic skills.
Expectations are critical to skill acquisition.**

20-hour acquisition

Skill Breakdown: Examples of priority elements to focus on during practice

Spend time on each one until acquired

1. Block starts: Sitting on deck – Deck Start – Sitting on block – Block start
2. Freestyle: Body position – Arm motion (pull and recovery) – Breathing – Leg action – Gliding (streamlining)
3. Backstroke: Body position – Arm motion (pull-recover) – Breathing – Leg action – Gliding (streamlining)
4. Turns: Close to wall (T on bottom) – Summersault – Flip – Straighten up – Push off – Keep kicking underwater
5. Breaststroke: Body position – Arm motion (catch-pull-recover) – Breathing – Leg action – Gliding (streamlining)
6. Butterfly: Body position – Arm motion (catch-pull-recover) – Breathing – Leg action – Gliding (streamlining) – Body undulation

Each skill can take up to 20 hours to acquire.



Home skill practice:

Pool time is usually a difficult thing to obtain, so unless SO swimming programs can add more pool time, athletes' progress will be dependent on accessing a pool on their own. The following skills can be practiced in most local pools or by joining a generic club.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Block Starts: | Progression can be done at local pool (in deep end) |
| Strokes: | Elements: body position, arms, breathing, legs and streamlining (gliding) can be practiced at public swimming under supervision |
| Flip turns: | Approach, summersault, flip and push off can be practiced anywhere |

Practice as many times as possible without worrying about perfect technique.

Swimming Example: Focused Basic Skills Session (1.0h)

Practice only one skill at a time: Example “Flip turns”

15 min. Warm up and stretching (before swimming)

10 min. Warm up swimming lengths

20 min. Flip turn freestyle (**with correct demonstrations and video, slow down demonstration when introducing a new skill, use hands to guide movements when necessary and use visual markers specific to each pool**)

- Approach for ten repetitions
- Summersault for ten repetitions
- Push off for 10 repetitions
- Leg kick and Streamlining for 10 repetitions
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10 min. Training (five intervals of one minute with one minute rest in between)

- Freestyle with Flip turns

20 min. Flip turns backstroke (**with demonstration in the pool or video of flip turns**)

- Approach for 10 repetitions
- Summersault for 10 repetitions
- Push off also for 10 repetitions
- Dolphin kick and Streamlining for 10 repetitions.

5 min. Cool down

It is possible to practice only one skill per practice; for example, you may want to focus only on summersault for 20’. Correct repetitions are important, therefore do as many as possible without worrying about perfection.

Conclusion:

Competing in freestyle and backstroke should be a priority for all SO swimmers and using the swimming skill sheet as a reference is an excellent way to learn basic swimming skills and encourage athletes to practice often. Training only once a week makes learning motor skills difficult for these two strokes and very unlikely for acquiring the skill of breaststroke and butterfly.

Visual learning and simple skill acquisition are key for SO swimmers, and many SO programs don’t have coaches or generic athletes demonstrating correct movements in the pool. Unless many more hours per week of focused skill acquisition is built into individual training, average SO swimmers will have difficulty with longer distances and competing in all four strokes.

Lesson Plan
Basic Skill Acquisition Program
(weekly or monthly)

Sport _____ Athlete Name: _____

Program Expectations

1- Weekly Practice (attend all practices)

Day (S) _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What the group is working on”:

2- Club Fit 100% attendance (Including Functional Testing exercises)

Day _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What you need to concentrate on”:

3- Basic Skill Development Homework (4 times per week - 1 hour per day)

Skill _____

“Individual Home Practice Objectives”