

SWIM WORKOUT CONCEPTS by Paul Landes

A little bit about me and then some of my thoughts on designing workouts.

I've spent many more years in the water than out of it. I started my competitive career at 6 and swam continuously until I graduated from college. A break was needed to repair my burnout. Seventeen years later I heard about Masters and thought I'd give it a try. My competitive spirit was still intact. Over the past 30 years I've done my share of pool swims, open water swims, adventure swims, water polo and everything in between.

I started coaching around 10 years ago. At that time, I was swimming for a coach who was and still is inspiring. I think I just wanted to be like him. He has impacted so many lives through his coaching and I'm not just talking about swimming. Peoples' outlook and attitude about humanity, sharing, participation, integrity, mental strength etc. have been positively impacted through this man's coaching.

I'm now coaching in Helena with Peggy Stringer and we make a good team. Together, we try to do what we can to provide opportunities for our swimmers to improve both inside and outside of the water. It's a blast!

DESIGNING SWIM WORKOUTS

My workout philosophy is simple – prepare challenging, diverse, and fun workouts for *each* swimmer.

Here are a couple of ideas to make sure that workouts can run as smoothly and efficiently as possible:

Warm Up. I start each workout with all swimmers warming up on their own for 5 to 8 minutes. Every swimmer warms up differently so it's important that they learn to do what's best for them. As we all know, there is always a swimmer or two who shows up a bit late for practice. The 5 to 8 minute rule accounts for this and assures that the later swimmer doesn't start off on a set that the others swimmers have completed. Lane symmetry is important. Additionally, I only have to explain the workout once.

Slow. The word *slow* never appears in my workouts or dialogue. There is no such thing as a slow swimmer. There is only fast, faster and fastest.

Drills. I rarely incorporate drills into my workouts. Not because drills are a waste of time—they're not. But I don't subscribe to the theory that one drill fits all and if a drill is done incorrectly it can cause unintended problems. I use drills on a one-on-one basis, or with a small group, to help a swimmer with a specific part of his/her stroke.

Keep It Simple. None of us want to be overwhelmed in our daily lives. When a swimmer takes an hour of his/her day to workout they want to get in the most efficient and rewarding workout as possible. Looking at a group of swimmers staring up at the whiteboard with 10 or 12 sets, each written in swimming's own vernacular, is sorta like watching a dog looking for a stick its owner didn't throw.

Workout Planning. I will always start by first designing the Main Set(s). These sets take the most time to complete and they are based upon the theme of the workout – sprint, stroke, distance, mid-distance, IM.

Rather than share specific workouts here, I have assembled *workout ideas* that can be used to piece together a complete 60 minute workout. Let's pretend this is like putting a complete meal together. We have the (1) Main Dish (main set) flanked by the (2) Appetizer (group set before the Main Dish) (3) Side Dishes (provide additional yardage with varied sets) and, (4) Dessert (fun sets)

MAIN DISHES (MAIN SETS)

Pyramid Sets. These are great sets that can be designed to meet the theme of any practice simply by changing the distances and rest intervals. Lots of creative and fun options here.

Short Distance Pyramid:

25, 50, 75, 100, 75, 50, 25. This can be done once, twice or three times. Change the rest interval ("RI") between each set. Example – 1st set RI = 30 sec., 2nd set RI = 20 sec., 3rd set RI = 10 sec. Try and maintain the same time/pace as the RI decreases. Or, do the 1st and 3rd set as freestyle and the 2nd set as stroke.

Longer Distance Pyramid

50, 100, 150, 200, 150, 100, 50. This is a great set for mid-distance and distance swimmers. You can add an extra 200 and make it a trapezoid. The RI depends upon the focus of the workout. For a distance focus, keep the RI at 10 or 15 sec. and for a mid-distance focus keep the RI around 20 to 25 sec. Swimmers should focus on pace and try to maintain the same pace throughout the entire set. Additionally this can be done with freestyle on the way up – 50, 100, 150, 200 and stroke on the way down – (200), 150, 100, 50.

Distance Set.

400 straight swim
4x 100 RI = 30 sec
300 straight swim
4 x 75 RI = 20 sec
200 straight swim
4 x 50 RI = 15 sec
100 straight swim
4 x 25 RI = 10 sec

As written, this is a 2,000 yd set and will take most of the practice time to complete. The 400 and 4 x 100 can be eliminated if needed. This can also be done with the straight swims as freestyle and the 4x swims as stroke or IMs.

50s Countdown

I've never met a swimmer who doesn't love this set. It really brings out the competitive juices.

Figure out what you can do a few 50s on with around 5 seconds rest.

Example - you know you can do 3 or 4 x 50s at 40 sec with 5 sec. rest. So start your first swim when the clock's second hand hits 60, next swim on the 59, next swim on the 58, etc. You will be decreasing your rest by 1 sec on each swim and you will swim until you can no longer make the interval.

Example – you know you can do 3 or 4 x 50s at 55 sec with 5 sec. rest. Start you first swim when the clock's second hand hits 15, next swim on the 14, next swim on the 13, etc. You will be decreasing your rest by 1 sec on each swim and you will swim until you can no longer make the interval.

So, figure out where you want to end up with little rest and add 20 seconds to determine your start time.

Drafting Set

This is a fun and productive set for all swimmers, not just open water swimmers. It's best to have a minimum of 3 swimmers per lane and it's best if they all have similar abilities/speed. It's possible to do this with 2 swimmers per lane. It will take some coordination at first but once learned swimmers love it.

So, you have 3 or more swimmers per lane. Your set is 1 x 1,000 yards. At the send-off each swimmer leaves *immediately* after the swimmer in front of him/her and swims as close to their feet as possible. At the end of 100 yds, the lead swimmer, #1, stops in the far right corner of the lane and swimmer #2 takes the lead. Swimmer #1 joins at the end of the pack. This continues with each swimmer taking a turn as the lead swimmer. So, with 3 swimmers, swimmer # 1 would lead 4 times and the other 2 swimmers would each lead 3 times.

You can vary the distance to achieve the proper yardage or to meet the goals of the swimmers. CAVEAT – It is not the goal of the lead swimmer to take off and try to lose the pack. The lead swimmer should maintain a pace that will challenge the pack, yet keep it in line.

Descending Set

6 x 100 Descending 1-3 and 4-6.

The RI is first swim + 15 seconds. Hold this RI throughout all 6 swims

9 x 50 Descending 1-3, 4-6, 7-9

The RI is first swim + 15 seconds. Hold this RI throughout all 9 swims

Dice Set

This can be placed anywhere in the workout depending upon how it's designed. I know Die is the singular form of Dice, but I'm going to use Dice to refer to a single cube. Using the word *die* at swim practice just doesn't sound right to me.

So, place a dice at the end of each lane. A swimmer from each lane will roll the dice once to determine the set and a second time to determine the number of times they will swim that set.

The Set - 1 = 100 kick, 2 = 50 back, 3 = 100 free, 4 = 2 x 25 breast, 5 = 50 fly and 50 free, 6 = 50 choice

If the first roll is a 6 and the second roll is a 4, then that lane will do 4 x 50 choice. You can create any 6 sets with whatever swims you want.

APPETIZERS (Get the heart rate up before the Main Set)

After finishing an Appetizer Set, move right into the main set.

(4)(2) x 25 Kick
4 x 25 Fast Swim

4 x 25 - Make each 25 faster than the previous one
4 x 50 - All Fast Swim

Vertical Kick – In the deep end have the swimmers raise their hands as high out of the water as possible while kicking – flutter, dolphin, egg-beater. The coach has a good view to make sure each swimmer is kicking properly – keep the kicks narrow and within the slipstream. The coach can use a whistle and randomly blow the whistle to start and stop each kick set. Alternatively, intervals can be done using the clock – 15 sec kick/15 sec rest; 30 sec kick/15 sec rest. Vary it up.

4 x 50 Kick. 1st 25 is Tombstone Kick – grab the kickboard in the middle and submerge half of it underwater. 2nd 25 is traditional kickboard kick
4 x 50 Pull. Focus on good technique – early vertical forearm catch, accelerate thru the pull.

6 x 50. Descend 1-3 and 4-6. For these swims I prefer the RI to be the swimmers 1st swim plus 15-20 seconds. This ensures (usually) that the swimmer will swim the first swim at a moderate pace and can then descend from there.

SIDE DISHES (Add additional yardage)

200 Pull (stay smooth), (100)(50) Kick, 3 x 125 swim with last 25 at race pace. RI = 20 to 30 sec

2 x 125 free, 2 x 50 stroke, 2 x 75 free, 2 x 25 stroke. RI = 20 to 30 sec. These are quality swims

3 x (200)(150) Pull
 #1 Use Paddles and Pull Buoy
 #2 Use Pull Buoy Only
 #3 Use Paddles Only

2 x 25 Kick - Moderate
3 x 25 Kick - Hard
4 x 25 Kick - Crazy Fast!!!
1 x 25 Kick - EZ

200 Pull Free
4 x 50 Stroke
100 Pull Free
2 x 50 Stroke

DESSERTS (Fun Sets)

I find that swimmers work hard both in and out of the water. Once a month, reward that work with some fun.

Relays

Who doesn't love relays? It's always a challenge to pick evenly matched relay teams, especially when doing several different relay types but I've found that if they're "somewhat" closely matched everyone has fun. All of these relays have each swimmer doing 25 yard swims.

1. Catch-Up Relay. Assuming 2 relays teams, each team starts at the same time but at opposite ends of the pool. Once one team catches the other team, it's over. With evenly matched teams this can go on for an eternity. It can be done all free or mix in some strokes.
2. Medley Relays – back, breast, fly, free.
3. Corkscrew Relay – This can be challenging. Each swimmer swims one stroke free and then rolls over and does one stroke backstroke continuously for one length. If you want to go two rounds, make the second round "feet first"

Bonus Fun

Reverse Tug O' War. Pair 2 swimmers with similar kicking abilities. Start in the middle of the pool with each swimmer grabbing a kickboard at opposite ends. Ready, Set, GO!! They kick as hard as possible trying to push the other swimmer back. These can end at a set time (30 sec) or when one swimmer is pushed back to the wall.