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# Introduction

## Why an adult learn-to-swim program?

*“I thought it was too late for me to learn to swim.” Bonita, 75*

Learning to swim is a cherished rite of passage for many of us. Millions of children are taken to pools, lakes or other relatively quiet bodies of water and enrolled in swim lessons throughout the year. Whether organized by a private individual, a community organization, a school or a local governing body, swim lessons are often the highlight of our young lives. By learning how to move safely through water, a new world opens for us to explore and enjoy. For the kids that “get it,” the possibilities can seem limitless.

But what about the child who never received the extra encouragement needed to comfortably put his face in the water during lessons; or who never had the opportunity to take lessons at all? What about the young woman who felt the water pull her under and only survived because a lifeguard rescued her? And what about the young swimmer who never mastered how to breathe properly and gets fatigued after a short distance of arduous stroking? For these people and many others who have had similar experiences, instead of offering possibilities, a body of water becomes an obstacle or even something to be feared.

Once a person is convinced that swimming any distance is impossible, a life of avoidance begins. Excuses are made to remain safely on the beach while friends run for a cooling dip. Vacation plans are altered so that swimming is not included. Fearful or nonswimming parents will stay out of the water or instill fear in their kids to keep them safe. Cruises, fishing from a boat, and ferry rides are all accompanied by the concern of, “What happens if we go over?” For anyone who does not know how to swim comfortably, there is a nagging sense of something missed, that the joy others feel while swimming is not available.

It takes courage for an adult to overcome a lifetime of reinforced behavior and face the negative feelings formed around water and swimming. Unlike children who come to swim lessons as blank slates, the adult student may come to you with psychological hurdles that you, as the instructor, must acknowledge. For most adult learn-to-swim students, rarely will a lesson simply be a simple case of hopping in the water, putting the head down and floating. To ensure that your students have a positive experience, you must find out the circumstances of why they have avoided swimming. You must be patient as you progress at their pace. Your success will be dependent on the amount of empathy you show.

Besides teaching the fundamentals of swimming, as a certified ALTS instructor, you will also help people overcome their fear or lack of confidence. This is truly one of the greatest gifts you can give someone.

# Chapter 1

# Becoming a USMS-certified ALTS instructor

*"Swimming is the only sport you can learn that can save your life." John, 25*

## Who should become an ALTS instructor?

If you are an adult who loves working with people, and swimming plays an important part in your life, then this course is probably right for you. U.S. Masters Swimming wants ALTS instructors to be representative of the communities they serve. Although we are bound by the common love of swimming for safety and fitness, the backgrounds of our ALTS instructors may span a full spectrum of careers and life choices. It is a diverse group that approaches swimming from innumerable paths including:

**Professions**

- Swimming instructors
- Swim coaches
- Camp counselors and directors
- Retirement community activities directors
- Physical therapists, occupational therapists, aquatic therapists
- Teachers from preschool to adult education
- College professors
- Fitness and nonacademic skills instructors
- Psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers
- CEOs, directors and managers of for-profit and nonprofit ventures

**Vocations**

- Local government board volunteers
- Service organization volunteers
- Tutors
- Coaches
- Adult educators

It is important that you come to this endeavor with life experiences that will provide the necessary skill set to work with adults in a variety of situations. Sensitivity to others' needs in a potentially stressful situation cannot be taught in a weekend course. This is a skill that comes from years of working with others and one that we believe is essential to your success as an ALTS instructor.

As a certified ALTS instructor, you will be involved with people who come to the water with a wide range of aspirations. We hope that the experience you bring to your classes will prepare you to welcome everyone who walks into the pool area, listen to each student's goals and concerns, and, using the information in the curriculum, formulate a plan to help your students achieve these goals and more.

## Benefits of becoming a certified ALTS instructor

By participating in this course, you'll receive:

1. The education necessary to teach adults to learn to swim and become more safe in the water
2. A lesson plan and lesson templates

3. Certification from a national organization (USMS), which may enhance job security, job opportunities and possibly increased work hours (if part time) or a higher wage
4. Increased credibility
5. Ability to list your contact information on the USMS website, so clients can find you
6. eNews publications with tips and updated educational resources
7. Marketing resources that can help you accelerate recruitment of new students

Utilizing the benefits of being a certified ALTS instructor will help attract more adults to your learn-to-swim program, enhance your success as an adult swim instructor and increase the likelihood of your students accomplishing their goals in the aquatic environment.

# Chapter 2

# ALTS curriculum

*"For some reason, I just never learned to swim. I'm not afraid; the opportunity was never there." Kathleen, 60*

As a USMS-certified ALTS instructor, you must be sensitive to the needs of each person you teach. Listen to your students' stories, acknowledge their goals, and be flexible in using the curricula to suit your students. Watch your students' reactions to each skill, and adjust when needed. Your success and the success of your students will depend on how you mold this program to the needs of your students, not how you fit your students into the program.

Although each swimmer will come to you with his own set of goals, the fundamental purpose of the ALTS program is to provide the basic water skills necessary to be safer in and around water. To this end, U.S. Masters Swimming worked with the American Red Cross to adopt these five skills of water competency, based on skills defined by the ARC:

1. Swim 25 yards
2. Step or jump into deep water
3. Return to the surface and float/tread water for one minute
4. Turn around in a full circle and find an exit
5. Exit the water

Instructing each ALTS student to meet or exceed these goals is the beginning of helping every student enjoy swimming as a lifelong healthy activity.

## Class organization

When deciding whether to teach group or private lessons, there are differences you should consider, including how much pool space you will have and when it will be available, the number of instructors available and the number of students to be served. There are benefits to both group or private lessons, and your students have the potential to benefit from either.

### Private lessons

In a one-on-one class, your full attention is on the student's needs with individualized pacing. Because you can immediately react to the student's reactions, the class will be tailored so that the student will learn more quickly and feel that his issues are being addressed directly.

Teaching private lessons reduces the number of people you can help in a given amount of time.

When working one-on-one, you will have an uninterrupted dialogue and should be able to perceive changes in your student's comfort level more quickly.

### Group lessons

Group lessons give you the ability to maximize pool time, keep the cost of lessons affordable, and help the greatest number of people. The value of group lessons comes from the sense of camaraderie among the participants. In a group, people can find inspiration from others and will have time to integrate instruction privately while the instructor focuses on other members of the class.

Also, people will often help each other in practice sessions. The student to instructor ratio should not exceed 3:1.

Working in a group, though, can be difficult because of the differing levels of ability and each person's perception of the water. Some people can feel the class is moving too quickly while others would like a faster progression. To avoid this:

1. Create an atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable informing you of how they are doing. If a student feels the class is moving too quickly, encourage him to practice a skill he has already mastered.
2. Ask the class at regular intervals if everyone is OK, especially before introducing a new step in the progression.
3. Use words of encouragement and point out how far they have come as a group. Keep the class upbeat and enjoyable.
4. Have fun! If you are having a good time with the class, the class will have a good time learning.

Create a "safe place" for your students. Whether teaching individuals or groups, you must be aware of each student's reactions to the skills you present. Before attempting a new skill or while practicing, you should watch their reaction to your explanation, how they approach the practice, and if they are hesitant to begin. Watch for:

1. Fast, shallow breathing
2. A far-away look in the eyes
3. Rigid muscles or tightness in the neck and shoulders

At the beginning of your group class, arrange to have a place where students can physically go to step back and reestablish a safe comfort level. This can be a ladder, a specific place to hold onto the side of the pool, or somewhere to sit on the side. A student should never feel out of control. A student should not have to tell you how she feels. Empower your students to help themselves. Be constantly vigilant.

## Basic teaching tips

When learning a new skill, different people will process the information differently. People learn by either listening to instructions, seeing the skill performed, or practicing it. When teaching, you should incorporate each of these learning styles so that every student is exposed to the presentation that works best for them. In this course, we use the explain, demonstrate, explain, and practice method for presenting new skills.

1. **Comment constantly.** During practice of any skill, you should keep a running dialogue with your student or class. Not only will you be able to address minor alterations that are needed, but the students will also know you are right there and focused on their work.
2. **Use mental pictures.** Often when teaching, a description of a skill can be most easily presented with a short explanation and a familiar movement or concept. For example, to explain extending your arm in front of your shoulder in freestyle, pretend to reach for a bowl of ice cream. The idea is fun, and it guarantees that your student will not forget the skill. Be creative.

3. **The three points.** If you keep your explanations brief, your student will be more likely to remember the instructions. The first time you introduce a skill, provide a demonstration. Afterward, break down what you said to three or fewer points. For example, freestyle stroke is: head down, long strokes in front and back, and fast kick.
4. **One step forward, two steps back.** There will be times when students are best served by not adding new skills, but instead, by reviewing skills that are familiar. Even if you are teaching someone who doesn't self-classify as a fearful swimmer, you might have to slow down or review to help build confidence.
5. **The "positive sandwich" method of criticism.** It can be difficult for people to hear and accept what they have done incorrectly. When teaching someone to swim, inevitably you will have to make corrections. Compliments heighten attention, so if you bookend your criticism with praise, your student is more likely to hear and remember your critique.
6. **Smile.** When you smile, you give your students the confidence they need to get over a difficult hurdle. You are supporting students, not judging them. Keep your attitude upbeat and positive—smile, and smile often!

## The students you will encounter

Students will come to you with a variety of experiences and skill levels. Below is a general discussion of the types of skills people possess. None of these categories are firmly set, and you will find that many of your students fit into more than one. By identifying which category best fits your student, you can begin the process of instruction. Remember you must be flexible and adjust your classes to your students' needs. By doing this, you will keep your classes interesting and your students engaged.

1. **The nonswimmer.** A surprisingly large percentage of the population in the United States never learned to swim as children. They may not have had access to swimmable water or, for some reason, they may have been kept away from the water that was available. The people who fit into this category are not fearful, but they have limited skills. Make sure you explain the importance of each step. Start from the beginning with everyone, and remain on a skill until competency is shown.
2. **The swimmer.** When you teach someone to be comfortable in the water, they are going to want to spend more time practicing, improving and learning. By learning new strokes and perfecting the ones already learned, swimming becomes an adventure with the potential to hold the person's interest.
3. **The swimmer who has trouble breathing.** Some people can swim for short distances but quickly become fatigued and out of breath. These people never learned to properly integrate breathing into their strokes. Consequently, without effective air exchange, their muscles become starved for oxygen, and they stop to catch their breath. With a few important pointers, this student can learn to enjoy swimming and see it as a potential lifetime fitness activity.
4. **The fearful nonswimmer.** This student may have had a traumatic incident in the water or an experience involving water that left him fearful of the aquatic environment. The degree of fear that your students have will vary depending on the circumstances and how the event was integrated into their psyches.

You will meet people who say they are afraid, but enter the water with little hesitation because they are ready and determined to learn to swim. Others will become visibly agitated when they get near the water. For individuals who are profoundly fearful, U.S. Masters Swimming recommends referring the student to an instructor who has specialized training in the extremely fearful nonswimmer.

5. **People with impairments.** Some impairments will be visible, and others will not. It's important for you to understand if your student needs accommodations, and for you to be able to adjust your lessons accordingly. We will touch on skills adaptations in the pages that follow. But to begin, here are some guidelines based on information from the International Paralympic Committee. The IPC is the governing body of the Paralympic Movement, and it acts as the international federation for 10 sports, including swimming, from initiation to the elite level.
   The following is not an exhaustive discussion, but it is provided for you to understand this text effectively moving forward, and to begin to learn how to work with swimmers who have impairments, including those who want to learn to swim for exercise and, perhaps, eventually, sport.

   **Abbreviations to know:**
   AK – Above the knee amputee
   BK – Below the knee amputee
   AE – Above the elbow
   BE – Below the elbow

   **Behavior guidelines:**
   Assistance: If you see a situation that you think requires it, offer assistance, but remember it will not always be accepted. You should always ask if an individual would like assistance before rushing in and imposing yourself on the person. Your help may not be required. However, don't feel awkward about offering to help; it is polite and acceptable to do so. Also, if your assistance is declined on one occasion, do not be offended or put off from asking in the future. It is the same as if you were asking an able-bodied person if they want help – they might not.

   Communication: Always speak directly with the person rather than their companion, assistant or interpreter. Remember to use your usual manner and speak in your normal tone – a person with a physical impairment does not necessarily have a hearing impairment or learning disability, so be aware to not sound condescending. Please consider that a person with an impairment is just as likely as anyone to have higher education.

   Intellectual impairment: If you are talking to someone with an intellectual impairment, use simple, plain language and give them time to answer your questions. Tell the person if you did quite not understand what was said and ask them to repeat what they have said, rather than letting them believe that you have understood them.

   Wheelchair users: Be aware that a wheelchair is part of a person's personal space, so do not lean on it or hold onto it unless offered

permission to do so. Do not squat or kneel to talk to someone in a wheelchair unless they invite you to.

Behave naturally: For example, shake hands as you would with any other person, even if they are wearing a prosthesis or have limited movement of their hand or arm. It is a universal sign of greeting.

Everyday phrases: There is no need to feel self-conscious about using everyday phrases. Some everyday phrases are perfectly acceptable; some people who use wheelchairs will state themselves, “I’m going for a walk.” It is also perfectly acceptable to say to a visually impaired person, “I will see you later.” Using commonsense, everyday phrases of this kind are unlikely to cause offense.

If in doubt: Ask. If you are unsure of what to do in a situation, ask.

## Equipment

The use of equipment and tools may be beneficial to your students. Your goal is to make the process of learning to swim as pleasant for the student as possible, so having these tools available is recommended. You will find that equipment that works for one person may be a hindrance to another. Experiment, be open and flexible, and offer new techniques with honesty and confidence. When testing your student’s proficiency of the water competencies, goggles should be the only equipment used.

1. **Goggles.** For most people, the use of goggles is essential for relaxed swimming. All of your students should use them as soon as you begin to move toward submerging the face. Make sure students use goggles that form a watertight seal around their eyes. Goggles that leak can hinder progress by holding water around the eyes even after lifting the face from the water. Also, when working indoors, use clear goggles. Before each session, rinsing the goggles with anti-fogging solutions or baby shampoo will minimize or eliminate fogging.
2. **Nose plugs.** Some people have difficulty keeping water out of their noses. If your student repeatedly complains of this, recommend a nose plug. This could help eliminate discomfort and help the learning process proceed more quickly. Water in the nose is very easy to recognize by a person’s reaction when he lifts his head from the water. If this keeps happening, he will eventually expect it, and this will hinder progress.
3. **Ear plugs.** As we get older, the shape of the ear canal can change, making it harder for water to drain out. Water in the ears can be uncomfortable and could lead to ear infections. Earplugs can reduce this risk substantially. Your student might have to experiment with different types before finding a good fit.
4. **Swim cap.** Keeping hair away from the mouth, nose, eyes, and arms is important during the learning process. A cap should be worn to restrict the hair from impeding progress.
5. **Snorkel.** If you take away the possibility of water going into the nose and mouth and give your students the ability to breathe whenever they need,

much of the trepidation about putting their heads in the water is removed. A number of programs use snorkels with great success.
6. **Fins.** Students may benefit from wearing fins. Fins enable poor kickers to elevate the lower half of the body toward the surface of the water and provide forward propulsion.
7. **Pull buoy.** A pull buoy helps the student elevate their legs and eliminates the need to kick in order to keep the legs and hips at or near the surface of the water. It helps the student concentrate on the stroke.
8. **Neoprene shorts**. Neoprene shorts can help buoy the lower half of the body, making it easier to concentrate on body position.

# Chapter 3

## Lesson progression

*“In my country, we were not allowed to go near the water.” Kukua, 34*

In the early twentieth century, in response to the ever-increasing popularity of “bathing” and the corresponding increase in drowning deaths, organizations in the United States took on the challenge of training the public in lifesaving and swimming skills. Commodore Wilbert E. Longfellow formed the American Red Cross Lifesaving program with the goal of training volunteers to teach people in their local communities how to be safe around the water. These efforts successfully cut drowning deaths in the U.S. by more than half and raised awareness of the importance of swimming as a safety skill.

Today we find a dichotomous situation in the U.S. Although our country is a leader in competitive swimming and other water sports, about half the population is considered unsafe around water. Aquatic activities are some of the most popular forms of recreation, yet many of the people at the beach end up sitting on blankets for the entire day.

The fact that water covers more than two-thirds of our planet is only one reason to help people feel comfortable in and around the aquatic environment. Aquatic exercise provides proven relief to those with a variety of conditions affecting the muscles and bones. As we get older, many doctors recommend aquatic fitness regimes to take pressure off our joints. Plus, there are many recreational activities that require competence in the water. You miss so much if you never learn to swim.

The following curriculum can be applied to any student who comes to you without fear of the water. This progression moves from water comfort to basic stroke proficiency. Start everyone from the beginning so that competency is assured in all the necessary steps. Once the student proves mastery, proceed to the next skill.

## Air exchange

A person’s ability to effectively exhale into the water and then take a breath when their face is exposed to the air is the foundation of effective swimming. This skill must be mastered if the swimmer is going to cover any substantial distance

comfortably. For the nonswimming adult who is not afraid of the water, use the following progression:

- **Sit on the side.** With your student sitting on the side of the pool, ask him if he is comfortable with his face in the water. Explain how important it is to be able to breathe fully while swimming.
  - When swimmers do not exhale completely into the water, their muscles slowly become starved for oxygen. An insufficient amount of oxygen will force a swimmer to stop and catch his breath.
  - Combined with inefficient breathing, if a person is not completely comfortable submerging the face, he might swim with his head out of the water. That forces the legs to sink, creating drag. Explain that it will be the goal to avoid this.
- **Practice breathing.** To develop breath awareness, have your student practice this exercise before they get in the water. Many people have little consciousness of all the elements of breathing, and this will help them become more attentive.

  **Count.** Have your student breathe normally through his nose, silently counting as he inhales and then counting as he exhales. When first doing this exercise, you can also count for your student or class. Say: “Breathe in. One, two, three, four. Breathe out. One, two, three, four.” Encourage your students to feel the air as it moves from their nostrils to their lungs and out again. As they release the air, encourage them to release any tension they feel in the rest of their body. As the air leaves, let it take the tension with it.

  **Repeat.** Do the same exercise breathing through the mouth. Some people have little experience doing this and have to concentrate intensely so that they do not breathe in through their nose.

  **Practice.** As your students proceed to the next step – getting in – have them use this breathing exercise to remain calm and become aware of their breathing as they incorporate this skill into swimming.



**Be sure to let your student set the timeline for getting in the water.**

- **Getting in.** When your student is ready to get in, have him safely enter the shallow end on the side or with the ladder. Be sensitive to older adults who are not as flexible or agile and might need assistance getting in.
    - As soon as their feet touch the bottom of the pool, have your students begin walking along and holding the side. Watch your students' reactions as they get in and how they move through the water. This will give you a sense of the level of their water comfort.
    - Any lower-body injured swimmers may need to hold the gutter or the side of the pool.
    - Once acclimated, have your student hold the side with their arms straight and their feet underneath their shoulders. Remember, with each of the steps in this section, explain, demonstrate and explain again before your student practices.

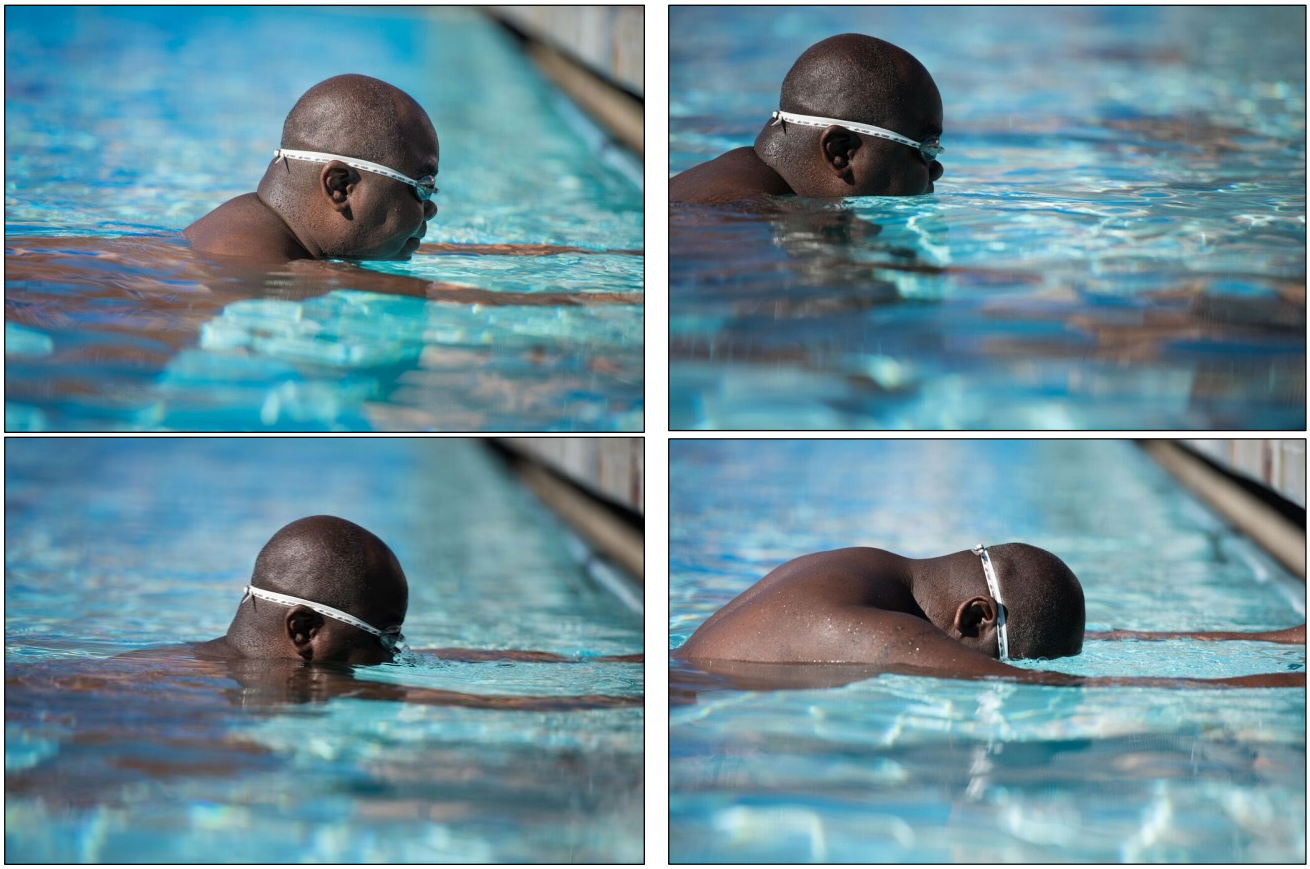
## Getting the face in the water

If your student has never submerged his face or head in the water or is uncomfortable with this, you must proceed in steps so he can feel more comfortable. Follow this progression:

- **Chin.** Start by having your student put his chin on the surface of the water while holding his breath. Count out loud so your student learns how long he can hold his breath. He should raise his head when he needs to breathe. Do this as many times as it takes for your student to feel comfortable.
- **Lips.** Next have your student submerge his closed lips. Explain that as long as his lips are sealed, no water will get in his mouth. Some people have a fear of getting water in their mouths when in a larger body of water. It is important to explain that when tightly shut, the lips form a watertight barrier that keeps the water out. Once again, count each time he does this exercise.
- **Nose.** Submerging the nose can be a major hurdle because many people have experienced the unpleasant sensation of water going up the nose. Whether this is an issue or not, explain that to avoid getting water in the nostrils and sinuses, your student must breathe though the mouth. Explain that any water around the nostrils will be drawn in when inhaling. To avoid getting water up the nose initially, have your student pant quickly for a few breaths before attempting to submerge the nose. When he puts his nose in, count out loud and then cue him to pant as he raises his nose from the water. Once comfortable, he can breathe normally though the mouth.
- **Face.** Getting the eyes in the water might be something your student has avoided. The most effective way to change this is to wear goggles. If your student does not want to wear them, show him how to put his face in the water by submerging and then lifting it out again in quick succession. Once your student is comfortable putting his face in, have him hold his position for longer periods. Count time for him.
- **Head.** When submerging the whole head, the main concern for some of your students will be the unfamiliar sensation of water going in the ears. Explain that your student can get used to this new feeling, but if it is too

uncomfortable, earplugs are available. Also, as your student begins to practice, he might express a sense of claustrophobia as the water surrounds his head. This reaction is also based on a lack of familiarity. With slow and gentle practice, your student can learn to feel comfortable. If your student reacts nervously when you explain the goal of this step, talk with him about his concerns. You can introduce your student to this skill by having him submerge and stand up quickly in quick succession, then increase time underwater progressively.

- If your swimmer is a double AK they may start to float and become horizontal as they get more of their face in the water. Prepare your student for this possibility.



**Learning to put the face in the water is a key skill and a huge accomplishment for some new swimmers. Introduce the steps gradually, and keep the ears out of the water at first. AEs or BEs won't hold the wall. Depending on the amputation they can partially hold the wall or just stand in the water.**

**Prepare your student for the feeling of having water in the ears. This can be unfamiliar for some people. Remember, too, that first time your student puts her whole head underwater is cause for celebration. Congratulate her!**

For students who are comfortable with their heads in the water, follow this progression to develop their ability to breathe:

- **Bubbles on the surface.** Explain to your student that he should exhale all his air on top of the water, creating “bubbles” in front of his mouth. This should be done with lips pursed, as if trying to extinguish a candle flame. He should lift his head and breathe through the mouth. Have him count to himself the length of the exhalation and inhalation. Explain that when swimming, all the air should be exhaled in the water.
- **Bubbles with face submerged.** Holding the wall, your student should put his face in the water and then exhale through the mouth in the same fashion as blowing bubbles on the surface, counting to himself to stay aware. When he lifts his head, make sure he inhales through the mouth. Have him practice this with repeated breaths so that he begins to get comfortable with this type of air exchange.
- **Exhaling through the nose.** Many swimmers exhale through their noses or a combination of the nose and mouth when they swim. Have your student do this, but remind him that he must inhale only through his mouth. Remind him to count the length of his breaths to remain focused.
- **Bobs.** Bobs are a great way to practice air exchange and many new swimmers enjoy them as a warm-up. Some people even consider them to be meditative. Have your student hold the side of the pool with his arms straight out and his feet under his shoulders. Have him do a squat in the water so that his head submerges while he’s looking forward. Explain that he should blow out all his air under the water, then stand and take a breath. Once he feels comfortable blowing through his mouth, have him perform five bobs blowing out through the nose, then breathing in only

through the mouth. Some people prefer this method because it helps keep water out of the nose.

**Watch and listen to your student during this practice.**

- Is there a thin stream of bubbles when your student blows out, followed by a final exhalation and inhalation when he stands up? Remind him to blow out forcefully and completely under water, and show him if necessary.
- When he takes a breath, does your student rub his nose and wince? Your student is breathing in through his nose, and water is getting in his sinuses. Have him pant to practice mouth breathing before proceeding.
- Does your student speed up as if to get the practice over? Then he is not exchanging his air completely. As he becomes oxygen deprived, your student is trying to get the exercise done so he can catch his breath. Tell him to slow down and blow all his air into the water.

## Breathing with a snorkel

Using a snorkel can eliminate many of the apprehensions your students have about breathing and swimming at the same time, an can allow for proper air exchange by people who have neck or back impairments or injuries. Getting a breath, how long to hold the breath, proper technique to move the head to get air—all these hurdles may be resolved by using a snorkel. A center-mounted snorkel is recommended, and all initial practice should be conducted in water where the student can stand.

- To begin, explain to the student the benefits of using a snorkel. Demonstrate the use of the snorkel. Explain how to put the snorkel on by stretching the band over the head like a pair of goggles and placing the frame on the forehead. The mouthpiece can then be put into position. Remind the students not to bite the mouthpiece but use their teeth to hold the apparatus in place.
- Continue your explanation by telling your students that they should only breathe through their mouths. Have nose plugs available. Tell the students that sometimes water gets into the tube and to get it out, they simply have to give a forceful breath out, and the water will be ejected through the top of the snorkel and the one-way valve.
- Show the students how to breathe with your head out of the water so that they can hear the breaths and watch you. Next, put your face in the water and breathe naturally. Then put the top of the snorkel under the water and let it fill up. Raise the top from the water and clear the tube as explained. Stand, take the snorkel off and ask your students if they have questions.


**Demonstrate and practice with a snorkel at first in water where your student can stand comfortably.**

- Have your students practice by first breathing with their heads out of the water using the snorkel. Watch and listen to make sure no one is breathing through his nose.

- Once your students are comfortable breathing with the snorkel, have them lean over in the water and put their faces in while breathing through the snorkel. After a few successful breaths, cue your students to raise their heads. This accomplishment can be very exciting for your students. Make sure you acknowledge and celebrate this achievement.
- Have your students place the top of the snorkel in the water so that they get water in it. Have them practice clearing the snorkel. Assist anyone who is having trouble and stand close by to help anyone who gets anxious.
- From this point, if your students are comfortable using the snorkel, they can choose to proceed with the following progression all the way to freestyle without breathing while using this device.

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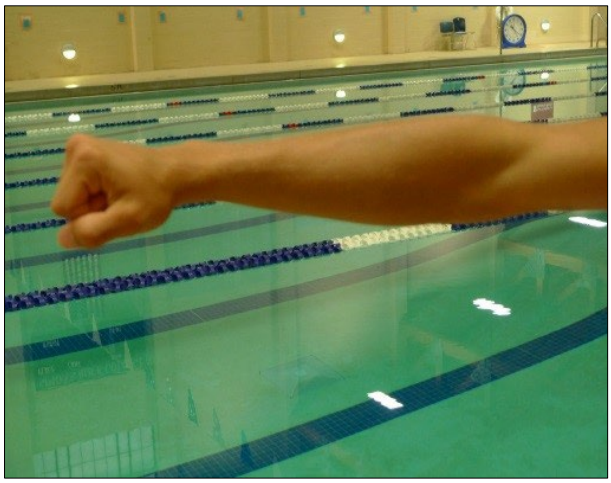
**Breathing underwater with a snorkel can take some practice. Be patient, and make sure to demonstrate how to clear the snorkel of any water that sneaks in.**

## Supported front float

During the front float progression, it is important that the student be in control with as little physical assistance from the instructor as possible. This approach respects your student's personal space and gives him a greater sense of accomplishment in a shorter amount of time.

- Explain that when the lungs are filled with air, they provide enough buoyancy that the student will float. Depending on the person, the body will settle into a relaxed float with either the body flat on the surface or with the legs hanging down so that the student has to kick gently to remain horizontal. You will be able to tell where your student falls on this spectrum as soon as you begin these exercises.
- In swimming, head position often determines body position. Using your arm to demonstrate, with your fist representing the head and the forearm representing the body, show your student that when he raises his head, his body will compensate like a seesaw. If his head is down, looking at the bottom of the pool, his body will rise to the surface more easily.
- For AKs or double AKs, wearing neoprene shorts can give the swimmer confindence and make them more comfortable going horizontal, at least at first. If neoprene shorts are not available, a pull buoy can be used.



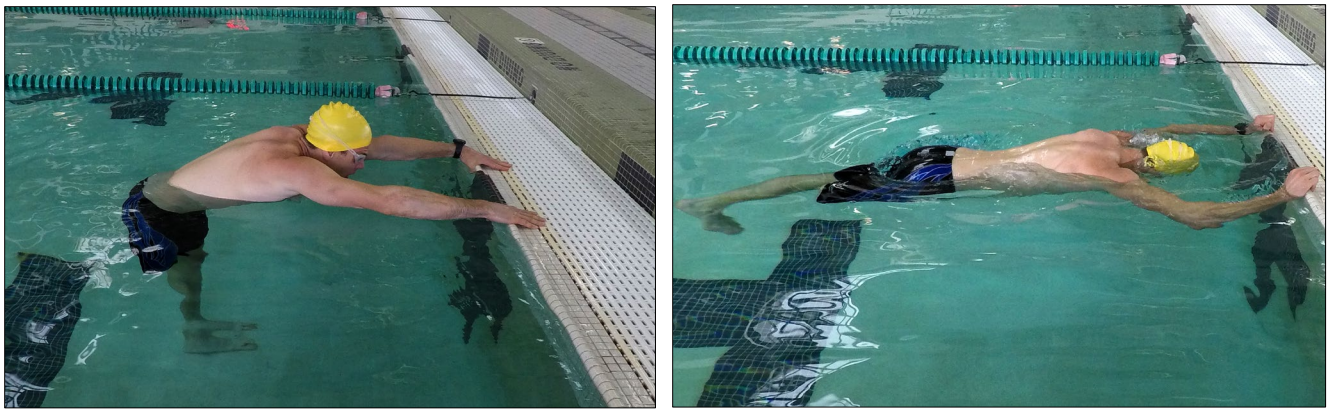
**Use your fist and forearm to demonstrate what happens when a swimmer raises his head to look forward – his lower body will sink.**

- Demonstrate the supported front float by holding the side of the pool and backing away so that your body is diagonal to the wall. Take a deep breath and put your head down so that your ears are covered. Raise your head and emphasize breathing through your mouth.
- This is also a good time to introduce the stand-up recovery. Demonstrate how your students should get back to a standing position from the supported front float by bringing your knees to your chest and then planting your feet to the floor. The stand-up recovery will be covered in more detail in the next steps.
- Your students should practice by getting in the diagonal position with their shoulders at or slightly below the surface. Cue them to take a

deep breath, and when they put their heads in the water, begin counting. Watch what happens to their body and see if their legs float or rest on, or just above, the bottom. When you count to five, remind them to raise their head and breathe through their mouth. For students who have never experienced their own flotation, this can be very exciting. Celebrate this and invite them to try again.

**Watch and listen**

- Does your student's body remain in a diagonal position when he puts his face in the water? If so, have him try again, but focus on putting his head in the water so his ears are submerged and only a small section at the back of his head is above the surface.
- If he remains diagonal, have him kick gently after a brief description of this skill. You can give him a quick demonstration.
- Watch your student's body language. If he appears to be tense about this skill, place your hand on his and reassure him that you will be right there to help, that he is holding the side, and all he has to do to stand is raise his head. Tension in the neck and shoulders will also affect your student's ability to float.
- Once your student feels his buoyancy and he has held his breath for at least 10 seconds, encourage him to relax his grip and as he floats, to bounce his hands up and down above the wall, letting his floating body hold him up. Explain that if he begins to drift away, you will gently grab his wrist and pull him back to the wall.



**The wall provides support and security for the new swimmer learning to front float.**

## Sculling

Efficient sculling is imperative to an efficient stand-up recovery, which will be taught next, as well as to propulsion once your student is swimming. It can be taught like this:

- When sitting on the side of the pool, ask your student to clap and hold his hands in place once his palms touch.
- If your student is a bilateral AE, you should still teach this skill.

- Hold your own hands, palms facing each other, on either side of your student's hands, about shoulder-width apart.
- Ask your student to turn his palms outward and clap his hands against yours.
- Then your student should return to the original, palms together, clapping position. You can say, "Clap in, clap out."

**Clap in**

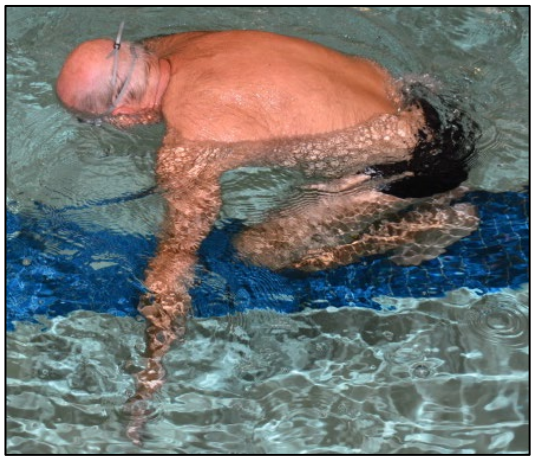
**Clap out**

Repeat this sequence in the water, first in shallow water, and remove yourself from the exercise. Continue in shoulder-deep water. The student should be feeling the water push against the force of his palms. Once proficient, have your student experiment with lifting his feet off the bottom. This is the first step, too, in learning to tread water.

## Stand-up recovery

Once the supported front float and sculling drills are mastered, it's time to teach the stand-up recovery. You can teach bilateral AKs the same sequence with an emphasis on the treading since they will not stand up. You can also teach a rollover at this point for AKs who do not feel comfortable with the sculling. Explain to your student that in order stand after a front float, he must do all three of the following skills simultaneously:

- Press the hands down, and tuck the knees under the chest
- Lift the head to initiate rotation
- As the body becomes vertical, extend the legs to the bottom and put both feet securely on the pool floor, shoulder width apart with one foot slightly in front of the other.



**Demonstrate the recovery while standing close to the wall, and show your student that he can use the wall if the rotation does not work at first. Tell him to stand immediately after he begins to float so he has enough time to make corrections.**

**A little help to stand up builds confidence.**

## Watch and listen

- Does your student bring both knees toward his chest at the same time? Sometimes, your student will try to keep one leg outstretched as a way to protect against sinking. This will result in an incomplete rotation and is an indication that he is not completely relaxed. Help him by placing your arm

under his hands. It's possible, too, that your student does not have complete range of motion, and both he and you will need to make adjustments for this. Improvise and practice, and good results can be achieved.

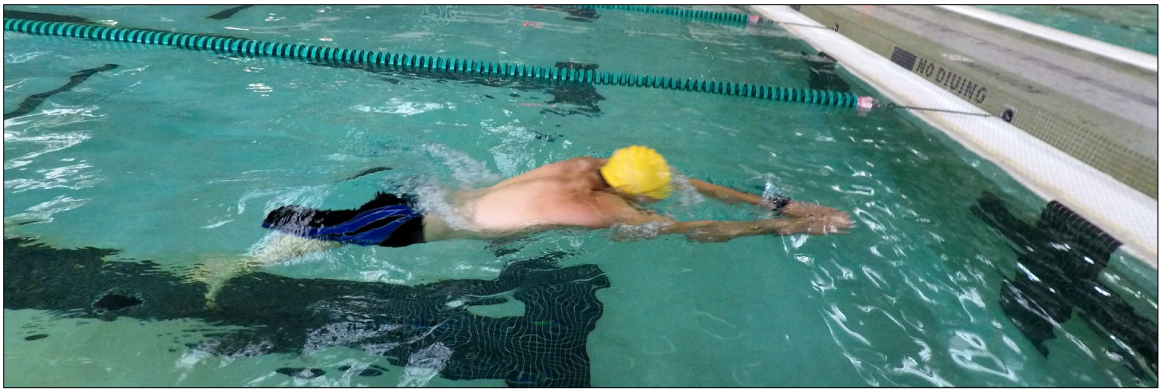
- As your student gets more confident, have him back away from the wall a little farther on each attempt. Until he is completely confident, make sure he floats for no more than half the maximum time he can hold his breath.

## Unsupported front float

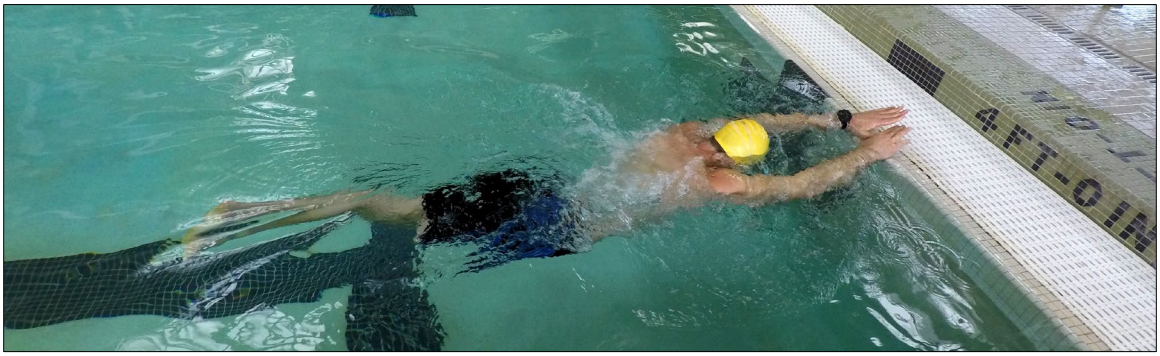
This progression will help your student feel comfortable floating without the assistance of the wall. If he was bouncing his hands above the gutter when doing the supported front float, make sure he understands that he is able to do this because he is floating on his own and he does not need the wall for this skill.

- Explain that he will stand away from the wall and, using the buoyancy and momentum provided by the full breath he takes, he will briefly float as he falls toward the side. Reassure him by saying if he raises his head at any time during this exercise, you will quickly assist him.
- Demonstrate by standing with your arms stretched toward the wall with your hands about three feet away from it. Put your face in the water and fall toward the wall with knees straight. As you fall, the momentum will lift your feet off the ground for an instant until you reach the side. Lift your head to breathe out and in.
- Your student should attempt and practice what you just demonstrated.


**Don't rush your student as he prepares to fall toward the wall.**




**Your student will briefly float, unassisted, as his momentum carries him toward the wall.**



**The wall provides a stopping point, and support, for your new floater.**

Some students with limited thoraxic extension or shoulder injuies may not be able to have their arms and hands over their head. They may have to do this skill with their hands by their sides facing away from the wall so they do not hit their head on the wall.

### Watch and listen

- Does your student jump to the wall with his head only partially submerged?
- If your student jumps toward the wall, he is trying to get through this exercise as quickly as possible because he is not confident. If your student has trouble relaxing, put your forearm under his outstretched arms so that he can see it when his face is in the water. Reassure him that if he raises his head, you will lift him safely from the water. If that's not enough support, let him gently rest his arms on yours so he has additional support.

**When the head is up, the body goes down.**

## Front glide

Now that your student is beginning to move through the water, it is a good time introduce the concept of streamline.

**Be sure to correct for proper arm and head position.**

An effective body line is the platform from which all the strokes are built. When explaining how to streamline, use the three-points principle to help the student remember the basics: 1) The swimmer should place his hands with the fingers of one over the fingers of the other; 2) the arms should have straight elbows; and 3) biceps go behind the ears. The head position is with the chin on the chest. If the arms are behind the ears, the head adjusts to this position automatically. (If they cannot keep their spine straight when they have they have their arms over head, or if they have to bend their elbows in order to have their hands on top of one another, they should keep their arms apart so their arms are straight.)

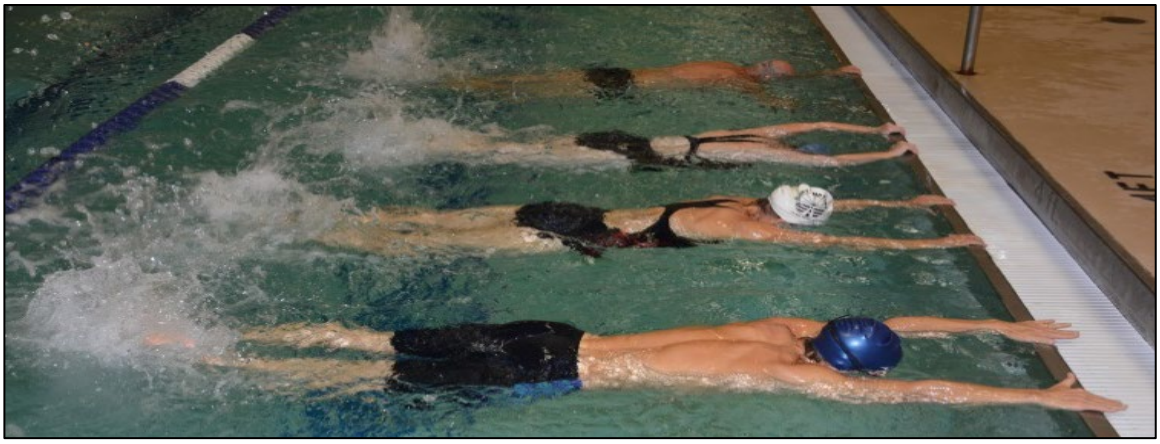
- Demonstrate by standing three feet from the wall. With your arms in the streamline position, drop your face into the water between your biceps as you once again fall toward the wall.
- Explain again using the three-points principle: Fingers over fingers, elbows straight, arms behind the ears.
- Practice by having your student increase the distance he glides, as he feels more confident.

## Front flutter kick

When swimming, especially with freestyle or backstroke, developing an effective kick is important. The kick is like a rudder on a boat—it keeps the ship steady and on course. If a student can develop a strong and effective kick early in the learning process, it will serve him well when he adds strokes.

Although kicking can be helpful in getting your student horizontal while floating on the wall, in order to perfect the kick, it is recommended to work at the wall as little as possible. The kick provides propulsive force, and the student should experience this as soon as he floating without assistance.

- While your student watches, explain the different elements: knees straight but loose, feet separating no more than 12 inches and ankles floppy with toes pointed away from the body. Then demonstrate the kick at the wall.



**With the face in the water, correct body position is easier to maintain.**

- Explain again with the three-points principle: knees are straight but loose, feet 12 inches apart, and the ankles are floppy.
- To assess your student's kick, have him work at the wall. This also alleviates the added concern about floating. While kicking at the wall, your student should keep his head in alignment with his spine and put his face in the water to facilitate good body position.

Using the "positive sandwich" method of criticism, remember to point out needed corrections by giving criticism between two positive observations.

### Kick troubleshooting

- **Toes not pointed.** Remind your student to relax his ankles. Ask him to visualize shaking a loose shoe off his foot. Some adults, as they age, lose flexibility in their ankles. Swim fins might help, and in extreme situations, have the swimmer consider breaststroke or scissor kick.
- **Bending the knees.** Your students might lift their feet from the water by bending the knees as they kick. Tell your student to keep their knees straight and their kick small – keeping the feet no more than 12 inches apart. They should also feel the effort in their quads and hamstrings. (You might want to point out these muscles to your student as you explain this.)
- **Locked ankles.** Some people will tighten the muscles of their ankles as they try to point their toes. This is why we focus on “floppy ankles” instead of pointed toes. Once again, this can also be a function of the fact that most people lose flexibility as they get older.
- If his kicks are efficient, have your student step arm’s length from the wall as with the front float before. Ask your student to use the streamline position, and as his feet leave the bottom, begin to kick. Stay next to your student to assist, if necessary. As your student’s kicks become more effective, increase the distance from the wall. Point out that he is moving through the water on his own, and congratulate him.

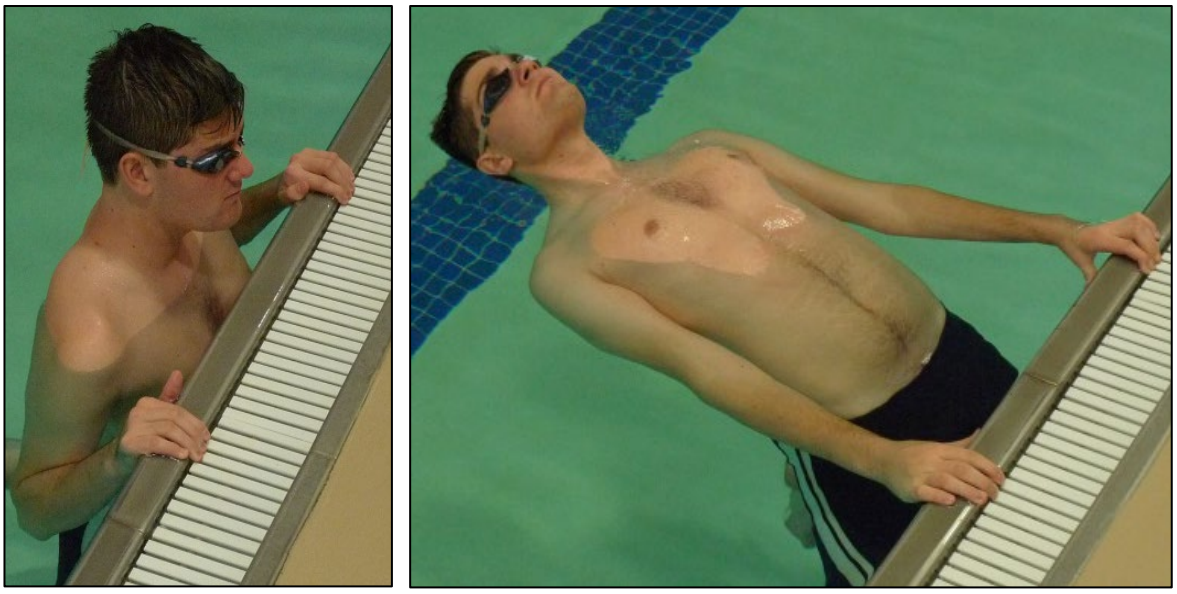
## Back float

Being able to float on your back is a basic water-survival skill. Explain to your student that the back float is a skill that gives people the ability to save themselves in an emergency. When on his back, your student can breathe freely, look around to see where he is, and call for help if needed. Also, from the back float, your student will learn basic swimming techniques so that he can get to safety. Bilateral AEs and BEs should start with a supported back float.

- This exercise should be done in water that is approximately shoulder deep.
- Demonstrate by standing next to the wall, holding on with both hands, and with your knees, hips and chest against the side. Tell your student that when you’re in this position and your shoulders are level with the top of the water, you barely have to hold on to support yourself.
- Next, lean back until your ears are in the water, your chin points to the ceiling or sky and your arms are straight but relaxed. As you rest in this position, explain to your student that the water is cradling your body and your hands are holding you to the wall, not holding you up.
- Finally, let go of the wall and gently push away from the wall with the tops of your feet. Your hands should be loosely at your side.
- Show your student that to stand, he needs to raise his head, bring his knees to his chest, and swirl the water with his hands, all at the same time. (More on this in the next section.)
- Practice by having your student hold the top of the wall, standing with his knees, hips, and chest against the wall. It might take some time for your student to relax and let the water hold him up. Encourage relaxation, and to feel the water support every part of the body. Enjoyment boosts

confidence, so don't rush the process, and let your student feel his buoyancy.

- Have your student hold the side in shoulder-deep water, with his knees, hips, and chest against the wall. Next, have him relax and lift his feet off the bottom by bending his knees and feeling the water providing support. Remind him that the buoyancy provided when his lungs are filled with air works the same way for the back float as with the front float. Show your student correct positioning.
- Next, the student should look to the ceiling or sky, lean back and let the water support him as his arms extend to straight. Keep the chin up.
- Remind your student using the three-points principle — chin up, chest up, breathe deeply.
- Practice by placing your hand between your student's shoulders for initial support. When it is clear that your student does not need your help, inform him that he is floating on his own and you will gently pull your hand away. After floating for a short amount of time, help your student stand by lifting at the shoulders. Once he is successful, have him practice unaided and for longer periods.



**Make sure your student is relaxed. Feel the buoyancy, and let go.**

### Watch and listen

- Does your student begin to sink after they let go of the wall? Body and head position are very important in this exercise. If your student is not relaxed, they will instinctively resort to the fetal position. By doing so, they will lift their head, let their hips drop and raise their knees. Any combination of these will literally sink your student. Avoid this by standing next to your student and coach them as they float, reminding them to keep their chin and hips up.

## Stand-up recovery

Especially when doing the back float, your student should be able to return to standing. Just like with the recovery on the front float, do the following simultaneously. These are also the three points you want to repeat. Assist when necessary, but independence with this skill is the goal.

**Step 1: Scull the hands forward while bending the knees.**

**Step 2: Lift the head as the hands continue pushing back.**

**Step 3: Bend the knees to the chest, complete the rotation, and stand up.**

Demonstrate this for your student and emphasize that this skill has to be done deliberately and with speed. Explain that you will stand behind him and not let his face go under water.

**Watch and listen**

- How quickly is your student moving? If your student is hesitant while trying to stand, he will not get vertical, and his face will go under.
- Does your student lift just the head or just the knees? Either of these will again force the head under water.
- Does the arm movement provide adequate propulsion to rotate the body? Sculling is a learned skill and one that has to be practiced. Have your student practice while standing.

## Back flutter kick

The back flutter kick uses the same elements as the front flutter kick: knees straight but loose, feet separating no more than 12 inches and ankles floppy with toes pointed. The difference is that the propulsive force comes from lifting the leg instead of pushing down. Because of this, there is a tendency to bend the knees so they come out of the water. Warn your student against doing this because he runs the risk of pushing his upper body under the surface. When this happens, water will likely go up his nose, and it usually takes time both physically and emotionally to recover.

**Your students can concentrate on the kick when they hold the board.**

- Demonstrate the back flutter kick by hugging a kick board to your chest. Initiate a back float from a standing position by bending your knees so your shoulders dip into the water and gently push off the bottom. When you are horizontal, you can begin explaining as you kick because your face is out of the water.
- Explain that the back flutter kick is very similar to the one your student has already mastered on the front. Continue by pointing out the similarities and the differences.
- You can use visual images to help avoid “bicycling” the legs, such as:
  - Splash the water out of the pool each time you kick.

    - Imagine dribbling a soccer ball with the top of your feet.
- Explain again with the three-points principle: knees are straight but loose, feet are 12 inches apart, and the ankles are floppy.
- Practice first by letting your student hug a kick board. Have him kick slowly, focusing on the correct technique. Once this is established, encourage him to kick faster and stronger to generate propulsion.
- Once your student is kicking effectively with the board, have him kick without any floatation aids, starting from the ready position on the wall. (Discussed in the next section.)

**Watch and listen**

- Do your student's knees come out of the water with each kick? Remind your student how this could affect him if he were not hugging the kickboard.
- Do your student's toes come out of the water with his feet almost perpendicular to the bottom? Remind your student to point his toes and relax the ankles. If this does not work, try using fins to help get the feet in the proper position. In some cases, people have limited flexibility, and it will be difficult for them to generate efficient propulsion.

## Pushing off the wall

**Front glide**

Up to this point, you have had your student work toward the wall. That solid wall being nearby has built the student's confidence and comfort level. But the student now has the skills to push away from the wall and set his sights on the other side of the pool.

The ability to maximize the speed generated by pushing off the wall starts with proper positioning.

To get into the ready position:

- Hold the wall at the gutter with one hand. The other arm is straight and pointing to the opposite side of the pool.
- Both feet should be against the wall with the knees bent.
- Shoulders should be at the surface of the water.
- Eyes should be focused to the other side of the pool.


**This swimmer is in the front ready position for the front glide.**

To push off:

- Take a breath and tuck the head while simultaneously bringing the two hands together in a streamline position.
- Double AKs or BKs will not be able to push off the wall, so they will have to push off the wall with their back hand. Their lead arm will start the first stroke. There is no streamlining for these swimmers.
- Let the body sink slightly below the surface and push off.
- Demonstrate the front glide from the wall, and after gliding for five seconds, do a stand-up recovery. Have your student practice this, and when he has reached a level of competency, have him begin kicking as soon as he pushes off the wall.

**Watch and listen**

- Does your student push off before the hands are together? If so, he is not maximizing the push because the hands are not in an effective streamline position.
- Is your student's head held high as he continues to look forward? With the head above the arms, this is not only an inefficient streamline, but the legs will be forced toward the bottom.

**Back glide**

Many adults enjoy swimming backstroke because they can breathe at their leisure. The following progression allows your student to take advantage of the push from the wall and get in an optimal body position to add the kick and stroke. Demonstrate the following as you explain it. With your face out of the water, this method can be quite effective.

To get into the ready position:

- Face the wall, and hold the gutter at water level with both hands.
- Bring the feet up on the wall, and crouch there with the knees to the chest and the elbows bent. Let the water support you with your shoulders at water level, your chin up and ears in the water.

To push off:

- Relax the arms slightly, let go of the side, lift the hips to the surface and push off gently.
- Let the hands rest at the side.

**Make sure the ears are in the water.**

**Chin up to push off.**

**Watch and listen**

- Does a wave cascade over your student's head? If so, he pushed off with too much force. Tell your student to slow down and let his chin drop slightly toward the chest. This will make his head ride higher in the water with a slightly diagonal body position. As he develops the skill, he should move the head to the neutral position to get his body horizontal.

# Teaching basic strokes

The USMS ALTS program encourages adults to learn to swim and enjoy swimming as a lifelong activity. The first stroke presented is freestyle. These competencies, based on ones established by American Red Cross, are used as a measure of success in learning the freestyle progression. They are:

1. Swim 25 yards
2. Step or jump into deep water
3. Return to the surface and float/tread water for one minute
4. Turn around in a full circle and find an exit
5. Exit the water

Once the student has mastered the water competencies, additional strokes can be taught, including:

- **Elementary backstroke** This is considered a "safety stroke" because it requires little energy, and allows the swimmer to breathe, look around and yell for help, if needed.
- **Survival backstroke** This double-arm backstroke is a skill that is taught to many service members
- **Backstroke** Many of the skills used in freestyle are transferable to backstroke with the added benefit that the swimmer can generally breathe at their leisure.
- **Breaststroke** This is the only stroke that uses the inside of the feet and legs to generate propulsion. Also, when swum slowly, it is a great safety stroke that can be done for long periods with less fatigue.

This

# Chapter 4

# Becoming Safer in Water

## Water competency skill 1: Swim 25 yards

### Freestyle

Now that your swimmer can float and move through the water with a functional kick, your student is ready to learn the basic freestyle swimming skill.

- **Stroke description:** The hand enters the water fingertips first, palm down, extended in front of the shoulder. As the hand pushes down on the water and begins the stroke, it accelerates straight along the side of the body and finishes below the hip. To recover, the swimmer lifts at the elbow, and keeps fingertips close to the water with a high elbow. If there are shoulder or elbow limitations, a stroke can be done with a straight arm that is low to the surface of the water and is moving in line with the hips.
- **Kick description:** The knees are straight but loose; ankles are floppy; and toes are pointed. The feet separate between 9 to 12 inches on each kick. The swimmer should feel the kick in his quadriceps and hamstrings. For some with lower body injuries, a pull buoy or neoprene shorts might be needed. Coordinating arms and legs can be very difficult and you might have to isolate the arms first.
- **Body position:** The body is horizontal with the head in a neutral position looking at the bottom or slightly forward. The body rolls laterally along the axis of the spine with each stroke.

## Teaching freestyle without breathing

- Explain to your student that you will now add arm stroking to his streamline kicks. For the initial attempts at this, the goal is to get the student reaching long with his hands in front of his shoulders and finishing long below his hip. The arms and hands should not drag through the water on the recovery. The head should be neutral, with the student looking to the bottom of the pool. The kick is a steady flutter.
- Demonstrate by getting in the ready position, pushing off the wall in a streamline and kicking as soon as your feet leave the wall. When you begin to kick, drop one hand, moving it parallel along the side of your body and finishing with your hand below your hip. Recover with a high elbow as you begin to stroke with the other hand. Swim for a few strokes and finish

**Three-points explanation: Arms long in front and back, head down, and steady kick**

with a stand-up recovery.

**Watch and listen**

Does your student lift his hand before completing the stroke? When doing dog paddle, rotating the hands directly under the face gives the sense that the hands are holding the head up. New swimmers will sometimes feel the need to use similar short, quick strokes when they first attempt freestyle. Reassure your student that he has many seconds of air to recover from a mistake and that he should relax. Remind him to slow down and stretch his hands below his hips so he gets the most from each stroke. Two mental images can help:

- Thumb to your thigh
- Imagine someone you'd like to splash who is standing at your feet as you swim. With the completion of each stroke, send a little splash their way

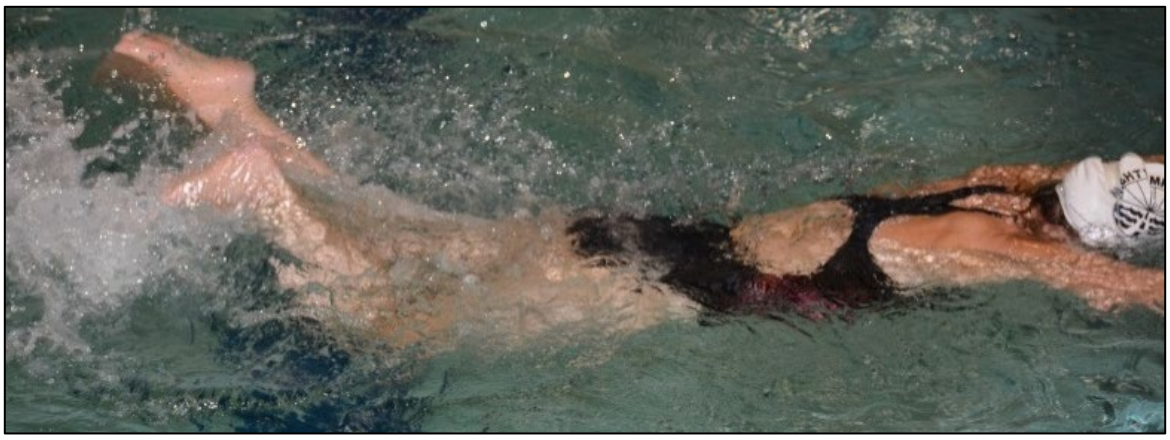
**An example of a short stroke.**

Is your student's body diagonal in the water? Look at your student's head position. If the head is out of the neutral position and looking up to any degree, his feet and legs will be pushed down. Tell him to relax his neck and shoulders and let the water cradle his head so the surface of the water is at the top of his scalp.

**For every action there is an equal but opposite reaction. If the head is up, the feet are down, and working too hard. Your adult student will understand this and will appreciate the explanation.**

Does your student's kick revert to bent knees, feet too high out of the water, uneven rhythm and/or a one-kick-per-stroke pattern? When first adding the stroke, it can be difficult for new swimmers to integrate kicking and stroking together. You can help in a number of ways:

- Tell your student to continue kicking for a longer period of time before adding strokes.
- If your student has a functional stroke, explain that he should concentrate completely on kick. Remind him of the three-points principle of a good kick before starting.
- Take a step back and have your student do a front glide with kick without adding the strokes to reestablish an effective kick.
- Is your student's stroke "all over the place," with their head swinging back and forth, arms flailing with an erratic kick? Emphasize that your student should slow down and reach farther ahead.
- Explain that the farther the swimmer's arms and legs are from their axis, the larger the body's profile becomes and the more drag they create. Have your students imagine swimming through the narrowest tunnel possible. By slowing down and lengthening, they are shrinking the diameter of the tunnel, reducing drag and maximizing propulsive force. Remind them of the three-points principle for the stroke and kick and have them attempt this again.



**This student is kicking from her knees.**

When teaching the freestyle arm stroke, you might find a snorkel helpful, since the proper breathing technique has not yet been taught. Using a snorkel while teaching can let your student concentrate on the skill being taught because breathing worries are alleviated. In this case, the snorkel allows the student to establish good body position and kick, and work on the proper arm movement while not having to hold their breath.

**In this photo, the student benefits from using a snorkel while the instructor is teaching the arm strokes by using a "catch-up" drill. When the student's hand hits the instructor's, it's time for the other arm to start its cycle. Catch-up is a great way to teach the freestyle arm stroke, as it forces the student to go slowly and deliberately.**

Until the proper technique for breathing is taught, another good option to get your swimmer actually moving, is to teach the rollover. The rollover is a vital safety skill. The swimmer can transition from swimming freestyle on his front, to floating on his back where he can rest and breathe until he is ready to swim on his front again.

You will find that even your swimmers who can breathe properly appreciate knowing how to transition from their fronts to their backs. Follow the steps shown in the following photos.

**1. Ask your student to swim a few freestyle strokes before initiating the rollover.**

**2. Using the momentum created by a downward stroke, the student will begin to turn onto his back. He will roll to the opposite side of the stroking arm, which stays at his side once the**

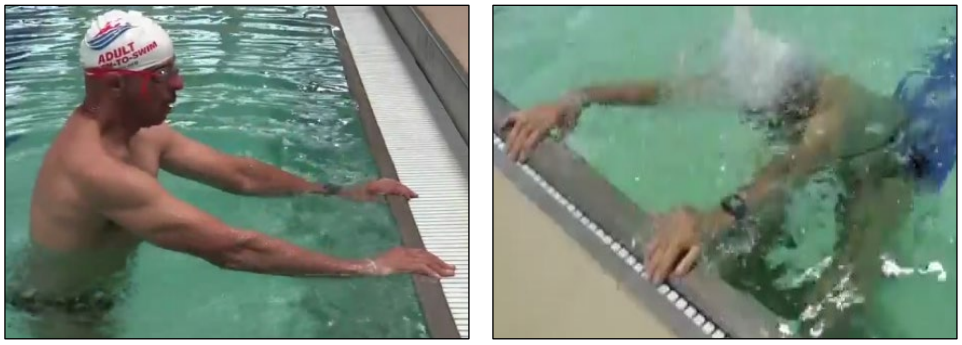
**3. As he spins onto his back, he will pull with his other arm until it reaches his hip. The force of this stroke will turn him onto his back.**

**4. The swimmer can rest and breathe in the back float position. If necessary, he could look around for an exit or call for help.**

## Freestyle with breathing

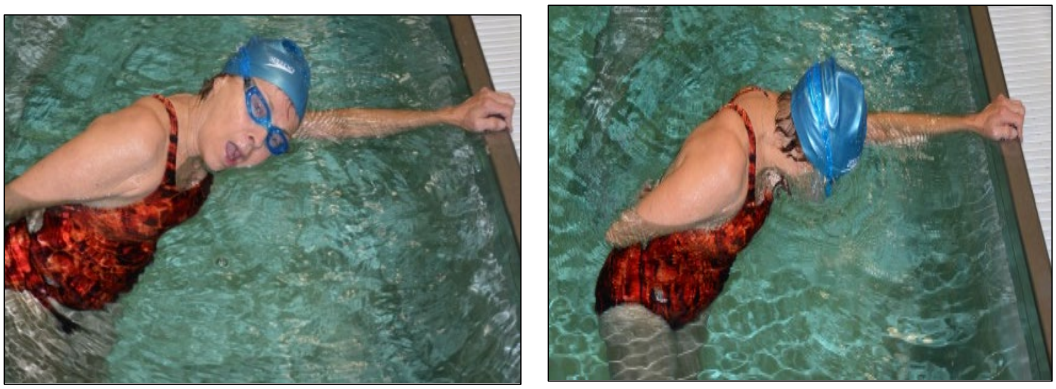
The most critical skill to learn for an adult non-swimmer is proper breathing technique. Many adults who took lessons as children stopped before they mastered the ability to breathe while swimming. Be observant and patient and offer helpful advice. Use the following steps to help your student develop confidence with putting these skills together:

- **Bobs.** Remind your student that good air exchange is the basis for swimming any distance comfortably. Beginning with this exercise, you will add breathing progressively to his stroke. Have him hold the wall and do 10 or more bobs. Make sure you have your student alternate between blowing from his nose and mouth.



**Proper breathing starts with good bobs.**

- **Breathing in position.** This step introduces the proper head position and movement for taking a breath while swimming freestyle.
  - Explain to your student that he will hold the wall with his left hand, arm extended straight out. His shoulders should be at water level. The right hand will remain at his side, with his feet securely on the bottom. He should not kick while practicing breathing.
  - Continue by saying that your student's head should rotate on the axis of the spine so that he can exhale to the bottom of the pool and inhale while his ear is in the water. As he turns to take a breath, your student can roll his shoulder out of the water. To avoid getting water in the mouth when taking a breath, encourage your student to look to the ceiling or sky on the initial attempts.
  - Demonstrate for your student and emphasize taking a breath through the mouth when turning the face out of the water.



**Explain with three points: Exhale to the bottom, place the ear in the water, and inhale through the mouth.**

### Watch and listen

- Does your student lift her head and look forward when taking a breath? Remind her to breathe to the side and keep the ear in the water. By letting the water cradle her head in the neutral position, her body will stay horizontal while swimming.
- Can you hear your student exhale when she turns her head for a breath? Tell your student to blow out all her air explosively and completely when her face is in the water. There is not enough time for complete air exchange when the face turns out of the water.
- Does your student get water in her mouth when she inhales? Make sure she is lifting her mouth toward the ceiling or sky and no part of her mouth is under water when she inhales. You can also point out that as the student becomes accustomed to breathing this way, she will learn to deal with the water that may get in her mouth.

- **Single-arm stroke at the wall.** Once your student can breathe effectively with her head rotating in the correct position, she is ready to add this skill into the stroke. This next step gives your student the opportunity to concentrate on her stroking arm and how the head movement fits into the arm rotation.
    - Explain to your student that using the same position she used in the previous step, she will begin to stoke with one arm while she breathes. While holding on with the left hand, your student should put her left ear in the water as before. As soon as she takes a breath, her right arm should begin stroking. Explain simply: When the hand is forward, she should exhale with her face in the water. When her arm is by her side, she should inhale by looking to the ceiling or sky and keeping her ear in the water.
    - As you demonstrate, be aware that the focus of this exercise is not stroke perfection. Your arm should basically windmill. Do this very slowly and make sure your arm rotation does not change speed.
    - As your student develops proficiency, you can refine your explanation by pointing out that the head begins to turn for a breath as the hand passes under the face. After a breath is taken, the arm pushes the face back in the water during recovery.

**Explain with the three points principle: When the stroking hand is forward, exhale. When the hand is back, inhale through the mouth.**

### Watch and listen

- Does your student stop moving her arm at any point? Sometimes your student will feel that her breathing will have to catch up to the stroke or vice versa. Remedially, you can help move her arm for her. Once in position, gently hold your student's arm at the wrist. As you move the arm through the stroke, instruct her when to inhale and when to exhale.
- Do you hear any exhalation when the student turns her head from the water? Remind her to exhale completely underwater.
- Does your student lift her head to face forward for a breath? As soon as this happens, stop the practice. Remind her to keep her ear in the water while looking to the ceiling or sky to take a breath. It can be helpful to point out something, either real or imagined, on the ceiling or sky on which she can focus.

### Freestyle with one breath

Although your student is now ready to swim, we will introduce the full integration of all three skills in small steps. By focusing on a series of smaller steps, the progression to the entire stroke will be easier to conquer.

- Explain to your student that she will now attempt to take one breath as she swims freestyle. This can be explained as a two-part three-point skill:
  - Part 1: Tell her to 1) push off the wall from the ready position and begin kicking. As soon as she begins to kick, 2) have her start stroking. Once she starts stroking, 3) she should begin to exhale.
  - Part 2: When she needs to take a breath, 1) wait for her hand to pass under her head, 2) turn her face to the ceiling or sky, and 3) inhale. Do a stand-up recovery after a few more strokes.
- Demonstrate for your student by making sure that you stand up after one breath. By having her focus on this single breath, your student does not have to worry about making it all the way to the other side of the pool and she can concentrate on this single element.
- You should demonstrate with a perfect stroke, but this is still not the time to engage your student in the finer points of freestyle. Comfortable breathing first, stroke refinement later.

**Watch and listen**

Remember to watch for the following:

- Watch that your student is blowing out in the water by the bubbles around her head.
- Listen for a breath when her face turns from the water.
- Is her head rotating on the axis of her spine, or is she lifting face forward?

Once your student is able to integrate air exchange into her stroke, you can encourage her to take another breath. Then progress to adding five breaths. Next, head halfway down the pool, and finally swim the entire length. Repeat each of these steps enough so that your student can build her comfort and confidence. And as with all steps within this manual, remember to congratulate your student on her efforts and successes!

## Stroke corrections

**Crossing over.** All movement in swimming should be balanced and deliberate to reduce drag. Considering that the center of the body runs from the top of the head and down the spine, each stroke should remain on the side where it originates.

- Description: Upon entry, it is a common fault to extend the hand beyond the center to the opposite side.
- Effect: This decreases stroke efficiency and in extreme cases, can push the body back and forth with each stroke, increasing the swimmer’s profile and creating more drag.
- Solution: 10 and 2. Have your student’s hands enter the water at 10 o’clock and 2 o’clock on an imaginary clock dial. This might seem a little wide, but the overcorrection usually results in the student landing her hands where they need to go.

**Dropped elbows.** If perpendicular to the bottom of the pool, your forearm contributes a considerable amount of propulsion. If your swimmer lets her elbow drop, forcing the forearm closer to parallel, as she moves through the stroke, the propulsion is greatly reduced.

- Description: As your swimmer initiates the pull, the elbow leads through the stroke.
- Effect: She looks like she is spinning her arms and not getting anywhere.
- Solution: There are several:
  - Fist drill. With the hand held in a fist, the swimmer concentrates on a high elbow with their forearm perpendicular to the bottom of the pool.
  - Reach over a barrel. Give your student the mental image that she is leaning over a barrel with her arms hanging over the side.
  - Lead with the palm. Explain that as she pulls, your student should move her palm under her elbow.

**Short stroke.** If your student does not get full extension on each stroke, she will not maximize propulsion. Also, this can contribute to limited lateral body roll.

- Description: Your student's hand enters slightly above the shoulder with the pull initiated quickly thereafter.
- Effect: Your student cuts out the most effective part of her stroke—the catch at the beginning. Without reaching long in front, the shoulders also have a tendency to remain flat.
- Solution: Explain to your student that she must fully extend her arm to get the most out of her stroke. Two visual images can help here:
  - Swim over the noodle. Tell your student to imagine she is pushing a pool noodle perpendicular to her body as she swims. With each stroke, she should reach over the noodle before letting her hand enter the water.
  - Favorite dessert. Ask your student what her favorite dessert is. (This always gets a student's attention and it's amazing the care that goes into making the decision!) Tell your student to imagine a huge portion of that dessert at the other end of the pool. With each stroke, as soon as the hand enters the water, she should give an extra effort to reach a little farther to get that dessert. This stretches the stroke and helps roll the shoulders.

**Fingers spread.** Many swimmers relax their fingers as they swim, creating gaps that reduce propulsive force.

- Description: While stroking, your student spreads her fingers too far apart.
- Effect: This reduces both drag and lift forces while swimming. Although there is some research that says vortexes are created between fingers with a slight gap, effectively increasing surface area, most swimmers are not capable of maintaining this without spreading the fingers too far.
- Solution: Tell your student to use a karate chop hand position, feeling each finger touch the ones next to it.

**Slapping hands.** As you watch and listen to your student, you will distinctly hear a "slap" as her hand enters the water.

- Description: Instead of slicing into the water fingertips first, the student "slaps" the water palms down.
- Effect: As the hand slaps the water, it drags air bubbles into the water with it. These bubbles act as grease, reduce essential friction, and cut the stroke's propulsive potential.
- Solution: This can be corrected by reminding your student to slice the water with her fingertips first and reach under the water, not over it.

**Flat shoulders:** As your student strokes, her shoulders should rotate back and forth on the axis of her spine.

- Description: The shoulders remain fixed on the surface with no lateral roll.
- Effect: When the shoulders roll correctly, they cut through the water at a diagonal, acting the same way a keel of a boat cuts through water. Flat shoulders are not hydrodynamic and create drag.
- Solution: 6-kick switch or 6-kick, 3-stroke drills. Your student should kick on her side, lower hand stretched in front, upper hand resting on her side. Kick 6 times side-to-side, take 1 stroke, and switch to the other side. For the 6-kick, 3-stroke drill, add 3 strokes between each of the 6 kicks. When first trying this drill, have the student wear fins.

**Head high.** Many of us were taught to swim looking forward with the water surface just above our goggles. Although many people still swim in this manner because we naturally want to see where we are going, this head position has a negative effect on the proper body position relative to the surface of the water.

- Description: The student's head is facing forward and too high in the water.
- Effect: The physics principle of "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction," applies here. As the head is raised, the feet will either sink or more effort will have to be exerted to keep the feet horizontal. In either case, your student will have to work harder.
- Solution: Tell your student to feel the surface of the water on the top of her head instead of her forehead. She should look at the bottom of the pool, not where she is going.

Once your student has progressed to this point where she has mastered the basic skills of swimming freestyle, it is time for the student to work toward the American Red Cross competency goal of swimming 25 yards. Do this by helping the student increase her endurance by having her swim short distances using the skills learned, and increase the distance as she becomes more confident and proficient with her swimming.

- Once the student is comfortable extending her swimming distances and you are satisfied that she is in control, invite her to swim from the deep end to where she can stand. Remind her that you will be right there to help if she has any concerns. As she swims, stay close by with a floatation device. If the student has concerns about being in deep water, keep the student swimming in the shallow water.

# Water competency skill 2: Jump into deep water

**Embracing deep water.** Now that your student has a sense of her own buoyancy and has learned the freestyle stroke, it's time to introduce her to jumping into deep water and swimming to the side of the pool. Not only is this an American Red Cross water competency goal, it'll also help her conquer a major concern for many nonswimming adults. By jumping into deep water and swimming to safety without assistance, your students will increase their chances of saving themselves in an emergency situation.

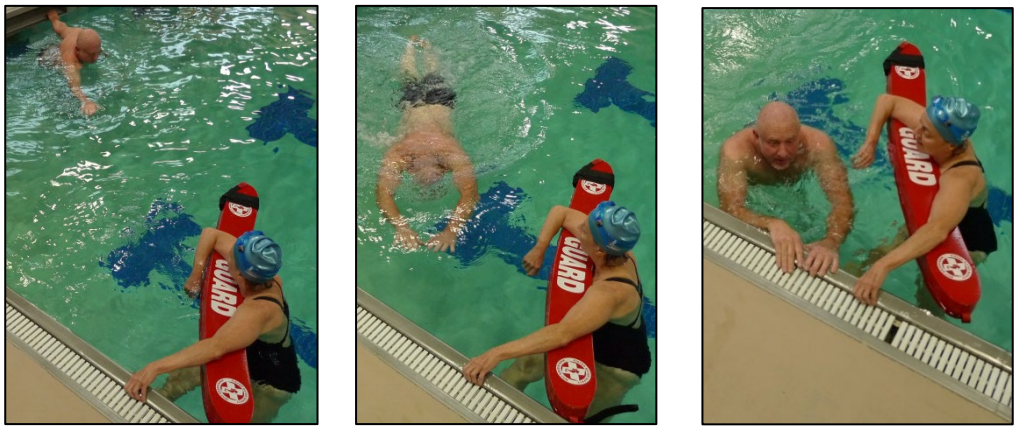
- Swimming. Make sure your student understands that all the skills he has mastered work equally well in deep water. During the following exercises in deep water, make sure that you are holding a floatation device. Although you will go slowly enough that your student should remain calm, always be prepared to ensure that both you and your student will be safe.
- After sitting by the side of the deep end and talking with your student about how he feels, invite him to go down the ladder and then hold the side. Get in the water and stay right next to him.

**As your student enters the water, stay close, and have a floatation device, just in case.**

- Have your student hold the side as though he were preparing to do the back float. As he relaxes and the water begins to support him, have him eventually support himself with just his fingertips on the side.


**Remind your student that he can float just as effectively in the deep end as the shallow.**

- Once your student is holding the side with his fingertips, invite him to do a supported front float as he did in the shallow end. Tell him to focus on the similarity of the feeling, but this time, look below. Instruct him to appreciate that he is in the deep end, but he is still in control by holding the side. Continue with the front float progression, bobbing the hands on the side, kicking, moving away slightly, and then kicking to the side.
- Move to the corner of the deep end and explain that the student will swim diagonally the short distance from the side to the end. Once he does this successfully, increase the distance. During this exercise, you should hold a floatation device such as a lifeguard tube that you can give to your student if he gets nervous. You can avoid this by starting with very short distances.




**Swimming diagonally across a corner of the pool is a good way to boost confidence.**

## Jumping into deep water

What happens if I fall in water over my head? What do I do if the boat sinks? How do I convince my kids to stay out of the deep end? One of the main elements of being afraid of the water is unexpectedly falling in water that too deep. By helping your student overcome this hurdle, you are truly introducing her to a new perspective on long-held fears.

Some students will appreciate learning to jump into the water by starting from a seated position. After that is mastered, if your student is comfortable, they can stand and jump in.

## Seated deep-water jump

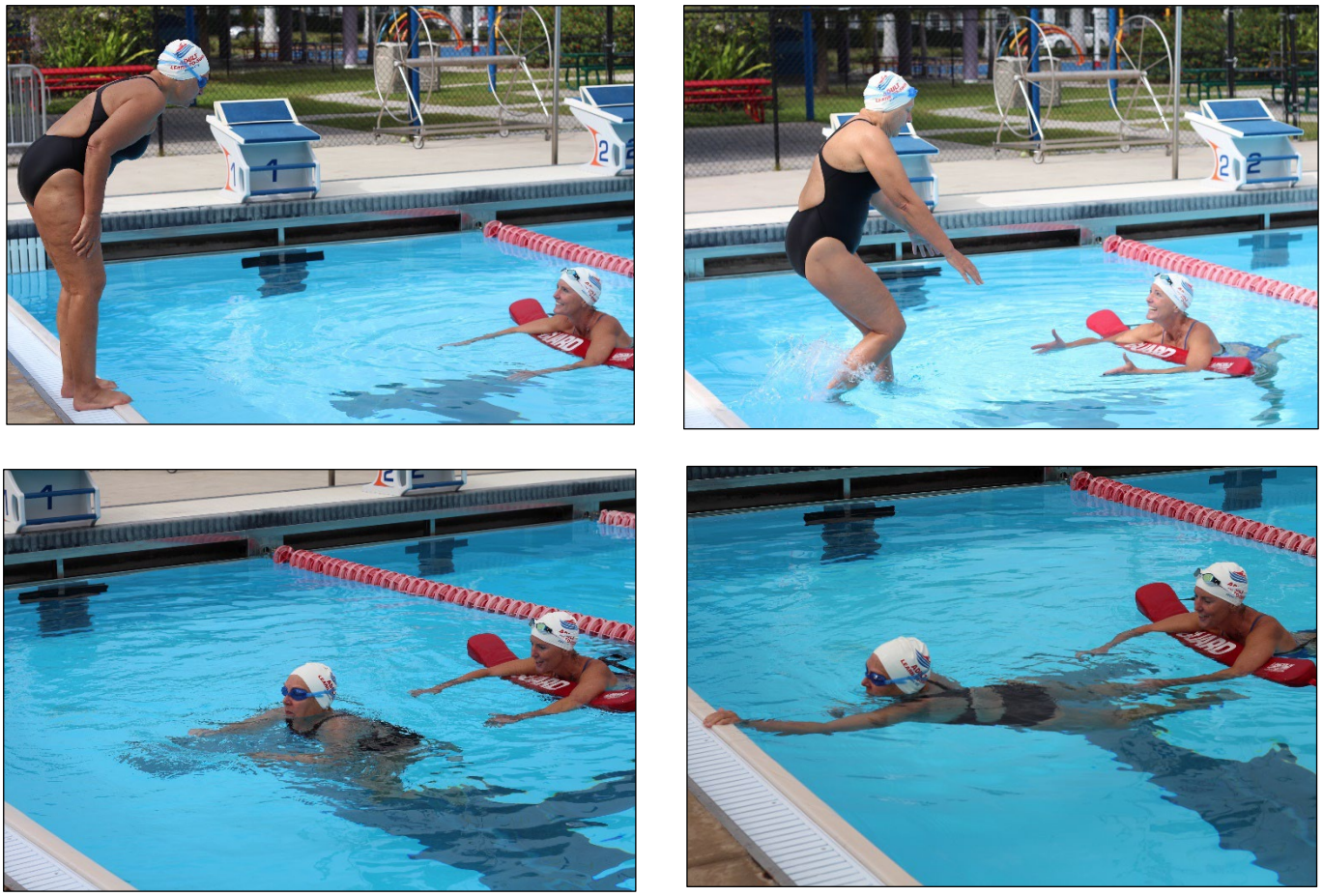
During this exercise, make sure you hold a rescue tube or other floatation device that can adequately support two people.

- Using the “explain, demonstrate, explain, practice” technique, explain to your student how to do this skill. Remind him that you will be by his side with floatation available, if needed. Follow the steps outlined in the following photos.

**Seated deep-water jump: Your student should sit with hands at the side and resting on the edge of the pool (top left). To enter the water, the student pushes up and away from the side (top right). As he enters the water, he should push down with his hands and arms and stroke to the surface (bottom left). When his head surfaces, he should take a breath, then put his head down and stroke to the wall (bottom right). Most of the time, the student will only have to reach for the wall and grab it.**

## Standing deep-water jump

- Have your student stand on the edge with her toes over the side. Explain that she should have her arms outstretched as she enters the water.
- As she jumps from the side with her two feet together, your student should push her hands down as they enter the water.
- Once she is in the water, she should continue gently stroking and kicking until she comes back to the surface.
- When she reaches the top, she should take a breath as her head comes up and then do relaxed strokes to the side.



**Standing deep-water jump success! Once your student has reached this point in her lessons, she will have learned that water can be enjoyed. From here, you can teach your student all the competitive and safety strokes. After that, it will be her choice whether to embrace a life filled with great swimming.**

## Water competency skill 3: Tread water or float for one minute

Any movement that keeps the body in a vertical position in the water is considered treading water. To do this safely, though, so the swimmer can remain in place for an extended length of time with minimal exertion, there are specific elements that must be incorporated.

- Stroke description: The hands are angled palm down and maintain a sculling motion back and forth in front of the chest.
- Kick description: To tread water, the swimmer should use the eggbeater kick. With the body in a sitting position, the knees are bent so that the thighs are parallel to the surface of the water with lower legs perpendicular to the surface. The left lower leg moves in a clockwise motion while the right lower leg moves in a counterclockwise direction.
- Body position: The body is vertical with the legs in a sitting position.

## Teaching treading water

- **Sculling while standing.** While standing in water at shoulder depth, have your student practice sculling. Review the sculling "clap" drill described in Chapter 3. She should do the motion slowly at first so that you can watch her hand position. Encourage her to feel the pressure on the palms of her hands.
- **Flutter kick at the wall.** While your student holds the wall in deep water, she should do vertical flutter kick so that she feels the kick holding her up. Explain that this will work when treading, but it takes the most amount of energy and therefore is not a good option as part of this safety skill.
- **Treading water with flutter kick.** When your student shows that she can stay up with the flutter kick, have her move arms-length away from the wall. She should scull and kick to get the sense of treading water.
- **Breaststroke kick at the wall.** The student should do vertical breaststroke kick while holding the wall. This is a better alternative than the flutter kick.
- **Treading water with breaststroke kick.** Repeat as with the flutter kick. Make sure your student can reach the wall easily.
- **Treading with the eggbeater kick.** Follow the same progression as with the flutter and breaststroke kicks.

**Your student should experiment with hand angles to find the most effective pitch. She can also practice varying kick techniques. The eggbeater is the most complicated to teach and learn, but it is the most efficient and requires the least exertion.**

# Water competency skill 4: Turn around in a full circle and find an exit

## Sidestroke

The sidestroke is believed to have originated in ancient times when swimmers doing the breaststroke complained about lifting their head from the water. By partially resting the head in the water, the sidestroke automatically becomes an easier stroke, and it becomes a perfect option for satisfying the fourth water-competency skill: the turn in a full circle and find an exit. Also, this stroke can be done for long periods without the swimmer getting overly tired because only one arm does most of the work at any given time. When the swimmer gets tired, she can roll to the other side.

- **Stroke description:** Starting with the lower arm extended forward and the upper one resting on the side of the body, the best way to teach this is using the image — pick the apple, hand it off, put it in the basket.
- **Kick description:** The scissor kick starts with one leg over the other with knees straight. To initiate, the knees bend as the legs separate. When fully spread, the swimmer brings them together quickly, straightening the knees until the legs are together again.
- **Body position:** Horizontal with the hips perpendicular to the bottom.

**Pick the apple**

**Put it in the basket**

**Scissor kick**

## Teaching sidestroke

- For the kick, begin by practicing on the deck. Demonstrate and explain while lying on your side. Bring your heels and knees up, split them so your top leg extends forward and your bottom goes back. Straighten the knees as you bring the legs together. Use the cues — Heels up, split, squeeze, and glide.
- Practice in the water using a kickboard. Hold with the extended lower arm (the leading arm) under the board, gripping it in front. Rest the head on the board and begin the kick.
- Explain and demonstrate the arms with the apple picking comparison.
- Using the cue “arms and legs bent, arms and legs straight,” show your student how to coordinate the kick and stroke into an effective pattern.

**Watch and listen**
While your student practices, make sure the water cradles her head.

# Water competency skill 5: Exit the water

At this point, your student has gained confidence in the water and has overcome many fears and concerns. Confidence grows with each new technique learned. Each pool or body of water is different, and in many cases, there is not only one effective way to make an exit.

Some adults will be able to pull themselves out of the water with just the use of their arms. If the water is shallow enough, the legs can add upward thrust. In deeper water, the student may need to place one knee or leg over the side of the pool, or in the pool’s gutter, and use the hands, arms, and leg to pull and lift the body to the pool deck surface.


**As an instructor, you may have to try different methods based on your student’s ability.**

# Chapter 5

## The Swimmer with Trouble Breathing

*"I'm a runner and want to do triathlons, but I'm wiped out after swimming one lap of the pool." Steve, 48*

One of the most common complaints from students is that although they can swim for a short distance, they quickly get out of breath and feel tired. For a large percentage of people describing themselves this way, especially when swimming freestyle, the ability to breathe efficiently was never mastered. Because their air exchange is not sufficient to supply the needs of their working muscles, the student either arrives at the other side of the pool unable to continue or has to stop to catch their breath midway.

If your student fits into this group, the progression to help him swim with comfort and enjoyment can be accomplished in a relatively short time. Be aware though, that you must watch the student swim first and then make your own assessment of where they fit in the curriculum. If your student has trouble putting his face in the water, it is recommended that you use the necessary steps from the nonswimmer progression.

**Preliminary interview.** After initial introductions, ask your student what he hopes to accomplish in the lesson. If he describes not being able to swim for any distance without getting tired and out of breath, then it is quite possible this student needs help integrating correct breathing into his stoke. To determine whether the student is fearful, ask if he's ever had an experience where he thought he was going to drown or had trouble getting to safety while swimming. This is a precaution because your next step will put a fearful swimmer in an uncomfortable position that can be avoided with this simple question. If the answer is no, proceed with this progression.

**Swim one lap**. Ask your student to enter the water and swim one lap of the pool with the best stroke he can do. This most often will be freestyle. Explain that you will walk along with him as he swims so you can watch his stroke. Also, you might want to reassure him that you'll be right there to help, if needed.

As your student swims, be attentive to his whole stroke, but focus on the head and upper body because these areas will hold the answers to his questions. As he swims:

- Watch for bubbles on either side of the head. The lack of any disturbance from expelled air indicates the student is not exhaling under water.
- Listen when your student turns his head to inhale. If he is blowing air out when his head is turned, you will often hear this quite clearly. If this is happening, your student is not getting proper air exchange.

**Watch and listen**

- When he takes a breath, does your student lift his face out of the water, exchange a few quick breaths, and then continue on for more strokes without any breathing?

- Your student may also start with good head position during the first few strokes, but then start lifting his head the farther he goes.
- Does your swimmer speed up the closer he gets to the other side of the pool? This mad dash is a way of getting an uncomfortable skill over with more quickly and might be a sign that the student desperately needs to take a breath.
- Does the stroke appear to get sloppier and lose form as the student continues?

**The reaction at the other side.** All of the points mentioned above are an indication of poor air exchange. Another indication that this is the skill your student needs to work on is that he will grab the wall and gasp for air quite urgently when he gets to the other side of the pool. Let your student catch his breath, and while you wait, consider his stroke.

Besides obviously needing to work on his breathing, was the student's stroke adequate with effective kicks and strokes that would move him through the water? If so, this is **not** the time to correct finer details of your student's stroke. His stroke will not improve until he learns to incorporate effective breathing into the pattern.

**The importance of breathing.** After your student has regained his composure, help him in the following way:

- Explain to your student that because he is not expelling all his air completely, he is getting an insufficient amount of oxygen into his lungs to supply his working muscles. Without that needed air, your student will get tired and gasp at the end of the lap.
- Continue by saying that when swimming freestyle, kicking, stroking and breathing are each separate skills. For the immediate purpose of working on the skill of breathing, his kick and stroke are functional. (If his kick and stroke are better than functional, make sure you congratulate him for this ability.)
- Ask your student to swim another lap of freestyle, but this time he should focus completely on blowing all his air into the water.
- Tell him to swim as slowly as possible and without thinking about his stroke.
- Reiterate that he should focus completely on breathing. He should blow all the air in his lungs into the water and only breathe in when his head is turned and his mouth is out of the water.

**The second lap.** By asking your student to isolate a single element of his stroke, in this case breathing, you give him the chance to focus on that skill. Without the distraction of trying to "swim well," you help him develop his breathing so that he can then successfully integrate it into the whole. As your student swims:

- Watch whether he is going noticeably slower than during the first lap. This is very important because a slow stroke does not require as much air.
- Make sure that your student is expelling air into the water. Watch for obvious bubbles by the side of the head and either side of the neck as he progresses.

- Listen as your student turns to take a breath. You should not hear any exhalation.
- Watch if his pace remains consistent as he moves down the lane. Consistent speed is a sign of comfort.

**The other side.** If your student slowed his pace and was successful in developing a more functional air exchange, then you should notice a big difference in the way he finishes his second lap. Not only will he be more relaxed without gasping for air, he will be quite excited about experiencing swimming as a pleasant activity and not a struggle. Some of the reactions you will encounter at this point can be very rewarding. Make sure to congratulate your student and from here, help him perfect this new skill.

**More practice needed.** If your student was unable to incorporate your suggestions and is still gasping when he gets to the other side, do not ask him to try again. Instead, reassure him and then do some remedial practice to isolate the breathing further and give him more of a chance to incorporate this into his stroke. Remember, be confident and encouraging that your student will be able to master this skill. Use the following drills to help your student practice:

- Bobs. Hold the side with the feet firmly set on the bottom. Make sure your student blows all the air out under water and that he only takes a breath in when he stands up.
- Breathing in position. While holding the wall with one outstretched arm, breathe by turning the head toward the shoulder of the other arm that is stationary at the side.
- One-arm breathing. In the same position, begin to stroke with the hand not holding the wall. When it's forward (by the wall), blow out into the water; when it's down (by the side), turn to take a breath.
- Freestyle with one breath. Ask your student to swim freestyle. As soon as he starts stroking, your student should begin blowing his air into the water. When he needs to take a breath, wait for the hand to begin moving through the stroke on the side he is breathing on, turn the face toward the ceiling or sky, and inhale.

**Breathing sequence.** Here's another way to build up to efficient and comfortable breathing:

Step 1: Ask your student to start with a front glide. Be sure he exhales as he glides. When his momentum slows, he should initiate a stand-up recovery. When his feet are on the floor, he should inhale.

Step 2: Have your student do a back glide with his hands at his side. He should inhale, and when his momentum slows, do a stand-up recovery.

Step 3: Add the rollover. Start with a front glide and exhale; take one stroke to roll onto the back; inhale and do a stand-up recovery.

**Combine mastered skills to achieve comfortable breathing.**

**Start with a front glide (top) and exhale.**

**Take a stroke to perform a rollover (second photo).**

**Inhale while resting on the back, then complete a stand-up recovery (bottom left and right.)**

**As your student becomes more proficient in Step 3, he can expand the sequence to include more strokes before rolling over, or to spin back-to-front instead of putting his feet on the floor.**

# Chapter 6

# The Fearful Nonswimmer

*"I can feel the water pulling me under." Samia, 62*

A large percentage of adults who cannot swim are fearful of being in and around water. When students identify themselves as fearful of water, acknowledging, dealing with, and overcoming the fear becomes the primary goal of your instruction. Simply teaching swimming skills will not get this student over the fear hurdle.

Fear of water can result from a wide range of experiences, from a drowning or near-drowning incident to the more subtle influence of a parent or guardian instilling fear because they themselves were fearful. Perceptions can be altered by stories of others drowning or experiencing frightening situations in the water. Whatever the cause, the fearful adult comes to you after years, and often decades, of living with their negative perceptions of water and swimming.

Although you will be teaching this person to swim, it will be essential for you to help this student confront and learn to control the debilitating effects of his fear through much of the process.

To be successful with this type of student, it is imperative that you remain patient, kind and empathetic. Your goal should not only be to help this person accomplish the American Red Cross water competencies, but more importantly, to empower him by overcoming his fear to his satisfaction.

## Process overview

**The student is in control.** Adult students appreciate having ownership of their learning process. Listen with empathy to your student's history with water and swimming, and help him to develop goals for his lessons.

**Build trust.** An adult who is fearful of water can be comfortable on land because they trust that there is no chance of drowning. Your student must grow to trust you and your abilities so he can challenge his fear in the environment that activates it. Because you want to use the student's time most efficiently, you must begin this process from the first conversation. Without attention to building trust, your lessons will be far less effective.

**Offer hope**. Many people who have experienced trauma feel there is no hope for the future. In relation to swimming, people who are afraid often believe it will be impossible to learn to enjoy the water. When faced with the prospect of being by or in water, many fearful people are stuck in the past traumatic experience that changed their perception of this environment, even if it happened when they were very young. You must help your student focus on the present and future, both of which will include the safe appreciation of being in water of any depth.

**Develop confidence through repetition.** Mastery of any skill comes from repetition. When someone is fearful, repetition becomes even more important because with each successful attempt, the student is reassured that what he previously thought was impossible can actually be accomplished. Repetition establishes muscle memory, and as skills become rote, confidence builds. As the

instructor, you must review all elements of your class every time you meet with your student until mastery has been achieved. By doing so, the student will develop the confidence necessary to challenge himself further until he learns to swim.

**Don't assume**. At the same time, don't assume the fear goes away entirely and forever. Be ready for setbacks, and respond with empathy.

Working with fearful adults can be one of the most satisfying experiences you can have as a teacher. Besides imparting essential and potentially life-saving skills, helping adults surmount years of fear removes a burden that has affected their lives to that point. The empowerment of getting positive results in the water can provide benefits far beyond the pool. Such students often report feeling greater inner strength, compassion for others, self-awareness and even a greater ability to experience joy and serenity. By quieting the fear, you make room for emotions that are far more fulfilling and healthy.

## Teaching the fearful adult

When working with a fearful student, you are a facilitator. You will help your student change his perspective so that instead of focusing on the traumatic past, he will focus on the present and turn an impossible future into one of possibilities. This process begins with the preliminary interview.

### The preliminary interview

During the preliminary interview, your student should provide most of the content to the simple questions you ask. During this process, it is imperative that you be patient and interested in the person's explanations. This is the point where you begin to build trust, so relax, be patient and try to empathize with what your student is telling you.

Use active listening. Active listening is a commonly used technique to enhance interpersonal communication. Active listening means that you validate what the other person is saying by repeating vital facts of his dialogue back to him throughout the conversation. During the preliminary interview, you can use this technique so your student knows that you have heard and understood what he is going through.

After your initial introductions, explain that most people who are afraid of the water have had a traumatic experience that left them with this fear. Offer to listen to the story if your student would like to tell it, but if the retelling is painful, ask instead what he feels he has lost as a result of this fear. How has the fear of water affected his life to this point? This could include answers as diverse as having to change vacation plans to having a sense of losing control whenever he gets close to water. There are no right answers to this question.

The goal of this conversation is not to dredge up bad memories. Instead, you want to help your student keep what happened to him in perspective. People who have had traumatic experiences relive them on a regular basis without any prompting. In some cases, telling the story to an instructor can be beneficial. In others, though, all the negative symptoms of reliving such an event can occur. Let your student guide this conversation and be sensitive to his reactions. Remind your student that the trauma is in the past. By taking swim lessons, your

student is choosing to live in the present and has hope for a future of enjoying being in and around water.

During this conversation, do not make comparisons to other stories you have heard or share your own experience. Actively listen and avoid using statements like:

- “That wasn’t so bad.”
- “You should just forget about it.”
- “Forgive and forget.”
- “If you think that’s bad, let me tell you what happened to me…”

When your student has finished explaining how living with the fear of water has affected him, explain that it takes a great deal of courage to be sitting where he is at that moment. Commend him for this and then ask, “Why now?” Find out what has motivated your student to take swimming lessons, to get in the water, and face this fear. This too, will elicit a wide range of answers, all of them correct. If you do not understand something, ask for clarification. This will only reassure the student that you are truly listening.

To complete the preliminary interview, ask your student what his goal is for taking your swim class. Ask how he would define success at the end of the process. Often, people who are afraid of the water have a vague idea of what it would be like to have the ability to swim safely and in control. Ask your student if the ability to swim will have an effect on any people he knows. Point out that once he has overcome his fear, he will be a positive example to others. This alone is an empowering potential, especially for parents of young children.

Most answers to this final question will provide a good opening to proceed toward the water.

## The process

Ask your student if he would like to share anything else concerning his feelings about the water. If not, offer that you would like to explain how the class will run and how he can expect to be treated while working with you.

First, reassure your student that he will be in control of how fast the class progresses. Explain that you will ask him repeatedly how comfortable he is during any skill practice and will not add additional skills until the student is completely ready. Agree on a simple cue, such as “OK,” that you will ask to assure your student is ready for each new skill or task.

Second, explain that you will review previous material throughout the teaching progression, returning to mastered skills often to build confidence.

Third, remind your student that repetition of skills is the basis of conquering his fear and learning how to swim. Each class will begin with a review of skills accomplished in the previous class.

### Get a little closer

Ask if the student is satisfied with this explanation. If he is, invite him to move toward the side of the pool by explaining that you will be getting closer to the water without immediately getting wet. Sit by the pool in a chair, on top of a stack

of kick boards, or simply on the deck. Remember to be vigilant and sensitive to any outward signs that your student is getting nervous. Once seated, ask how being so close to the water makes him feel. Ask the student to describe the thought process he usually goes through when this close to the water. Some students will have no trouble being in close proximity to the pool and want to proceed to the next step. Others will have to take more time to build the courage to move on.

Remember, you should have no expectations about how this process should unfold. No two students are alike. You are the facilitator – let the student dictate the speed of his progress.

**Practice breathing as you sit by the pool. For fearful nonswimmers, controlling the breathing can help them calm down if they feel nervous. Count. Have your student breathe normally through her nose, counting as she breathes in and out. Encourage her to feel the air as it moves from her nostrils to her lungs and out again. As she releases the air, tell her to release any tension she feels in the rest of her body. Repeat. Do the same exercise breathing through the mouth.**

## Feet first

If your student is calm and ready to move to the next step, ask him to rest his feet in the gutter while continuing to sit on the deck. Because of the different configurations of pools, you might have to adapt in some way, but the goal is to get part or all of your student's feet in the water while he rests on a solid surface.

- **Focus on the present.** As your student puts his feet in the water, tell him to focus on the way the water feels on his skin. Have him express this. Is it cold? Is it warm? Try to describe the texture. How does the water feel on different parts of the foot? Your goal in asking these questions is to have your student concentrate on the actual, not the possible. For years, your student has lived with the possibility of drowning. In this beginning step,

you are beginning to change his perception of water. Encourage him to talk about what he is sensing at that moment.

**Watch your student's response to having contact with the water. What does her body language say? Are her muscles tight or relaxed? Does she move hesitantly or with ease? What is the expression on her face? Ask how she's feeling and whether she would like to proceed, take more time resting her feet in the gutter, or go back to sitting away from the water. Remind her that she's in control and that there is no rush.**

## Touching the water

If ready to move ahead, invite your student to dip one of his hands in and gently swirl the water. This can be a major step for some people, so make sure you watch your student. Keep up a dialogue and check how he's responding at that moment. Let him talk, but also gently guide him to focus on the sensations of his hand in the water. Is there a difference between how the water feels on his fingertips and the palm? Describe the temperature. Is the sensation pleasant?

Have your student open and close the fingers of his outstretched hand as they sweep through the water and explain that to swim, your student should keep his fingers together. While sweeping back and forth, he should practice opening and closing his fingers. Ask if there is a difference in the way the water feels on his hand as he does this. Is it harder to pull through the water when the fingers are together?

If your pool configuration makes it possible, have the student sit on the gutter so that his legs from the knee down can hang in the water. Encourage him to swing his legs gently back and forth, and ask him to compare the sensation on his legs to his hand. Your goal is to get your student to focus on what he is experiencing in that moment. Let your student consider your questions and encourage him to talk about this as much as possible.

## Getting in

Watch your student's reactions. Once he appears to be relaxed and in control, explain that you think he's ready to get in the water. Give him the option to get in and stand in the shallow end.

- Fearful adults are often concerned about the depth of the water. Stand next to the student on the deck and explain the depth in the shallow end and where it comes up to you.
- To reinforce this, get into the water. This not only shows the depth, but also allows you to explain how to get in, especially with ladders with recessed steps.
- The fearful student is often anxious about his safety. Reassure him that he will be able to protect himself with four points of contact — both feet on the bottom and holding the side with two hands. Also, you will be standing next to him so if he does fall, you can catch him.
- Your student should be able to get in gradually using stairs, the ladder or a zero-depth entry.

**Once ready, you should stay close as the student enters the water. Let her go at his own pace, watch her reaction and remind her that she can get back on deck at any time. As she gets deeper, you can put a supportive hand on hers. As her feet touch the bottom, remind your student to hold the side with two hands. Watch her reaction. Has her breathing quickened? How responsive is she? Is she showing any other physical indication of anxiety? Ask if she would like to proceed or go back to sitting on the side.**

## Walking along the side

As he stands in the water, tell your student to concentrate on anchoring his feet on the bottom, pushing his feet down firmly. Ask him to focus on the feeling of the water by taking inventory of each part of his body — the feet, the knees, the hips, the belly, the arms and the shoulders. If your student appears calm as he stands in place, ask if he feels ready to explore.

- Explain that you want your student to move along the wall in the shallow end, sliding both hands along the edge and taking very small steps, one foot at a time. As your student moves through the water, stay close to him. Ask how the water feels as he moves. Is it different from standing still? As your student becomes more confident, have him take larger steps, and take one hand off the wall. Have him lean into the movement. Encourage him to consider that the sensations might be enjoyable.

**Always ask before touching your student, but you are likely to find that your student appreciates your holding her hand as she gets used to walking along the side of the pool.**

Remember, be aware of your student's reactions. Is he relaxed? Does he have a far-away gaze, or is he talking and engaged? Make sure he wants to continue, and remind him that he can get out of the water at any time.

## Head in

Getting the face and head in the water is a major issue for fearful people. Besides the sense of claustrophobia and "closing in" that some people feel when submerging their heads, there is the possibility that water will rush in through the nose and mouth. Compounded by stinging eyes and water in the ears, many of these people are committed to avoiding this experience. It is your goal to help your student overcome these negative perceptions by giving him the tools he needs to make the experience not only possible, but pleasant.

While going through this progression, it is recommended to ask if your student would like you to put your hand over his as he holds the side. It can be reassuring to your student to have some physical contact with you. A gentle touch can be a powerful aid as your student takes on these challenges.

- **Chin.** For many people, putting any part of the face in a large body of water has been out of the question to this point. By putting the chin in the water first, your student avoids the mouth, nose, ears and eyes. He is also in complete control with the ability to see while he completes this skill.
  - Explain to your student that he will work his way slowly toward getting his whole face submerged, and the first step is to put the chin in the water. Encourage him to focus on the waterline at the point where the chin meets the surface of the water.
  - Demonstrate by extending your arms out and lowering your chin while you are looking forward. Tell your student that while he has his chin in

the water, you will count out loud. By doing this and setting a time limit for submersion, the student will have a comfortable goal.

- Practice by having your student hold his chin in the water for five seconds, reminding him to keep his lips shut. If relaxed, increase the time to 10 and then 15 seconds. Remember to encourage, watch and complement each time the student does this. He should repeat until he feels a degree of mastery. To stay warm and repeat a successfully completed skill, go back to walking along the side again.

**Count for your student when she first puts her chin in the water.**

- **Lips.** Explain to your student that as long as he keeps his lips shut, water will not get into his mouth. Water in the mouth is a common part of the fear people have, and it's important to acknowledge this and offer a solution is important information for the fearful student. The following exercise will give your student the ability to avoid getting water in the mouth.
  - Explain that the next step toward getting his face in the water is submerging the lips with his mouth shut. Continue by saying you are very aware of the importance of keeping water out of the mouth and that this is the main goal of this exercise.
  - Before starting, you want to give your student the skill to keep water out of his mouth once he lifts his head. This will also prepare him with the tools for putting his nose in the water in the near future.
  - Ask your student if he's ever had a birthday cake and blown out the candles. (Hopefully, he has!) Tell him to imagine that the cake is on the deck in front of him and when he lifts his head, to blow the candles out and then inhale through the mouth.
  - Demonstrate by holding on to the side again, taking a breath, and putting your own lips in the water. When you lift your head, exaggerate blowing out and taking a breath through your mouth.
  - Practice having your student put his lips in the water as you count to five. Watch that the nose doesn't submerge and that his lips are shut.

Keep your student focused on the present by asking him to concentrate on the sensation of the water on the outside of his lips while he is submerged. Your student should not be wincing or shrugging his shoulders. This indicates an unacceptable degree of anxiety. If this happens, have him stop and go back to walking around the edge until he is calm and then start over. Count for him on each attempt, increasing the time as your student gets more comfortable. Before going to the next skill, take a walk along the side. Emphasize concentrating on the sensations of the water on your student's body and ask him to inventory the feelings from his feet up. This also helps keep your student warm.

**Water will not go in if the lips are shut. Congratulate your student on this achievement.**

- **Nose.** Humans breathe through their noses so the sinuses can filter the air before it reaches the lungs. It's a great system on land, but when in the water, it can pose some problems. For swimmers, a little water in the nose is a minor discomfort. For the fearful adult, it is a pain that often reminds them of an event they'd rather not revisit. Getting the nose into the water is the next major step for your student, and one that you must approach with care and sensitivity.
  - Explain that when your student puts his nose into the water, it is imperative that, from that point, he only inhales through the mouth. Any amount of water that is around the nostrils after the nose is submerged will be sucked in, prompting that unpleasant sensation.
  - Demonstrate by holding the wall with your feet below you. With your arms straight and your shoulders at water level, breathe in deeply and slowly submerge your nose. Once in, hold it for five seconds. Then lift your head, exhale, and take in a breath through your mouth. Ask your student if he would like you to repeat the demonstration, reassuring him that no water got into your nose.

- Remind your student again, before attempting this, that he must only breathe in through his mouth when he resurfaces. As you count for your student, watch his reaction and be aware of his body language. If he appears nervous in any way, do not push ahead with this exercise, but instead go back to putting the chin in the water.
- Count to five as soon as he puts his nose under and remind him to lift his head. As he lifts, you can say, “Breathe in through your mouth.” This can be a profound moment for a fearful student, and he may easily become absorbed in past reactions to this experience. A simple cue can help avoid this and the unwanted result. Repeat this and as your student feels more confident, increase the amount of time he keeps his nose underwater. Congratulate him, and go back to walking along the wall. Discuss his reaction to putting his nose in the water if he’d like.

**Putting the nose in is a big step. Remind her to not inhale through the nose when she lifts her head.**

**Eyes and face.** Although water doesn’t get in through the eyes, when unprotected, the irritation and the disorientation of blurred vision can be a hurdle as intimidating as water in the nose or mouth. To avoid these issues, make sure your student is wearing comfortable yet watertight goggles, especially during your initial lessons. With goggles, these issues are not only removed, but the experience can actually be a pleasant one. As an instructor, it can be quite satisfying to watch the reaction of your student when he first opens his eyes underwater.

- Explain to your student that because he is wearing goggles, he will be able to see clearly underwater without any discomfort to his eyes. Try to emphasize how pleasant it is to put your face in the water and have the ability to see. Continue by saying that he will first put his face in and then remove it and proceed to keep his face in the water for longer periods. Remind him of the importance of only inhaling through the mouth when lifting the head.
- Demonstrate for your student. Hold the side with two hands with your shoulders at the surface of the water. Take a breath, put your face in

the water, and then lift it out, emphasizing exhaling and inhaling only through the mouth. If you turn to your student with a smile, this will just emphasize how benign the process is.

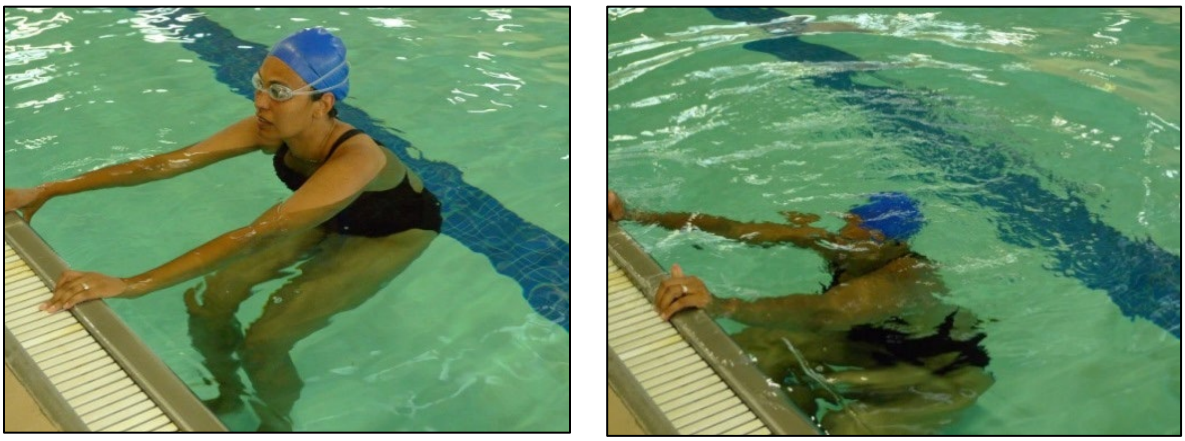
- Practice with a quick dip and if your student is comfortable with this, continue practicing, adding more time as he progresses. Remind your student to only inhale through his mouth as he lifts his head from the water, especially on the first attempt.

**Make sure your student's goggles fit properly and that the seal is secure around his eyes. On a fearful student attempting to put his head in the water for the first time, leaky goggles can hinder progress.**

**The whole head.** For fearful adults, putting the whole head underwater is another major step. The water pressure can feel claustrophobic and revive unpleasant memories. When the ears are submerged, the water does get in. This is a sensation that requires some time and practice to get used to.

- Explain to your student that he is now going to put his whole head in the water. He will feel a different sensation when submerging completely because there is greater pressure. Also, as water fills the ear, it might feel like it's going to continue without stopping. Reassure him that it will stop and as soon as he stands up and the water will drain from the ear. As with other submersions, you are going to do a quick dip and then stay in longer as confidence builds.
  - Demonstrate a bob by putting your 2 hands on the wall, arm's length away. Stand with your feet under your shoulders then bend your knees and submerge your head while looking forward. Come up and immediately exhale your air and inhale a breath through your mouth.
  - Practice by first watching your student's reaction to the idea of going underwater. If he appears nervous, have him put his head underwater progressively, submerging a little more of the head each time he goes down so he can get used to the sensations. Tell him to focus on the surface of the water as it touches his head. Focus on the now and remind him to only inhale though the mouth as he surfaces.
  - Once your student does put his whole head under water, count and add seconds as he develops proficiency. Before beginning the next step in this progression, walk along the wall again to warm up and

have a chance to discuss how the student is feeling. Remember to ask if he has any symptoms of anxiety—a pounding heart, a sense of being out of his body, or shaking from being cold. If so, go back to practice mastered skills.



**When first submerging the head, make sure your student has her feet firmly on the bottom of the pool.**

## Supported front float

Depending on how buoyant your student is, he might have already experienced his feet rising from the bottom when submerging his face in the water. There are a number of variables that contribute to a person's buoyancy. Some people float as if supported by floatation, others find neutral buoyancy an inch or two under the surface. This is not an indication of future swimming ability. Make sure you explain this to your student, especially if he has to kick to keep his legs near the surface.

Refer to Chapter 3 for the supported front-float progression. It is important that the student be in control, so ask before touching him to assist. Ideally, the student will progress with as little physical assistance from the instructor as possible. This approach respects your student's personal space and gives him a greater sense of accomplishment in a shorter amount of time.

Remember that with fearful students, patience and proximity are key. Have no timeline, and stay close.

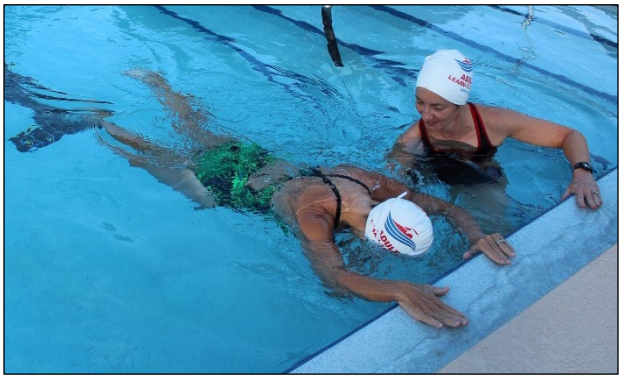
Watch your student for body-language clues, such as tucking the knees to the chest, as in a fetal position. The fetal position is an instinctual physical response that humans exhibit when there is potential for harm to the body. In this position, the knees are raised toward the chest and the head brought to the knees to protect our vital organs. In either the front or back float, if you observe your student having difficulty stretching out, it's likely an indication that his body is trying to get into the fetal position and that he does not feel safe. Step in and offer to support him with your hands under his outstretched arms during the front float or at the shoulders during the back float.

## Unsupported front float

Upon success with the supported front float, continue with teaching sculling and the stand-up recovery, as described for the nonfearful student. Remember to stay close, keep your student in the present, and proceed at your student's pace. Then you may progress to the unsupported front float.

- Follow the progression steps outlined in Chapter 3. Practice by having your student stand close to the wall. Make sure that he places his face in the water and falls, not jumps, toward the wall. Jumping is a way to make the skill practice end as quickly as possible and happens because of your student's lack of confidence. If your student has trouble relaxing, put your forearm under your student's outstretched arms and reassure him that if he raises his head, you will lift him safely from the water. You can be in contact with his arms or have your arm just below his so he can see it under him.

**As your student gets ready to fall toward the wall, make sure you are nearby and ready to offer support, if needed.**



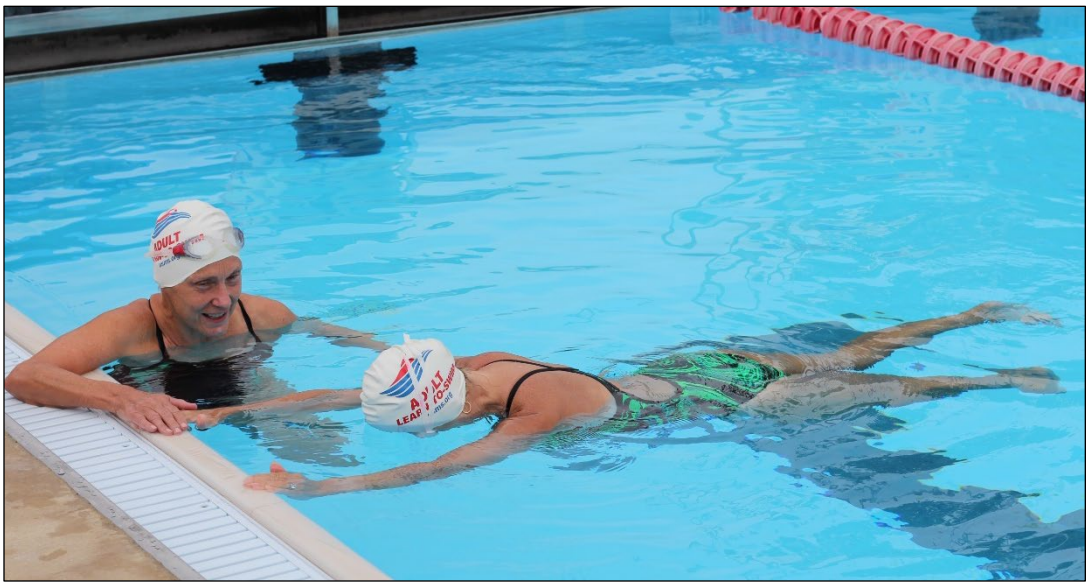
**Your student's momentum will carry them to the wall, and seeing your arm underneath as she passes by will be comforting.**

## Front float with flutter kick

Adding the flutter kick not only helps a student whose legs hang toward the bottom of the pool, it is also an essential element in the freestyle and backstroke — strokes that we will encourage our students to try once they have developed

more confidence. The flutter kick is the basic propulsive force from the legs and one that all swimmers should master.

- Explain to your student that he will hold the side again with his face in the water and gently move the legs up and down. Their knees should be straight but loose and ankles floppy. Once he feels confident and is exhibiting a functional kick, have him pick up the speed.
- Demonstrate the kick at the wall. Talk to your student while they watch you and point out the different elements of the kick — knees straight but loose, legs separating no more than 12 inches and ankles floppy with toes pointed away from the body.
- Practice the kick by having your student first try this at the wall. You don't want to do too much kicking against the wall because the student should feel the propulsive force of this motion, and this is difficult to exhibit while holding the wall.



**Using the positive-sandwich method of criticism, tell your student all the elements of the kick that are correct, then tell him what he can do to improve. If his kick is efficient, have him step arm's length away from the wall as with the front float before. Tell your student that as his feet leave the bottom, he should begin kicking gently. Stand next to your student to assist if necessary. As your student's kick become more efficient, increase the distance from the wall.**

## Basic breaststroke with flutter kick

Once your student has demonstrated effective kicking and is moving forward for longer distances, the addition of simple strokes can be empowering and give him the ability to go farther. This is truly swimming! Remember, your student may have felt that this was impossible just a few lessons ago.

- Explain that as soon as your student puts his head down and starts kicking, he should scull outward and down with outstretched arms, moving his hands to a distance just outside his shoulder. Then, he should recover his hands, fingertips first, under his face, bringing the hands back to the

beginning. This is a basic breaststroke. Some fun mental pictures include: scooping the rim of the ice cream bowl and making the pizza/cut the pizza. With adults, images of food seem to work well as motivational devices.

- Demonstrate this for approximately four strokes and then stand up. Make sure you demonstrate the stand-up recovery, as well.
- Your student should practice short distances first, covering the same distances he did kicking. When he is confident with is ability, have him go farther. Watch that your student's wrists are rigid, that his elbows are bent, and that his head, neck, and shoulders are relaxed. Comment and offer any suggestions for improvement.

**Your student might be more interested in just getting moving than in learning proper strokes. Listen to your student's goals and desires, and tailor your lessons to those.**

## Breathing

Now that your student has gotten his head in the water and achieved a basic propulsive stroke, this is an appropriate time to introduce breathing. The ability to breathe comfortably is one of the keys to good swimming. A swimmer must exhale completely when his face is submerged and only inhale when the face is clear of the water. Once the face is wet, a swimmer can exhale through the nose and mouth, but must only inhale through the mouth. For some people, inhaling through the mouth is not a familiar skill, and in order to make sure your student is able to perform this skill, it's best to have him practice before putting his face in the water.

Have your student do the following breathing exercises without putting his face in the water. He should breathe naturally without hyperventilating.

- Five breaths in and out through the nose
- Five breaths in through the mouth and out the nose
- Five breaths in and out through the mouth

You might have to help your student by showing him how to do any one of these, but once you are satisfied that he is able to make the distinction between the different ways of breathing in and out, then he's ready to begin gradually getting his head in.

- **Blowing bubbles.** It is imperative that your student understands that as long as air is coming out of his mouth, water will not get in. Water in the mouth is a major concern for fearful adults. You will prove that they can control this as he incrementally gets his face deeper in the water.
  - Explain to your student that the first step in this process is to exhale with only his lips in the water. He should always purse his lips (like giving a kiss) while exhaling. Start this with a mental image — blowing out a candle.
  - Demonstrate this first by exhaling while your lips are just below the surface. Your nose should not be in the water. Lift your head to inhale and emphasize inhaling only through the mouth. Before your student attempts blowing bubbles, explain that if his nose does go in, he should inhale through the mouth from that point on because any water around the nostrils will go straight to the sinuses. Everyone knows how unpleasant water up the nose can be, and this sensation can slow progress.
- After successfully completing a single breath and inhaling without getting water up the nose, help your student get a sense of breathing while swimming by doing this repeatedly. He should breathe naturally with air going into the water and lifting his head to inhale. It is often helpful to cue your student. As he lifts his head, say, “Take a breath in and go down.”
- **Nose bubbles.** Explain that when swimming, many people like the option of blowing out through either their nose or mouth. Exhaling through the nose can also clear the water if water gets in. Demonstrate by exhaling through your nose while the nostrils are slightly below the surface of the water. Have your student do this once.
- **Alternating bubbles.** Have your student exhale five times from his nose and five times through the mouth. This practice is very helpful in learning to feel comfortable with the face in the water.
- **Bobs.** Now that your student can put his whole head under and exhale through his nose and mouth, he can practice both by doing bobs. Hold the side, bend at the knees, and squat down in the water. As your student keeps his feet firmly on the ground, he should exhale all his air under the water and then stand up to inhale. Watch for efficient air exchange — all the air goes into the water. Also, only inhale when you stand. Keep watching and pointing out if your swimmer needs to expel more air or take deeper breaths. His lungs need to be emptied and filled as completely as possible.

## Back float

As with the front float, you are the facilitator, guiding your student as he accomplishes each step in this progression under his own power. These back float exercises are intended to help the fearful student develop his confidence with as little physical assistance from the instructor as possible. As with all aspects of teaching a fearful adult, make sure he knows that he can stop and return to skills where they have more mastery. Also, before starting this progression, you can remind your student that when he inhales deeply, the air in his lungs provides enough buoyancy to keep him afloat.

- Explain to your student that he will now learn the back float. The back float is a skill that will immediately give students the ability to become safer in an emergency. On the back, they can breathe freely, look around to see where they are and call for help, if needed. Also, from the back float, your student will learn basic swimming techniques so that he can swim to an exit point from the water. This exercise should be performed in water that is approximately shoulder deep.
- Now follow the steps for this skill that are outlined in Chapter 3.

Tell your student you will place your hand between his shoulders for initial support. When you are both in position, instruct your student to let go of the wall while he leans back. Make sure his hips and knees remain in the same position unless his legs float to the surface. This is where, if your student gets nervous, he will let his hips drop and try to raise his knees. As discussed previously, this is caused by attempting to get in the fetal position. Keep talking to him, remind him that you are there and won't let go. Encourage him to relax, stretch out and keep the chin high.

**Let your student feel her buoyancy before she lets go of the wall.**

When your student is ready to float on his own, you should barely have to support him. As he becomes convinced of his own buoyancy, have him start at the side again and tell him you will support him with one finger, but will not let his face go in the water. At this point, if your student is completely relaxed, you can bounce your finger on his back to show how you are not providing buoyancy. Finally, after telling your student, pull your finger away and let him float on his own. Count to five and then help him stand, reminding him to lift his head, bring his knees to his chest, and swirl his hands forward.

- Have him start the back float from the wall without your assistance. Do not rush the process as he goes from holding the side to letting go. Depending on your student's buoyancy, his feet will either remain close to the bottom of the pool or rise to the surface as he drifts away from the wall. As he practices this skill, some students will be concerned if their legs hang down in the water. Remind them that some people are more buoyant than others and by gently kicking, they can bring their legs toward the surface.

**Most students will get excited when they first do a back float. In fact, it is rare that a student does not break into a smile on the first successful attempt. Make sure you acknowledge this enthusiastically. As an instructor, this can be very rewarding.**

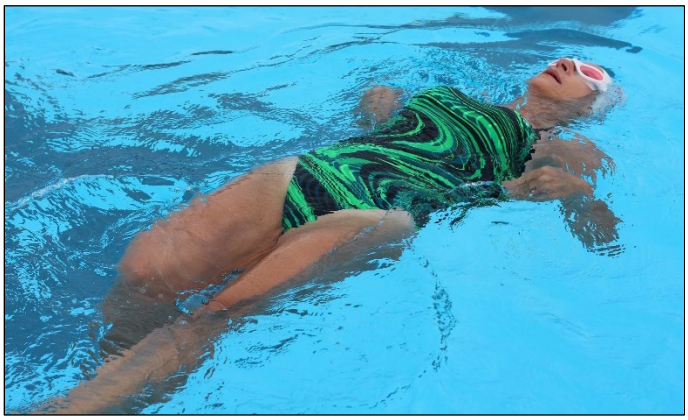
## Elementary backstroke

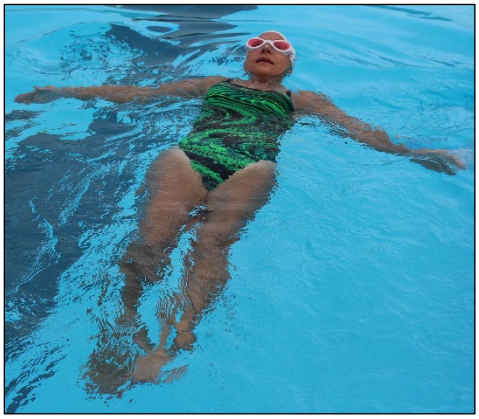
As stated before, the goal of taking swim lessons for many students is the ability to float and swim to safety in an emergency. Along with sidestroke, elementary backstroke is considered a safety stroke that provides the greatest amount of propulsion with as little effort as possible. By doing basic strokes and kicks while on his back, the fearful swimmer will be able to accomplish this goal.

- Explain to your student that once he can do a relaxed back float, the next step will help him move through the water. Combined with enough kick to keep his legs up, by stroking in a fashion that mimics a bird flapping its wings, he will generate enough propulsion to move through the water.
- Demonstrate on your back. Using the cue, "Tickle, Tee, Touch," bring your hands up along your sides to your underarms, stretch your arms straight out in a T, and bring your hands down to your sides with your elbows

straight. Glide and repeat. Although you can flutter kick gently, you can also just let your legs float straight on top of the water. Later, you will find a breaststroke kick requires less effort.

- Practice first with your student leaning back slightly in the water with his feet on the bottom. Make sure he understands that by having his wrists firmly set and not loose, he will get a better push through the water.
- On the initial attempts, reassure your student that you will keep your hand below his back and that you will not let his face go underwater. He should begin slowly and build to stronger pulls as his skill and confidence grows.
- As he strokes, make sure that his chin stays pointed toward the ceiling or sky. You should stand behind your student as he moves and if you see the chin drop, you can ask him to look at you. As his confidence builds, have your student swim farther. Many students can, at this point, swim across a 25-yard pool. This is one of the American Red Cross water competencies.
- Celebrate this great achievement with your student. By successfully accomplishing this skill, your student will begin the process of being released from his fear of water.





**Elementary backstroke arms in three steps: tickle (top left), T (above), touch (left). Or: chicken, airplane, soldier. Traditional elementary backstroke uses a breaststroke kick. The legs are a mirror image of each other as the knees bend and the feet drop down. The toes point away from the body as the legs spread. Both feet are snapped together as the legs straighten out.**

## Embracing deep water

Now that your student has a sense of his own buoyancy and has mastered rudimentary strokes, it is time for him to swim and jump into deep water and pull himself out of the pool. Not only is this an American Red Cross water competency, it is conquering a major concern for many fearful adults. By jumping

into deep water and swimming to safety without assistance, your student may improve his survivability in an emergency.

Sometimes your fearful swimmer will ask if it is harder to float in deep water. Although this can sound irrational to the seasoned swimmer, for the fearful adult, this idea derives from the simple fact that in the deep end, you cannot touch the bottom. Follow the steps outlined for water competency No. 2 to teach your student how to swim across the deep end of the pool, and how to jump in an return to safety. These drills will help empower the individual to overcome this fear.

Stay close to your student and be ready to take a step back if your student is uncomfortable.

## Where does your student go from here?

Once your student is comfortable in the water, he has many options to take advantage of the aquatic environment for health and fitness. He may find lap swimming an enjoyable exercise, or he might confidently sign up for a water aerobics class. He will be more at ease when kayaking and canoeing or fishing from a dock.

Parents who have learned to swim can play happily with their children in the pool, lake or ocean. They are also more likely to sign up their children for swim lessons of their own.

And, who knows? Your swimmer might join a Masters swim team and learn about the competitive side of his new sport. The possibilities are as varied and endless as your student’s interests. One day, your student might even teach other adults to swim, giving back in a life-changing way.

# Chapter 7

# Other strokes

## Backstroke

Backstroke incorporates many of the same elements found in freestyle. Although these are easily transferable, it does take time for some students to feel relaxed on their backs.

**Stroke description: The hand enters the water pinky first at arm's length above the head, palm facing away from the body.**
**The hand drops a few inches below the surface, then the elbow bends, bringing the hand close to the side of the body.**
**The hand then pushes downward, and the arm straightens to the hip.**
**The hand is lifted out of the water, thumb first.**
**To recover, the elbow remains straight as the hand rotates so the pinky will enter first. (You can say, "thumb out, pinky in.")**

**Kick description: The backstroke uses the flutter kick, focusing on lifting the water up with the top of the foot. The leg is straight with knee loose and the ankles floppy.**

**Body position: The body is horizontal with the head in a neutral position looking up or lifted slightly. The body rolls laterally with each stroke.**

### Teaching backstroke

- Kick: Have your student practice kicking on his back starting from the ready position on the wall. Watch that his body is horizontal and his kicks work to move him through the water.
- Adding the stroke: When first combining the stroke and kick, your student should focus on two skills.
  - Thumb out, pinky in on recovery
  - Keeping the hands opposite each other as they stroke.
- Tell your student to get in the back ready position and push off into a glide.

- As soon as his feet leave the wall, he should begin to kick at a slow to moderate rate.
- Begin the stroke by lifting one hand out of the water, thumb first with the elbow straight. As the arm rises, the hand should gradually turn so the palm faces away from the body. The hand should enter the water pinky first.
- When the first hand enters the water, the second arm should start stroking. From this point, both hands should continue rotating so that the hands are directly opposite each other.
- If your student can maintain this basic stroke with his body horizontal and kicks maintaining good form, then you can begin to help him perfect his stroke with the corrections below.

## Stroke corrections

**Arms stuck at side.** Whenever an element of a stroke is uneven, the result will eventually lead to more drag and reduced propulsive force.

- Description: The swimmer only strokes with one hand at a time. As one arm finishes a complete stroke, it stops at the side as the other arm begins.
- Effect: The student will move through the water in a stop-and-go manner.
- Solution: Practice while standing on deck or in shallow water. Have your student raise one hand above his head while the other arm is straight at his side. Tell him to begin turning his arms like a windmill, with the hands always opposite each other. Once he has done this successfully, have him translate this to his stroke.

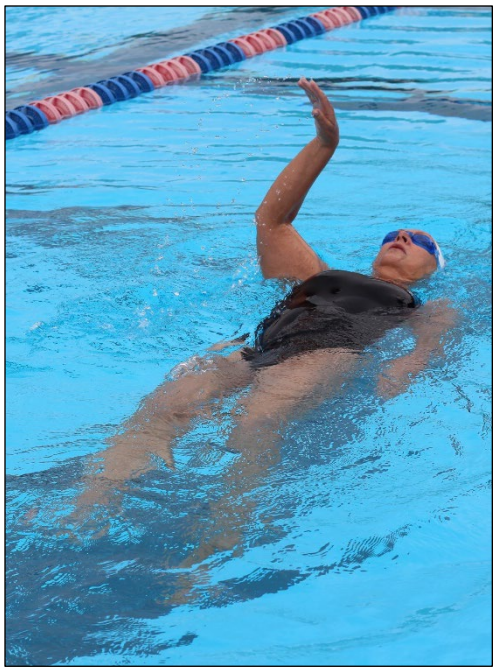
**Bent arms on recovery.** Alignment is very important in backstroke because there may not be a visual reference above the swimmer to help stay on course.

- Description: As the arms rise from the water, the arm is bent in varying degrees at the wrist and elbow.
- Effect: When the whole arm is out of the water, gravity has a huge impact, and any misalignment can alter the direction of the body as it cuts through the water.
- Solution: Fingertips to the ceiling. Tell you swimmer that when his hand is above his shoulder he should extend his fingers to reach for the ceiling or sky.

**Crossing over.** A bent arm recovery often develops into a stroke that crosses over upon entry into the water.

- Description: The hand will be placed in the water in line with the top of the head or beyond center to the opposite side.
- Effect: From this position, the hand will initiate the stroke by pushing to the side before pulling. The resulting back and forth body motion increases drag.
- Solution: Tell your student that the hands enter at roughly “10” and “2” on an imaginary clock face. Explain in the same fashion as freestyle.
- Head too high/Sinking hips: The head is a counterbalance to the rest of the body, especially for backstroke and freestyle. Head position determines body position.

- Description: Your swimmer lifts his head away from the neutral out of the water. The ears are often out of the water.
- Effect: By lifting the head out of the water, the legs are forced deeper away from horizontal. This creates resistance by exposing more of the swimmer's body to the water, thereby cutting a bigger hole through the water.
- Solution: Tell your student to relax his head and neck and look at the ceiling or sky. Remind him to keep his ears in the water.



**Swimming in a straight line is a challenge for backstrokers, especially if they have floppy arms on recovery (left), or are crossing over the midline when they swim (right). Help your students enjoy backstroke by helping them correct these common mistakes.**

**Bicycle kick/Lifting knees.** In an attempt to kick using the knees, the swimmer appears to be moving his legs in the same fashion he would for peddling a bike.

- Description: With each kick, the swimmer lifts his knee from the water and either pushes with the bottom of his feet or does an ineffective kick with the top or the foot.
- Effect: Raising the knees from the water during the kick produces very little useful propulsion. Also, gravity will exert added weight on the lower body, forcing the hips lower in the water, increasing the swimmer's profile and thereby increasing drag.
- Solution: Have your student try kicking with fins while keeping the legs straight. Also, you can use the visual image of dribbling a soccer ball over his feet with each kick. You can also tell your student to try kicking the water out of the pool.

**Flat shoulders.** Just like with freestyle, if the shoulders remain flat and unmoving on top of the water, you create considerable drag.

- Description: The swimmer's body lies flat in the water with no lateral roll as the arms stroke.
- Effect: By not rolling the shoulders with each stroke, drag is increased because of the larger surface area exposed.

- Solution: Six-kick switch or six-kick, three-stroke drills are effective here. Your student should kick on his side with the lower hand stretched in front, upper hand resting on his side. Kick six times side-to-side, take one stroke, and then switch to the other side. For the six-kick, three-stroke drill, add three strokes between each of the six kicks.

**Straight arm stroke.** It is often difficult for a new swimmer to move from a windmill backstroke to one that incorporates a bent arm.

Great for any stroke explanation: Tell your student to stand in front of the wall with the gutter at chest height. With both hands on the side and arms extended straight, ask him to lift his body out of the water. This is impossible. But bend the arms and try to do the same, and your swimmer will lift himself right onto the pool deck. Translate this to any stroke — a bent arm is stronger than a straight one.

- Description: As the arm enters the water above the shoulder, the arm can either head for the bottom of the pool in a circular pattern or sweep to the side at or slightly below the surface.
- Effect: When the arm follows a circular pattern, it creates considerably less force, because a straight arm is significantly weaker than one with a bent elbow. Also, this puts strain on the shoulder. For the side sweep, besides offering little propulsive force, the body is pushed to the side with each stroke, increasing the swimmer's profile and consequently, drag.
- Solution: Explain that when the elbow is bent, power is increased substantially. Have the swimmer do the one-arm drill so he can focus on the correct pattern by isolating one side at a time.

## Breaststroke

Breaststroke can be the most relaxing of the strokes and offers great value as a safety alternative in an emergency. For a number of the adults you work with, breaststroke kick will be the only one they can do effectively because of the loss of ankle flexibility. (Others may prefer to use a flutter kick. See description in Chapter 6 of basic breaststroke with flutter kick.)

- **Stroke description:** The stroke begins with the arms extended forward. As if outlining the edge of a circle, the hands move as mirror images of each other, pushing out and down as they swing under a high elbow. With palms perpendicular to the body, the hands sweep in toward each other in front of a line extending down from the shoulders. As they meet directly under the face, the elbows squeeze back and the hands are extended, side-by-side with fingertips forward to a full extension. You can say – "sweep out, sweep in," or "make the pizza, cut the pizza!"
- **Kick description:** With legs straight, horizontal, and toes pointed, the swimmer brings both feet toward the outside of the hips, facing the bottom of the feet to the ceiling with toes raised to the shins. The feet turn out, away from the body's center axis. With toes leading and knees bent, the legs spread apart. Using the bottom of the feet to generate propulsion, the feet push back and away from the center axis. As the legs accelerate to full extension, the swimmer brings the feet together with arches pointing to each other as much as possible. You can say, "feet to buns, toes to the wall, out, around, and back with a slap."

- **Body position:** The body undulates in a wave. The shoulders rise above the surface as the hands sweep in front of the chest. With the head held facing forward, the swimmer takes a breath, then lunges forward as the head drops down, face to the bottom of the pool. As the lunge drives the arms to full extension, the hips rise slightly and the kick is initiated.
- **Rhythm:** When your swimmer is first learning the stroke, it is important to emphasize separation of the kick and pull by the glide. As a quick reminder, you can say, “kick, glide, pull.” As your student becomes more proficient, the rhythm becomes more assertive and you can say, “pull, kick, glide.”

## Teaching breaststroke

**Kick without the stroke.** Because the kick differs substantially from the other three strokes, begin the progression by teaching this first.

- Lie down. Have your student lie on something soft and talk him through the kick. If needed, ask your student if you can hold his feet and move them through the kick as you describe each element of it.

**Breaststroke kick can be complicated, so first demonstrate and practice on land.**

- Kick at the wall. With one hand holding the gutter, your student should push against the wall to keep his body horizontal. He should move his legs through the kick slowly so he can focus on correct form.
- Kick with a board. Once your student shows proficiency at the wall, have him use a kickboard and remind him to focus on the rhythm — kick, glide, kick, glide.
- Standing stroke. Show your student the correct stroke while standing in shallow water. Explain as you demonstrate. Have your student repeat this until he shows an understanding that he must sweep his hands through the water instead of pulling them through.
- Explain the rhythm of the stroke to your student — kick, glide, pull. Tell him to push off the wall in a streamline, do one breaststroke kick, and

count to three slowly as he blows his air out. He should then pull, lifting his head to take a breath. Demonstrate before letting your student try.
- Correct until he has good separation of the stroke and kick and is breathing comfortably.

## Stroke corrections

**Limited glide.** The glide in breaststroke helps maximize the force generated by the kick and pull. It is an essential part of the stroke.

- Description: Your student kicks and pulls at the same time.
- Effect: Without the glide, propulsion is wasted, making it appear that the swimmer is working harder than his speed indicates. The stroke can also appear choppy and uneven.
- Solution: 1-2-3 drill. Tell the student to hold his glide and count very slowly to 3.

**Knees leading the kick.** As with all strokes, a primary goal is to be as streamlined as possible, reducing your profile in the water and cutting the smallest hole as you progress forward.

- Description: The kick is initiated by the knees with the feet following.
- Effect: The feet never attain a position where they can produce much force.
- Solution: Kick with a pull buoy between the legs. Practice the kick on deck again or tell your student to hold his knees together during the kick.

**Kick with pointed toes.** Breaststroke kick is the only competitive stroke where the majority of the propulsion generated comes from the bottom of the inside of the feet and legs. This can be a hard adjustment for some students to make.

- Description: When the student brings the feet to the hips, instead of turning the toes toward his shins, he points them away from the body.
- Effect: By attempting to kick with the top of the feet, the kick is rendered almost useless.
- Solution: Have your student hold the wall and have him kick very slowly. Tell him to use one of these visual images:
  - Karate kick the water behind them
  - Lead with the heel of the foot
  - Try touching the toes to the knee during the kick.

**Hands below the hips.** Another element of breaststroke that is almost counterintuitive to new swimmers is the fact that the propulsive force generated by the hands comes from lift forces and not drag forces.

A simple explanation of what moves you through the water:

Drag force: By moving the flat hand from the front of the body toward the back (the opposite direction of where you are headed), propulsion is generated. Basically, by pushing a bunch of water molecules toward your feet, you move forward.

Lift force: When a hand is swept perpendicular to the body, the same forces that work on a wing or propeller apply and propulsion is generated.

- Description: When your student initiates his stroke, instead of sweeping away from the center axis, the hands are brought under the body and stop at or below the hips.
- Effect: When the hands are extended to the hips, the recovery creates so much drag that the propulsion generated is almost zeroed out.
- Solution: Have your student stroke by making a very small circle in front of his face with the elbows barely bending. Tell him that he should be able to see his hands at all times when doing this practice.

**Dropped elbows.** Hand position has a direct effect on stroke efficiency, and when dropping the elbows, this efficiency is compromised.

- Description: As the swimmer begins the sweep under the chest, the elbows drop toward the body.
- Effect: Instead of the necessary perpendicular plane needed to generate lift force, the hand and arm move to the diagonal. This greatly reduces the propulsion from the stroke.
- Solution: The windshield wiper drill helps the swimmer get a better sense of the sweep. The swimmer floats on his stomach with the elbows perpendicular to the body and on or close to the surface. The forearms rapidly sweep back and forth, pitching in on the in-sweep and out as they move to outside the body. You can also tell your student to feel that he is lying over a barrel as he strokes.

**Loose wrists.** Would a plane get off the ground if its wings were flexible and did not hold their shape?

- Description: The wrists and possibly the hands are not held in a rigid, propulsion-generating plane.
- Effect: When the hand is not held flat, adequate lift forces are not generated.
- Solution: Explain the importance of this to your student. Have him practice the stroke while standing, moving through the stroke slowly as you point out where he needs to adjust.

# Chapter 8

# Organizing Your ALTS Program

*“It’s incredible, people just keep signing up.” —Sue, 51*

## For instructors with pools

If you are affiliated with an aquatic facility, adding the ALTS program to the established offerings should not be difficult. An ALTS program provides an added benefit to current members and can attract new members. Benefits to a facility with an ALTS program include:

- Marketing resources from USMS
- Enhanced adult programming
- Increased membership and member retention
- A program that provides a community service
- Recognition on the USMS website
- Grants and fundraising opportunities

If you must write a proposal or make a presentation for this program, we have resources to help you. Visit the usms.org website or, if you need further assistance, contact USMS at 941-556-6285.

## For instructors looking for a pool

If you are not affiliated with a pool and would like to find a location to offer your program independently, the process can be more involved and time consuming. Although it will take more work to get your program up and running, the resulting autonomy and control you have from owning your own business can be quite rewarding.

Below is a general plan to follow when trying to set up your independent program. As with all elements of the ALTS program, you might have to adjust this to accommodate your own situation.

1. Identify all potential sites. When making a list of all the pools in your area, don’t dismiss any possibility. When considering pools, explore whether programming already exists at the facility you are investigating. Many facilities will say they offer adult lessons, but when you examine their lessons closely, you may find they are based on children’s curricula and often under-attended. When approached with respect, facility directors are often open to new ideas. Considering that you have the backing of U.S. Masters Swimming, your argument will be all the more convincing. And leave no stone unturned when searching for a pool. Possible pool locations in your area can include:
    - Community-based organizations such as the Y, JCC, or any locally-run community centers
    - For-profit fitness centers with pools
    - Colleges and universities
    - Nontraditional pools such as hotels and motels, apartment and condominium complex pools, and retirement communities with pools
    - Privately-owned pools

- Country clubs
- Resorts

2. Once you have identified potential sites, stop by or call for an appointment. Most facilities have a front desk where information is distributed, where people check in or where potential members sign up. The front desk attendant can often provide you with very helpful information. Take advantage of any assistance that person may give, and collect any brochures that are available. Questions to ask include:
    - Does the facility rent to private individuals and if so, what is the fee?
    - Are other individuals renting the facility on a regular basis?
    - Are there times where the pool is underused?
    - Who is the best person to contact to discuss rental options?
3. Make a budget. Once you have an idea about your potential costs, you can write a preliminary budget. A budget is a financial guide that forecasts the revenue generated from your program and the expenses you will incur. It will give you the information you need to negotiate a deal with the person overseeing the pool. Before writing a budget for your program, it is important to consider what your goals are going to be. As with many elements of the ALTS program, there are many ways you can approach this and you have a great deal of latitude when making your decisions. Below are some considerations you must take into account when making a budget forecast:
    - **Your remuneration.** There are many elements to arriving at your salary goals for this program. Are you currently employed with your ALTS work being a side job? Do you want to make this a full-time business? If this is a “labor of love,” and one you are taking it on as a volunteer to help your community, a large portion of your budget — your salary — does not have to be included in your calculations. If you see this as a business opportunity, your fees and rental agreements must balance so that you eventually receive fair payment for your professional services.
    - **Prices of other offerings in the community.** It is very important to research what other facilities in your area are charging for adult lessons. If there are no comparable lessons, look into what people pay for children’s swim lessons. People will often pay more for services when they benefit personally. On the other hand, if you are going to target parents, understand that most of these adults have limited time and often limited funds for themselves. If there are no aquatic offerings, review other classes like yoga, Pilates, martial arts and even singing or art classes.
    - **Travel costs.** Rarely will you find a facility within walking distance of your house. You must take into consideration your travel time, the gas used, and depreciation on your car. The current U.S. government per-mile reimbursement is approximately $.54. These numbers can add up quickly and cut into your bottom line.
    - **Insurance.** If you remain a member of USMS and the students in your swim lessons are members of USMS, both you, the student and the

facility will be covered by the USMS insurance. For more information about insurance coverage, see the instructor-only ALTS-in-a-box page on USMS.org. If you do not want to make this a requirement for participation in your program, you should protect yourself by obtaining insurance elsewhere.

- **Advertising.** How are you going to get the word out that you are offering an ALTS program? You could take out an ad in the local paper, but a social media presence will likely reach more potential students, and will be considerably less expensive or even free. Consider Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn good starting points. Ask visitors and followers to “like” and “share” your pages and announcements. You should also ask to be included on your facility’s webpage. You can list your program on the “Club Finder” section of USMS.org, and you can include your contact information in the searchable instructor database.
  You may want to print flyers announcing your business and make them available at sport shops, nutritional stores, athletic facilities and faith-based organizations.

4. Create a proposal strategy. Make contact with the person in charge of the pool and gauge the potential for bringing your program to the facility. If the potential exists, ask the pool contact if you can submit a proposal in writing with your ideas. This is a good way to continue the conversation and make sure there are no misunderstandings in the future. When writing a proposal, it is very important to take the type of facility into consideration:

   - **Ys, JCCs, and locally-run community centers.** These organizations are very committed to offering programs that benefit the community. Additionally, because you are helping people be safer around water, the ALTS program aligns with their mission.
   - **Fitness centers.** These businesses are membership driven organizations trying to generate a profit. Your program has the potential to provide an increased amount of revenue from membership as well as program fees.
   - **Colleges and universities.** Some higher education institutions open their campuses to the surrounding community members, but some are very insular. There are many factors that determine whether an institution is open to outside programming, and it’s recommended that you explore this before contacting the aquatics director. Remember, the students, faculty, staff, and alumni are usually very receptive to community service offerings.
   - **Hotels, motels, apartment and condominium complexes, retirement communities, country clubs and resorts**. You do not need a competition-sized pool to teach a person how to swim. Many pools spend much of every day empty or underused, and you may have success scheduling pool time for your program by offering a modest rental fee to rent the pool during these off-peak hours.

- **Privately owned pools.** Although “backyard” pools can work, unless you have a close relationship with the owner or you ARE the owner, it is not a recommended venue from which to run an ALTS program. Besides liability concerns, there may be local zoning considerations that will make this prohibitive. However, private lessons with the owner of the pool and his or her family are acceptable.

5. Once you have identified the best way to approach the targeted facility, write a proposal taking the following points into consideration:

- **Revenue.** It’s likely every facility you approach will be interested in generating additional revenue. A director of a facility will be much more receptive when he or she identifies a way to benefit from your program financially than if you ask for a charitable donation of pool time. Remember, the budget you create is your tool. During negotiations, this tool gives you the information you need to set the parameters of what will work for you.
- **New members.** Retention of members and the addition of new members is a priority for any facility trying to cover its operating costs with membership fees. New programs help facilities retain members and attract new members. Research shows that adults over the age of 50 are the most profitable for most facilities. As an ALTS instructor, this is the demographic you are most likely to teach. When drafting a proposal, it is important to give a projection of the number of people you expect to teach. The best way to make this estimate is to consider the number of students you can comfortably teach during one hour in one lane of the pool.

  For example:

  Programs build on reputation. Your first session may look quite different from the ones that follow. But you should show this in your proposal.

  - 1 instructor X 1 student X ½ hour class = 2 students per hour/per lane

  As you build confidence as an instructor and word spreads about your offering, your private classes can become semi-private or group lessons.

  - 1 instructor X 3 students X ½ hour class = 6 students per hour/per lane

  Extrapolate in your proposal and show the real benefits of what you are offering. Consider the total hours you are asking to rent:

  - 6 students per hour/per lane X 4 hours = 24 students

  Twenty-four students who came to this facility for the first time are potential new members. If some in this group are currently members, then because of your successful instruction, they are now interested in the pool for the first time and are excited to remain members of the facility to improve their swimming and

fitness. By helping a facility retain members, you will become a valuable asset. Emphasize this in your proposal!

- **Publicity and community service.** Although adult swimming has gained media attention and it's generally understood that every citizen of the U.S. should be "water safer," this attainable goal has yet to be reached. Any concerted effort to help move toward goal is a positive human-interest story and one that will often be picked up by media outlets. When a facility embraces an ALTS program, they are saying to the surrounding community that the safety of the people living there is important to them and that they are making an effort to help in the best way they know how. There is no better publicity for a facility than this.
- **Presentation.** Once you have written your proposal, make sure you have a second party read it before you send it to the facility. Spell check does not comment on the strength of your argument. Based on your initial conversation with your contact, give them time to read your proposal and follow up after a reasonable number of days.

6. Setting up your program. Once you have successfully secured pool time at the facility of your choice, maximize the time you have been given. Get the word out to people who might be interested in participating, make registration a fairly easy procedure, and get participants in and out of their lesson safely and happily.

   - **Scheduling:** How long will each class be? Will you do private or group lessons or leave that option open to participants?
   - **Advertising:** Print media: newspapers, "Shopper's Guides," local magazines; Internet: email blast, website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn; Local: flyers posted at local businesses and brochures in the facility and in other locations throughout the community; Broadcast: local radio
   - **Registration:** Will you be in charge of registration and collect the fees? Will registration be handled by the facility?

7. Running your program**.** Your first encounter with a new student is very important. Be professional and on time. Strive to have the first lesson proceed safely and without confusion. Once the lesson is finished, you want your student to leave the facility feeling that he was in good hands and that he learned valuable skills.

   - **Emergency Action Plan**. Every aquatic facility should have an EAP. In the event of an emergency, the people involved with addressing the situation must have a clear understanding of the protocol and each party's responsibilities. There must be clear communication between everyone helping so that care can be given as quickly as possible. Keep the EAP simple and brief as too much information creates too many possibilities for mistakes. If the facility has an EAP, familiarize yourself with it so that you will know what your responsibilities are, as well as those around you, in case of an emergency. If for some reason

the facility does not have an EAP, write your own. If you are running your own program, it is recommended that you have your own EAP that works in synch with the facility's.

- **ALTS in-a-box**. USMS has put together a resource for your use in establishing and running your ALTS program. It contains information and templates for registration and administration, including budgeting, as well as guides for keeping track of student attendance and progress. Check it out on USMS.org, and know that the USMS Club and Coach Services is always available to answer questions and offer instructor support.
- **Final details.** Create a comfortable atmosphere**.** Make sure your student knows what to bring to the lesson, what he can expect when he gets to the pool, and once there, how to get to the lesson. This is very important to the success of your program. The facility staff also should be aware of your program and know how to direct your student to the pool. Enjoy your students. As your first students walk through the door, relax, smile, and enjoy the people you are going to help. If you are positive, it will set a tone that is contagious.

# Appendix

## History of U.S. Masters Swimming and the ALTS Program

*"I never thought I'd be so excited to swim…. I'm fired up!" Ray, 63*

Why would U.S. Masters Swimming attempt to address the disproportionate number of adults in this country who do not have basic swimming skills?

For much of its history, USMS has been an organization dedicated to adult competitive swimming — running swim meets and keeping records of top athletes. Although this is still a big part of what USMS offers, the mission and vision statements that guide the organization have been re-examined with an eye toward broadening the scope of involvement and services available.

The USMS vision statement declares: "USMS will be the premier resource for adult aquatic fitness in the United States and will make fitness through swimming available for as many adults as possible."

Therefore, a program that helps others learn to enjoy the water fits into the goals of the organization perfectly. USMS's more than 62,000 members are all aquatic enthusiasts and many are professionals in the field or volunteer as coaches. This is an organization with a vast amount of experience and passion about swimming. When you are passionate, you want to get others involved. This is the underlying objective of the ALTS program, and in many ways, it is the essence of why USMS was created in the first place.

In 1970, Captain Ransom J. Arthur, M.D., a doctor and avid swimmer in San Diego, went to the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) and proposed a championship swim meet to be held specifically for adults. Although it had never been done before, Dr. Arthur believed that swimmers would see this championship as an incentive to keep physically fit through the rest of the year. Beyond that, his vision was one of inclusion, welcoming anyone from past college competitors to athletes who were new to swimming.

John Spannuth, president of ASCA, agreed with Dr. Arthur and on May 2, 1970, Masters Swimming was born with the first National Masters Swimming Championship held in the Amarillo Aquatic Club pool. Forty-six swimmers participated in that meet. By 1981, 11,000 swimmers were taking part in USMS events as members. Each year, the organization grew with expanded meet offerings and new clubs and teams all helping to keep competitive swimming an integral part of many adults' lives.

In 2014, USMS launched its April is Adult Learn-to-Swim Month campaign to bring national attention to the problem of adult drowning risk. In its inaugural year, the governors of nine states gave their backing to this initiative and issued proclamations stating that April is Adult Learn-to-Swim Month. With more than 3,000 mentions in the media and almost 30 programs doing their part to help adults learn to be safe in the water, USMS was well on its way to helping nonswimmers in communities across the country.

In January 2015, U.S. Masters Swimming began offering its Adult Learn-to-Swim instructor certification program. The ALTS program offers training to teach an adult to swim, become water safer, and enjoy the aquatic environment.

Considering the following statistics, ALTS instructors are a vital part of the community's safety network:

- More than a third of adults in the U.S. cannot swim the length of a pool.
- On average, 10 people die by drowning each day. The majority of these deaths are adults.
- Drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the United States.
- The U.S. Center for Disease Control identifies a variety of factors that can influence drowning risk, including the lack of swimming ability.
- The children of adults who do not know how to swim are at a greater risk of not learning to swim, which increases their risk of drowning.
- There are more than 18 million swimming pools and hot tubs in the United States.
- Not including the shores of lakes and rivers, there are 12,383 miles of coastline in the United States.

Dr. Arthur's vision of adults improving their fitness through swimming has guided the development of U.S. Masters Swimming. Recognizing the value of our shared experience, USMS wants to take that vision even further. By providing an educational program specifically for adults, instructors will be able to go into their communities and help adults enjoy the many options available once they learn to swim and become safer in and around water.

By taking this certification class and using this method to teach adults to swim, you may save and improve the lives of many in your community.

Thank you for getting involved!