

TRAIN NOW

The "off-season" is a good time to add some variety and skills development to your swim training, says **Fiona Ford**

So, suddenly it's all over. Weekends of having five or more open water swimming events to choose from have been replaced strange blanks on the calendar. It's no longer inviting to spend long evenings hanging out at your local lake.

Some swimmers will move smoothly into a winter of masters swim meets – lining up on the blocks for races as short as 25m – and other will become cold water evangelists, but if mass participation open water swims are your thing then your year definitely has an off-season and it could be very beneficial to have an end of season break to allow for rejuvenation of muscles, mind and body. Even if you're moving into indoor pool racing, taking a break in your training now will be useful.

By break, we don't mean total abstinence from swimming (although a few days to a couple of weeks out of the water will probably do you little harm) but changing the structure of your training

to introducing new skills and practise other strokes. Both training intensity and volume will decrease but there are a number of benefits to be had from training and developing your range of other strokes and pool-based swim skills during the off-season.

1) Technically mastering new strokes from a simple kick, to drills and finally the full stroke (butterfly, backstroke and breaststroke), utilises a greater number of muscle groups, which develops functional strength, improves range of movement and core strength for freestyle swimming.

2) Swimming other strokes physiologically conditions you anaerobically and aerobically by simulating the unpredictable environment of open water swimming. The demands of switching between butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle (say while doing an individual medley) improves your lactate and anaerobic

threshold for swimming due to how physically demanding it is.

3) Successfully mastering new skills psychologically provides swimmers with a competitive advantage and develops persistence, confidence and determination to succeed. This provides a strong scaffold for winter training, maintaining the positive success cycle where training gains are often the most rapid.

4) Variety in training helps injury prevention by not overly relying on one stroke to train the same movement patterns continuously or overusing training aids (such as paddles) to develop functional strength for swimming.

The sessions this issue are aimed to help you maximise the off-season to make strength and skill gains to apply to your given distance and set you up for a motivated winter training block with some new skills to put into practice.

SHORT DISTANCE (FOR THOSE RACING 750m TO 2km)

Warm up: 200m FS, 100m backstroke or breaststroke, 200m FS

Build set: 6 x 50m as 25m medley kick into 25m medley drill or full stroke. 10 seconds rest after each 50m. Fins optional but don't use on breaststroke kick, drill or full stroke.

Main set:

- 200m FS @ aerobic pace (CSS +3-5 sec per 100m) working on effective turns (tumble or touch). 20s rest.

- 2 x 100m as first 25-50m medley drill or full stroke into FS. 15s rest after each.

- 4 x 50m as reverse medley (freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, fly). 10s rest after each

Repeat

Cool down: 200m easy, include 25-50m of double arm backstroke

Total: 2000m

MEDIUM DISTANCE (3km TO 5km)

Warm up: 200m FS, 200m backstroke or breaststroke, 200m FS

Build set: 8 x 50m as 25m medley kick into 25m medley drill or full stroke. 10 seconds rest after each 50m. Fins optional but don't use on breaststroke kick, drill or full stroke.

Main set:

- 2 x 200m FS @ aerobic pace (CSS +3-5 sec per 100m), working on effective turns (tumble or touch). 20s rest after each.

- 4 x 100m as first 25-50m medley drill or full stroke into FS. 15s rest after each.

- 8 x 50m as reverse medley (freestyle, backstroke, breast stroke, fly). 10s rest after each.

- 16 x 25m as four sets of fly (or fly drill), backstroke, breast stroke, freestyle. Sprint the first half length of every fourth 25m. 5 to 10s rest after each.

Cool down: 400m easy, include 25-50m of double arm backstroke

Total: 3000m

GUIDANCE NOTES

CSS - Critical Swim Speed. Effectively training at your threshold pace provides you with significant speed efficiency gains

Pacing - using the pool clock, your own stopwatch or a timing device such as a Finis Tempo Trainer or Wetronome

BB = Bilateral Breathing

UB = Unilateral Breathing

BS = Backstroke

FS = Freestyle or front crawl

BRS = Breaststroke

FLY = Butterfly

PULL = Swimming with a pullbuoy or float between your legs. No kicking.



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LONG COURSE (10km PLUS)

Warm up: 400m FS, 200m backstroke or breaststroke, 400m FS

Build set: 8 x 50m as 25m medley kick into 25m medley drill or full stroke. 10s rest after each 50m. Fins optional but don't use on breaststroke kick, drill or full stroke.

Main set:

- 2 x 200m FS @ aerobic pace (CSS +3-5 sec per 100m), working on effective turns (tumble or touch). 20s rest after each.
- 4 x 100m as first 25-50m medley drill or full stroke into FS. 15s rest after each.
- 8 x 50m as reverse medley (freestyle, backstroke, breast stroke, fly). 10s rest after each.
- 16 x 25m as four sets of fly (or fly drill), backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle. Sprint the first half length of every fourth 25m. 5 to 10s rest after each.
- 8 x 50m as medley drill or kick into full stroke. 10s rest after each.
- 4 x 100m FS @ aerobic pace. Start each 100m with a dive and do first 25m fast. 15s rest after each.
- 2 x 200m FS @ aerobic pace, working on effective turns (tumble or touch). 20s rest after each.

Cool down: 400m easy, include 25-50m of double arm backstroke

Total: 4600m

PROGRESSION IDEAS

Develop medley stroke competency from kick to drill to full stroke gradually in each of these sessions if repeated once a week for 6-8 weeks.

Start the 100m efforts from a dive start, fine tuning your head positioning to ensure your goggles stay in place. Aim for a 'neutral' spine, rather than putting your chin on your chest or tucking it down too far. This will help ensure the pressure of the water pushes the goggles onto your face rather than off.

Work on your tumble turn technique: push off the wall after your forward roll to be facing the surface, i.e.: on your back in a streamline. As you clear the wall, then roll over onto your side and front. Use the aerobic paced sets to develop competency at low speeds. Focus on your exhalation throughout to avoid water going up your nose as you tumble.

Develop speed and power in your streamline push off aiming to clear the flags or at least 5m from the wall before turning to breathe in, ideally perform a few strokes before disrupting the momentum with a breath. In fly, backstroke and breaststroke you should also aim to be clearing the flags (5m) before performing your first stroke. Engage a powerful kick and the best streamline you can maintain to assist with this.



SWIM SMOOTH SQUAD TRAINING AND VIDEO ANALYSIS SESSIONS



Triathlon Europe provides weekly Swim Smooth squad training in South West London. The squad enjoy training all year round in fabulous indoor and outdoor 33m pools. Fiona offers 1-2-1 video analysis sessions and stroke correction sessions on weekday mornings and weekend Swim Smooth workshops.

Find out more: www.fionafordcoaching.com