



TEACHING ACTIVITIES, DRILLS AND GAMES

Drills

Treading Water

Beach Ball Tread

Purpose: To improve strength and endurance of the kick when treading water

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–5

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Beach ball

Additional Safety Considerations: Watch participants carefully for signs of fatigue.

Description:

1. Have participants form a circle in deep water and tread water.
2. Toss a beach ball to a participant.
3. Have participants attempt to toss the beach ball to one another without letting it hit the water.
4. Each time a participant successfully tosses the ball back into the air it counts as 1 point.
5. Set a goal for the number of points participants should achieve.

Do As I Say

Purpose: To improve strength and endurance of treading water

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–5

Class Formation: Participants face instructor

Equipment: Whistle and watch with second hand

Additional Safety Considerations: Watch participants carefully for signs of fatigue.

Description:

1. Have participants tread in deep water.
2. Call out a specific way that participants are to tread water, changing it every 30 seconds. Variations for treading water:
 - Arms and any leg action
 - Arms only
 - Arms and breaststroke kick
 - Breaststroke kick only
 - Arms and scissors kick
 - Scissors kick only
 - Arms and flutter kick
 - Flutter kick only
 - Arms and dolphin kick



- Dolphin kick only
- Any leg action while clapping hands above the head

Drills That Can Be Modified to Most Strokes

Bracketing on the Wall

Purpose: To introduce leg actions

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–4

Class Formation: Line

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants bracket on the wall in the proper position for the specific stroke.
2. Have them perform the leg action of the specific stroke for a designated number of kicks or amount of time.

Participants should practice the kicks with the breathing and timing.

Sit and Kick

Purpose: To feel the motion that creates propulsion in the kick

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3 and Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–3

Class Formation: Line, sitting on edge of pool

Equipment: None

For flutter kick:

1. Have participants sit as close to the edge of the pool as possible, letting their legs dangle in the water.
2. Have them slowly move the feet up and down, keeping the knees straight but not stiff and the ankles as loose as possible. Tell them to be sensitive to the feeling of the water pressing the toes down as each leg pushes up, since this is the motion that creates propulsion.
3. To heighten the awareness of the action, have participants repeat this drill wearing a pair of swim fins.

For elementary backstroke kick:

1. Have participants sit as close to the edge of the pool as possible, holding the legs together and straight with the toes pointed and the feet out of the water.
2. Have them bend the knees and slowly drop the feet into the water.
3. Have them flex the ankles and turn the toes out then move the lower legs and feet in a circular, pushing motion until the legs are in a straight position.
4. Have them point the toes at the end of the kick for a few seconds before starting the next kick.
5. Repeat the motion.



Using a Kickboard or Barbell

Purpose: To improve leg action

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–6

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: Kickboards or barbells

Description:

1. Have participants get into the proper position on the front or back, depending on the stroke. How the kickboard/barbell is held will vary depending on the stroke:
 - For front crawl, butterfly and breaststroke: participants extend their arms above their heads and hold the kickboard or barbell.
 - For back crawl and elementary backstroke, participants extend their arms above their heads and hold the kickboard or barbell or hold it across their chests.
2. Have participants perform the leg action of the specific stroke for a designated distance.

For strokes on the front, have participants kick with their faces in the water and bring their faces up or to the side only to take breaths as necessary.

Using a Pull Buoy

Purpose: To improve strength and arm stroke technique for most strokes. This drill does not work well for sidestroke.

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: Pull buoys

Description:

1. With pull buoys in place just above the knees, have participants get into the proper position on the front or back, depending on the stroke.
2. Have participants perform the specific arm stroke for a designated distance.
3. Have participants remove the pull buoys and swim the full stroke for a designated distance.

Participants should integrate the proper breathing and timing into the arm stroke throughout the drill.

Putting It All Together

Purpose: To improve technique of a stroke by focusing on different elements of the stroke

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None



Description:

1. Have participants perform the kick of the stroke for a designated distance, such as 15, 25 or 50 yards.
2. Have participants swim a designated distance while kicking, using their left arm only.
3. Have participants swim a designated distance while kicking, using their right arm only.
4. Have participants swim a designated distance using a coordinated stroke.

Front Crawl

Fist Swim

Purpose: To improve arm stroke technique

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Description:

Have swimmers swim with closed fists to emphasize the use of the whole arm in swimming.

Hand-Touch Drill

Purpose: To focus on performance of the arm stroke as well as endurance

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants push off the side in a streamlined position.
2. Have participants begin an arm stroke with one arm. The other arm remains extended in front of the head.
3. The nonstroking arm remains extended until the stroking arm completes the stroke. Begin the stroke with the other arm once the stroking arm touches the extended arm.
4. Repeat steps 2–4 for a designated distance.

Pants Pocket Arm Stroke

Purpose: To reinforce good arm recovery

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None



Description:

1. Have participants push off the side in a streamlined position and perform the front crawl.
2. Tell participants to imagine that they are pulling their hands out of their pants pockets, dragging the thumbs up the sides to the armpits and then extending the forearm.
3. Have participants swim in this manner for a designated distance.

Fingertip Drag

Purpose: To reinforce good arm recovery

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants push off the side in a streamlined position and perform the front crawl.
2. Tell participants to relax their arms and trail the fingertips through the water. They should not touch their thumbs to their sides.
3. Have participants swim in this manner for a designated distance.

Side Flutter

Purpose: To improve the flutter kick and body rotation along the midline and build strength and endurance

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants flutter kick on one side with one arm extended and the other arm at the side.
2. After 8 kicks, have participants take 1½ strokes so the opposite arm is extended.
3. Have them continue the sequence for a designated distance.
4. Next, have them perform the same skill but take the strokes after only 6 kicks.
5. Have them continue the sequence for a designated distance.
6. Next, have them perform the same skill but take the strokes after only 4 kicks.
7. Repeat the sequence for a designated distance.
8. Finally, have participants swim the coordinated stroke for a designated distance.

This drill can be done with either the front crawl or the back crawl.



Back Crawl

Noodle Behind the Back Crawl Trick

Purpose: To help reinforce opposition rhythm of the arms for the back crawl

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: Foam noodles

Description:

1. Have participants stand on the deck with one arm up and one arm down, thumbs set to go up and pinkies set to go in the water.
2. Have each participant hold a foam noodle behind the backs with both hands.
3. Have them use a windmill action with the arms to keep the noodle tight. If the noodles go limp, one hand is catching up to the other one.
4. Have participants enter the water. Have them swim the back crawl with the noodles behind the backs.

Lane Line Swimming

Purpose: To focus on the power of the inverted, bent-elbow pull and the push of the hand downward at the end of the pull

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4 and 5

Class Formation: Line

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: Be sure that participants stop before reaching the side of the pool.

Description:

1. Have participants float on their backs alongside the lane line or rope and reach one hand, elbow extended straight behind the head, to grasp a lane line disc. The other hand may be forward of the head or at the side.
2. When they grab the lane line disc, their elbows bend and they pull themselves along the line. The hand grasping the disc slowly pulls the body forward until the thigh reaches that hand, and then releases it.
3. Have participants recover with the same arm, grasp the lane line disc again with the same hand and repeat the drill.
4. At the end point, participants reverse direction and return to the starting point so that they repeat the drill with the other arm.

Toe Check

Purpose: To refine the flutter kick on the back

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Class Formation: Stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: Kickboards



Additional Safety Considerations: Be sure that participants know how to gauge their distance to the wall so they do not strike their heads.

Description:

1. Have participants hold a kickboard across the stomach, making sure their head is back and ears are under water.
2. Flutter kick the length of the pool. Glance at the feet and legs occasionally to see that only the toes break the surface—not the whole foot or knees.
3. Remove the kickboard.
4. Extend the arms behind the head with hands clasped together while squeezing the ears.
5. Flutter kick the length of the pool, glancing at the feet and legs occasionally to see that only the toes break the surface.

Slow Stroking

Purpose: To strengthen the kick of the back crawl

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Line, facing the pool wall

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: The arm that is not stroking should remain extended above the head.

Description:

1. Have participants push off the side in a streamlined position on their backs, and then begin flutter kicking.
2. Have participants begin an arm stroke with one arm. The other arm remains extended in front of the head.
3. The nonstroking arm remains extended until the stroking arm completes the stroke. Begin the stroke with the other arm once the stroking arm touches the extended arm.
4. Repeat steps 2–4 for a designated distance.

Breaststroke

Simultaneous Kicking

Purpose: To support the beginning stages of learning simultaneous kicking on the front and promotes good body position on the front

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Level 3; Learn-to-Swim Level 2

Class Formation: Line, bracketed against the wall

Equipment: None



Description:

1. Have participants start by facing the wall and supporting themselves in a front float position.
2. Have them draw their feet to the surface, toward their hips, and point their knees toward the bottom.
3. Have them push with the bottoms of their feet to the starting position. (Do not have them turn their toes out, rather, have them just kick straight back.)
4. Repeat several times.
5. Next, have them draw their feet to the surface, point their knees toward the bottom, then point their toes toward the sides of the pool. Using a pushing, circular motion, kick back until the legs are straight.
6. Repeat several times.
7. Next, have them draw their feet to the surface, point their knees toward the bottom, then point their toes to the sides of the pool. Suggest that they draw an imaginary “heart shape” to the finish point. The kick should have a force to the end of the action (back), not to the sides or out.
8. Have participants follow your count: When you call “one,” their heels should be drawn toward their hips at the surface and their knees should be pointing toward the floor. When you call “two,” they should be kicking back in the circular, pushing motion. When you call “three,” they should be at the end of the heart shape, with their ankles touching.

Duck Walking

Purpose: To have participants become familiar with good foot position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Class Formation: Any

Equipment: None

Description:

1. On the deck, have participants stand with their ankles flexed and feet rotated outward.
2. Have participants take very small steps, keeping their feet pointed outward and their knees inside their ankles.

Kick Me Back

Purpose: To feel the push of the breaststroke kick with the feet and ankles in good position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Class Formation: In a line, bracketed on a wall

Equipment: None



Description:

1. Have participants bracket themselves on the wall while in a front position.
2. Have participants practice the breaststroke kick.
3. Move from participant to participant, and hold each participant's feet and manipulate the legs. The rest of the participants should continue to practice the kick while you are working with individual participants.
4. Apply a slight force on the inside of their feet with your open hands.
5. Tell participants to complete a breaststroke kick, trying to push you back with the force of their kick. The kick should end with their legs extended and legs close together.

Kicking and Breathing

Purpose: To refine the breaststroke kick with the timing of breathing

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 4

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: Kickboard

Description:

1. Have participants kick with their arms extended in front and their face in the water (holding a kickboard).
2. Have them push off and glide on the front.
3. Have them lift for a breath and put the head back down.
4. Have them immediately kick and glide with the head down.
5. Have them repeat the breathe, kick and glide rhythm.

How High Can You Go?

Purpose: To feel the push of the breaststroke kick with the feet and ankles in good position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 4

Class Formation: In a circle in deep water

Equipment: Kickboards or other types of buoyant equipment

Description:

1. Have participants put a kickboard under each arm and hang vertically in the water.
2. Tell participants to perform the breaststroke kick and try to kick their bodies as high out of the water as possible.

Pulling in Air

Purpose: To have participants become familiar with the arm stroke

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 4

Class Formation: Any

Equipment: None



Description:

1. Have participants lie on the stomach on the pool deck with the gutter or edge of the pool directly below the shoulders, arms extended over the water.
2. Have them begin pulling. The arms should touch the pool wall at the end of each pull.

Stop the Pull!

Purpose: To help participants become familiar with the position where the pull ends

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: Foam noodles

Description:

1. Have each participant place a foam noodle under the arms.
2. Swim breaststroke for a designated distance or length of time.

3-1 Drill

Purpose: To promote proper timing

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants perform 3 breaststroke kicks with arms extended.
2. Next, have participants perform 1 complete stroke.
3. Repeat this sequence for a designated distance or length of time.

1-3 Drill

Purpose: To improve arm pull

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants perform one breaststroke kick.
2. Next, have participants perform three breaststroke arm pulls.
3. Repeat this sequence for a designated distance or length of time.

Elementary Backstroke

Duck Walking

Purpose: To have participants become familiar with the proper foot position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Class Formation: Any



Equipment: None

Description:

1. On the deck, have participants stand with their ankles flexed and feet rotated outward.
2. Have participants take very small steps, keeping their feet pointed outward and their knees inside their ankles.

How High Can You Go?

Purpose: To feel the push of the elementary backstroke kick with feet and ankles in proper position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Class Formation: In a circle in deep water

Equipment: Kickboards or other types of buoyant equipment

Description:

1. Have participants put a kickboard under each arm and hang vertically in the water.
2. Tell participants to perform the elementary backstroke kick and try to kick their bodies as high out of the water as possible.

Kicking

Purpose: To refine the elementary backstroke kicks

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: When doing this drill on the back, be sure participants know how to gauge the distance to the wall to avoid striking their heads.

Description:

1. Have participants hold a kickboard across the chest.
2. Have them push off and glide on their back.
3. Have them slowly move the knees up and drop the feet into the water.
4. The legs extend out then come back together to the straight position. The feet move in a circular, pushing motion.
5. The toes point at the end of the kick for a few seconds before starting the next kick.
6. Repeat the motion.
7. During the power phase of the kick, think about turning the ankles so the toes are pointing up and out.

How Far with How Few?

Purpose: To refine the elementary backstroke kick

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: None



Additional Safety Considerations: Be sure participants know how to gauge the distance to the wall to avoid striking their heads.

Description:

1. Have participants lie on their backs with their arms extended (no kickboard) and perform the elementary backstroke kick.
2. During the power phase of the kick, have participants think about turning the ankles so the toes are pointing up and out.
3. Have them kick a designated length with as few kicks as possible.

Variation: Repeat this drill but have participants add in the arm stroke. This can be done with the breaststroke kick as well.

Tickle, T, Touch

Purpose: To refine the elementary backstroke

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: Kickboards

Additional Safety Considerations: Be sure participants know how to gauge the distance to the wall to avoid striking their heads.

Description:

1. Have participants line up in the water facing the wall. On your cue, have them push off into a back position with the arms at their sides.
2. Have them stroke on your cues. When you say “tickle,” they draw their fingers up their sides and drop their heels.
3. When you say “T,” they extend their arms straight out at shoulder level and their legs begin the leg action of the elementary backstroke kick.
4. When you say “touch,” they squeeze their arms to their sides and complete the leg action of the elementary backstroke kick.

Sidestroke

How High Can You Go?

Purpose: To feel the push of the scissors kick with the feet and ankles in proper position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 4

Class Formation: In a circle in deep water

Equipment: Kickboards or other types of buoyant equipment

Description:

1. Using two kickboards, one under each arm, have participants hang vertically in the water.
2. Tell them to draw their legs up under the body, then step out with one leg and back with the other.



3. Have them squeeze forcefully so that the body comes up out of the water. Be sure that the legs stop when they get side-by-side and the toes are pointed.
4. Encourage participants to come up out of the water as high as possible.

One-Arm Stroking

Purpose: To feel the push of the scissors kick with the feet and ankles in proper position

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants lie on one side. Have them start with the bottom arm extended above the head and the top arm resting on the side.
2. Have them swim the length of the pool using the scissors kick and stroking with the bottom arm.
3. For the return length, have participants lie facing the same direction so that stroking is occurring with the opposite arm.

How Far with How Few?

Purpose: To refine the sidestroke

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Line, stagger or wave

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants lie on their preferred side and begin the sidestroke.
2. Tell them to concentrate on stretching out their legs during the recovery, flexing the top ankle and squeezing their legs together forcefully. Their legs should end up straight and feet should be together. At the end of each kick, you should see pronounced movement in the intended direction of travel.
3. Have them accentuate the glide so that they swim a designated length with as few strokes as possible.

Butterfly

Butterfly Wiggle

Purpose: To introduce the dolphin motion

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 3; Learn-to-Swim Levels 2 and 3

Class Formation: Line

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: If participants' arms are at their sides, they need to stay away from the sides and the bottom of the pool.



Description:

1. Have participants do a body wiggle under water in a face-down position. Arms can be outstretched or at their sides.
2. Have participants rotate to the left side and do a body wiggle on the side.
3. Have participants rotate to a face-up position and do a body wiggle on the back.
4. Have participants rotate to the right side and do a body wiggle on the side.

Dolphin Kicking

Purpose: To introduce the dolphin kick

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 3; Learn-to-Swim Level 2

Class Formation: Line, stagger or wave

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: Since participants' arms are at their sides, they need to stay away from the sides and the bottom of the pool.

Description:

1. Have participants practice a glide with their arms by their sides.
2. Have participants practice a front glide (arms at sides) moving their heads toward the bottom.
3. Have participants do the front glide, moving their heads toward the bottom, then back toward the surface.
4. Have participants move through the water using their heads and bending at the hips.
5. Ask them to gradually increase the frequency of the bending and decrease the depth of the bending of the movement.
6. Have participants put their arms in front of their heads and repeat this sequence.

Corkscrew Kick

Purpose: To balance the dolphin kick

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3 and 4

Class Formation: Line, stagger, wave or circle

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: If participants' arms are at their sides, they need to stay away from the sides and the bottom of the pool.

Description:

1. Have participants perform a series of dolphin kicks (2, 3, 4, etc.) on the front, then on one side, then on the back, then on the other side, then back to front. Arms can be outstretched or at the sides.
2. When kicking on the side, participants should travel forward in a straight line. If they move in a crooked or diagonal fashion, this means that their undulation is unbalanced (i.e., kicking down harder than kicking up or vice versa).
3. Focus on dolphin up and down so that the kick is balanced.
4. Vary speeds from slow motion to fast forward.



Hips Up

Purpose: To emphasize hip action in the dolphin kick

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3 and 4

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: If participants' arms are at their sides, they need to stay away from the sides and bottom of the pool.

Description:

1. Have participants practice the dolphin kick on their backs. Arms can be outstretched or at the side.
2. With chins tucked slightly down, participants strive to see the front of their swimsuits come to the surface of the water on each kick.

Coming Up to Speed

Purpose: To improve the feel of the dolphin motion

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4 and 5

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Additional Safety Considerations: If participants' arms are at their sides, they need to stay away from the sides and bottom of the pool.

Description:

1. Have participants perform the dolphin kick over a certain distance in super-slow motion. Arms can be outstretched or at the side.
2. Have participants imagine themselves having been recorded and then played back in slow motion with every movement perfect.
3. Tell them to begin movements at the head with exaggerated “yes” nods of the head, finishing with whips of the lower legs.
4. With each length or designated distance, gradually increase the speed until an appropriate tempo is reached.

Kicking It Up

Purpose: To increase strength of the dolphin kick

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4 and 5

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants perform the dolphin kick in deep water in a vertical position.
2. Have participants kick with a short amount of time, and then gradually increase the amount of kicking time.



3. Give participants cues to vary the speed of the kick.
4. Have participants scull with their arms to support the kick or increase the difficulty by not using the arms.

6-1 Drill

Purpose: To increase strength of the dolphin kick while incorporating the arm stroke

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4 and 5

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants perform six counts of the butterfly kick with arms extended.
2. Have them perform one complete butterfly stroke ending with the arms in a streamlined position above the head.
3. Repeat for a designated distance.

The Chin Stretch

Purpose: To improve breathing technique when swimming butterfly

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4 and 5

Class Formation: Wave or stagger

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants perform the butterfly and focus on stretching their chins forward when taking breaths, rather than lifting their heads.
2. Have participants visualize placing their chins on the “table of water” to inhale.

One-Arm Butterfly

Purpose: To practice the full dolphin motion, one arm at a time

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4-6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle swimming

Equipment: Kickboard (optional)

Description:

1. For a designated distance, have participants swim using the full kick but stroking with only the right arm. The left arm is extended forward of the head. The extended arm may hold a kickboard if needed.
2. Have participants stroke with the left arm, keeping the right arm extended forward of the head.



One-Arm Butterfly with Fins

Purpose: To practice the full dolphin motion, one arm at a time

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle swimming

Equipment: Fins

Description:

1. Have participants wear swim fins and swim butterfly, stroking with one arm and the opposite arm extended in front. Tell them to breathe to the side.
2. Have participants continue for a designated distance.
3. Have them switch arms and repeat for a designated distance.
4. Have participants swim butterfly, taking one stroke with the right arm (left arm extended in front), then one stroke with the left arm (right arm extended in front), then one whole stroke.
5. Have them continue for a designated distance.

Almost There

Purpose: To practice the full dolphin motion with both arms

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Wave, stagger or circle swimming

Equipment: None

Description:

1. Have participants swim using the full kick but stroking with only the right arm and the left arm extended forward of the head for four strokes.
2. Next, have participants stroke with the left arm, keeping the right arm extended forward of the head for four strokes.
3. Next, have participants swim the full butterfly stroke for four strokes.
4. Repeat this sequence for a designated distance.