

Monthly Manager Moments

Article #8 – Alternate Styles of Swimming

Have you ever heard of Overarm Sidestroke, or Inverted Breaststroke? They are two of the alternate styles of swimming. When new instructors learn ALL the swimming strokes, they discover that there are at least 12 strokes that can be learned:

1. Crawlstroke or freestyle
2. Backstroke or back crawl and sometimes “Double-arm Backstroke”
3. Breaststroke
4. Butterfly
5. Elementary Backstroke
6. Sidestroke
7. Trudgen Crawl
8. Trudgen and sometimes “Double Trudgen”
9. Overarm Sidestroke
10. Inverted Breaststroke
11. Winging and kicking or “combined stroke on back”
12. Survival Stroke or Survival Swimming

In this article, we’ll take a look at those uncommon strokes. What are they used for, and why do they exist? The key to why they exist and what they’re used for is in the article’s title: they’re simply alternate ways to swim that work. They’re not as popular as the first six, although trudgen, trudgen crawl, and winging/kicking are very common. That’s because many people do these strokes without realizing it. I talked about winging and kicking in the article on Backstroke; and trudgen/trudgen crawl are alternatives of the crawlstroke that employ a scissors kick on the breathing. Lots of swimmers do a scissors kick when they side breathe, without realizing that this is a trudgen or trudgen crawl that they’re doing. I’ll describe each one briefly.

Trudgen Crawl – This stroke is essentially the crawl stroke, with unilateral breathing (on your favorite side only), a flutter kick while your head is straight down, and a scissors kick while your head turns to breathe. This scissors kick is much smaller than the “splits” I described for the sidestroke. It’s not just a sideways flutter kick, however. It is truly a small scissors kick. The armstroke is exactly the same as crawlstroke.

Trudgen - Trudgen is a variation of trudgen crawl where there is no kick other than the scissors on the breathing. This stroke is also very commonly done by “accident.” It is also done with unilateral breathing on your favorite side (every four arm pulls). The Double Trudgen is the same stroke done with bilateral breathing, thus the scissors kick is done on the right, then the left, and so forth. The kick is done every three strokes, instead of every four. There is still no flutter kick between breaths. Because there is no flutter kick in between scissors kicks, the kicks can be a bit wider, but they’re still not a full blown scissors kick as in the sidestroke. You’ll notice that the timing is thrown off on your breathing, when you first try to do a trudgen or trudgen crawl. That’s because a scissors kick has a recovery that takes time. A flutter kick is continuous, so it doesn’t really affect the timing. Be ready for this. If you

recover your legs before you turn to breathe, you'll find that the timing works. The armstroke should not end up with a glide to accommodate the scissors kick – that's the hard part. Try counting the armstroke in an even rhythm while you swim and fit the scissors kick into the even count.

Overarm Sidestroke – The name is descriptive. This is the sidestroke, but with the top arm (trailing arm) recovering over the water, rather than underwater. It is more difficult to master the timing because the loss of resistance of the water against your trailing arm during recovery throws it off. Without it, your trailing arm recovers too quickly, and feels quite awkward. The secret is to relax your trailing arm and let your hand hang from your elbow, delaying the recovery into a sort of slow motion movement. Put your hand back into the water, fingertips down, and at the top of your head. You'll still make the + sign with your hands as in the sidestroke, but it will be as the two hands pass each other in front of your face. Again the leading hand must be inside the trailing hand, or they'll collide.

Inverted Breaststroke – This name is also quite descriptive, but *it's not just the breaststroke inverted* to a supine position. Parts of it are the same, but parts of it are also much different. I'll break it down.

- Arms – Begin with your arms extended in a streamline position above your head. If you have range of motion issues, this may be difficult, if not impossible to do - because you have to keep your elbows in the water, locked out straight, and against the sides of your head. This is the glide position, just like the regular breaststroke (only inverted). Pull your arms down, and pitch your hands to engage the water with minimal slipping. Bend your elbows to a maximum of about 90°, just outside your shoulders, and continue pushing all the way down to your sides. This is NOT how the arms move in the regular breaststroke! You'll extend your arms as you push the water straight back toward your feet. Be careful of slipping from over-bending your arms. Pull hard, and you'll be thrust forward. Next, hold your arms for about one full second, and start to recover them slowly all the way up the sides of your body, to behind your head, where your hands will come together. Overlap your hands again into the streamline position, and get ready to shoot them out straight into the glide position.
- Kick – Inverted Breaststroke employs the whip kick. It's exactly the same as elementary backstroke kick, with flat hips, and flexion of the legs during recovery, without flexion at the hip. Full range of motion on the recovery of your feet is still essential, along with proper eversion and dorsiflexion of your feet. The speed differential we discussed before still applies; along with the circling motion of your legs during the power phase.
- Timing – This is MUCH different than regular breaststroke. Starting with your body all stretched out in the glide position, I like this phrase for the timing of inverted breaststroke - pull all the way down, unofficial glide (this is the full second hesitation mentioned above), recover, kick, official glide – 2 – 3. So, you still “kick your arms out in front” and glide, like the regular breaststroke, except your hands are behind your head, in an awkward position when you do the kick. The 2-3 refers to stretching out the glide for three seconds before starting the next stroke. The “unofficial” glide will help make your stroke feel less awkward. I've dubbed it the unofficial glide because some sources describe the arm motion as having no stop at all at the end of the power phase. I suggest using the unofficial glide, however. You'll find that the stroke just works better with that one second hesitation.

Survival Stroke – Synonymous with Survival Swimming, this is often overlooked as a stroke at all, but it really is another stroke that's different from the rest. It's intended for very long distances, and in warm water, because your face will be down in the water between breaths. Warm water by definition is considered to be above 70°. To be honest, that's still pretty darn cold. If you're in water above 80°, however – you can swim the survival stroke for an extended period without hypothermia overtaking you. Survival stroke is a very slow resting stroke (has 2 long glides), and employs the Survival Float technique as an integral part of the stroke. First, let's look at Survival Float, then we'll add the rest to turn it into Survival Stroke.

To do Survival Float, begin by lying face down in the water and let your arms & legs dangle beneath you. Hold your breath for about 10 seconds. When you are in need of a breath, lift your hands up next to your face and push them back down gently, making a slight circling motion as you do. When your hands are extended again, let them dangle beneath you as before. As you push down, lift your head slightly, just enough to bring your mouth clear of the surface. Do NOT tread water to take a breath. Survival Float's objective is to rest, and save energy. The less you do, the better. Some non-buoyant swimmers may need to do an easy scissors kick to get their mouths out of the water for a breath, but if you can take a breath without any kick, you should. Basically, it's dangle, breathe, dangle, breathe, and that's all. If you're so non-buoyant that you sink in the "dangle position" you'll need to move your arms and legs slowly to maintain your position at the surface. Still, don't sit up as you would when treading water. Stay in a face down position, and move just as much as you need to keep from sinking.

Now, to turn this into Survival Stroke – when you push down to take a breath, instead of returning your hands to the dangling position, put them together in a praying position under your chest. Do a strong scissors kick and shoot your hands forward into an extended glide position. Your body should be stretched out and become horizontal as your glide forward. Next, pull your arms all the way back to your sides and glide again. Now, let your arms and legs dangle again. You're back to the Survival Float position. Repeat this to gradually move forward. Here's the timing phrase for survival stroke: survival float, push down, take a breath, pray, scissor kick, glide, pull down, glide again, survival float.

Double-arm Backstroke – This style of swimming is usually not recognized as a different stroke, but since it has a name, and is used for competitive swimming drills, I'll briefly describe it. This skill is backstroke with the arms in unison, rather than opposition. Because simultaneously lifting both arms above your head adds a lot of weight to your upper body, many swimmers will submerge their faces when performing this skill. You can avoid face submersion by adjusting your body position to a more diagonal, using your flutter kick to keep your chest from sinking. This "stroke" is very inefficient, because of the frontal resistance created by the diagonal body position, and the awkwardness of the arms. The important body roll used in backstroke is now impossible, and range of motion of the shoulders is more of an issue.

Are there others? Probably, but these are the identified strokes. We'll look at other swimming skills next month, such as sculling, treading water, finning vs. winging, underwater swimming, etc.

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