

HOBART AQUATIC MASTERS SWIMMING CLUB SKILLS AND DRILLS NOTES

BREASTSTROKE

Key features

- **Styles.** There are basically two styles of breaststroke being practised today – a flat style where the body stays flat in the water, and a wave style where the body undulates in a similar manner to butterfly. The wave style is a higher energy-sapping style than the flat style. Breaststroke sprinters (50 to 100 metres) might use the wave style, whilst the flat style is generally used for longer events (200 metres breaststroke and individual medleys), although there are some very successful flat style sprinters as well. Style is a matter of personal preference.
- **Resistance.** Breaststroke is the slowest of all four strokes mainly because it generates the most resistance to the water. Therefore it is vital that you reduce resistance and streamline as much as possible whilst swimming breaststroke.
- **Flexibility.** Breaststroke also demands more hip and knee flexibility than the other strokes. This can be developed, but anyone with hip and or knee flexibility issues needs to approach breaststroke with caution and consult your medical professional first if needed.
- **Kick.** Breaststroke kick makes a more substantial contribution to your forward momentum than other strokes and therefore a strong kick needs to be developed.

Technical points

- **Arm stroke components** – the stroke can be broken down into five components: outswEEP, insweep, finish, lunge and glide. These five components need to be completed seamlessly, noting that during the glide your hands will be steady for a brief moment before the next outswEEP.
- **Glide** – an effective glide is key to your stroke efficiency. Many swimmers neglect this important component and commence their outswEEP too hastily, missing the benefit of a glide. Your glide involves lunging into a streamlined position with arms extended, head down and body flattened out. Develop confidence in your glide in training by counting to three before commencing your outswEEP.
- **Hands below elbows during outswEEP and insweep** – as with freestyle and butterfly, your elbows need to be bent during outswEEP and insweep, with your hands going backwards and slightly downwards. Avoid allowing your hands to go too wide and flat, and too far back behind your shoulders. They should stay in front of your face. A big, wide hand movement is not better with breaststroke as it only adds more resistance as you insweep.
- **Fast finish and lunge** – at the completion of the insweep phase your elbows and hands need to finish by snapping in close to your body with elbows under your ribcage, and hands coming together under your chin as you prepare to lunge forward. This sets you up to lunge into a streamlined body position, as if you were diving forward. Your hands may break or go above the surface as you lunge to reduce resistance.

- **Breath** – you need to arch your back when outswEEPing to allow your chest and head to rise up far enough for you to take a breath. Only come up far enough for your mouth to clear the water and inhale, unless you also have a well-developed wave style, in which case you may come up higher. In both styles your head and shoulders move up together. You do not tilt your head independent of your shoulders, as you might with butterfly.
- **Start and turn** – the sequence of actions for a start and a turn, once you are in the water, are the same: glide with arms fully extended and face towards the bottom of the pool, take a full stroke with your hands going down to your hips combined with a single dolphin kick (but not a breaststroke kick!), glide, then your hands lunge forward combined with a single kick and stay in the fully extended glide position until your head breaks the surface, then start the outswEEP of your first complete stroke cycle. Make sure you maintain the momentum gained off the block or off the wall when completing this sequence.

Training and drills

- **Kicking.** You need to develop a kick that makes a positive contribution to your forward movement. Isolated kicking will help you to develop a powerful kick. Practise kicking with a kickboard or a training snorkel. Time your laps and try to improve your lap time. For those swimmers new to breaststroke you need to develop a strong kick before progressing to work on your stroke, so be patient with your kicking drills. Also practise kicking on your back with arms extended over your head or by your side. Concentrate on the symmetry of your leg movement, pushing outwards and backwards with the soles of your feet, and bringing your feet together at full leg extension before drawing them up towards your waist whilst keep your knees below the surface of the water. Practise on your back then replicate the kick on your front.
- **Pull/kick plus kick only.** Do a complete stroke cycle with arms and kick, and then in the streamlined position just do a single kick (or more kicks if you can hold your breath). This drill will help you improve your streamline, develop power in your kick, and improve your stroke/kick synchronisation.
- **Pull/kick plus pull only.** Do a complete stroke cycle then do a complete arm stroke without a kick. This drill will help you develop power in your stroke, and improve your stroke/kick synchronisation.
- **Sculling.** Shorten your outswEEP to about half your normal stroke. This drill will help you develop power in your outswEEP and develop power in your kick. It will also help cure you of any tendency to over-stroke (going too wide, too flat and hands going behind your shoulders).
- **Start and turn sequence.** Practice the start and turn sequence (described above), and see how far out from the wall you can get before needing to break the surface. Do not rush the sequence, but try to maintain your forward momentum. When you dive in and when you push off the wall you need to go at a downward angle first, then approach the surface as you lunge and kick. If you go parallel to the surface you will pop up too early and the water will resist your forward momentum.

- **Stroke count.** Count your strokes per lap and try to reduce the number of strokes. Generally this requires you to hold the glide a bit longer and get maximum value out of your streamlined body position. Count to three on the glide before outswimming. Try to go faster without increasing your stroke count by putting more energy into the stroke whilst maintaining a three count on your glide. This drill will help you to develop an efficient stroke. Use this drill to check the timing of your kick, ensuring it commences as you reach the finish stage of your stroke and is completed as you lunge into the glide. This timing will help you develop a powerful lunge based on a powerful kick.

Visualise the stroke

- Watch competent breaststroke swimmers to develop your mental picture of the movement needed to swim streamlined, powerful breaststroke.
- This video highlights the key features of the stroke:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfJ105NN68U>

Prepared by Philip Tyrell for Hobart Aquatic Masters Swimming Club 7 April 2019