

Triathlon Swim Starts and Exits

Swim starts and exits are an essential element to a good performance. Like swimming, cycling and running it is important that you practice swim starts and exits in order to become proficient at doing them quickly and efficiently. Below are some tips and insights on how to make your swim starts and exits, fast and efficient.

Race Start - land start:

Always warm-up, with 2-4 minutes of swimming, no matter what distance race or how cold the water may be, before the race. In fact the colder the water the more important it is to warm up to avoid breathing and muscle constriction when you start the race. A warm-up also gives you a chance to adjust your wet suit, secure your goggles and adjust your swim cap. Note, always place your goggles under your swim cap to avoid the them getting knocked off your head during the swim.

During your warm-up swim, determine if there are any rocks, sand holes, sticks, etc. at the start that you should avoid. Prior to the race start position yourself in the group where you feel most comfortable relative to your swimming abilities and what direction your turn at the first buoy relative to the start line. Use the following guidelines:

| Buoy Turn | Swimming Ability | Start Position |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Right | Fast – Strong | Front Right |
| Right | Moderate | Middle or Front Left |
| Right | Beginner - Developing | Back Left |
| Left | Fast – Strong | Front Left |
| Left | Moderate | Middle or Front Right |
| Left | Beginner - Developing | Back Right |

For a land start, once the gun goes off and the race begins it is best to run with high knees into the water until it reaches upper thigh level. Once at this level it is generally safe to dive in. A shallow dive 20 - 24 inches below the surface is the most effective dive. This will allow you to resurface quickly, begin your stroking and begin navigating the first few minutes of the race.

If you are in an ocean swim in which you have to deal with breaking waves it is important to still take that first dive when the water level is at the upper thigh but since the water is also reseeded and other waves are breaking, dolphin diving is usually an effective method to propel your far enough into the surf to start swimming. Thus, once you are ready to dive it is usually under a breaking wave, take the dive then immediately stand up again walk a few steps until you need to dive under the next breaking wave.

During the start it is important to sight often, every 2-5 strokes, to ensure you are not running over the top of anyone and on line for the first buoy. In addition, it is critical to start within your abilities and overall race goals. Even if it is land start, run or even walk to the waters edge based on your overall race goals and swim abilities. Faster swimmer should push their pace from the beginning, knowing how fast of a hard pace they can swim. Moderate swimmers should strive for an evenly paced moderate to moderate hard effort during the start. Slower swimmers should stay within their abilities and start modestly.



Race Start – in water start:

Most of the same strategies apply to in water starts as land starts, including warm-up, sighting and positioning on the start line. One of the biggest advantages to in water starts is that you can settle into your rhythm much sooner than land starts. The biggest difference with an in water start is that you are often treading water prior to your race start. This can be aid in your overall warm up however. To start in water where you are treading water requires 10-20 yards of very strong stokes and hard kicks to create momentum for a good start but once you have completed 20 yards of strong swimming start to find your rhythm.

Exiting the water:

Exiting the water can be a difficult and tiring maneuver if not done correctly. As you approach shore wait to stand up until you are able to stoke the ground with your hand during a regular swim stroke. It is at this point the water is shallow enough for you to stand up and walk/run out with high knees onto the shore without having to expend a great deal of effort. Be careful of any rocks, holes, slippery areas, etc. when exiting the water.

If you are in the ocean, as you begin to approach shore, during several of your breaths, turn your head so you can see behind you. This will enable you to see any breaking waves that may tumble on top of you or that you can ride into shore. Continue to look behind you until you can either ride a wave into shore or you are ready to stand up. If you decide to catch a wave remember to catch it just as the wave is starting to break and body surf it in with arms starched out in front so you can control your body and keep yourself front hitting the bottom of the ocean. Once you stand up be ready to fight any reseeding waves and waves that continue to crash onto the beach. These can cause you to fall or waste a lot of valuable energy. By keeping the knees high and coming in close to shore once you stand up this issue can be minimized.

