

Triathlon Transitions

Transitions are often referred to as the fourth sport in triathlons. They are an essential element to a good performance. Like swimming, cycling and running it is important that you practice transitions in order to become proficient at doing them quickly and efficiently. Below are some tips and insights on how to make your transitions, which includes the swim start and exit, fast and efficient.

Swim to Bike Transition:

The first key to a fast transition is to know where you placed your bike in transition. To help you mark the location of your bike tie a bright colored handkerchief on the bike rack at your location in transition. You can also count the number of rows from the transition entry point and find a landmark to know where your bike is located. Example: 5th row on the right, next to the bushes and the bike is half way down the rack. Knowing exactly where your bike is in transition can save you minutes of anguish and lost time trying to locate your bike.

The second key to a fast transition is to know the area where you exit the water and where you enter transition to your bike (T1). This means to scout out the area during your dry land warm up. This will give you a mental map of what to expect when you exit the water and allow you to plan for a fast transition. As you exit the water peel back your goggles, onto your forehead and begin peeling your wet suit off. By the time you get to the transition area you should have your wet suit peeled off the arms and down around your waist and you should have peeled off your swim cap and goggles, holding them in your hand.

As you run into the transition area be looking for your designated row of bikes and your special marker (handkerchief, etc.). Do not look for your specific bike until you have found your row. And or marker. At your bike, drop your cap/goggles next to your bike and unpeel the legs of the wet suit down to your calves. Once the wet suit is below the knees then raise one knee while standing on the arm of the wet suit with the other leg. Repeat this process, on both legs, until the wet suit comes off the legs. If it does not come off, use your thumbs to push off the remaining wet suit from around your ankles. While removing the wet suit place your helmet on your head, **strap it,** and then place on your sunglasses.

Once all that is complete un-rack your bike and push it out of the transition area, passed the designated mount line before you mount the bike, in your usual manner, making sure you are clipped in the peddles. Watch for other bikers and swimmers coming into the transition area. This can also be a chaotic time so stay relaxed as you complete this part of the race. This process takes practice but will save you valuable seconds in transition.

Bike to Run Transition:

The bike to run transition will be your hardest transition from a physical stand point but to begin scout out the transition area to know where you enter the transition off the bike and where the dismount line is located. Also, visualize where your bike is to be re-racked before the run. As you enter into the transition area be in your small chain ring for the last ¼ mile. This allows your legs to “loosen up” before you half to run. There are several different ways to prepare and dismount your bike and in this article I will refer to the most basic way.



Just before the designated dismount line as you are still rolling, unclip one of your shoes, then stop at the dismount line and dismount your bike in the usual fashion, just like you would any ride. Once off your bike walk or jog it into the transition area. As you walk or jog into the transition area be looking for your designated row of bikes and your special marker (handkerchief, etc.). Since there will be a “sea” of bikes it may be hard to distinguish your row but do not panic. Remember the marker you established for your self prior to the race and calmly look for your row.

Once you have found your row get to your spot and re-rack your bike before you do anything else, then remove your helmet, then shoes, then any other clothing if needed. Once all that is complete put on your running shoes. Locate the exit area to the run portion and head out on to the run. Watch for other bikers and runners coming into the transition area. This can also be a chaotic time so stay relaxed as you complete this part of the race.

You may also use this time to re-hydrate and re-fuel if you have had a hard time while riding completing this all-important part of the race.

Running: Pacing is also key. You should be able to settle in to your running goal pace within the first ½-1 mile. The first portion of the run your legs and feet will feel numb or like “tree stumps” and make for an awkward initial start to the run portion. Do not try and force your pace. Allow your legs to settle into their run or walk mode. A shorter stride and slower pace may you to make this transition easier. Once the run is underway and the blood flow gets redirected the legs will feel like normal. Once you have settled into your goal pace, enjoy your run mile by mile. Do not think of how many miles are left in the race, instead concentrate on each mile individually. Keep an eye out for all the mile markers.

If you find you self ahead of your goal pace, especially in the first half of the race, ease off and get back on pace as soon as you realize your error. If you find that you are behind your goal pace, especially in the first half of the race, gradually increase your speed to get back on pace. If you find you are behind you goal time at any given mile split but you have been running at your goal pace for the last several miles, do not try to make up the time immediately. Very gradually make up the time over the course of the next 1-2 miles.

Keep in mind that nearly all courses will have hills. Which will automatically alter your pacing. It's best to therefore establish a finishing goal time that is realistic for a hillier course and not to panic if a given mile split is off since any given hill can effect a mile split. Be sure hydrate and get carbohydrate replacements at the established times. (see the Nutrition section)

