

Bilateral Breathing for Young Swimmers

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1-2-3 Breathe!

The "1-2-3 Breathe" method of teaching freestyle builds on a step-by-step, progressive system of drills that teaches the body positions and component skills of the stroke. This comprehensive progression leads to a high rate of success, and the swimmers learn quickly, too.

Freestyle in its most elegant form is a continuous, whole body movement in which one side lines up finger to toe, followed by the other side lining up finger to toe in a smooth rolling transition. The smoother the transition, the more effective the stroke.

When you look at the fastest swimmers, many seem to be spinning side-to-side through a tunnel in the water.

A swimmer's most streamlined position in the water occurs when he/she is stretched out on the side, one hand reaching forward -as if being pulled by the tip of the fingers -with the rest of the body trailing behind.

That is the exact position to be in when rolling to take a breath in front crawl. One arm is "spearing" forward, the other finishing off the last stroke, with the body gliding hydrodynamically through the water.

The stroke is a constant rolling motion between the two sides. The "front" in "front crawl" is just a transition between the sides.

Skill/Drill Sequence to Achieve 1-2-3 Breathe

Streamline/Stretch on Front. Swimmers need to create the "tunnel" in

the water through which to swim. Use verbal imagery such as, "Swim like a swordfish" or "Be a knife and cut through the water."

Front Flutter Kicks. The kick gives front crawl the lift necessary to maintain a body position parallel to the surface of the water. Using phrases such as, "Fast feet," "Make the water boil" and "Splashy toes" encourage the swimmer to perform a more powerful kick. Drills with kickboards and flippers help to strengthen the kick.

1-2-3 "Big Arms" and Roll onto Back (1-2-3 Rollover). Young swimmers can easily perform three armstrokes with kicks and roll onto their back for a breath. Use verbal counting of the strokes -"1-2-3" - with a strong emphasis on "rollover." This is the first step in linking breathing cycles together and in building distance.

Side Glides. The key here is getting the swimmer to feel comfortable and relaxed in the side position. Initially, the instructor should assist the swimmer with the side glide before he/she progresses to a glide with a kickboard in the lead hand. This is then followed by an unassisted glide.

Verbal imagery such as, "Be long and straight like an arrow and shoot for the target" helps the swimmer to visualize the correct body position. Be sure to tell the swimmer to "press your ear into your shoulder" on the lead arm.

Side Glides with Kicks. The side kick keeps the body aligned and parallel to the surface through the breathing phase on either side. Initially, the swimmer should practice with the lead arm holding a kickboard. Flippers will help the beginning swimmer to build power in their side kicks and stability in their body position. Encourage the swimmer to maintain a high shoulder position on the trailing arm.

1-2-3 Breathe! On the initial attempts, it is helpful for the swimmer to perform long, slow strokes and a long side kick while getting a breath.

As the swimmer becomes more proficient, the cycle can be shortened. The progression emphasizes repetition, mastery, strength and endurance. All of these features combine to develop a strong freestyle in which the swimmer is relaxed, powerful and streamlined in the water.

Repetition of the side skills -even after swimmers have learned the armstroke-improves freestyle. New swimmers grow stronger and gain endurance. They get a better sense of stability on their sides. They begin to feel how to slip through the water. Swimmers who have already learned front crawl gain a whole new appreciation of how freestyle works.

Working on side skills corrects many of the problems in their strokes. Swimmers who habitually swim flat learn where to breathe in the stroke. Their side skills help them get the most out of every stroke. Swimmers who get "side-wise" are finally able to relax and breathe.

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