

Part 1: Key Open Water Skills to master!

Acclimatisation and managing anxiety

Every time you swim in an open water environment you should follow an acclimatisation ritual which will allow your body and even your mind to adjust to the open water and the effects of the colder water. Start by splashing your hands and face with the water, then ease yourself into the water gently (ideally by walking down a ramp or a shallow gradient). Once in the water, pull the front of your wetsuit forward to allow the water to enter and so to allow your body to cool down and to adjust to this new environment.

Next, it's time to put your face in the water: this may be for only a few seconds at first but try to do this a few times and extend the duration each time. Add in some breathing and while your face is looking downwards start breathing out calmly and effectively. Before you set off on your swim, try some floating. Float on your back and then on your front with your arms and legs apart in a star-shape. This will again help your body, your muscles, your lungs and your mind to relax before you set off on your swim. Take note of how much your wetsuit has increased your buoyancy!

Swimming Straight

Being able to swim in a straight line is essential in open water. With the absence of lane ropes and black lines to guide you, coupled with reduced visibility and variable weather conditions, this can be harder than it sounds! Above all, it's important to swim in a straight line to avoid swimming further than the marked course distance. Did you know that in open water races, most swimmers tend to swim 30% further than the course distance itself?

Above all, to swim in a straight line you should aim for symmetry in your stroke and as such avoid situations whereby one arm is crossing over the centreline of the body. Good body position and alignment should keep you swimming in a straight line. Follow our "swimming straighter" tips and drills below and then you'll be able to swim the right distance and save energy!

Sighting

Sighting is the term used to refer to the process of looking where you're going in open water and maintaining the straight line swimming trajectory that we talked about above. The absence of lane ropes, black lines and the inability to see the bottom in an open water environment makes navigation and swimming in a straight line somewhat challenging.

In order to sight, you should lift your head to the front. A good sighting technique involves just lifting your eyes out of the water and then rolling your head to the side to breathe. This should all take place in one smooth and fluid motion. It takes practice to integrate good sighting technique into your front crawl stroke without interrupting your rhythm and momentum. Definitely avoid keeping your head elevated for several strokes at a time as this can be extremely fatiguing.

