

Swim Session Planning Elements

This paper outlines elements or characteristics that underpin the preparation and deliver of swim sessions by Masters Coaches. This paper focuses on the sessions that fit under the macro, meso and micro-cycle structure, it focuses only on the sessions being coached. It is recommended that coaches evaluate their proposed swim sessions against each of the elements listed below prior to coaching the session. E.g. 1 is the swim session Inclusive, Challenging, does it have Variety etc.

| Elements | Description and Comments |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Preparation | Each swim session needs to be planned and written down in advance. |
| Alignment & Purpose | The purpose, intensity, load density and overall volume of the session should align to your Head Coaches' Coaching Plan. You should be able to explain how the sets deliver / aligns to its purpose. Also, you need to consider what was delivered at previous sessions and what is planned for future sessions – so your session correctly fits into the overall coaching plan. |
| Clear, Legible and Understandable | Is what I have written up (assuming that you are using a whiteboard) legibly written, in a readable colour (orange and green are hard to be read by some people), is it sufficiently large enough to be read by swimmers, clear and consistent in language, does it inform swimmers of all they need to know (distance, stroke, effort, rest / interval, focus etc.) |
| Specific | Aimed at improving and training for identifiable aspects (goals) of swimmers (e.g. fitness, techniques, breathing, racing skills, open water skills etc.). Goals need to be both realistic and tangible (achievable within a defined timeframe). |
| Knowledge | You need to know your swimmers, including any health issues, likes, dislikes, goals, upcoming events and motivational triggers. Also need to know each swimmer's cruise and threshold speeds to be able to set suitable timings for repeats etc. and to know how long activities will take. |
| Encouraging | Use positive speech and encouragement. Discuss with swimmers what they're doing well and where there are opportunities for improvement. Limiting, for each swimmer, to only discuss and work on a maximum of two areas of improvement at a time. |
| Inclusive | Adapting and modifying coaching practises, session and sets to ensure that every participant regardless of age, gender ability level, personality, disability or ethnic background are equally included and catered for in your session. |
| Challenging | Generally, the session should be the right intensity level and challenging for your swimmers to complete. The session should be achievable. |

| Elements | Description and Comments |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Variety | The session needs to contain variety to provide a mental breaks and stimulus for swimmers. Including a break or a change of activity in the middle of a large volumes of the one activity. Having variety is a great way to add motivation and can give swimmers a feeling of progressing through or achieving the session. Having variety also ensure that swimmers who may dislike the stroke coached in your main session, still get to practice their preferred stroke. |
| Fun [not dull or boring] | The session should not be boring, they should be fun to swim and different to previous sessions. Coaches need to provide motivation. It is recommended to you do an activity occasionally (not necessarily in every session) that is specifically focused as being both purposeful and FUN. |
| Flow, Structure and Synergy | From the warmup through to the cooldown – there should be a flow (a progression) in the structure that links individual activities of the session together. The opposite been disparate unconnected set of swim activities. This also applies to the use of training aids such as fins and pool buoys where it's not recommended to change from for example fins on to fins off, too often. |
| Suitable | The sessions should be suitable for the skill level and fitness of your swimmers |
| Flexible | Be able to include, modify or remove sets to suit time constraints or the swimmers' capacity on the day. Including repeats (or rounds) is one way to easily make adjustments. Another is to plan in to your session options or alternative swim sets e.g. to give them the set A or set B depending on the remaining time. |
| Targeted | Sessions should be targeted at each lanes skill level, distance to be swum, fitness and general capability. |
| Intensity and Balance | Sets should be designed so that swimmers are working the appropriate energy system with a suitable work to rest balance. There needs to be a balance across the whole session in the volume of low intensity, moderate intensity and high intensity swimming. |
| Reportable and Measurable | Can inform each lane of the distance swum, be able to review the session with swimmers. Have an established criterion for measuring progress towards the attainment of each goal. |
| Feedback | <p>Seek feedback from swimmers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did they think of the session, was it too hard, easy, short Other - What was good - What was not so good - What was missing |
| Tested | It is recommended for coaches to swim (and evaluate) their session themselves to determine if the session is ready to be delivered. |

The structure of my typical session plan

Once written, it's recommended that coaches review their proposed session against the elements listed in the table above and make adjustments as they see fit.

Coach's talk: Welcomes members and any new or trial swimmers. Advises the swimmers what the sets focus is, it's an opportunity to outline the session and to describe the drills, their focus points and any tools required (pull buoy, flippers etc.). Allocate swimmers to lanes (a swimmer may need to be promoted to a faster lane to make it more challenging for them). Also, it is a good opportunity to disseminate club news, upcoming events etc. Lastly it kicks off the commencement of the swim session.

Warmup: Options include for example:

- Xx mètres FR, xx BA etc.
- Xx metres choice
- Every xx lap is form,
- Every 4th 25 is moderate
- 1st xx strokes of each lap is BU
- Turning on the "T", no the wall.

Drills & Skills: Options include (but not limited to) drills, kicking, paddles and pull buoy, starts, breakouts, turns and finishes, hypoxic training, stroke technique

Build: Option include:

- Short FR sprints.
- Sets of hard – easy, easy – hard etc
- Short medleys (e.g. 100 IM)
- Combinations such as 200 FR swim, 100 IM, 2 x 50 Hard, 4 x 25 Sprint
- Kick (including tombstone kicking), pull, then a swim set

Main(s): Almost unlimited possibilities including:

- Hard – moderate - easy variants,
- Broken sets e.g. a mentally easy 1500 is: 3 x {200, 150, 100, 50}
- Pyramids, ladders, descending, and ascending sets
- Fartlek, over distance, intervals, rest variants, CCS, negative splits
- Relays, red mist, sprints, broken sets, medley sets, various pyramids
- Locomotives (continuous swimming that includes fast and slow components)
- Medleys with different distances for each stroke

Fun Set: Anything that's fun to do

- Sprints on the whistle (for the whole squad) – for any or all strokes – can also include hypoxic activities, drills like one arm FR etc
- Pursuit relays
- Relays made up with one swimmer from each lane – so that you have fast and slow swimmers in every team.
- Beep test
- Swim the set you draw from the coaches barrel
- Relays – FR and IM

Extras: Extras lists sets that can be used to substitute sets in “Main” or any other section so that the total set can be modified to suit the swimmers that turn up on the day.

Cooldown: Include FR and if the set contained a lot of FR, include some BA to work the opposite set of muscles.

Greg Gourley

National and NSW Coach of the Year 2019 and 2020

Coach Tuggeranong Masters ACT