

Teaching Breaststroke

Breaststroke is the oldest of the four competitive strokes which has been used for centuries. Examples of this stroke are pictured in the Cave of Swimmers near Wadi Sora in the South West part of Egypt near Libya discovered in 1933 during the Almasry Expedition

Captain Webb used this stroke to swim the channel in 1875. Captain Webb's breaststroke is very much removed from the breaststroke that we have seen performed this summer at the Olympic Games. This stroke has undergone major changes to try and eliminate resistance and increase streamlining whilst staying within the Rules and Regulations set down by FINA (Federation Internationale de Natation)

Breaststroke is the slowest of the four competitive strokes but uses more muscles than any of the other three strokes. In an effort to increase speed, style and variations of performance have occurred. Some swimmers have a wave like action with a high upper body position and the hands recovering over the water followed by a below the surface phase. This is a contrast to the leisurely, wide armed, wedge kick style of leisure swimmers. A demonstration by a good swimmer gives learners a visual image of how the whole stroke should look. The whole- part- whole method is recommended for teaching Breaststroke

In Breaststroke one side of the body is like a mirror image of the other. Both arms and both legs have a simultaneous action in the same horizontal plane. The leg action can take a long time for some children to master especially the mirror image action of the legs and the dorsi-flexion of the feet. There are two types of leg kick, the wedge and the whip kick. The whip kick is used for competitive swimming as it is faster. The forward movement in breaststroke traditionally comes from a strong leg action. Swimmers need a basic breaststroke which can then be modified as they progress

As with all strokes the Rules and Regulations governing the stroke need to be kept to the forefront whilst teaching. Federation Internationale De Natation (fina.org) is the governing body of all international swimming it is their rules and regulations that should be followed to cover the whole of the UK



FINA Rules and regulations for Breaststroke

- SW 7.1 From the beginning of the first arm stroke after the start and after each turn, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm stroke and one leg kick in that order.
- SW 7.2 All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.
- SW 7.3 The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast on, under, or over the water. The elbows shall be under water except for the final stroke before the turn, during the turn and for the final stroke at the finish. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn.
- SW 7.4 During each complete cycle, some part of the swimmer's head shall break the surface of the water. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer may take one arm stroke completely back to the legs. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke. A single downward dolphin kick followed by a breaststroke kick is permitted while wholly submerged. Following which, all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.
- SW 7.5 The feet must be turned outwards during the propulsive part of the kick. A scissors, flutter or downward dolphin kick is not permitted except as in SW 7.4. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward dolphin kick.
- SW 7.6 At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. The head may be submerged after the last arm pull prior to the touch, provided it breaks the surface of the water at some point during the last complete or incomplete cycle preceding the touch.

Teaching Breaststroke Body Position

The body position should be emphasised in other practices, especially leg practices

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push and glide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long and narrow like an arrow



Teaching Breaststroke Leg Action

There are 2 types of leg kick that may be performed. The wider wedge kick, where the knees turn outwards and the narrower whip kick where the knees are kept in line with the hips. The wider wedge is likened to a diamond shape and the narrow whip kick to performing a hamstring curl. The narrower kick is the more efficient, but swimming teachers need to ensure that the knees are slightly apart and that the main rotation comes from the hips. Knees kept close together with rotation from the knee only may cause knee damage.

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting on the poolside or any other elevated surface. The position of the feet should be emphasised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Heels to buttocks' not 'knees to chest' during the recovery phase of the legs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stroke may be best practised in the supine position prior to the swimmer turning on to the front. This allows the swimmer to see the action of the legs and feet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive the legs backwards, speed should increase during this phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At a rail or any convenient place depending on the structure of the pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feet should also be dorsi-flexed at this time. Draw a circle with the heel. Drive heels back first.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking in the supine position using floats or a woggle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feet turned outwards in the propulsive phase of the stroke.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking action in the prone position using two floats held so that the forearms are supported on the floats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feet should 'whip' together at the end of the kick – kick hands forward.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking action using one float, kicking action holding a woggle may be better than using a float as it gives more stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick like a frog.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical kicking downwards in deeper water i.e. treading water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squeeze the legs together.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking with a float emphasising a glide after each kick. This helps the swimmer to improve timing. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimmers can count the number of kicks that it takes to cross the pool and then try to reduce the number. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leg action can be attempted without using a float, the arms may be extended or a more advanced practise is to have the arms at the side and feel for the feet as recovery takes place. 	



Breaststroke Arm Action

This raises the body in the water. The arms are fully extended at the start of the stroke with the palms facing downwards and slightly outwards so that the thumbs are lower than the fingers. Propulsion is obtained from the sculling action of the hands and forearms.

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sculling practices should be encouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arm action should be continuous from glide to glide; arm action should not start until the legs are together.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arm action should be tried standing in the pool with the water about chest high. The analogy of cleaning out a shallow bowl may help. Shoulders should be in the water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep hands in front of shoulders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arm action can be tried whilst walking. Breathing can be incorporated into this practice 'Blowing the arms forward' can help here. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arm action and leg action should remain narrow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a woggle may help to teach the arm action or to correct the stroke of a swimmer who is taking the arms back too far. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scull with the hands.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arm stroke can be tried from a glide to another glide. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The full stroke can then be tried. 	

Breaststroke Breathing

The natural rise and fall of the shoulders should assist with the breathing rhythm. The breath is taken at or towards the end of the propulsive stage when the body is high. As the arms are pushed forwards the face drops into the water and the breath is exhaled. Breathing should take place with every stroke. Breathing out may be of the trickle or explosive type.

Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can be practiced during both part practice and full stroke practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathe each stroke.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Blow the hands forward'



Breaststroke Timing

The propulsive arm action takes place and then the leg action takes place as the arms recover. The body is then in a streamlined glide for a short time in each stroke although this may become imperceptible in some competitive swimmers. The timing of the stroke and the length of the glide varies from swimmer to swimmer

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Teaching Practices	Teaching Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to cultivate a glide so that the proper sequence of - 'arms - breathe - legs - glide' can be established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pull- Breathe- Kick- Glide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with a glide and doing just one stroke to end in a glide can be practiced. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasising the glide and reducing the number of strokes that it takes to swim a width may help. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For more experienced swimmers reducing the number of strokes without the stroke being slowed down is important, i.e. count the strokes but also time the length or width. 	

Breaststroke is enjoyed by children when swimming underwater, but usually has a long pull back of the arms to the hips. Sometimes this underwater motion is combined with front crawl leg action or a scissors kick. This poses the problem of restricting the arm pull when they are attempting the stroke above the water – using a woggle or goggles to watch their hands moving may help.

NOTE: Be aware that overuse of the woggle may cause friction burns on the inner arm

Because of this natural flowing action underwater try not to combine underwater swimming or retrieval of objects under the water as a contrast to a breaststroke lesson, as all the effort of getting the arm movements correct will soon be forgotten!

Breaststroke can be a relaxing stroke to swim and is popular with recreational swimmers as they are able to chat as they swim. It is used in lifesaving and survival because, once mastered, breaststroke can be swum with relative ease and conserve energy; the head is above water so breathing should be easily achieved. Enjoy teaching this elegant stroke!

