

Face your first open water mile with confidence with coach Dan Bullock

Following a structured and progressive training plan that incorporates fitness and technique work is the best way to improve your event-day performance. As a pre-requisite, I would suggest you can swim front crawl for at least 10 minutes continuously. A training section is usually split into the following parts: **WARM UP** – the ‘warm up’ literally helps warm up the body and mind for the hard work to come. Start slowly and focus on good technique.

SUBSET – this might consist of ‘drills’ (swimming exercises that help you improve your technique), some work on strokes other than front crawl to add variety to your training or exercises to increase your heart rate prior to the main set. Make this optional if you find the full set too hard initially. **MAINSET** – this is where the main fitness work is done and is the core part of this programme. **COOL DOWN OR SWIM DOWN** – after all the hard work this is your chance to relax, swim slowly and let

your heart rate return to more normal levels. In your first session, I recommend you test yourself to see how far you can swim in 10 minutes, and repeat the test perhaps two weeks after you finish the programme to gauge progress. We also provide examples of warm-ups and cool-downs that you can use as you choose with each main set to build a full training session. Also, feel free to add in other strokes during this part of the sessions.

WARM-UPS

WARM-UP 1: 400m easy FC swim followed by 4x50m getting quicker each one with 10s rest after each. (Use with session 1, week 1)
WARM-UP 2: 200m easy FC, 150m FC pull; 100m opening and closing the fists every 2-3 strokes; 50m FC kick. (Use with session 2, week 1)

COOL-DOWNS

COOL-DOWN 1: 200m easy swim, include 100m backstroke
COOL-DOWN 2: 200m alternating lengths FC with a pull buoy, then double arm backstroke.
COOL-DOWN 3: 100m, not FC

Dan Bullock is the founder and head coach at Swim For Tri (SFT), a swimming coaching company specialising in open water swimming. He is an accomplished swimmer himself and has many times won his age group at the Swim England National Open Water Masters Championships.

WEEK 1

Session 1
TIME TRIAL + STEADY ENDURANCE
 100m FC with 15s rest
 200m FC with 25s rest
 300m FC with 35s rest
 10-minute time trial
 Swim with a steady and sustainable effort except for the time trial. Keep a record of how far you swim in the time trial.

Session 2
BUILD SPEED WITH TECHNIQUE
 4x100m FC with 10s after each.
 4x100m FC with 15s after each.
 4x100m FC with 20s after each.
 Aim to maintain a strong but sustainable effort throughout. The extra rest is to offset the fatigue building through the set.

Session 3
STEADY ENDURANCE
 100m FC with 15s rest
 200m FC pull with 25s rest
 300m FC with 35s rest
 400m FC pull with 45s rest
 300m FC with 35s rest
 200m FC pull with 25s rest
 100m FC

WEEK 2

Session 1
PRACTISE DIFFERENT BREATHING PATTERNS
 500m FC, breathe every 5th stroke.
 400m FC pull, breathe every 4th stroke. Switch sides each length.
 300m FC, breathe every 3rd stroke.
 200m FC with as few breaths as you can.
 Rest 20s after each*
 100m FC & a fraction faster breathing every 3rd then 2nd stroke (i.e. 3-2-3-2 etc).

Session 2
RACE PACE PRACTICE
 3 x 500m FC swum as:
 50m at target race pace, rest 10s
 100m at target race pace, rest 20s
 150m at target race pace, rest 30s
 200m at target race pace
 Rest 45s between each 500m. Don't start too fast. Aim to keep your pace even throughout.

Session 3
PACING AND BREATH CONTROL
 10 x 100m FC with 30s rest after each 100m. Aim to only allow 4 or 5 breaths on last 25m of each 100m. This helps break autopilot and lower drag, and hence improve technique when it's usually at its worst.

*Intermediate swimmers start with the 500m swim, beginners start with the 400m swim. It's OK to stop for a breather at the end of the length if necessary.

WEEK 3

Session 1
TECHNIQUE FOCUS. TRY TO MAINTAIN STROKE COUNT AS PACE INCREASES.
 4 x 300m FC with 45s rest after each swum as:
1 & 3: Alternate 50m full stroke, 50m pull.
2 & 4: Increase effort in blocks of 100m.

Session 2
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL CHALLENGE
 Swim as many sets of 150m + 30s rest after each as you can in 24m.*
 Swim as many sets of 75m + 15s rest after each as you can in 12m.
 Swim as many sets of 50m + 10s rest after each as you can in 8m.
 Swim as many sets of 25m + 5s rest after each as you can in 4m.
 Aim to achieve the same number of repeats in each block.

Session 3
STEADY ENDURANCE & PACE CONTROL
 4 x 300m FC with 45s rest after each swum as:
 6x50m FC with 10s rest
 3x100m FC with 20s rest
 6x50m FC with 10s rest
 3x100m FC with 20s rest
 Don't start too fast. Aim to keep your pace even throughout.

*Intermediate swimmers can start with the 24-minute swim, beginners can skip this and start with 12 minutes.

WEEK 4

Session 1
FITNESS BOOST
 12 to 18 x 100m FC with 15s rest after each 100m.
 Aim to swim each 100m in exactly the same time. Your first 100m should feel easy. The last few will be challenging. If you start slowing down at the end it means you started too fast.

Session 2
TIMED SWIM/ MENTAL PREPARATION
 Swim as far as you can in 30* minutes. Aim to match three times the distance you swam in 10 minutes in week 1.

Session 3
IMPROVE LEG KICK
 500m FC, steady pace. Kick every 5th length (kick board optional).
 400m FC, steady pace. Kick every 4th length (no kick board)
 300m FC, steady pace. Kick every 3rd length.
 200m FC, steady pace. Kick every 2nd length (no kick board)
 100m FC hard kick (board optional)

*Beginners can do 20 minutes.

WEEK 5

Session 1
SPEED AND PACING. AVOID SLOWING DOWN THROUGH MAIN SET.
 Complete the following swims at about 70% effort with 15s rest after each. All FC.
 50m, 100m, 150m, 200m, 250m, 300m, 350m, 400m..

Session 2
STROKE TECHNIQUE AWARENESS
 Do this twice:
 150m FC at 50%
 150m FC at 60%.
 150m FC at 70%
 150m FC at 80%
 Immediately after each 150m swim 50m FC as six strokes with fists clenched*, six strokes normal. Take 30s rest after each.
Swim as far as you can in 2m30s.

Session 3
STROKE TIMING AND ACCURACY
 5 x 300m as:
 Numbers 1, 3 and 5: 250m FC at 60% effort followed by 50m of catch-up
 Numbers 2 and 4: 50m of catch-up followed by 250m FC at 75% effort.
 Take 30s rest between each 300m.
 *Swimming with either your fists clenched or with your fingers spread out is a useful drill to develop your feel for the water. You obviously wouldn't swim like this in a race.

WEEK 6

Session 1
IMPROVE YOUR CATCH
 300m FC using different breathing patterns from week 2.
 250m pull, breathing every 5 strokes. Keep the head still when not breathing.
 200m FC. Try to maintain a similar stroke count on first and last lengths.
 150m pull breathing every 5 strokes.
 100m FC. Reduce stroke count by 1 stroke per length each length through focus on good technique.

Session 2
SINGLE ARM DRILL
 8 x 100m FC with 20s rest after each as:
 Numbers 1, 3, 5 and 7: 25m single arm (half distance on each arm) followed by 75m FC.
 Numbers 2, 4, 6 and 8: full stroke FC but focus on perfect technique.

Session 3
MAINTAIN GOOD TECHNIQUE
 500m continuous swim as:
 50m catch up
 200m FC pull (70% effort)
 250m FC (80% effort with 3,2,3,2 breathing pattern)
 Intermediate swimmers can repeat three times with 30s rest after each.
 Take 30s rest between each 300m.
 Count strokes on the 250m FC section and rethink your technique if this number starts to go up. Take extra rest if necessary to maintain technique.

WEEK 7

Session 1
AEROBIC FITNESS AND TECHNIQUE
 Rest 45s after each of:
 250m FC, breathe every 5.
 200m FC, breathe every 4 (alternate sides each length).
 150m FC pull, breathe every 3.
 100m FC breathe every 2
 50m FC strong effort but only 3 to 5 breaths per length.
 50m easy*
 100m FC, breathe every 5.
 150m FC pull, breathe every 4 (alternate sides each length)
 200m FC, breathe every 3
 250 FC breathe every 2 (alternate sides each length)

Session 2
PACING AND ENDURANCE
 4x400m with 45s rest after each swim as:
1 & 3: Alternate 50m FC, 50m pull
2 & 4: Increase effort after each 100m

Session 3
AEROBIC FITNESS AND TECHNIQUE
 Repeat session 1 from this week, but complete entire set using full stroke (i.e. no pull buoys). Work on the breathing patterns to improve symmetry in your stroke and to give you versatility in your swimming so that you can cope with varying conditions when swimming outside.

*Novices can stop here. Intermediate swimmers continue!

WEEK 8

Session 1
HOLD TECHNIQUE UNDER PRESSURE
 12 to 20 x 50m FC at strong effort & with a generous 45s rest after each to allow decent recovery.
 Aim to swim the same speed and with the same stroke count on each. Use the rest to refocus and concentrate on maintaining good technique.

Session 2
PACING AND SPEED ENDURANCE
 12-minute timed effort: swim 75m as many times as you can taking 15s rest after each.
 50m easy swim
 8-minute timed effort: swim 50m as many times as you can taking 10s rest after each.
 50m easy swim
 4-minute timed effort: swim 25m as many times as you can taking 5s rest after each.
 50m easy swim*

Session 3
PACING AND SPEED ENDURANCE OVER 1500M
 3 x (200m) steady pace, rest 30s after each (including the 3rd) and go straight into
 5 x (100m) strong steady pace, rest 20s after each (including the 5th) and go straight into
 8 x (50m) strong steady pace, rest 10s after each..

*Use a countdown timer on your watch for this. Aim to hit the same number of repeats on each.

DEFINITIONS FC = Front crawl. 100m FC means swim 100 metres (four lengths if you're in a 25m pool) of front crawl. Pull = Swimming with a pull buoy (a special type of float) between your legs. 100m pull means you swim four lengths (25m pool) using just your arms with the float held between your thighs. If you don't have a pull buoy, just swim these parts as normal front crawl. Kick = Using your legs only. Either hold your arms out straight in front or rest them on a float. Many swimmers use a large flat float known as a 'kickboard'. Interval training = Repeating a fixed distance within a fixed time. For example, 4 x 50m FC off 90s means swim 50m front crawl four times and start each one 90 seconds after the previous one. This means if it takes you one minute to swim 50m, you will get 30 seconds rest. Catch-up = a swimming drill where you leave your leading hand in place in front of you until you have completed a full cycle of the stroking hand.