



Special Olympics

AQUATICS COACHING GUIDE

Planning an Aquatics Training and Competition Season



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Goals

Realistic, yet challenging goals for each athlete are important to the motivation of the athlete both at training and during competition. Goals establish and drive the action of both training and competition plans. Sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Please see Section 2 – Principles of Coaching for additional information and exercises on goal setting.

Benefits

- Increases athlete's level of physical fitness.
- Teaches self discipline
- Teaches the athlete sports skills that are essential to a variety of other activities
- Provides the athlete with a means for self-expression and social interaction

Goal Setting

Setting goals is a joint effort with the athlete and coach. The main features of goal setting include the following.

1. Structured into short-term, intermediate and long-term
2. Stepping stones to success
3. Must be accepted by the athlete
4. Vary in difficulty - easy attainable to challenging
5. Must be measurable

Long Term Goal

The athlete will acquire basic Aquatics skills, appropriate social behavior and functional knowledge of the rules necessary to participate successfully in Aquatics competitions.

Individual Goal Setting and Evaluation Format

The card is used to plan the individual athlete's training, keep a record of targets met and timelines of achievement.

Coaching Point

- Keep the athlete's Assessment Card with their Individual Goal Setting and Evaluation Card – this becomes the athlete's individual training plan through to their promotion into squads.
- From Squad level goal setting and progress planning are just as essential and the Goal Setting and Evaluation Card continues.



Individual Goal Setting and Evaluation Card

Athlete Name _____
Information _____

Date of Birth _____
Start Date _____

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
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Date		Goals	
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Date		Goals	
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Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			



Planning an Aquatics Training and Competition Season Goals and Objectives

Sample Individual Goal Setting and Evaluation Card

Athlete Name Kate Brown

Date of Birth 5/9/1995

Information Prone to ear infections; asthma

Start Date Jan 2003

Date	1/2003	Goals	Progress through water confidence
Evaluation	Able to submerge in shallow water – eyes shut – no breathing		

Date	2/2003	Goals	Able to open eyes underwater – blow bubbles and move to floating
Evaluation	Floats on back with assistance, eyes shut on submersion – blows on water		

Date	3/2003	Goals	Prone float – eyes open under water – blow bubbles in water
Evaluation	Prone floats with assistance – Eyes Open under water – blowing bubbles in water		

Date	4/2003	Goals	Float independently – to push and glide – exhale underwater
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Date		Goals	
Evaluation			

Example



Assessing Goals Checklist

1. Write a goal statement.
2. Does the goal sufficiently meet the athlete's needs?
3. Is the goal positively stated? If not, rewrite it.
4. Is the goal under the athlete's control and that it focuses on their goals and no one else's?
5. Is the goal a goal and not a result?
6. Is the goal important to the athlete that they will want to work towards achieving it? Have the time and energy to do it?
7. How will this goal make the athlete's life differently?
8. What barriers might the athlete encounter in working toward this goal?
9. What more does the athlete know?
10. What does the athlete need to learn how to do?
11. What risks does the athlete need to take?



Planning an Aquatics Training and Competition Season

Pre Season Planning and Preparation

The aquatics coach needs to prepare themselves for the upcoming season. The list below offers some suggestions on getting started.

1. Improve his/her knowledge of aquatic sports and his/her coaching skills by attending training sessions and clinics.
2. Locate a facility (community, school, hotel, club) with proper equipment for a practice session.
3. Recruit volunteer assistants from local swimming or diving programs. Train these assistants in handling techniques to ensure athletes' safety during training sessions.
4. Recruit volunteers to transport the athletes to and from practice and competition.
5. Ensure that all prospective aquatics athletes have a thorough physical examination before the first practice. Also, be sure to obtain parental and medical releases.
6. Establish goals and draw up an eight-week training plan such as the one provided later in this guide.
7. Try to schedule a minimum of two training session per week.
8. Plan a mini-competition for your athletes during the halfway point in the training season.



Confirmation of Practice Schedule

Once your venue has been determined and assessed you are now ready to confirm your training and competition schedules. It is important to publish training and competition schedules to submit to the interested groups below. This can help generate community awareness for your Special Olympics Aquatics Program.

- Facility Representatives
- Local Special Olympics Program
- Volunteer Coaches
- Athletes
- Families
- Media
- Management Team members
- Officials

The Training and Competition schedule is not exclusive to the areas listed below.

- Dates
- Start and End Times
- Registration and/or Meeting areas
- Contact phone number at the facility
- Coaches phone numbers



Essential Components of Planning an Aquatics Training Session

Each training session needs to contain the same essential elements. The amount of time spent on each element will depend on the goal of the training session, the time of season the session is in, and the amount of time available for a particular session. The following elements need to be included in an athlete's daily training program. Please refer to the noted sections in each area for more in depth information and guidance on these topics.

The Warm Up	25-30 minutes
Specific Event Workout	15-20 minutes
Conditioning or Fitness Workout	15-20 minutes
The Cool Down	15-20 minutes

The final step in planning a training session is designing what the athlete is actually going to do. Remember when creating a training session using the key components of a training session, the progression through the session allows for a gradual build up of physical activity.

- ♦ Easy to difficult
- ♦ Slow to fast
- ♦ Known to unknown
- ♦ General to specific
- ♦ Start to finish

In organizing the team for effective teaching and learning experiences, the coach should always arrange the session so that:

- ♦ The safety of the athlete is ensured.
- ♦ Everyone can hear the instructions.
- ♦ Everyone can see the demonstration.
- ♦ Everyone will have an opportunity for maximum practice.
- ♦ Everyone will have an opportunity to be checked regularly for skill improvement.

The most important factor is to provide for the safety of the athlete. Every effort must be made to prevent an accident from occurring. A certified lifeguard must be on duty during all aquatics activities. Rules such as no running, no dunking, no horseplay, and no diving into shallow water must be explained and enforced. Potential hazards should be pointed out. All athletes must be accounted for at the start of a period, periodically during the period, and at the close of the training. Coaches should remain in the pool area until the end of training and all swimmers are accounted for and have left the area. A lifeguard must be in a position to observe the safety of the swimmers at all times. The coach needs to be aware of any special medical conditions such as seizures.



The procedures used for learning and practicing skills in the water are determined by the skill to be learned, the skill level of the swimmers, the size and shape of the facility, the extent of shallow and deep water areas available for practice, and the number, sizes, and ages of the athletes. The following factors are for coaches to ensure successful learning, regardless of the type of teaching approach implemented.

1. Athletes, if at all possible, need to face away from the sun, bright light from windows, or distracting influences during demonstrations.
2. Athletes must be able to see and to hear the instructions during the demonstrations and practice sessions.
3. Athletes must have the opportunity:
 - ♦ to make the physical and mental adjustment to the water in relation to the skill to be learned;
 - ♦ to find and maintain a good working position in the water as determined by the skill to be learned; and,
 - ♦ to have maximum practice in terms of accuracy, coordination, speed, and expenditure of energy. This practice must include an analysis of each athlete's movements and the provision of appropriate and timely suggestion for improvement by the coach, an assistant coach, or buddy.
4. Swimmers must have ample space in which to practice without interference by other athletes.

Patterns of a Training Session

Patterns of organization are formations employed by the coach to provide athletes with the opportunity to develop the desired skill. On the following pages are some of the more common patterns of organization. Coaches need to become thoroughly familiar with all of them. They include formations for discussions, demonstrations, drills in which the athletes remain in one spot (static drills), and drills in which the athletes move from one point to another (fluid drills).

Coaches must constantly strive to provide maximum opportunity for skill practice for all athletes during each class period. Failure on the part of the coach to keep the athletes actively involved can cause the inactive athletes to become chilled, bored and restless, which can cause disruption and loss of control.

Arranging for Land Instruction

Formation	Semicircle of one or more lines (The same requirements apply for water instruction)
Use	When speaking to the group
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sun needs to be behind the swimmers or divers. 2. Face away from the sun and other distracting influences. 3. Wind coming from behind the coach will help to carry his or her voice to the athletes.



Arranging for Water Instruction

Formation	“L” formation of single or multiple lines
Use	When standing at the end and the side of the pool
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The coach works in a pocket directly in front of the athletes.2. If taking against the wind, the coach needs to talk toward the water and allow the sound to be carried over the water.3. Athletes need to be close to and high enough above, to look down on the coach and/or demonstrator.

Formation	Single line
Use	When working from a single runway or from the side of the pool or the deck when the group is small. Important Factors: Same as the “L” formation.

Formation	Multiple lines
Use	When working from a single runway or the side of the pool when the group is large
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. One group sits, the next group kneels, and the third group stands.2. Same as the “L” formation.

Arranging Team for Static Drill on Land in Shallow Water

Formation	Single line
Use	When the area is long and narrow and the group is small, either on land or in the water
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The athletes are far enough apart to not interfere with each other.2. The coach may stand in front of, or at either end of, the line.

Formation	Parallel lines
Use	When the area is long and narrow and the group is large
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Especially effective when the athletes work as buddies.2. The coach position may vary as in the single line formation.

Formation	Multiple lines
Use	When the area is short and wide and the group is large
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The swimmers are far enough apart not to interfere with each other.2. The coach must be seen by all swimmers and vice versa.



Formation	Circle
Use	When the area is short and wide and the group is large
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is difficult to observe all the athletes at the same time with this formation. 2. The coach must be certain that all swimmers are able to see demonstrations. 3. The coach can have an observer outside of the circle for the safety of the athletes.

Arranging Team for Fluid Drills

Fluid drill formations are used to improve the skill efficiency and the physical endurance of the athletes as well as to evaluate them. These drills should be varied to meet the needs of the athletes and the coach. The following factors should be considered when these drill formations are used: the level of skill proficiency of the athletes, their physical condition, and the distance to be achieved for each swim, the intensity level of each swim, and the frequency and length of rest periods between swims. Athletes should be comfortably tired, but not physically exhausted at the end of the training session.

Formation	Wave
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ To divide a large group into smaller units to provide maximum supervision at practice ♦ To allow the coach to observe fewer swimmers at one time in order to make comments for skill improvement
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The group is divided into smaller groups known as #1, #2, and so on. 2. The coach tells each group what to do and when to do it. Example: “Freestyle #1’s, ready, swim.” 3. Each group swims as a unit on the appropriate command. 4. Each groups swims to a designated point and stops.

The wave formation is one of the most often used of all fluid drill formations. Consequently, the coach must become skilled in organizing a team quickly. Some of the major factors to consider are listed below.

Coaching Tips

- For fluid and static drills on dry land or in shallow water, have the athlete’s line up in one straight line. Have them count off according to number of groups desired, starting from one end. Have the athletes turn their heads in the direction of the count so that the next athlete can clearly hear the number being called out.
- Depending on the number of ranks to be formed, have the #1’s hold their positions, #2’s step back two paces, #3’s step forward to paces, etc.
- For fluid and static drills in shallow water, have the tallest athletes nearest the deeper water and the shortest athletes nearest the shallow water. A lane marker can also be used to divide deep from shallow if there is a weak swimmer in the group.
- With patience, perseverance, and the use of humor by the coach, the athlete can quickly learn to move only on the appropriate command, to stop, and to remain in place at the designated location.



Formation	Stagger
Use	When it is necessary to watch athletes individually and for final evaluation of many skills
Important Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The group remains in a single line.2. Signal the first athlete to start swimming. If two coaches are available, start each end of the line simultaneously.3. The athlete next in line starts when the swimmer just ahead reaches the spot designated by the coach.4. The coach is able to follow the progress of each athlete for a few body lengths.5. The coach usually moves along the deck to have a better view of the swimmers.

Circle Swimming

When training for distances more than one length of the pool or for practicing or for distance swimming in an enclosed area that is narrow and long. Important Factors: builds stamina and permits individual attention to the athlete by the coach.

1. The swimming area is divided into smaller areas with lane lines.
2. For the short course, divide the group by the number of areas available. If possible, one group is assigned to each area by similar abilities.
3. For the long course, place the faster swimmers ahead of the slower ones.
4. Designate the number of laps, one length or width of the pool to be completed before stopping.
5. The swimmers keep a safe distance apart.

Hints for Organizing a Good Training Session

1. Use the pool to your best advantage
2. Organize stations by ability. Color code ability groups (i.e. Green-Beginner; Blue-Rookie, etc.). No one should be standing around while you arrange things. Keep everyone busy.
3. Keep athletes informed of changes in schedule or activities.
4. Introduce athletes to one another and orient them to the instructional setting.
5. Demonstrate the sports skill as frequently as possible.
6. Keep the fun in fundamentals. Use a game approach.
7. Devote a part of each training session to group activity.
8. If an activity is going well, it is often useful to stop the activity while interest is high.
9. If a swimmer joins the team after training has begun, skill assessment should be done in shallow water.



Principles of Effective Training Sessions

Keep all active	Athlete needs to be an active listener
Create clear, concise goals	Learning improves when athletes know what is expected of them
Give clear, concise instructions	Demonstrate – increase accuracy of instruction
Record progress	You and your athletes chart progress together
Give positive feedback	Emphasize and reward things the athlete is doing well
Provide variety	Vary exercises – prevent boredom
Encourage enjoyment	Training and competition is fun, help keep it this way for you and your athletes
Create progressions	Learning is increased when information progresses from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known to unknown – discovering new things successfully • Simple to complex – seeing that “I” can do it • General to specific – this is why I am working so hard
Plan maximum use of resources	Use what you have and improvise for equipment that you do not have – think creatively
Allow for individual differences	Different athletes, different learning rates, different capacities.



Tips for Conducting Successful Training Sessions

1. Assign assistant coaches their roles and responsibilities in accordance to your training plan.
2. When possible, have all equipment and stations prepared before the athletes arrive.
3. Introduce and acknowledge coaches and athletes.
4. Review intended program with everyone. Keep athletes informed of changes in schedule or activities.
5. Alter the plan according to weather, the facility in order to accommodate the needs of the athletes.
6. Change activities before the athlete become bored, and lose interest.
7. Keep drills and activities brief so athletes do not get bored. Keep everyone busy with an exercise even it is rest.
8. Devote the end of the practice to a fun, group activity that can incorporate challenge and fun always giving them something to look forward to at the end of practice.
9. If an activity is going well, it is often useful to stop the activity while interest is high.
10. Summarize the session and announce arrangements for next session.
11. Keep the fun in fundamentals.



Training Session Safety Guidelines

Coaches are a major part of aquatics programs. They need to be well informed and trained in all facility procedures such as emergency action plans, completing and filling accident reports, and any follow up procedures to an incident that may have occurred while they were in charge.

Electrical Safety

Electrical shock is a very real hazard in the operation of swimming pools. Permanent or temporary electrical connections and wires used with the following equipment may come in contact with water including:

1. Underwater lights
2. Tape recorders
3. Record players
4. Automatic timing devices
5. Place clocks
6. Electronic loud speakers
7. Start systems
8. Pool vacuum cleaners
9. Many other types of electrical devices operating on line voltages in the vicinity of the racing course involve wires stretched across the pool deck. These devices are connected to the power supply.

In the case of electrical shock or electrocution, call emergency personnel and follow the facility's emergency action plan. Shut off the power source and check the swimmer's - airway, breathing, and circulation at once. Use nonconductive equipment to remove swimmer from source if power cannot be turned off.

Assists and Rescues

Swimmers may be in danger of drowning from a head injury, heart attack, stroke, fainting, overexertion, seizure, or incapacitating cramps as well as other causes.

How the Coach Can Assist

Teach swimmers that if they feel panicky, they need to try to reach the lane lines and use the lines for support. You can use the reaching, throwing, or wading methods described below to assist a swimmer in a water emergency. In most cases, at least one of these measures will be successful. While you attempt to make an assist, someone with your group needs to be prepared to call emergency personnel immediately to attend to the rescued swimmer, if necessary.

Drowning Situation

In this situation, a swimmer is unable to call for help or to wave his/her arms. A distress situation may become a drowning situation when the swimmer, for whatever reason, is no longer able to keep afloat and becomes a athlete. Drowning situations may be classified as passive or active.



Passive

In a passive drowning situation, the athlete may be conscious or unconscious. The swimmer may suddenly slip underwater, making no attempt to call for help, and may float facedown near the surface of the water. A passive drowning situation may result from any of the following causes:

- A heart attack or stroke.
- An accidental blow to the head from another swimmer or an object such as a kickboard.
- Hyperventilation and blackout.
- Cold water shock after sudden submersion in cold water. The athlete may feel a strong urge to gasp. Gaspng may cause the person take in water which, in turn, may cause panic and eventual suffocation.

Active

In contrast to a passive situation, the athlete in an active situation is conscious. Actions may be violent or weak, depending on the amount of energy the athlete possesses. An active drowning athlete's buoyancy will alternate between neutral and negative. The athlete's arms may be extended outward from the sides, thrashing up and down in the water, not allowing forward progress. Instead, the athlete will alternately raise and lower them self in the water.

Buoyancy may be lost each time the athlete goes beneath the surface. The athlete becomes less able to take in air and has to work harder to stay on the surface. Panic will begin to set in during the process, and the athlete will be unable to call for help because of concentrating all conscious efforts on breathing. Swimmers must be supported so they can breathe freely after initial contact and during the carry to safety. In distress or drowning situations, the coach must use safe and effective forms of rescue.

Equipment

Pools and aquatic areas that are properly supervised usually have the equipment described at the end of this section. The equipment is kept in view at the pool or in the swimming area.

Do Not Endanger Yourself

Remember, you can help a swimmer in trouble only if you are in a safe position yourself and if you maintain control of the situation. The reaching, throwing, and wading methods presented in this section will help keep you safe and in control. Swimming out to bring a distressed swimmer to safety requires special training. If a coach who has not had safety training approaches a distressed swimmer, he or she will be risking two lives. Leaping into the water to help someone may seem courageous, but choosing one of the methods described below is much more likely to result in a successful assist.

Reaching Assists

Reach with a pole, a kickboard, or other object. Firmly brace yourself on the pool deck reach out to the athlete with any object that will lengthen your reach such as a pole, kickboard, rescue tube, shirt, belt, or towel. When the athlete is able to grasp the extended object, slowly and carefully pull the athlete to safety.

Reach with your arm or leg. In the water, use one hand to get a firm grasp on the pool ladder, overflow trough, or other secure object; then slip into the water and extend your free hand or one of your legs to the athlete. Maintain your grasp at the water's edge. Do not swim out into the water.

If you can see a athlete lying on the bottom, reach the athlete with the hook end. Encircle the athlete's body and pull the body to the surface.



Throwing Assists

You can throw a ring buoy, throw bag, rescue tube, or other device so that the athlete can grab it and be pulled to safety. In order to throw:

1. Get into a position that is safe and allows you to maintain your balance. Bend your knees. Step on the non-throwing end of the rope.
2. Aim your throw so that the device will fall just beyond the athlete and within reach.
3. When the athlete has grasped the device, keep talking reassuringly while slowly pulling the athlete to safety, leaning your body weight away from the athlete as you pull.

Ring Buoy

This is made of buoyant cork, kapok, or foam rubber. The buoy should have 20-25M of lightweight line with a lemon or other object at the end. This will float the line if it falls in the water and prevent the line from slipping out from under your foot when you throw the ring buoy. The buoy and coiled line is hung in an easily accessible location in such a way that anyone can quickly grasp them.

Free Floating Support

A rescue buoy, kickboard, rescue tube, and a ring buoy are examples of equipment that can be used as free floating supports. To use a free-floating support, push it to the athlete and encourage him or her to grasp the support and kick toward safety.

Wading Assists

If the water is shallow (not above waist deep), you can wade in with an emergency device or buoyant object and extend it to the athlete. For this kind of assist, use a rescue tube, ring buoy, kickboard, or pull buoy.

You can use the equipment for support in the water, and the athlete can grasp the other side of it. You can then pull the athlete to safety, or you can let go of the piece of equipment and tell the athlete to start kicking toward safety.

Always, always keep the piece of equipment between you and the athlete. If the athlete should panic and grab you, you could be in danger too. Keeping the piece of equipment between you will help prevent the athlete from grabbing you.



Tips for Conducting Safe Training Sessions

1. Establish clear rules for behavior at your first practice and enforce them.
 - ◆ Keep your hands to yourself.
 - ◆ Listen to the coach.
 - ◆ When you hear the whistle, Stop, Look, and Listen
 - ◆ Ask the coach before you leave the field of play
2. When the weather is poor, have a plan to immediately remove athletes from inclement weather.
3. Always rope off the throwing areas so that athletes do not wander into the line of throwing.
4. Make sure athletes bring water to every practice, especially in hotter climates.
5. Check your first aid kit; restock supplies as necessary.
6. Identify the nearest phone accessible during practice.
7. Ensure that the locker rooms and or rest rooms are available and clean during practice.
8. Train all athletes and coaches on emergency procedures.
9. Do not allow athletes to play while wearing watches, bracelets, or jewelry including earrings.
10. Provide proper stretching exercises after warming up at the beginning of each practice.
11. Provide activities that also improve general fitness levels. Fit athletes are less likely to get injured.



Aquatics Practice Competitions

The more we compete, the better we get. Part of the strategic plan for Special Olympics Aquatics is to drive more sport development at the local levels. Competition motivates athletes, coaches and the entire sport management team. Expand or add to your schedule as many competition opportunities as possible. We have provided a few suggestions below.

1. Host aquatics meets with adjacent local Programs.
2. Ask the local high school can your athletes compete with them as practice meets.
3. Join the local community aquatics league, club and/or associations.
4. Create your own aquatics league or club in your community.
5. Host weekly aquatics meets for the area.
6. Incorporate competition components at the end of every training session.



Sample Program Structure

Training Period

The program runs 44-46 weeks per year, with a 7-week break for all swimmers, except any squad swimmers who have a forthcoming competition. Athletes may elect to attend one or more sessions per week.

Facilities

The program is conducted across five different pools at three different facilities.

Beginners	Two (2) sessions available for youth and one (1) session for adults in indoor heated 25M pools Youth groups have the option of shallow recreation space or lane space.
Stroke Development Groups	Two (2) sessions per week, both in indoor heated 25M pools
Squad Training	Three (3) sessions per week: two in outdoor heated 50M pool, one in indoor 25M pool
Schools Group	One (1) session per week in an indoor heated pool

Groups/Session Times

	Beginner Youth (red)	Beginner Adults (red)	Stroke Correction Youth (green)	Stroke Correction Adult (green)	Squad Training Level 1 (aqua)	Squad Training Advanced (blue)
School Group	45 minutes	N/A	45 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A
Monday	x	x	x	x	1½ hours	1½ hours
Wednesday	1 hour	x	1½ hours	x	1½ hours	1½ hours
Friday	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1½ hours	1½ hours

Schools Group

One (1) session held per week pool 28 weeks per year for one primary school group. Sessions are held for athletes 8-12 years of age in an indoor heated pool. The beginners spend most of their time in a small pool, while the stroke development group utilizes the 25M pool. Schoolteachers provide all out of water and some in water assistance to the program, staffed by two swimming coaches.

Beginner Youth Group

Two sessions are held each week. A minimum 1:3 ratio of coach/helper for each three youth is recommended. New youth, with no water adjustment may be required to have a parent, care giver or older sibling accompany them into the water for the first few sessions.

Training will take place in shallow recreational area of the pools, moving through to deeper water and then lane space as the ability of the youth increases.

The basic techniques for water adjustment and basic swimming skills are taught through games and activities.

Students from this group participate at the club's own swimming carnival in walking, assisted swim, treasure hunt and kickboard races with helpers supervising each swimmer and any other carnivals that provide these activities.



Beginner Adults Group

This group includes adults for whom swimming is a new sport and also those adults who may never move beyond enjoying their time in the pool. A 1:1 ratio of one coach/helper to each two athletes is required and frequently dependent for this group.

Activities take place in thigh deep to shoulder deep water in a poolside lane with hoist for those unable to climb pool steps.

The program includes drills, skills, activities and appropriate games aimed to develop mental adjustment to water and basic swimming skills.

As for youth's beginner group, the regional competition will include events for participation by this group and one or two other programs will also provide such events each year.

Stroke Development Youth Group

Youth usually spend some time at this level, having moved through the beginners group to a point where they are able to swim around, but have little technique. A ration of one coach, with up to 10 swimmers and one assistant can be managed at this level.

Freestyle, backstroke and breaststroke are developed at this stage and butterfly introduced. Starts, turns and race finish techniques are also taught at this stage, as youth are ready for them. Lap swimming is introduced and strength development and flexibility are also developed in order for youth to be strong enough to move through to the squad program.

Swimmers will begin competing in club carnivals and other events at this level. When they are able to participate in 2-3 swim events they will no longer be offered the earlier level events.

Stroke Development Adult Group

Adults join this group either having come through the beginners program or having joined with such poor technique that a period of time at this level is required to develop good technique. Others are just unable to maintain 25M swims and need to improve technique and build fitness.

Drills, skills, activities and pre-squad work are introduced and utilized to prepare the swimmer for competition and promotion to squads.

Competition opportunities open up as ability develops. Once 25M events can be undertaken other developmental events are usually withdrawn.

Squad Group – Level 1

Most club swimmers will have spent some time in the previous groups before coming on to this level. At this stage adults and youth are mixed, not necessarily in the same lane, but more divided by ability than age. One employed coach is responsible for all squad groups, with volunteer assistants utilized, as required. Three sessions are offered each week, with swimmers attending one to three of these at this level.

Some competency of stroke and distance is required in order to join the squad, however, especially with swimmers with an intellectual disability, constant reinforcement and repetition of skills is required in order to maintain skills. All work is required to be age appropriate to the group. Squad training with an emphasis on correct technique and development of full program, events, starts, turns and finishes, strength and distance are developed within this group.

Swimmers form this group would usually compete in up to 14 short course and four long course events during each year, with additional opportunities for higher level competition for some.



Squad Group – Advanced Level

Swimmers at this level would be undertaking a full swim program, with at least two sessions each week required. Three sessions are offered each week.

The program follows from the proceeding, with individual medleys and long distance events and a greater emphasis on endurance. Event specialization may occur at this level, with different swimmers working on different strokes and distances.

This group competes on a regular basis, at least 14 competitions each year, with opportunities to compete in multi-disability events in mainstream competitions open to them.

Management

Each group has a qualified coach in charge, assisted by volunteer helpers, as required. Up to 10 volunteers work at any one session, with up to 50 swimmers.

The program has an overall manager, a racing secretary who manages competition entries and maintains all time records; there is also a session manager for each session.

The club's sports manager and the management committee maintains overall responsibility for all programs and works in consultation of all stakeholders to provide a service that meets the needs of the athletes.



Selecting Team Members

The key to the successful development of a Traditional Special Olympics or Unified Sports® team is the proper selection of team members. We have provided some primary considerations below for you.

Ability Grouping

Unified teams work best when all team members have similar sports skills. Partners with abilities that are far superior to other teammates will either control competition or accommodate others by not competing to their potential. In both situations, the goals of interaction and teamwork are diminished and a true competitive experience is not achieved. For example, in Football, an 8 year old should not be competing against or with a 30 year old athlete.

Age Grouping

All team members should be closely matched in age.

- Within 3-5 years of age for athletes 21 years of age and under
- Within 10-15 years for athletes 22 years of age and over

Creating Meaningful Involvement in Unified Sports®

Unified Sports® embraces the philosophy and principles of Special Olympics. When selecting your Unified team you want to achieve meaningful involvement at the beginning, during and end of your sport season. Unified teams are organized to provide meaningful involvement for all athletes and partners. Every teammate should play a role and have the opportunity to contribute to the team. Meaningful involvement also refers to the quality of interaction and competition within a Unified Sports® team. Achieving meaningful involvement by all teammates on the team ensures a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates compete according to the rules of competition.
- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- Teammates understand how to blend their skills with those of other athletes, resulting in improved performance by athletes with lesser ability.

Meaningful Involvement Is Not Achieved When Team Members

- Have superior sports skills in comparison to their fellow team members.
- Act as on field coaches, rather than teammates.
- Control most aspects of the competition during critical periods of the game.
- Do not train or practice regularly, and only show up on the day of competition.
- Lower their level of ability dramatically, so that they do not hurt others or control the entire game.



Daily Performance Record

The Daily Performance Record is designed for the coach to keep an accurate record of the athlete's daily performances as they learn a sports skill. There are several reasons why the coach can benefit from using the Daily Performance Record.

1. The record becomes a permanent documentation of the athlete's progress
2. Helps the coach establish measurable consistency in the athlete's training program.
3. The record allows the coach to be flexible during the actual teaching and coaching session because he can break down the skills into specific, smaller tasks that meet the individual needs of each athlete.
4. The record helps the coach choose proper skills teaching methods, correct conditions and criteria for evaluating the athlete's performance of the skills.

Using the Daily Performance Record

At the top of the record, the coach enters his name; the athlete's name, and their aquatics event. If more than one coach works with the athlete, they should enter the dates that they work with the athlete next to their names.

Before the training session begins, the coach decides what skills will be covered. The coach makes this decision based on the athlete's age, the athlete's interests, and his mental and physical abilities. The skill needs to be a statement or a description of the specific exercise that the athlete must perform. The coach enters the skill on the top line of the left-hand column. Each subsequent skill is entered after the athlete masters the previous skill. Of course, more than one sheet may be used to record all of the skills involved. Also, if the athlete cannot perform a prescribed skill, the coach may break down the skill into smaller tasks that will allow for the athlete's success at the new skill.

Conditions and Criteria for Mastering

After the coach enters the skill, they must then decide on the conditions and criteria by which the athlete must master the skill. Conditions are special circumstances, which define the manner in which the athlete must perform a skill. For example, "given a demonstration, and with assistance". The coach needs to always operate under the assumption that the ultimate conditions in which the athlete masters a skill are, "upon command and without assistance", and therefore, does not have to enter these conditions in the record next to the skill entry. Ideally, the coach needs to arrange the skills and conditions such that the athlete gradually learns to perform the skill while upon command and without assistance.

Criteria are the standards that determine how well the skill must be performed. The coach needs to determine a standard that realistically suits the athlete's mental and physical abilities. For example, "perform a distance of 30cms, 60 percent of the time". Given the varied nature of skills, the criteria might involve many different types of standards, such as amount of time, number of repetitions, accuracy, distance or speed.

Dates of Sessions and Levels of Instruction Used

The coach may work on one task for a couple of days, and may use several methods of instruction during that time to progress to the point where the athlete performs the task upon command and without assistance. To establish a consistent curriculum for the athlete, the coach must record the dates he works on particular tasks, and must enter the methods of instruction that were used on those dates.

Planning an Aquatics Training and Competition Season Daily Performance Record



Event: Insert Event Name **Athlete's Name** Insert Name
Skill: Insert Skill **Coach's Name** Insert Name

Skill Analysis	Conditions & Criteria	Dates & Instruction Methods	Date Mastered



Aquatics Attire

Appropriate aquatics attire is required for all competitors. As coach, discuss the types of sport clothes that is acceptable and not acceptable for training and competition. Discuss the importance wearing properly fitted clothing, along with the advantages and disadvantages of certain types of clothing worn during training and competitions. For example, long pant jeans to blue jean shorts are not proper aquatics attire for any event. Explain that they cannot perform their while wearing jeans that restrict their movement.

Take athletes to high school or collegiate meets while training or during competitions and point out the attire being worn. You can even set the example, by wearing appropriate attire to training and competitions and not rewarding athletes that do not come properly dressed to train and/or compete.

Clothing must be suited to the activities involved. Few sports require less equipment than swimming. Although equipment such as goggles and caps are recommended, a Special Olympics athlete only needs a swimsuit to participate.

Swimsuits

The swimsuit can be anything that closely resembles his/her skin in fit and feel. For males, any brief swim suit made of smooth, quick-drying fabric such as nylon or lycra is fine. Gym shorts with waistbands that fit snugly around the waist can be substituted.

A one-piece suit is recommended for females. The suit needs to be close fitting and cut so as not hinder the movements. The swimsuit needs to be substantial enough to stay on the athlete's body while they train.

Racing suits, whether for men or women, will provide less drag and again provide more efficiency in the water.

Cap

A tight-fitting, stretch swimmer's cap is recommended. Swim caps will prevent the hair from falling in the swimmer's face and thus provide less of a distraction. Besides keeping the swimmer's hair dry, the cap also reduces water drag and resistance.

Goggles

Swim goggles are encouraged. Goggles allow the swimmer to comfortably put their face in the water, thus allowing for better body positioning and more efficiency. There must be careful adherence safety in the use of this equipment. There are several varieties of goggles which allow for choices depending on each swimmer's face.

Nose Clips

Nose clips are helpful to those athletes who have difficulty in controlling their breathing or who have sinus problems. Such clips should be used only when necessary.

Coaching Tips

- Discuss the types of clothes to worn when Swimming.
- Discuss the importance of wearing properly fitted clothing.
- Point out the advantages and disadvantages in various types of clothes which can be worn.
- Show pictures of clothes which are appropriate for swimming.



Aquatics Equipment

The events of swimming require the use of particular items of sporting equipment and devices used both in training and competition. It is important for athletes to be able to recognize and understand how equipment for the specific events works and impacts their performance. Have your athlete's name each piece of equipment as you show it and give the use for each. To reinforce this ability within them, have them select the equipment used for their events as well.

Touch Pads

Touch pads are used as part of the automatic timing device system which is located at either end of the pool during competition swimming. When a swimmer touches the pad during the turn or finish of an event their times will be recorded and displayed on a digital timing board located within the pool area.

Pace Clock

A pace clock is used within a swimmer's training program and swimmers should be taught how to read and use the clock. Pace clocks are generally mounted on a wall within view of the swimmer. Electric pace clocks should not be placed on pool deck but mounted preferably on a wall. Battery pace clocks may also be used.

Timing Devices

A fully automatic timing (F.A.T.) system or electric or digital stopwatches are recommended. When F.A.T. is used, times will be recorded in one one-hundredth (1/100) of a second. Most manual timing devices are equipped with a button for start, a button for stop, and a reset button. All manual times will be recorded in one-tenth (1/10) of a second.

Starting Devices

A starter's button or electronic tone starter unit with a strobe light is recommended for hearing impaired athletes. If possible, these devices can be used occasionally during training sessions to expose the athletes to the sound prior to participation in a competitive event.

During training sessions swimmers can practice starts both in and out of the water by using the correct cues as used in formal competitive swimming but without the use of a professional starters button.

Coaches can signal a swimmer to start the event by verbally or whistling the swimmer up onto the blocks or into the water, verbally cueing the swimmer to take their mark and either verbally or by the use of whistle to have swimmer start/leave the blocks. Check with your lifeguard that using a whistle while on pool deck is appropriate.





Backstroke Flags

Backstroke flags are used in a training session as well as a competition. The flags hang 5M from each end of the pool and 1.18M above the water surface. As part of a swimmers training session, they need to practice counting the number of arm strokes it takes them from the flags to the wall.



Swimming Aids

The use of swimming aids such as kickboards, pull buoys, fins, can be effective in greatly improving an athlete's progress. Such aids can be used in drill work programmed into the session and can help develop and maintain good stroke technique.

Kickboard



Pull Buoys



Fins





Pool Preparation

Before swimming, the area needs to always be cleared and in a safe condition. Swimming aids and all other pool equipment should be in a designated place. No equipment or articles should be left lying on the deck area.

Many Special Olympics athletes train within a public pool complex so it is important that swimmers are aware of the designated areas /lanes allocated to them for training purposes.

Although most Special Olympics athletes do not require special facilities for swimming, some modifications and adaptations may be necessary for safety reasons. Considerations when planning a swimming training session need to include the following.

- Architectural barriers within and around the pool
- Entrances
- Doorways
- Restrooms and showers
- Locker or change rooms
- Pool decks and bottom
- Water depth and condition
- Water and air temperature
- Ladder, steps, stairs, and ramps
- Lighting
- Review emergency plan and check what specific signals are used in identifying an emergency within the facility.
- Check for slippery deck conditions and remove standing water.
- Ensure certified lifeguards with no other duty but to guard.
- Check wheelchair access.
- If in a public pool, designate an adult/volunteer to act as a spotter for the group. Life guards may not be specifically watching your group/squad all the time.
- Check location of safety equipment for emergency use around the pool area.
- Be aware of other users within the complex.

You must always be ready to make adaptations and modifications in both your program and facility if necessary. Remember, it is always better to adapt the program to the program to the facility than not to offer any swimming instruction and training at all.



Coaching Tips

- Always check with the lifeguard on duty.
- Take a head count of your swimmers and record their attendance. Give numbers to the lifeguard.
- Make lifeguard aware of any potential emergencies which may arise due to medical or behavioral conditions of swimmers.
- Designate a “spotter” for the group, could be a parent/volunteer.
- Show swimmers the area in which they have been allocated.
- Set rules before any session commences. Ensure swimmers know their boundaries.
- If in an outdoor pool, check air and wind conditions as well as water temperature.
- Ensure that swimmers have been made aware of specific signals or cues used in an emergency.
- Show swimmers correct point of entry and type of entry required into the water.
- Prepare your session 15 minutes before start time. Have all necessary equipment placed in an appropriate and safe position on pool deck.



General Swimming Equipment List At – A - Glance

Chamois	Can be used in conjunction with a towel.
Fins	Used primarily in helping to develop and maintain good stroke technique especially in drill work. Can be used within a fun activity within your training session.
Flags	Located 5M from end of pool. Used especially when swimming Backstroke, indicates to swimmer in backstroke distance from end of pool for turn or finish. Can be used in training sessions in pool.
Goggles	Encourage swimmers to wear goggles at all times while participating in a session in the water. Goggles help beginners to put face in water and encourage confidence. Be aware that some swimmers may have prescription goggles and swimmers should learn how to maintain and care for these.
Kickboards	Used within training sessions.
Nose Clips	Used by some swimmers who experience taking in water through their nostrils especially when performing turns.
Pace Clock	Used by swimmers to check their rest and go times during training. Can be used by coach when no stop watch is available. Swimmers need to be taught the use of a pace clock.
Pull Buoys	Can be used within a training session to help maintain buoyancy, within specific drills in developing upper body movement and strength.
Stop Watches	Used by the coach to check swimmers times, during time trials. They can also be used if no pace clock available.
Swim Caps	Encourage swimmers to wear caps. However, they are not always necessary. Swimmers at competition level may be required to wear a cap so it is a good idea to have the swimmer get used to wearing one. Also help keep hair out of face and decreases drag.
Towels	Swimmers are encouraged to have a clean towel with them at training sessions.