

Triathlon Swim Glossary – Beginner Friendly

A

Arm Extension – Fully stretching your arm forward in freestyle before beginning the pull phase.

Anaerobic Swim – Short, fast intervals where your muscles work without relying on oxygen (not heavily used in this beginner plan).

B

Bilateral Breathing – Breathing alternately to both sides every 2–4 strokes. Improves symmetry and reduces fatigue.

Body Roll / Rotation – Rotating the shoulders and hips with each stroke to make swimming more efficient.

C

Catch – The phase of the stroke where your hand enters the water and begins to pull backward to propel yourself.

Catch-Up Drill – Swim drill where one arm stays extended forward until the other “catches up.”

CD (Cool-Down) – Easy swimming at the end of a session to help recover and relax muscles.

D

Drills – Specific exercises in the pool designed to improve technique, balance, or strength.

Distance Per Stroke (DPS) – How far you move forward with each arm stroke.

F

Fins – Swim fins worn on feet to help with propulsion, kicking rhythm, and ankle flexibility.

Floating / Float – Relaxed body position in water to practice breathing and gain confidence.

Fingertip Drag Drill – Drill where fingertips lightly drag along water during recovery to improve high elbow and rotation.

H

High Elbow – Technique cue where the elbow is kept high during the recovery phase to increase efficiency.

Hydrodynamics – How efficiently the body moves through water; better technique reduces drag.

K

Kickboard – Equipment used to isolate legs and strengthen kicking technique.

Kicking Drill – Exercise focusing on legs; can be done with or without a kickboard.

M

Main Set – The primary part of the swim session where you complete the main distances or intervals.

Moderate Pace – Swimming at a sustainable speed that feels challenging but not exhausting.

O

Open Water Swim (OW) – Swimming in a lake, river, or sea instead of a pool; adds navigation and safety challenges.

P

Pull Buoy (PB) – Foam device placed between thighs to float the legs and focus on arm technique.

Pace – Swimming speed: usually categorized as easy, moderate, or fast.

Propulsion – The forward movement generated by arms and legs.

R

Recovery – The phase of the stroke where the arm moves above water after finishing the pull.

Race Simulation – Practicing open water swims as if it were race conditions (pace, sighting, and confidence).

S

Sculling Drill – Hand movements in a small figure-eight motion to feel water and improve catch technique.

Sight / Sighting – Lifting your head briefly in open water to see landmarks and swim straight.

Stroke Rate – Number of strokes taken per minute.

Streamline – Position with arms extended and body straight to reduce drag.

T

Tempo Trainer – Small waterproof device to help maintain consistent stroke rate or interval timing.

Technical Focus – Concentrating on proper form rather than speed.

W

W-up (Warm-Up) – Easy swimming at the start of a session to loosen muscles and prepare the body.

Wetsuit – Buoyant suit worn in open water for warmth, flotation, and confidence.

Tips for Athletes Using This Glossary

- Reference this whenever a drill or equipment is mentioned.
- Understanding these terms will make open water swimming less intimidating.
- Pair with cue cards or YouTube drill links for visual reinforcement.

