

Goal-Setting

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Goals turn effort into progress. But for athletes, they need to be simple, specific, and connected to action. In aquatics, goals are the bridge between daily practice and long-term achievement. A swimmer chasing a qualifying time, a water polo player improving defensive skills, a diver perfecting entries, or a Masters athlete focusing on fitness – all rely on clear, achievable goals to stay motivated and track progress. Yet too often, goal-setting becomes either overwhelming (too many technical details) or underwhelming (too vague to inspire action). The solution? A system that balances big performance dreams with simple process goals, ensuring that athletes not only know what they're working toward but also how today's workout brings them closer to it.

Key takeaway: The best goals mix performance targets (times, placements, stats) with process goals (skills and habits).

The challenge

- Many athletes focus only on end results without knowing *what to change* to achieve them.
- Complex plans overwhelm. If you can't explain a goal in under one minute, it won't stick.
- Athletes lose motivation if they can't see how a drill or set connects to their bigger goals.

The framework

1. **Performance goals:** measurable outcomes (time, placement, assists, dives).
2. **Process goals:** actions needed to bridge the gap (technique, habits, specific drills).
3. **Gap analysis:** what are athletes at the desired level doing differently?
4. **Coach explanation rule:** goals must be explainable in under 60 seconds.
5. **Workout linkage:** every set or drill should have a line: "We're doing this to improve X."

Examples

Swimming

- **Performance:** Drop 1 second in the 50m freestyle.
- **Gap:** Weak kicking.
- **Process:** 3 kick-focused sessions per week + dryland leg strength circuit.

Diving

- **Performance:** Execute a clean 3m forward 2½ somersault dive.
- **Gap:** Inconsistent takeoff and body alignment.
- **Process:** Daily dryboard drills → spotted trampoline reps → controlled water entries.

DEVELOPMENT

Artistic Swimming

- **Performance:** Increase routine scores at competition.
- **Gap:** Breath control breaks form during transitions.
- **Process:** Progressive breath-holding sets → underwater transition training → routine simulation under fatigue.

Water Polo

- **Performance:** Stronger defensive performance as a team.
- **Gap:** Poor in-game communication.
- **Process:** Weekly defensive positioning drills → call-and-response communication exercises → scrimmages emphasizing live defensive calls.

Open Water

- **Performance:** Complete 5km race under 1 hour.
- **Gap:** Weak buoy turns and pacing.
- **Process:** Pool sets on pacing consistency → buoy-turn technique in open water → full-distance practice with nutrition strategy.

High Diving

- **Performance:** Consistent entries from 20m platform.
- **Gap:** Over-rotation on entries.
- **Process:** Low-height progressive dives → mid-height controlled entries → full 20m with video feedback.

Masters

- **Performance:** Improve 400m freestyle time by 10 seconds.
- **Gap:** Inefficient breathing and stroke rhythm.
- **Process:** Technique-focused drills (bilateral breathing, catch) → endurance-based interval sets → timed test swims with pacing goals.

Resources

Athlete Weekly Check-In Form

- Met weekly effort expectations
- Training load and recovery were appropriate
- Physical health concerns addressed (fatigue, pain, injury)
- Mental well-being and motivation observed and addressed
- Communication was clear and consistent
- Notable progress this week: _____
- Concerns or barriers to address: _____
- Priority focus for next week: _____

Session Preparation Review

- Goal: *[target]*
- Why: *[one sentence about gap]*
- This session helps by *[one line - what drill/set trains that]*
- Your weekly task: *[one action]*