

Skill Development in Aquatics

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Skill development in aquatics is all about foundations first, layers second. From swimming to water polo to diving, athletes need comfort, safety, and body control before they can master complex skills. Without these foundations, progress becomes harder and frustrating. Every aquatic discipline is built on skills layered over time. Before swimmers can master a 200 IM, they must first feel comfortable breathing and floating. Before water polo players execute complex tactics, they must first move confidently in the water. Before divers perform difficult routines, they must first nail safe entries and takeoffs. Across sports, the principle is the same: foundations first, complexity second. Without strong foundations, advanced skills become shaky and

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inconsistent. Skill development is about guiding athletes step by step, ensuring that comfort, confidence, and technique build naturally into discipline-specific mastery. Done well, it creates athletes who not only perform but also enjoy the journey of learning and improving in the water.

The challenge

- In all aquatic sports (except diving), the first step is feeling safe and comfortable in water: breathing control, floating, and relaxed movement.
- Without this, athletes struggle to learn advanced skills.
- Each discipline has different end targets, but the process is the same: start simple, then layer in complexity.

The framework

1. **Establish foundations.** Safety, breathing, floating, agility in water.
2. **Layer skills.** Add body position, timing, holding water, kicking.
3. **Define discipline targets.**
 - **Swimming:** complete a 200 IM with solid mechanics.
 - **Artistic Swimming:** achieve clean figures and control in routines.
 - **Diving:** safe entries, consistent takeoffs, then progress to harder dives.
 - **Water Polo:** efficient movement, then passing, shooting, and tactical play.
 - **Open Water Swimming:** endurance, buoy navigation, drafting.
 - **High Diving:** build confidence with controlled progression in height.
 - **Masters:** prioritize health, fitness, and technique longevity.
4. **Plan step by step.** Where do we want them to get? Where are we starting? What resources (coaches, pool time) do we have?
5. **Document.** One-page per group with targets, drills, and checkpoints.



Practical advice

- Always start with the outcome in mind.
- Break goals into 1–3 sentences so they're clear.
- Don't overload skills—layer them slowly.
- Adjust based on resources: not every club has the same pool time or staffing.

Resources

Practical Framework & Evaluation Tool Template

➤ Outcome first

- Write a clear, one-line outcome for the group.
 - Example: "Athletes can complete a 200 IM with legal turns and consistent pacing."

➤ Assess

- List where they are now using a simple checklist.
 - Can they...?
 - Do they consistently...?
 - Are they confident in...?

➤ Progressions

- List 3 progressive drills per skill (Intro → Challenge → Game-speed).
 - Intro drill: [basic movement or controlled setting]
 - Challenge drill: [increased difficulty, added variable]
 - Competition-speed drill: [competition-like or performance simulation]

➤ Measure

- Pick 1 metric to track progress.
 - Examples:
 - Time (e.g., 25m kick under 30s)
 - Accuracy (e.g., % successful entries or passes)
 - Endurance (e.g., sustain effort for X minutes)
 - Consistency (e.g., repeat skill correctly 3 times in a row)