

An Open Structured Approach
Maximizing the learning experience in learn-to-swim.

TigerShark Swim School: I Can Swim Stages 2 and 3:

Firstly, we don't share lanes. That is, every group has a full-length lane, irrespective of how well they can swim. There a maximum number of children per lane, with the beginner classes having 7 and the more advanced having 10. Each class lasts for 45 minutes. We use small kick boards and flippers (fins) occasionally.

Our normal progression is with teaching backstroke first, then freestyle (bi-lateral breathing is taught early), followed by breaststroke and then butterfly.

As children progress across the stages, we end up with differing ability children in each lane. This means, we have to know what each group is up to, so that we can confidently register new children in a group suitable for their level and move children if they need to be challenged more.

We label groups Stage 2/3 in September and January for administrative and organizational purposes, but after that, the group progress at their own rate, the teacher doing whatever they feel they need to do to improve their group's swimming. Following the curriculum of one Stage only pigeonholes the class, and confines the swimmers to a set amount of tasks, without their being challenged until all the set tasks have been completed. Under our system, we have had children swimming 25 plus metres backstroke, and only a few metres freestyle. We want to keep challenging the child, letting them achieve what they can to the best of their ability. This will keep their self-esteem high, because they are achieving, and the focus isn't on passing the requirements of a pre-defined level, a part of which they may have difficulty with. We find, that their interest is maintained, and the things they find difficult, will be mastered sooner, if their self esteem and feeling of achieving is maintained. We have had many children who have started in our first lane as absolute non-swimmers, some with no water confidence at the age of 5, reach squad training within 3 - 4 years, capable of swimming all four competitive strokes with turns to a basic competitive standard.

We do NOT have a system in place where the instructors are given a methodology to adhere to. This places restrictions upon the instructors' own background knowledge and creativity. That is not to say that we don't give help to our instructors. We do have a basic handbook and we do give each other a hand, after all, we are all on the same team!

It is important to remember, there is not one way to teach, and not all children will respond to the same message or instruction the same way. We believe our system gives us the most flexibility to help kids improve their swimming.

Stage 4:

Children enter Stage 4 when they can swim freestyle, backstroke and they have a reasonable technical grasp of breaststroke. This group has up to 10 swimmers, and the sessions last for an hour to an hour and a half. The swimmers come two or three times a week. It is part learn-to-swim and part competitive club.

Here the swimmers are taught butterfly, tumble turns, all the starts and finishes, and their strokes are refined to a higher technical accuracy. The distances swum normally vary between 1,500 and 2,000 metres/hour.

The pace clock is introduced, with programming including sprint and endurance work, coupled with more complex drills.

Orange Squad:

This is where it gets more serious. The swimmers use of the pace clock increases dramatically. Our demands and expectations go up, as do the swimmers' own demands and expectations.

The technical emphasis focuses on the finer points. The training sessions are organised on cycles, with distances varying from 2,000 to 3,000+ metres per hour. We do not place any requirements on how often the swimmers should attend training, but we recommend that they attend all three sessions. We are happy to see them each time they arrive. Of course, the achievers do train a little more often. However, we don't confuse attendance with the quality of work. It's no good having a swimmer showing up often, and not putting in 100%!

When should I enrol my child?

You may or may not agree, but we do not take children under 5 years of age. This "line in the sand" has been drawn for many reasons:

1. Human development theory shows that the cognitive processing and motor skill development required to swim has not been reached before this age.
2. The child's concentration span is very limited.
3. The rate and incidence of ear infections is higher among the very young.
4. We are more interested in achieving performance for our swimmers, rather than only "turning the till".