



RICHMOND TRI CLUB

OPEN WATER SWIM CLINIC

PRACTICE | PREPARE | SWIM WITH CONFIDENCE



ADAPTING YOUR FREESTYLE STROKE FOR OPEN WATER

One stroke does not fit every condition.



CALM, FLAT WATER

SWIM EFFICIENTLY AND STAY CONTROLLED.

- Use a relaxed, efficient stroke rhythm similar to your pool stroke.
- Maintain good body position and a complete underwater pull.
- Keep your breathing consistent and stay long through the water.
- Avoid increasing stroke rate simply because you are racing.



CHOPPY OR ROUGH WATER

ADAPT TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM.

- Slightly increase your stroke rate when the water is moving around you.
- Keep your recovery relaxed but purposeful.
- Maintain forward momentum instead of gliding excessively.
- Adjust your breathing side based on waves and wind.
- Stay relaxed when your normal breathing rhythm gets disrupted.



CROWDED WATER

STAY CALM AND PROTECT YOUR SPACE.

- Shorten your stroke slightly if needed.
- Expect occasional contact and stay composed.
- Maintain forward momentum without fighting other swimmers.
- Return to your normal stroke as soon as space opens.



BREATHING MAY NEED TO CHANGE

BE FLEXIBLE.

- You do not have to breathe bilaterally for the entire swim.
- Adjust for waves, sun position, other swimmers, navigation, and fatigue.
- Comfort breathing to either side gives you more options.



KEY TAKEAWAY

- The best open-water swimmers maintain rhythm, efficiency, and composure when the environment changes.
- Practice adaptability in training so race morning is not the first time you need it.



Coach Justin White | Tabula Rasa Racing



RICHMOND TRI CLUB

OPEN WATER SWIM CLINIC

PRACTICE | PREPARE | SWIM WITH CONFIDENCE



OPEN-WATER SWIM SKILLS PRACTICE GUIDE

Don't make every open-water swim a continuous endurance workout.



STRAIGHT-LINE TEST

FIND YOUR NATURAL DRIFT.

- Pick a landmark and swim 20–30 strokes without sighting.
- Stop and check whether you drifted left, right, or stayed straight.



SIGHTING FREQUENCY

TEST DIFFERENT PATTERNS.

- Practice sighting every 6, 8, 10, or 12 strokes.
- Notice how each pattern affects your line and rhythm.



SIGHT → BREATHE DRILL

SEPARATE THE ACTIONS.

- Look forward briefly.
- Return the face toward the water.
- Rotate normally to breathe.



CHANGE YOUR STROKE RATE

LEARN TO CHANGE GEARS.

- Swim a few short segments with a smooth rhythm.
- Then slightly increase turnover without losing control.
- Practice adapting for chop or crowded water.



BUOY APPROACH & GROUP SWIMMING

PRACTICE RACE SKILLS.

- Approach a marker, sight more often, and turn with momentum.
- When safe, practice swimming beside others or following feet.



PUTTING IT TOGETHER

PRACTICE ONE OR TWO SKILLS PER SWIM.

- Spend 10–15 minutes on deliberate skill work before your main swim.
- Confidence improves through repetition and exposure.



Coach Justin White | Tabula Rasa Racing



RICHMOND TRI CLUB

OPEN WATER SWIM CLINIC

PRACTICE | PREPARE | SWIM WITH CONFIDENCE



OPEN-WATER SIGHTING

Stay on course without destroying your stroke rhythm.



KEEP THE MOVEMENT SMALL

EYES UP, NOT HEAD UP.

- Lift only enough to get your eyes above the surface.
- Raising the whole head too high causes the hips and legs to drop.
- Return quickly to your normal swimming position.



SIGHT FIRST, THEN BREATHE

LET IT FIT YOUR STROKE.

- Look forward briefly.
- Return your face toward the water.
- Rotate normally to breathe.
- Avoid trying to sight and breathe forward at the same time.



HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU SIGHT?

FIND THE RIGHT FREQUENCY.

- Sight more often near buoys, in rough water, or with poor visibility.
- Sight less often in calm water or when you have strong landmarks.
- Experiment with every 6, 8, 10, or 12 strokes.



USE LANDMARKS

LOOK BEYOND THE BUOY.

- Buildings, tree lines, or large objects are often easier to spot than a small buoy.
- Identify useful landmarks before the swim starts.



KEY TAKEAWAY

NAVIGATE WITHOUT WRECKING YOUR RHYTHM.

- Good sighting gives you just enough information to stay on course.
- Practice sighting in training until it becomes part of your normal stroke.



Coach Justin White | Tabula Rasa Racing



RICHMOND TRI CLUB

OPEN WATER SWIM CLINIC

PRACTICE | PREPARE | SWIM WITH CONFIDENCE

RACE-DAY OPEN-WATER SWIMMING

Your result depends on more than swim fitness.



1. PRE-RACE PREPARATION

STUDY THE COURSE AND CHOOSE YOUR START.

- Identify the first turn, big landmarks, the final line to shore, and the swim exit.
- Choose a start position that matches your speed and comfort with contact.



2. CONTROL THE FIRST FEW MINUTES

SETTLE BEFORE YOU RACE.

- Avoid turning the first 200 yards into an unsustainable sprint.
- Establish rhythm, control breathing, and find usable space.



3. USE OTHER SWIMMERS

DRAFT, BUT KEEP NAVIGATING.

- Draft behind the feet or slightly off the hip of another swimmer.
- Continue sighting so you do not blindly follow someone off course.



4. APPROACH BUOYS WITH A PLAN

SHORTEST IS NOT ALWAYS FASTEST.

- Sight more often as you approach the turn.
- A slightly wider line can be faster if it avoids congestion.



5. EXPECT CONTACT AND FINISH STRONG

STAY COMPOSED.

- Brief contact happens. Refocus on the next stroke.
- Keep swimming until the water is too shallow, then transition deliberately to the run out.



6. KEY TAKEAWAY

RACE WITH FITNESS, SKILL, AND COMPOSURE.

- Strong open-water racing combines navigation, positioning, pacing, and adaptability.
- Train those skills before race day so you can stay confident and controlled.



Coach Justin White | Tabula Rasa Racing