



## Connecting the Dots



We are all relatively aware of the KEY ROLE learn to swim plays in the aquatic programming scheme. One of the most challenging tasks is making it obvious and easy for a young swimmer to TRY the swim team experience. Even those teams within house learn to swim, struggle with this concept. The term BRIDGE PROGRAMMING has been coined to describe the process of facilitating swimmer (and parent) to get from Learn to Swim to the entry level pre-team experience.

Each situation and Learn to Swim experience is unique. Each USA Swimming team/club is also unique. This makes a template rather difficult to define. There are however some basic strategies that can increase the chance for success:

1. Keep the marketing and information for BRIDGE PROGRAMMING low pressure. Make sure the pre-team experience is not rushed. Learning skills, drills, and easy paced preparation can make this a positive experience for swimmer and parent.
2. If the swimmer has a fun and positive experience, they will be more likely to stick with it. Little steps with achievable and practical goals with reasonable praise can be valuable.
3. Keep the sessions short and accomplish something each time the swimmer is in the water. 30 to 45 minutes of learning and practicing specific skills is so much better than swimming laps for an hour or more. Boredom can be a main reason swimmer STOP coming.
4. There are many nationally recognized Learn to Swim curriculums and some very good independent ones, but the program is only as good as the instructors delivering it. The swim team and the Learn to Swim simply MUST understand each other and have an open line of communications that is frequently used. Some things to consider:
  - a. Does the Learn to Swim program use methodologies that teach best technique towards competitive swimming? It really does not take any longer to teach a stroke properly with the goal an efficient competitive style stroke.
  - b. Do the drills taught effectively translate to competitive more advanced drills that will be introduced at the pre-team level? Do both the instructor and coach use variations of the same drills and skills?
  - c. Is the terminology used at both levels consistent? Everyone seems to like to name a movement their own way; seems to give them a sense of inventiveness. That can be very confusing to the swimmer. It's much better to be on the same page.

- d. At what levels of both programs does the swimmer get recognition for attaining goals or reaching a certain level? Does the Learn to Swim program and the Pre-team program have similar identifiable level structures? Both swimmers and parents like things they can easily understand.
  - e. The programs service the swimmer but market to the parents. The parents need to be continually told what the short-term goal is and the steps you are using to help the swimmer progress. The how and why you are teaching certain things is really important.
5. If there are opportunities to have staff visible to each other's program – take them. Continuity and a common sense of goals is an important concept to swimmers and parents:
- a. When swimmers are close to being ready "skill wise" to progress to the pre-team bridge program, have the coach of the pre-team do a presentation to the parents. This must be designed to be service and benefits orientated rather than pressure filled.
  - b. The converse is true – after parents make the decision to try the pre-team, have the swim instructor drop in on the pre-team session after a few weeks to reinforce that the L2S and team work together. Just a "hi how are you visit" for a few minutes about ½ way into the pre-team session is fine.
  - c. Don't expect parents who cannot afford the competitive experience it to be really excited about it.
    - i. Some may not be able to financially afford the team fees, equipment, meet fees, and travel.
    - ii. Others may not be able to commit the TIME that is needed to progress to the actual team.
    - iii. Have answers and options available for both these situations and make sure the time commitment is not over-bearing for the bridge programs.
    - iv. Have an alternative – like a youth aquatic fitness program – available for those that are intimidated by the TEAM. Some people need a little more time than others to decide how they are going to spend their recreational \$ for their children. The youth fitness programs need to mirror the TIME commitment required by the bridge program. Think of this as an extension of the bridge program that will continue to TEACH more advanced skills. 2 times a week for 30-45 minutes in the water is much better than not in the water at all.
6. Have a written lessons plan that is periodically reviewed by both the swim instructor and coaches.
- a. Each 30-45-minute lesson must have a skill goal and a drill and teaching progression that supports that goal. Teach one thing well rather than 2 things partially. There is no rush to get the swimmer "on the team". If they are not ready, they will probably drop out so take your time.
  - b. Each lesson needs to have some time for reviewing what was accomplished the previous lesson. These are kids that probably can't find their way home without the bus. Teach them – reinforce what you have taught – teach them again.
    - i. The typical lesson could look something like:
      - 5 minutes water acclimation and warm-up – keep them moving with kicking or technique swimming
      - 5 minutes review what was taught last lesson – keep them moving, don't just lecture – use the "show me what you can do" method
      - 15 minutes of new skill introduction and practice. Lots of movement by swimmers. Parents don't want to see their kids STANDING around for very long and swimmers listen for long

technical explanations. That is why drills to teach skills work well. Break each skill down into small parts. If you talk 1 minute let them practice for 2-3 minutes

- 5 minutes review of last week skill and this week skill and get some general swimming in so they get stronger in the water
- Thank them for coming today and ask them if they had fun. Their parents will probably ask them afterwards if they had fun so if they say yes to you, they will most likely say yes to them.

7. Develop a sessions plan that accomplishes the goals you desire. This plan needs to match up well with your pool time and the school year and holidays etc.

Here would be one example of a session and lessons plan for the pre-team:

*Lesson #1* Free style head position Side Kick and swim Drills  
Emphasis on looking slightly forward on breath so as to promote a high head position in Free  
Start right now teaching swimmers to breathe on both sides for freestyle.

Side Kick Drill + 12Kick3Swim (single arm movementsx3) Drill + 9Kick3Swim Drill + 6Kick3Swim Drill  
Kick with Head Up and out of H2O No Board hands in 2 positions (1) at side like a seal (2) out front streamline  
Catch Up Stroke Free touching hands out in front

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*Lesson #2* Freestyle general swim drills  
Review 9K3S Drill & Catch Up Stroke Free  
Scooter Free Right Arm & Left Arm (one at a time) with Kick Board  
Thumb Touch Free Recovery Drill (touching thumb under armpit to promote high elbow recovery)  
Water Polo Free Swim – head up and eyes front Freestyle – stress kick and body position  
Shark Swim – one leg up in back 90-degree bend at knee so shin and foot are out of water - fun

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*Lesson #3* Back Straw Drills – use soda straw to emphasize the straw cannot move – hold head still – the straw acts like the hand of a Dial – good time to have swimmers get out and stand to watch those who are doing it well  
12K3S - 9K3S - 6K3S Swim same type of drill and Freestyle. Emphasis on body rotation with no head movement.  
Rifle Barrel Drill 4 count – hold each arm up perpendicular to body with hand pointing at ceiling for 4 count  
Yacht Kick - probably can't do this without alot of practice or wearing fins. Both arms are perpendicular to body and are out of water pointing at ceiling. Sometime the drill needs to be too hard to accomplish it first try.  
Pick Free Drills from above and review the last 5 minutes of class.

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*Lesson #4* Backstroke general swim drill  
Double Arm Back – used to be called “elementary backstroke” use both arms simultaneously emphasize proper depth of hand finish of stroke  
Back flutter kick underwater off wall streamline position – have them see how far they can go without holding breath to the point they are straining. Tell them to be careful about breath holding  
Last 5 minutes Review 12K3S + 9K3S + 6K3S Back and Free mixed swimming repeating 50 yards with some rest between.

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*Lesson #5* Breast Streamline Drills – (this assumes they have learned breaststroke kick in L2S lessons)  
Emphasis on up & lunge forward "downhill" movement rather than up and straight down movement when breathing.  
Kick with hands out front diving after each kick – do not use kick board.  
Kick with hands at side on front NO Board heel touch Drill. Heels touch fingertips of hands each kick cycle.  
Kick with hands at side on back No Board heel touch Drill. Heels touch fingertips of hands each kick cycle. On the back they (and you) can see if their knees are close together or pointing outwards which is not good.  
Catch up Kick Stroke Drill – do one full breaststroke and then skip the arms and do kick only every other stroke cycle.  
Emphasizes the power of the kick and the support of the arms  
Last 5 minutes Review Drills from previous sessions.  
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*Lesson #6* Breast Drills – Right Arm only & Left Arm only swim with legal Kick and regular breath timing.  
Teach Underwater Pull & Kick off wall  
Last 5 minutes Review Drills from previous sessions.  
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*Lesson #7* Fly Drills Kick Front/Back/Sides No/Board with hands at side. Breathe by pushing chin forward rather than lifting chest up.  
Talk about head and hip timing.  
Scooter Swims Fly with board and out-to-side straight arm recovery one arm at a time.  
Use variations of alternating arms  
Right Arm & Left Arm alternating Fly swimming with full Kick and regular every other stroke breathing  
332 Fly Drill = 3 right arm - 3 left arm only 2 full strokes both arms  
Last 5 minutes do some Breaststroke review  
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*Lesson #8* Review Fly and all the drills from the last 3 weeks by doing IM drills and testing swimmers to see how much they remember and recognize the names of drills. This will teach Individual Medley order of strokes. Limit to short distances that the swimmers are comfortable with – E.G. ½ a length each stroke or do widths. Depending on class ability this would be a good time to cover legal touch basics and turns for IM.  
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*Lesson #9* Fly Drills Kick Front/Back/Sides  
8-kick1full stroke for a 25 or one length then 8-k2s for a length then 8-k3s for a length then 8-k4s for a length (rest between 1 lengths)  
Breathe by pushing chin forward rather than lifting chest up. Review head and hip timing.  
5 minutes of IM drills  
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*Lesson #10* Vertical Kicking Sculling Drills  
Apply feel to free pull – S pattern  
Free Kick with no board – arms out in T-position with 90-degree bend at elbows 3 scull inside shoulders 3 sculling outside shoulders  
Vertical Kicking Sculling Drills  
5 strokes freestyle then roll to 5 strokes backstroke for various distances = 5/5 drill  
Incorporate 5/5 drill into IM swimming last 5 minutes  
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Lesson #11 Vertical Kicking Sculling Drills – review

Apply feel to Back pull with emphasis on sculling at catch and finish parts of arm pull  
Weak arm (non-dominate) one arm drills – if swimmer swims crooked, they do not have the best stroke pattern  
Back clap catch-up drill – clap hands perpendicular to body with arms straight to ceiling  
Incorporate Back drills in IM swimming last 5 minutes

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Lesson #12 Breaststroke - Lunge + Lunge + Lunge

Depending on pool availability you can divide this lesson into lane stations – have swimmers switch lanes every 4 minutes – perpetual motion – very little rest  
Streamline Kicking Lanes 5 & 6 with or without boards  
Lanes 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 extension only 4K1S Catch Up Drill – assign lanes per drill  
3K1S Catch Up Drill  
2K1S Catch Up Drill  
1K1S Catch Up  
Use 25yd pool & swim 2 per lane & count strokes per 25 yds with/no Underwater pull and kick

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Lesson #13 Fly

*Kick Vertical if 5' or deeper water available – otherwise kick horizontal*  
*Swim Fly/Free combo swims working on 2 kicks per stroke fly and the drive forward kick*

power

*Fly Fin Kick if fins available*  
*Swim IM mixed swims working on 2 kicks per stroke and kick power. Re-emphasize hand and body legal IM turns*

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Lesson #14 Freestyle Flip Turns

1. Kicking
  2. Head and hand positions & movements
  3. Turns in middle of pool away from wall (flips) blow air out through nose
  4. Foot position & speed
  5. Jump power – the feet and legs are super important
  6. Streamlining
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Lesson #15 Back Turns

1. Kicking
  2. Head and hand positions & movements
  3. Right & Left = must be able to turn either way so learn it now
  4. Foot position & speed
  5. Jump power
  6. Streamlining
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Lesson #16 Breast & Fly Turns

1. Kicking- the differences between breast and fly turns
  2. Head and hand positions & movements
  3. Right & Left = must be able to turn either way so learn it now
  4. Foot position & speed
  5. Jump power
  6. Streamlining
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Lesson #17 *IM turns 7 of them*  
1. *Kicking*  
2. *Head and hand positions & movements*  
3. *Right & Left = must be able to turn either way so learn it now*  
4. *Foot position & speed*  
5. *Jump power*  
6. *Streamlining*

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Lesson #18 Free stroke mechanics – review with drills emphasizing Catch - Finish - Transition phases  
Do a low rest call the drill out and swimmers do it session – this is the beginning of aerobic swimming

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Lesson #19 Back stroke mechanics - review with drills emphasizing Catch - Finish - Transition phases  
Do a low rest and call the drill out and swimmers do it session – this is the beginning of aerobic swimming

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Lesson #20 Breaststroke mechanics - review with drills emphasizing Catch - Finish - Transition phases  
Do a low rest call the drill out and swimmers do it session – this is the beginning of aerobic swimming

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Lesson #21 Fly stroke mechanics - review with drills emphasizing Catch - Finish - Transition phases  
Do a low rest call the drill out and swimmers do it session – this is the beginning of aerobic swimming

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Lesson #22 Front Starts – teach from side first in minimum of 6’ deep water – progress to starting block in minimum of 6’ deep water will vary depending on skill and comfort of swimmer. Take your time with this. You will probably have to split the group into skill levels – some will get this much faster than others. If a swimmer smacks the tummy on the water, you will have a new hurdle to overcome which is FEAR. Go carefully through the step-by-step teaching progression always stressing SAFETY multiple times throughout every lesson.

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Lesson #23 Back Starts - teach from side first in minimum of 6’ deep water – progress to starting block in minimum of 6’ deep water will vary depending on skill and comfort of swimmer. Take your time with this. You will probably have to split the group into skill levels – some will get this much faster than others.

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Lesson #24 Recital for parents – Swim 25 yards each stroke with starts in heats.  
This may be the time everyone gets a ribbon or free drink card at local sponsor’s restaurant or snack bar.  
Also, a good time to have swim team coach present.

**Note\***

- There are literally a dozen or more different drills for each stroke than can benefit the swimmer's skill level. Do not limit the lessons plan to just these sample drills and progressions. Make sure the drill terminology matches that of the swim team you are working with.
- If you have a PACE CLOCK available teach them how to time their rest and how to do very basic intervals – the team coach will appreciate it.
- Teach the swimmers proper pool etiquette and how to follow rules
- Teach proper use of kickboards and other equipment and how to take care and be safe with all pool equipment
- Try to reinforce the importance of being on time but remember swimmers this age does not drive – parents do!
- Also stress the importance of attendance and not asking to get out early. Let the parents know up front how you will handle request for make-ups (if any) for missed lessons.