



Teaching Racing Starts - Safety Protocols

Before You Teach, Be Sure:

1. Swimmers can jump feet first into deep water, surface, turn around, level off and swim 10 feet.
2. Swimmers can demonstrate correct hand, arm, and head position. Practice a tight streamline on dryland.
3. For front facing forward starts and back facing backstroke starts, swimmers can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push and glide underwater.
4. You and the swimmers know the water depth. USA Swimming requires you teach in a minimum of 6-foot depth.
5. Starting blocks are tightly secured to the pool deck. They must meet size and height regulations.
6. For backstroke start practice, have the swimmers slip into the water feet first with one hand on the deck. Swimmers should not grasp backstroke start bar while entering the pool.
7. Always be sure the landing area is clear of other nearby swimmers.
8. Prior to certification, all racing starts must take place from a position in the water, regardless of pool depth. After certification, racing start practice may take place in water depth of 4 feet and deeper.
9. **Note:** Local, state and municipal statutes, ordinances, rules and regulations may have depth limitations in conflict with this section. The Local Swimming Committee (LSC) and all USA Swimming member clubs should always check for this.

Teaching Forward Facing Starts:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step-by-step progression BEFORE using the starting blocks.
 - PREQUISITE: Swimmers can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push and glide underwater on their front.
 - STEP 1: Sitting
 - STEP 2: Kneeling
 - STEP 3: Compact
 - STEP 4: Stride
 - STEP 5: Shallow Angle Start
2. Make sure swimmers can enter water with control at each step before moving to the next step.
3. Always have swimmers hold arms fully extended overhead during entry. Do not perform entries with arms at sides.
4. Do not perform entries over stationary objects like poles, lane lines or kickboards. (Note: Coaches with additional training might use advanced techniques in water at least 12 feet deep with experienced swimmers; This includes having them practice over a soft item, such as a noodle.)
5. **Note:** Local, state and municipal statutes, ordinances, rules and regulations may have depth limitations in conflict with this section. The LSC and all USA Swimming member clubs should always check for this.

Teaching Backstroke Starts Without the Ledge:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step-by-step progression BEFORE using the starting blocks.
 - **Prerequisite:** Swimmer can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push from the side and glide underwater on their back before adjusting their hands to come to the surface at an angle.



- **Certification Criteria:** Swimmer gets into position with the hands grasping either the gutter or the lower bar on the blocks, whichever is closest to the water surface. The swimmer performs a shallow backstroke racing start following the steps listed on pages 4-5.
 - **Advanced:** Once certified, coach may teach swimmer to use the backstroke bar, if in the coach's opinion the athlete is tall and strong enough to handle this skill safely.
2. Always have swimmers hold arms full extended overhead during entry.
 3. Do not perform entries over stationary objects like poles, lane lines or kickboards. (Note: Coaches with additional training might use advanced techniques with experienced swimmers. An example would be having them practice over a soft item, such as a noodle.)



Teaching Backstroke Starts With the Ledge:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step-by-step progression BEFORE using the ledge starting blocks.
 - **Prerequisite:** Swimmer is certified for backstroke starts without the ledge.
 - **Certification Criteria:** The swimmer gets into position with the hands grasping either the gutter or the lowest bar on the blocks, whichever is closest to the water surface. The swimmer performs a shallow backstroke racing start following the steps listed on page 8.
 - **Advanced:** Once certified, coach may teach swimmer to use the backstroke bar, if in the coach's opinion the athlete is tall and strong enough to handle this skill safely.
 - **Note:** Research has shown that older, larger and stronger swimmers can generate more height. Consequently, the risk of reaching greater depths with the ledge is more pronounced with these athletes.
2. Always have swimmers hold arms fully extended overhead during entry. Do not perform entries with arms at sides.



Teach Your Swimmers the “Do’s” and “Do Not’s” for Starts:

Do:

1. Use starting blocks and backstroke ledges only during controlled swim practice, instruction, supervised warm-up or competition.
2. Know the water depth and location of pool floor slopes. Use feet first entry if unsure.
3. Use feet first entry in warm-up and always enter at the starting end of the pool.
4. Look before entering the pool.
5. Enter the water only with permission of marshal at a meet or the coach at practice.
6. Use a shallow angle entry and hold arms fully extended overhead.
7. For backstroke start practice, have the swimmers slip into the water feet first with one hand on the deck.

Do Not:

1. Start a water entry until the preceding swimmer has come to the surface and moved away from the entry area.
2. Do a headfirst entry into cloudy water.
3. Fool around on the starting blocks or the pool edge.
4. Attempt to abort a poor start or a false start by somersaulting, pulling up quickly or rolling to the side.

5. Attempt a somersault or flip entry into a competition pool.
6. Enter headfirst with the arms at the side.
7. Grasp backstroke start bar while entering the pool for backstroke start practice.

Teaching Backstroke Start (Detailed Protocol):

1. Have the swimmer grasp the pool edge at water level with both hands and place your feet on the wall, either parallel or slightly staggered. Arms should be straight and relaxed, eyes looking forward at the wall. Swimmers who are older, larger or stronger, and are comfortable reaching a bar on the starting block, can do so. Have the athlete keep their feet placed near the surface of the water.
2. On the command "Take your mark," the swimmer should bend their arms and legs to pull their body up and closer to the wall. Swimmers learning the start should pull up slightly to a level their strength can handle. Swimmers who are comfortable and strong enough to grip the bar can pull up more, with the hips at the surface of the water or just above.

The swimmer should adjust the angle of their back so their body is ideally positioned to jump off the wall while not slipping. With their back perpendicular to the water, they may be less likely to slip but their legs may be too tightly bent to get the best jump. To get into this position, have the swimmer bend their legs more to bring the hips closer to the wall or bend their arms less. Alternatively, with their back leaning towards the wall, they may be more likely to slip, but it may be easier to extend their legs to push away from the wall. To do this, have the swimmer bend their legs less so their hips are further from the wall or have them bend their arms more. This position may be better suited with a ledge.



The backstroke start position should be individual to each athlete, their strengths and comfort. Try experimenting with different combinations of knee bend, arm bend and back angle to find the best position for them.

3. On the starting signal, the swimmer should throw their head back to a neutral position, which is generally in line with the spine. Simultaneously, they should throw their hands from the edge or starting block straight back over their head. They should push forcefully with their legs to jump upward and away from the wall while arching their back and driving their body, hands first, up

over the water. The swimmer should kick their feet up to ensure they get over the water and into full streamline.



4. The athlete should tip their head back and get into a streamlined position. The goal is to have a clean entry and maximize forward speed by not going too deep. Their hands should enter before their back, and their back should enter before their legs. To improve their entry position and depth, athletes should adjust how high and away they jump off the wall while also working on kicking their feet up. A higher jump may lead to a cleaner entry but may also be deeper, which is not preferred.
5. Once in the water, athletes should adjust the angle of their hands and/or head for a horizontal streamlined glide. They should straighten their back to avoid a rear somersault.

Teaching Forward Starts (Detailed Protocol):

(From the American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches manual)



1. Sit on the edge of the pool with your feet on the edge of the gutter or against the side of the pool.
2. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-3).
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Lean forward, try to touch the water, and push with your legs.
5. Straighten your body and extend both legs upon entering the water.
6. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.



1. Kneel on the pool deck with one leg while gripping the pool edge with the toes of your other foot. The foot of your kneeling leg should be in a position to help push from the deck.
2. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-4).
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Lean forward, try to touch the water, and push with your legs.
5. Straighten your body and extend both legs upon entering the water.
6. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.



1. Starting from the kneeling position, lift up so that both knees are flexed and off the deck. The toes of your leading foot grip the edge of the pool and your back foot is in a position to help push from the deck. Keep your knees bent so that you stay close to the water.
2. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-5).
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Lean forward as though you are trying to touch the surface of the water and use your legs to push off the deck.
5. Straighten your legs and bring them together so that your body is in a straight line as you enter the water.
6. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.



Fig. 7-7A To gain momentum for the dive, swing your arms backward and upward, letting your heels rise as your body begins to move forward.



Fig. 7-7B Enter the water at an angle no greater than 45°.

1. Stand upright with one leg forward and one leg back, with the toes of your leading foot gripping the edge of the pool.
2. Extend your arms above your head.
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Bend your legs only slightly while also bending at the waist toward the water (Fig. 7-6).
5. Lift your back leg until it is in a straight line with the rest of your body. Keep your forward leg as straight as possible as you lean forward.
6. Bring your legs together as you enter the water.
7. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.



Fig. 7-6 Headfirst entry from stride position.

1. Stand on the edge of the pool with your feet about shoulder-width apart and your toes gripping the edge of the pool.
2. Flex your hips and knees and bend forward until your upper back is nearly parallel to the pool deck.
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. To gain momentum for the dive, swing your arms backward and upward, letting your heels rise and your body start to move forward (Fig. 7-7A).
5. When your arms reach their maximum backward extension, immediately swing them forward. Forcefully extend your hips, knees, ankles, and toes, one after another, to drive your body forward in a line of flight over and nearly parallel to the surface of the water.
6. Keep your body stretched, with your arms angled slightly down and your hands interlocked in front.
7. Before entering the water, drop your head slightly between your outstretched arms.
8. Enter the water at an angle no greater than 45° to the surface of the water (Fig. 7-7B).
9. Once underwater, use your hands and head to steer your body upward toward the surface. Keep your body fully extended and streamlined while gliding underwater. Before losing too much speed, start your leg kick to rise to the surface and start swimming.