

“YOU DON’T HAVE TO TOUCH THE WALL FIRST TO WIN THE RACE; YOU JUST HAVE TO APPLY SEVEN POUNDS OF PRESSURE TO THE TOUCHPAD.”

MARK SCHUBERT, NATIONAL COACH US SWIMMING,
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APPROACH

The ‘finish’ starts quite a distance before the end of the race. The technique and effort over the final 5, 10 or even 15m of swimming (“the approach”) can change the ranking order of swimmers and can definitely change the time. The approach is the most important part of a race finish. A strong, aggressive and well timed approach followed by a forceful touch can make **at least 0.3 – 0.5 seconds** difference to a race time and, often, even more.



FREESTYLE

Freestyle is the easiest stroke on which to finish a race because the swimmer has a choice of either hand and can easily ‘spot’ the distance markers of the black line ‘T’ and the wall cross.

However, many swimmers glide in excessively or finish with their arm excessively bent so that their noses are danger of activating the touchpad. The touch should be made with an almost fully extended arm so that full extension is found when the hand flattens against the wall or touchpad.

This position is relatively easy to attain because the freestyle stroking pattern can be lengthened or shortened (a ‘learned’ skill) to ensure a great finish is possible.

There should be no breathing after the flags (5m) and possibly for a longer distance than that. Breathing has three drawbacks: the change in head position tends to compromise streamlining, and creates wave drag. It also tends to be associated with a change in pulling and kicking rhythm which compromises coordination, consistent application of force and, ultimately, speed. These are bad effects, but worse is that the swimmer cannot see the finish point at the wall if they turn their head, meaning the finish itself is also compromised. The combined effects of slowing down and being unsure of where the wall is can sum up to a lot of lost time.



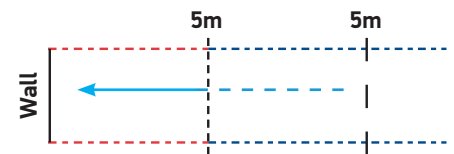
PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Anaerobic ability to ‘lift’ the effort at the last stages of the race.
- Ability to swim the last portion of the race with no breathing.
- Shoulder flexibility for long reach.
- Spatial awareness of the relative positions of the body and the wall and of the swim speed.

TESTING & MONITORING

- 5m timed finishes (time is taken from the head passing the backstroke flag pole to the hand touch).
- 8-10 x 10m/15m swim in at full speed – score how many touches are made with 'perfect' stroke timing. Vary the start point somewhat from swim to swim.

FREESTYLE FINISHES



THE RULES

- **SW 5.2 (FREESTYLE)** Some part of the swimmer must touch the wall upon completion of each length and at the finish.

COACHING PROCESS & CONTROL

- Once the swimmer has 'finished' the race there are no more opportunities to chase someone, overtake, make up for lost time, or try harder. That's it. It's over. Best to make the best of it.
- *"The swimmer's responsibility is to activate the touchpad at the earliest possible opportunity."*
- Insist on legal, purposeful finishes on every swim of every set, every day.
- Backstroke flags must be 5m from the wall and must be 1.8m above the water. If your measurements are different your swimmers will have problems when they swim in regulation pools.

LAND EXERCISES

- Shoulder flexibility

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Practice, practice, practice.
- Focus on the 'T' on the pool floor and count the strokes into the wall – swimmers do not need to lift their head to look for the wall; it's not going to move.
- If they need to physically see the target cross on the end wall they should lift their eyes without tilting their head.

INTERPRETING THE RULES

- On **freestyle** the swimmer can finish with any part of their body so, if they miscount and go into a tumble turn their foot touch will count as the finish. Best not to miscount though.

COMMON FAULTS & FIXES

- Gliding/kicking in.
- Finishing with a 'short' arm stroke.
- Lifting the head (and shoulders) on the final stroke.
- Stopping the kick before the wall is touched.
- Finishing with the shoulders 'flat' – rotate away from the finishing arm to give a longer reach.

DESCRIPTIVE WORDS & IMAGERY

Strong, determined, purposeful, forceful, hit the touchpad, stop the clock, lunge.

SEE ALSO

- British Swimming: britishswimming.org
- ASA: swimming.org
- SASA: scottishswimming.com
- WASA: swimwales.org
- BSCA: gbswimcoaches.co.uk