

Swim TO Stay Safe, Swim Safe

Stay, Play, and Learn at Home Swim: Intermediate to Advanced – Lesson One Part A

Today's Lesson: Front Crawl

[Build your swim terms knowledge base](#)

[Front Crawl Arm Positions and Movement](#)

[Front Crawl Side-to-Side Breathing](#)

[Front Crawl S Pull and Bent Arm](#)

[Let's see how front crawl looks in water](#)

Swim Level: Intermediate-to-Advanced

Learn-to-Swim Levels: Preschool 3 to 4, Ultra 3 to 5, Youth and Adult 2

Safety Reminders: Safety Reminders: Caregivers should ensure that children **are supervised and never left unattended in and around water**. Adults and youth who practice any water activities should, also, **have a buddy close by**. Bathtub and shower **safety measures** should be **adhered to at all times**.

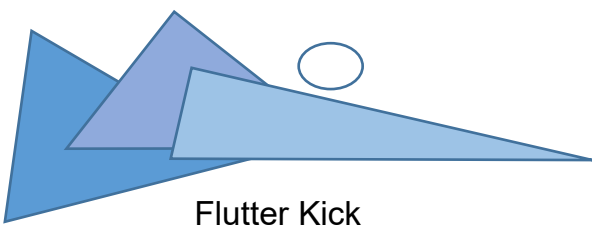
For all skills and drills, ensure that the area is free from obstruction and be aware of objects and people around you at all times. Caregivers should ensure that children are properly supervised at all times.

Remember that movement should be comfortable and should not cause any pain or discomfort in the joints or limbs. If discomfort is felt, please modify the movement so that it is comfortable for you. It is highly recommended to stretch prior to beginning any movement exercises.

Knowledge Goal: Word Challenge

When we say 'swimming' we mean 'movement through water under our own power'. For the most part, if we are in the correct body position the human body will float because it is slightly less dense than water. To actively propel ourselves through water while floating or gliding, swimmers use a variety of techniques generally called 'strokes'.

Look online, choose from our resource page, or create your own word find, crossword or similar word game using some or all of following words



Flutter Kick

Elementary Back

Butterfly

Front Crawl

Breast Stroke

Side Stroke

Back Crawl

Whip Kick

Freestyle

Do you know what all of these strokes are? Do you know which of these strokes are considered competitive strokes? Revisit these words at the end of this lesson and see if you were right.

Swim Goal: Front Crawl Basic Arm Positions and Movement

The fastest of the four most well-known, competitive strokes is front crawl. Swimming in a face down position allows for an easier range of arm movement, so front crawl is generally learned before back crawl.

Swimmers who begin to learn front crawl are most often already comfortable floating, gliding and breathing to the side in water.

To start learning front crawl, we start with practicing the arm movements, focusing on one arm at a time. The goal is to make a large circle with your arms while standing.

How to Start:

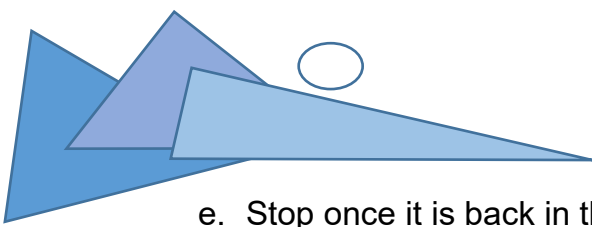
Complete as many activities below that match your comfort, age, and skill level or that of your child's.

Materials:

- An area free from obstructions
- Mat (optional)

Steps:

1. Practice moving each arm in a large circle.
 - a. Start with your right arm and keep your left arm by your side.
 - b. Standing in an area free from obstructions, put your right arm straight up in the air so that your bicep (the top part of your arm above your elbow) is beside your right ear. Use a mat to assist with balance, if desired.
 - c. Begin making a large circle with your right arm by bringing your arm forward and down so that it is at your side and your thumb now touches your hip or top of your thigh.
 - d. Now bring your right arm back to complete the circle, keeping your arm straight.



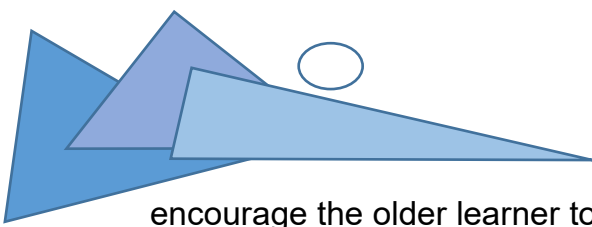
- e. Stop once it is back in the starting position straight up in the air with your bicep beside your ear.
 - f. Switch arms and repeat Steps 1 a-to-e with your left arm.
2. Practice moving both arms in large circles, at the same time.
 - a. Repeat Step 1, moving both arms at the same time, continuously.
 - b. Both arms should be making large circles.
 - c. Ensure that you are brushing your hip or top of the thigh with your thumbs as you pass it.
 3. Practice moving both arms at the same time, in windmill motion.
 - a. Repeat Step 2 except try alternating your arms' positions, so that when one arm is up by your ear, the other one is down by your side.
 - b. Try moving them continuously.
 - c. Ensure that when one arm is up by your ear the other is down by your side, like a windmill.

Progressions:

- Add in proper body positioning: As you alternate your arms, move your body (if you were on the floor, or in water this would be a rolling motion) so that your right hip is more forward when your right arm is up and then your left hip is more forward when your left arm is up.
- Focus on the glide: As you alternate your arms, roll your body so that your right hip is more forward when your right arm is up and then your left hip is more forward when your left arm is up. Each time the arm is fully extended, hold for a count of 3 and then alternate your arm, holding again for a count of 3.
- Repetition is the key to ensuring movements become more ingrained and your body is able to perform them more naturally. Repeat all movements at least 10 times before moving on to the next step or progression.

Variations:

- Make smaller circles that do not come right up to your ear, or bend your elbows slightly if flexibility or mobility of the arms are limited.
- To incorporate a core strength workout for youth and adults:
 - Try on the floor
 - Try balancing on an exercise ball with legs and feet touching the ground, or lifted off the ground.
 - Try balancing with the lower part of your body on the bed and the upper body off the edge of the bed.
- For older children, youth and adults, incorporate some knowledge principles to provide greater understanding. See below for some 'Did You Know?' tips and



encourage the older learner to expand what they know about the science of swimming by visiting the library or looking online.

- Remember that children learn best through play. Use games and songs to encourage children to copy and interact with a caring adult. Some game and song selections are listed below:

Swimmer Simon Says

Age Recommendation: 3 years +

Materials

- An area free from obstructions

Activity

This activity is a copycat game. Swimmer Simon gives a command with an action for a listener to follow.

Designate a Swimmer Simon who will be the leader and give the swim commands to the listener. Swimmer Simon should provide swim commands and demonstrate the action that the listener should listen to and copy, if the correct command form is given. Swim commands generally begin with the words "Simon says" and if Swimmer Simon doesn't start the command with these words the listener should not obey. If the listener obeys incorrectly then switch roles.

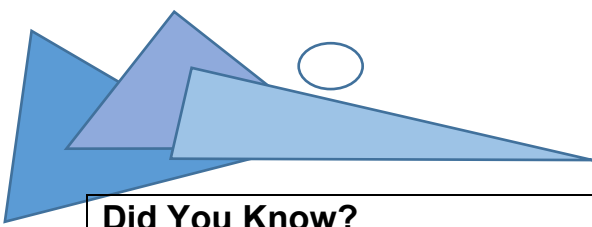
Variations

- Use this game to have a young learner copy an older learner's or teacher's actions as they go through front crawl arm positions until they are able to complete windmill arms.
- If there is more than one listener, eliminate participants if they do not follow correctly until only one listener is left who then becomes Swimmer Simon with a new game.

Tips and Reminders

This activity can be used to teach movements that are easy to demonstrate but harder to describe.

Caregivers should consider being Swimmer Simon to start the game to provide the correct demonstration of the movements being taught.



Did You Know?

The arm movements provide most of the forward motion for front crawl. When your arm is in the water it is working at propelling you forward. If it is behind you, your arm is recovering and getting ready to start working again when it hits the water.

Tips and Reminders

To swim faster, ensure that your arms are always opposite each other so that one arm is working while the other is recovering.

Swim Goal: Front Crawl Side-to-Side Breathing

Side-to-side breathing is an important factor in being able to swim a continuous front crawl. For swimming, building lung capacity and learning breath control comes with practice.

You will find that it is easier to turn your head to one side than the other. It is important to ensure that you practice breathing to both sides to prevent one side from becoming dominant over the other and to keep your body balanced. An imbalanced body will make it more difficult to swim straight.

Side-to-side breathing allows more opportunities to breathe, and more air often translates into faster swimming.

Let's work on building lung capacity, developing breath control and practicing side-to-side breathing.

How to Start:

Complete as many activities below that match your comfort, age, and skill level or that of your child's.

Materials:

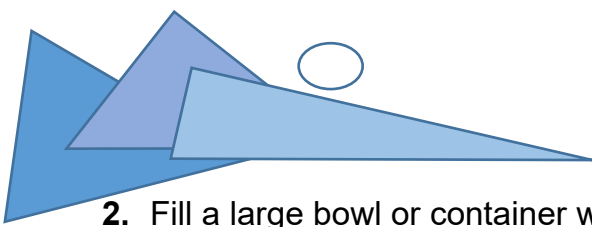
- Large bowl or container
- Water
- Mat or towel

Steps:

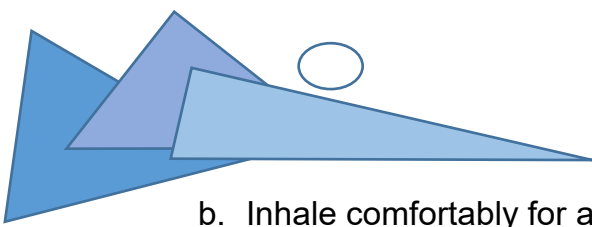
1. This activity involves submerging your head for progressive amounts of time.

Please, follow these important reminders:

- a. Caregivers should ensure that children are supervised at all times and should never be left unattended for all water activities. Adults and youth who practise water activities should, also, have a vigilant buddy close by.
- b. It is not encouraged to hold your breath for periods of more than 10 seconds at a time.



2. Fill a large bowl or container with water and place on a counter. Ensure that the bowl or container is secure by placing a rubber mat or wet towel underneath. The bowl or container should be large enough to put your face in and turn your head side-to-side.
3. Practice putting your face in water and holding your breath for progressive amounts of time.
 - a. Take a breath and put your face into the water.
 - b. Hold your breath for a count of 3 and take your face out. Exhale.
 - c. Take a breath again and this time put your face in and hold your breath for a count of 4 and then take your face out. Exhale.
 - d. Continue steps 3 a-to-c increasing the count until you reach a count of 10.
 - e. Once you get to 10, you can continue the exercise but decrease the number you count to each time until you get down to 3.
4. Practice putting your face in water and exhaling out through your mouth and nose for progressive amounts of time.
 - a. Take a breath and put your face into the water.
 - b. Slowly start blowing bubbles out of your mouth and nose for a count of 3 and then take your face out.
 - c. Exhale any remaining air.
 - d. Take a breath again and this time put your face in and slowly blow bubbles out of your mouth and nose for a count of 4 and then take your face out.
 - e. Exhale any remaining air.
 - f. Continue steps 4 a-to-e increasing the count until you reach a count of 10
 - g. Once you get to 10 you can continue the exercise but decrease the number you count to each time until you get down to 3
5. Practice side-breathing and positioning your head.
 - a. Inhale and put your face in the water. Turn your face to the right so that your chin is pointed towards your right shoulder while keeping your left ear in the water. Exhale. Hold this position with your head turned to the side and your ear in the water for 3 seconds. Inhale.
 - b. Turn your face so that it is back in the water.
 - c. Practice turning to the other side. Turn your face to the left so that your chin is pointed towards your left shoulder while keeping your right ear in the water. Exhale and hold this position for a count of 3. Inhale
 - d. Repeat steps 5 a-to-c to practice.
6. Practice side-breathing, focusing on breathing
 - a. Repeat step 5a but this time practice slowly breathing out (exhaling) all of your air when your face is in the water. When you turn your face to the right side, inhale.



- b. Inhale comfortably for a count of 3 while holding your head position, head turned to the right side, left ear in water.
- c. Turn your face so that it is back in the water and exhale out into the water by slowly blowing bubbles out of your mouth and nose until you feel that you have comfortably exhaled.
- d. Now turn your face to the left so that your chin is pointed towards your left shoulder, keeping your right ear in the water and inhale.
- e. Inhale comfortably for a count of 3.
- f. Repeat steps 6 a-to-e for practice.

Progressions:

- Focus on breath control and building lung capacity.
- Once you are comfortable exhaling in water and inhaling while your head is turned to the side, you can then focus on your head position. It is important to minimize your head movement as much as possible and to keep your ear in the water.
- Ensure that you turn your head to opposite sides each time you breathe.
- When you are comfortable moving your head side-to-side, work on combining breath control and movement.
- Practice combining side-to-side head movement with the arm movements from front crawl.
- Repetition is the key to ensuring movements become more ingrained and your body is able to perform them more naturally. Repeat all movements at least 5 times before moving on to the next step or progression.

Variations:

- Remember that children learn best through play. Use games and songs to encourage children to copy and interact with a caring adult.

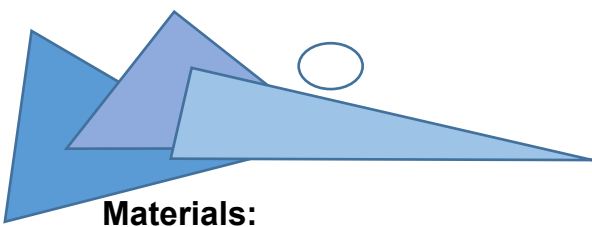
Swim Goal: Front Crawl S Pull and Bent Arm

Now that we have learned the basic arm movement for front crawl, we can introduce the S pull which provides better propulsion through the water.

Front crawl arms are often taught with straight arms first to help master the circular, opposite, windmill arm movement. Once you are comfortable with the basic large circle, we can add in a bent arm while the arm is in its recovery phase out of water. This makes the overall arm movement more comfortable and efficient.

How to Start:

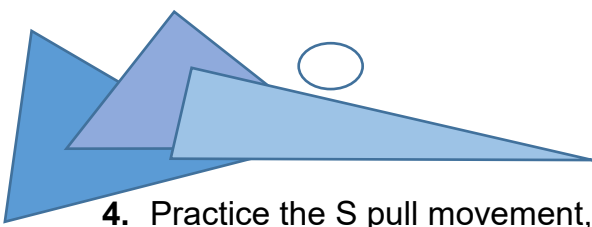
Complete as many activities below that match your comfort, age, and skill level or that of your child's.

**Materials:**

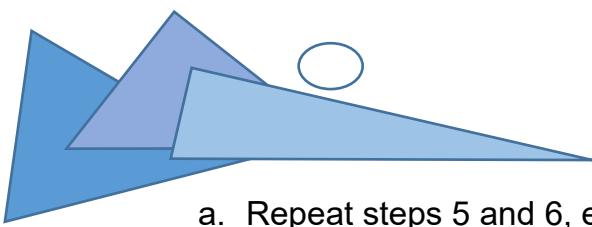
- An area free from obstructions
- Mat (optional)

Steps:

1. Practice the S pull movement with each arm.
 - a. Start with your right arm and keep your left arm by your side.
 - b. Standing in an area free from obstructions, put your right arm straight up in the air so that your bicep (the top part of your arm above your elbow) is beside your right ear. Use a mat to assist with balance, if desired. Relax and allow the right elbow to bend slightly. Keep your left arm down by your side.
 - c. Move your right arm down and at the point where your arm would touch the water, extend your right arm fully, briefly. Continue to move your right arm down, drawing a large S.
 - d. Your hand will move away from your body, palm facing outward to trace the first upper curve of the S then move slightly in front of you as the S curves back, so that the thumb will trace the last part of the S curve along your stomach down to your hip.
 - e. Your arm should now be fully extended down at your side with the thumb touching your hip or the top of your thigh.
 - f. Now bring your right arm back up to complete the circle, keeping the right elbow slightly bent and your hand positioned within shoulder width.
 - g. Stop once it is back in the starting position straight up in the air with your bicep beside your ear.
 - h. Switch arms and repeat Steps 1 a-to-g with your left arm.
2. Practice the S pull movement with both arms, at the same time.
 - a. Repeat Step 1, moving both arms at the same time, continuously.
 - b. Both arms should be making the modified s pull rotation on the way down, when the arm would be in the water, and have a slightly bent elbow on the way up when the arm would be out of the water.
 - c. Ensure that you are brushing your hip or top of the thigh with your thumbs as you pass it.
3. Practice the S pull movement with both arms at the same time, in windmill motion.
 - a. Repeat Step 2 except try alternating your arms' positions, so that when one arm is up by your ear, the other one is down by your side.
 - b. Try moving them continuously.
 - c. Ensure that when one arm is up by your ear the other is down by your side, opposite of each other, like a windmill.



4. Practice the S pull movement, while kneeling.
 - a. Repeat steps 1 to 3 while kneeling. You can rest on your heels or keep your body above your knees straight.
 - b. Repeat steps 1 to 3 while kneeling and leaning slightly forward.
5. Practice the recovery arm movement of front crawl with side breathing:
 - a. While standing, bend at the waist and lean forward as far as you are comfortable doing so, while maintaining your balance.
 - b. Look down at the ground and with your left arm stretched out in front of you so that your bicep is against your ear and the right arm is stretched in the opposite direction so that it is pointing backwards with the thumb by the hip or top of the thigh.
 - c. Turn your face to the right slightly so that you are in the side breathing position and your chin is near your right shoulder.
 - d. Your face still turned to the right, left ear towards the ground, bring your right arm up behind you in the air. Keep your left arm out in front of you with the bicep by the ear.
 - e. When your right arm is straight up, fingers pointing to the sky, bend the right elbow so that your fingers come down near your face and right shoulder.
 - f. Turn your head so that you are looking back down at the floor.
 - g. Now extend your right arm out to meet your left arm. Your left arm should extend to meet your right arm as well. Your hands should be within your shoulder width. In water, this would be a glide position.
6. Practice the S pull, also called the arm pull, movement of the front crawl with side breathing:
 - a. From the glide position of step 5, with both arms' biceps up by your ears, both elbows extended and your head still looking down, begin to move your left arm in the S pull movement. Keep your left arm out in front of you with the bicep by the ear.
 - b. Complete the S pull movement so that your right arm is now fully extended against your side with the thumb touching the hip or top of the thigh, while your left arm is still by the ear.
 - c. You are now in the opposite position as step 5b with your right arm, instead of your left stretched out in front of with the bicep against the ear and the left arm stretched in the opposite direction so that it is pointing backwards with the thumb by the hip or top of the thigh.
 - d. Repeat steps 5 c-to-g on the opposite side.
7. Practice the arm pull and recovery movement, both arms at the same time, in windmill motion, with side breathing:



- a. Repeat steps 5 and 6, ensuring that when arm is down by the side, the other arm is by the ear.
- b. Remember to alternate turning your head from side-to-side
- c. Add in breath exhalations when your face is looking down and breath inhalations when it is turned to the side when you are comfortable.

Progressions:

- The S pull is designed to minimize the energy used to perform front crawl. Work on keeping your arm relaxed when it is out of the water and pulling on the S curve when it is in the water.
- The point when the arm first touches the water after the recovery movement is sometimes called the 'catch' movement. Work on having the hand enter the water between your head and shoulder, within your shoulder width.
- Start with breathing side-to-side on every arm recovery.
- Work towards taking a breath on every third stroke. Remember to turn your head to alternate sides to maintain your body balance.
- Work towards continuous arm movement.
- Repetition is the key to ensuring movements become more ingrained and your body is able to perform them more naturally. Repeat all movements at least 5 times before moving on to the next step or progression.
- Work on keeping your elbows high.

Variations:

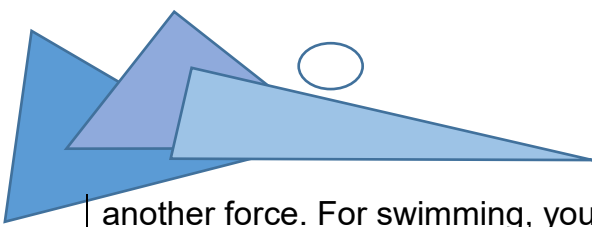
- Remember that children learn best through play. Use games and songs to encourage children to copy and interact with a caring adult.
- For older children, youth and adults, incorporate some knowledge principles to provide greater understanding. See below for some 'Did You Know?' tips and encourage the older learner to expand what they know about the science of swimming by visiting the library or looking online.

Did You Know?

Even with the S pull, front crawl arms are still a circular motion, although a smaller circle than straight arm front crawl. Circular stroke patterns are more effective than back and forth movements because it is a continuous motion and not a stop and start motion.

Tips and Reminders

Understanding the physics of swimming helps you swim faster. For example, the law of inertia states that bodies at rest or in motion stay in that state until acted upon by



another force. For swimming, you need more energy to start a stroke than to keep moving.

Finger Drag Drill

Swim Level Recommendation: Advanced

Materials

- Bathtub
- An area clear of obstructions
- Mat (optional)

Activity

1. Lie on your stomach in the bathtub with some water (or on the floor using a mat or on a bed), slightly on your right side so that you are in the breathing position, with face turned to the right, chin at your right shoulder and your left ear in the water. Your right arm should be by your side with the thumb at the hip or top of the thigh.
2. Your left arm can be up by your left ear, under the water, or wherever is comfortable for you to stabilize.
3. With your right arm, elbow bent, drag your thumb along the side of your body while keeping your fingertips along the surface of the water.
4. Continue dragging your fingers across the top of the water until your right arm is stretched out in front of you, bicep by your ear. It is important to keep your elbow high while doing this.
5. Repeat steps 1 to 4 for practice.
6. Then roll over onto your left side and repeat the exercise, steps 1 to 5.

Progressions

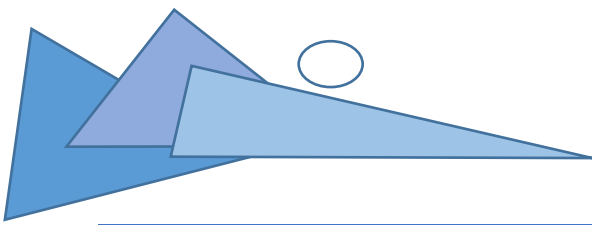
- Work on keeping your elbows high and your fingers as close to the side of your body as possible.
- Focus on relaxing the arm as much as possible.
- Work towards keeping the same arm position as in the drill but with the finger tips about one inch (two and half centimetres) above the water.

Tips and Reminders

This activity is used to teach the proper arm position for the recovery phase of front crawl.

Finger drag is used in drills only as it will slow the front crawl down.

Focus on high elbows with finger tips out of the water to move faster.



Swim Goal: Let's see how front crawl looks in water

Let's put all the steps from above together and review the front crawl stroke and how it would look in the water.

Figure 1 Body and Head Position



The head remains in a neutral position, with hips and feet close to the surface.

The body rotates along the longitudinal (length-wise) axis.

Figure 2 Side-to-Side Breathing



Breathing should be bilateral (using both sides) and rhythmic.

The head should turn to the side, as the body rotates along the longitudinal axis during each strokes

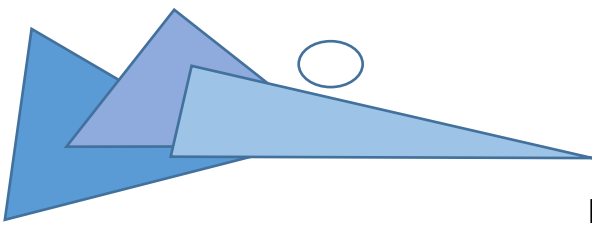


Figure 3 Arm Pull



The forearm of the recovery phase should be close to the surface, with a bent elbow ready to initiate the catch of the pull into the S pull

Ensure that there is a finish of the S pull, where the hand propels the body further with the pull past the hip.

Figure 4 Kicking



The kick is alternating and rhythmic, and originates from the hips.

The kick is small, fast and near the surface of the water.

Continue Lesson 1: Back Crawl and Flutter Kick

Look for our next lesson to learn about back crawl arms and combining front crawl and back crawl arms with flutter kick.

Continue to follow us on the path to learning how to swim.