



HEADLINE/ **10 COMMANDMENTS OF SWIMMING**

Swimming gods from across the country share the top-10 laws for increasing your efficiency in the water

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**COMMANDMENT 1:****Thou Shalt Not Train with Poor Form**

When it comes to swimming, the key word is *quality*, not *quantity*. "Focus primarily on your technique," says Cami Stock, a professional triathlete and multisport coach based in Colorado Springs, Colo. "Endurance, strength and power will come later, but if you don't have the fundamentals down, nothing else matters."

Grant Holicky, an aquatics director and coach in Boulder, Colo., agrees. "This is not a sport in which you can train your way to good," he says. "You have to practice proper technique to improve. It's not how much you are doing but what you are doing."

COMMANDMENT 2:**Thou Shalt Get an Honest Assessment of Thy Stroke**

How can athletes know if they're using proper form? They can hire experts to tell them. "Find yourself a qualified instructor and get your stroke right before you spend hundreds of hours working out and developing bad habits," says Clay Britt, a swim coach and world record-holder in multiple swimming distances who lives in Bethesda, Md. "The cost will be well worth it, in enjoyment of the sport and in your success."

What should your instructor look at? "All the main stroke parameters, such as arm and leg propulsion, streamlining, posture, rhythm, tempo and breathing should be analyzed," says Drew Surinsky, a triathlon, swim and strength coach based in Evanston, Ill. "Ideally, the stroke should be filmed both above and underwater. From there, the coach can recommend drills tailored to the swimmer."

COMMANDMENT 3:**Thou Shalt Take Notice of the Swimmers Who Beat Thee**

If a gifted swimmer blows past you, do not get jealous—get attentive. "Watch the fast swimmers," says Anna Scott, a swim coach and instructor in Boulder, Colo. "They are not all perfect, but they're faster than you, they are doing something you can learn from."

Of course, there are a few caveats. "When you pick the good swimmers—this usually means watching the kids that swim on the swim team, not the adults in the lap lane who may have bad habits from years and years ago," says Earl Felt, a triathlon coach in New York City. "Ask your swim-team coach who has a great freestyle stroke to spend a few minutes watching what he does in the water and try to replicate his stroke."

COMMANDMENT 4:**Thou Shalt Not Decelerate**

If you've ever been kayaking, you know that as you complete a paddle stroke on one side, you should immediately begin a paddle stroke on the opposite side. Doing this keeps your kayak moving forward and minimizes deceleration. When you swim, the same idea applies. "Learn to maintain your reach—your arm's extension and entry into the water—and precisely time the catch at the end of the propulsion phase of the pull," says Marc Evans, a San Francisco, Calif. swimming coach, author and inventor of Speedo swimming products. "In other words, there should be little, if any, deceleration and gliding."

COMMANDMENT 7:**Thou Shalt Wean Thyself From Toys**

If you can't complete a set without your kickboard or you feel naked without your paddles, that just might be a sign you've been relying on them too much. "Use toys for no more than 25 percent of any given workout," says Paul Huddle, a swim coach based in Encinitas, Calif. "I don't care if your legs are tired or if you are going to be wearing a wetsuit in all of your competitive swims. Swimming with toys isn't swimming; it's swimming with toys."

Yes, training gear has its proper place in the swim world, but that place shouldn't be front and center. "Don't rely on equipment to make you go fast for long distances all the time," Scott says. "They can be useful for training and learning technique, but they are often used as a crutch to go fast in workouts when you're tired."

COMMANDMENT 8:**Thou Shalt Not Fear Open Water**

Easier said than done, right? But our experts swear it's possible. "It's difficult for some people to not be able to see below themselves in the water," says Steven Munatones, an open-water swimming coach based in Huntington Beach, Calif. "They can overcome that fear by simply not looking down, closing their eyes when their face is in the water, opening their eyes and enjoying the scenery when they breathe, or swimming backstroke or head-up freestyle when they get nervous."

Another potentially scary element of open-water swimming is the crowds; Surinsky feels your pain but swears you can still take control of the situation. "It's impossible to predict every possibility, but it's smart to prepare for things that can be anticipated," he says. "Learn to use your arms as antennae and as fences... look around above water and don't put your head down without knowing where your neighbor's legs are."

COMMANDMENT 9:**Thou Shalt Not Show Up for an Event Unprepared**

"Plan out every aspect of your race and prepare, prepare, prepare," Britt says. "Don't wait to get to the race to discover that your only pair of goggles just broke or you don't know how to go off a block or you've never done an open-water start and haven't mentally prepared for the chaos. Practice mental imagery of the race and how you want to swim and how you will respond to something going wrong."

COMMANDMENT 10:**Thou Shalt Have Patience**

Remember, swimming is different than running and biking—it requires a solid technical base before your speed can improve. Simply exerting more effort will just wear you out. "Swimming works under different rules than what you're used to," Surinsky says. "I often work with accomplished athletes who are accustomed to mastering new skills quickly, and they get frustrated at how difficult swimming is. In the beginning, it's better to approach swimming as more of an art than a sport. And remember, before you can be good, you have to be bad for a while. But before you can even be bad, you have to try." ■