INTRODUCTION TO SYNCHRONISED SWIMMING

Synchronised Swimming used to be known as 'water ballet' and this is a good starting point to see the sport because routines are essentially athletic movements performed in water and choreographed to music.

However, Synchronised Swimming is also a very strenuous and skillful sport because competitors need strength and flexibility to perform the routines, as well as rhythm and flair to synchronise and interpret the music.

Synchronised Swimming is open to both male and female athletes but it is a sport dominated by women, mainly because the Olympic and World Championship competitions are not open to men.

Athletes perform routines that can be anything from two and a half minutes to five minutes long, depending on whether they perform alone or part of a team. The routines are made up of certain movements that are performed using certain basic positions.

Approximately two thirds of a synchronized swimming routine is performed under water.

Synchronised swimming is based on a number of basic positions and transitions. These include the obvious ones, such as performing a figure on the front or back or from a vertical position, to the more technical ones such as the flamingo position, where one leg is straight and the other is bent in the same kind of shape as a flamingo, hence the name!

There are also certain movements that swimmers can perform in many different ways, so for example a swimmer can spin in the water but this can be spinning 180degrees or moving their entire body for one rotation (360 degrees).

Or with the Flamingo position there is a way to move the leg into the bend position and a way to get out of the move

Positions and movements

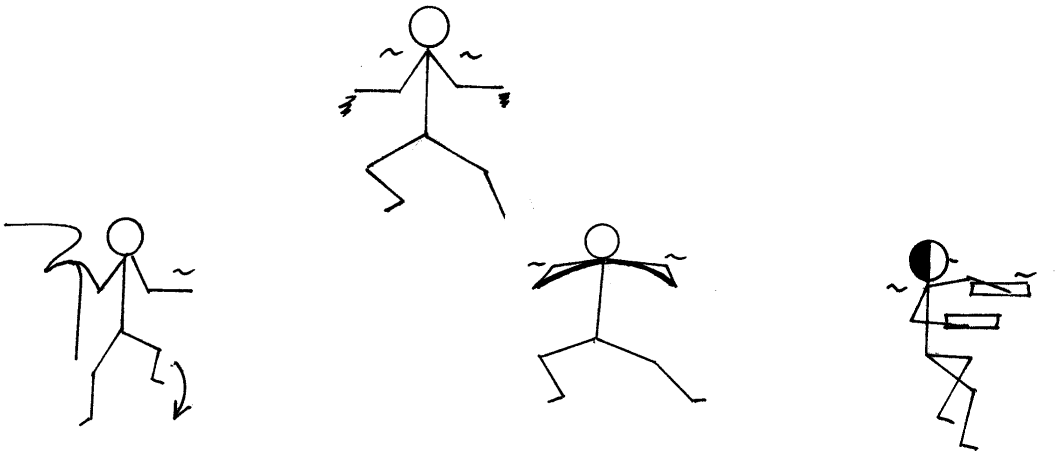
Eggbeater Leg Kick

Treading water allows you to perform arm actions out of the water. Using flutter kick, breaststroke or cycling actions do not provide continuous pressure to the bottom of the pool.

Eggbeater leg kick provides continuous downward pressure.

Key Points

- get upright with the back straight and the head as high as possible out of the water
- thighs pulled up towards the body and the knees very wide
- keep the thighs relatively still and make the action come from the knees
- flex the feet by pulling them up towards the shins
- circle the shins rotating them alternately inwards
- imagine you are drawing circles on the bottom of the pool with the soles of the feet



Synchro Strokes

All swimming strokes can be adapted for Synchro. They are adapted for visual effect, for variety within routines and in many cases, to allow the swimmers to have visual contact with each other. In all strokes the legs provide the major propulsive force and the arms are adapted for the visual effect

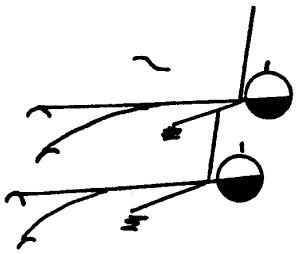
Back crawl

Key Points

- angle the body so the legs are lower than usual and the ears are just out of the water.
- long legs kicking under the water with no splash!
- lift the little finger out of the water
- put the little finger in the water first
- as little splash as possible with the arms

Try the following arm shapes

or



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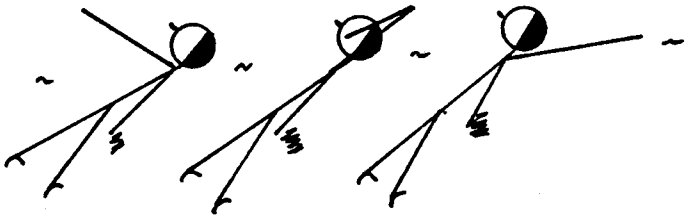
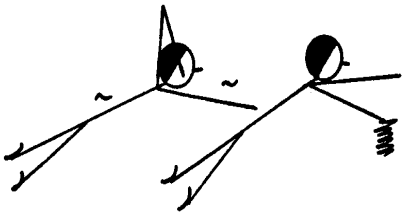


Front Crawl

Key points

- angle the body so the legs are lower
- keep the legs down – normal front crawl kick but no splash
- keep the shoulders square to the direction of travel
- keep the shoulders back and the chin dry

Try the following arm actions



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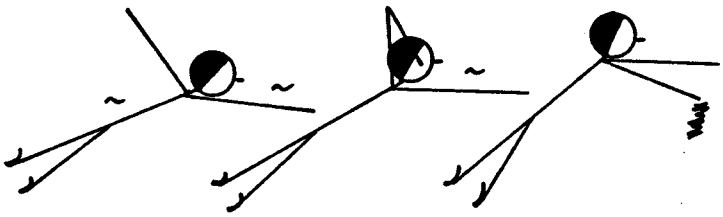

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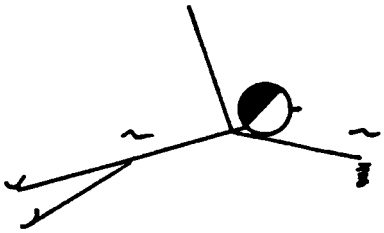
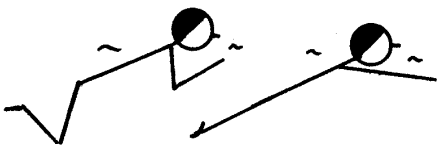


Breaststroke

Key Points

- angle the body
- keep the legs down and the kick very smooth
- keep the shoulders back and the chin dry.

Try the following arm movements



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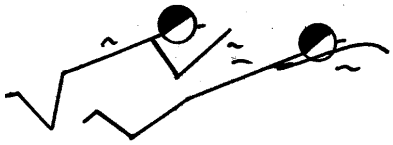
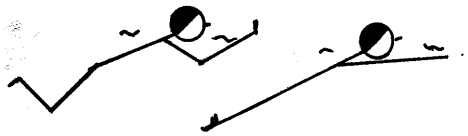


Or push the water forward



Practices for Strokes

The following practices can be adapted for any of the strokes

- leg actions can be practised using any leg practices for the ‘normal’ swimming strokes. Remember to keep the body position at a slightly greater angle and keep the legs down so there is no splash.

Arm actions

- keep in time with the modelling of the teacher (remember teachers to use the same arm as the swimmers. If they are using their right arm you should be using your left)
- use one arm practices for front and back crawl. Support the other arm with a float.
- keep in time with the beat of the music and the teacher’s demonstration. (music ideas later).
- work with a partner – try to keep in time – use the same arm at the same time.
- work in different relationships with your partner. Try these

```
X X     X     X
        X       X
```

- work with your partner changing from one pattern to another
- work with your partner trying to change the pattern of the arms over the water. What different shapes can you make?
- work with your partner changing from one stroke to another. How can you change smoothly from one stroke to another? Can you change at the same time as your partner? Are you changing in the same direction?
- work in a larger group. Use the same arms at the same time. Can you make different patterns in the water? Can you change from one stroke to another? Can you change from one pattern to another?

Try some of these patterns for 4 swimmers. Can you find others?

```
X  X       X       X  X  X  X       X     X     X
X  X     X   X                      X       X     X
                                    X
                                    X
```

Or these more difficult shapes

```
X         X           X X      X X     X X X
X          X           X X       X       X
X X           X                  X
                X
```

- practice changing from one pattern to another. Do all the swimmers have to move? Which patterns follow on easily?
- practice pattern changes on land. Try using spoons/coloured discs or coloured sweets to represent the individual swimmers. The different colours help to follow the individual swimmer through the pattern changes.
- put the routine to music. Allow time in each pattern so the 'audience' can see the patterns clearly.

Sculling

Sculling is both the basis of all swimming strokes as well as all Synchro skills.

Key points

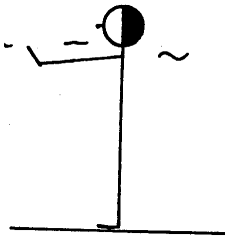
- start with curved shaped hands.
- keep the fingers together.
- press the hands away from and towards the centre line of the body.
- press out and in evenly. Turn the palms out on the outward scull and in on the inward scull. An angle of about 40 degrees will give the best lift.
- scull using the whole arms.
- keep the wrists firm.
- set and maintain a regular rhythm.
- use constant, even pressure on the inward and outward movements.

To remain stationary keep the palms flat to the bottom of the pool.
To travel backwards turn the fingers up so the palms face towards the feet.
To travel feet first, turn the fingers down so the palms face towards the head.

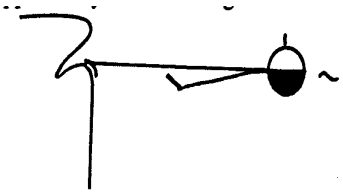
Trying using the sculling action using the following hand and body positions.

Some basic practices

- standing in the water. Keep the hands under water and try not to make a splash.

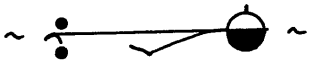


- with the feet supported by the rail or trough.



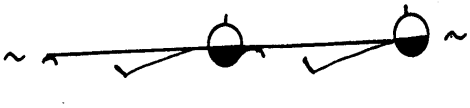
- with the feet gently kicking.

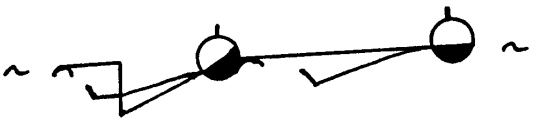
- with the feet supported by a pull buoy



Some fun practices

- tug of war
- boat races
- boat races but with some added resistance.
- pushing a partner across the pool.





Some simple skills

These simple skills in Synchro terms are called figures. They are used in figure competitions or are integrated with the strokes to choreograph a routine. They require sculling or scooping techniques.

Tub

Key points

- start flat at the surface, head back, hips and feet pushed up. Use a sculling action with the hands flat to the bottom of the pool.
- draw the shins along the surface until the knees are above the hips. Let the hips sink. Keep the head back and the ears wet! Keep the hands flat sculling.
- push the feet around the body. Rotate with the hips acting as the pivot point.
- rotate all the way round.
- extend the legs back to the extended position.
- use sculling actions throughout.

Back Tucked Somersault

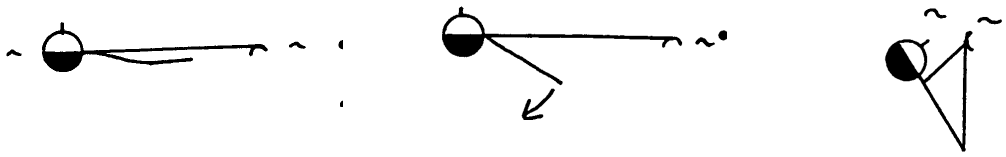
Key points

- start flat at the surface, head back, hips and feet pushed up. Use a sculling action with the hands flat to the bottom of the pool.
- draw the shins along the surface pulling the knees right into the chest. Keep the hands sculling by the sides of the body.
- keep the body in a tight tuck, press down on the hands and imagine the arms are turning a skipping rope forward. Rotate the body backwards.
- rotate all the way over until back in a tucked position at the surface.
- extend the legs back to a fully stretched position.

Oyster

Key points

- start in a fully stretched back layout position.
- press down on the hands and over the head (like a butterfly arm action).
- as the hands leave the water bend sharply at the waist and lift the legs into a very close piked position.
- sink with the legs vertical and with the hands touching the lower legs.



Bent knee

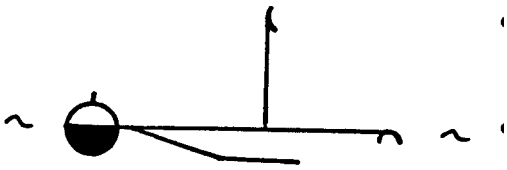
Key points

- this is easier performed travelling head first (sculling with the fingers pointing up).
- lift the knee and keep the big toe in contact with the horizontal leg.
- keep the head back and keep the ears wet.
- keep the hands sculling very hard.

Ballet Leg

Key points

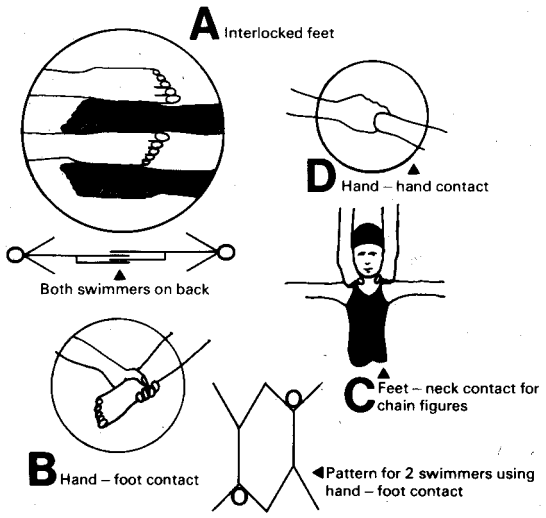
- this is also easier travelling head first
- from the bent knee position lift the foot up to the surface
- keep the head pressed back in the water
- keep the hands sculling very hard. It will help if you bend the elbows a little bit.



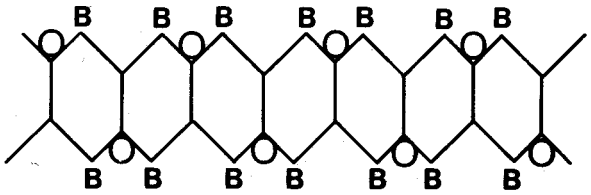
Floating Patterns

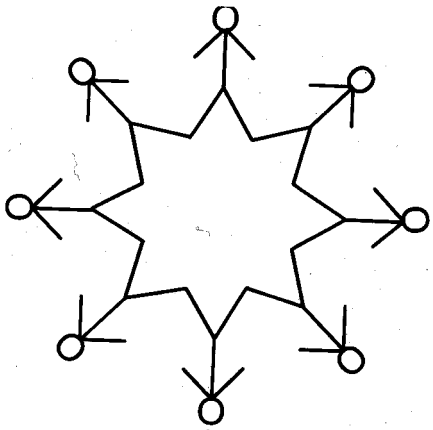
Floating patterns are another aspect of routine work. They can be integrated with the strokes and figures to form routines. Before attempting group patterns, different ways of linking with and supporting partners should be tried. Swimmers must always try to support each other. To do this, excessive downward pressure should be avoided. Grips are best made from underneath with the pressure being exerted upwards.

These are some of the grips you can try



Try these patterns. The letters show where each grip should be used.





Try to find other patterns that use more of the different grips

Use of music

To play music you will need a licence. You must always use equipment that is run on batteries. It should be as far away from the water as possible and should only be operated by the teacher or by someone specifically designated. It is essential that this person has dry hands!

Pre-recorded music must be used unless you have a licence from the ASA to cut and record music.

When choosing music for routines it helps if you select music that has a regular beat that you and the swimmers can count. Try to count it in regular 8s. Much of the 60's music has this regular beat and regular phrasing. This helps the swimmers to remember and repeat their sequences. It also helps if the swimmers like the music as they will have to listen to it many times.

Further information

Books
Introduction to Teaching Synchronised Swimming available from the Amateur Swimming Association. This gives additional information on the teaching of these, as well as additional skills.

Website

The ASA website, www.britishswimming.org provides information on teaching courses for synchronised swimming.