

OPEN WATER PRACTICE GUIDELINES & CHECKLIST FOR SCS COACHES AND CLUBS

CHECKLIST ITEM	GUIDANCE & CONSIDERATIONS
SAFETY	<p>Safety is the #1 consideration for any open water swim or practice. Athletes should know how to tread water and float on their back in deep water for self-rescue purposes while waiting for assistance.</p> <p>Athletes should always swim with a Buddy, even in a coached open water practice. If this is not possible, either have someone on the shore observing with binoculars, or swim within sight of the lifeguards. Athletes can also wear a personal safety buoy to be more easily visible to others including paddlers and boaters.</p> <p>Sighting landmarks and swimming in a straight line in open water are important skills to practice. Sighting can be in all four directions – to both sides and to the back, in addition to the front.</p> <p>Remember to bring a water bottle, electrolyte replacement (Gatorade, Powerade, etc.), gels/bars/food, extra towels, and warm clothes (to the starting point or to leave in the car).</p>
PLANNING	<p>Visit the body of water in advance to observe the venue, key landmarks, parking/drop-off availability, bathroom/shower situation, actual swimming area, and any safety considerations (surf/swells, current/tides, boats, surfers/paddle boards, marine life, etc.).</p> <p>Note that amenities and landmarks can change from year to year, or even during the same season, especially with rain, flooding, fires, run-off, and any current state, county, and local public health restrictions.</p> <p>Using Google Earth (or other mapping site), create a “map” of the open water venue and proposed swim practice course with distances and landmarks.</p> <p>Check the local water quality website for recent/current status. Water quality should be “safe for recreational swimming or bathing”. Note that swimming in open water venues (ocean, lake) should be avoided for 48 to 72 hours following a heavy rain.</p> <p>Check the water temperature. Depending on temperature and preference, athletes might want to wear a wetsuit. Be aware of any swimmer limitations in cold water and signs/symptoms of hypothermia.</p> <p>Review state/county/city/local “active use” guidelines and other local public health orders in place if applicable.</p> <p>Review the guidance from USA Swimming entitled “Safety Management for Open Water Workouts” and “Structuring Your Open Water Workout.”</p> <p>Assign coaches and safety paddlers/parents to each open water session. The Coach to Athlete Ratio can be varied according to ages and open water ability of athletes. <i>Note that USA Swimming does not mandate a specific Coach to Athlete Ratio for Open Water Practices.</i></p>

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PLANNING CONTINUED...	Assign athletes to groups/sessions. Consider having no more than 10-12 athletes per group or session for safety purposes. Athletes can be organized according to comfort and experience in open water.
	Have a meeting or conference call/virtual meeting with all coaches, athletes, and parents in advance to review process and procedures for open water practices including safety considerations.
	Write the practice sets for the swim course venue in advance with flexibility in mind. Depending on the buoy and paddler situation, may need to use landmarks on the beach, pier, jetty, parking lot, and surrounding land areas to set the course.
	Arrange to bring warm water, food, extra towels/blankets to the practice.
AT PRACTICE	Notify the lifeguards on duty about your open water practice and safety plans.
	Take ROLL . Be sure to count swimmers at all times throughout the practice session.
	Review swim course, warm-up/practice plan/sets, and safety procedures on land, BEFORE entering water.
	Ensure DIRECT line-of-sight by coaches to all athletes at all times. Coaches can best supervise out on the water. Assign positions of safety persons – paddlers on water, and persons on beach/land.
	Have FUN! Remember to COUNT swimmers.
	Depending on water temperature and conditions, total practice time may be shorter than planned.
	Ensure ALL swimmers have EXITED the water safely and are accounted for.
POST PRACTICE	Evaluate the practice: what went well, what to do differently next time, and any lessons learned. Revise and update the plan for next open water practice(s).
	Find additional venues for open water practices as state/county/local public health guidelines and local conditions change.
RESOURCES	USA Swimming Open Water Information: https://www.usaswimming.org/swimmers-parents/swimmers/open-water#education