

Starting Tips



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A start not only begins the race, but often sets the tone for it, especially during shorter distances where a well-executed start is not just helpful, but often necessary for winning. But don't let the starting blocks intimidate you. A well-prepared swimmer can learn to combine speed and power for a perfect start with a little practice. According to coach Steve Bultman, head coach of Texas A&M's women's swimming team, the most important aspects of a start to master are reaction time, power and entry.

1. Getting off the block quickly, but without false starting can be tricky. Luckily, the best way to a fast reaction is practice. Try getting in position to start, but instead of jumping at the sound of the beep, clap your hands together. This or other reflex-type drills help develop the speed that can be carried into the real thing. After several rounds of clap-starting, begin performing starts, responding to the beep as quickly as possible. Track starts (one foot forward, one back) are often considered the fastest starts, while grab starts (both feet forward) tend to be known for their power. Either one can be very effective if preformed well.
2. While speed is important, it's really the swimmer who reaches the 15 meter mark first that has accomplished the most. This requires power as well as speed. A strong start initiates from the arms. Grip the edge of the block and then use the arms to launch forward and out. As the arms move, use your feet to push away from the block and towards the water. Both feet push at the same time in grab starts. In track starts, the back foot pushes first and then the front. Swimmers can work on developing strength with jumping exercises. Try jumping onto and off different levels of bench or boxes (be sure to do jumping under supervision).
3. Finally, a clean entry marks the end of a good start. Use the momentum of the push-off to enter the water streamlined with chin tucked and one hand over the other; even toes are pointed. Swimmers should focus on entering the water through as small a hole as possible. Swimmers struggling with a wide or inefficient entry can practice by diving through a hula hoop held on the surface of the water or by diving over a pole held at the block's level, just away from the swimmer.