



Why count strokes?

By Kevin Koskella, TriSwim Coach

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You may have had coaches that made you count strokes throughout the workout, either by mixing it into drill sets, the main set, or at the end of a workout. As a coach of distance swimmers and triathletes, I believe stroke-counting is a necessary part of most swimming workouts.

What stroke-counting can do for you

If you stick with it and do it on a consistent basis, stroke-counting in swimming is an excellent way to increase your DPS (Distance Per Stroke). The world's best swimmers are faster than you because they travel further with each stroke, not because they are moving their arms faster.

Keeping track of the number of strokes you take per length will allow you to begin to lengthen out your stroke, as well as add more speed and distance while keeping your heart rate down and allowing you to save your energy for later in the swim or race.

Finding your target stroke count

The goal should be to bring down your average stroke count per length. Great swimmers like Alexander Popov or Ian Thorpe may be able to scoot through the water at record speed while taking 30 strokes per length (50 meters), but this low stroke count does not have to be your golden number for improving your stroke.

First, determine what your range is. Try to swim most of the time at the low end of your range or below your lowest stroke count. Don't worry about speed at first- you can influence this later, perhaps as you begin to learn what your "ideal" stroke count is.

Here is an example of a set that can help lengthen your stroke, as well as build endurance:

- Do a set with yard distances of 50+100+150+200+200+150+100+50
- Take 10-30 seconds between swims
- Count your strokes each length on the way up
- Try to maintain or lower your stroke count on the way down while keeping the same pace

Another fun set that you can play with is free golf. For example: 6x50's Free on 1:05. For each 50, count your strokes AND check your time. Add these 2 numbers together to get your golf score. Try to lower this score through the set. The tricky part is, trying to add speed without adding strokes, or subtracting strokes without sacrificing speed.

Consistently incorporating stroke-counting into your workouts will, over time, help you to swim longer (or "taller") in the water, and use less energy to go the same speed or even faster. And for those that don't consider swimming to be their strength in a triathlon, this saved energy is sure to translate into a better bike and run!

Kevin operates the Web site www.triswimcoach.com, a resource for beginning through intermediate level