

POOL ETTIQUETTE

As you may have noticed, the Masters program at the Y has grown considerably, and this is great! A robust program will make everyone a better swimmer for a variety of reasons, but even with our ability to use the whole pool Tuesday and Thursday, 6-7 people to a lane requires good pool etiquette to make the program work. Swim etiquette in a Masters program, is a little more complicated than solo swimming during open lap time and it brings up an entirely new set of guidelines and rules to swim, and live, by. The likelihood of "lane rage" (an even more violent and sudden variation on "road rage") is multiplied exponentially by the number of swimmers in a lane, so masters swimmers take heed!

Lesson #1: Choose the right lane

First off, choose a lane that suits your speed, rather than the one's where your friends are swimming. If you are constantly bringing up the rear in your lane's pecking order of interval send-offs; please find another lane! This isn't as problematic when it's a set of 50's, but on longer sets it slows down everyone behind you, and eventually those who started ahead of you, if you are slow enough to get lapped. We try our best to tailor the workout to each lane so that the speeds and distances are challenging but not unrealistic, and so that people get to work on a variety of strokes. If you find that you are a "tweener", it's ok to hang on to faster people sometimes, or to throw on the fins during a challenging set if you think afraid you will hold others up. You can still get a good workout in a slower lane by descending your sets and then enjoying the rest at the end of your interval. But don't be afraid to move up a lane if you think you are ready, or are feeling good that day. Check with the coach before you move so she/he can determine if this is the right move on that day. A couple of other things to remember:

- Allow others to lead the lane occasionally – even if they are slower. This develops a nice collaborative feel in your lane. Often one person will be a better kicker, or better at backstroke (for instance) even if they generally bring up the rear, so allow this person to lead the lane on that type of set.
- If you are leading the lane, you'd better know how to read the clock! Being good at counting is a plus, too. I know some of you have trouble reading the clock without your glasses and prefer to use your watch, but you need to synch your watch with the pace clock, or do not take the lead. It's unrealistic to expect everyone in the lane to go on your watch.
- Everyone should be allowed time to read the workout. When you are always 4th in line and have to keep saying "what's next?" – you might be missing valuable pieces of the workout. Between the warm up and the main set it's a good time for everyone to review the workout and get a general idea of the pattern and where the sets break (i.e., 5 descending hundreds followed by stroke work, etc ...)
- The traditional interval between swimmers is 5 seconds. If everyone in the lane is fairly evenly paced, each person should go 5 seconds apart. If a slower swimmer is leading the lane, allow 10 seconds between swimmers. No one likes to have someone constantly swimming up on them.

I'm not a huge fan of passing – don't really see much reason to be passing people for most of the swimming we do. These are swim practices, not races. But sometimes, especially on longer sets, the need to pass arises. Here's what to do in that instance:

Lesson #2: Passing

If you find yourself behind someone slower than you are, tap them on the foot and see if they slow down. If they do not, wait until the next break in your set to move ahead of them, but ask politely (swimmers are a sensitive bunch, and an apologetic "I feel really good today, do you mind if I go first?" is a lot more effective than "You're holding me up, so let me go ahead of you!")

If you must risk passing someone mid-lane, do so at your own risk, but watch for oncoming swimmers. Do not keep tapping them on the foot, or plow over them like a tractor.

Conversely, if you feel yourself being tapped on the foot, the proper thing to do is move to the right and slow down. Do not start kicking as hard as you can in an attempt to drown your lane-mate in whitewater.

If the pace is a little fast for you during a particular set and you need to "sit out" a 50, pull over at the END of the lane and pull to the right, as most swimmers will cut to the left at the wall for their turn or finish. Most everyone I've seen at masters is good at getting out of the way if they need to.

Lesson #3: Don't be a ...

Don't become a "Drag Queen," a derogatory term in swimming circles (non-gender specific), describing someone who drags/drafts off of a slightly faster swimmer by swimming directly behind them and continuously tapping their feet but not offering to take their spot. Sometimes dragging (or paceline) is part of the workout, but if you find yourself swimming up on someone (pay attention), be sure you are leaving at least 5 -10 seconds behind them.

Lesson #4: Joining the class already in session/starting early

If you arrive late to masters, find out where everyone in your lane is and join the warm up (or main set) at the same place everyone else is, rather than starting from the beginning. True, you will have missed the early part of the warm up, but you can't ask everyone else to hold up for you, and it's chaos in the lane if everyone isn't doing the same thing.

By the same token, some of you like to get in the pool early and get an extra long warm up, or sometimes you want/need to leave early, so you get to the pool early to get an hour in. In either case, you still need to start at the beginning of the warm up with everyone else and get as much done as you have time for. Again, in order to maintain order in the lanes, everyone must be working on the same thing.

I've actually seen people come to masters with their own workout (from another coach), or have had athletes show up who are tired from a race and tell me they just want to "swim easy". Again, it's important to understand your surroundings and be considerate of those who came to do masters. Either the masters' workout is not going to work for you that day and you need to swim at another time, or if that's the only time you can swim, you need to try to do as much of the masters' workout as you can (moving down a lane if necessary).

Thanks for understanding and please let me know if you have any questions.