

2.5 Breaststroke

At the end of this section you should have a clear understanding of:

What to teach in breaststroke:-

- The technique of the stroke.
- The common faults in the breaststroke.
- The corrections for the main faults in breaststroke.

How to teach the breaststroke:-

- The technique of the breaststroke to inform explanations and demonstrations of the breaststroke.
- Suitable activities to introduce and develop the breaststroke related to pupil ability.
- The sequencing of practices to introduce and develop the breaststroke.

There is a wide selection of practices for the stroke. The focus is on a range of practices that will cover levels of ability from complete beginner to more able swimmer and provide adequate material to avoid boredom. Guidance is given on the suitability of different practices for different levels of ability – when to use them.

**Practice makes perfect - but
only if you are practicing
the correct thing !
Practice also makes permanent
- and that also applies
if you are doing the incorrect
technique**

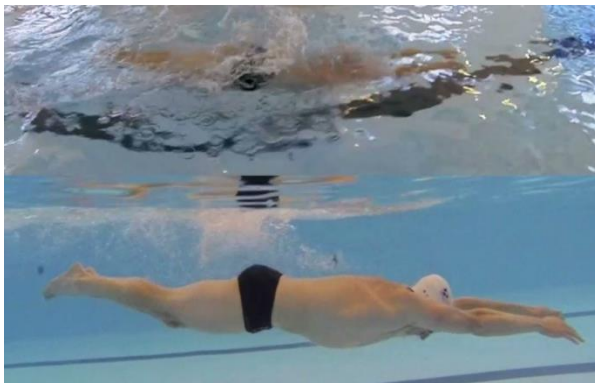
Question 1: What happens if a learner keeps repeating widths, with a float, practicing the leg kick with the feet in the wrong position?

2.5.1 Stroke Technique



Breaststroke is the slowest of the four main strokes due to the forward breathing position, the slightly more angled body position, the underwater arm recovery and the resistance created by the thigh on the leg recovery.

Body Position



The body position is **prone / lying of the front**. It should show the following features:

- **slightly angled / inclined from the head to the feet** (to allow for forward breathing and to allow the leg action to take place in the water).
- **head steady** with minimum flexion/extension of the neck.
- shoulders parallel to the water surface.



Leg Action

In breaststroke the legs make a major contribution to propulsion (more so than the leg kick in the other strokes). The legs kick simultaneously and in the same horizontal plane i.e. they are at the same level as each other. This kick has a narrow circular, backward driving action. This is now accepted as the efficient action concentrating on applying force backward in the slightly circular movement of the legs. This is the version, which is commonly used by competitive swimmers.

The former version of the kick, known as the 'wedge kick,' was much wider and more circular in pattern and had greater outward and inward components to it, which made it less efficient. It was however slow but less demanding to perform and more relaxing for the user, hence can still be seen in recreational swimming, particularly amongst the older generation, where the head is often held clear of the water.

The kick can be broken into a **recovery phase**, i.e. the bending up of the legs ready to kick, and a **propulsive phase**, i.e., the extension backward of the legs and feet.

The Recovery Phase

From the extended position with the legs in line behind the body:-

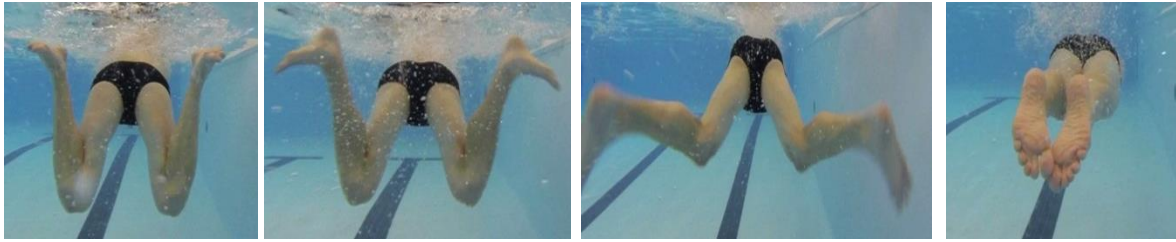
- as the hips drop slightly, the **legs bend drawing the heels towards the seat**.
- do not to drop the knees too low or draw them under the body (resistance).
- the legs part as they bend until **knees are hip width or slightly wider** apart.
- at the end of the recovery the **lower legs are vertical** and the angle between the trunk and the thigh should be about 130 degrees.
- at the end of the recovery phase the feet are **dorsi-flexed (flat) and turned out**.



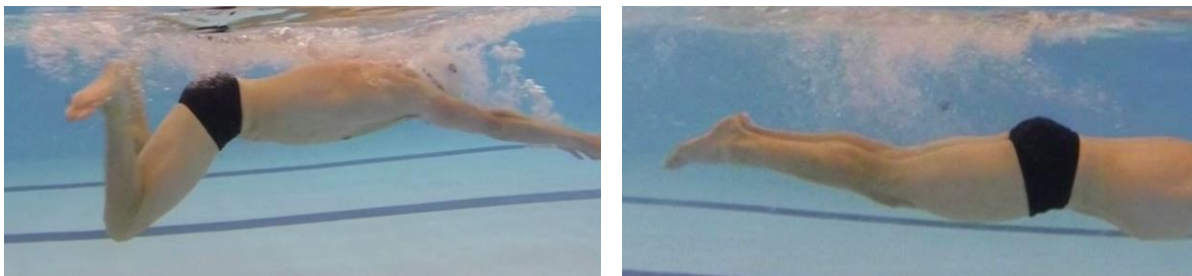
Propulsive Phase

In the propulsive phase:

- the feet are driven back by the **vigorous extension of the knee and hip joints**.
- the dorsi flexed / turned out feet **sweep back and round towards each other** (there is a slight downwards sweep which helps to raise the hips into a streamlined body position).



- the **feet come together** as the legs complete their extension.
- the ankle should be **plantar flexed (pointed toes) at the end** of the kick.
- the feet should **accelerate throughout the kick** (avoid legs 'drifting' together).



Question 2: List 3 key points of technique in the breaststroke leg kick for the **inexperienced** swimmer, new to the breaststroke.

1.

2.

3.

What help (points of technique) would you give a more able swimmer who already has a **legal** kick (i.e. their feet are turned out and flat as they kick back) **but not very effective** kick in order to improve / strengthen their kick.

1.

2.

3.

Arm Action

The arm action can be divided into a propulsive and recovery stage. As with the other strokes the propulsive phase can be divided into a series of sweeping actions. Both arms move at the same time and on the same horizontal plane.

Propulsive phase

The propulsive stage commences in the extended position in front of the body at a depth of about 6 inches / 15 – 20 cms.

Outsweep to **catch**

- the hands are turned so that the palms face diagonally outwards.
- the propulsive phase starts with the arms sweeping out and slightly down.
- the arms are kept straight.
- the movement is like reverse lobster scull.
- the 'catch' point is at about shoulder width and about 6 inches below the water surface (where then can begin to feel pressure on the water).

Downsweep

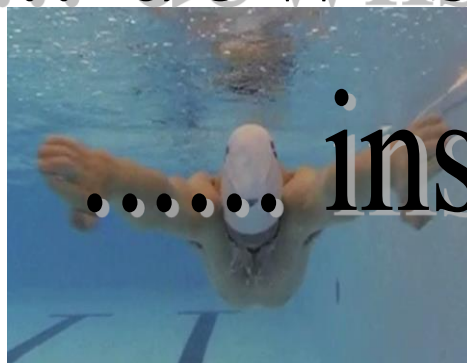
- the next sweep is downwards and slightly outwards.
- as the arm moves in this downward and outward sweep the elbow bend increases.
- the elbows remain 'high' (putting the hands in a position to apply force backward).

Insweep

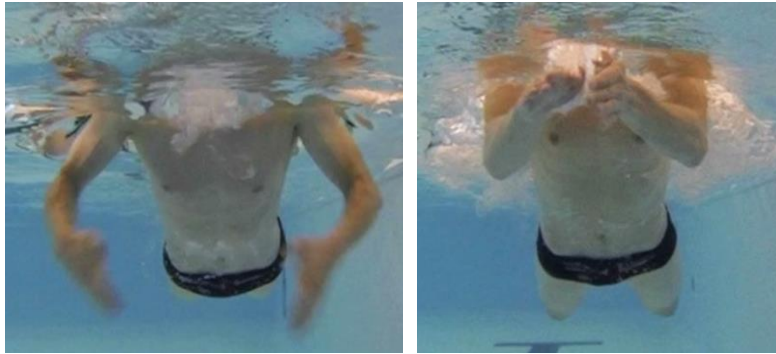
- as the arms approach shoulder level the hands begin to sweep inwards.
- the palms of the hands face slightly inwards.
- the hands move in towards each other / towards the chin in a sculling type movement.
- the elbows follow in towards the body.
- the hands should accelerate throughout the propulsive phase / throughout all the sweeps.

..... outswEEP

..... downswEEP



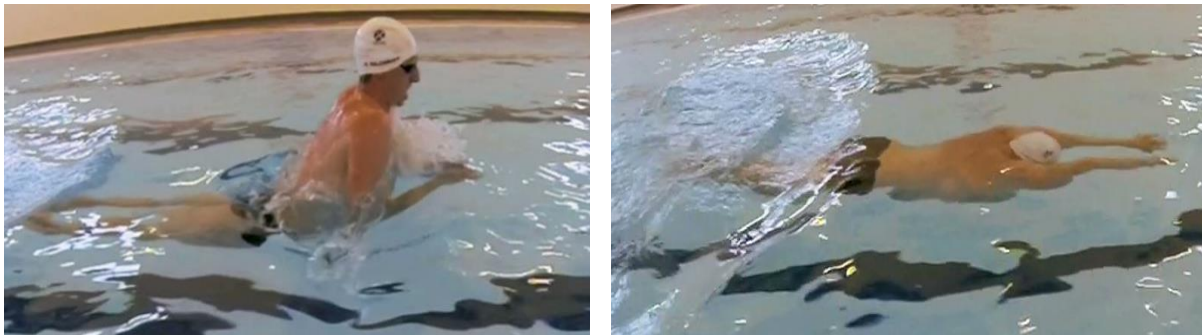
..... inswEEP



Recovery phase

In the recovery:-

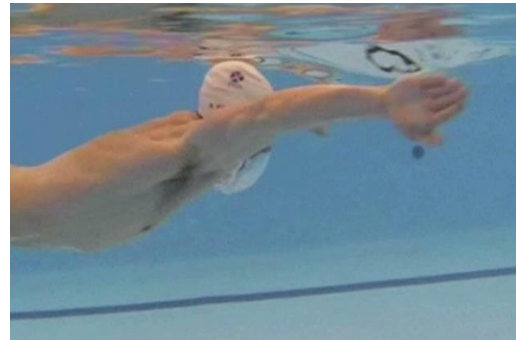
- the arms **extend forwards** underneath the water surface.
- the **fingertips lead** the arms forward.
- the **palms face down and slightly out** to minimise resistance.
- the arms reach full extension - this is '**the glide position**'.



Competitive swimmers do not normally hold the glide for long but go through the streamlined position before starting the next stroke. Swimmers in a recreational context or in less need of speed tend to hold the glide briefly. This allows them to both profit from their propulsion by being in the most streamlined position and also benefit from the brief rest between propulsive efforts.

Breathing

The breath is taken at the point when the head and shoulders are at their highest, i.e. at the end of the propulsive phase. This is normally as the hands are sweeping in under the chin. The head should not be lifted. The body will rise with the movements of the stroke and the chin should be held pushed forwards and still.



Timing

The basic timing of the stroke is **pull-breathe-kick-(glide)**:

- As the arms are finishing their propulsive phase the breath is taken.
- At this time the legs are beginning to recover.
- This returns the body to the starting glide position.
- The legs kick back as the arm recovery takes place.
- The body is in a fully **streamlined** position (glide) as the legs complete their kick.



Pull – breathe - kick - glide

Task:

- a) Stand in front of a mirror and demonstrate the breaststroke arm action. Be critical of your demonstration – are you showing the key features.
- b) Talk through your demonstration as if you were giving it to pupils. Make sure that your commentary fits with what the pupils are watching.

2.5.2 Practices for Teaching the Stroke

Practices must be selected to suit the ability of the child/group and relate to the aim of the lesson. Use of a more extensive range of practices adds interest to sessions. Practices are listed with some brief comments indicating their main use, important points in execution of the drill, etc. Teaching points should be selected from your knowledge of stroke technique and appropriate to the pupil's level. Good observation of the performer's skills is the key to doing this accurately and selecting appropriate practices.

Leg Kick Practices

PRACTICE (what to do)	USE (when to do it)	COMMENTS (how to teach it)
1. Sitting on the side, plantar flexion and dorsi-flexing the ankle.	Practice for correcting the foot position in early stage learners.	Watch the feet, feel the position of the ankle/feet.
2. Sitting on the side, dorsi-flexion of the ankle and turn out of the feet.	Practice for correcting the foot position.	Watch/feel the position of the feet.

<p>3. Sitting on the poolside with the feet dangling in the water:</p> <p>i) Dorsi-flex feet. ii) Turn feet out so that little toes are against the poolside. iii) Draw a circle with the heels on the water.</p>	<p>As above.</p>	<p>As above emphasise 'watch' and 'feel' the action.</p>
<p>4. In the water with the back to the wall holding onto the rail/channel. Practice leg kick in this semi-sitting position.</p>	<p>For correcting foot position and leg action.</p>	<p>Emphasise the foot position /semi-sitting position to watch leg action. Notice the similarity to the practice above – only a small change for the pupil to master.</p>
<p>5. On the back with 2 floats, one under each arm or a noodle. Practising leg kick.</p>	<p>As above.</p>	<p>Head up in a semi-sitting position to watch the leg action. Once correct leg action is established it can be done without watching the legs. Notice the similarity to the practice above – only a small change for the pupil to master.</p>
<p>6. Lying on the front at the wall, holding the rail practising leg kick.</p>	<p>Elementary practice for corrective purposes. Easy for teacher to see/check and give feedback to the pupil.</p>	<p>Not always the same kick as the pupil does with a board or in full stroke. This is the first stage where they cannot see the legs – if they cannot do it then go back to the stage where they can see the feet.</p>
<p>7. On the front with 2 floats, one under each arm, or with a noodle practising the leg kick.</p>	<p>Elementary leg kick practice for those who have had difficulty learning the leg kick or for beginners.</p>	<p>2 floats give added buoyancy so it is possible to feel confident going very slowly and 'thinking about' the action.</p>
<p>8. On the front with one float practising leg kick.</p>	<p>Basic kicking practice.</p>	<p>Once the basic action is established, technique can be refined with use of appropriate teaching points. E.g. to work on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accelerating through the kick • Completing the kick • Narrowing the kick
<p>9. On the back with the hands at the hips</p>	<p>Helps develop high 'catch' with the feet / open angle at the hip / helps with</p>	<p>Feet should come to touch finger tips while the angle at the hip remains open. i.e. feet</p>

	acceleration of kick. Only for able swimmers with legal leg kicks.	drop in the water rather than knees rise.
10. On the front, hands at the hips practising leg kick.	Helps develop high 'catch' with the feet/ helps with acceleration of kick. Only for able swimmers with legal leg kicks.	Feet should come high enough to touch fingers with the hands held in by the sides.
11. On the front, arms extended, head up, practising kicking.	Helps develop power. Only for very able swimmers.	Small scull with hands for breathing.
12. Breaststroke kick in a vertical position in deep water. Kick to raise body, sink, kick to raise the body again.	Develops strength. Adds variety, only done occasionally with moderately able swimmers who have legal kicks.	For able swimmers. Arms can be sculling initially but should really be just for balance.
13. Breaststroke kick in a vertical position with the hands on the head.	Only used for fairly able swimmers. Strengthening of leg kick to support weight out of the water.	The more of the arms that are raised out of the water the harder the practice becomes.
14. Breaststroke kick on the back with the arms extended behind the head.	Only for able swimmers. Only where swimmers can keep the arms in the water. Helps develop a narrow kick. Helps keep a wide angle between trunk and thigh.	Knees must be kept under the surface.
15. Kicking (with 1 or 2 floats) round the edge of the pool. Pushing off from the wall with the foot on that side.	Individual practice for persistent screw kickers to correct of a 'Screw Kick'.	'Offending' foot must be at the side. Toes turn up to give push off from the wall.

Arm Practices

PRACTICE (what to do)	USE (when to do it)	COMMENTS (how to teach it)
1. Arm action standing in shallow water.	Elementary practice for establishing basic pattern of arm action.	Body position should be leaning forward shoulders submerged. Elbows high, arms in front of shoulders.
2. As (1) walking across shallow end.	Elementary practice for establishing basic pattern of arm action.	As above.
3. Arms only using pull buoy or leg float.	Strengthening arm pull for able swimmers. Must not be used with weak swimmers.	Continuous pulling, which is tiring, is required
4. Breaststroke kick with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small scull of the hands in the extended position 	Can be used to improve timing or to correct the range of the arm action. Particularly	Developmental from a small scull, gradually enlarging to a larger scull, to a small arm

<p>in front.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradually increase the size of the sculling movement until it becomes the arm pull. 	<p>helpful for correcting the arm action that pulls back beyond the shoulder line. Only of use where an effective leg kick already exists.</p>	<p>pull. Sweeping the hands round the inside of a small bowl.</p>
<p>5. Full stroke breaststroke concentrating on points of arm technique</p>	<p>Arm technique</p>	<p>Limit number of points to be worked on at any time.</p>
<p>6. Breaststroke with 2 kicks to each arm pull.</p>	<p>Helps to develop the reach of the arms forward / the stretch into the glide position / the holding of the glide.</p>	<p>Check extension through the body.</p>

Breathing practices

PRACTICE (what to do)	USE (when to do it)	COMMENTS (how to teach it)
<p>1. Standing in shallow water, arm action practice with timing of breathing.</p>	<p>Elementary breathing practice.</p>	<p>Use for limited time. Head up to chin at surface. Breathing in when propulsion is finished / hands in front of chest.</p>
<p>2. As (1) walking across.</p>	<p>As above.</p>	<p>As above.</p>
<p>3. Full stroke breaststroke concentrating on breathing.</p>	<p>Only relevant when the leg action and then the arm action is established.</p>	<p>Avoid bobbing the head up / down. Head should rise with the insweep of the arm stroke.</p>

Timing Practices

PRACTICE (what to do)	USE (when to do it)	COMMENTS (how to teach it)
<p>24. Breaststroke kick with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small scull of the hands in the extended position in front. Gradually increase the size of the sculling movement until it becomes the arm pull. 	<p>To improve timing. Only of use where an effective leg kick already exists.</p>	<p>Developmental from a small scull, gradually enlarging to a larger scull, to a small arm pull. Focus on the timing of the kick to the arms reaching forwards.</p>
<p>25. Practice of various combinations of one arm pull and two kicks or two arm pulls and one kick.</p>	<p>Awareness of the timing. For experienced swimmers.</p>	<p>Focus on the timing of the kick to the arms reaching forwards and / or the streamlining of the limbs not working</p>

Summary of main points of technique for teaching the basic stroke at Elementary/Improver level

- Body position **slightly angled** to allow legs to kick in water.

- **Head** looking forward, held **steady**.
- Foot position; **ankle dorsi-flexed** and **feet turned out** as they kick back.
- **Drive back and round** with the heels.
- Draw **feet to seat** in recovery (not knees up under the body).
- **Arm action** takes place **in front of the shoulder** level.
- Sweep **out, down and then inwards** with hands
- **Breathe** as the arms finish pulling (**end of insweep**).
- **Pull----Breathe-----Kick-----Glide**
- **Kick as the arms reach forward** into the extended position.

select from the appropriate practices for
 each element to be worked at
 make sure the steps are small
 increase your pupils' chance of success

Question 3: Find 3 practices for pupils who do not turn their feet out. Give a teaching point you would use for each to encourage the correct action

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

In summary:

- Identify all the 'things' that the pupil needs to be able to do in order to be successful in the skill that you are aiming for

- Identify the *fundamental element* from those ‘things’
- Use that as the basis of your sequence of practices
- Build all the practices required into a *logical sequence*
- Have *minimum changes* / new requirements of the pupil *between one practice and the next*.

establish what the
 fundamental element is
 - always teach this element
 first
 - build from basics to the
 full skill

2.3.3 Faults and Corrections for breaststroke

The best way to know how to correct the fault in a swimmer’s stroke is to understand how the body moves in water. If you understand how the body moves in water i.e. what happens when you raise your head, what happens if the legs bend too much etc. you will understand why things happen and will therefore know how to correct them. The following table provides you with a number of key / frequently found faults in young swimmers / early stage learners, shows the most likely reasons for those faults and provides suggestions of practices that could be used to correct them.

In the first instance spotting the fault and getting it correct (i.e. spotting the primary fault / the most basic of the faults) requires both good observation and adhering to the procedure of looking at the stroke systematically i.e. BLABT. Look at the body position then the leg action then the arm action then the breathing then the timing. Pick the first fault as the most important.

	Stroke Fault	Causes	Corrective practice
1	Body angled and legs low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head too high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence, submerging and breathing

			practices.
2	Screw kick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One foot not turned out / dorsi-flexed • One knee turned in / one out • One shoulder lower • One hip lower • Head turned to one side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the correct foot position. • Kicking practice on the back where feet can be observed. • Check head and body position.
3	Both feet planter flexed and pointing backwards in the propulsive phase of the kick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of foot position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the correct foot position. • Kicking practice on the back where feet can be observed.
4	Knees bought too far forward in the leg kick recovery, under rather than behind body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hips being flexed too much • Focus on hip bend rather than knee bend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking practice focusing on recovery – on front or back with hands by hips bringing heels to hands.
5	Legs not together and extended at the end of the kick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not completing the kick to the legs together / glide position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking practices with emphasis on completing the kick / fewer kicks per width
6	Elbows dropped in the propulsive phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arms bending at start of pull / arms not kept straight for outswEEP / to catch • No catch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm practices, focus on straight arms in out sweep and catch.
7	Pulling too far back, beyond the shoulder line, with both arms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or little propulsion from legs, so seeking more from the arms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kicking practices • Kick with arms in front sculling • Build up mini scull pull – gradually enlarge
8	No arm extension at the end of the arm recovery – no stretch / glide position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomplete recovery • Starting next action too early – possibly weak kick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick without float - arms extended in front
9	Incorrect timing of arms and legs – both in propulsion at the same time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushing the stroke • Not completing each propulsive phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing drills 2K – 1P, 2P – 1 K, full stroke with long glide.
10	Not breathing every stroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor timing • Poor breathing technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing practices • Timing practices

			as for no. 9.
11	Breathing too early in the arm action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressing down at the start of the arm action, raising head too early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathing practices focusing on exhaling during arm pull.

Question 4: List 3 common faults displayed by participants learning the breaststroke. List a suitable correction **activity** (practice) for each. Complete the task without reference to the list above.

	Fault	Correction Activity
1		
2		
3		