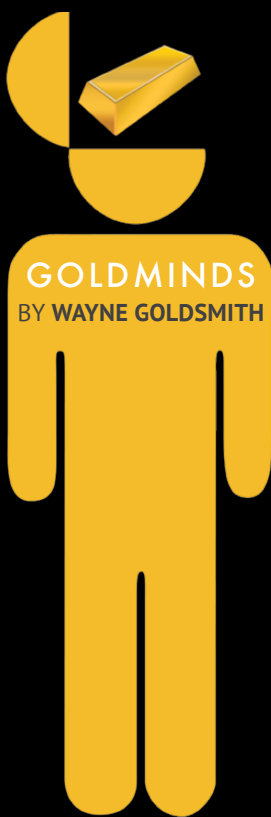


# SWIMMING 101: BACK TO THE BASICS



**GOLDMINDS**  
BY WAYNE GOLDSMITH

**Are you new to the sport of swimming?  
No worries...when it comes to learning something  
new, there's always a first time for everyone—  
even for future Olympic gold medalists!**

**B**efore you push off for that first lap, before you take that first stroke, think about one word that will have a bigger impact and a more positive influence on your swimming training and racing than any other: relax!

No matter what type of training you are doing—no matter what your swimming goals may be—no matter what level of competition you are preparing for, relaxation in the water is the most basic, most fundamental, yet most important swimming principle you will ever learn.

So, where to start? Let's begin with Swimming 101: Back to the Basics.

## THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Following are the seven basic swimming skills that are at the core of all great swimming performances. The accompanying Do's and Don'ts will guide you to faster swimming:

### BREATHING

#### DO:

- Inhale deeply and normally every breath.
- Exhale completely and forcefully under water every breath.
- Exhale through your nose and mouth—particularly when turning.
- Leave one goggle, the corner of your mouth and one ear in the water when you

turn your head to breathe.

#### DON'T:

- Hold your breath.
- Have your face in the water without air in your lungs.
- Take shallow breaths.

### KICKING

#### DO:

- Keep your feet soft and loose and “floppy.”
- Kick with long, loose, relaxed legs.
- Feel the water “bubbling” and “boiling” around your toes on the surface of the water when you kick.

#### DON'T:

- Keep your legs tight and stiff.
- Bend your knees too much.
- Forcefully point your toes.
- “Try harder” when trying to kick faster (i.e., keep your legs loose, relaxed and soft at all speeds).

### HEAD POSITION

#### DO:

- Look at the bottom of the pool or just slightly ahead of you.
- Keep your head in a “neutral” position (i.e., as if you were walking down the street).
- Keep your head movements very small—particularly when you turn your head to breathe.

**You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great. It all begins with those first few strokes in the pool: get moving to get moving. And remember, above all, to relax!**



[PHOTO BY ANDREA NIGH]

#### **DON'T:**

- Move your head too much.
- Lift your head too often.
- Look too far ahead.

#### **BODY POSITION**

##### **DO:**

- Keep your body, hips and neck in the same line as your head (i.e., a tall, straight, neutral, flat, natural “walking” position).
- “Connect” your head, neck, body and hips together.
- Try for evenness and symmetry—be the same left-to-right and up-and-down.

##### **DON'T:**

- Move from side to side.
- Allow your hips to drop too low in the water.
- Move up and down (i.e., “bobbing” in the water).

#### **CATCH AND ARM STROKE**

##### **DO:**

- Keep your fingers and hands soft and relaxed as you enter the water.
- Bend your elbow slightly, and pull your arm straight through.
- “Feel” the pressure of the water on the palm of your hand at all times.
- Keep your hands and arms soft and relaxed as they recover forward.

##### **DON'T:**

- Worry about “S” patterns or sculling diagrams.
- Bend your arms too much.
- Tighten and stiffen your hands—particularly as you get tired or when you try to swim faster.
- Remember that your arms should maintain a “fingers, wrist, elbow” movement throughout the stroke.

#### **TIMING AND RHYTHM**

##### **DO:**

- Practice maintaining a steady, controlled timing at all training sessions—particularly as you start to get tired.
- Routinely count your strokes and learn to “feel” your stroke rhythm.
- Start with a basic “catch-up”-style stroke timing, then practice other stroke timings as you progress and improve.

##### **DON'T:**

- Overthink stroke timing! Just stay relaxed, stick to the basics of head, body and hip positions, arm movements and kicking...and then “play” with your timing as you master the basics.

#### **URNS**

##### **DO:**

- Reach your arm toward the wall as if you are taking another stroke, then “follow” your hand through the water with your head (i.e., put your chin on your chest to commence the turn).
- Keep your knees together.
- Put your heels on your backside as you somersault forward and flip over.

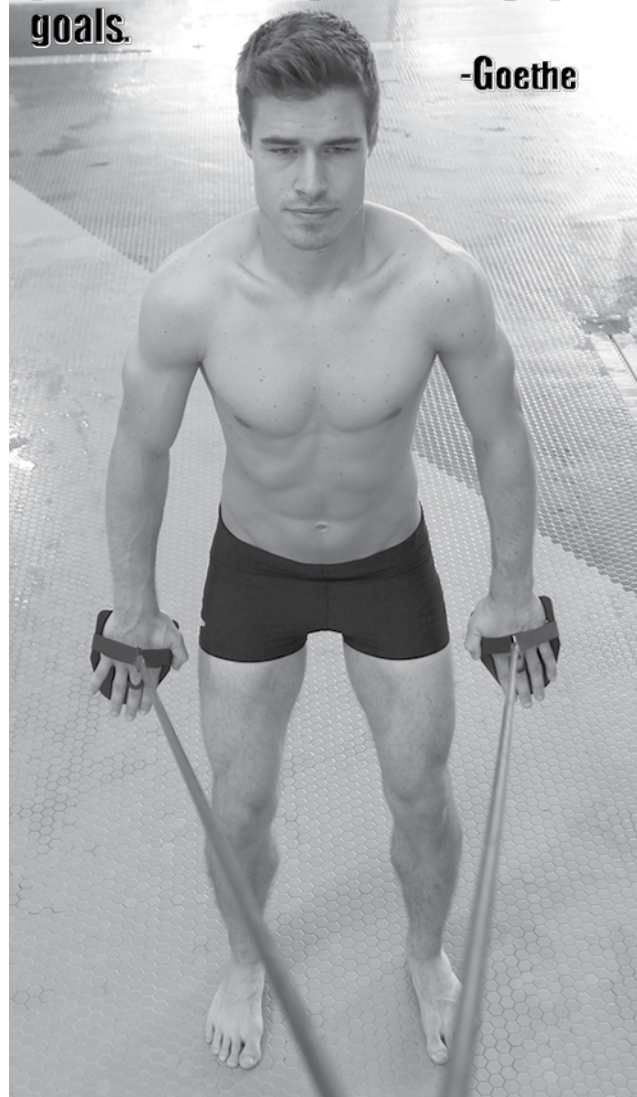
##### **DON'T:**

- Avoid learning to turn—it’s a lot of fun, and you can cover a lot more distance in your training if you learn to turn.
- Slow down as you approach the wall.
- Breathe on your last stroke into the wall—you lose a lot of speed and momentum.
- Breathe on your first stroke coming off the wall—you lose a lot of the speed you gained from your push-off. ❖

*Wayne Goldsmith is one of the world’s leading experts in elite-level swimming and high-performance sport. Be sure to check out his websites at [www.wgaquatics.com](http://www.wgaquatics.com) and [www.wgcoaching.com](http://www.wgcoaching.com).*

**What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.**

**-Goethe**



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