



# Planning a Swimming Season

The length of the competition season will vary from program to program and will be impacted by the resources available to the program, the availability of facilities, and athletes competing in other sports.

You can break the season up into three main phases:

- Pre-Season
- In-Season
- Post-Season

## Pre-Season

The pre-season or preparation phase is the section of the season directly prior to competition phase commencing. Pre-season involves optimally preparing your athletes for the coming competition season. This involves gradually building an aerobic base, building muscle and strength, improving flexibility and mobility, and mastering fundamental sport-specific skills and tactics that will be used during the competition phase.

Pre-season allows coaches to gradually increase the loading (*Training load/loading refers to the impact of training on athletes. Harder training like conditioning would represent a high training load, while a lighter or recovery session would represent a low training load. Spikes or rapid increases in training load can lead to injuries in athletes. An example of a spike in training load would be an athlete returning to training after the off-season. As this athlete was not training for an extended period of time, by returning to training at a high-intensity would put that athlete at a greater risk of sustaining an injury*) on their athletes to best prepare them for competition. It is vital that you do not prescribe too much activity for your athletes too early in the pre-season phase as their bodies will not be used to this loading following the off-season (*The off-season is the time off an athlete has between their post-season training sessions and the start of the next pre-season*). By gradually increasing the training load, athletes are able to fully recover from the previous session, thus allowing for supercompensation (*Supercompensation is a process the body goes through after a period of training where it recovers in a way that subsequent performance is greater than it was previously. For example: If an athlete lifts a 25kg weight in the gym, this will cause fatigue in the athlete's muscles and would require time to recover. With supercompensation, the recovery would allow the athletes to return at a level slightly above where they were prior to lifting the 25kg weight. This supercompensation effect will now allow the athlete to lift a slightly higher weight*) to take effect.

For swimming, coaches can divide their season preparation into two categories.

- On-Land Preparation
- In-Water Preparation





## 1. ON-LAND PREPARATION

On-land preparation will aim to increase flexibility, strength, and muscle endurance through body weight and resistance based exercise. In addition to this, building an athlete's aerobic and anaerobic capacity can be done on-land through running, cycling and skipping variations.

**Important:** All resistance-based and aerobic/anaerobic exercise should be carried out safely, in an appropriate environment and using correct technique. As a coach, if you are not competent in demonstrating or correcting an exercise it is best to not prescribe this exercise to your athletes unless you have a trained fitness or strengths and conditioning coach to offer their expertise in this area.

The Special Olympics Online Learning Portal offers a variety of fitness courses which will educate coaches and fitness professionals on best-practice in these areas.

## 2. IN-WATER PREPARATION

In-water preparation will focus on the sport specific movements for your swimmer. This allows swimmers to work on and develop technique, endurance and speed in the water. In-water activities should be varied and include drills that work on freestyle and form strokes. Pre-season is a great time for coaches to work on fundamentals of swimming (*Fundamentals are the core competencies that an athlete should have in their sport. For swimming this would include: Pool Entry and Exit (Entry may include starts, be that standing or sitting on the concourse or blocks); Starting and Finishing; Streamlining; Stroke Technique (Can athletes identify the difference between strokes and the reasons why the strokes require different technique?)*) while optimally preparing their swimmers for the coming competition season.

**Remember:** Each athlete is different and will require a different focus in their pre-season program. Athletes could be competing in a different sport during their swimming off-season and may require some swimming specific conditioning work to get back into the swimming 'mode'. Others may have had a relatively inactive off-season if they do not compete in other sports. This swimmer would require a more general return to swimming program where they will have to re-build their aerobic capacity and remind themselves of the fundamentals of swimming. It is the role of the coach to identify the individual needs of their athletes and cater their program specifically to meet those needs.

### In-Season

In-season or the competition season is the stage of the swimming season when swimmers will compete regularly in competitions, swim meets, or World Games. Training in this section of the season will focus on in-competition performance, corrections of errors, and fitness maintenance. An important part of in-season training is to allow your athletes to recover (*Recovery from exercise comes from multiple sources, all as important as the other. Three key sources of recovery are: Sleep (Rest); Nutrition + Hydration; Continuous stretching + functional movements for the muscles*) fully from their competition and training to ensure optimal subsequent performance.





Competition seasons vary from program to program depending on how their season is structured. Some may have one big competition at the end of the season, while others may have competitions every few weeks over an extended period. Your plan should be adjusted to suit the layout of your season and to get the best out of your swimmers.

Similar to pre-season, in-season can be broken down into two categories:

1. On-Land Training
2. In-Water Training

### **1. ON-LAND TRAINING**

In-season on-land training will be reduced in comparison to pre-season. In replacement, a coach may want to use on-land training sessions to work on athlete mobility, flexibility, or some tactical work.

### **2. IN-WATER TRAINING**

In-water training will be based around error correction from previous performance, preparation for next performance, or recovery post-performance. In-season training can resemble competition but will be adjusted to allow swimmers sufficient time to recover between drills, races, or long-distance swims.

**Coaching Tip:** Three things to work on in-season

1. Work at 'race pace' or slightly faster but ensure swimmer has a full recovery.
2. Practice pre-race warm ups.
3. Psychological preparation, motivation in preparation for competition.

### **Post-Season**

The post-season is the period of time after the competition season has ended. This provides the swimmer and coach with time to reflect on the season just gone and identify what they want to improve, opportunities they were grateful to experience, and to rest up and recover in preparation for their next sporting adventure.

The post-season and off-season are different in that a post-season still involves training sessions for the athletes in a structured way, although a different structure to what we would have seen in the pre-season and in-season phases. Post-season training sessions are usually reduced in load, more proactive, and focus solely on creating a fun and enjoyable environment for athletes to unwind from the season that has just passed.

**Coaching Tip:** Drills and error corrections are usually replaced with games or free swims to allow the swimmers to relax and interact in a stress-free environment with their training partners or teammates.





Three tips for post-season trainings are:

1. Reduce the number of sessions conducted per week
2. Maintain healthy eating and out of water exercise (mobility and flexibility)
3. Rest and recovery period

