

The 5 Unwritten Rules of Open Lap Swimming

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Courtesy of Claire Forrest

It's the time of year when many people choose to make a fresh commitment to their fitness. For some, this means stepping up their swimming to a new level. For others, this means starting to swim for the first time. Regardless, if you've noticed a spike in the amount of swimmers at your pool during open swim, you're not alone. Here are my five simple rules that swimmers of all abilities can follow to make open lap swim a more enjoyable experience for everyone:

5) Come to the pool expecting to circle swim.

Circle swimming is standard when lap swimming. In most places, that means staying to the right of the black line, switching sides when you make your turn. Yes, having a lane to yourself is awesome, but if you show up to the pool on a Saturday morning, expect that you will be circle swimming. If there are fewer than three people to your lane, you will probably split a lane, which is also a lucky break. Holding a grudge over not having your own lane won't make other swimmers go away, in fact, they'll still swim around you if you refuse to cooperate.

4) When it comes to claiming an empty lane, first come first serve!

A swimmer placing their equipment bag and water bottle in front of a lane is ancient swimmer code for marking territory. To the other swimmers, it says, "Hey, I intend to swim here!" So you can imagine it's annoying to see your once empty lane snapped up before you've even put your goggles on. If you see someone who looks like they clearly intend to enter an empty lane, ask politely if you can please swim with them before jumping in. And if you lose out on an empty lane because you weren't there first, remember the previous rule: circle swim rules the pool.

3) There is no shame in the slow lane.

This is coming from a swimmer that spent most of her competitive career training in the slow lane. Some lap pools divide their lanes into fast, medium, and slow lanes during open swim. Please select the lane for your ability honestly. Being in the slow lane does not mean you are a poor swimmer, and anyone who tries to make you feel otherwise is probably overcompensating in the fast lane. Most lap swimmers simply want to get a good workout in without making it more difficult for the other swimmers. Putting yourself in the correct lane for your speed makes this goal easier for everyone to achieve.

2) It doesn't matter what you've swum before, we're all at open swim.

If your lap pool isn't divided into separate speed lanes, open swim can feel a bit like a crazy free for all. You might be an NCAA champion, but you still have to share a lane with anyone who shows up to the pool at the same time as you. Leave lots of room to be passed if need be, and be a polite passer. If you're stopping at the wall, move as far to the side of the wall as possible. Remember, it's just as scary to have a fast swimmer whip past you swimming butterfly as it is frustrating to be stuck behind a sidestroker. Be polite and do the best you can. It's not the end of the world.

1) Treat others as you would like to be treated.

The golden rule applies to everything, even open swim! Be the lane mate you would like to swim with. Be patient, courteous, and acknowledge the other swimmers as they enter your lane and as they swim. It's such a simple thing, but it will make swimming a good experience for us all.