

Helpful Terminology for Masters Swimmers

Many swimming terms are universal and some specific to BUMS. Here are some you might hear on deck. If you are new to swimming or BUMS, familiarize yourself with these terms and feel free to ask the coaches for clarification.

Interval. Time to complete a swim of a certain distance. Rest time is included in the interval and varies in duration depending on the specific aims of the set. i.e., 4 x 200 on 3:00. This means that you have 3 minutes to complete 200 yards before you begin the next one. You push off to begin swim #2 at exactly 3:00, etc. Nearly all sets are done on either an interval or rest interval.

Rest Interval (abr. RI). Rest time after a swim of a certain distance. i.e., 4 x 200 on 10s RI. This means that after you complete the first 200, you immediately look at the pace clock and begin the second 200 exactly 10 seconds later. If you touch the wall at 2:53, you push off for the next swim at 3:03. Nearly all sets are done on either an interval or rest interval.

Base Interval (abr. Base or B). This term is used for freestyle repetitions of 100 yards unless otherwise specified. It is the interval at which you can swim a sustained aerobic effort for a prolonged distance 1000-2000 yards. It is not necessarily the fastest interval you can make, but one which challenges you while allowing you to remain in control of your swims. Typically, if you are doing a set of 10 x 100s, you would be getting approximately 10 seconds rest. Younger swimmers, distance swimmers or those in excellent aerobic shape might err on slightly less rest (a few seconds less).

Test sets are an effective measure to determine your Base and there are a number of different test sets you can do. Here is a simple one. Swim 5 x 100 at maximum effort on 10s RI. Note the gross time for the swim and subtract the cumulative RI (in this case 4x10s=40s). Take this number (your net swim time), divide by 5 to get an average pace for your 100s and add approximately 10 seconds to this number to determine your Base Interval. When doing this test set, make sure that you are swimming as fast as you can (you should be breathing heavily), that you are taking exactly 10 seconds rest between each 100, and that you note your time correctly. i.e., Let's say you start this test set at 0:00 on the pace clock and complete the fifth 100 at 8:22. Subtract 40s to get 7:42. Divide by 5, which will give you an average pace per 100 of 1:32.4. Your Base is 1:40 or 1:45.

Your base interval will change with your fitness level. As you get more fit, your base interval will drop and you will need to move up a lane. Unfortunately, the reverse is true as well. Swimming on the correct interval is important in helping you achieve your goals. Faster swimming will not come from putting yourself on the lowest possible interval or rest interval. But your interval will drop as you get faster. The fitness comes first, not the interval. Many Masters Swimmers obsess about their Base Interval and tie too much of their ego into this arbitrary number, which can have adverse effects on their performance.

Descend (abr. Desc). Each consecutive swim gets faster. Your swim time decreases = you get faster. i.e., 4 x 50 descend 1-4 means that #1 is easy, #2 is faster, #3 is faster still, #4 is fastest. 8

x 50 descend every 4 means that #1 & 5 are easy, #2 & 6 is faster, #3 & 7 is faster still, #4 & 8 is fastest.

Ascend (abr. Asc.). The reverse of Descend. Each consecutive swim gets slower. Your swim time increases = you get slower. i.e., 4 x 50 ascend 1-4 means that #1 is fastest, #2 is slower, #3 is slower still, #4 is slowest. 8 x 50 descend every 4 means that #1 & 5 are fastest, #2 & 6 is slower, #3 & 7 is slower still, #4 & 8 is slowest.

Build or Build Up (abr. BU). Often confused with Descend, Build has a distinct meaning. Each swim starts slow and ends fast. You build your speed throughout the swim. i.e., 4 x 50 Build means that each 50 starts easy and gradually builds to fast by the end. Each of the 4 swims is performed the same slow to fast.

Build Down (abr. BD). The reverse of BU. Each swim starts fast and ends slow. Gradual decrease in speed.

Individual Medley (abr. IM). Swim, usually 100, 200 or 400 yards long, swimming all four strokes in the following order: fly, back breast, free. i.e., a 200 IM would be 50 fly, 50 back, 50 breast, 50 free.

IM Transitions (abr. IM Trans). Swims focusing on 2 back-to-back strokes in the IM. i.e., 3 x 50 IM trans would mean #1 - 25 fly/25 back, #2 - 25 back/25 breast, #3- 25 breast/25 free.

IM Order (abr. IMO). 4 x 75 IMO means #1 - fly, #2 - back, #3 - breast, #4 - free.

Reverse IM Order (abr. Rev IMO). 4 x 75 Rev IMO means #1 - free, #2 - breast, #3 - back, #4 - fly.

Drill (abr. Dr). A general term for doing technique specific work during a set. There are many different types of drills and often the coach will explain exactly what he or she wants you to do. After swimming for a while, you will develop a repertoire of drills for each stroke that you may be called upon to use when an imprecise "drill a 50 " is offered.

Pulling. An exercise that uses just your arms. This usually involves putting a pull buoy between your legs. Your feet should remain immobile. It is recommended to strap your feet together with a band to prevent kicking with a pull buoy, something that not only diminishes the positive benefits of a pulling set, but can negatively impact your kicking mechanics.

Kicking. An exercise that uses just your legs. A kickboard can be used for dolphin, breast, and flutter kick on your stomach, but never for flutter kick on your back. You can also kick without a board, on your stomach, side, back, or with a swimmers snorkel. Kicking can also be performed in a vertical (stationary) position.

Warm up. This is an essential part of the workout. A good warm up allows your muscles to loosen and warm up. Swim slowly at an easy pace. Your heart rate should not be increased much during the first half of the warm up. A normal warm-up is about 1200 yards.



Cool Down. This is the last part of the workout, but it is very important, especially if you have been sprinting or raising your heart rate. The cool down is a recovery set that allows the lactic acid built up in your muscles to dissipate. Cooling down properly helps avoid muscle soreness.
