

# happy laps™

by Terry Laughlin



## A Total Immersion Instructional Manual



**Congratulations** on purchasing [Happy Laps](#). This is the most important video we have ever produced because it is designed to meet the most fundamental need in swimming – how to swim for health, fitness or pleasure with absolute comfort and confidence. [Happy Laps](#) is the first Total Immersion learning aid to address the real basics: how do I swim without fear of sinking, how do I breathe in water, and how do I move with such efficiency that I will be able to swim graceful, nearly effortless laps for as long as I like. While the video is self-explanatory, this user's manual includes guidance for a successful learning experience and detailed tips for each step in the progression. For additional free articles on smart, satisfying swimming please visit [www.totalimmersion.net](http://www.totalimmersion.net).

## WHY TOTAL IMMERSION CAN TURN ANYONE INTO A SWIMMER

Swimming is the closest thing to a perfect exercise – a weightless, virtually injury-free, year-round body toner that makes you feel great inside and out. But too few people ever discover that, because early swimming experiences can be so discouraging.

It happens most to folks, probably not unlike you, who may be wary of the water to begin with, and who quickly find themselves fighting to stay afloat, struggling for air, and probably reluctant to leave the shallow area. For many people, that's all the proof they need that they just don't have what it takes to become a swimmer. Or they may be discouraged by the prospect that – even if you can find instruction appropriate for an adult with years of frustrating experience – it could take years to become a “real” swimmer.

But with Total Immersion, it doesn't have to take long at all. As we've seen with countless thousands of hopeful swimmers, you'll be surprised how much you can learn each time you step into the pool. This self-teaching book and video can be the first step in changing your swimming experience every bit as dramatically as all the Total Immersion students before you have. This TI program offers what has been for many aspiring swimmers an impossible dream: a simple, clear, common-sense approach to learning to move through the water easily, comfortably, and so pleasurably that your practice time becomes the healthiest, most rewarding, part of your day.

Too good to be true? No, it's not. The hopefuls who hang up their bathing suits for good after a couple of frustrating attempts are simply victims of two basic facts:

- (1) Swimming, unlike walking or running, is a fundamentally unnatural activity for humans. We instinctively try to bully our way through the water, throwing up a commotion that would mystify any easygoing fish – and suggesting that nature never thought of us as aquatic beings in the first place.
- (2) When we seek help for our churning, exhausting strokes, we're often taught in a way that actually makes it *harder* to swim easily, gracefully, and effectively.

Both problems are easily solved. First, we can get back what nature left out – a fish's instinct for maximum speed with minimum effort. Total Immersion has proven again and again that virtually *anyone* can learn to swim easily, comfortably, and enjoyably. Second, we're not permanently stuck with the bad habits we've developed. This video and guide will show you, step by step, a completely fresh way to move through the water, a way I guarantee will make more sense, and that will make swimming easier than anything you've tried before.

## SWIMMERS ARE MADE, NOT BORN

Swimming doesn't come naturally. The National Swim School Association estimates that only 2% of all Americans can swim a quarter-mile without stopping. The other 98% either can't swim at all, or find it such a struggle that they can manage only a lap or two before running out of gas. What these folks lack is not ability

or endurance, but awareness. Humans don't have to be taught to walk or run, because those abilities come naturally to us land-based creatures – but no one learns to swim well without at least some instruction.

Swimming well seems difficult because millions of years of adaptation to life on *terra firma*, ruled by the laws of gravity, have made it exceedingly difficult to move easily in a fluid environment, ruled by the laws of hydrodynamics. Humans *in* water are like fish *out of water*. A handful of us manage to muddle through with extraordinary effort, but swimming well and efficiently has always been harder than it needs to be.

The crowning irony, of course, is that while we're struggling mightily to become a skilled swimmer, an accomplished swimmer makes it all look impossibly smooth and easy. Anyone watching beautiful swimmers instinctively appreciates what they do. And when we do observe the world's best swimmers – both dolphins and Olympic swimmers – we see the same qualities: grace, economy, and flow.

This natural ease, universal among sea creatures, is rare among humans, as the water-frothing lappers at any health club pool graphically illustrate. It's probably this stark contrast between fish gliding through an aquarium, and our fellow humans churning up pools, that makes skill more impressive to us than raw power ever could be. The serenity and grace of a middle-aged swimmer who can flow – like water itself – up and down the lane, seems a more elegant accomplishment than the power-oriented speed of youthful competitors. And that elegant swimmer could be you, whatever your age. For while most of us have little chance of recapturing the power and athleticism that world records require, the grace and skill of that older swimmer – who may be very much like ourselves – are within our grasp.

Ask Don Walsh, a Total Immersion teacher who decided to dedicate himself to stroke mastery at age 49, then swam 28.5-miles around Manhattan at age 50 and 52. Today, Walsh is stopped regularly at his health club by envious fellow swimmers, curious about how he learned to swim so beautifully. "There are plenty of faster and more physically impressive people around here," he relates, "but it's my smoothness that seems to fascinate everyone."

Or take Mark Seides, a Total Immersion workshop alum, who resolved to improve his stroke after watching 72-year-old Ben Reynolds glide up and down the pool one day. "There was this older guy swimming alongside me and I'd never seen anyone look so smooth and relaxed in the water. I asked him where he learned to swim like that and when he told me Total Immersion, I knew I wanted to learn the same thing." And he did.

## GOING TO FISH SCHOOL

So what can we learn by watching fish? First, of course, is that they move through the water much more easily than we do. Faster, too. While the fastest human swimmers travel only about 5 mph at full throttle, some fish have been clocked at over 50 mph. It not only looks easy, it *is* easy. Dolphins swim 10 times faster than the fastest humans using a third less power.

They're not "gifted," they just know what all fish know: how to avoid drag, how to simply slip through the water. Being slippery is far more important than being powerful because when you're trying to move through water – which is a thousand times denser than air – the water acts like a virtual wall. The harder you pull and kick, the harder the water resists you. Small wonder we find smooth, relaxed, swimmers so fascinating. How can they get so far, so attractively, on so little energy?

## THREE MISTAKES EVERY HUMAN SWIMMER MAKES

To swim better tomorrow, you must understand what's holding you back today. Chances are, you've thought there was something wrong with you because:



**(1) You find it difficult to float.** The most common misconception is the notion that you're supposed to float on *top* of the water. This is, in fact, impossible! No matter how "buoyant" you are, sinking into the water is what the human body is designed to do – every part of the human body, except for the chest cavity, is non-buoyant. The first step to swimming well, to moving through the water with the greatest of ease, is to learn to "sink cleverly" – in a horizontal position instead of legs-first, like a capsizing boat. In a horizontal position, you give the water much less surface area to resist, making progress far easier. You find your ideal body position by getting your head aligned and redistributing your body weight until you feel the water support you. Once you stop fighting to stay on top, you'll be amazed at how much energy you have to move ahead. Our self-guided "Discovery Exercises" will take you through the steps that help you find this "floating sweet spot."



**(2) The water holds you back.** Why do you tire so quickly? In large part because most of the energy you expend goes into making waves and turbulence, not into effective propulsion. Again, this is the result of a mistaken notion most people have about how you're "supposed to" swim. Most swimmers figure that since they propel themselves by pulling and kicking, swimming better means pulling and kicking faster and harder. That's a good way to churn up the water and tire yourself out, but a bad way to gain speed. Again, consider fish. No arms or legs, so no pulling and kicking. But speed to burn, with just a few tail flicks, because they are perfectly balanced, beautifully streamlined and propel with *fluent, whole body movements*. Our self-teaching program will teach you how to comfortably master the body positions that will allow you to slip through the water with the greatest ease and then to use smooth and coordinated whole-body movements for propulsion.

**(3) You run out of steam too soon.** Even highly conditioned marathon runners wonder where all their fitness went the minute they begin swimming. A couple of laps and they're done for. Where did all that endurance go? Here's where: If you haven't first learned to relax in water, to be supported by it, to slip through it, almost any attempt to go faster will wear you out. Total Immersion shifts the focus away from pushing harder against the water, to learning to work *with* it. When most of your energy and attention have been refocused on keeping yourself slippery, you'll be amazed how much easier it will be to swim any distance at any speed. That's why the fastest swimmer in the world today, Alexandre Popov, spends most of his practice hours becoming slippery, rather than swimming hard. You will soon, too.

## FIRST START PLAYING AROUND

When it comes to swimming well, kids have the right idea – swimming is just another form of play. The fact that they're learning as they play is a bonus. But in their water play, they gain an instinctive understanding of the freedom and flow that being nearly weightless offers. Adults typically play too little and worry too much about "getting it right" and in the process make improvement a struggle instead of a pleasure. And since traditional instruction leads to frustration anyway, it just makes things worse.

The solution? Become a child again – in the pool, at least. Conventional wisdom says that to develop the strength and stamina to swim better, you first need to grind out the laps. I say that's a mainly a good way to perfect your mistakes. You must first learn to relax and be at home in the water, or all those laps will do is make your bad habits more permanent.

The foundation of the Total Immersion program is a series of thoughtfully-choreographed learning games and self-awareness exercises – guided "play" that will put you in touch with your body again, and teach you the same things that children learn when they have fun in the water. The most comforting aspect of this program is that there's no "right or wrong" about these exercises. In fact, you can gain a sense of greater freedom by

*choosing*, in some cases, to do the exercises “wrong” and discover how your body reacts when you do. You’re in a safe place, so there’s no risk in making that choice. If you do each step with an open and curious spirit, you’ll find that each step is designed to reveal how your body really behaves in the water which will help you make informed choices on the smartest way to take advantage of those properties.

Step by step, you’ll begin to understand how to move *with* the water instead of muscling it out of your way. Lesson One will show you how to become comfortable and relaxed in the water and how your body naturally behaves in a fluid environment. In Lesson Two, you’ll learn which body positions allow you to slip through the water with the least drag and commotion. Finally, in Lesson Three, come the skills of “fishlike” swimming, propelling yourself with unprecedented ease and speed by learning to swim with your whole body instead of just your arms and legs.

## HOW YOUR BODY LEARNS BEST

The most helpful thing you can do for yourself is to trust your instincts. The human body is a marvelous learning instrument, teaching itself through routine life experience how to move, balance, lift, climb, and carry – usually on land. Swimmers who began as children learned a lot of their “natural swimming ability” in the same instinctive way. As a result, they usually can’t tell you how they came to swim so efficiently because so much of what they do is intuitive.

The Total Immersion program gives you a second chance to acquire that “instinctive ability” for yourself – in much less time than it usually takes children. We’ll guide you through a series of exercises that will *let you learn* (as opposed to *teaching you*) how your body naturally behaves in the water, and how to become perfectly comfortable with that. Think of these exercises as structured playtime, a more organized path to learning what child’s play at your local pool would have taught you years ago.

And for now, please don’t worry about “your stroke.” Though stroking and kicking are the starting point for traditional instruction, we give them far less emphasis here. Once you learn how to move your entire body easily and naturally with the water, it becomes almost inevitable that your arms will follow the efficient, fluid pattern that propels you most effectively. With Happy Laps, you’ll explore your movements in the water in a free and informal way before channeling your increasingly natural relationship with water into formal strokes. And once more, please don’t *think* too much. Your senses will tell you how you’re doing. What *feels* right, *is* right.

## THE TOTAL IMMERSION “BUDDY SYSTEM”

While some swimmers will feel comfortable doing these exercises on their own, we’ve designed the Happy Laps program to work best as “collaborative learning.” In teaching thousands of swimmers in TI workshops and classes since 1989, one of the most exciting discoveries we’ve made was how dramatically a “Buddy” approach accelerates progress.

In the Buddy System, swimmers learn in pairs, taking turns in two roles:

The *swimmer*, who learns the correct positions and movements with help from their partner.

The *coach*, who helps the swimmer find the right position, offers support as needed, assists with momentum by towing or launching, then releases and continues observing the swimmer to assist in any way that may be helpful.

## ADVANTAGES OF THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Learning to be comfortable, balanced and “slippery” in the water presents some unique challenges:

- (1) Many new swimmers are uncomfortable and feel a bit insecure in the early stages of exploring the “alien,” and perhaps threatening, aquatic environment. The inhibitions that naturally result make it more difficult to respond naturally to the water. Your partner can help a great deal in making you feel more secure and learning to trust yourself and the water.
- (2) In the beginning, new swimmers can’t yet recognize important sensations such as: Is my head in line? Are my hips sinking? Is one arm *dry* from shoulder to knuckles? Are my shoulders stacked? Your partner can clearly see and help you with the subtle adjustments that will make such a difference in achieving the best position. And once you feel it, you can then replicate it much more easily on your own.
- (3) As land-based creatures, we’re not accustomed to actively controlling torso muscles to stay balanced horizontally. On land we *stand on* our balance; in water we *hang from it*. Your partner can assist you in achieving balanced positions, giving your muscles more time to learn how to maintain them.

## USING THE BUDDY SYSTEM EFFECTIVELY

Those who sink more easily (usually those who are leaner or more heavily muscled) and those with non-propulsive kicks will benefit the most from the Buddy System. Their instinctive reaction to sinking or loss of propulsion is to flail about or kick harder, which increases turbulence and discomfort, while doing nothing for momentum. Towing allows these swimmers to master balance and ease with greater comfort and fewer concerns about sinking or momentum. The added momentum is invaluable in helping them learn to do the drills solo, because it’s far easier to conserve momentum, than to generate it when you’ve lost it.



When swimmers with a weak kick are towed, then released, they may lose headway quickly. If you’re acting as the *coach*, resume towing for a moment, then watch to see how long they maintain it and how they’re kicking. Repeat as needed. In most cases, your swimmer will gradually learn how to maintain momentum for longer stretches. Repeated experience of traveling through the water seems to help them acquire better hydrodynamic awareness. Gradually, you should be able to tow less frequently and more briefly.

While coaching, it’s sometimes helpful to tell your swimmer exactly what you are going to do – i.e. “I’m going to support your feet now,” or “I’m going to move your arms closer to your sides.” This minimizes disruptions to concentration, and helps your swimmer stay relaxed.

Finally, if you have any doubts about your qualifications to “coach,” set your mind at ease. Coaching in the TI Buddy System takes no expertise at all. You only need to recognize ease and sleekness, compared to struggle and awkwardness. Compare your partner’s positions with those on the video and objectively report what you observe – or gently assist their adjustments. Pay particular attention to head position and alignment. Minor misalignment in head and neck is usually multiplied many times in the legs.

As the swimmer, your task is mainly to allow your partner to guide you and to tune into how you feel when they say you’ve got the position right. (1) Memorize how your head, torso, limbs and general position feel at that moment, so you can replicate them without help. (2) Remember the feel of ease and comfort you experience while being towed and stay as close as you can to that sense after release. In particular, keep your kick as streamlined, supple, quiet and gentle after release as when being towed. Don’t kick harder if you feel yourself slowing. Instead focus even more on sleekness and balance.

## WHO CAN BE YOUR BUDDY?

What is most exciting about the Buddy System is that it can empower literally *anyone* to teach *anyone else* how to swim with ease, efficiency and pleasure. The TI program has proven so simple and foolproof that hundreds of TI swimmers, who had never done any teaching, have told us of exhilarating success in helping other swimmers learn the TI way. The Happy Laps program is designed so you can teach and learn effectively with no special experience or knowledge. Two complete novices can absolutely help other effectively at every step.

But you can also invite an already experienced swimmer to be your partner. Even if they can already swim far or fast, there will be learning opportunities in these exercises that make their swimming even better. The symbiotic experience of switching between teaching and learning provides deeper understanding for both partners at every stage. And the best part of using the Buddy System is that you can begin creating your own Total Immersion Community of intelligent, mindful swimming. A partner who shares your experience and goals gives you an invaluable support system.

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During these exercises you'll experience water in all the ways you do when you're swimming, but you'll be freed from the pressure to swim "right" or to go fast. Experiment with each exercise for as long as you want, repeating it as many times as you want. Your goal is not to do them correctly but to do them in a relaxed and fluid way, to turn each exercise from unfamiliar and possibly a little awkward, into smooth and easy.

Learning to swim this way will also put you in a frame of mind to appreciate the value of practicing swimming in the mindful spirit of yoga and tai chi. We have consciously designed Total Immersion to be practiced as a "moving meditation" in the same way as yoga and tai chi. And once you begin swimming mindfully, you won't want to swim any other way.

The best way to start comfortably is not to get in over your head. Literally. I strongly suggest practicing all of these exercises first in shallow water, as shown on the video. That guarantees you'll feel relaxed and in the mood to have some fun, knowing that if your play doesn't go exactly as planned, getting out of trouble is as simple as standing up. You'll know – as any kid would – when your body has learned its lessons well and it's time to head for the deep end.

And when that finally happens, you'll wonder why you waited so long for your second childhood.

# LESSON ONE:

## AT HOME IN THE WATER

Lesson One will help you develop a comfortable, trusting relationship with water, understand its properties, overcome common fears, and build the confidence to move on to mastery of balance drills. You'll let the water do what it does naturally, while you calmly experience how your body behaves in a fluid, so you can move without resistance or inhibition. Eliminating tension will allow you to progress more easily through every step of our learning process. In Lesson One, you'll also learn how to breathe comfortably while in the water and how it feels to glide short distances effortlessly. Follow these steps at your own pace, moving from one to another as you feel ready.

**A note about our demonstrators:** At age 6, Rosa Wilson helplessly witnessed a young friend drown in the ocean and has never been able to enter the water since. In the lessons on our video, working with Alice Laughlin, you see Rosa's actual first venture into the water in over 50 years. Vik and Dianne Malhotra took conventional swimming lessons for years without learning to swim. They took their first TI lessons just a few months before this video was shot and have progressed so far that they are now teaching TI to adult students.

### BEFORE ENTERING THE WATER:

**Practice "Yoga" Breathing.** At home, or in a comfortable place at the pool, lie flat on your back with legs apart, and arms slightly out with palms up. Support your head so your chin is neutral, not tilted up. Breathe slowly and deeply, 20 to 30 breaths, drawing air deeply into your lungs. Feel your abdomen rise as you inhale and sink as you exhale. Feel every part of your body relax as you breathe – starting with your face, neck and shoulders, arms and finally legs and feet. Feel yourself "melt" into the floor with each exhale. Use yoga breathing regularly to create a sense of relaxation and serenity that you'll aim to recreate in the water.

**Breathe under the Shower.** At home or at the pool, practice breathing with water streaming on your head and over your face. Breathe in through your mouth through the streaming water. The point of this exercise is to become comfortable simply letting the water run over and off your face without wiping or spitting. Breathe out through your mouth and nose, releasing tension with each exhale. Take 20 to 30 relaxed breaths until you feel as free of tension as during yoga breathing.

**Dangle your legs.** Sit on the steps or the edge with your legs dangling in the water. Notice your breathing and how wetness feels on your legs. Simply aim to enjoy the feeling of the water lapping on your legs and how they feel lighter while submerged. Sit here for 20 to 30 yoga breaths, relaxing more with each exhale.

### AFTER ENTERING THE WATER:

**Wash Your Face (Right)** Sit on the steps, where you feel safe and comfortable. Wash your face or pour water over your head until you feel no urge to wipe or spit, until you're comfortable letting the water run off and your breathing feels normal – almost bored.

**Blow bubbles** Hold the side, then take a breath and put your face in, leaving your feet securely on the bottom. Blow small, quiet bubbles. When you come up to breathe, let the water run off without spitting or





wiping. Do this until you're comfortable. If you feel as if your legs want to float up as you put your face in, let them. The more you relax, the "lighter" your legs will become. On the video, you'll see Alice help Rosa to experience by supporting her legs at the shins.

**Combo Breathing (Right)** This exercise will teach an advanced water-breathing skill: Even with water in your mouth, you can breathe through either your mouth or nose – without swallowing water. Crouch so the water wets your chin. Take five or six slow, easy breaths with your chin in the water. Continue until your breathing feels normal – almost bored. Next, let some water into your open mouth. Breathe in through your nose and out through your *mouth* five or six times. Continue until your breathing feels normal – almost bored. Then breathe in through your mouth over the water on your tongue and out through mouth and nose. Advanced swimmers are comfortable having water in their mouth while breathing. This exercise will help you develop the same comfort.



**Bubble Longer** Slow your breathing rhythm by making smaller, quieter bubbles. How quiet can you make your bubbling? This will help prepare you for exercises to come in which you'll want to have your face in the water for longer periods with no tension or sense of breathlessness. Inhale for two counts and bubble out for four to six counts. When you begin rhythmic breathing, you'll exhale more slowly than you inhale. On the video, as Rosa moves just off the steps, Alice keeps a comforting hand on her shoulder

**Breathe Rhythmically** Unlike land-breathing, water-breathing is always linked with body rhythms. The better you connect body rhythms and breathing rhythms, the more effortless your breathing becomes. This exercise introduces that connection. Dip just your mouth at first, then goggles and finally your entire head, as you gain confidence. Work toward a rhythm of a brief inhale and a longer exhale. The skill you developed under the shower – letting water run off your face without wiping or spitting – will be helpful here. Matching a partner's rhythms, as you see Alice and Rosa doing, is a good exercise.

**Explore Underwater** You might call this exercise "the incredible lightness of swimming." The key skill is learning to breathe and bubble in a horizontal position, just a bit closer to how you'll do it while swimming. Most students will start by maintaining strong support with their hands – as Rosa does initially – then gradually allow the water to support their body weight more and more as we see Rosa do as she gains confidence. Alice's reassuring touch helps keep Rosa stable, while also giving her the confidence to move toward a position more like Dianne's. Dianne shows what happens when you relax fully. The more she relaxes, the lighter she feels, until finally her hands float free. This initial experience in enjoying the full support of the water can be a wonderful confidence builder. The smaller and quieter your bubbles, the longer you'll be able to enjoy "floating" this way.

**Discover Weightlessness (Right)** This exercise illustrates how different TI swimming is from conventional approaches; it also represents an incredibly liberating moment for Rosa, after decades of fear of the water. The previous exercises in bubbling and "floating" at the stairs have helped Rosa learn to trust herself, and Alice, enough to move away from the wall and let Alice tow her a short distance. Being towed by Alice, for a few brief seconds shows Rosa that swimming the TI way will be completely different from the churning, frantic experience most people have in their first attempts at swimming. For someone who felt threatened by the water to start with, this is essential to building confidence. Near the stairs, as Alice releases her to glide the last few feet on her own, Rosa has a truly magic moment of knowing



the freedom that weightless swimming can bring. Even a glide that brief can help overcome years of fear and inhibition. If it helps you feel more secure, let your partner tow you toward the wall or stairs, before releasing you to glide on your own the last few feet. Gradually extend the glide. When you've become truly comfortable – again, almost bored – with tow-and-release, let your partner launch you from your feet, as Vik does for Dianne. Dianne doesn't have to travel very far in these solo glides to deepen the imprint of ease and flow. This kind of relaxed, effortless travel is the essence of Total Immersion-style swimming. Doing it six or eight times, over gradually increasing distances, will give you your first invaluable lesson in balance.

**Experience Calm** Some students have described achieving an almost spiritual sense of being “one with the water” while doing this exercise. After Dianne learned it herself, she taught it to her mother, who had never learned to swim in 60-plus years. The first time Dianne helped her mother to relax on the bottom, then float up, it was such a powerful experience, she began to cry tears of joy and release. As your partner presses you down, bubble just enough to keep water out of your nose. (In the final sequence on the video, Vik maintains gentle downward pressure as Dianne releases air slowly, until Vik can push her down with less resistance.) On the bottom, wrap your arms around your head and tune into the sense of peace and serenity. When you want to return to the surface, signal your partner. Notice how Dianne rises in balance, while Vik's legs come up more slowly. This difference is common between men and women – and more pronounced in lean or heavily muscled students. Both Vik and Dianne learn that you fall *up*, not down, in water.

When you trade places and help your partner submerge, you'll feel just how much the water pushes back as you try to press them down. When your partner achieves a high level of confidence, you can stabilize them on the bottom with a foot on the back.

# LESSON TWO:

## WEIGHTLESS IN THE WATER

Lesson Two exercises show you how to position your body and distribute your weight to get the water to support you completely and effortlessly. Once it does, you'll be able to move through the water with an ease you never dreamed possible. Your partner will become even more valuable in aiding your comfort, control and learning here too.

### FLOATING EXERCISES

The first four exercises are purely about learning to float. If you're an adult and haven't yet learned to swim comfortably, it's not likely you can persuade your rational mind after all these years that you can get the water to support you. Instead you simply need to do floating exercises over and over until you know "in your bones" that the water *will* support you every time. So do these exercises repeatedly until you feel completely secure in that knowledge.

**Instant Flotation** (Right) The most buoyant part of your body is your lungs. This exercise teaches you how to use the air in your lungs – in TI we call that your "buoy" – to create instant flotation. It will work best if you start with a deep breath and bubble out only enough air to keep water from invading your nose. Just reach down for your toes and – presto – feel yourself suspended in the water. Once that happens, just enjoy the sense of rocking back and forth gently.



**Regain Your Feet** The safest feeling for any new swimming student is when they have their hips over their feet and their feet solidly on the bottom. When their feet come off the bottom and their hips float out behind, they will often feel vulnerable. This exercise teaches you how to stand securely and introduces your first bilateral coordination skill.

When you're ready to stand from the Jellyfish float, keep your head down and reach forward with one leg, then draw both arms back. Keep your head down until your foot is solidly on the bottom and your hips under you. Then draw your arms into your sides and stand. You chose to do it with that leg because your brain is "wired" to favor that leg. But swimming is a bilateral skill, so repeat this process, reaching the other leg forward. As you do, tune in to how it feels different to reach with the other leg instead. To become a true TI swimmer, you'll need to use both sides of your body (and brain) with equal facility. Movements that don't come naturally require mindful practice to learn.

**Egg Float** (Right) In the Jellyfish, your limbs serve as "outriggers" or stabilizers. In the Egg, you take away the outriggers and allow your body to bob around in response to water movement. Just enjoy the experience of giving yourself over to the water without resistance or reservation.



**Basketball Dribble** (Right) Our final flotation exercise should be fun for both partners. The partner who is more comfortable in the water should be the "basketball" first, so the less experienced partner can observe before being pressed under. It's also a good idea to plan in advance how many times you'll dribble – no surprises. Being dribbled will reveal each person's buoyancy characteristics. A swimmer who bobs up quickly will also achieve balance fairly easily. One who bobs up more slowly will need more manual assistance in coming exercises.



**Spinning** (Right) This particularly playful exercise will be your first opportunity to explore how the water's "thickness" can make it harder to move if you take up too much space, or easier to move when you work with that resistance effectively.

**Try some experiments:** Tuck your body tightly to see how easy it is to spin. Open your tuck to experience more resistance. Use smooth arm movements to experience effective propulsion, then hurried, choppy movements to experience how they waste energy. The lesson: a streamlined body and smooth propelling movements will use the least energy.



**After that, try the following:**

- Spin in one direction...then in the other.
- Spin with your left arm only. Then with your right arm only.
- Spin both left and right with your left arm only, then go each way with your right arm.

These will teach you about bilateral skill and coordination.

- Find the fewest arm sculls to complete a full circle with each arm in each direction.
- How many complete circles can you make in each direction before stopping to breathe?
- With your eyes closed, spin exactly one circle to the right, then exactly one to the left.

These exercises will teach you about movement efficiency.

## TEACH YOURSELF FISHLIKE POSITIONS

These exercises depart completely from traditional swimming instruction. I've watched many classes where beginning swimmers were urged to kick the water into a froth or tear awkwardly at it with their arms. They wear themselves out yet hardly move; no wonder so many never learn to swim. In TI instruction, we want you to start by learning to do *hardly anything* and glide seemingly forever.

Like the floating exercises, Prone Glides, with assistance from a partner, are worth doing again and again to deeply imprint habits of ease and grace. The first two exercises will teach you how to distribute yourself so the water holds you up without effort. The next two will teach you the unmatched joy of balanced, slippery, effortlessly supported gliding through the water.

**Find Your Balance** This will be your most valuable exercise in self-awareness, to this point, as it applies directly and practically to swimming. Repeat it many times, as each attempt can give you a better understanding of how to reach the most horizontal position with the least effort.

Start in the Egg float, and slowly extend your arms and legs. As you see on the video, Linda reaches a perfectly horizontal position with ease, while Som is angled upward about 30 degrees to the surface. Women generally find it easier than men to achieve a horizontal position.

If, like Linda, you can do this easily, then focus on extending your bodyline another inch or two and on making sure your head is right in line with your spine. If your balance is more like Som's, try extending a bit more slowly and carefully, as follows:

- (1) Extend your arms with hands an inch or two below the surface.
- (2) Slowly, gingerly, extend just one leg, then the other. You may find it easier to stay horizontal with just one leg extended, then use that leg as a stabilizer as the other goes out to meet it.



- (3) After extending your bodyline – in whatever position you're in – lower your arms by degrees, then raise them again to see which arm position helps you most.
- (4) Lean into the water on your breastbone to see if that helps make your hips and legs lighter.
- (5) After you've done all you can to become more horizontal on your own, let your partner lift your legs to a horizontal position. If you're the partner, do it with the lightest touch possible.

As “coach” you can also make sure your swimmer's head is right on the head-spine line. When alignment is right you'll only see a small sliver of the back of the head above the water. Then launch your partner into a glide – if they balanced on their own, do it with a light push. If you needed to help lift the legs, give a stronger thrust. While gliding, how does it feel to be perfectly balanced? Tune into and enjoy the relaxing feeling of being supported by the water.

**IYX (Right)** These exercises will be an experiment in gaining more control over your body position by exploring how you can affect your equilibrium with your arms and legs. If you can improve your balance in a Y or X position, then try to maintain that sense of better balance when you extend yourself into the I position again. You and your partner should help each other as needed as you work toward awareness of how to stay balanced with the least effort. When assisting your partner, provide the lightest possible support, staying alert to allow your partner to achieve the best possible position they can without your help.

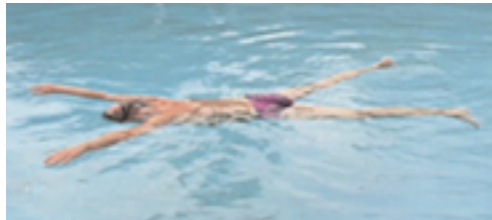
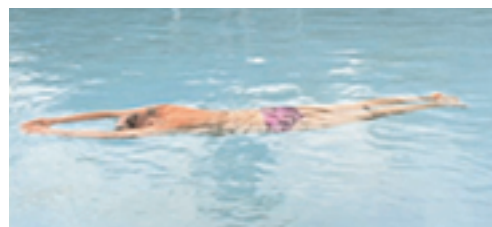
**Prone Glide** Our final series of Lesson Two exercises will foreshadow how effortless and enjoyable swimming will be when you become Fishlike. Take your cue on how to assist your partner, from the first clip, where Som launches Linda with a feather-light push.

If your partner needs help in getting horizontal, reach under his knees and lift until he's balanced from head to toe. Maintain contact and support as you move down to the feet. Then, hold your partner *lightly* by the toes and walk him around a bit, allowing him to sense how it feels to part the waters, moving forward without doing a thing.

After launch, see how far you can travel without kicking. Don't begin kicking until you've done five or six assisted glides. Each time try to travel a bit farther by staying more balanced and extending your bodyline into the longest sleekest position possible.

When you're gliding motionless as far as possible, you can begin kicking – barely enough to keep your legs from sinking and to maintain momentum. Kick quietly and gently, keeping your legs inside your body cylinder. This light minimal kick is typical of TI swimming.

Next, practice self-starting glides without a partner. Push off the wall, balance and streamline and see how far you can glide without kicking. Or push from the bottom into a long, lazy glide. Try to travel a bit farther each time. The less effort or kick you need *now* to balance, the less you'll need *later* to drill or swim.



**Rolling Glide** (Right) This will orient you to the rhythmic body roll of TI freestyle. When acting as “coach,” support your partner’s ankles while she extends into Prone Glide position. Turn her slightly to both sides, from the ankles. Watch to see that she can maintain good head-spine alignment, and stop rotating if she loses it. After rotating at least twice to each side, give her a push, so she can try to continue rolling on her own. If you’re the swimmer, focus on keeping yourself needle-like and learn how much you can roll while maintaining your alignment. After launch, roll easily from side to side, imprinting the movement you’ll use in swimming.



**A Few Easy Strokes** If you’re anxious for a taste of “swimming” by this point, feel free to try a few strokes. After launch, glide a bit with your head in line and feeling like a streamlined vessel. Keep looking down as you take 6 to 8 strokes. Don’t worry about “technique.” Just reach forward with one arm, then the other, hold the water in your hand and move it straight back under you. Let your legs follow your body in whatever way feels most natural. Your primary focus should be on maintaining the same supported-body-with-minimal-kick feeling you have just gained. Stroke as gently and quietly as possible for a “preview” of how relaxing TI swimming will be.

# LESSON 3:

## BECOMING BALANCED AND SLIPPERY

Now that you've experienced the freedom of weightless, effortless movement, Lesson Three will teach you to swim as fish do. This process will be different from the conventional crawl stroke done so awkwardly by most people, we'll teach you a swimming style that will be easy to learn so you can quickly begin gaining all the benefits and pleasures of swimming fluent laps. And the skills we'll teach you will also serve as the perfect foundation for going on to learn the traditional strokes – but with a difference. From the beginning, you'll develop habits of flow, efficiency and ease, rather than struggle.

### BALANCE ON YOUR BACK (BB)

The prone balance positions in Lesson Two provide valuable insights about ease in the water, but are limited by your need to breathe. In this exercise you can experience the support of the water, without having to do anything special to get air.

**As the “Swimmer” do the following:**

- Begin kicking gently as your coach starts towing. Relax and allow your coach to position your head. Pay particular attention to your head: feel the water at the corners of your goggles and the bottom of your chin with ears underwater. We'll use this head position for all nose-up drills.
- Lean into the water with your upper back (but keep your shoulders relaxed), then notice how that affects the position of your hips and legs.



**As the “Coach” do the following:**

- Begin towing from the shoulders to provide some momentum.
- Continue towing as you position the swimmer's head with the face parallel to the surface, and with water touching the corners of the goggles. Note: For some students, this head position may feel very deep in the water. You may need to encourage the swimmer to trust you and release neck and shoulder muscles.
- Release the swimmer's head and continue walking. Walking backward to provide “draft” is a great aid to their maintaining a relaxed kick. Check and adjust head position as necessary and lightly press arms to sides. Resume towing as needed.

### SOLO PRACTICE

Once you've both achieved ease and comfort, you're ready to try some “solo” practice – which you can initiate by launching your partner from their feet. Practice with these focal points:

- Feel just as you did while being towed, particularly head position and sense of effortless support.
- Kick with a compact, silent flutter – lightly flicking your toes toward the surface. Study the underwater video sections to observe how shallow and gentle the kick is.
- Arms pressed lightly to your sides (no sculling or bracing)
- With practice aim to travel more quietly and with less effort. If you feel yourself losing balance, just stand up, breathe deeply to relax and resume with a push from the bottom. Your momentum will aid as towing did. Your main goal is to replicate the sensation you felt while being towed.

## SWEET SPOT (SS)

This is the “rest and recovery” position for all drills that follow.

Sweet Spot is especially invaluable to understanding how to keep good head-spine alignment while rotating and keeping your feet and legs tucked cleanly inside your body cylinder. Start in BB and rotate very little, following the example of Jennifer and Tobey on the video. The goal isn't to roll all the way to your side, but to find the most comfortable position.

### As the “Swimmer” do the following:

- After your coach assists you to SS, tune in to your head-spine alignment and slipping your entire body through the smallest possible “hole” in the water.
- Keep your body rotation minimal. SS is more towards your back than the side.
- Maintain this position after release by leaning back on your shoulder and keeping the water at the corners of your goggles.
- Kick only enough to maintain balance and momentum; after release continue to feel as if you're being towed.

### As the “Coach” do the following:

- Use one hand to keep your swimmer's head aligned and stable, as you use the other hand to help them rotate to SS. Then tow with hands on both shoulders, while adjusting head position as needed.
- Eyeball the line from head to toe and correct as needed. When the line from head to toes looks aligned, release and continue leading.
- Resume towing your swimmer if they lose momentum. Tow and release as often as needed.



## SOLO PRACTICE

After you have each traveled easily for 20 to 30 feet after release, try some solo practice. Just a short distance at first, then longer as you feel able, giving your attention to these focal points:

- Try to feel as much as possible like you did while being towed.
- Start each repeat with head hidden in BB, then rotate just slightly to reach SS.
- As you rotate, keep your head still and stable. Water should touch the corners of both goggles at all times.
- Slip through the water as cleanly and quietly as possible. If you feel a bit less comfortable on one side, try to tune into what you do on the other side and try to make both sides feel similar.

**Active Balance (AB)** This will help you improve your feel for SS by practicing it in a dynamic manner. As you rotate to each side, your goal is to consistently find your most comfortable position. Employ the Buddy System much as you did in SS, but with more attention to keeping the head “hidden” and perfectly still as the body rotates back and forth. In “solo” practice, your main goal is to rotate with gentle weight shifts and without help from your hands or extra effort on your kick. Stabilize on one side for three “yoga breaths” before rolling to the other side.



## LENGTHEN YOUR VESSEL (LV)

This drill teaches a lesson that will be most valuable when you begin swimming – that you reduce drag and can move faster and more easily when you extend an arm to lengthen your bodyline. In fact, you should become so “slippery” in this position that you can tow very effectively by just a single fingertip, as you see Mark do with Alice on the video.



### As the “Swimmer,” do the following:

- Begin in BB and allow your coach to help you rotate slightly to your SS.
- Follow your Coach’s cue to sneak your lower arm to full extension, slightly below the surface and allow your Coach to position it. Then tune into the sense the “traction” on your hand gives you of having a long, sleek bodyline.
- Focus on slipping through the smallest possible *hole* in the water during towing and after release.
- Use the lightest possible kick to maintain balance and momentum after release – keep that kick inside your body cylinder.

### As the “Coach,” do the following:

- Assist your swimmer as needed as they begin kicking in BB and rotate to SS. Check head position and head-spine alignment, and assist in positioning.
- After your swimmer sneaks their arm forward, help position the arm and hand correctly. The hand should be just below the surface, and the arm fully extended but relaxed. Particularly watch for a backward-bending wrist; correct this so the hand is straight or *slightly* flexed.
- Tow gently to emphasize the *long vessel* feeling.
- If your swimmer is a sinker or weak kicker, tow for as long or as often as needed for them to learn to maintain minimal momentum without over-kicking.

## SOLO PRACTICE

After you have each traveled easily, after release, for 30 to 40 feet on each side, we’ll again do solo practice, for short distances. Give your attention to these focal points:

- Start in BB and rotate to SS before sneaking your arm overhead. Then try to feel as you did while being towed – long, sleek and relaxed. Keep your head hidden – with water at the corners of your goggles – and lay back until your hips and legs feel light.
- If you feel less comfortable after extending your arm, return it to your side, regain your balance, then extend the arm *weightlessly* without changing your body position
- Keep your extended hand in the position in which you feel the least strain, but it might be useful to experiment with a palm-out position, which can help prepare you for nose-down positions to come.
- The main benefit of this drill is in mastering the lack of effort or struggle that Jennifer shows in her solo practice. That comes from a long slippery balanced bodyline. Aim to feel this way on both sides. If you have any difficulty feel as effortless as Jennifer looks, try the drill with fins to experience the relaxation that’s so important in balance drills.

## FISH

In the Fish drill, you'll learn to balance directly on your side in the nose-down position (the only time you'll be balanced on your side is when you are nose down). Fish is also the easiest way to learn to keep your head directly in line with your spine – as it will be in every skill to follow.

### As the “Swimmer,” do the following:

- Starting from BB (possibly with an assist from your coach to initiate momentum), rotate to SS on one side and remain there long enough to check your balance.
- Rotate to nose down and kick gently while allowing your coach to guide your head and torso into the right position. Memorize these positions – particularly the feel of your head position. Look directly down and use the lightest possible kick.
- Return to SS for 3 “yoga” breaths and allow your Coach to help you refine that position. Rotate with gentle weight shifts, trying not to disturb the water.
- Feel as if you are following a laser line as you rotate between nose up and nose down positions.



### As the “Coach,” do the following:

- Gently (or firmly as needed) position your swimmer's head after they rotate to nose down and make sure shoulders are stacked. Take Jennifer's assist on the underwater view as your cue.
- You can help with propulsion by pressing forward – and slightly downward – on the upper shoulder, to improve momentum and balance. If your swimmer is still tilted “uphill” you can also press upward a bit on the lower rib cage.
- Assist as needed in helping your swimmer return to SS *with head hidden*. They should be in exactly the position they started from.
- Observe your swimmer on the second cycle as they continue independently, helping as needed.
- You can also help them rehearse with support from the feet as Tobey and Jennifer show on the video.



## SOLO PRACTICE

After you've each practiced Fish successfully on each side, we'll again do solo practice, traveling a short distance – just one to two breathing cycles – at first. Focus on these points:

- Try to feel just as you did while being assisted, particularly in finding the same head position – leading with the *top* of your head and looking directly down.
- Lean just a bit on your lower shoulder to keep your hips and legs feeling light.
- Try to follow a “laser line” down the pool as you rotate back and forth between nose-up and nose-down positions, with your head also remaining right on the spine-line as it rotates.
- Slip through the smallest possible “hole” in the water, with the least water disturbance.

## SKATING (SK)

In Skating, you'll experience balance for the first time in a true swimming position and learn to position your extended hand correctly below your head. Skating will also reinforce that you breathe by rolling a balanced, sleek bodyline to the air, rather than by turning or lifting your head.

### As the "Swimmer," do the following:

- Start in the Fish position. Pause to check that you're looking directly down with your shoulders stacked, then extend your lower arm.
- Allow your coach to assist in positioning your arm below your head, then check that your nose is straight down, shoulder straight up
- Continue kicking gently, slipping through the smallest possible "hole" in the water. When you need to breathe, let your coach help you rotate back to the LV position as shown.
- Take 3 yoga breaths before you return to the Skating Position. Feel as if you're following a laser line as you rotate between nose up and nose down positions.

### As the "Coach," do the following:

- Check your Swimmer's head position and alignment in the "Fish" position. Stack the shoulders if they're not vertical.
- After your swimmer extends the lower arm, check that it's *palm down and below the head*. Tow down and forward on your swimmer's hand and flex the wrist to point fingers down.
- Continue towing as much as needed to imprint true ease and balance. Keep checking head position as you do. You can also assist by pressing forward on the upper shoulder (as in Fish).

## SOLO PRACTICE:

When practicing on your own, feel just as you did when being towed and assisted. Start with just one or two breathing cycles and increase your distance one breath cycle at a time. Avoid any sense of struggle. At first, start each Skating practice segment from the Fish position; later you can begin from the nose-up LV position. If you feel a loss of balance, angle your extended hand to a deeper position, until you feel your hips and legs become lighter. Memorize the hand position that produces the greatest sense of balance and use it in the next two drills.

## UNDERSKATE (USK)

This may be the simplest drill in the entire sequence as you need only add one simple movement to the Skating drill. Progress to UnderSkate after you've become entirely comfortable with solo practice in Skating. The main skill to imprint here is to be sure your head is still in line and your shoulders are still stacked when you see your hand under your nose.

### Solo Practice

- Start in Skating position and check: Head position, shoulders stacked, and arm angling DEEP with your palm and fingertips down.
- Sneak your other arm forward. Use this as your "mantra" as you do: *Wipe your belly. See your hand. Check your balance.*
- Check that you're still on your side with shoulders stacked when you see your hand, then slide it back to your side and roll all the way back to your nose-up LV position. Keep that laser-line feeling as you do.
- Practice on both sides until it's second nature to stay balanced on your side when your hand is under your nose.



## UNDERSWITCH (US)

We've come to the final step in our Happy Laps progression. For the brand-new TI swimmer, this will be "swimming" for you – an exercise that allows you to enjoy the satisfaction of doing lap after fluent lap. UnderSwitch provides all the health and wellness benefits of swimming, while also giving you a foundation for acquiring a whole range of advanced skills. Just watch Jennifer and Tobey on the video to see what a beautiful way this is to move your body through water – balanced, sleek, graceful and comfortable. UnderSwitch is designed to be done solo, but a partner can still be very helpful in giving you feedback on how your movements resemble those on the video.

### Practice UnderSwitch

(1) Start as in UnderSkate. When you see your hand under your nose, switch and roll to LV position on the other side. Take three yoga breaths and check your balance. Then, swivel nose-down to Skating position...pause...and repeat in the other direction.

(2) After you've mastered the basic movement, give attention to these focal points one at a time. Focus on *doing one thing really well each length*:

- Don't begin sneaking your hand until you check head and hand position and that your shoulders are still stacked.
- Switch when you see your hand and switch all the way to your Sweet Spot. Think of breathing this way: "Take your belly button to the air; your head just goes along for the ride."
- Switch through the smallest possible "hole" in the water and drill *silently*.



## WHAT COMES NEXT

Mastery of US will give you a skill that will let you swim many laps with graceful, fluent, efficient movements. You've taken an important step in making the water a welcoming place and learning to move through it with flow and ease...but that's just the first step. Total Immersion swimmers are lifelong learners and we have many ways to help you get even more satisfaction and enjoyment from swimming.

America's most popular swimming stroke is the "crawl" most popularly known as freestyle – largely because it's the fastest way to cover any distance from a sprint to a marathon. Freestyle is swum by all kinds of swimmers from recreational to competitive. Unfortunately, most swimmers – even those with years of experience – swim it inefficiently, never experiencing the bliss of swimming it with the kind of flow and grace you've seen on this video.

TI Freestyle is always satisfying and so economical that you can learn to use it to swim almost any distance. You've already begun the slightest exploration of it at the end of Lesson Two. To take the next step, you can learn a TI Freestyle with the aid of our DVD **Freestyle Made Easy** which builds naturally and seamlessly upon the foundation you started here and guides you through a series of sequential skills. You'll learn:

- How to continue working with a practice partner
- How to further develop your balance skills
- How to create rhythmic propelling movement in advanced
- The most effective stroke timing with ZipperSwitch drills



- And how to transition seamlessly from drills to a beautiful stroke with. Overswitch drills. You can also get instruction from expert Total Immersion Teachers
- in a workshop setting with other swimmers like you
- or in private 1-on-1 classes.

Find information about all the ways Total Immersion can help you become a complete swimmer at our website at [www.totalimmersion.net](http://www.totalimmersion.net). Or call us at **800-609-7946**.

Happy Laps!  
Terry Laughlin  
New Paltz NY  
December, 2003