

10 TIPS FOR THE STUDENT-SWIMMER

This week across the country, many kids experienced that awful, anxious, no-good feeling once again: they went back to school. Which means many swimmers also went back to the pool. I'm unsure which devious, evil group of adults conjured this unfair alignment of school and pool obligations, but nevertheless, the first week of school and swimming can be a difficult one. Kids around the country must learn how to balance the student-swimmer lifestyle: swimming in the morning, school during the day, more swimming in the afternoon, and endless hours of homework at night.... Then repeat.

As a former student-swimmer myself, I've come up with some studying tips and tricks to help swimmers cope. To help kids endure the onslaught of lectures, homework marathons, and 1650 repeat sets this fall. I've been there. I've done it. I don't have a Harry Potter time stoppage device, but these tricks can help.

Here are 10 Tricks For the Student-Swimmer...

I. Carpool to the Pool.

Anytime "pool" is used in a word, pay attention, swimmers. Carpooling was a lifesaver for me in high school. Our high school was 30 minutes from the pool, so teammates took turns carpooling. Or, in college, a teammate would drive to practice while the rest of us squeezed in 5 more minutes of sleep. You can also carpool to meets. Carpooling is the ultimate time saver, so long as you can "trick" someone else to drive you around. (Ahem, I mean "carpool" you around.) Read. Study. Quiz yourself. Or just nap, nap, then nap some more.

II. Tape Record Lectures.

Sometimes in class I'd get so tired, I couldn't pay attention. So, I began recording lectures on an audio recorder. After class, before tests, or on weekends, I'd plug in the audio – usually when I was jogging or riding a bike -- and I'd re-listen to the lectures. You know how you watch a movie over, and see all sorts of things you didn't catch the first time? Re-listening to lectures is the same way. Buy an underwater mp3 player (if your coach supports this) and re-listen to lectures and entire classes while you're warming up for practice. Great, very underutilized way to study.

III. Eat During Class; Nap During Lunchtime.

My teachers allowed us to eat during class. I'd bring my lunch, eat, and then during lunch break, I'd find a quiet little corner of a hallway and nap. No one bothered me – especially when I put my huge red fuzzy parka over my face. (Be prepared to be labeled "the weird kid in the fuzzy red sleeping bag" if you do this.)

IV. Cut Out Reality TV.

No amounts of "Bachelorette" will help you do homework. No amounts of "Dancing With The Stars" (unless Natalie Coughlin is a contestant) will improve your life. As someone who has watched countless hours of horrible, terrible, brain-numbing reality TV, I know. I want those hours of my life back. I could have written the Next Great American Novel, but instead, I'm wondering which Real Housewife will melt down on screen next. Don't fall into the reality TV trap. Take my advice. Run far from your TV, and do your homework instead.

V. Laminate Flash Cards.

This is for the very intense student in you, perfect for pre-test study days. Laminating flash cards can help you study poolside. Occasionally there are long breaks between sets in practice. I remember one girl used to laminate her flash cards for a test and bring them to the pool and study between sets. She figured that on those days when there just wasn't enough time to get everything done, she'd overlap a few duties. Our coach appreciated she didn't skip practice to

study, and she appreciated that she got to study a few extra minutes at the pool.

VI. Social Media-less Sundays.

Nothing will suck your free time away faster than social media. I'm not advocating getting rid of everything. But set aside one day a week – or one afternoon a week, if a whole day is too difficult – to lock yourself in a room and study. I call these days "Social Media-less Sundays." As a friend once told me, "Unless you're a rocket scientist or the President of the United States, there's no real reason you would ever have to check your email more than once a day." He's right. (I'm guessing none of our readers are rocket scientists or present Presidents.)

VII. Write Facts On Water Bottles.

Another easy way to efficiently merge studying with your swimming. Write a fact – something, anything – onto your water bottle. (Make sure you can erase it later) This is even a great way to improve your vocabulary and learn fun new words to confuse your coach with, like a "Word of the Day" exercise. Or just study for a big test coming up.

VIII. Shorten Epic After-Practice Showers.

Sitting in the showers for 45 minutes after practice during a cold January night is awesome. My coach used to joke that they'd name a specific shower after me because I spent so much of my youth there. But this is a time killer. Hours of your week go by like this, sitting in hot water. That's all you're doing. Sitting or standing in hot water. If you really like sitting in hot water so much, find a hot tub, bring a book, and do some studying. This is coming from someone who literally spent YEARS of his life sitting in after-practice showers. I can't get them back. They were awesome, but I wish I had done something more productive than stand in hot water.

IX. Don't Cut Sleep.

Many kids assume the best way to "do everything" is to sleep less. They won't cut out reality TV, or Twitter/Facebook/Pinterest/Tumblr, or epic after-practice showers. Instead, they'll sleep an hour less. Guys, you need sleep to function properly. Especially when you're young. You think with more clarity. You grow more. You recover stronger. Everything is a much happier place when you sleep. Your mood improves. People around you like you. You smile more. There are all sorts of scientific data about how sleep is important, but if you find yourself cutting out sleep, you should instead cut an activity or two. A coach once told me, "Do you want to be average in many things, or great in a few things?" I stopped playing soccer and piano lessons and baseball and focused on a few things, like swimming and school and music. That was the choice I made. Sleep isn't an activity to "quit."

X. Set Aside Time To "Do Nothing."

When I was stressed for time in college, I was given a book called "Zen in the Martial Arts." This book has less to do with martial arts and more with life balance and living a productive, healthy life. While there were many great lessons that helped me with my swimming, there was a chapter about a writer who, each week, sets aside a day to do nothing. Literally. Doesn't have lunch with others because that was "doing something." He found that he needed a break in his day, a pause between the action, to reset himself. So many times in our day, we are too simulated. Too overworked. Too much going on. Like any great song, oftentimes it's not the notes, but the silences between the notes that make a song truly sing. Life is the same way. Sometimes you have to schedule a "do nothing" period – even if it's just 15 minutes. A period of time to sit and pause and reflect, even if you think you don't have 15 minutes to spare. While it seems counter-productive to "do nothing" when you're stressed for time, try it out. You'll be charged up for the rest of your day.