

Coach / Teacher to Student Ratios for Learn to Swim and Coaching

There are a whole range of risk management factors which need to be considered in determining what is a prudent Coach or Teacher to Swimmer/Learners ratio. These factors can be broken down into the following sub headings.

Environmental

- Built (e.g. Pool) or natural environment
- Potential for change (e.g. tide, currents etc.)
- Depth – variations in / between pools
- Prior accidents and incidents
- Space – lane width, pool length
- Temperature of the air and water
- Foreseen risks

Learners

- Age – mental and physical
- Ability – including the spread between lowest and highest skill level within the class
- Prior experience
- Activity being undertaken

Coaches/Teachers

- Qualifications and accreditation level
- Skill
- Experience
- Number of Coaches/Teachers and Caregivers present

What is an ideal class ratio for a particular activity that may have been undertaken numerous times by the Learners (such as swimming across the pool in standing-depth water) may be inappropriate for a new activity being undertaken for the first time (swim across the pool in deep water).

Class Ratios

The table below documents the industry consensus.

Classification	Age Indicator	Ratio
Prenatal	Prenatal	Exercise and education program for the parent
Newborn	Under 4 months	1:1 Caregiver/ Newborn Home education program
Baby, Toddler	4 months to 42 months	1:1 Caregiver/ Baby, Toddler Max 7 Caregiver/child couples per Teacher Varied water
Preschooler	42 months to 60 months	When teaching in shallow water 1:5 Preschooler/Teacher When teaching in deep water 1:1 Pre-schooler /Teacher When teaching in varied water 1:4 Pre-schooler /Teacher
Primary Schooler	5 to 12 years old	1:10 Learners with little or no swimming experience 1:12 Intermediate Learners who have basic skills and can swim 25m 1:15 Advanced Learners who can swim 50m

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Secondary Schooler	13 to 17 years old	1:10 For Learners 1:25 If all are Swimmers
Mini or Junior Squad		1:25 For groups which contain only Swimmers
Advanced or Senior Squad		1:40 For regular training squads
Adolescent	Approx. 14 to 18 years old	
Adult	18 years upwards	

For students with special needs the ratio will vary but may be as high as 1:1 – based on risk assessment of student need and ability

These ratios are for swimming pools only – ratios are different for open water environments

Note: A “transitional period” is recognised and has been identified between 30 months to 42 months.

Depending on maturity and development, a young Child of this age may be classified as either a Toddler or Pre-schooler. A specific document on the issues surrounding determining Newborn, Baby, Toddler and Preschool Learners is available separately from ASCTA.

There has been a gradual shift over the decades to smaller swimming and water safety class sizes. Most lessons in the 1950’s 1960’s and even into the 1970’s consisted of large classes, sometimes up to 40 children with one Teacher. The Teacher tended to use a very autocratic style of teaching.

There are stories of Teachers acting like Sergeant Majors marching up and down the pool deck using a broom stick to stop children holding on to the side of the pool, drilling children in a regimented style with a military precision. There was much repetition of swimming drills with the emphasis on everyone doing something all the time so that misbehaviour didn’t become a factor.

In spite of fewer opportunities to swim, children did acquire swimming and water safety skills as they tended to be older than those in swimming and water safety lessons today and the skills taught were well reinforced within gradual progressive steps.

Today, swimming and water safety lessons are generally characterised by much small classes in specially designed teaching pools with qualified Teachers catering to individual needs. The instructing techniques are more sophisticated with a greater number of drills, swimming aids and progressive techniques in use. Teachers are in the water, interacting in a less formal way with more of a focus on individual progression rather than a whole group approach.

However there is still a demand for larger size classes, especially in school situations and the question is often asked by Teachers with little experience as to how to approach teaching a this type of large class. As is often the case with large groups, if the class is conducted in an educational facility or to a school group the Teacher must firstly make themselves fully aware of the relevant Education Department’s rules and regulations which may contain limits on class sizes, detail supervision requirements and the levels of emergency response, Teacher qualifications and other class procedures that must be in place.

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Generally when instructing large groups, the method often employed is to instruct the group as a whole, then allow controlled performance of the instructions either by a Learners demonstrating or all the class participating followed by selective feedback to a couple of identified individuals or a general (positive or negative) response to the whole class. Drills provided are usually brought down to the lowest “common denominator” so that all Learners can undertake the instruction. More experienced Teachers will provide modified sets of instructions to cater for higher achievers within the group. E.g. if kicking with a board on your back is the drill, more advanced Learners might be instructed to kick without the board, but to remember all other instructions i.e. point your toes, keep your feet and knees under the water etc.

Other strategies observed with more experienced Teachers are:

Working across a pool with the less experienced Swimmers in the shallow end, graduating the level of Learners to the better Swimmers being in the deepest part of the pool.

Using games to enhance group control yet allowing Learners to work at their own level e.g. “who can race to the other side the fastest!” may result in better Learners swimming across whilst inexperienced Learners may walk across.

Sending Learners off in lots of two or three at a time, so individual feedback can still be provided. Make sure that Learners are separated so as not to crash into each other e.g. the Learners from either end goes each time or every second child goes on the command.

A smart Teacher will set up the start of a drill so that they are not giving a command to every Learners to commence (i.e. not acting a traffic cop!). This may be achieved by using the pace clock to set Learners off at intervals or by a placing a pool side marker so that as one swimmer passes by it indicates when the next Learners is to depart or Learners commence on the wave of a hand or some other visual signal.

Drills may be themed but a variety of individual variations permitted. E.g. the theme may be alternate kicking correctly. The variations may be (from least to most experienced Learners)

1. sitting on the edge with feet in the water kicking
2. in the water holding on to the side kicking
3. on your front with a kick board – kicking
4. torpedo with kicking
5. on your back with a board – kicking
6. on your back with no board kicking

In all cases the instructions may be to remember to kick under the water, knees only bending slightly with a fast up and down movement. This way the ability of variety levels of Learners

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Swimming and Training Squads

A swimming Squad is one where the focus is on improving stroke technique. These are often called mini squads or junior squads and are mainly for swimmers transitioning from swimming and water safety lessons to a training squad.

A training Squad is often called a senior squad and has a focus on improving all aspects of the Swimmer to improve performance. A multifaceted approach to improving stroke technique, fitness levels, mentality, nutrition etc., will be utilised by the Coach.

As all participants are competent Swimmers in a familiar environment with a great deal of prior experience between the Swimmers and the Coach, much larger ratios can be safely managed, however the actual levels should be set based on a prudent risk management assessment.

Should one or more Swimmers be classified as a Learner or “non-Swimmer” then the ratios must default to the level of the least capable Student.

Safety

In all instances, Learners or Swimmers should be educated in what the emergency signal at the venue is and how to respond appropriately. A system which allows for outside emergency assistance to be called without delay should be available within the pool venue. E.g. a phone or call system to emergency services.

Venue Evacuation Procedures should be documented and known. Coaches and Teachers should inspect the venue prior to commencing lessons and constantly monitor for changes which may impact upon the lessons. Risk assessments should consider the prior accident and incident history of the venue and group. Risk assessments and action plans should identify the rescue and resuscitation responsibilities and roles of Coaches, Teachers, Lifeguards, pool management and others.