

# Which is the best stroke to introduce first in learn-to-swim lessons?

## Different First Strokes for Different Folks (and Cultures)

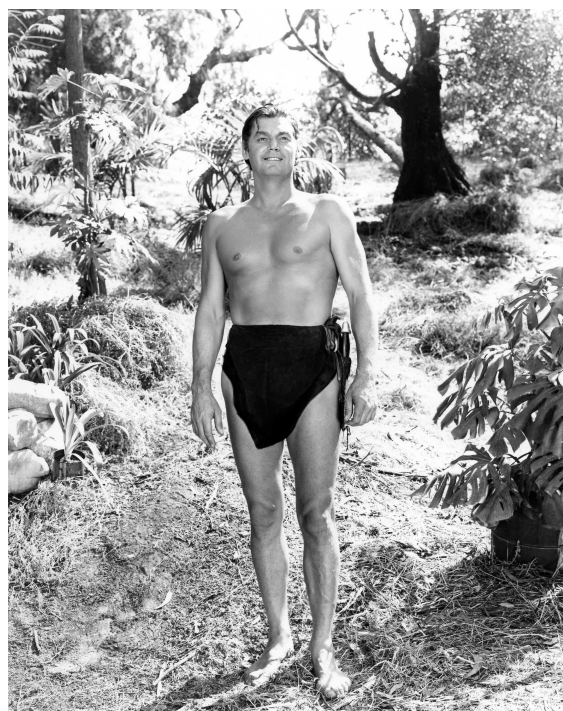
You may not realize that around the world, different cultures and countries have vastly different approaches to the question of which swim stroke is the “best” one to introduce first. In most of **Europe, Asia, and Japan**, the strong preference is teaching Breaststroke first. The rationale is that for beginners, Breaststroke can be done with the head out of the water which allows a simple forward breathing pattern and also a symmetrical arm and leg action. Critics of Breaststroke, of course, point out how challenging the Breaststroke kick is for beginners (i.e. whip kick) to learn along with the “pull, breathe, kick, glide” stroke coordination timing pattern.

Interestingly, in **North America** and in **Australia**, learn-to-swim programs primarily teach Freestyle (front crawl) and Backstroke first. The popularity of front crawl swimming likely dates back to the 1920s when Olympic swimming champions, Johnny Weismuller and Buster Crabbe, went on to star in the movies, with Weismuller often showing off his swimming prowess in his popular role as Tarzan.

Despite its popularity, Freestyle is not the easiest stroke for novices to learn, due to the difficulty of the overarm action and the lateral breathing.

However, the Freestyle stroke is easily the fastest and most efficient competitive swimming stroke when performed by expert swimmers. It is also the stroke most kids enjoy.

Once the learners have mastered the technique of Freestyle, it makes the teaching of subsequent strokes a lot easier because the coordination of kicking, arm circles and breathing has already been learned.



In **New Zealand** we follow the Australian learn to swim model which is teaching Freestyle and Backstroke first.

Therefore, we are preparing children not only be able to swim and save themselves but also be competent enough to swim to save others.

Finally, Backstroke is the most important stroke from a safety perspective. If children get into trouble and have to swim a distance, lying on their back is the best position to conserve energy and ensure breaths can be taken.

### Reference:

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