

Novice Document

A Guide to starting your triathlon journey

Hi everyone! I am Lucas, this year's Men's captain for the Triathlon Club. Together with Emilia, the Women's captain, we are responsible for all things sports-related this year in the club. If you are reading this - you must be one of the keen-beans excited to start your Triathlon journey. Starting a new sport is indeed quite daunting - especially when you are starting three (or four, depending on who you ask)! I have gotten a lot of questions over the first couple of weeks so I thought it is best to summarise my thoughts and suggestions in one document - but if you have any more questions and suggestions, feel free to let Emilia and me know!

Triathlon - A quick introduction

Triathlon is a multi-discipline sport, bringing together swimming, cycling and running in one single event. It is a great sport that adds a lot of variety to those who are sick of only doing one sport! Unlike some multi-discipline sports, triathletes complete all three sports in a single race, therefore adding Transition, transitioning between different sports, as a key component of the sport (it is often called the fourth discipline in Triathlon). Triathletes aim to complete the course in the shortest amount of time - so like any race, you win by first crossing the finish-line.

There are different types (called distances) to a triathlon event; mainly differing in the course length. Here is a table of triathlon distances:

Course Length	Super-Sprint	Sprint	Standard	Middle Distance/ Half IRONMAN 70.3	Long Distance/ IRONMAN
Swim (Open-water)	400m	750m	1.5km	1.9km	3.8km
Bike	10km	20km	40km	90km	180km
Run	2.5km	5km	10km	21.1km	42.2km
Remark		Swim - Pool (400m)			

Varsity Triathlon, the event where we aim to beat our arch-enemies (**bridge), is a Sprint Triathlon. It is a short, punchy, race that requires a bit of endurance and a lot of power. There are two BUCS Triathlon events throughout the year and they are Sprint and Standard distance triathlons, normally organised in May and June respectively. If you are an Oxford student, you may want to look into competing in them and getting points for Oxford!

The British Triathlon Federation, abbreviated as BTF (<https://www.britishtriathlon.org/>), is the national governing body for Triathlon events here in the UK. If you are a dedicated triathlete, you may want to get a BTF membership which gives students a discount at £35.00 for a Core membership. The main thing you want to get from it is the Personal Accident Cover as well as Race Licences which are third-party Public Liability insurance for the duration of the race. If you turn up to a lot of events during the year, it might be helpful to have a Core BTF membership as they offer unlimited race licences. However, a Race Pass now only costs £2 for participants aged 24 or under (£8 for 25 and older) so there is not much point getting a membership anymore - unless you want the other benefits the membership provides!

Some of our members prefer two-sport events. There are three kinds of these races - Duathlon (no swim), Aquathlon (no bike) and Aquabike (no run). The BTF also happen to be the national governing body for these events. In fact, duathlons are the main events that happen outside of the main Triathlon season (around April to September) - there is normally a BUCS Duathlon event in November and our annual Varsity Duathlon happens in February. This is normally the event where runners and cyclists shine...

Triathlon is a relatively new sport. The first modern triathlon event was held at Mission Bay, San Diego, California on 25th September, 1974. 46 participants entered the event and it was organised by members of the San Diego Track Club. Since then, we have grown a long way - the first Olympic Triathlon event was held in Sydney in 2000 and since then has become arguably the best sport to watch - GB Triathlon has consistently ranked as the Best Nation in the Olympics since 2012!

Overall Session Planning

Training for a triathlon is a lot - you have to manage your training across all three sports and maintain a good work-life balance... that is not easy! You will also need to think about some additional transition-focused skills...

The club offers a lot of sessions for members to join and train. Here is the timetable for the sessions run during the week again:

<https://outric.web.ox.ac.uk/training>

Most of the sessions are committee-led. This means that Emilia and I will be planning the overall training plan structure with the coaches (behind the scenes) but most of the sessions will be led by one of our wonderful committee members who will give you some advice on how to go about the set and they will do it with you together. Three of the sessions in the week during term time are coached: these are Track on Wednesday (19:30) and the swims on Thursday mornings (06:30, 07:30) and Friday evenings (19:30).

This year we have our returning swimming and track coaches who have been so wonderful in helping the club rinse the tabs last year (12-0 to us...). Matt (Seddon) has been coaching the club since the beginning of time and have been vital to our running successes. He also coaches the Cross Country Team and you will often find him eagerly talking to experienced and beginning athletes alike at Track in the dark. Matt is a really nice coach and even has his own personal website and podcast - I really encourage you to check them out (<https://www.sumrunning.com/coach>). Sam and Connie have been with us as student coaches since last year and were the key reason why we completely destroyed Cambridge in Varsity. Sam is currently the Blues captain for the Swimming team and is a really really fast swimmer - he always gives hard aerobic sets that will be so good for you in the long-term (even though you are so defeated every time after doing his sets). Connie had swum competitively in the States and has been with the Oxford swimming team for a couple of years now - the wooden board of records has multiple entries of hers. She also might be (if you notice her last name) related to a certain Olympian in the GB team... We also have Arundhati, our student Triathlon coach, who will be writing some of the sets for our training programme. Arundhati is a really really good triathlete but since last year has been more-or-less always injured. But she is always sunshiny and lovely so you should definitely have a chat with her if you see her around!

You might find some of the sessions a bit confusing so here is a quick guide to what they are:

Turbos - Turbos are cycling sessions where you bring your own bike and it gets mounted on a cycle turbo so you can pedal whilst being in one spot. This year, Arundhati will be writing the turbo sets and they normally will alternate between a more steady aerobic set and a more speed, effort set.

Track - Track sessions are coached by Matt and is one of the most attended sessions in the week. Matt has a dedicated running programme for the club and normally we will have a dedicated session for the night. You will find groups of people running at different speeds during the reps. It takes a while to figure out what you are doing and which group you should run with - but running with people can help you improve by pushing each other bit-by-bit!

Swim - The swim sessions are organised at the Rosenblatt Swimming Pool at Iffley. Normally we have four lanes and the lanes are divided by speed and distance - the lane closest to the windows does the Short set whereas the lane furthest away does the Long set. It will take a bit of time to figure out what lane you should be in, but starting in an easier lane and then move up if you are

too fast is normally the way to go. Connie and Sam write all of our swimming sets - Thursdays mornings are normally for pulls and drills (since we have track on Wednesday night), Friday evenings are the hard aerobic set and Sundays are a bit of a recovery set with bursts of effort.

Brick - brick sets are the hardest to explain - they are basically transition-focused sessions where we would alternate between biking on the turbo and running around the track. They are really helpful in getting your body and in particular, leg muscles to switch between running and cycling, which is a key part in Triathlon and Duathlon races. This year I am writing the brick sets - so please complain to me if you don't like them!

Open-Water - Normally our open-water sessions are more of a "let's go a swim together"-sort of a session held when the water temperature is above 12C. This usually happens mid-April (around the beginning of Trinity term) and we will cycle together down to Queenford Lakes (<https://www.facebook.com/p/Queenford-Lakes-Open-Water-Swimming-100055420514565/>) which is around 18km from Central Oxford to do an open-water session together. We don't have specific sets written for Queenford sessions - instead people normally do loops and some of our athletes might plan for interval sessions they have written for themselves. I would encourage you to go and join the crowd when the time comes - it gives you some crucial experience in outdoor swimming which is very different to swimming in a pool!

Training Efforts

The club sessions are normally organised into sessions of different training efforts. There are sessions that are 'Easy', 'Aerobic', 'Threshold' or 'VO2 Max'. Our coaches also use different terms for efforts within a set - Matt uses running times, Sam uses Aerobic levels and Arundhati and Connie uses the terms stated above. Sometimes Emilia and I will also talk about Zone X...

So what are training zones? Training zones are levels of physical activity, each describing a different exercise range from the lowest to the maximum limit of intensity. Consequently, every zone suggests a different physiological process and therefore different target in the training your bodily adaptations. The basic training zone system has 5 zones - Zones 1 to 5. Here is a table of summarising what they do:

Training Zones	HR Max	Explanation
Zone 1	50-60%	'Guilty Zone' - very low intensity zone. Recovery zone. It is so easy it doesn't even feel like a workout.
Zone 2	60-70%	'Conversation Zone' - this should be low intensity... enough to hold a conversation for the duration of the workout but you feel like you will have to work a bit if it goes on for several hours.
Zone 3	70-80%	'Gray Zone' - this is a bit harder than Zone 2. Typically it feels hard enough that you can only talk in short phrases as answers but you also don't feel like you are working too hard. This is pretty much somewhere around your lactate threshold and your lactate starts building up slowly, and slightly over your FTP.
Zone 4	80-90%	Race Pace - this is when you start to have burning legs and lungs and you cannot keep the effort up for more than an hour. This is where any answers you can give are restricted to one to two words and your breathing is quite laboured.
Zone 5	90-100%	Max Effort - this is pretty much all out. For a seasoned athlete they might be able to hold it for a few minutes. Typically I would call this a sprint effort.

When I first started taking training seriously, these terms really confused me. Here is how I interpret the terms between the different systems, using training zones described above as a basis.

Training Zones	3 Zone Model (Lactate)	7 Zone Model (Cycling)	Running Paces	AX System (Swimming)	General Terms
Zone 1		Active Recovery (1-54% FTP)	Easy Runs		Recovery/Steady
Zone 2	Endurance (< 1st VT/LT)	Endurance (55-74% FTP)	Marathon	A1 (70-50 BBM)	Easy
Zone 3	Below Lactate Threshold (between 1st and 2nd VT/LT)	Tempo (75-89% FTP)	Half-Marathon (LTP)	A2 (50-30 BBM)	Tempo
Zone 4	Above Lactate Threshold (> 2nd VT/LT)	Lactate Threshold (90-104% FTP)	10k	A3 (30-20 BBM)	Threshold
Zone 5		VO2 Max (105-120% FTP)	10k-5k	AT (20-10 BBM)	VO2 Max
Zone 5+		Anaerobic Capacity (121-150% FTP)	5k Effort	Best Average (<10 BBM)	Max
Zone 5++		Power (>151% FTP)	Sprints	Max (HARD BBM)	Superrrr

I know. There is a lot going on in the previous table. So let the science-side of Lucas explain what is going on with the abbreviations and stuff. Most of the training zones can be broken down their relative positions in the lactate and ventilatory gas production scale. VT1 is the point at which the volume of air breathed out starts to increase at an exponentially greater rate than VO2; whereas VT2, the second ventilatory threshold, is where the person starts to breathe heavily. The onset of VT1 and VT2 is similar to the lactate levels LT1 and LT2 points. LT1 is the lowest intensity at which blood lactate levels start to increase above resting values. LT2 is the lactate threshold - this is when the point when the body produces and removes lactate at the exact same rate, above which lactate starts to build up and you get more and more fatigue. Interestingly, LT2 is indicated by LTP (Lactate Threshold) in running and T-pace (threshold-pace) in swimming... just more terms I guess. Cyclists use instead something called Functional Threshold Power (FTP) - the average number of Watts that a cyclist can sustain over an hour of steady cycling. Above I have kind of approximately indicated where the lactate levels lie for the different scales used in our training sessions.

Why do we care about training efforts? Training in different efforts give us different benefits. Matt likes to talk about training in some sort of like a pyramid - your base training acts as the base, and your threshold, max training at the very top. Training at lower intensities build the aerobic base which allows you to go further and improves your fitness, but that must be accompanied by sessions of Max/Threshold efforts that pushes you just over the line to give your body a bit of a taste of 'work'. I won't go too much into the details of planning behind the scenes, but what the captains and coaches have done is to organise the training timetables and sessions to have a good balance of all these things. This is why going to a good selection of sessions is more useful and beneficial for training instead of going to all of them blindly and working yourself over.

Training Load

Having a well-planned training schedule is one of the keys to success. The club runs a lot of sessions per week but it is essential that you make up your mind about what sessions to come. It is crucial that you don't come to all of them - even the most experienced athletes will not turn up to every single session available on the timetable. Besides, the timetable is only there to give you a guidance of what you can do in a week. Here is what Emilia and I would recommend you attend (train) in a week:

	Beginner	Beginner II	Intermediate	Intermediate II	Advanced
Swimming	1	2	2	3	3
Cycling	1	1	2	2	3
Running	1	2	2	3	3
S&C			1	1	2
Rest Days			1	1	0.5
Total	3	5	7	9	11

For historic reasons the training load is colour-coded - Green for beginners, Yellow for intermediates and Red for the experienced. If you are a true beginner, I wouldn't recommend going to more than 4 sessions per week. Your body needs a bit of time to adjust to the new training time table, and you should let it get used to the training load for a couple of weeks. Since in triathlon we have three sports to take care of, I would recommend starting with a target sport that you really want to improve on and do an extra session in that sport so you can a bit more of a training benefit out of it. The other sports should be training with Easy efforts - so no Threshold efforts in the other sports. With two sessions, you will be able to put an Easy session together with a Threshold one to work on technique and aerobic endurance.

Take an example - say I am a beginner and I would like to improve my running. Coming to one easy swim (perhaps the Thursday technique session) and doing one easy ride in the weekend should be enough to maintain my fitness in the other two sports. To improve my running, I would come to track for the Threshold session, and do an easy recovery run on the side as an extra session. That would help give a good balance to the overall training and slowly build your running fitness.

The keen-eyed amongst you will have spotted something called S&Cs. This is Strength & Conditioning, colloquially known as gym. Essentially, these are sessions that accompany an athlete's overall development by giving them power and strength training specific to the sport. It also targets muscle recovery, mobility and conditioning that will help the body recover faster and train better. More on this later.

Rest days are so important. I can't stress that enough. We are all incredible people with busy lives and to balance work, training and your personal life is not easy. It is important to take a break once in a while. Your body will not improve unless it can recover well. A good and stable sleep cycle, eating enough and healthily, having a balanced social and personal life and maintaining a positive mindset and psychology are all important ingredients into an athlete's success. Our recommendation is to take a rest day at least once per week where you absolutely not do anything. Just eat and sleep and do other things (like work, study and see your partners). Take the time off. Your body will appreciate the time and it will help it recover to take on the next bit of training down the road.

The most important thing I would like to stress is that you should never overtrain. So come to an adequate number of sessions, rest well and take care of your body. I say this as a novice who overtrained a lot in my first year and it ended up doing a lot of harm to my own performance. You will get so much more for doing consistent training, and improving the bits and pieces in your technique and training methods. If you are tired and dizzy, don't come and train. Take a break. Prioritise recovery.

Illness, Injuries and Recovery

It is inevitable that you will encounter some form of illness or injury down your triathlon journey. The first thing is noticing it and not making it worse. If you are sick or ill, take some time off. Don't try and push it off and keep training - your body needs a lot of energy to fight whatever is hampering your immune system, and training has the exact opposite effect in helping it do that. Take a few days easy and see how it goes. In particular, do not come to swim if you have a cold - your snot will just go everywhere and I am sure that the other people in your lane will not appreciate seeing that...

Injuries are a bit more difficult to deal with. Some are acute and come about because of a crash or race, whilst others might come about because of over-training or over-use. If there is any pain anywhere in your body - stop training. Check it out. If it is acute, take some time off - it will take a bit of time for your body to repair, and it is unlikely that an easy week will change your fitness in any significant manner. If it persists or if you suspect it is a long-term problem, a good start is to get a physiotherapist's appointment and get it checked out. Sports physiotherapists are trained professionals that can diagnose potential clinical issues and provide advice, suggestions and support to alleviate the pain and help you get back to training as soon as possible. They will sometimes give you exercise suggestions for you to follow to help get the muscle/tendon back into shape. Good physiotherapists are around - there are PTs at Iffley as well as in Summertown - let Emilia or I know if you need help on that.

For long term injuries the road to recovery might be long and rough. You might not be able to do whatever you were able to do before - it is frustrating and demoralising. But do listen to your physiotherapist and take it easy. Keep doing the exercises you are recommended to do and only train when you get an approval from your physiotherapist and coach! Recovery is very important for illnesses and injuries so your body can get back up to strength. Only then will it have the power to fight and conquer your new goals again!

Emilia and I have compiled an injury form for club members to report their injuries this year - it can be entirely anonymous and if you provide your name we will be happy to follow-up and provide extra support. It also gives us useful information to tweak the sessions and prevent future injuries in the team. So feel free to fill that in or just reach out to us!

Nutrition

Triathlon is an endurance sport - we burn a lot of calories even in training! Nutrition is therefore key to training effectively. Without eating or fuelling enough, you will not have the energy and nutrients to stay healthy and perform well.

Typically, about 70% of a triathlete's energy is spent on basal metabolic rate (so, surviving) and 25% on food digestion. We, however, spend a lot of extra energy in training and working (studying hard Oxford degrees) - this accounts for about 5% or more of our metabolic output. To fuel correctly, you will need to think about recovering the energy you have spent in training. We need both macronutrients (a balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fats) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) to replace training loss.

A good way of deciding what to eat is to look at the heaviest days of training through the week. A typical meal should consist of 2:2:1 carbs:veg:protein ratio. If you have a hard session coming up, fuel up the meal before with a lot of long-lasting carbohydrates, perhaps up to about 50% of what you eat. Rice, wholemeal, pasta and potatoes are all really good choices. Bump up vegetable intake to replace your vitamin and mineral loss on more recovery-focused training days. In recovery, we want to refuel, repair and rehydrate well. So think about not just how you are feeling at the moment, but where you are in the training week and programme and adjust your dietary intake as required. Some people snack - I do that quite a bit just cause I am small and can't really eat enough in a normal meal. I have some cookies and fruits in my office and I normally just consume them in-between meals. Typically, 20% of snacks is good but it is always best to substitute unhealthy snacks with healthier options like fruits, nuts and bars.

Fuelling for training sessions is a bit tricky. Make sure you drink at least a cup of water before you start training. During training (aerobic), about 250ml of water intake every 20 minutes is a good start depending on the temperature and weather. You want to replace the lost fluid after a set slowly - I normally have a cup of water and a big cup of tea after the morning sessions. A quick bite before a hard morning or evening session is not a bad idea. Gels, bars and jelly babies are really good fuel sources during training, and will often be essential in longer aerobic training such as long weekend rides. Make sure you think about what you need for training, and take them with you either in your bags or in your jerseys before you head out to train.

On hot and humid days water and electrolytes become more important. Normally in the summer I would take two bottles when I go for long rides - one with just water and one with electrolytes to replace mineral loss via sweat and stuff. In races a bottle at transition is not a bad idea - I always find it quite relieving when I can grab something at T1 to drink on the long bike after a rough swim (particularly in Standard and 70.3 distances...)

Carb-loading is important for longer race events of more than an hour. It gives you enough reserve so you can have an extra bit of power jolt on your big day. You can experiment this a bit more on your weekly hard training days - see what your body prefers to eat and stick to it on the key competition days!

Training Blocks and Planning

Block periodisation, or the annual approach, is a planning structure that focuses on long-term growth of an athlete. You will often hear coaches or us talking about training blocks - this is essentially some behind-the-scenes planning for training. There are three main cycles - the macrocycle is the overall annual goal. For the majority of the club this is Varsity Triathlon - the main target race of the year in May. A lot of athletes would aim to peak their performance then. The mesocycles are smaller cycles colloquially known as training blocks and lasts about 4 to 6 weeks. They are basically small, self-consistent blocks of training with a particular goal and adaptation in mind. Normally there will be consistent training for the majority of the block, with down-weeks of lower intensity and volume weeks for the body to absorb and utilise the training. The microcycles, training weeks and days, is basically the day-to-day training that we do - which includes nutrition, preparation, testing and recovery, etc. This is basically the kind of stuff we have been talking about so far.

There are different goals in a given competition year. Currently we are in the offseason/preseason period, where a lot of focus is put on base training, muscle endurance and aerobic capacity. As the new year rolls around we will try and switch to a different block with some specific focus in elevating performance, strength and power. The triathlon season normally starts in April - this is when most of our sets are more maintenance-based and race-specific. Individual athletes will normally tweak their programme to suit their target races of the year and adjust recovery and down weeks around major competitions if necessary. After a major race and the season the Postseason period is used for (active) resting and recovery.

I am including this here just to help you understand why we are sometimes doing hard efforts in our training sets and why sometimes the coaches change how the sets normally look like half-way through the term. Normally captains and coaches will chat about the season goals of the team and we will all agree on a direction for the wider club for our sessions to adapt to that goal. You do not need to worry about this, but feel free to chat to Emilia and I about any races you might want to target. It is good to have a goal, a target race, to train for so you feel a bit more motivated to turn up to a session. A bit of planning and understanding does indeed go a long way to improve your performance!

Signing-up to Sessions

All that talk - but how do you sign-up and come to sessions? Coming to any OUTriC sessions are easy. For most running sessions there is no capacity so just come along and join us! We normally meet at the Radcliffe Camera for social and morning runs and Iffley Road Centre for the track session. For turbo and swimming sessions - we have a dedicated sign-up sheet that allows our

members to sign-up as we don't necessarily have enough turbos or spots for every single member! To do this, simply put your name down in the respective column for the session you would like to attend. If the list is full, we kindly ask you to put your name down in the wait-list and check for empty spots later. If you have signed up to a session but can no longer make it, we urge you to message the next person on the waiting list or drop a message in the group chat saying a spot is free. Please do not jump ahead of people in the waiting queue - unless it is one-hour before the session or 2100 the night before an early morning session.

We have club bikes that we can borrow for those of you who don't have their own road bikes! Here are some rules for borrowing club bikes:

- Currently, during term time, we can only borrow club bikes for turbo sessions and committee-led rides. Committee-led rides are **committee-led novice and intermediate rides** and do not include rides that are put on the sheet by a committee member for their own training!
- The club has three club bikes that are available for use during the sessions and committee-led rides. If you wish to use the club bikes during the turbo sessions, please sign-up to both the turbo list and the club bike row (corresponding to the size of club bike you would like to borrow, small 52', medium 54' and large 58') as we also have a limited number of turbos!
- If you wish to borrow a club bike for a committee-led ride, please in the first instance put the club bike size you would like to borrow next to your name and contact the committee member leading the ride you are borrowing a bike. They may want to meet you earlier at the sports centre to fetch the bike and change the meeting point for the ride!
- If you want to borrow a club bike for a club-organised race (BUCS/Varsity), please contact the exec committee members (Nick, Rosie or Roman) or the captains (Emilia or me). We will need to see if there is space to bring the club bike and how many people are using it so make sure to do that before signing up to race!
- We however cannot rent the club bikes out for other occasions for the time being - but we are looking into other options!

Individual Disciplines and Areas

Now I want to chat about the three sports and some extra information on each of the disciplines...

Running

I want to perhaps chat about the 'easiest'-sport-to-get-into first. Running is probably the most straightforward sport. You only need a T-shirt, a pair of shorts and some good shoes to run in. And that is it!

Running is considered a high-impact sport. This means that every stroke and step puts a lot of force on your body. As a result, running training has to be typically closely-monitored, maintained and taken care of to ensure that injuries do not occur. A good way of doing this is to follow a general running block suitable to your level. Matt, our wonderful running coach, sends out a training plan dedicated to running every month and has some general guidelines for how to train properly. If you are a beginner runner, or just coming back from injury, generically I would recommend no more than 3 sessions per week - a base session, a track session and a recovery one. If you have a target race that you would like to train for, it is always good to have a quick chat with Matt during the track session - he will be able to give you a bit more advice on how to tweak your training plan for the week and build a good training block to target the race. Matt gave me a lot of great advice for my marathon - without him I wouldn't have gotten so fasttt!!!

Running Shoes and Gear

If you are bumping your running volume up, it is perhaps good to get some good running gear to ensure that your body is training optimally and not getting injured because of bad shoes! A really important factor for running are your running shoes - a good pair often gives you an extra boost, whilst being not too tight or loose to protect your feet (and especially your toes)! You can check some good videos online to see what running shoes you should look for (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8lIFxCE5Ro>). Different people have different feet geometry and

therefore may find some brands more suited to them over the others (for example, ASICS shoes are generally good for people with wider feet). Do also consult Matt as he would be happy to give you some really good advice as well - as running shoes these days do cost a bit and is a bit of an investment so you want to get the right pair! Up and Running and other running shops often have trained sellers who will perform a gait-analysis and recommend a suitable pair of shoes for you.

If you are serious about running, a pair of racing shoes might be something you want to think about getting. Racing shoes are typically carbon-plated and gives you that extra springiness in your races - they are also typically less durable as a result. You can check here to see some videos on racing shoes here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8S5vszTj9Y>).

A typical pair of running shoes will last you about 300-500k - although a good pair might last you till 800k. Typically, above a certain mileage, the pair of shoes will start to loose its form and structure and will no longer protect your feet as well as new ones. The conditions of the pair of shoes are also dependent on the frequency, weather and surface of running - running in a different multitude of terrains will cause additional wear on the pair of shoes. If your shoes are muddy after a run, it is important to clean them so dried mud will not cause wear on the shoe. I typically wipe it lightly with an old towel, but you can also see here for some additional tips (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnVc4S7syzU>).

Layering

In winter temperatures in the UK does go down to below-freezing. A good principle to judge how much to wear is to assume that you are walking outside at 10-15C higher than the real-feel temperature. The real-feel temperature is the temperature of what it feels like rather than the actual temperature - and typically takes into account wind, precipitation and humidity into account. In the winter, I normally wear an extra jacket and perhaps an extra T-shirt to my long easy runs for weather conditions above 5C, and add-in a base-layer and running tights for runs below 3-5C. It might be cold at first but once you are warmed up you don't want to overheat as well! It will depend on your personal preference in the end, as well as how hard the run will be.

Long Runs

Long runs are important for aerobic development and training for longer distance races, say half marathons. There is no shortage of good running routes in Oxford - you maybe able to find a good database on the OUCCC website (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnVc4S7syzU>) or stalk a certain captain... On long runs, it is important to bring enough water and fuel (like gels or gummy bears). You should also bring along some payment method in case you need to take transport back in case of an emergency. I normally bring along my trusty running and hydration pack for long runs above 25k - and bring along (in addition to the hydration pack) a small bottle of water, some sweets, my phone and credit card.

Hitting the wall, or bonking, is a condition typically found in long-distance runners when they run out of carbohydrate reserves in their body - when the glycogen reserves stored in the livers and muscles run out. Typically, one will feel dizzy, experience muscle tightness, cramps and pain, rapid breathing, raised heartrate and some generally wanting to stop. If you are training, you should make sure to stop, have some water and consume some carbohydrates (gels, gummy bears, jelly babies) to replenish the storage. The immediate remedy is drinking any liquid form of carbohydrates, be in juice, sports drinks, etc. The effects should diminish after around 10-15 minutes, but make sure you keep up the consumption (if you wish to continue) as the carbohydrate reserves remain low in your body.

As an aside, should you feel any muscle pain during running, I would strongly advise to stop. If you previously have an injury, or that your body is on the verge of overtraining, any running will just greatly exacerbate your conditions... so do take care of your body!

Swimming

Swimming, I would say, is the most technique-based sport of the disciplines in triathlon. Having good swimming technique is probably one of the most important things to improve your

swimming. Connie and Sam recommends typically a lot of good drills to focus on certain areas in swimming:

- head-position during breathing
- body position
- the catch
- recovery hand position - glove-cup-barrel
- the kick

There are a number of drills that will help you improve your swimming. I won't list them here, but you should ask Connie and Sam for advice as everyone has their own technique issues that they will need to work on. Sam has in particular recommended this https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQy_c30INjI.

It is useful to get your own swimming kit! You won't get told off for stealing other people's kit during the session and always ensure that you have something to use whenever you are doing drills, pulls and kicks. Some really useful kit items are:

- pull-buoy (encouraged)
- kick-board (encouraged)
- paddles
- fins

The club has a limited amount of fins and paddles to be lent out to members during drill sessions. Remember that at Iffley fins and paddles are banned in public sessions so if you want to use them in your drills you will have to bring them to a club session!

Swimming Lane Etiquette

Swimming can be daunting! Our swim sessions (coached or committee-led) take place at the Rosenblatt Swimming Pool at the Iffley Sports Centre. We normally have four lanes, and they are speed/distance categorised. The lane closest to the window usually completes the Short session, and the two lanes furthest from the window typically complete the Long session. We encourage you to join the lane as you are comfortable in to start and the coaches/committee member will help suggest where to get in if you are not sure.

We have a strict limit of 8 swimmers per lane. Normally it gets quite busy so please be aware that we are swimming together in a lane and be careful of the people in front and behind you. Aim to set off 5-sec apart for every rep. If you are a faster swimmer please get to the front of the lane (or the next one up) so you don't make other people nervous! Similarly, if you are not as comfortable, please let the others go in front of you (or drop down a lane)!

The lane directions may be different for every session. We aim to swim continental-style - this means odds clockwise, even anti-clockwise or the other way around. This is to minimise clashes of hands when we do reps. Do ask other people in your lane, or the coaches and caps if you are confused!

Open-water Swimming

Open water swimming is very different from pool swimming. Typically, there is a whole new set of skills regarding sighting and drafting that is very helpful for swimming out in the lakes and sea. You will also need additional equipment to swim in open-water venues.

Typically, we would go to Queenford Lakes for our open-water sessions during Trinity term. There will be a lot of committee and regular members who would cycle from the city centre to the lake and do their session there. I have my own checklist for a list of things to bring to the sessions:

- goggles
- swim cap (2 if I am feeling particularly cold)
- cycling equipment
- wetsuit
- swimsuit - to wear underneath my wetsuit

- towel/towel robe
- slippers
- tow floats - for safety, required at Queenford
- Garmin watch/ cycling meters
- phone, emergency cash
- warm clothes to change into (if relevant!)

There are loads of skills that are relevant for open-water swimming. Spotting, or sighting, is a very important skill in swimming outdoors - particularly when you are in a race so you don't go the wrong way! There will be open-water skill sessions run by Georgie, our alumni, later next term so watch out for those sessions. These typically include:

- front sighting
- going around buoys
- drafting - on the hips and on the toes

I found them really helpful when I first started open-water swimming. Be sure to also turn up to the pre-Varsity open-water session to gain some familiarity out in the lake as well! (More on that later!)

Wetsuit

Obviously, purchasing the correct-sized wetsuit is key to being fast like a mer-athlete! There are loads of guides online (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buusDBk0Ytw>), but the key tips are:

- Find the correct size! You want one that fits you perfectly - not too slack or too tight. Generally, the wetsuit should be quite tight but you should be comfortable to swim in it (doing threshold efforts in it). A good start is to look at the size guide online of the respective brands you want to look at.
- Don't cheap out. Zone3 and Orca offer decent prices - they are often a bit costly but the material is fine and a well-maintained wetsuit can last for several seasons! The club has a discount on Zone3 products. There are also discounts around the year that you might want to keep an eye on.
- Find the right material and model. Most brands offer a variety of wetsuit sizes and types with different types of material at different areas of the wetsuit. In particular, some wetsuits are more beginner-friendly and there are more areas, particularly in the leg area, covered in neoprene which helps with lifting and correcting leg positions in the water. In contrast, advanced wetsuits are a bit more streamlined and the neoprene is layered more around the chest area. Some swimmers actually find the beginner-ones a bit more useful as it helps with body position in water - and in fact make them faster! If you want a bit of advice, feel free to chat to the coaches and captains about your swimming technique and see if they can offer a bit of advice on which type of wetsuit to get!
- Take good care of it! A good wetsuit, well-maintained, could last for at least three to four years. Always rinse the wetsuit with cold water after every use and try it on a rack (not a hanger), ideally in a shaded area before storing it. When drying it you should turn it inside-out, but store it the correct way in. Never fold your wetsuit or put anything sharp near it. When you put the wetsuit on, make sure that your nails do not damage the wetsuit as neoprene layers are hard to repair! (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQr52oEzQzY>)

Early in the season, the water will be around 12C to 14C which is quite cold if you have never done open-water swimming. This will still feel kind of chilly even with a thermal wetsuit! Some tips to combat the cold:

- Make sure you are not sick and have some warm layers before you jump in.
- When you get into the water normally you will experience something called cold-water shock - increased heartrate, breathing rate and a bit of panic will sink in. Keep calm, move your body around and make sure to keep going by kicking harder and doing a faster stroke rate.
- A good way to reduce cold-water shock is to slowly get in the water - and as you go in put some water in-between your wetsuit and your body whilst putting some cold water around

your neck and face. The water layer in between the wetsuit and your body is the insulating layer that will keep you warm as you swim - it will get heated up as you get going.

Meanwhile, the little bit of water in your face will help your brain adjust as you put your face down into the freezing water...

- Don't overdo a session. A good tip to see if you should continue swimming is to see if you could move your fingers in the cold water when you swim. If your hands are too frozen to even clasp, you should get out within 5 minutes to reduce the chance of hypothermia. If this is your first time, stick to a smaller loop around the lake so you can get out if anything goes wrong!
- As you get out quickly dry yourself up and change into something warm! Don't just stand around and get wet...

I made the mistake of turning up to my first Queenford session being slightly ill and unprepared - I ended up nearly getting fished out after 200m and shivering on the side of the lake even after changing (Cormac ended up saving me then but that's another story)... so make sure you prepare for it and don't over-do it if you don't feel like it!

Cycling

Cycling is perhaps the most equipment-heavy discipline of the three. Typically in triathlon races we will ride on our road bikes (draft-legal events) or TT bikes (if you have one that is, draft non-legal events) - in training it is useful to have your own road bike but the club, as mentioned before, does have bikes for the club sessions for those of you who don't own their own!

Buying your own bike

That being said, getting my own bike is probably one of the best things I have done in this decade. Picking a good road bike is tricky, especially if you don't have a lot of experience in picking one. Previous captains have written really good guides on this so I am not going to rewrite a lot of the information here (<https://outric.web.ox.ac.uk/buying-bike>), but feel free to chat to us about getting bikes!

In general, here are some general tips (and updated information) on purchasing your own bike:

- In general, entry-level bikes have aluminium frames and carbon forks. For a bit of information of the different bike parts you can see here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDnfbzxP15U>). Decathlon offers some really decent bike models at a really reduced price (£300-400) - the price is extremely good for its value. If you are looking for a decent entry-level bike from a well-established company (e.g. Trek, shout-out to my Trek boys Ben and Cormac), their entry models often start from around the £600-700 range.
- Second-hand bikes are good if you can find a decent seller. Make sure you check with the seller about the conditions of the bike as it could be quite deceiving how good the bikes can look in a photo.
- Bike sizing is important especially if you are getting a second-hand bike. The most reliable bike sizing is of course done in a bike shop by trained mechanics, but you may be able to find some decent resources online on that topic (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lulAQlbZmPE>).
- If you are a bit more experienced, you may want to look into a bike-fit which helps fix your position on the bike and find a set of optimal measurements to improve your position on the bike. There are several decent fitters around Oxford - beware they do cost a bit though!

Road Cycling in Oxford

Cycling in Oxfordshire is quite nice. Compared to our rivals, we are blessed with two hill ranges that are easily accessible - the Cotswolds to our northeast and the Chilterns to the south. You can find a list of cycling routes here in the OUCC database (<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ydxl-Fytxg5QdyVNSUOzkncVyHy3I4HhCGNATKcEk/edit?gid=0#gid=0>) or by asking the captains (and stalking their Strava...). In general there are four directions for cycling in Oxford:

- NW - this is the way out to the Cotswolds. Typically we ride towards Eynsham before heading towards Witney along Eynsham Road. The Cotswolds are nice, quite and typically have wider roads than the Chilterns - I generally find riding here the nicest out of all directions.
- NE towards Central Buckinghamshire. This direction could be either extremely flat or extremely hilly, depending on how you plan your route. The route towards Brill via Elsfield, Horton-cum-Studley and Boarstall is really hilly and you will find a lot of climbs along that route if you continue into Buckinghamshire... If you want some flat/power/TT practice, the best route is the long B road from Islip to Ambrosden. The roads are quite flat and it is a good place to learn to take corners too. From Ambrosden you can continue to Buckingham, Winslow and Bletchley. This is also the start of the Cambridge-Oxford route (which I have done multiple times - shout-out to Roman and Franz for suffering that Oxford-Cambridge-Oxford ride on the day of the Euro finals last year).
- SE towards the Chilterns. This is the way towards Queenford Water Sports Centre for our open-water sessions in Trinity. Once past Watlington the hills then come and go - and you can ride all the way to Reading, Henley or even London. The Spire and Spokes is a really good pub at the base of Watlington Hill and it is an ideal cafe for cyclists. I would highly recommend stopping there for a nice slice of cake or coffee!
- W towards Uffingdon and White Horse Hill. Typically I would only cycle west if I want a bit of quiet flat roads. The A roads are typically really busy so be extra careful when crossing them - but you will be able to reach White Horse Hill if persistent enough and that grants you one of the nicest views of the vale. You can then do a loop via Abingdon and return from the south.

Let me know if you have any good suggestions on route choices!

Group Cycling

Now - cycling on your own is kind of depressing sometimes. So why not ride with your mates? Whilst Emilia and I would love for every pace and distance to be catered for, the committee is simply not able to provide this - so we cannot run a novice, intermediate and advanced ride every week. As such, we recommend trying to form your own riding groups!! We understand that group riding is a bit scary and that it can be hard to find a group of people to ride with... so here again are some tips on group cycling...

What do I need to bring on a group ride?

- Bike
- Helmet
- Bike lights (especially as it is getting dark early)
- Puncture repair kit (including: tyre levers, inner tube (x2) (patches), hand pump)
- Multi-tool
- Snacks (gels, skittles, anything fun!!)
- Phone
- Water
- Cash/ card (always be aware that if you cannot fix a mechanical you could have to taxi/ bus/ train home + some repair shops only take cash) (for cafe stops... yum!!)
- Warm layers (including gloves - important to ensure you can change gear/ brake in these colder months)

How do I organise a group ride?

- Decide what you want to do (distance + speed)!
- Pick a route. A good starting point for routing is one of the routes from the OUCC database (<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ydxLFytxg5QdyVNSUOzktnCVyHy3I4HhCGNAITKcEk/edit?gid=0#gid=0>) - detours and shortcuts are good but in general avoid small farm roads (especially in the Chilterns and Cotswolds) as they could be quite muddy and gravelly and not very nice to ride on.
- Be aware of which British Roads are not safe for road riding. **No motorways**. Dual carriageways are also a no-go. Roads are not advised, unless you are only turning into a small road and spending a really short amount of time on them.
- Put the ride on the google sheet so that people can sign-up! Also put a message onto the cycling community in WhatsApp (sign up to this here: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/DxliudbWw4G2chV95PLNyR>). On the google sheet detail the time and place you will start

your ride/meet-up, the distance and the pace. In the sign-up spreadsheet we use average pace - so taking hills and descents into account (e.g. a 32kph flat-riding speed might translate to 28kph on a hilly course or 25kph on a real bumpy challenge). Make sure you stick to the planned pace unless you all agree to deviate from it. No one wants to go on a 'chilled' ride and end up riding at threshold for two hours!

- Download the ride route onto your watch/ bike computer. (Do not worry if you don't have a bike computer. A Garmin forerunner 745 which has Garmin's most basic navigation tools or even your phone in your back pocket could help you navigate just fine!!)
- Pick a cafe and enjoy your ride YAY

Safety when riding in groups on open roads

- In the UK we ride on the left hand-side of the road.
- Keep close to the edge of the road but NOT in the gutter (you are more likely to puncture riding over bumps, holes and debris). DO NOT ride too close to the curb as having your wheel rub against the curb is an instant crash!
- Riding two abreast is advised in large groups but be prepared to single out on skinny roads or if it is busy. (be aware that sometimes 8 people 2 a breast is safer for passing cars than 8 people in a single loooong line)
- Cycling etiquette -
 - Give people space but be aware of how much of the road you are taking up
 - NEVER cross wheel (have your wheel overlapping the person in front of you)
 - Be aware of the movements of others
 - NEVER stop or swerve suddenly - people behind/beside you won't have time to brake or change directions in a group
 - Keep your hands near your brakes (i.e. no puppy paws and save the TTing for solo rides)
- Hand signals are an important tool when cycling on loud roads - see this YouTube video for detail [\(1\) How To Use Hand Signals Whilst Cycling | Essential Group Ride Communication For Bike Riders - YouTube](#)
- If its not safe to take your hands off the bars then SHOUT

Mechanicals/Maintenance

- Before you go out on a road, you should be aware that you might get a mechanical. Always do a quick check on your bike to make sure that brakes are working, tyres are pumped up, and there are no mechanical failures with your bike.
- You or someone in your group should be comfortable fixing a puncture/ deal with minor adjustment issues in the ride. There is no shortage of good tutorials online - see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwwfV99VV8I>
- In case of a mechanical, find somewhere safe to stop. If you are on a busy road, walk to a side road/ stay on the pavement so you do not block traffic before investigating the problem.
- If you cannot fix the mechanical problem (and no one in your group is able to), you will need to either find your way back or go to the closest bike shop to fix it.
- In case of a crash, make sure you are okay and safe before helping others. If it is serious/ you suspect an injury is serious (concussion) please call 999 or a taxi to hospital. (and do let us know if we could be of any help)
- It is good for general to clean/ wash and wipe down your bike after a ride. It keeps it happy and free of mechanicals! (grit and mud caught in the chain will cause damage over time)

Last but not least, please be courteous to others!! Be aware of the pace you can comfortably ride at and the distances you can comfortably cover. Weekend rides are generally aimed at training endurance and as such should be zone2/3 - save the watts for the turbo!! Please be aware of others' expectations for the ride, so that the ride can go ahead as planned. Drafting for extended periods if fine but being dropped isn't pleasant for you or the group. People may also need to be back for other commitments! But enjoy the Oxfordshire countryside and the nice weather (if we ever get it that is)... cycling is one of the best things I have done since I moved to Oxford!

Bike Maintenance

So what should you do if you need some maintenance on your bike?

- The most common thing for bikes are **punctures**. There are numerous videos online on how to fix punctures, and you should try and do them yourselves so if you are stuck somewhere in the wild you will be able to do it!
- Brake pad replacements (for rim brakes) are also easy. Typically the pads can be misaligned and you can learn how to adjust them from (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCaRp1T0VY>).
- I generally recommend cleaning your bike after every ride. Even just a rinse, particularly the chain, will go a long way to keeping it nice and durable for the next ride. Grit and mud does build up in a ride and sometimes that will severely wear the chain and pads down if not washed away.
- You should aim to do a bike clean every month if you regularly train on it. You should also try and take it to the bike shop every year for an annual check-up to make sure everything is running smoothly.
- Other bike maintenance problems - ask the internet or the bike mechanics! Some of our members are also really experienced in bikes and they might be able to help... and you can always pop a message on the group chat!

Strength & Conditioning

Strength & Conditioning, often known as S&C for short, is a specific kind of training that aims to improve performance by developing and selecting exercises that target specific areas of the body. This is often done in conjunction with other training, and aims to improve the general fitness of the individual by complementing areas neglected by the sport.

I will not delve too much into this here. The club, however, currently have two ways of supporting club members to gain access to an S&C scheme.

- Blues Performance Scheme (BPS) - this is a programme designed to help the top-performing athletes in the team in S&C, nutrition and psychology. The selection is normally made at the start of each term and the application details will be sent out by Emilia or me.
- Development Squad - this year we were able to gain an additional 12 slots for members not in the Blues squad to access S&C coaching provided by the sports team in Oxford. The programme is specifically designed to introduce S&C and general physical preparation skills to athletes. The sign-ups are also out at the start of each term and they are run on a **first-come-first-served** basis.

Conditioning however, is still important for everyone, even without gym training! Stretching is really good after a session or after taking a shower in helping muscles recover and gain strength. You can find some mobility routines here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts3rzaNTyk0>) - doing these every week will have an impact to the effectiveness of your training!

Transition Skills

Ah - finally. Transitions. My dearest enemy.

Transitions are perhaps the 'discipline' that distinguishes triathlon from other sports. We typically call the swim-bike transition as T1 and the bike-run transition as T2. To do well, you will need to practice. There are some general tips (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkUjNZnTaUQ>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVQjZ1qYTw4>) and coming to brick sessions where we focus particularly on T2 and training for muscle adaptation is really good!

Conclusions

This has been a long guide - there are loads of waffle from me but hopefully some of the information here is quite useful for you to start your journey! But enjoy the sport, enjoy the club and most importantly, enjoy the people around you on this amazing triathlon journey!

Acknowledgements

There are honestly too many people to thank. Firstly, my fellow captain Emilia who has shared my passion for the sport and working so hard behind the scenes for the team. I was also a novice two years ago and the support and advice from the previous captains, Harri, Carys, Nick and Emily has made me grow so much both in the sport and as a person.

I have learnt so much from the coaches over the years on how to train properly and efficiently, chief of them all Matt, who has placed so much support in the team as well as each individual athlete. His valuable coaching advice and encouragement was the key behind the success for both our team and me as an individual athlete. Connie and Sam, who have been wonderful swimming coaches in helping raising our swimming standards (particularly mine) and on how to improve my swimming standards. Georgie for giving me incredible open-water advice, as well as James for lighting up the gym and making me as strong as I am now.

My journey in triathlon has not been long - but without all the people I have met in this wonderful club I would not be here. The people I have met in the club have given me so much encouragement, support, advice and courage that it would make it so different without them, chief of them Ben, Joel, Ollie, Arundhati, Franz, Tom Schwantje, Tom Bell, Aggy, Ed, Debs, Rosie, Roman, Jess, Justin, Alice Evans and Non. And Kieran, for being such an amazing president last year and getting me properly initialised in Triathlon, and, of course, Cormac, for all the up-and-downs and good memories that made me fall in love with the sport.