

# Deep Explorations: Considerations for Designing Deep-Water Choreography

By Pauline Ivens, MS

Recently we have witnessed a surge in new deep-water workouts. Presenters, trainers, and instructors have been creating all sorts of “new moves” for deep. It is great to see this creativity and be able to offer fresh new challenges for our deep-water participants. This article will look at some of the key considerations when designing deep-water choreography. *The following assumes that participants are wearing a flotation belt.*

## Deep More Limited than Shallow

Deep-water movement vocabulary is more limited than shallow water. The lack of contact with the pool bottom means there is no anchor point for any exercise. Deep-water exercises are defined by cadence of movement, rhythmic patterning, and limits of range of motion. You have familiar exercises like jogging, running, cross-country ski, but be aware that any exercise that relies on contact or pushing from the ground will not be successful in deep water. For example, try jumping out of deep water!

## Use Systemic Moves

It is important to remember that the body is totally immersed in water that is usually lower than core body temperature. Prioritize exercises that involve the whole body, and repeat them frequently. Cross-country ski is a good example. It uses long levers, large range of motion, moves a large amount of water, has a rhythmic, alternating action of arms and legs, tones muscle groups throughout the body, offers flexibility development (particularly in the hip flexors), and can be sustained for long periods of time without causing overuse. Cross-country ski is one of the most beneficial deep-water exercises.



**Explore the depths  
of your pool and your  
creativity with deep-water  
choreography.**

## Symmetry vs. Asymmetry

Balance is a key word in deep-water movement vocabulary. With no anchor points for the feet on the bottom of the pool, each movement still needs an end point. When you do a cross-country ski, how do the legs know when to change direction? They are limited by personal range of motion and controlled by the instructor showing a specific demonstration, plus imposing a musical rhythm. If each leg is placed an equal distance in front and behind the body, the movement feels balanced.

Symmetrical exercises are easier to perform because both sides of the body match. Symmetrical alternating exercises like running and cross-country are also easy because they are balanced through each side of the body doing the same action. Asymmetrical moves are more challenging because the uneven placement of the limbs in deep water will often cause the trunk to shift away from vertical. As the participant feels the body going off-balance, they will automatically strive to maintain the vertical working position. This will make the postural muscles of the trunk work harder, and an instructor may offer asymmetrical exercises specifically with this intention.

### PAULINE'S EXAMPLES:

*I have played with asymmetrical moves in deep.*

- Running using one leg only
- Running using one arm only
- Cross-country ski with buoyant barbells: one arm stays still on water surface; the other arm does the sagittal arm swing
- Tucked body position and sideways travel pulling with one arm only

## Variations, Variations, Variations!

Deep-water classes usually have 6-8 primary exercises, and everything else is really a variation on these core moves. When you offer cardiovascular fitness training in your class, you need a long section of time when the participant can sustain target heart rates, and do continuous aerobic activity. If your teaching asks them to constantly keep changing the move, maybe with ‘hard to remember’ combinations, they won’t be able to sustain energy levels to achieve the best aerobic benefits. Choreography



about the benefits of the exercise, the muscle groups challenged, the energy systems used, the joints taken involved, ranges of motion, etc. Always make sure you know why you have selected exercises, and what benefits they will provide for your participants. And it is okay to do some things just for fun!

## If it Works in Shallow it Will Work in Deep

Not true. This is a very real challenge for instructors who have to teach both deep and shallow in the same class. Mark Grevelding's Sha-Deep program is a great resource for this! There are several moves that do work in both depths, like jogging, cross-country ski, front kicks. But beware of the following in deep water:

- Rocking Horse and Pendulum do not work in deep. Both moves require a push off the ground to rock to the other foot.
- Jumping Jacks do not apply in deep. You cannot jump in deep water. You can abduct and adduct the legs, so just call them jacks.
- Front kicks are feasible in deep, but side kicks are a much bigger challenge unless you keep the torso centered. Back kicks are also very challenging because the body will tip forward. Counter-balancing the back kick with an arm action in front of the body might work, but watch for participants arching the lower back.
- Any move where both legs are placed to one side of the body will be very challenging without using a strong sculling arm action.
- Special Note: If you add buoyant barbells (one in each hand) to act as surface stabilizers it is easier to side-to-side moves because you can lean on the barbell.

## Don't Change the Move Too Often

With no contact on the pool floor it takes longer to change direction in deep water. It is rare to do just 2 counts of a move in deep water. Counts of 32, 16, 8, 4 are manageable. If you want to do 2 counts it will depend on the move:

- Run for 2 counts and change direction is tough
- Two skis + one jack is feasible (this would take 4 counts)

### PAULINE'S EXAMPLE:

*I choreographed a deep flutter kick with ¼ turns every 2 counts. It is fast and turns very quickly but that was the intention and challenge!*

### PAULINE'S EXPERIENCE:

*I taught a deep water class at a college where we had the use of a huge diving well. It was great because I could sustain each move for long periods of time and not have to make changes very often. Guess what? The student evaluations still said I changed the move too often! Food for thought when you are doing your choreography.*

## Too Much Sculling

Sculling is a necessary skill in deep-water exercise. It is an excellent exercise for the rotator cuff and is often used to stabilize the body. But be careful that your deep-water choreography does not rely on too much sculling.

### PAULINE'S EXPERIENCE:

*I took a deep-water workshop that was packed with choreography and complex movement patterns. I loved the challenge but when I got out of the pool my shoulders were aching. I realized that I had sculled for about 80% of the workout in order to execute the leg patterns and leg combinations. Be aware of this as you design your moves.*

## Equipment Considerations

The information in this article is based on participants wearing flotation belts. The belt provides mid-body flotation support so you can move the arms and legs in multiple directions, do asymmetrical moves, and tilt or lean around the belt like a pivot point. There are other equipment options for deep water, but they would change the choreography.

I like to use noodles because I have three different placements: between the legs, under the hips, around the torso. This offers options for new exercise variations, but I have to keep in mind that participants can fall off the noodle so I must review my choreography and adjust accordingly. It is harder to plan a class if some of the participants are wearing belts and some are placing a noodle between the legs!

Buoyant ankle cuffs present another choreography challenge. You have to plan where to place each cuff so that good posture is challenged and participants do not fall over. Placing both cuffs to one side of the body is sure to cause problems!

## Can You Teach It From the Deck?



How many times have you worked on your choreography in the pool only to discover that you can't demonstrate it from the deck! Many deep-water moves are water specific, and these are the hardest to simulate on deck. You are on the ground and have to portray deep-water moves. This is when you wish you could levitate!

Explore the depths of your pool and your creativity with deep-water choreography. For more information on how I put together suspended movement patterns, please check out the two Deep Water Choreography DVDs available at [www.aquaaerobics.com](http://www.aquaaerobics.com). Each offers an online CEC quiz to earn continuing education credits!

- DEEP EXPLORATIONS-Follow the Mermaid!
- DEEP 124 ●

## Author



*Pauline Ivens, AEA Training Specialist, regularly writes articles for AKWA and is well known for her deep-water teaching. Pauline's number one goal is to provide the highest quality of education in a positive learning environment. She simply shares her knowledge with those who seek to improve the health and well-being of others. Pauline is a teacher, educator, trainer, writer, and owner of*

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