A Quick Guide to doing your first Triathlon.

This is a quick guide designed to give you an idea of what to expect from your first foray into the sometimes weird and wonderful but above all else FUN world of triathlon.

You may have a misconception that you have to be superman or wonder woman to complete a triathlon. It's just not true, people of all shapes, sizes, ages and abilities have been competing in triathlon for many years. It is a very inclusive sport. That's not to say that completing one isn't a fantastic achievement, it is. Keep that in mind as you train towards the big day.

**So what is a ‘sprint’ triathlon?**

It’s a 400m (16 lengths) swim in a pool, followed by a 20km bike ride and finally finished off with a 5km run.

It’s a challenge but remember it is supposed to be fun, savour it, smile when your supporters shout your name, give it your all and savour that moment when you cross the finish line and become a triathlete. That only happens once in your life.
**Before The Race.**

One of the first things that you need to do is provide an estimated swim time so that the race organiser to group you into a ‘wave’. This is nothing magical, it just means you will hopefully be swimming with people of the same ability as you, that way you shouldn’t get lapped and the whole experience in the pool should be much more enjoyable.

*“How do I know how fast I’ll swim 400m?”*

Well you could go to the pool if you are already a regular swimmer and time yourself roughly swimming the 16 lengths; it doesn’t have to be accurate to the second. Saying 9 minutes 30 seconds is fine. If you haven’t built up to swimming that far then try and estimate it based on 2 lengths and multiply it by 8.

If like me, maths isn’t your strong point then just estimate it – as a rough guide the fast swimmers will be doing 5 minutes and those at the other end of the speed spectrum will be finished in about 25 minutes.

My best advice is to make sure you train enough to give you the confidence to complete the race. You should try to at least swim 400m, cycle 20km and run 5km individually in the time leading up to the race. This will give you a massive mental boost and prepare you for what is to come.

Don’t worry about training like a professional athlete; remember it’s supposed to be fun.

Maximise your strengths by working on your weaknesses. What do I mean? Well if you have always been a runner but you are stressing about the swim, concentrate on your swimming in training. Get in the pool a couple of times a week. By becoming a better swimmer you’ll arrive at the run part of the race less stressed and fatigued and will then be able to run to the best of your ability.

Don’t like running? The hardest part of any run is the first steps out of the door. Build up your distance gradually, google ‘Couch to 5k’ for a progressive training plan.

Remember rest is important, factor in rest days when you train for the event. Your body repairs itself when you rest and sleep.

Train with a friend if you can – you’ll motivate each other, you’ll have a laugh and before you know it you’ll both be much fitter than you thought you could be.

Reward yourself when you hit a goal in your training – a cake, a trip to the cinema, those new running shoes you’ve had your eye on.

Above all else don’t stress about what is to come. I’ve lost count of how many triathlons I’ve done and I’ve made every mistake there is to make. I’ve been competing for 10 years – if you have questions, worries etc. then please email me and I’ll do my best to reassure you.

Ask Andy – a.holgate@lancaster.ac.uk
The Kit.

Do you really need a £3k bike with the latest electronic gears, posh wheels and a saddle that would cut a mosquito in two? Can you ride your shopping bike with three gears and a basket? The simple answer is if your bike is roadworthy ie: working brakes, two wheels and a seat then you are good to go.

Here is a list of what you’ll need to compete, you could add a lot a more if you want to but I’m trying to keep it simple. Those items in CAPITAL LETTERS are vital and should be included in your kit for the day.

Swim

SWIMSUIT / TRISUIT (One piece or separate tri top and shorts )
GOGGLES
SWIM CAP – provided by race organisers.
Nose Clip – can help if you get sniffly after swimming or have allergies.
Ear Plugs – can help if you get dizzy when swimming
flip flops – to wear to exit the pool and get to your bike.

Bike

BIKE
HELMET – no helmet, no race – thems the rules!!
BIKE SHOES/TRAINERS – you’ll need these for pedalling comfortably.
CYCLING /RUNNING TOP – if you don’t have a trisuit you’ll need to put a top on.
Socks – you can go barefoot, it’s a comfort thing.
Sunglasses – they’ll protect your eyes and you’ll look cool on any race photos.
Water Bottle – containing your drink of choice, keep hydrated.
SPARE INNER TUBE – hopefully you won’t need it, better safe than sorry.
Tool Kit / pump – see above. It will fit in a saddle bag or jersey pocket.

Run

TRAINERS – unless you are Zola Budd or a Masai Warrior.
SHORTS / TOP – usually the same as what you wore on the bike.
Socks
Cap

Other Stuff

RACE NUMBER– worn on the front on the run and on your back on the bike.
Number Belt – great bit of kit, elastic that you pin number to, just swivel it round when you change from bike to run. This is an item worth investing in.
Elastic Laces – a brilliant invention: no undone laces, just pull your shoes on in seconds and start running. Like a number belt worth investing in.
Sports watch
Flip Flops/Sandals – to put on to get from the pool to your bike.
IDENTIFICATION – to prove who you are when you pick up your race number

**Transition**

Transition is the area next to the pool where you leave your stuff that you'll need for the race.
There will be metal scaffolding racking where you place your bike in athlete number order. So if you are number 96, you go and find the number 96 on the racking and place your bike there. It's a bit like being back at school and having your own peg.

You would normally hang your bike by its saddle with its front wheel resting on the ground. By the side of your bike or just in front of it depending on how much space there is you set out all the gear that you will need for the bike and run sections. (see photo at the end of this section)

Some people like to place a towel on the floor, it means you can dry your feet before you put your trainers on. At the front of the towel have your helmet and trainers/bike shoes, then behind them anything you need for the run section.

Leave your helmet with its straps undone, makes it easier to put on. REMEMBER YOU MUST PUT YOUR HELMET ON AND FASTEN IT BEFORE YOU TOUCH YOUR BIKE. It’s a rule that should be obeyed.

Look around you, work out where the entrance and exit are for each part of the race, they will most likely be different. If you are not sure ask one of the friendly marshalls.

**T1 : Swim to bike**

Ok you’ve had a great swim, you run/walk to where you bike is in transition. Here’s what you do next:

Put your cycling/running top on.
Put your helmet on and do the strap up.
If wearing a race belt step into it and pull it up to your waist with the number on the back.
Put your socks on if wearing them – hint put talc in them when you set up transition, it will help dry your feet.
Put your shoes on.

Take your bike off the rack and run/walk pushing it to the bike exit.
At the ‘Mount Line’ – a marshal will tell you that you can get on your bike and start riding. Hint: have it in a gear that will help you get started, you can always change to a harder gear when your legs have warmed up.
T2: Bike to Run

As you get towards the end of your bike ride try and get in an easier gear and spin your legs faster, this will prepare the muscles to start running. You can practice this in training. When you get back from a training ride, spin your legs, put your bike away and just run to the end of the street and back to get used to that feeling of running on tired legs.

Also wiggle your toes and stretch your back.

When you get back to transition there will be a dismount line, a marshal will tell you to get off your bike – try to come to a dignified and safe stop.

You then walk/run your bike back to your spot on the bike racking.

REMEMBER RE-RACK YOUR BIKE BEFORE UNDOING YOUR HELMET!

Rack your bike, take your helmet off, turn your number belt around (number on front), put your trainers on if they aren’t already and head for the ‘run exit’ with a huge smile on your face. You are almost done.
The Swim

The swim will take place in an eight lane 25 metre pool.

You will swim 16 lengths.
You will be responsible for counting your own lengths but it should be easy as you will swim 2 lengths in each lane and then move across to the next lane. So you start on one side of the pool and finish on the other side having swum 2 lengths in each of the eight lanes.

Usually you will swim in a lane with 2 or 3 other people, you will set off at timed intervals (10 or 20 seconds).

If the swimmer behind taps your feet, please let them pass you when you reach the end of the pool. Just hold onto the side and let them swim ahead of you. This stops them getting frustrated and you getting sore ankles from constantly being tapped.
DO NOT Pull a person’s foot or swim over them.

When you finish, jump out, leave your swim cap on the side of the pool and walk/run to the indicated pool exit and go find your bike.

Those new to the sport usually stress about what to wear when it comes to racing.
To minimise getting changed throughout the event you may want to buy a trisuit (all in one lycra suit that you can swim in) or a two piece tri top and shorts. You can cycle and run in these and they bare actually quite comfortable, if not completely flattering.

Ladies tri-suits tend to have some sort of chest support built in but if you need extra support then you can wear a sports bra underneath.

BUT you can swim in your normal swim wear, just add the shorts and top when you get into transition.

YOU CAN SWIM ANY STROKE YOU WANT EXCEPT BACKSTROKE.
The Bike

As I said earlier in this guide you don’t need to have spent a fortune on top end racing bike, if you have one that’s great but it’s not essential. I’ve seen people racing on mountain bikes, shopping bikes and even a bmx.

As long as your bike is in a safe roadworthy condition then you will normally be allowed to use it. Just check with the organisers of most races beforehand if there are any restrictions on the type of bikes allowed. For the Lancaster University triathlon anything goes, well except a unicycle.

HINT: Learn how to change an inner tube, if you get a puncture it means your race isn’t over.

Most races will not allow someone to help you if you have a puncture or ‘mechanical’, at the Lancaster triathlon we will allow you to receive help if you need it. It’s about fun, not qualifying for the Olympics.

Although the roads will be closed, there may be at some point a vehicle on the course, the marshals will get it off the course as soon as possible. Please obey the normal rules of the road.

Please listen to any instructions from the marshals, your safety is there number one concern.

Try not to draft. Drafting is when you cycle too closely to another cyclist basically sheltering behind them saving energy. Try to keep 3 bike lengths apart and when overtaking leave yourself enough room to do so safely and quickly.

Slow down over the speedbumps, you may lose a second but you’ll stay safe.
The Run

You’ve made it to the final bit of the race. You are probably already wearing everything that you need – maybe add a cap if it’s sunny. So just turn that number belt around so the number is on the front and head out of transition following the ‘run out’ signs.

All that stands between you and becoming a triathlete is a 5km run. Pace yourself according, if you are super-fast then go for it, if you need to walk then have a walk, there is no shame in that.

It’s a nice and welcome touch if you have the breath to thank the marshals, they have volunteered to make the race possible. Give them a shout out, trust me it makes it all worthwhile.

Just get yourself to the finish, smile for the cameras and pick up your medal.

You are now a triathlete, be warned it’s very addictive.

AND FINALLY…..

Remember if you have any questions, and there is no such thing as a daft question then please feel free to ask Andy.

His email is a.holgate@lancaster.ac.uk

HAVE A GREAT RACE 😊