

Tips for Faster Triathlon Transitions

How many hours of swim practice would it take to lop two minutes off your swim time? Probably hundreds, maybe even thousands. How many hours of transition practice would it take to lop two minutes off your transition time? Maybe only one! Many triathletes are so focused on swim, bike and run splits they forget the clock is still running in the transition area. Every second counts. Transition practice isn't as fun as running but it is a good investment of your training time. Triathletes looking to win need to shift their entire mental focus and integrate the transition seamlessly into their race. The transition is not a rest area but a place to speed in and out of, in the fastest time, with the least energy.

Here are the top tips for a fast transition:

Practice your plan - Have a plan of exactly what you are going to do and practice it over and over again until you are fast with no mistakes. Practice it physically several times over in training and then rehearse it mentally several times on race morning. By the time you are in transition in during race you should be moving on autopilot. Never try something new on race day.

Keep it simple - The fewer tasks you have to do in the transition area, the faster you will go. Start the swim with your full bike/run outfit under your wetsuit. A one piece tri-suit is ideal. Any clothing changes will add lots of time. Don't try to put arm warmers or your shirt on once you are wet from the swim. You don't need gloves! Skip the socks and get rid of anything you don't absolutely need. Forget washing your feet! Clutter will slow you down.

Attach your stuff to your bike - Handling small items sucks up time. Everything you need on the bike course should be attached to your bike. Tape gels to the frame, water bottles should already be on board, sunglasses looped to a cable, spare tube in a seat pack and CO2 cartridge taped to the seat post.

Navigation - Know the transition area – Have you ever come out of a different mall door at Christmas time and had trouble finding your car? You can have a similar experience in a large transition area. The first thing Elite athletes do when they arrive at the race site is study the details of the transition area; the exit of the swim and bike, the entry of the bike, mounting and dismounting lanes. Note where your rack spot is and how to find in from the swim exit and bike entrance. From your rack, know where the bike and run exits are and the quickest route to them.

Get your bike/running shoes ready – Make sure your bike is in the right gear for the course. If you know that you have to climb a hill right off the transition area, don't leave your gear on the big chain ring. If it's a flat course or at least starts flat, definitely put on the big chain ring for best usage of your power output and also to save time with shifting. Rack your bike from the saddle, put your helmet on the handlebars (with the straps already open) facing you so you don't have to turn it around. Leave your sunglasses with the arms open inside the helmet (put

them on before you put the helmet on so you don't pull them off with your helmet in T2). Put your bike and running shoes in a position ready to put them on, with bike shoes closest to you. Tying your running shoe laces in a bow takes time. Eliminate this step using lace locks or speed laces (elastic lace shoes) that don't need to be tightened, pull the tongue of the shoes out and turn it forward to facilitate the entrance of your feet. Baby powder is a great trick to speed the slide into the shoes (bike or running).

Grab and go - In T2, grab what you need and go. Put on your hat and fuel/race belt while you are running. It is always faster to complete your tasks moving down the course rather than standing in front of your rack.

THESE ARE ADVANCED MOVES THAT CAN SAVE EVEN MORE TIME, BUT DON'T DO THEM IN A RACE UNTIL YOU'VE PRACTICED THEM OVER AND OVER AND KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!

Bike shoes in the pedals - Coasting down the course at 15 miles per hour while you put your feet in your shoes will move you far ahead of your buddy sitting on his butt in T1 doing the same task. Set your bike up in the transition area with your shoes attached to the pedals and rubber bands looped between the heels and frame holding them horizontal. On leaving T1, pedal with your feet on top of your shoes. Once you are cruising at speed, coast and slip your feet into your shoes. Keep your eyes ahead on the road, not down on your feet. On the return, slip your feet out of your shoes before you reach T2. Learn this skill first on an indoor trainer before taking it out on the open road.

Run with your bike - The distance from rack to mount line can be considerable at large triathlons. By running safely and quickly with your bike, it is easy to fly over this distance. Run upright with good form on the left side of your bike holding your seat with your right hand. Left arm swings by your side. Hold the bike upright to go straight and lean it to the side to turn. Practice in an empty parking lot.

Speed over the mount / dismount line - Learn a cyclocross mount / dismount to cruise over this line without losing any momentum. In the race you will be doing this in bare feet but initially learn and practice this skill wearing running shoes.

Jumping on your bike – Yep, that's what they do and it's called "flying mount". You can smoothly and safely jump onto your bike when on the move, all you have to do is practice. After you get your bike off the rack, push it through the saddle (you can run better and have a better vision of the transition/people around), when you get to the mounting lane, find your space (preferably not behind someone) hold the handlebars with both hands, clear the lane, tilt the bike to the left a little and start the jump. You have to land on the saddle on the inside of your upper thigh. It should be a gentle movement, landing light. The best way to do is to double hop. Hop once (with your left foot) to give the height you need to throw your (right) leg over the saddle. Time it so that the inside of your thigh hits the saddle at the same time your left foot would hit the ground. This will make your landing on the saddle more gentle. Quickly hop off your left leg, keep your legs a little bent (not to hit the cranks in case they're moving) and

step on the top of the shoes. Get a little speed and one at a time, using your hand to hold the front of the shoes, slide your foot in and strap the velcro. Don't forget to look up and forward so that you won't crash into somebody.

Getting off the bike – When you are about 100 to 150yds from the dismounting lane, unstrap your shoes (preferably without looking down), one at a time, put your foot back on the top of your shoes. With about 40yds to go, find a clear space, take your right leg over your bike, behind the saddle and put it behind your left leg, cruise a little and when you're about 10yds from the lane, move your right leg between your left leg and the bike frame and step down in a running movement. Again don't forget to look up and straight not to crash and to dismount behind the lane not to get disqualified.

If you're not sure you can do this and are a little afraid to try, what about a grass field? If you fall on it, it might minimize the damage. Good luck and train safe!!