

Triathlon Transition Tips

Most triathletes spend the bulk of their training time focused on the three events: swimming, cycling, and running. But the transition between each event also requires training. Each triathlon has two transitions: a swim-to-bike and a bike-to-run. Although they seem simple a poor transition can add precious time and waste energy during a race. A good transition can improve your position and spirits while a bad one can leave you struggling to make up lost time. Here are some tips to help you perfect your transitions.

1. **Simplify**

Keep your transitions clean and simple. By this, I mean don't try to do too many things during a transition. Keep the number of tasks to the bare minimum. In a transition, the more you have to do, the more time it takes and the more that can go wrong. During the swim-to-bike transition, the fastest athletes may only put on a helmet and grab their bike to run out. Wear a one-piece racing suit to avoid clothing changes if possible. Some racers leave their shoes attached to the pedals and they put them on while riding. A trick they use is to rubber band the heel loops of the cycling shoes to the bike so that they are right side up. Sunglasses can be looped over the handlebars and put on down the road. Food and drink are already attached to the bike so you can fuel on the road as well.

2. **Multi-task**

If you want to be efficient in the transition, you need to learn how to do a few things at once and keep moving in a seamless, fluid motion. Know what things you can do while running or riding or on the run-up to the transition zone and what you have to do before leaving. Something as small as taking off your cap and goggles, or unzipping your wetsuit on the run-up to the bike can save seconds, putting on your cap and sunglasses as you run is equally efficient. It may seem like these things take little or no time, but this will help keep your momentum for the next event.

3. **Train for Transitions**

It is clear that if you want to get better at transitions, you need to practice them. But many athletes don't practice this part of the race. A good time to practice is during your regular event training, but a mental walk-through of a transition is also important. Practicing transitions during your regular training will help you feel very comfortable on race days. This sort of practice is also a good time to try new techniques and to see what you can do without. Never try something new on race day.

4. **Race Day Set-up**

On race day, you should arrive with enough time to survey the transition area before the race and actually do your run-ups and exits so you know exactly where to go. Lay out your gear and do a test run to make sure everything is where you need it and ready to go. Make sure you can find your bike and know your path in and out. This pre-race check is also a good time to do a mental rehearsal as well. Visualizing your transition will help you deal with any challenges that are not a part of your practiced walk-through.

As you do more and more events, you will find what works best for you, but these tips will help you develop transitions that are efficient so you can save your energy for biking and running.

Triathlon transition is really two parts: the transition set up, and the execution. Both are critical and like any other activity in sports, they need to be practiced to be completed well in competition. Why? Think of it like this: most of you will regularly compete in a sprint to Olympic distance race that will involve wetsuits in the swim. A properly executed transition will easily shave 1:30 to 2:30 from your overall time. Key to transition is to keep it simple, keep moving, always be thinking, and practice.

The Transition Set up:

Initially you will have to pick a good place to rack the bike. Rack with the seat to start, and on the Brake levers to finish. Saves time and is less clumsy. Place the helmet with the straps out facing you exactly how you will throw it on. ALWAYS have the helmet strapped while on the bike, this is and immediate disqualification. Walk the bike in transition, riding is immediate disqualification. Place your glasses either inside the helmet exactly how you will put them on, or hung to a cable where they will not fall off and you can put them on down the road. Shoes should be either in the pedals so you can begin to ride and slip into them as you are heading down along the lakefront, or on the ground exactly how you will place them on, Velcro or laces already open (however I would discourage this for a few reasons). Race number should already be pinned to you or tucked in your swimsuit under your wet suit on a race belt. If no wet suit, either on your singlet for guys waiting in transition on top of your glasses exactly how you will put it on (careful not to have the glasses tangled in the singlet), or on a race belt for girls to be slipped on. Make sure tires are almost to max pressure, this is important, not to the max or over. Place running shoes in a location that is accessible and will not get knocked around. Place any running hat on top of shoes to be put on first, place both on a conspicuous looking towel to be easily identified.

TIPS for execution:

Practice

Minimize movement, never make yourself move once you get to the bike, especially around to the other side of the bike.

Keep it simple.

Lace locks of some sort.

After exiting the water, immediately unzip your wet suit and pull it down to your hips. Don't worry about looking for your swim time. This will just distract you and pull you off your transition game plan, you need to be thinking all the time.

Never try and drink anything in the swim to bike transition. Wait until your, on the bike.

Rack your bike in a gear that will be easy to turn as you try and get down the road and slip into your shoes. Too big of a gear and you will fall over, happens all the time. Too small a gear and you will be spinning like crazy and probably weaving. As people begin blow by you a few bad things can happen, example...

Likewise the bike to run, there will be water right when you exit the transition to run, drink there, or carry that second water bottle on the run. Chances are though, you will never see it again. Don't waste time in transition sipping water.

ALWAYS KEEP MOVING, pausing only to place on your singlet, glasses and helmet to bike, and your flats to run.

Forget the socks, T-shirts, shorts etc... Compete in what you swam in, sorry.

Other tips...

The last thing you grab from the swim to bike is the BIKE. This is a common novice mistake. The first thing you do is rack the bike on the brake levers when you return, and rack standing on the same side your running shoes are on, as to not have to move around the bike.

Walk the transition ahead of time before the race, know the following:

Where is the bike, how many rows, on what side?

Where will I throw my wetsuit when I rip it off so I don't get it in the way when I return and I can find it when I leave, and everyone will not trample all over it?

Is my helmet and glasses ready to be placed on in a few seconds?

Are my bike shoes ready to be put on?

Where do I exit and reenter transition? Can I walk or run?

Is my bike pump out of transition? Do I have enough water?

Is my sports bag out of the way or out of transition all together?

Transition Tips

Before the Race

- Use our [Race Day Checklist](#).
- Get to the transition area early.
- Check the pressure in your bike tires before going to transition.
- Put on sunscreen.
- Body Lube your neck if you are wearing a wet suit to prevent chafing. Likewise do your arms if you are wearing a sleeveless model.
- Body Lube other sensitive parts, like nipples and groin, for the bike and run.
- Don't use Vaseline if you are wearing a wet suit - it's bad for the neoprene. If you don't have Runner's Lube or Body Glide, or something similar, Pam works in a pinch.
- Bike helmets are often inspected upon entrance to the transition.
- If provided, have your race numbers on the bike handlebars and bike helmet.
- Transition may be open only to the participants - make sure you can carry everything in yourself.
- Many people like to mark their bike location with a balloon or some type of flag. If you don't have one, put your bike next to someone who does. Trees can also serve this purpose, or tie a bandana to the rack.
- The bike racks can be I-o-n-g. Think about where to set up. Closer to the swim in means the less you have to run from the swim and out on the run, but longer you have to go in and out with your bike. Closer to the bike exit means longer swim in and run out run, but less you have to go with your bike.
- Setting up near the bike exit will mean a shorter transition time, all things being equal.
- Put your bike in a low gear.
- Bring a large beach towel to put down next to your bike. If you have a unique one, it can help you locate your bike - assuming you run down the right rack.
- On the towel, going from the back of the bike to the front, lay out your bike gear closest to you and the run gear closest to the rack.
- Open up your bike shoes and running shoes by loosening the straps/laces.
- *IF* you are comfortable putting on your bike shoes while riding (and don't wear socks), secure them horizontally on the pedals with rubber bands.
- Roll down your socks to the ankle - makes them easier to get on.
- Unbuckle the bike helmet strap, put the straps over the side, and put the helmet on your handlebars (if it will safely stay there). Undo your bike gloves and put in the helmet. Sit your sunglasses, open, on top of the gloves.
- Open zippers of all clothing.

As soon as you have everything set up, walk to the Swim in. Walk back to your bike. Count the racks, aisles, etc. Look for "landmarks" to point you to your rack. Go down your rack to find your bike. Repeat.

Now walk from your bike to the Bike exit/entrance. Thinking about doing this with your bike. See how to get out and where you can mount your bike after exiting, and where you have to dismount coming back in. Now walk back to your bike. Look for "landmarks" in this direction to point you to your rack and to your run gear. Find your bike. Repeat.

Now walk from your bike to the Run out. Think about the best way to get there. Repeat.

Swim to Bike (T1)

- When you come out of the water, unzip your wetsuit and pull it down to your waist. This helps prevent overheating.
- Take off your goggles and swim cap immediately on exit.
- Some people prefer to take the wetsuit off completely at the swim exit. If you do this, move out of everyone's way.
- If you are worried about your feet, have a friend at the swim exit (or up the path a ways) hand you a pair of sandals or flip-flops to wear up to the transition area.
- Pull your wetsuit off inside out. Put it down on your towel out of the way, under the rack. Don't worry about folding it; you can do that after the race.
- Put on shorts, shirt, socks, shoes. Put on sunglasses, bike gloves, then put on your helmet and fasten it. Grab our bike off the rack and head toward the exit. NOTE: Helmet on and fastened before unracking your bike!
- Run to the bike exit using a seat carry -- hold onto the back of the seat and steer the bike by leaning it. Practice this before the race!

Bike to Run (T2)

- When you are coming towards the end of the bike course, shift to a lower gear and pedal faster (higher cadence). This helps prepare your legs for the run.
- Dismount in the designated area; you cannot ride into the transition area.
- Keep your helmet on and buckled until you rack your bike.
- Jog easily with your bike to find your stuff, using the seat carry. Your legs will probably feel like they're made of stone. It'll get better when you get out onto the run.
- Put your running shoes on first. This way you can grab the other stuff (hat, gels, etc.) and put them on as you head toward the exit.