

How to Prep for Swab Summer

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While Swab Summer 2020 was a different Swab Summer unlike any other, I'd like to share my insight into how I prepared for it, what I should have done differently, and what I won't take back from the summer. I appreciated all the help and advice I got before Swab Summer-- I asked too many questions for my own good—and want to do the same for you too. They aren't in any order, but I hope this helps!

1. Physical Activity

- a. When everyone says prepare physically, they really mean it. Getting stronger in running, arm strength and core strength is so important not only to set you up well for the inevitable daily ice, and IT sessions but also to protect yourself from injury in the middle of Swab Summer. While we didn't run much this summer due to the masks, but being in cardiovascular shape was crucial because speed walking, or "walking with a purpose" through the P-ways of Chase, and charging up the stairwells (some platoons are on the 2nd floor while some are on the 4th floor) left us so out of breath and red faced when we reached the bulkhead.
- b. Personally, arm strength was something I regret not having worked on more. For the cadre, their go-to physical exercise was push-ups, and I came in only able to do 30 push-ups in a row to the PFE Cadence, and while I got stronger throughout the summer, I was a lot slower at the push-ups than my peers. As well, being stronger upper body-wise is a great help for static holds.
- c. Make sure to use every Morning Calisthenics to get stronger, and every time you get dropped to build strength for the next time you push deck. It is up to you, how much you want to improve physically during Swab Summer.
- d. Lastly, make sure you have a strong core, and know how to protect your back during Swab Summer. I know a lot of my shipmates complained about their backs hurting either from standing on the bulkhead for too long or doing exercises incorrectly or carrying heavy things. I was able to avoid most of those problems by constantly thinking to tighten my core in anything remotely using my back.

2. Splurge on electronics or taper off them

- a. While this summer, we got issued computers during the summer, we were NOT allowed to use them apart from the online trainings, and Swab Summer math lessons. Depending on what your summer looks like, you may or may not be issued computers. My two strategies for you are, either splurge on your electronics because you will not have any of that over Swab Summer, or ease yourself off of your cellular device addiction so the withdrawal won't be as bad. You should spend your last few weeks hanging out, every second you can, with your friends, family, and pets because you will not be seeing them for a couple of months.

3. Drive all you Can

- a. If you love driving, do as much of it as you can because once you get to the Academy, you won't really be driving around until you are a senior if you get a car. There are exceptions, but most of the corps does not really use their licenses until they get home again.

4. Treat Yourself

- a. Either go to your favorite restaurants, spend as much time doing the things you love because once you arrive on campus from S-Day, you will be micromanaged from when you get to use the

bathroom to asking permission to adjust your cover (your cap). Swab Summer is designed to deprive you of certain things to create a mentally challenging training environment. On the other hand, you will have your newly christened shipmates ready to survive the summer TOGETHER.

5. Break in your tennis shoes before reporting in and bring 2 pairs of insoles.
 - a. Make sure that you have worn your shoes, run in them, worked out in them in the months leading up to Swab Summer. Also, if you have a low arch in your foot, like me, or find insoles to be more comfortable, put some in your tennis shoes, and bring at least one extra for the BoonDockers (black leather boots) that will be issued to you. This will help prevent rolling your ankle, back pain, blisters and shin splints.
6. Save all important documents and documents sent to the Academy either on your computer or in a folder. Make two copies of everything.
 - a. You send in a pre-S-Day package with all the required documents but before you send those make sure to make a copy of all of them to keep at home, and to bring with you on S-Day. I brought an extra copy of everything to S-Day just in case, and never used my copies but I have them with me. Also, if you are asked, do not forget to bring original documents with you.
7. Send your address to your family and all your friends.
 - a. Build your support network before you leave. Make sure to send all your friends and family your address and remind them to address you as "Swab (your name)." You will get a mailbox for yourself in Chase Hall, so be sure to give them the right address so your letters don't get lost.
 - b. Also, these letters are your lifeline. If you run out of something or find out you need something else, you can ask your parents for it. On the other hand, the letters are very delayed, so you may not get what you want in time and end up not needing it.
 - c. Template:

First Name Last Name
US Coast Guard Academy
Chase Hall Box ####
New London CT 06320-8117
8. Prep your envelopes
 - a. You might write letters back, but don't count on writing too many back. In that case, prep an envelope to each friend you supplied your address to, and envelopes to your family. Do this before you get into Swab Summer because it will be much harder to get their addresses than if you had prepped them. Write your address in the top left corner and paste a stamp in the top right corner. Also bring stationary, notebook paper, pen or pencils to write with, extra stamps, and envelopes for yourself and for other people who might need it in your platoon.
9. For Females: Practice making your bun, and figure out what works best for you before you report in
 - a. My bun was "the worst bun I've ever seen" per the cadre, so do not be me and plan ahead. Either cut your hair short so that it won't brush the collar of your uniform or leave it long, so it makes a secure bun. Don't make the mistake of getting a middle length hair cut if you have thick hair or layers, like me, because my bun would always end up with flyaways and would fall out.

- b. Consider your options: thick hair bands, or thin hairbands, bobby pins, hair gel, hairspray. There are so many ways to do your hair to keep it neat, but make sure you choose a method that is quick, efficient, and will last the entire day. You might end up with a "gel met," but if that keeps your flyaways down you got to what you need to do.
 - c. While this differs from platoon to platoon, across the board, you will not be allowed to make a braided bun or use hairnets during the summer.
10. Make a list of all the things you need to do to keep everything straight
 - a. There are so many things that the Academy asks you to do before S-Day, so take advantage of the list they provide you with; double and triple check that you have covered everything.
11. Do not get hurt leading up to S-Day.
 - a. In some cases, an injury happens without warning. In most cases though, avoid situations that could put you into unnecessary harm, because you need to be in the best shape you can before S-Day.
12. Make sure your relatives and friends know about pduddy pictures Facebook page so they can watch you in action.
 - a. Mr. Duddy is the resident US Coast Guard Academy photographer, and he posts tons of pictures of Swab Summer on his Facebook page pduddy pictures. Send that page out to your friends and family so they can see what you have been up to.
13. Stay on your feet even when you are not working out.
 - a. One of the hardest parts of Swab Summer is not the working out but being exhausted from walking and standing all day. A cadet told me that it is like walking around all day at Disney: you haven't done any strenuous activity but just the fact that you have been moving all day leaves you drained, and your feet numb. I would recommend going on walks as often as you can, or when doing something that involves sitting try to do that standing so that way you get used to that feeling. Try it with the pairs of shoes you will be taking to Swab Summer too!
14. Acclimate yourself to warmer temperatures, and lack of air conditioning.
 - a. I'm from Texas so this might have been easier than it will be for some of you but try to simulate what it will be like being in an un-air-conditioned building.
15. Bringing things to Swab Summer
 - a. Make a list of everything they ask you to bring. It will be a long list, but I highly recommend it. You want to make sure you show up to S-Day with everything you need and not have to deal with the extra stress of forgetting something you really need, especially important documents.
 - b. For soaps, I would bring 2 in 1 shampoo and body wash (I used a baby soap brand) and conditioner in a separate bottle.
 - c. Do not bring extras or anything not on the list, at least on S-Day. It will make your bag heavier and your reporting -in day miserable. If there is stuff you want to bring like Tide sticks, cough drops, ask your parents to send them in with the first care package instead of in the bag you are bringing.
 - d. Logos on clothing are fine as long as they aren't super obvious.
 - e. Bring a sharpie with you so you can label EVERYTHING. Everyone gets issued the same stuff so to avoid losing something, write your name on it. I always wrote First Initial. Last Name.

- f. Organize the bag you are brining by packing all your stuff in Ziplock bags. It will keep things neat and organized, and you can use those Ziplock bags to store stuff in later.
 - g. Also, if you are missing supplies, you will get a chance to visit the Exchange store on campus, or you can ask your shipmates.
16. Get in contact with a current cadet so if you ever have questions all you have to do is text.
- a. While this post has a lot of details, it is not an inexhaustible source. When attending get-togethers before Swab Summer, make sure to take advantage of current cadets offering to help you prepare because they really are a great resource.
17. Practice hospital corners, folding etc.
- a. I came into swab summer having done AIM, so I felt like I had a pretty good understanding of what was going to happen. Despite going to AIM though, I still experienced a learning curve, which is part of Swab Summer. What I recommend is not necessarily to teach yourself how to do these things before coming to the Academy (you can, of course), but reach out to your shipmates in your platoon especially the "prepsters" who have had a year of prep school. Other than that, don't expect to get everything on the first try. I, for one, struggled on learning how to iron, and prepare my uniforms, but I was better at time management. Don't be afraid to ask for help and to trade tips with your shipmates. I think that that is one of the most important things about Swab Summer: learning to rely on your shipmates. So, embrace that.
18. Prepare care packages before you leave.
- a. Either prepare your packages yourself, one for each week of Swab Summer, or make sure your parents know what you'd like to get. Place items strategically and think about when you might need something during the summer, so you don't have to write home asking for something later.
 - b. Pack a lot of snacks and try to vary it. Send stuff that is from your local area, or something you usually eat at home. Also, send protein bars because there will be times where you will be hungry and in need of food at your disposal.
19. Work on your posture
- a. If you have bad posture, I certainly do, Swab Summer will be tough on you in that respect. You will probably be yelled at to keep your shoulders back, and to puff out your chest as part of the "Position of Attention." Your shoulder muscles will hurt from holding yourself in such a foreign way, but just think of it as improving your posture.
20. Delete or deactivate all social media before arriving at the Academy.
- a. Do this before the night before, like me, because you might be up a little later than expected trying to figure out how to deactivate your accounts because some apps make it really hard to do so. You might also have accounts with passwords you forgot. The cadre expect you to delete those as well so don't be surprised if you need to reset your password to access an account you made in third grade.
21. Memorize the mission of the Coast Guard Academy before S-Day.
- a. Know it, and it will be one less thing to worry about.