

Swimming Glossary

THE FOUR STROKES

The four competitive swimming strokes are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly. The combination of all four strokes is called individual medley.

Freestyle

In freestyle events, the competitor may swim any stroke. The stroke most commonly used is sometimes called the crawl, which is characterized by the alternate stroking of the arms over the surface of the water and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick.

Backstroke

Backstroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick while on the back. On turns, swimmers may rotate to the stomach and perform a flip turn and some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. The swimmer must finish on the back.

Breaststroke

The breaststroke requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pressed out from in front of the breast in a heart shaped pattern and recovered under or on the surface of the water. The kick is a simultaneous somewhat circular motion similar to the action of a frog. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously at, above or below the water surface.

Butterfly

Some consider the butterfly to be the most beautiful of the strokes. It features a simultaneous recovery of the arms over the water combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not flutter, scissors or use the breaststroke kick. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish.

IM

The individual medley, commonly referred to as the I.M., features all four strokes. In the IM, the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to backstroke, then breaststroke and finally freestyle.

A to Z Swimming

"A" time

Time classification for a swimmer, as with A times, AA times, B times, and so forth. Age group Division of swimmers according to age. The National Age Group divisions are: 10-under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18. Some LSC's have divided the swimmers into more convenient divisions specific to their situations: 8-under, 13-Over, 15-Over, Junior, Senior.

ASCA

The American Swim Coaches Association. The professional certifying organization for swim coaches throughout the nation. ASCA offers many services for coaches' education and career advancement.

Backstroke

One of the 4 competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on the back. Backstroke is swum as the first stroke in the medley relay and second stroke in the IM. Racing distances are 50 yds/mtr, 100 yds/mtr, and 200 yds/mtr. (LSC's with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd back)

Bell lap

The part of a freestyle distance race (400 yards or longer) when the swimmer has two lengths plus 10 yards to go. A timer rings a bell over the swimmer who is the first to reach the backstroke flags before making the last turn at the start end of the pool. Note: In higher competitions a timer rings a bell over the lane of each swimmer who has reached the backstroke flags before making the last turn at the start end of the pool.

Blocks

The starting platforms located behind each lane. Some pools have blocks only at the deeper end of the pool (called the "start end"), and some pools have blocks at both ends. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.

Breaststroke

One of the four competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swum as the second stroke in the medley relay and the third stroke in the IM. Racing distances are 50 yds/mtr, 100 yds/mtr, and 200 yds/mtr. (LSC's with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd breaststroke.)

Butterfly

One of the four competitive racing strokes. Butterfly, or fly, is swum as the third stroke in the medley relay and first stroke in the IM. Racing distances are 50 yds/mtr, 100 yds/mtr, and 200 yds/mtr. (LSC's with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd back)

Button (plunger)

A manual timing system device that records a back-up time for use if the swimmer did not hit the touch pad or the pad malfunctioned. The button or plunger is at the end of a wire, plugged into a deck terminal box. There are usually two buttons per lane. The timer is responsible to push the button as the swimmer finishes the race.

Championship finals

The top 6 or 8 swimmers (depending on the # of pool lanes) in a Prelims/Finals meet who, after the Prelims swim, qualify to return to the Finals. The fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held.

Championship meet

The meet held at the end of a season. Qualification times are usually necessary to enter the meet.

Check-in

The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck seeded meet, sometimes referred to as "positive check-in". Swimmers (or their coaches) mark their names on a list posted by the meet host by a specified deadline.

Circle seeding

A method of seeding swimmers when they are participating in a prelims/finals event. The fastest 18 to 24 swimmers are seeded in the last three heats, with the fastest swimmers being in the inside lanes in the final 3 heats. See rule book for exact method for seeding depending on the lanes in the pool. Also called championship seeding.

Club

A registered swim team that is a dues paying member of USA Swimming and the local LSC. Consolation finals

After the fastest 6 or 8 swimmers, the next fastest 6 or 8 swimmers (depending on the # of pool lanes)

in a Prelims/Finals meet who, after the Prelims swim, qualify to return to the Finals. Consolations are the second fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held and are conducted before the Championship heat.

Deck

The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an authorized USA Swimming member may be on the deck during a swim competition.

Deck Entries

Accepting entries into swimming events on the first day or later day of a meet.

Developmental meet

A classification of meet or competition that is usually held early in the season. The purpose of a developmental meet is to allow all levels of swimmers to compete in a low pressure environment.

Disqualified

A swimmers' performance in an event is not counted because of a rules infraction. A disqualification is shown by an official raising one arm with open hand, and can be explained after the meet by the coach.

Distance

How far a swimmer swims. Distances for short course are: 25 yards (1 length), 50 yards (2 lengths), 100 yards (4 lengths), 200 yards (8 lengths), 400 yards (16 lengths), 500 yards (20 lengths), 1000 yards (40 lengths), 1650 yards (66 lengths). Distances for long course are: 50 meters (1 length), 100 meters (2 lengths), 200 meters (4 lengths), 400 meters (8 lengths), 800 meters (16 lengths), 1500 meters (30 lengths).

Dry-land

The exercises and strength programs swimmers do out of the water. Dry-land work is vital for injury prevention and effective competition.

Electronic timing

A timing system that usually has a push-button starting machine with a horn and a strobe light, touch pads in the water, junction boxes on the deck with hook up cables, buttons for backup timing, and a computer-type console that prints out the results of each race. Some systems are hooked up to a scoreboard that displays swimmers' times.

Entry

An individual, relay team, or club roster's event list in a swim competition.

Entry fees
The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the LSC and type of meet.

Entry limit

Each meet usually has a limit on the number of swimmers that can be accepted, or a time limit that cannot be exceeded. Once an entry limit has been reached, a meet will be closed to entries.

Event

A race or stroke swum over a given distance. An event equals 1 preliminary with its final, or 1 timed final.

False start

When a swimmer leaves the starting block before the horn or gun. A false start confirmed by both of two designated officials is a disqualification.

Fastest to slowest

A seeding method that may be used on the longer events held at the end of a session. The fastest seeded swimmers participate in the first heats followed by the next fastest and so on. Many times these events will alternate one girls' heat and one boys' heat until all swimmers have competed.

FINA

The international, rules-making organization, for the sport of swimming.

Final results
The printed copy of the results of each race of a swim meet.

Finals
The final race of each event. See "Championship Finals", "Consolation Finals", "Timed Finals", etc.

Fins

Large rubber fin type devices that fit on a swimmers feet. Used in swim practice, not competition.

Flags

Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately 15 feet from the wall.

Freestyle

One of the four competitive racing strokes. Freestyle is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the IM. Racing distances are 50 yds/mtr, 100 yds/mtr, 200 yds/mtr, 400 mtr/500 yd, 800 mtr/1000 yds, 1500 mtr/1650 yds. (LSC's with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd free)

Heat sheet

The printed listings of swimmers' seed times and their assigned events, heats and lanes at a swim meet. Heat sheets are usually sold at the admissions table.

Heats

A division of an event in which there are more swimmers than lanes, so that they cannot all compete at the same time. The results for an event are compiled by swimmers' time swum after all heats of the event are completed.

High point award

An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. All meets do not offer high point awards; check the pre-meet information.

Horn

A sounding device used with a light to signal the start of a race.

IM
Individual Medley. An event in which an equal distance of each of the four competitive strokes is swum in order. The order of strokes is butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle. IM distances are: 100 yds/mtr, 200 yds/mtr, 400 yds/mtr.

Infraction

Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification, if observed by an official, and reported to the referee, who confirms the disqualification.

Insurance

USA Swimming offers insurance coverage which is automatic when swimmer, coach, official, pays their USA Swimming registration fee.

Interval

A specific elapsed time for swimming or rest used during swim practice.

Invitational

Type of meet that requires a club to request an invitation to attend the meet.

Kick board

A flotation device used by swimmers during practice.

Lane

The specific portion of the pool in which a swimmer is assigned to swim.

Lane lines

Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from the starting end to the turning end for the purpose of separating each lane and quieting the waves caused by racing swimmers.

Lap

One length of the course. Sometimes may also mean down and back (2 lengths) of the course.

Lap counter

The large numbered cards (or the person turning the cards) used during the freestyle events 500 yards or longer. Counting is done from the end opposite the starting end. The number on the cards are "odd numbers" only with the final lap being designated by a bright orange card.

Leg

The part of a relay event swam by a single team member. A single stroke in the IM.

Long course

A 50 meter pool. The long course season typically lasts from the beginning of April through August.

LSC

Local Swim Committee. The local level administrative division of USA Swimming with supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries designated by USA Swimming.

Marshall

The volunteer official who observes the pool during warm-ups, and may control the crowd and swimmer flow at a swim meet

Meet Director

The volunteer in charge of the administration of the meet.

Meter pool
The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the metric system. Long course meters pools are 50 meters long; short course meters pools are 25 meters long.

Mile

The slang referring to the 1500 meter or 1650 yard freestyle, each of which is slightly short of a mile.

NAGTS

National Age Group Time Standards - the list of "C" through "AAAA" times published each year.

Nationals

USA Swimming senior or junior level meets conducted in March/April and August. See Senior or Junior Nationals.

NT

No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not achieved an official time in that event before.

Officials

The certified, adult volunteers, who operate the many facets of a swim competition. Open competition Competition which any qualified club, organization, or individual may enter. Pace clock

The large clocks with highly visible numbers and second hands, positioned at the ends or sides of a swimming pool so the swimmers can read their times during warmups or swim practice.

Paddle

Colored plastic devices worn on the swimmers hands during swim practice. Positive check-in

The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded meet, and at some pre-seeded meets. Swimmers must mark their names on a list posted by the meet host.

Prelims-finals

Type of meet with two sessions. The preliminary heats are usually held in a session that is early in the day. The fastest 6 or 8 (Championship Heat) swimmers, and sometimes the next fastest 6 or 8 swimmers (Consolation Heat) return later to compete in the Finals. A swimmer who has qualified in the Consolation Finals may not place in the Championship Finals even if their finals time would place them so. The converse also applies.

Pre-seeded

A meet conducted in which a swimmer is assigned to each event, lane, and heat prior to the meet. These assignments are then posted on heat sheets for the information of swimmers, coaches, spectators, and officials.

Psyche sheet

Another name for a meet program, usually before events are deck-seeded, that lists swimmers in order of their times without assigning them to heats or lanes.

Pull Buoy

A flotation device used for pulling between the legs in practice.

Qualifying times

Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer. See "A" "AA" (etc.) times.

Referee

The head official at a swim meet in charge of all of the "Wet Side" administration and decisions.

Relays

A swimming event in which four swimmers participate as a relay team, each swimmer swimming an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays: 1.) Medley relay - One swimmer swims Backstroke, the next swimmer swims Breaststroke, the third swimmer swims Butterfly, and the last swimmer swims Freestyle. Medley relays are conducted over 200 yd/mtr and 400 yd/mtr distances. 2.) Freestyle relay - Each swimmer swims freestyle. Free relays are conducted over 200 yd/mtr, 400 yd/mtr, and 800 yd/mtr distances.

Sanction

A permit issued by an LSC to a USA Swimming Club to conduct an event or meet. Sanction fee The amount paid by a USA Swimming Club to an LSC for issuing a sanction.

Scratch

To withdraw from an event after having declared an intention to participate. Some meets have scratch deadlines and specific scratch rules, and if not followed, a swimmer can be disqualified from remaining events.

Seed

Assign the swimmers heats and lanes according to their submitted or preliminary times. Seeding Deck Seeding - swimmers must report to the Clerk of the Course at some announced time before the event. After scratches are determined, the event is seeded.

Pre-Seeding - swimmers are arranged in heats according to submitted times prior to the meet.

Senior meet - A meet that is for senior level swimmers and is not divided into age groups. Qualification times are usually necessary and will vary depending on the level of the meet. Senior National championships are conducted as long course meets in the spring (usually in late March) and in the summer (usually in late July or August).

Session

Portion of meet distinctly separated from other portions by locale, time, type of competition, or age group. Many meets have separate morning and afternoon sessions depending on swimmers' age groups.

Short course

A 25 yard or 25 meter pool. The short course season typically lasts from the beginning of September through March.

Split

A portion of an event, shorter than the total distance, that is timed, for example, the time for the first 50 yards of a 100 yard race, or the time swum by one swimmer of a relay team. It is common to take multiple splits for the longer distances

Starter

The volunteer official in charge of signaling the beginning of a race and insuring that all swimmers have a fair takeoff.

State meet

A championship meet held twice a year (Short Course and Long Course) sponsored by the LSC. It is common to hold a Championship Senior meet and Age Group meet separately. Qualification times are necessary.

State qualifier

A swimmer who has made a necessary cut off time – an 'A' time – to enter the state championship meet.

Stroke

There are 4 competitive strokes: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle. Stroke & Turn

Judge

A volunteer official trained and authorized to observe racers' strokes as they swim through the jurisdiction assigned to the official, usually 2-4 lanes. At a short course meet, the stroke judges will generally stand at either end of the pool, and have jurisdiction to the midline of the pool. At a long course meet, a stroke judge will usually walk along the side of the pool as the swimmers race, and may have jurisdiction from one end to the other. A stroke judge who observes a swimmer commit an infraction will report to the referee, and the swimmer may be disqualified.

Submitted time

Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets.

Swim-off

In a Prelims/Finals type competition, a race after the scheduled event to break a tie. The only circumstance that warrants a swim-off is to determine which swimmer makes finals or becomes an alternate, otherwise ties stand.

Taper

The resting phase of training for a Age Group & Senior swimmer toward the end of the season before the championship meet.

Time standard

A time set by a meet or LSC or USA Swimming (etc.) that a swimmer must achieve for qualification or recognition.

Time trial

An event or series of events where a swimmer may achieve or better a required time standard.

Timed finals

Competition in which only heats are swum and final placings are determined by those times. Timer

The volunteers, sitting behind the starting blocks/finish end of pool, are responsible for obtaining watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system. Touch pad
The removable plate (on the end of pool lanes) that is connected to an automatic timing system. A swimmer must properly touch the touchpad to electronically register a time in a race.

Unattached (UN)

An athlete member who competes, but does not represent a club or team, as during the 120 days after an athlete transfers from one team to another. (abbr. UN)

Unofficial time

The time displayed on a read out board, read over the intercom by the announcer immediately after the race, or clocked by the lane timers.

USA number

A 12 part number assigned to a swimmer after they have filled out the proper forms and paid their annual dues. The first three parts include the two letter abbreviation for the LSC (Local Swim Committee) and the registration year. The next three parts are letters standing for the first initial of: Last Name/First Name/Middle Name in that order. The last 6 parts are numbers of swimmers birthdate: Day/Month/Year using zeros as place holders. For example: USS# for swimmer Kent Michael Nelson, a member of Indiana Swimming, registering for the 1993/94 year and born Aug. 27, 1976 = IN4NKM082776.

Yard pool

The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the American system. A short course yard pool is 25 yards (75 feet) in length.

Zones

The country is divided up into 4 major zones: Eastern - Southern - Central - Western. At the end of the long course season (in August) the Zone Administration sponsors a championship age group meet.