

All About Time Standards

Swim parents often have questions about time standards, what they mean and how to understand them. Don't worry – you're not alone.

All swimmers are on their own path. For our 10-U swimmers, the goal of developing legal strokes and fostering a love of the sport is our primary goal before qualifying for meets. As swimmers grow older, finding pride and accomplishment through competition goals keeps swimmers involved with the sport long-term. Whether your swimmer is chasing their first legal 50 fly, a new BB cut or a dream of making a special team roster, we will support and guide them on what it takes for the next step.

Here is a breakdown of everything time standard related.



PART 1: What is a Time Standard?

For competition purposes, a time standard or “cut” is the time a swimmer must achieve to participate in a certain meet. Time standards are unique to each swim meet and are in place to:

- *help control the size of the meet*
- *help control the pace or speed of the meet*
- *help control the level of competition at the meet*

Some other factors also play a role like:

- *the size of the facility*

Larger pools can accommodate more swimmers than smaller pools. Most facilities have capacity limitations for safety and air quality control.

- *whether the meet is timed finals or prelim/finals*

Prelim/Final meets require sessions to be a certain length, so athletes have time between sessions to rest, eat and recover. Some meets have time restrictions where sessions cannot go over a certain amount of time.

There are meets where the time standard restricts swimmers from being too fast to attend. There are also meets with a clear and precise number of athletes who can attend and swim per event (typically high school and NCAA level meets). These types of meets have unique time standards that change each year. All these factors play a role in determining time standards for each meet.

Some meets will have a bonus time standard for events where swimmers making at least (1) meet “cut” will be able to swim additional events to round out their meet. This helps swimmers gain exposure and opportunities racing at that level of meet. Bonus swims will sometimes have a separate time standard slower than the one for the meet (Missouri Valley Championships, Sectionals, Junior Nationals and some NCSA Age Group events are like this) and sometimes not. Occasionally, bonus swims will need to be at an event distance of 200 and below (no bonus swims in 400IM, 400/500, 800/1000 or 1500/1650). There may also be limitations on the number of bonus swims an athlete can do at the meet.

PART 2: USA Swimming Time Standards

USA Swimming is the governing body of our sport and is the largest of any USA sports organization in the country in terms of membership. USA Swimming is the sponsor of many nationally run meets with unique times standards that present swimmers with a progression to climb in terms of achieving new “cuts” throughout their swimming careers (more on this later).

USA Swimming also has the job of analyzing times and setting motivational time standards for USA members to achieve. These are called the [USA Swimming Motivational Time Standards](#). These times are released each 4 years at the beginning of the new Olympic cycle and are based on time analysis from the previous 4 years. These were just updated for the new Olympic Quad. These time standards represent a swimmer’s level and are based on age, gender and ability. The higher the swimmer achieves on these times, the higher they will rank in the national percentile in their age group. This is a great tool for measuring your swimmer’s progress from year to year as they age up from the 9-10 age group through the 17-18 age group.

The USA Swimming Motivational Time Standards go in this order (slowest to fastest): B, BB, A, AA, AAA, and AAAA in the 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16 and 17-18 age group divisions for girls and boys and in each of the three competitive courses (Short Course Yards, Short Course Meters and Long Course Meters). The AAAA time is the fastest time achieved on this metrics and places you inside the top 1-3% of your age group for that swim. There are also Single Age Divisions but are rarely used – however, they are a good measure of improvement from year to year within a single age (don’t worry about these).

There is not a “meet” attached to these times, per say. However, some meets we attend will use these time standards for participation. For example, 11 and over swimmers will need to have at least a BB time to enter and swim in the Winter Classic meet this December. The Tri-Meet we attend required swimmers be below an A time. In the summer, swimmers can attend the Central Zone Championships if they achieve a AAA time. Zones is a USA Swimming regional meet of the fastest 14-U swimmers from the Central Zone (Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Lake Erie, Michigan, Midwestern, Minnesota, Missouri Valley, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Ozark, South Dakota and Wisconsin) broken into 2 separate regional meets. Again, these meets choose the times standards associated with the meet entry to help serve the purpose of the meet described in Part 1.

PART 3: Locating Time Standards for Meets We Attend

We attend many of the same meets each season. Some require a time standard, and some do not. We aim to attend a mix of meets for every level of swimmer on AAAA. As a rule of thumb, most Championship Meets will require a “cut” to attend. We will list what the meet time standard is or have a link on the Event page online. You can also find meet Information on the Missouri Valley Swimming website. Here are the three main resources for looking up Time Standards:

- the AAAA website [here](#)
- the Missouri Valley website [here](#)
- the USA Swimming website [here](#).

Consult the [Events/Meets](#) page on our website for each swim meet. We update the schedule periodically as clubs update their meet info or as meet additions or cancellations occur. All complete versions of official swim meet information can be found on the host team website or on Missouri Valley Swimming under Calendar > [Meets and Events](#).

The screenshot shows the Missouri Valley Swimming website's navigation bar with the following items: HOME, LESSONS AT THE FARM, ANNUAL REGISTRATION, CLUB INFO, **EVENTS/MEETS** (circled in red), RECORDS, MEET SCHEDULE, SWIM 101, ALUMNI, and POOLS. Below the navigation bar is a sidebar with various icons. The main content area is titled 'Team Events' and has tabs for 'General' and 'Practices'. Under 'General', there are tabs for 'Current & Upcoming' and 'Past & Archived'. A search bar labeled 'Search for Events' and a 'Customize Filters' button are present. The list of events includes:

Date	Event Name	Time Standard / Notes	Action
Nov 23 2024	CNS Gobbler Meet 23 November 2024 - 24 November 2024	Our ONLY Team Timed Final Meet for the Fall	Attend / Decline
Dec 06 2024	Winter Classic - BB Time Standard / 10-U NO Time Standard 06 December 2024 - 08 December 2024	Team Mid-Season Prelim/Final Meet for AAAA - Last one for 2024 BB Time Standard for 11 and Over- must be qualified 10-Under is NO Time Standard Meet is prelims/final	Attend / Decline
Jan 17 2025	Brian Howard 17 January 2025 - 19 January 2025	Let's kick off 2025 in Lenexa at the prelims/final meet	Attend / Decline

PART 4: Hierarchy of Swim Meets

As mentioned before, USA swimming, Missouri Valley Swimming and our team present a pyramid of meets and time achievements to help swimmers progress. On the following page, we have outlined what this looks like. This chart includes some basic beginner milestones, IMX achievements, a hierarchy of meets, camps and teams to qualify for and the USA Swimming Motivational Time Standards. Remember, the USA Swimming Motivational Time Standards serve as a continuous measure of improvement in each age group for as long as your swimmer competes.

This is a somewhat simplified progression, as there are many meets and camps around the country with different time standards as mentioned in Part 1. However, this is what we aim to have AAAA swimmers look to for going to the “next level” from season to season. We have linked what the standard is for each of the highlighted meets.



Swim Meet Hierarchy

  	12-O	<i>Make Olympic or Worlds team - .001% of swimmers!</i> USA Olympic Trials (cuts released 2yrs before trials) / USA Summer Nationals / US Open – 5 Star USA Swimming Meet Make National Junior Team Second swim at Summer Jr. Nationals USA Swimming Summer Jr. Nationals – 4 Star USA Swimming Meet Second swim at Junior Nationals USA Swimming Winter Jr. Nationals – 3 Star USA Swimming Meet / USA Swimming TYR Pro Series Meets Score at Futures / NCSA Juniors USA Swimming Futures / NCSA Juniors – 2 Star USA Swimming Meet Score At Sectionals USA Swimming Sectionals – 1 Star USA Swimming Meet
	14-U	Make USA Swimming National Select Camp – Only 104 swimmers in the country Make USA Swimming Zone Select Camp – 1-2% of swimmers in the Central Zone! AAAA Times / Score at Zones Championships AAA Times / USA Swimming Zone Championships (AAA Times) NCSA Age Group MVS All-Stars Team – Selected Team based on your LSC rank in the events within your age group. AA Times A Times / MVS LSC Championships (IMX) Legal in all long distance in All 4 Strokes BB Times / MVS District Championships B Times (IMR) Legal in short distances in All 4 Strokes Legal in all strokes for a 25

PART 5: Participation in Swim Meets to Qualify and Set Goals

It may sound obvious, but to achieve the time standard your swimmer is chasing, they need to participate in swim meets to race, gain experience and track improvements in their training.

Sanctioned swim meets are the only place to qualify and swim new “cuts”. We recommend swimming in at least (1) meet per month when offered. However, swimming in (2) meets per month is also okay. In these cases when meets are close together, we recommend swimming some different events at each meet. This helps with achieving your IMX scores, etc. Swimmers who race more often gain the experience they need to continue to make the improvements in competition and more importantly in practices between competitions.

We find swimmers with the best attendance and best work ethic at workouts over extended periods of time have the best opportunities of achieving the time standards they are chasing. For older swimmers especially, these athletes tend to have the most fruitful “tapers” when it comes time to rest for bigger championships meets. There is no magic number of attended practices for achieving a new time standard. Likewise, quantifying the work ethic of a swimmer can be tricky. We do our best to use a mathematical approach to track swimmer progress on swim sets during the season. This coupled with our years of experience in coaching gives us a pretty good idea of who will swim well at competitions by observing workouts and considering swimmer practice attendance.

The higher you climb on the meet progression, the more commitment, focus, and ability is required from the athlete. Katie and I believe in the saying of “hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” You can go far simply by showing up, working hard and doing the little things well (stroke corrections, diet, hydration, sleep, etc.) day-to-day, month-to-month and season-to-season.



PART 6: Getting Ahead of the Cut

Young minds can have a difficult time grasping the big picture when it comes to setting goals or getting a new “cut” to attend a certain meet. We have had swimmers show up for their first meet and overhear more experienced swimmers talk about getting a Champs cut. They will then come up to us and say, “I am going to try and swim for my Champs cut in my next race. What should I do?” While we appreciate this enthusiasm, we all know it takes a little more than brief pep talks before a race to achieve something like a new Championship cut for a beginner swimmer.

As coaches and as parents, we can help frame the process for achievement by setting up our swimmers for success each season. Working towards a goal of achieving a new “cut” takes hard work, patience and a plan. For your swimmer, the plan starts by following the workout and meet schedule for their group and then working hard at each practice. Young swimmers will see improvements on a grander scale as they start out in swimming. Their baseline is 0 and by accumulating practice and race experience they will grow quickly by following the AAAA workout routines. Young swimmers also experience physical growth which aids in their early development.

We adopt a gradual approach to workload as swimmers grow in our sport. We follow this basic model for minimum practices attended per week based on age. Our swim groups and practice offerings mirror this philosophy:

Ages 7-8 - 2x practices per week

Ages 9-10 – 3-4x practices per week

*Ages 11-12 – 4-5x practices per week**

*Ages 13-14 - 5-6x practices per week**

Ages 15-Over -7x practices per week +

**There can be variations on ability and goals in these age groups*

For older swimmers ages 13 and up, this plan takes place over a season or often spans 1-2 seasons or even years. For High Performance swimmers, Katie and I like to think of things in these terms. Again, it’s not an exact science, but certainly can help frame how important it is for a swimmer to be consistent over long periods of time. How a swimmer is swimming NOW, reflects the work/foundation they have laid over the previous 9-12 months. This is what we mean by helping our young minds see the big picture. One practice, a week of practices or even one great month of practices before a big

meet has little to no effect on the athlete's performance in contrast to the accumulation of work that has taken place over the past 9-12 months. The key is consistency. There is a saying that goes:

*String together a few good repeats and you have a good set,
String together a few good sets and you have a good practice,
String together a few good practices and you have a good week,
String together a few good weeks and you have a good month,
String together a few good months and you have a good season,
String together a few good seasons and you have a good career.*

We understand each swimmer is on their own path with regards to reaching the next level in their swimming career. We believe it is important to get ahead of the cut for the meet you're trying to attend that season – meaning the sooner you can get that cut the better. Having the cut to begin the season is ideal but also takes foresight and hard work in the previous season or seasons. It is not uncommon to exhaust all opportunities in making a new cut for an end of season meet and it is certainly still an amazing accomplishment whenever it happens. Still, one can see how awesome it could be to have the cut in advance so the swimmer can focus solely on one meet and not on trying to get a cut in the last weeks leading up to it. As young swimmers are starting out, this may take some time to get ahead of the cut – but keep trying and putting in the work.

