

## GLOSSARY OF SWIMMING TERMS (Adapted from USASwimming.org)

There are a lot of strange and unusual words used in swimming. You may or may not find these words in the English Dictionary, and if you do, their definitions will probably be radically different from the ones listed in this Glossary. Relax and take your time reading. Soon you'll be understanding and maybe even speaking some "swim slang."

- **Age Group** – Division of swimmers according to age. The National Age Group divisions are: 10-under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18. Pacific Swimming also has an 8-under division.
- **Age group meet** – a competition in which events are divided by age, as opposed to entry time.
- **Alternate** – In a Prelims/Finals meet (see below for the definition of that), after the finalists are decided, the next two fastest swimmers other than the finalists are designated as “alternates.” The faster of the two is the first alternate and the next is the second alternate. If a finalist cannot participate, the alternates are called to take their place.
- **Anchor** – The final swimmer in a relay. Also a term coaches use for the beginning of all four strokes indicating the “high elbow”, “catch,” or “early vertical forearm.”
- **Approved Meet** – A meet conducted with sufficient USA Swimming officials to certify conformance to USA
- **Swimming rules**. The meet may include competitors who are not USA Swimming members. The meet may be a competition sanctioned at the LSC level with the added approval of USA Swimming because both member and non-member athletes will be competing.
- **ASCA** - The American Swim Coaches Association. The professional organization for swim coaches throughout the nation. Certifying coaches and offering many services for coaches' education and career advancement.
- **Attached** - swimmers are registered in US Swimming through their team, compete in official meets, and score points for that team. Our swimmers are “attached” to NA
- **Backstroke** - One of the four competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on your back. Backstroke is swum as the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 25 yard (8-under only), 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter.
- **Blocks** - The starting platforms located behind each lane. Minimum water depth for use of starting blocks is 4 feet. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.
- **Breaststroke** - One of the four competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swam as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 25 yard (8-under only), 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter.
- **Butterfly** - One of the four competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed “fly”) is swam as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 25 yard (8-under only), 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter.
- **Camp** - A swimming function offered by USA-S, your LSC, or a USA-S coach. There are many types of camps for just about every level of swimmer. When selecting a camp, ask for your coach's advice as to what will be the best for the swimmer, or see the USA-S swimming website for details on the many camps they offer.
- **Cap** - a latex or lycra swim cap used during a race or workout to protect a swimmer's hair from the effects of chlorine in the water as well as help cut down water resistance.

- **Carbohydrates** - The main source of food energy used by athletes. Refer to a Nutritional Manual for more information.
- **Championship Meet** - The meet held at the end of a season. Qualification times are usually necessary to enter the meet.
- **Championship Finals** - The top six or eight swimmers (depending on the number of pool lanes) in a Prelims/Finals meet who, after the prelims are swum, qualify to return to the Finals. The fastest heat of finals, when multiple heats are held.
- **Check-in** - an administrative procedure at meets where the swimmer signs in to confirm his/her intention to swim an event.
- **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.
- **Clinic** - A scheduled meeting for the purpose of instruction. (i.e. Official's clinic, Coach's clinic).
- **Closed Competition** - Swim meet which is only open to the members of a specific organization or group. Summer club swim meets are considered to be "Closed Competition."
- **Club** - A registered swim team that is a dues-paying member of USA-S and the local LSC.
- **Code of Conduct** - A Code of Conduct that both swimmers and coaches are required to sign at certain USA-S/LSC sponsored events. The Code is not strict and involves common sense and proper behavior.
- **Consolation Finals** - After the fastest six or eight swimmers, the next six or eight swimmers (depending on the number of pool lanes) in a Prelims/Finals meet who, after the prelims are swum, 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.
- **Convention** - United States Aquatic Sports annual, week long, meeting where all rules changes are decided and working committees are established. Representatives are sent by each LSC to make up the voting body.
- **Course** - Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. Long Course = 50 meters / Short Course = 25 yards or 25 meters.
- **Deadline** - The date meet entries must be received by, to be accepted by the meet host. Making the meet deadline does not guarantee acceptance into a meet since many meets are "full" weeks before the entry deadline.
- **Deck** - The area around the swimming pool, often reserved for only swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an "authorized" USA Swimming member may be on the deck during a swim competition.
- **Deck Entry** – Entering meet events on-site at the meet. It is VERY uncommon for deck entries to be accepted at Pacific Swimming meets.
- **Deck Seeding** – When heat and lane assignments are posted after swimmers have checked in or have “scratched” (indicated they will not participate in the event.) Swimmers are placed in proper heats and lanes according to their seedtime just prior to the event.
- **Dehydration** - The abnormal depletion of body fluids (water). The most common cause of swimmers cramps and sick feelings.
- **Developmental** - 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.

- **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).
- **Diving Well** - A separate pool or a pool set off to the side of the competition pool. This pool has deeper water and diving boards/platforms. During a meet, this area may be designated as a warm-down pool, if there is proper supervision.
- **Division I-II-III** - NCAA member colleges and universities are assigned divisions to compete in, depending on the school's total enrollment. Division I being the large universities and Division III being the smaller colleges.
- **DQ** – short for “disqualification.” Happens at a meet when a swimmer does not swim a stroke according to the guidelines set forth by US Swimming. A disqualification is shown by an official raising one arm with open hand above their head. If a swimmer is disqualified from an event, the finish time is not recorded.
- **Drag suit** - a second, loose fitting swimsuit worn by swimmers in workout and warm-up to add a certain amount of weight and resistance to the flow of the water around the swimmer. The concept is similar to a batter swinging two or three bats while on deck in a baseball game.
- **Dry land** - The exercises and various strength programs swimmers do out of the water.
- **Dual Meet** - Type of meet where two teams/clubs compete against each other.
- **Entry** - An individual, relay team, or club roster's event list in a swim competition.
- **Entry Fees** - The amount per event that a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the LSC and type of meet.
- **Entry Limit** - Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept, or a time limit they cannot exceed. Once an entry limit has been reached, a meet will be closed and all other entries will be returned.
- **Electronic Timing** - Timing system operated on DC current (battery). The timing system usually has touchpads 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.
- **Event** - A race or stroke over a given distance. An event equals 1 preliminary with its final, or 1 timed final.
- **False Start** - occurs when a swimmer leaves the starting block, or is moving on the block, before the starter officially starts the race. Once the starter says “take your marks,” all swimmers must remain motionless until the starting horn sounds. In USA Swimming, one false start will result in an automatic disqualification from the race.
- **Fastest to Slowest** - A seeding method 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.
- **FINA** - Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming.
- **Finals** - The final race of each event. See "Consolation Finals", "Timed Finals", etc.
- **Final Results** - The printed copy of the results of each race of a swim meet.
- **Fins** - Large rubber flipper-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. Used by swimmers in backstroke to judge how close they are to the wall.
- **Freestyle** - One of the four competitive racing strokes. Freestyle (nicknamed "free") is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 25 yards (8-under only), 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, 200 yards/meter, 400 mtr/500, yd 800 mtr/1000 yds, 1500 mtr/1650 yds.
- **Goals** - The short- and long-range targets for swimmers to aim for.
- **Goggles** - Eyewear worn by swimmers in the pool to protect the swimmer's eyes from the effects of chlorine in the water.
- **Gravity wave** - Wave action caused by the swimmers bodies moving through the water. Gravity waves move down and forward from the swimmer, bounce off the bottom of the pool and return to the surface in the form of turbulence.
- **Gun (or Bell) Lap** - The part of a freestyle distance race (400 meters or longer) when the swimmer has two lengths plus five yards to go. The starter fires a gun shot (or rings a bell) over the lane of the lead swimmer when the swimmer is at the backstroke flags, to indicate that only two laps are left in the race.
- **Gutter** - The area at the edges of the pool in which water overflows during a race and is re-circulated into the pool. Deep gutters catch surface waves and don't allow them to wash back into the pool and affect the race.
- **Heats** - All of the swimmers entered in the event are divided into heats, or groups of swimmers. The results are compiled by the times swum, after all heats of the event are completed.
- **Heat Award** - A ribbon, coupon, or other prize given to the winner of a single heat at an age group swim meet.
- **High Point** - An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. Not all meets offer high point awards; check the Meet Sheet.
- **HOD** - House of Delegates. The ruling body of an LSC composed of the designated representative of each club plus the board of directors (BOD) of the LSC. One vote per club and board member. Also refers to the national USA-S convention meeting.
- **Horn** - A sounding device used to start races. Used mainly with a fully automatic timing system.
- **Illegal** - Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification.
- **I.M.** - short for "Individual Medley," an event in which the swimmer uses all four competitive strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle. Equal distances must be swam of each stroke. Distances offered: 100 yards, 200 yards/meters, 400 yards/meter.
- **Jump** - An illegal start done by the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th member of a relay team. The swimmer on the block breaks contact with the block before the swimmer in the water touches the wall.
- **Junior Nationals** - A USA-S Championship meet for swimmers 18 years old or less. Qualification times are necessary.
- **Kick Board** - A flotation device used by swimmers during practice.
- **Lane** - The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim. (ie) Lane 1 or Lane 2.
- **Lane lines** - the dividers used to delineate the individual lanes. These are made of individual finned disks strung on a cable, which rotate on the cable when hit by a wave. The rotating disks dissipate surface tension waves in a competitive pool.
- **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 numbers 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 swum by a single team member. A single stroke in the I.M.
- **Long Course** - a pool configured for swimming with a 50-meter long racing course. World records may be set in long course and short course competition. The main US Swimming Long Course season is during the summer months. The Olympic Games as well as all major international competitions are conducted in long course pools.
- **LSC** - Local Swim Committee. The local level administrative division of the corporation (USA-S) with supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries. The LSC for NA is Midwest Swimming (MW).
- **Marshall** - The officials who control the crowd and swimmer-flow at a swim meet.
- **Meet** - A series of events held in one program.
- **Meet Director** - The official in charge of the administration of the meet. The person directing the "dry side" of the meet.
- **Meet Sheet** -The officially approved informational sheet for each swim meet. The meet sheet will include information about the location, rules, events, and other logistical details of the competition.
- **National Reportable Time (NRT)** - the national age group time standard used for compiling top 16 USS age group times each season.
- **Nationals** - USA Swimming National Championship meet conducted in March/April (short course) and August (long course).
- **NCAA** - National Collegiate Athletic Association
- **Negative Split** - a race strategy in the distance freestyle events in which a swimmer covers the second half of the race faster than the first half.
- **Non-Conforming Time** - A short course time submitted to qualify for a long course meet, or vice versa.
- **NT** - No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swum that event before.
- **Observed Meet** - A meet that is not conducted according to USA Swimming rules (high school, YMCA) where a request for observation has been processed and approved in advance. Sufficient USA Swimming officials are present to certify that the athletes' swims are in compliance with USA Swimming technical rules.
- **Observed Swim** - A swim observed by assigned USA Swimming officials for conformance with USA Swimming technical rules in a meet conducted under other than USA Swimming rules.
- **Official** - a certified adult judge on the deck of the pool. Various judges watch the swimmer's strokes, turns and finishes or are timers.
- **Olympic Trials** - The USA-S sanctioned long course swim meet held the year of the Olympic Games to decide what swimmers will represent the USA on our Olympic Team. Qualification times are faster than Senior Nationals.
- **Open Competition** - Competition which any qualified club, organization, or individual may enter.
- **Pace Clock** - The electronic clocks or 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 warm ups or swim practice.

- **Paddles** - a swim aid, which attaches to the hand. These are generally used in the older age groups to work on stroke technique and strength.
- **Past Vertical** - a disqualification used primarily in backstroke, where the swimmer is "past vertical" toward his/her stomach upon leaving the wall after a turn.
- **Practice** - The scheduled workouts swimmers attend with their swim team/club.
- **Prelims** - Session of a Prelims/Finals meet in which the qualification heats are conducted.
- **Prelims-Finals** - Type of meet with two sessions. The preliminary heats are usually held in the morning session. The fastest six or eight (Championship Heat) swimmers, and the next fastest six or eight swimmers. (Consolation Heat) return in the evening 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.
- **Psyche Sheet** - An entry sheet showing all swimmers entered into each individual event. Sometimes referred to as a "Heat Sheet" or meet program.
- **Pull-Buoy** - a swim aid used to keep the legs motionless. It is a flotation device that is held between the swimmers legs and is generally used by older swimmers.
- **Pulling Tarps** - placing or removing the blankets on/from the top of a pool, which help minimize evaporation and keep the water temperature steady.
- **Qualifying Times** - Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer.
- **Referee** - the USA-S official who has the authority over all other officials at the meet. He/she makes all final decisions and sees to the efficient running of the meet.
- **Relay** - A swimming event in which four swimmers participate as a team. Each swimmer completes an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays: 1.) Medley relay - One swimmer swims Backstroke, one swimmer swims Breaststroke, one swimmer swims Butterfly, one swimmer swims Freestyle, in that order. 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.
- **Relay exchange** - the exchange between the swimmer in the water and the next swimmer on the relay team. A perfect exchange will simultaneously have the finishing swimmer's hand on the touch pad and the starting swimmer's feet just touching the starting block with the rest of the starting swimmer's body extended over the water.
- **Roll** - to move on the starting blocks prior to the starting signal. A roll is usually caught by the starter and called a false start, but swimmers will often try to guess the starter's cadence and get a good start. This is similar to illegal procedure in football.
- **Sanction** - A permit issued by an LSC to a USA-S group member to conduct an event or meet.
- **Sanction Fee** - The amount paid by a USA-S group member to an LSC for issuing a sanction.
- **Sanctioned Meet** - A meet that is approved by the LSC in which it is held. Meet must be conducted according to USA Swimming rules. All participants, including coaches, athletes and officials, must be USA Swimming members.
- **Scratch** - The process by which a swimmer withdraws from an event that they have entered in. Some meets have scratch deadlines and specific scratch rules, and if these are not followed, a swimmer can be disqualified from later events.
- **Sectionals** - Nickname for Speedo Championship Series (see below).

- **Seed Time** - the time a swimmer uses to enter an event. It is the swimmer's personal best time in that event and determines the placement of heat and lane for a swimmer.
- **Seeding** – The placement of swimmers in heats and lanes for individual events.
- **Senior Meet** – a high level meet in which all USA-S registered swimmers who have met the qualifying time standard for a specific event(s) are eligible to compete. See the Pacific Swim Guide for the times.
- **Senior Nationals** - A USA-S National Championship meet for swimmers of any age as long as the qualification times are met.
- **Short Course** - a pool configured in 25-yard or 25-meter lengths. US Swimming conducts most of its fall/winter competition in 25-yard lengths, including the Speedo Junior National Championships in March. NCAA swimming competition uses the 25-yard format. Most of the world swims short course meters in the winter (25-meter pool). The fastest times swum in a 25-yard pool may only gain US Open or American record status. The short course season generally runs from September to March.
- **Speedo Championship Series** - Open "senior level" meets held in the spring and summer. Each Zone may hold up to four meets. These meets are commonly called "Sectionals." Qualifying times, sites, dates and meet rules are determined locally.
- **Splash** - The USA Swimming magazine that is mailed bi-monthly to all members of USA Swimming.
- **Split** - a swimmer's intermediate time in a race. Splits are registered every 50 meters or 25 yards, depending on the pool and the equipment on hand, and are used to determine if a swimmer is on pace, as planned.
- **Start** - The beginning of a race. The dive used to begin a race.
- **Starter** - The official in charge of signaling the beginning of a race and insuring that all swimmers have a fair takeoff.
- **Stand-up** - The command given by the Starter or Referee to release the swimmers from their starting position.
- **Step-Down** - The command given by the Starter or Referee to have the swimmers move off the blocks. Usually this command is a good indication everything is not right for the race to start.
- **Stroke** - There are 4 competitive strokes: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle.
- **Stroke and Turn Judge** - a certified USA-S official, who determines the legality of swimmers' strokes and disqualifies those who do not conform to USA-S Rules.
- **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 an alternate, otherwise ties stand.
- **SWIMS** - USA Swimming database system that keeps track of every time achieved by all swimmers. Available through the USA-S website.
- **Taper** - the resting process in training for swimming competition. During the middle of the swimming season a swimmer may work out up to 10 to 15 thousand meters (8 to 10 miles) each day. As major competition draws near, the swimmer will taper off (reduce) the distances swum each day. A perfectly designed taper will enable the swimmer to compete at their peak capability and is one of the most difficult aspects of swim coaching.
- **Team Records** - The statistics a team keeps, listing the fastest swimmer in the clubs history for each age group/each event.
- **Timed Finals** - Competition in which only heats are swum and final places are determined by those times.

- **Time Standard** - A time set by a meet or LSC or USA-S (etc) that a swimmer must achieve for qualification or recognition.
- **Timer** - The volunteers sitting behind the starting blocks/finish end of pool, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.
- **Time Trial** - An event or series of events where a swimmer may achieve or better a required time standard.
- **Top 10** - A list of times compiled by the LSC or USA-S that recognizes the top 10 swimmers in each single age group (boys & girls) by each event and distance.
- **Touch** - the finish of the race, when the swimmer touches the touch pad or wall.
- **Touch-pad** - the part of the electronic timing system that rests in the water at the finishing end of each lane. Swimmers' times are electronically recorded when the pad is touched. These are used most often in junior and above meets.
- **Transfer** - The act of leaving one club or LSC and going to another. Usually 120 days of unattached competition is required before a swimmer can represent another USA-S club.
- **Trials and Finals** - in a trials and finals meet, trials are swum with all swimmers entering the event and are generally viewed as qualifying rounds for finals.
- **Turnover** - the number of times a swimmer's arms turn over (cycle) in a given distance or time during a race.
- **Two-hand Touch** - both hands must touch the wall simultaneously while swimming the butterfly and breaststroke.
- **Unattached** - An athlete member who competes, but does not represent a club or team. (abbr. UN)
- **USA Swimming** - The national governing body for amateur competitive swimming in America.
- **USA ID Number** - A 16-part number assigned to a swimmer after they have filled out the proper forms and paid their annual dues.
- **Warm down** – The recovery swimming that a swimmer performs after a race to rid the body of excess lactic acid generated during the race.
- **Warm-up** - The practice and "loosening-up" session a swimmer does before the meet and/or before their event is swum.
- **Yards** - 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.
- **Yardage** - The distance a swimmer races or swims in practice. Total yardage can be calculated for each practice session.
- **Zones (National)** - 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