



NFHS Guidelines For Officiating Swimmers With Disabilities

A student with a physical or cognitive disability requesting a specific accommodation(s) in the start, strokes, turns, etc. that does not require equipment, **must** seek approval from the state high school athletic/activities association, which may be authorized, providing the accommodation(s) does not fundamentally alter the sport and/or no advantage is gained. Written authorization from the state association should include what accommodations the referee should make for the swimmer.

The student with the disability and/or his/her coach are responsible for notifying the referee, prior to the competition, of the disability and of the written state association-authorized modification(s) that should be made. The swimmer/coach shall provide any assistant(s) or special equipment (tappers, deck mats, etc.), if required.

Some of the modifications which the referee should be aware of are:

- A change in starting position;
- Reassignment of lanes within a heat, e.g., exchanging Lanes 3 and 1;
- Allowing the swimmer to have a personal assistant;
- Other allowable modifications are further described in this section under the type of disability.

Modifications for the blind and visually impaired may include:

- Starts – With an audible starting system, no modification is usually required for a blind or visually impaired swimmer. A swimmer may, however, require assistance getting to and on the block, or into the water if an in-water start is used.
- Turns and finishes – A blind or visually impaired swimmer may be permitted to have a personal assistant (tappers who use poles with soft-tipped ends to tap the swimmer as notification of turns and the finish). Sounding devices shall not be used as they may cause confusion for other swimmers. It is the swimmer's responsibility to provide the tapper(s), who shall be positioned within the confines of the swimmer's lane at the ends of the pool.
- Relay takeoffs – A physical touch may be required to signal the relay swimmer when his/her teammate has touched the wall. The specific method may be tailored to the swimmer's preference so long as it does not aid the swimmer's takeoff or interfere with the timing system.

Modifications for the deaf and hard-of-hearing may include:

- Starts - Deaf and hard of hearing swimmers require a visual starting signal, i.e., a strobe light and/or starter's arm signals. The modification may include the referee reassigning lanes within the swimmer's heat, i.e., exchanging one lane for another, so that the strobe light or starter's arm signal can more clearly be seen by the deaf or hard-of-hearing swimmer. Standard starter's arm signals are shown in **Figures 1 and 2**. A false start rope may be required in the event of a recall.
- Strobe light location – The referee, or his/her designee, shall advise the swimmer and his/her coach as to the location of the strobe light and the light should be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start. For backstroke starts, the light should be positioned so that the swimmers don't have to turn their heads to look backwards.

Figure 1: Forward Start

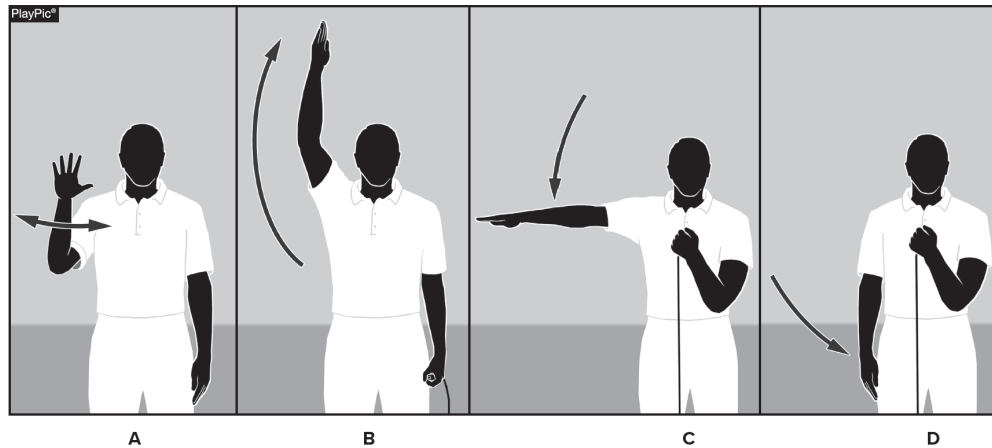


Figure 1 – Forward Start

- A. Twist hand at chin level – short whistles;
- B. Arm overhead – swimmer steps onto starting block;
- C. Arm moves to shoulder level – signal to “take your mark”;
- D. Arm moves to side of body – starting signal.

Figure 2: Backstroke Start

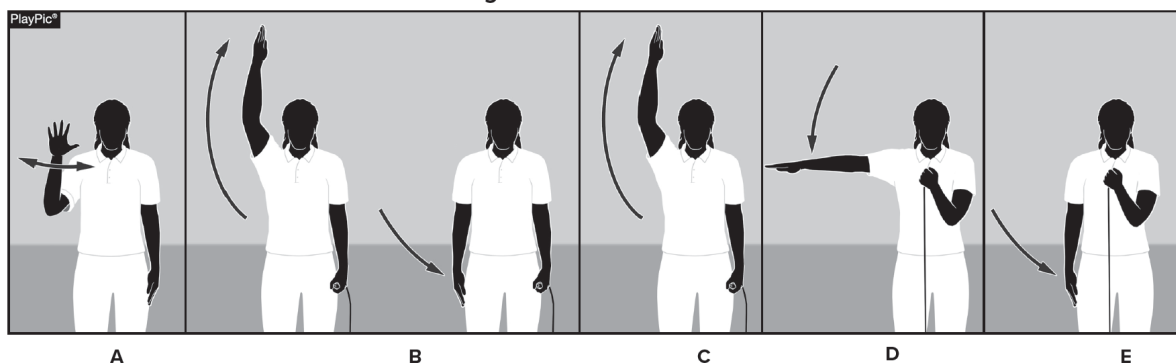


Figure 2 – Backstroke Start

- A. Twist hand at chin level - short whistles;
- B. Arm overhead - swimmer enters water; drop arm to side while swimmer enters water;
- C. Arm overhead - swimmer returns to backstroke start position;
- D. Arm moves to shoulder level - signal to “take your mark”;
- E. Arm moves to side of body - starting signal.

Modifications for students with a cognitive disability may include:

- General - A swimmer may be permitted to have an assistant on the deck when necessary. No other specific rule modifications are required other than patience and clarity in communicating instructions.

Additional information regarding accommodations and be found in the 2020-21 NFHS Swimming Officials Guidelines Manual.