Stroke Basics

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 surface and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick. On turns and finishes, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. Most swimmers do a flip turn.

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.

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.

The **butterfly** 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, scissor or use the breaststroke kick. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish.

The **individual medley**, commonly referred to as the **I.M.**, features all four strokes in this order:
1. Butterfly
2. Backstroke
3. Breaststroke
4. Freestyle

Order of the strokes is important, because an incorrect order will result in disqualification (DQ).

In the **medley relay**, all four strokes are swum, but by 4 swimmers, and in an order differing from the individual medley.
1. Backstroke – first swimmer
2. Breaststroke – second swimmer
3. Butterfly – third swimmer
4. Freestyle – "anchored" by fourth and final swimmer.

Again, order is important, because incorrect order will cause disqualification of the relay team.

The **freestyle relay** events consist of four freestylers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance of the event.

The technical rules of swimming are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and to promote uniformity in the sport. Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage over another swimmer.