



COMMON SWIMMING TERMS

Age Group

Events for YMCA meets are organized by age: 8 and under, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14 and 15 and over. For nearly all Winter YMCA meets the swimmers age on December 1 determines their age group for the remainder of the winter season. For example, a swimmer who turns 9 on December 14 will swim as an 8 and under for the entire YMCA winter season.

Alternate

The coach will designate an alternate for each relay. The swimmer designated as the alternate will swim if one of the four swimmers in the relay is not able to swim. It is important that the alternate not leave early without checking in with the head coach.

Backstroke

One of the four competitive racing strokes. It is characterized by the use of the flutter kick and the position of the swimmer on the back with gaze on the ceiling. Backstroke is swum as the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the Individual Medley (IM).

Backstroke Wedge

The wedge that is lowered into the water for swimmers to place their feet on during a backstroke start.

Best Time

A best time is achieved when a swimmer exceeds their own previous fastest time in an event - it shows that a swimmer has improved over their own time, regardless of how other swimmers finish.

Blocks

The starting platforms located behind each lane. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.

Breaststroke

One of the four competitive racing strokes. It is characterized by the whip kick, which is similar to, but not the same as the "frog kick". Breaststroke is swum as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the IM.

Butterfly

One of the four competitive racing strokes. It is characterized by the dolphin kick, which works similar to a mermaid's tail. Butterfly or "fly" is swum as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the I.M.

Cap Cards

A list of time standards beginning at black, then to orange, to yellow, to red, to blue, to purple, to silver, and ending at gold. Each time a swimmer achieves the next time standard, they receive a card letting them know which cap color they have achieved. These colors correspond to USA swimming's motivational time standards.

Check-In

When swimmers arrive at a swim meet, it is important that they check in at the team area. The swimmer should find their name and sign in. Parents should also sign in on the volunteer sheet.

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.

Course

Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. A long course pool is 50 meters, whereas a short course pool is 25 yards or 25 meters.

Cut

A time standard that a swimmer must meet or exceed to be included in a specific Competition, such as State and Regional meets.

Deck

The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. Only authorized USA Swimming members may be on the deck during a swim competition.

Distance

How far a swimmer swims.

Short Course: 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).

Long Course: 50 meters (1 length), 100 meters (2 lengths), 200 meters (4 lengths), 400 meters (8 lengths), 800 meters (16 lengths), 1500 meters (30 lengths).

Disqualified (DQ)

A swimmer's performance is not counted because of a rules infraction. A disqualification is shown by an official raising one arm with open hand above their head.

Dryland

The exercises and various strength programs swimmers do out of the water.

Dual Meet

A scored competition between two teams.

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. For mandatory YMCA meets, the fees are paid by our team. There are entry fees on optional/invitational meets.

Entry Limit

Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept, or a time limit they cannot exceed. For example, in winter dual meets, swimmers may be entered in a total of four events as long as at least one event is a relay.

False Start

When a swimmer leaves the starting block before the horn or gun. One false start will disqualify a swimmer or a relay team, although the starter or referee may disallow the false start due to unusual circumstances.

False Start Rope

A recall rope across the width of the racing pool to stop swimmers who were not aware of a false start. The rope is about 1/2 way on yard pools and about 50 feet from the starting end on meter pools.

Fin

The attachment on the back of the starting blocks which allows for the back foot to push during a start.

Final Results

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

Fins

Large rubber flipper-type accessories worn on the foot or leg and made from rubber, plastic, or combinations of these materials, to aid movement through the water. These are used during swim practice, not competition.

Flags

Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool. The flags are five yards from the end of the pool in a yard pool. There are five meters from the end in a meter pool.

Freestyle

One of the four competitive racing strokes. It is characterized by the use of the flutter kick and the position of the swimmer on the stomach looking at the bottom of the pool. Freestyle is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the IM.

Goals

The short-term and long-term achievements or 'goals' towards which a swimmer sets their sights. Striving to reach goals aids in focus and improvement in skills.

Goggles

Glasses-type devices worn by swimmers to keep their eyes from being irritated by the chlorine in the water.

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 gunshot (or rings a bell) over the lane of the lead swimmer when the swimmer is at the backstroke flags.

Hand-writer Sheet

The listing of swimmers and their events with the heat and event for each swim listed.

Heats

All 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.

Heat Sheet

The pre-meet printed listings of swimmers' seed times in the various events at a swim meet broken down by heat.

High Point

An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. Most meets do not offer high point awards.

Illegal

Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification.

Individual Medley (IM)

A swimming event using all four of the competitive strokes on consecutive lengths of the race. The order must be: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle. Equal distances must be swum of each stroke. Distances offered: 100 yards, 200 yards/meters, 400 yards/meters.

Interval

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

Invitational

Type of meet that requires the host club to extend an invitation to other clubs to attend the meet.

Kick Board

A flotation device used by swimmers for kicking during practice.

Lane

The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim, i.e. Lane 1 or Lane 2.

Lane Lines

Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from one end of the pool to the other which separate the lanes and reduce the turbulence caused by racing swimmers.

Lap

Down and back (two lengths) of the pool or 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 specific stroke in the IM.

Length

One time down the pool or course.

Long Course

A 50-meter pool.

Meet

A series of events held in one program. A competition between two (dual meet) or more teams with individual swimmers, relays and place ribbons.

No Time (NT)

The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has no official time reported for the event.

Officials

The certified adult volunteers who operate the many facets of a swim competition.

Pace Clock

The electronic clocks or large analog clocks with highly visible numbers and/or 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

Plastic devices worn on the swimmer's hands during swim practice.

Practice

The scheduled workouts swimmers attend with their swim team/club.

Psyche Sheet

An entry sheet showing all swimmers entered in each individual event in fastest to slowest seed time order.

Pull Buoy

A flotation device used by swimmers for pulling in practice.

Qualifying Times

Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer.

Referee

The head official at a swim meet

Relays

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; 2) Freestyle relay - Each swimmer swims freestyle.

Runner

A volunteer who picks up time slips, DQ slips, and other meet documentation and brings them to the computer table where the meet information is being compiled.

Scratch

To withdraw from an event after having declared an intention to participate. Swimmers that are not signed in will be scratched and will lose their spot in their relay.

Seed Time

A time that is used to assign the swimmers heats and lanes.

Short Course

A 25-yard or 25-meter pool.

Split

A portion of an event that is shorter than the total distance and is timed, i.e. a swimmer's first 50 time is taken as the swimmer swims the 100 yard race. It is common to take multiple splits for the longer distances.

Start

This is the entry into the water (generally a dive) or the beginning of the backstroke (push off back dive) at the sound of the starting gun.

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 ready for the start of the race.

Streamline

Position a swimmer assumes at the start of a lap in which their body and arms are straight with the elbows behind the ears, arms squeezing the back of the head.

Stroke

There are 4 competitive strokes: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle.

Stroke & Turn Judge

The officials positioned at various spots around the pool observing as the swimmers race. If the Stroke Judge sees something illegal, they report to the referee and the swimmer may be disqualified.

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 when it is necessary is to determine which swimmer makes finals or will be an alternate; otherwise ties stand.

Taper

The resting phase of a swimmer at the end of the season before the championship meet; distance swimmers will often taper for only a week or less, while sprinters (50 m-200 m) taper for up to 3 weeks.

Team Records

The statistics a team keeps, listing the fastest swimmer in the club's history for each age group/each event.

Timer

The volunteers standing behind the starting blocks or finish end of pool, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.

Top 10

A list of times compiled by our team that recognizes the top 10 swimmers in each single age group (boys & girls) by each event and distance.

Touch Pad

The removable plate at the end of pools that is connected to an automatic timing system. A swimmer must properly touch the touchpad to register an official touch pad time in a race, otherwise, back-up times will be used.

Warm-down

The recovery swimming a swimmer does after a race when pool space is available.

Warm-up

The practice and "loosening-up" session a swimmer does before the meet or their event is swum.



Terms Specific for USA Swimming

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 LSCs have divided the swimmers into more convenient divisions specific to their ages, i.e. 8-under, 13-Over, 15-Over, Junior, Senior.

Age Group Competition

A meet for all registered swimmers up to and including age 18, who have met the qualifying time standard for a specific event(s).

Alternate

In a Prelims/Finals meet, after the finalists are decided, the next two fastest swimmers, other than the finalists are designated as alternates. The faster of the two being the first alternate and the next being second alternate. If a finalist cannot participate, the alternate is called to take his/her place.

Check-In

The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded meet. Sometimes referred to as positive check-in, the swimmer must mark their name on a list posted by the meet host.

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; i.e. Lane 4 in the final three heats.

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.

Deck Entries

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

Deck Seeding

Heat and lane assignments are posted after swimmers have checked in or been scratched.

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.

Finals

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

IM READY (IMR)

The first step in the IMX Challenge is IM Ready (or IMR). To get "IM Ready," swimmers compete in a series of five events at shorter distances. Below, we've listed the line-up by age groups.

9 & Under; 10-year olds: 100 Free, 50 Back, 50 Breast, 50 Fly, 100 IM (SC) or 200 IM (LC)

11-year olds; 12-year olds: 200 Free, 50 Back, 50 Breast, 50 Fly, 100 IM (SC) or 200 IM (LC)

13, 14, 15, 16, 17, & 18-year olds: 200 Free, 100 Back, 100 Breast, 100 Fly, 200 IM

IM XTREME (IMX)

Ready to move forward? The next step is IM Xtreme (IMX). The IMX ranking includes a series of five or six events at longer distances. Once you've completed the IMX program, you can find out where your IMX score ranks nationally, within your zone, within your LSC rank and on your club.

9 & Under; 10-year olds: 200 Free, 100 Back, 100 Breast, 100 Fly, 200 IM

11-year olds; 12-year olds: 400 Free (LC) or 500 Free (SC), 100 Back, 100 Breast, 100 Fly, 200 IM

13, 14, 15, 16, 17, & 18-year olds: 400 Free (LC) or 500 Free (SC), 200 Back, 200 Breast, 200 Fly, 200 IM, 400 IM

Junior Nationals

A USA-S Championship meet for swimmers 18 years old or less. Meeting qualification times is necessary to participate in the meet.

Local Swim Committee (LSC)

The local level administrative division of the corporation (USA-S) with supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries designated by the Corporation. There are 59 LSCs.

Marshall

The official who controls the crowd and swimmer-flow at a swim meet.

Meet Director

The official in charge of the administration of the meet. The person directing the "dry side" of the meet.

Nationals

USA Swimming National Championship meet conducted in March/April and August.

National Age Group Time Standards (NAGTS)

The list of "C" through "AAAA" times published each year.

Open Competition

Competition which any qualified club, organization, or individual may enter.

Positive Check-In

The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded or pre-seeded meet. The swimmer or coach must indicate the swimmer is present and will compete.

Prelims

Session of a Prelims/Finals meet in which the qualification heats are conducted.

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, swimmers can be disqualified from remaining events.

Seeding

Deck-seeding - swimmers are called to report to the Clerk of the Course. After scratches are determined, the event is seeded.

Pre-seeding - swimmers are arranged in heats according to submitted times, usually a day prior to the meet.

Pro Series

A championship series of five meets that includes Olympic/Pro swimmers from all countries. It is set up similar to Nasar where the winners earn points and an overall prize from the series.

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 when it is needed to determine which swimmer will make finals or be an alternate; otherwise ties stand.

Timed Finals

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

Time Trial

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

Transfer

The act of leaving one club or LSC and going to another. Usually 120 days of unattached competition is required before swimmer can represent another USA-S club.

Unattached (UN)

An athlete member who competes, but does not represent a club or team.

USA Swimming

The national governing body of the sport headquartered in Colorado Springs.

Frequently Asked Question

The following are answers to questions frequently asked by our parents:

- Q. Our child has just joined the team and his times are worse than when he started. What's going on?*
- A. When a child starts a swimming program, stroke techniques are often in need of refinement. It takes a great deal of the swimmer's concentration to make these corrections. As the swimmer becomes more comfortable with the new techniques, his or her times will start to improve. It is important to remember that these new techniques are the basis for later improvement.
- Q. My swimmer's times have not gone down for a long time. Why?*
- A. Plateaus occur from time to time in every swimmer's career. It is important to explain to your swimmer that plateaus occur in all fields of physical learning and by working through them, he or she can go on to achieve his or her own maximum potential.
- Q. My child is losing enthusiasm. What can be done about this?*
- A. A parent's attitude and actions often shape those of their child. Be enthusiastic about taking your swimmer to practices and meets. Do not force your child to swim. Be sure that your child swims because they want to. No one gets excited about doing something they don't want to do.
- Q. When can I talk to the coach?*
- A. Coaches are available before and after practice if you should have any questions or concerns. Communication between the coach, swimmer and parent is very important. Remember that everyone's behavior, attitude and outlook on the sport have an important effect on your child. In swimming, as in life, nobody can win or succeed all of the time. It is important not to place the emphasis on your child's placement but rather on their self-improvement. They should always strive to improve.