

Brief Description of the Requirements of Each Stroke

Freestyle. Just as it sounds, swimmers may use any type of arm stroke and/or kick to propel themselves down the pool. There are a few basic requirements, which also apply to the other strokes. During the race the swimmers cannot walk or push off the bottom of the pool, they cannot pull on the lane lines to propel themselves, and they must touch the wall at the end of each length.

Backstroke. This stroke can be thought of as “freestyle on your back”. Swimmers may use any type of arm stroke and/or kick but must remain on their back, which is defined as keeping their shoulders “at or past vertical to the back”. The main challenge facing new swimmers is to remain on their back until they touch the wall at the end of the race. The only exception to the requirement of remaining on the back is the “backstroke flip turn”, during which experienced swimmers will roll onto their stomachs and execute a regular flip turn. The swimmers, however, must be careful to roll over close enough to the wall to execute a “continuous” turn or they will risk disqualification.

Breaststroke. The breaststroke is one of two “technical” strokes (with the butterfly), and has specific requirements for both the arm stroke and leg kick. Both arms must move simultaneously. During the arm stroke the hands cannot pull down below the hipline, and after the stroke they must be pushed forward from in front of the chest. The legs must kick simultaneously, and during the backward kick the toes must be pointed *outward*. In addition, at the end of each length (turns and finish), the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands *simultaneously*. The only exception to the requirement that the hands be kept in front of the hips applies to the first stroke at the start and after each turn, when swimmers may take one stroke all the way back below the hips while underwater (the “breaststroke pullout”).

Butterfly. As in the breaststroke, there are specific requirements for both the arm stroke and leg kick. The arms must move simultaneously, and after the backward pull is completed the arms must be brought forward *over* the water surface. The legs must kick simultaneously, with the toes pointed *backward* during the downward part of the kick. As in the breaststroke, swimmers must perform two-hand simultaneous touches at the end of each length and at the finish.

Parents should understand that both the breaststroke and butterfly strokes take some time to master, and virtually no swimmers are able to swim these strokes “legally” in their first few competitive attempts. *A natural part of a swimmer’s development in the sport* includes being disqualified at a meet, talking to a coach after the swim about what corrections need to be made, and then trying again at the next meet.