

Competitive Swimming 101

THE FOUR STROKES (adapted from USASwimming.org)

The four competitive swimming strokes are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly. The combination of all four strokes in a single event is called the individual medley.

Freestyle: 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.

Backstroke: Backstroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick, while on the back. The swimmer must stay on the back at all times, except for turns. 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.

Breaststroke: Perhaps one of the most difficult strokes to master, 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.

Butterfly: The most physically demanding stroke, the butterfly features the simultaneous overhead stroke of the arms combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not flutter, scissors or use the breaststroke kick. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish.

Individual Medley: The individual medley, commonly referred to as the "I.M.," features all four strokes. In the IM, the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to backstroke, then breaststroke and finally freestyle.

AGE-GROUP SWIMMING EVENTS

The following events are swum at each age-group level. The selection of individual events differs at every meet however. Typically, swimmers may compete in a maximum of four events per day, at any competition.

8 and under	9-10	11-12	13-18
Freestyle: 25, 50, 100 Backstroke: 25, 50 Breaststroke: 25, 50 Butterfly: 25, 50 IM: 100	Freestyle: 50, 100, 200, 500 Backstroke: 50, 100 Breaststroke: 50, 100 Butterfly: 50, 100 IM: 100, 200	Freestyle: 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 1650 Backstroke: 50, 100, 200 Breaststroke: 50, 100, 200 Butterfly: 50, 100, 200 IM: 100, 200, 400	Freestyle: 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 1650 Backstroke: 50, 100, 200 Breaststroke: 50, 100, 200 Butterfly: 50, 100, 200 IM: 100, 200, 400

COURSE (POOL SIZE)

Competition pools may be short course (25 yards), or long course (50 meters). The international standard, as used in the Olympics, is 50 meters.

In Pacific Swimming, most competitions in the fall and winter take place in short course pools (September through March, typically referred to as "Short Course Season") and most competitions in the spring and summer take place

in long course pools ("Long Course Season"). There are exceptions to this, however, including the Gators' annual "away meet" in Tahoe each July and the Alameda City Swimming Championships in August, both of which are short course meets.

BASIC RULES

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.

Trained officials observe the swimmers during each event to ensure compliance with these technical rules. If a swimmer commits an infraction of the rules that is observed by an official, a disqualification (DQ) will result. This means that the swimmer will not receive an official time and will not be eligible for an award in that event. A disqualification may result from actions such as not getting to the starting blocks on time, false starting, performing strokes in an illegal manner, or unsportsmanlike conduct.

DQs are also a result of technical rules violations. They include but are not limited to:

- **Freestyle:** Walking on the bottom, pulling on the lane rope, not touching the wall on a turn, or not completing the full distance of the race.
- **Backstroke:** Pulling or kicking into the wall once a swimmer has turned passed the vertical onto the breast at the turn (turning over too early). Turning onto the breast before touching the wall with the hand at the finish of the race.
- **Breaststroke:** An illegal kick such as flutter (freestyle), dolphin (butterfly), or scissors (side stroke); not on the breast; alternating movements of the arms; taking two arm strokes or two leg kicks while the head is under water; touching with only one hand at the turns or finish.
- **Butterfly:** Alternating movements of the arms or legs; pushing the arms forward under instead of over the water surface (underwater recovery); a breaststroke style of kick; touching with only one hand at the turns or finish.

If your child is disqualified in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For beginning swimmers, a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as a punishment. A disqualification alerts the swimmer and coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in schoolwork—they point out areas that need further practice. Disqualifications are necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all competitors. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, coach, and parent can make a positive situation out of the disqualification.