

Glossary of Swimming Terms

A Glossary of those strange and wacky words we use in the sport of swimming. You may or may not find these words in the English Dictionary, and if you do, their definitions will probably be radically different than the ones listed in this Glossary. Relax and take your time reading. Soon you'll be understanding and maybe even speaking some "SWIMSLANG".

"A"	Time classification for a swimmer. National Age Group Time Standard "A". "A" time is .01 seconds faster than the "BB" time standard and .01 slower than the "AA" time standard. See the NAGT published chart.
"AA"	Time classification for a swimmer that is .01 faster than "A" time standard.
"AAA"	Time classification for a swimmer that is .01 faster than the "AA" time standard.
"AAAA"	Time classification for a swimmer that is .01 faster than the "AAA" time standard. This is the fastest time standard listed on the NAGT chart. Times faster than this are approaching National cuts or Top Times consideration.
A-Meet	Swim meet that requires swimmers to have previously achieved an "A" time standard in the events they wish to enter.
A-B Meet	Swim meet that offers separate competition for both "A" swimmers and "B" swimmers, usually with medals for the "A" swimmers and ribbons for the "B" swimmers. Swimmers compete in separate brackets against other swimmers of their own ability. Usually only "A" swimmers can score individual event team points.
A-B-C	Swim meet similar to the A-B meet except that there are three divisions. This type of meet includes every ability level of swimmer from Novice to very experienced. All swimmers with an "A" time or faster compete in the "A" division, and all swimmers with a "C" and down compete in the "C" division. The "B" division is the most limited with both top (.01 slower than "A") and bottom (.01 faster than "C") limitations.
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 situations: (i.e.) 8-under, 13-Over, 15-Over, Junior, Senior.
"B"	Time classification for a swimmer. National Age Group Time Standard "B". "B" time is .01 seconds faster than the "C" time standard and .01 slower than the "BB" time standard. See the NAGT published chart.
"BB"	Time classification for a swimmer. National Age Group Time Standard "BB". "BB" time is .01 seconds faster than the "B" time standard and .01 slower than the "A" time standard. See the NAGT published chart.
B-C Meet	Swim meet that offers separate competition for both "B" swimmers and "C" swimmers, usually with ribbons for the "B" swimmers and smaller ribbons for the "C" swimmers. Swimmers compete in separate brackets against other swimmers of their own ability. Swimmers are not allowed to enter an event that they have an "A" time in.
Blocks	The starting platforms located behind each lane. Some pools have blocks at the deeper end of the pool, and some pools have blocks at both ends. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.
Breaststroke	One of the four competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swam as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter. (LSCs with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd breast)

Bull Pen	The staging area where swimmers wait to receive their lane and heat assignments for a swimming event. Area is usually away from the pool and has rows of chairs for the swimmers to sit. The Clerk of the Course is in charge of the Bull Pen.
Butterfly	One of the four competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed FLY) is swam as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter (LSCs with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yard fly).
Championship Meet	The meet held at the end of a season. Qualification times are usually necessary to enter meet.
Championship Finals	The top six or ten 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. The fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held.
Club	A registered swim team that is a dues-paying member of USA-S and the local LSC.
Course	Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. (ie) Long Course = 50 meters / Short Course = 25 yards or 25 meters.
Deck	The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an "authorized" USA Swimming member may be on the deck during a swim competition.
Distance	How far a swimmer swims. Distances for short course are: 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). Distances for long course are: 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	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.
Division I-II-III	NCAA member colleges and universities are assigned divisions to compete in, depending on the school's total enrollment. Division I being the large universities and Division III being the smaller colleges.
Entry Fees	The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the LSC and type of meet.
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.
FGC	Florida Gold Coast – the nonprofit organization that oversees the USA Swimming Clubs in the Palm Beach, Broward, Dade, Monroe, and Martin Counties in south Florida.
FINA	The international rules-making organization for the sport of swimming.
Flags	Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately 15 feet from the wall.
Freestyle	One of the four competitive racing strokes. Freestyle (nicknamed Free) is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the I.M. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, 200 yards/meter, 400 mtr/500, yd 800 mtr/1000 yds, 1500 mtr/1650 yds (LSCs with 8-under divisions offer the 25 yd free).
Heats	A division of an event when there are too many swimmers to compete at the

same time. The results are compiled by swimmers time swum, after all heats of the event are completed.

Heat Award	A ribbon or coupon 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. These sheets vary in accuracy, since the coaches submit swimmers times many weeks before the meet. Heat sheets are sold at the admissions table and are used mainly to make sure the swimmer has been properly entered in all the events they signed up for. Parents enjoy looking at the seedings prior to the race plus swimmers can tell the order the events will be conducted and get a rough idea how long the meet sessions will last.
High Point	An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. All meets do not offer high point awards; check the pre meet information.
IM	Individual Medley. 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 swam of each stroke. Distances offered: 100 yards, 200 yards/meters, 400 yards/meter.
Insurance	USA Swimming offers "accident insurance coverage," which is automatic when a swimmer, coach, or official pays their USA-S membership fee. Many restrictions apply, so check with your club for detailed information.
J.O.	Junior Olympics. An age group championship meet conducted by the LSC.
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.
Long Course	A 50-meter pool.
LSC	Local Swim Committee. The local level administrative division of the corporation (USA-S) with supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries designated by the Corporation.
Meters	The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the metric system. Long course meters is 50 meters, short course meters is 25 meters.
Mile	The slang referring to the 1500 meter or the 1650 yard freestyle, both of which are slightly short of a mile.
NRT	National Reportable Time. A time list published once a year, which if a swimmer equals or betters the time on the list, they may submit their time in that event for consideration for national recognition.
NT	No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swum that event before.
Officials	The certified adult volunteers who operate the many facets of a swim competition.
Olympic Trials	The USA-S sanctioned long course swim meet held the year of the Olympic Games to decide what swimmers will represent the USA on our Olympic Team. Qualification times are faster than Senior Nationals.
Parka	Large 3/4 length fur lined coats worn by swimmers. Usually are in team colors with logo or team name.
Prelims	Session of a Prelims/Finals meet in which the qualification heats are conducted.

Psyche Sheet	An entry sheet showing all swimmers entered into each individual event. Sometimes referred to as a "Heat Sheet" or meet program. However, a "heat sheet" would show not only every swimmer in an event, but also what heat and lane they are swimming in.
Qualifying Times	Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer. See "A", "AA" (etc.) times.
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. Medley relays are conducted over 200 yd/mtr and 400 yd/mtr distances. 2.) Freestyle relay - Each swimmer swims freestyle. Free relays are conducted over 200 yd/mtr, 400 yd/mtr, and 800 yd/mtr distances.
Sanctioned Meet	A meet that is approved by the LSC in which it is held. Meet must be conducted according to USA Swimming rules. All participants, including coaches, athletes and officials, must be USA Swimming members.
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, swimmer can be disqualified from remaining events.
Sectionals	Nickname for Speedo Championship Series (see below).
Seed	Assign the swimmers heats and lanes according to their submitted or preliminary times.
Short Course	A 25-yard or 25-meter pool.
Sizzler	Swim meets designed for 8 and under swimmers.
Speedo Championship Series	Open "senior level" meets held in the spring and summer. Each Zone may hold up to four meets. Meets are commonly called "Sectionals." Qualifying times, sites, dates and meet rules are determined locally.
Splash	TheUSA Swimming magazine that is mailed bi-monthly. A benefit of being a member of USA Swimming.
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 race. It is common to take multiple splits for the longer distances.
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 right for the race to start.
Submitted Time	Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets.
Taper	The resting phase of a swimmer at the end of the season before the championship meet.
Team Records	The statistics a team keeps, listing the fastest swimmer in the clubs history for each age group/each event.
Top 16	A list of times compiled by the LSC or USA-S that recognizes the top 16 swimmers in each age group (boys & girls) by each event and distance. The number 16 was arbitrarily chosen because it would normally fill the finals and consoles heats at a swim meet.
Touch Pad	The removable plate (on the end of pools) that is connected to an automatic timing system. A swimmer must properly touch the touchpad to register an

official time in a race.

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	An athlete member who competes, but does not represent a club or team. (abbr. UN)
Unofficial Time	The time displayed on a read out board or read over the intercom by the announcer immediately after the race. After the time has been checked, it will become the official time.
USA Swimming	The national governing body of the sport headquartered in Colorado Springs.
USA-S ID Number	A 16-part number assigned to a swimmer after they have filled out the proper forms and paid their annual dues. The first 6 parts are numbers of a swimmer's birthdate: Day/Month/Year using zeros as place holders. The next three spaces are the first three letters of the athlete's legal first name. The next letter is the middle initial, followed by the first four letters of the swimmer's last name. For example: USA-S ID# for swimmer Suzanne Eileen Nelson and born Aug.27, 1976 = 082776SUZENELS.
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.
Yards	The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the American system. A short course yard pool is 25 yards (75 feet) in length.
Zones	The country is divided up into 4 major zones: Eastern - Southern - Central - Western. At the end of the long course season (in August) the Zone Administration sponsors a championship age group meet.