

Swimming Terms

Age Group Swimming

The program through which USA Swimming provides fair and open competition for its younger members. It is designed to encourage maximum participation, provide an educational experience, enhance physical and mental conditioning and develop a rich base of swimming talent. Nationally recognized age groups are 10 and under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18 and 15-18. Local meets may also include events for 8 and unders and single age categories.

Approved Meet

An officially sanctioned USA meet.

Backstroke Flags

Lines of flags placed above the lanes at each end to signal to the backstroker that they are five yards or meters (depending upon the course) from the wall.

Block

The starting platform.

Bulkhead

A wall constructed to divide a pool into different courses, such as a 50-meter pool into two 25-yard courses.

Course

Designated distance over which the competition is conducted.

Cut

Slang for “qualifying time”, or time standard necessary to attend a particular meet or event.

Distance

Term used to refer to events over 400 meters/500 yards.

Disqualification (DQ)

This occurs when a swimmer has committed an infraction of some kind; e.g., freestyle kick in butterfly. A disqualified swimmer is not eligible to receive awards, nor can the time be used as an official time.

Dry Land Training

Training done out of the water that aids and enhances swimming performance; usually includes stretching, calisthenics and/or weight training.

Event

Any race or series of races in a given stroke or distance.

False Start

Occurs when a swimmer is moving before the start gun is sounded. In USA Swimming, one false start will result in DQ after the event concludes.

Finals

The concluding session of a prelim/final meet in which the fastest swimmers from preliminary heats return to race again, usually in the evening.

Gutter

The area along the edge of the pool in which water overflows during a race and is circulated through the filtration system.

Heat

A single race in an event in which there are too many swimmers to compete at one time.

Heat Sheets

The swim meet program that includes information such as the name of the events, heats, lanes and swimmers.

I. M.

Slang for Individual Medley event in which the swimmer uses all four strokes in the following order: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle.

Lane

The specific area in which the swimmer is assigned to swim, i.e., lane 1, lane 2, etc.

Lane Markers, Lines or Ropes

Continuous floating markers extending from one end of the pool to the other.

Lane Markings

Guide lines on the bottom of the pool and in the center of each lane extending from one end of the pool to the other.

Lap Counter

A set of plastic display numbers used to keep track of laps during a distance race. (Also, the person who counts for the swimmer, stationed at the opposite end of from the start.)

Leg

The part of a relay event that is swum by a single team member.

Local Swimming Committee (LSC)

An administrative division (e.g. Iowa Swimming, Inc.) of the National Governing Body (USA Swimming) with the supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries designated by USA Swimming.

Long Course

50-meter pool.

Long Distance

Term used to refer to events of 800 meters/1000 yards, to 1500 meters/1650 yards in lengths.

Medley Relay

A group of four swimmers each swimming different strokes in an event: Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly and Freestyle.

Meet

A series of events held in one program.

No Time (NT)

Seed time is entered as "No Time" if a swimmer has never swum an event before.

Official

A judge on the deck of the pool at a sanctioned competition who enforces USA Swimming rules. There are stroke and turn judges, administrative officials, starters and referees.

Open Competition

Competition any club, organization or individual may enter.

Preliminaries/Prelims

Races (usually held in the morning) in which swimmers attempt to qualify for the championship and consolation "finals" in the events.

Q-Time

Qualifying time necessary to compete in a particular event and/or competition. A "cut."

Qualifying Heats

Another name for preliminaries - a number of heats are swum to qualify the fastest swimmers for the finals where final placing for the event will be determined.

Relay

An event in which 4 swimmers compete together as a team to achieve one time.

Scratch

To withdraw from an event in a competition.

Seeding

Swimmers are arranged in heats in events according to submitted times and heat sheets are prepared prior to the day of competition.

Short Course

A pool 25 yards or 25 meters in length. USA Swimming conducts most of its winter competition in short course yards.

Split

A time recorded from the official start to the completion of an initial distance within a longer event. Also the time for one of the four individuals in a relay. Under certain conditions, splits may also be used as official times, for example, the lead off swim in a relay, or the lead off portion of an event.

Sprint

Describes the shorter events (50 and 100). In training, to swim as fast as possible for a short distance.

Starter

Meet official who fires gun or sounds horn that begins each heat of an event.

Starting Blocks

Platforms from which the swimmer enters the water at the beginning of an event.

Streamline

The position used by swimmers when starting or pushing off the walls designed to reduce water resistance.

"Take Your Mark"

The starter's command to swimmers to which they must respond by at once assuming a starting position.

Taper

The final preparation phase, sometimes referred to as "rest." Prior to major competitions, older, more experienced swimmers shave their entire bodies to reduce resistance and heighten sensation in the water.

Time Trial

A time-only swim, which is not part of a regular meet.

Timed Final Heats

Each swimmer swims that particular event one time and final placing is determined by the times performed in those heats.

Timers

Volunteers who time swimmers in a specific lane during a swim meet.

Touch Pad

A large sensitive board at the end of each lane where a swimmer's finish is registered and sent electronically to the timing system.

Unattached

An athlete who competes but does not represent a club.

Warm Down

Low intensity swimming used by swimmers after a race or main practice set to rid the body of excess lactic acid and to gradually reduce heart rate and respiration.

Warm Up

Low intensity swimming used by swimmer prior to a main practice set or race to get muscles loose and warm. Warm up gradually increases heart rate, respiration and helps to prevent injury.