



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 "swim slang."

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.

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 alternates are called to take their place.

Anchor

The final swimmer in a relay. Also a term coaches use for the beginning of all four strokes indicating the "high elbow", "catch," or "early vertical forearm."

Approved Meet

A meet conducted with sufficient USA Swimming officials to certify conformance to USA Swimming rules. The meet may include competitors who are not USA Swimming members. The meet may be a competition sanctioned at the LSC level with the added approval of USA Swimming because both member and non-member athletes will be competing.

ASCA

The American Swim Coaches Association. The professional organization for swim coaches throughout the nation. Certifying coaches and offering many services for coaches' education and career advancement.

Backstroke

One of the four competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on your back. Backstroke is swum as the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the Individual Medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter (LSCs with 8-under divisions may offer the 25 yd back).

Blocks

The starting platforms located behind each lane. Minimum water depth for use of starting blocks is 4 feet. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.

BOD

Board of Directors of the Local Swim Committee (LSC) or USA Swimming (USA-S).

Breaststroke

One of the four competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swum as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the individual medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter. (LSCs with 8-under divisions may offer the 25 yd breast)

Butterfly

One of the four competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed FLY) is swum as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the individual medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meter, 100 yards/meter, and 200 yards/meter (LSCs with 8-under divisions may offer the 25 yard fly).

Camp

A swimming function offered by USA-S, your LSC, or a USA-S coach. There are many types of camps for just about every level of swimmer.

Carbohydrates

The main source of food energy used by athletes. Refer to a Nutritional Manual for more information.

Championship Meet

The meet held at the end of a season. Qualification times are usually necessary to enter these meets.

Championship Finals

The top 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. The fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held.

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. See rule book for exact method for seeding depending on the lanes in the pool.

Clinic

A scheduled meeting for the purpose of instruction. (i.e.) Official's clinic, Coach's clinic.

Closed Competition

Swim meet which is only open to the members of an organization or group. Summer club swim meets are considered to be "Closed Competition."

Club

A registered swim team that is a dues-paying member of USA-S and the local LSC.

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 typically involves common sense and proper behavior.

Colorado Timing System

A brand of automatic timing system.

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. Consolation final swimmers do not advance to placing above consolation placement.

Convention

United States Aquatic Sports annual, week long, meeting where all rules changes are decided and working committees are established. Representatives are sent by each LSC to make up the voting body.

Course

Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. (i.e.) Long Course = 50 meters / Short Course = 25 yards or 25 meters.

Deadline

The date meet entries must be "postmarked"; to be accepted by the meet host. Making the meet deadline does not guarantee acceptance into a meet since many meets are "full" weeks before the entry deadline.

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.

Deck Entries

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

Deck Seeding

Heat and lane assignments are posted after swimmers have checked in **or** have “scratched” (indicated they will not participate in the event.)

Dehydration

The abnormal depletion of body fluids (water). The most common cause for swimmers to get cramps or feel sick.

Developmental

A classification of meet or competition that is usually held early in the season. The purpose of a developmental meet is to allow all levels of swimmers to compete in a low-pressure environment.

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 (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 or a dual confirmation of a false start.

Diving Well

A separate pool or a pool set off to the side of the competition pool. This pool has deeper water and diving boards/platforms. During a meet, this area may be designated as a warm-down pool with proper supervision.

Division I-II-III

NCAA member colleges and universities are assigned divisions to compete, depending on the school's total enrollment and budget. Division I are the large universities and Division III are the smaller colleges.

Dual Meet

Type of meet where two teams/clubs compete against each other.

Dryland

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

Dry Side

That part of the Code book (rule book) that deals with the "Administrative" Regulations of

Competition.

Entry

An individual, relay team, or club roster's event list in a swim competition.

Entry Chairperson

The host club's designated person who is responsible for receiving, and making sure the entries have met the deadline.

Entry Fees

The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the LSC and type of meet.

Entry Limit

Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept, or a time limit they cannot exceed. Once an entry limit has been reached, a meet will be closed and all other entries returned.

Electronic Timing

A timing system that removes most of the human error. The timing system usually has touchpads in the water, junction boxes on the deck with hook up cables, buttons for backup timing, and a computer-type console that prints out the results of each race. Some systems are hooked up to a scoreboard that displays swimmers.

Event

A race or stroke over a given distance. An event equals 1 preliminary with its final, or 1 timed final.

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 for the purpose of stopping 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~~ of meter pools.

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.

Fees

Money paid by swimmers for services. (i.e.) Practice fees, registration fee, USA-S membership

fee, meet entry, etc.

FINA

The international rules-making organization for the sport of swimming.

Finals

The races that allow the fastest swimmers in prelims to compete for the top place in an event. See "Consolation Finals", "Timed Finals", etc.

Final Results

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

Fins

Large rubber flipper-type devices that fit on a swimmers feet. Used in swim practice, not competition.

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 individual medley. 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 may offer the 25 yd free).

Goals

The short- and long-range targets for swimmers to work to achieve.

Goggles

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

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 rings a bell over the lane of the lead swimmer when the swimmer is at the backstroke flags.

Heats

All of the 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.

High Point

An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. Not all meets offer high point awards; check the pre meet information.

HOD

House of Delegates. The ruling body of a Local Swim Committee (LSC) composed of the designated representative of each club plus the board of directors (BOD) of the LSC. One vote per club and board member. Also refers to the national USAS convention meeting

Horn

A sounding device. Used mainly with a fully automatic timing system.

Illegal

Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification.

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 swum of each stroke. Distances offered: 100 yards, 200 yards/meters, 400 yards/meter.

IMX

IMX is a motivational program that allows swimmers across the nation to compare themselves to the thousands of other athletes in their age group. All you have to do is swim a combination of events, at least one time per season, and USA Swimming will automatically give you your ranking.

IM Ready

A stepping stone program to IMX where swimmers compete in a series of five events at shorter distances and achieve a score. In this program swimmers are not ranked.

Interval

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

Invitational

Type of meet that requires a club to request an invitation to attend the meet.

Jump

An illegal start done by the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th member of a relay team. The swimmer on the block breaks contact with the block before the swimmer in the water touches the wall.

Junior Nationals

A USA-S Championship meet for swimmers 18 years old or less. Qualification times are necessary.

Kick Board

A flotation device used by swimmers during practice.

Lane

The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim. (ie) Lane 1 or Lane 2.

Lane Lines

Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from the starting end to the turning end for the purpose of separating each lane and quieting the waves caused by racing swimmers.

Lap

One length of the course. Sometimes may also mean down and back (2 lengths) of the 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 single stroke in the IM.

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. There are 59 LSCs.

Marshall

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

Meet

A series of events held in one program.

Meet Director

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

Meters

The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the metric system. Long course meter pools are 50 meters, short course meters are 25 meters.

NAGTS

National Age Group Time Standards - the list of "C" through "AAAA" times published each year.

Nationals

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

Natorium

A building constructed for the purpose of housing a swimming pool and related equipment.

NCAA

National Collegiate Athletic Association

NGB

National Governing Body

Non-Conforming Time

A short course time submitted to qualify for a long course meet, or vice versa.

NT

No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swum that event before.

Observed Meet

A meet that is not conducted according to USA Swimming rules (high school, YMCA) where a request for observation has been processed and approved in advance. Sufficient USA Swimming officials are present to certify that the athletes' swims are in compliance with USA Swimming technical rules.

Observed Swim

A swim observed by assigned USA Swimming officials for conformance with USA Swimming technical rules in a meet conducted under other than USA Swimming rules.

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.

Omega

A brand of automatic timing system.

OTC

Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Open Competition

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

Pace Clock

The electronic clocks or large clocks with highly visible numbers and 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

Colored plastic devices worn on the swimmers hands during swim practice.

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.

Practice

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

Prelims

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

Prelims-Finals

Type of meet with two sessions. The preliminary heats are usually held in the morning session. The fastest six or eight (Championship Heat) swimmers, and the next fastest six or eight swimmers (Consolation Heat) return in the evening to compete in the Finals. A swimmer who has qualified in the Consolation Finals may not place in the Championship Finals even if their finals time would place them so. The converse also applies.

Pre-seeded

A meet conducted without a bull pen in which a swimmer knows what lane and heat they are in by looking at the heat sheet or posted meet program.

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.

Pull Buoy

A flotation device used for pulling by swimmers in practice.

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.

Ready Room

A room pool side for the swimmers to relax before they compete in finals.

Recall Rope

A rope across the width of the racing pool for the purpose of stopping 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.

Referee

The head official at a swim meet in charge of all of the "Wet Side" administration and decisions.

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.

Sanction

A permit issued by an LSC to a USA-S group member to conduct an event or meet.

Sanction Fee

The amount paid by a USA-S group member to an LSC for issuing a sanction.

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.

Schedule

USA-S or LSC list of meets with dates, meet host, meet location, type of meet, and contacts address and phone.

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.

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.

Senior Meet

A meet that is for senior level swimmers and is not divided into age groups. Qualification times are usually necessary and will vary depending on the level of the meet.

Senior Nationals

A USA-S National Championship meet for swimmers of any age as long as the qualification times are met.

Session

Portion of meet distinctly separated from other portions by locale, time, type of competition, or age group.

Short Course

A 25-yard or 25-meter pool.

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

The USA 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.

Start

The beginning of a race. The dive used to begin a race.

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 right for the race to start.

Stroke

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

Stroke Judge

The official positioned at the side of the pool, walking the length of the course as the swimmers race. If the Stroke Judge sees something illegal, they report to the referee and the swimmer may be disqualified.

Submitted Time

Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets.

Swim-A-Thon

The "Fund Raiser" trademarked by USA Swimming for local clubs to use to make money.

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 to determine which swimmer makes finals or an alternate, otherwise ties stand.

Swimming World

A paid-subscription swimming magazine.

SWIMS

USA Swimming system that keeps track of every time swum by all swimmers. Available through the USA-S website.

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.

Timed Finals

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

Time Standard

A time set by a meet or LSC or USA-S (etc) that a swimmer must achieve for qualification or recognition.

Timer

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

Time Trial

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

Top 10

A list of times compiled by the LSC or USA-S that recognizes the top 10 swimmers in each single age group (boys & girls) by each event and distance.

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.

Travel Fund

A sum of money set aside for a swimmer to use for travel expenses and entry fees to specified meets.

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-S

The governing body of swimming--USA Swimming.

USA Swimming

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

USA-S ID Number

A 14-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: Month/Day/2-Digit 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.

USOTC

United States Olympic Training Center located in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

VCC

Virtual Club Championships. The VCC recognizes and highlight clubs that are developing athletes and achieving success at multiple levels emphasizing the team element in club swimming. This program serves as a key part of the Athlete Development & Performance component of the Club Recognition Program.

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.

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.

Yardage

The distance a swimmer races or swims in practice. Total yardage can be calculated for each practice session.

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.