

Competition 101

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.

Course

Competition pools may be short course (25 yards or 25 meters), or long course (50 meters). The international standard (as used in the Olympics) is 50 meters. World records are accomplished in 25 and 50 meter pools. USA Swimming maintains records for 25 yard, 25 meter and 50 meter pools.

Competition

Participants compete in different age groups and meets depending on their achievement level and how old they are on the first day of the meet. Traditionally recognized age groups are 10 and under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18. Many local meets feature 8 and under, single age groups, or senior events. Team practice groups are usually determined by age and/or ability.

Officials

Officials are present at all competitions to enforce the technical rules of swimming so the competition is fair and equitable. Officials attend clinics, pass a written test and work meets before being certified. All parents are encouraged to get involved with some form of officiating.

Preliminary and Finals Meets

Championship meets sometimes have 2 rounds of competition with preliminary heats in the morning and finals at night. The number of finals can vary between one, two or even three heats including the top 8, 16 or 24 competitors. Team points and individual awards are determined by the placing achieved in the finals only. Swimmers can only achieve the place determined by their heat. For instance, a person who is in the consolation final can only achieve up to 9th place even if they swim faster than someone in the top 8 during finals.

Meet Awards

Swim meets are scored for both individuals and teams. At most dual meets no awards are given, however, dual meets offer the opportunity to earn qualifying times for championship meets. Other meets generally award ribbons or medals to individuals. Occasionally, individuals and teams may be awarded trophies. Meets vary regarding how many individual awards they provide, please refer to the meet sheet for details.