Greetings,

Thank you for volunteering to work as a timer on behalf of all the teams attending the upcoming meet. For those of you that have never timed at a swim meet before, this letter will provide you with a crash course on everything you need to know. For those of you that are experienced timers, please take a few minutes to review these procedures to help assure that all of our timers are using the same procedures.

First and foremost, timing is fun! No doubt about it – you have the best seats in the house!! You get to see the starts and finishes up close and personal. You also get to feel the energy and occasional nervousness of the swimmers first hand. And there is nothing like the excitement of team mates as a swimmer turns for home on the final leg of a relay.

Timing is also a very important job to support all the swimmers. Swimming is a somewhat unique sport in that winning races is great, but most often it is the swimmers’ times that determine how far they go in their sport. Some swimmers have set a goal to achieve a qualifying time for an upcoming event. Other swimmers are working on achieving a ‘best time’ in one or more events. That is why timing is so important to each and every swimmer as well as to the team.

Having said all that, remember timing is fun, often wet, and very easy to do.

There are several players on deck that are part of timing and running of a swim meet.

 • **The swimmers** – no explanation needed, you know many of these people and get to feed them when you get home from practice every evening.

 • **The timers** – that is what you will be doing. At our meets, it takes 2 timers per lane to time a sanctioned meet, and we have 8 lanes. So for every session, we need 16 timers in place.

 • **The starter** – that is the person who holds the microphone, gives the instructions to the swimmers and starts each race

 • **The starting horn**‐ this is the box on the pole next to the starter. At OCCC, this will be located to your left for most of the races. There is a horn that sounds and a strobe light that flashes. You need to watch for the strobe light flash – that is when you start your stop watch at the beginning of a heat.

 • **Head timer** – this is an experienced timer who will provide instruction at the beginning of your shift. The head timer is positioned off to the side and starts two additional stop watches. If for some reason your watch doesn’t start, raise your hand and that will signal the head timer to come over and give you one of the watches they started. This is also the person who will find you a substitute when you need to take a restroom break.

 • **Coaches** – they are the folks running around deck cheering on swimmers, going crazy every time someone misses a start, and celebrating every good swim and personal best.

The timing system of a sanctioned meet has 4 primary components, 3 of which are operated by the timers.

 1. **Touch pads**. These are the automatic timing devices located on the wall under the starting blocks in each lane. When everything works correctly, as it usually does, the official time will automatically begin when the starters horn goes off and end automatically when the swimmer touches the pad at the end of their race. As a timer, you have nothing to do with the touch pads. When this operates correctly, the touch pads are the primary timing device.

 2. **Push Button**. This refers to the black push‐button on wire that you will find in each lane. At OCCC, you will find one push button around the base of the starting block. At the end of the race, one of the timers in each lane is responsible for pressing the button at the moment the swimmer touches the wall. If you are the timer doing this, you will have the push button device in one hand and a stop watch in the other. Both will need to be stopped when the swimmer touches the wall.

 3. **Stopwatch**. Each timer will be provided with a stopwatch. You start the stop watch on the strobe flash, at the beginning of each heat. You stop the watch at the moment the swimmer touches the wall at the end of the race. DO NOT CLEAR YOUR WATCH until the time has been recorded on the clipboard sheet for that heat.

 4. **Clipboard/paperwork**. One of the two timers in each lane will be responsible for the clipboard and paperwork. This person will manage one stopwatch and the clipboard. At the end of each heat, the times from each stopwatch are written down for that heat.

**Useful Tips for timers**

 1. Timing is very important at a swim meet. While one hopes that the backup systems are never needed, they invariably are only needed when it is important and someone has just swum a personal best.

 2. Timing is not a dry activity! Plan on getting wet because you will!! Dress in clothing/shoes that won’t be damaged by pool water.

 3. DO NOT bring purses or personal items. There is no place to keep those items on deck and there is no safe place to keep your personal belongings.

 4. Turn your cell phones to silent mode! Cell phones and timing do not mix!

 5. Whether you are working with the push button or a stop watch, it is very important that you stand at the edge of the pool looking straight down the wall to see the swimmer actually touch the wall in order to get an accurate

 time. It is not possible to get an accurate time while jumping back from the wall as the swimmer finishes.

 6. You also cannot see a swimmer touching the wall through the starting block. Please make sure you step around the block and look straight down the wall.

 7. When operating the push button and/or the stopwatch, it is best to use your index finger rather than your thumb. Your index finger has the fastest and most consistent reaction time of all your fingers.

 8. Your shift may run a little bit longer than expected or a little shorter than expected. The length of time you will be needed is a function of the number of swimmers at the meet. **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR TIMING POST UNATTENDED. If you need to leave, please raise your hand and get the attention of the head timer to find a replacement for you**.

Instructions for the day of the meet [adapted from USA Swimming Guide to Officiating, Chapter 9‐Timing]

1. Report at your assigned time/date. Sign in on the volunteer sign in sheet.

2. Attend briefing with the Head timer.

3. Break into groups of 2 for each lane. One person picks up the clip board for a given lane.

4. Obtain your stop watch and practice starting it, stopping it and clearing it.

5. Go to your assigned lane.

6. As swimmers take their place to swim, double check their name with the listing on your clipboard sheet. For

relays, check the team name. Swimmers will be gathering around the blocks as their event/heat gets closer.

7. Do not engage in conversation with swimmers prior to their race unless they initiate the conversation. You

don’t want to distract the swimmer and end up making them miss their start.

8. Prior to the race, you should be sitting far enough back so that you will not distract the starter or the swimmers.

The chairs have been positioned at the start of the session, please do not move them forward.

9. When the Referee blows the long whistle that signals the swimmer to get up on the block. Then the starter will

only say “Take your mark”, then signal the start.

10. At the start, focus on the starting device and watch for the strobe light. Start your watch on that signal rather

than the sound. You do not need to push the push button at the start of a race.

11. Once each heat has started, check to be sure your watch is running. If it is not, or you think you started it late,

signal the head timer by raising your hand.

12. For distance events [16 lengths or longer] the split times are recorded on the clipboard sheet each time the

swimmer turns at your end of the pool. You can get these from the scoreboard.

13. Be at the edge of the pool for the finish. You must be looking down over the forward edge to see an underwater

touch. Stop your watch when any part of the swimmer’s body touches the wall. You are not concerned with whether the finish was legal. Be sure you only push the button once – each time you push it a new time is recorded and you don’t want that to happen.

14. Times should always be recorded to two decimal places. If no one is the lane for a given heat, record ‘No Swimmer’ as N/S.

15. Stay focused on your duties, especially during the start and finish. Do not cheer for particular swimmers and don’t get so interested in watching a race in another lane that you do not get an accurate time for the lane you are timing.

16. For distances greater than 16 lengths of the pool [over 400 yards], each lane will be given a bell to ring to alert the swimmer they are on the final 50 yards of the swim. One timer is recording the times for each 50 yards. As the swimmer comes in toward the starting block to make the turn for the final 50 yards, the other timer should be standing at the edge of the pool. Vigorously ring the bell from the time the swimmer reaches the flag coming in until he/she makes the flip turn and hits the flags going away from you. You need to get down close to the water and ring the bell vigorously so the swimmer can hear it.