

Glossary of Swimming Terms

25: One length of the pool

50: Two lengths of the pool

100: Four lengths of the pool

Bubble: A large tent erected over an outdoor pool during the winter months

Cut: A time standard that a swimmer must meet or exceed to be included in a specific competition such as State and Regional meets

Best Time: A best time is achieved when a swimmer exceeds their own previous "best time" in an event - it shows that a swimmer has improved over their own time, regardless of how other swimmers finish

Distances: 8 and under swimmers swim one lap (25 yards) in any stroke, except for the individual medley which is 25 yards of each stroke or 100 yards total. 9 and up swimmers swim two laps (50 yards) in any stroke, except for the individual medley (again 100 yards)

DQ: Disqualify

Dryland: Exercises or stretches that are conducted out of the pool in order to warm up, build strength and increase flexibility

Event: This is defined by the age group, sex and swimming stroke, such as Boys' 9-10 Backstroke. The number of events at each meet varies

Event winner: This is the swimmer who has the fastest time in the entire event consisting of all the heats of that event

Finishes: This is how a swimmer ends the race by touching the wall in a legal way depending upon the stroke

Flags: Backstroke flags are placed at both ends of the pool 15 feet from the end to serve as a warning to backstroke swimmers that they are nearing the wall for a turn or finish. Timers may "catch the heads" of younger swimmers who would otherwise hit the wall

Heat: When an event has more swimmers entered than available lanes, as is usually the case, there are multiple heats of the event

Heat Sheet: This is the official schedule of swimmers in their assigned events, heats and lanes drawn up by the coaches. It is usually sold at the meet so that swimmers can see where they will swim

Heat Winner: This is the person who comes in first in a particular heat of an event. This does not automatically mean that the swimmer has also won the event, since there are usually multiple heats for any event

IM: An event that encompasses all four swimming strokes including Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle. Lengths may vary from 100 yards/meters (one lap of each stroke) to 400 yards/meter (four laps of each stroke)

Lane: The pool is arranged into lanes by floating lane dividers so that the swimmers will not interfere with each other during a race. Some pools have 8 lanes, while others only have 6 lanes (those meets may last longer). At dual meets, the host team swimmers use the odd-numbered lanes while the visitors use the even-numbered lanes

Legal/DQ: These are the terms that describe whether a stroke is being performed correctly (legally) as defined by United States Swimming rules. If a swimmer is judged by a Stroke and Turn judge to be swimming incorrectly, that swimmer is disqualified (DQ) for that event in the meet. The swimmer should ask their coach for instructions to correct the problem before swimming the same event in another meet. DQ does not mean that a swimmer cannot swim in further events or meets. It is a learning tool for swimmers

Meet: A competition between two (dual meet) or more teams with individual swimmers, relays, place ribbons and team scores are kept

Meet fees: Fees incurred when a swimmer is registered for a swim meet

Relays: Relay races are sometimes offered at the beginning or end of a meet. Medley relays feature 4 swimmers each swimming a different stroke beginning with back, breast, fly and free. Free relays feature 4 freestyle swimmers

Runner: A volunteer who picks up time slips, DQ slips, and other meet documentation and brings them to the computer table where the meet information is being compiled

Seeding: This refers to the heat and lane assignment of the swimmer. Swimmers are arranged (seeded) by the best times, with the slowest swimmers in heat 1 and so forth. Further, the fastest swimmers are seeded in the middle of the pool outward

Starting Block: A raised platform that swimmers dive from during competition

Starts: This is the entry into the water (generally a dive) or the beginning of the backstroke (push off back dive) at the sound of the starting gun

Streamline: Position a swimmer assumes at the start of a lap in which their body and arms are straight with the elbows behind the ears arms squeezing the back of the head

Stroke Clinic: A practice with a specific goal of improving technique on one or more specific strokes

Stroke and Turn Judge: A trained volunteer who determines if swimmers are swimming each stroke legally within the guidelines set by USA Swimming, a stroke judge determines if a swimmer will be disqualified

Timer: A volunteer who uses a stopwatch to record a swimmer's time during a swim meet or is a backup timer for a touchpad system

Turns: A swimmer who is swimming more than one length of the pool in an event must perform a legal turn at each wall to continue the race. Each stroke has its own turn requirements, which are taught in practice. Turns are needed in the individual medleys, and 50 yard distances for the older swimmers

Warm-ups: Each meet begins by having a warm-up period. This is very important so that swimmers do not pull muscles and also allows swimmers to get familiar with the pool