

# The “Professional” Starter - or - It’s more than three short words!

1

## The “Professional” Starter should:

1. Read the “GUIDE TO OFFICIATING SWIMMING” on the USA Swimming website (the Starter chapter in particular!)
2. Know the Rules and the protocols, procedures and philosophies for being a successful starter
3. Be on time for each session and officials’ briefings, and dress appropriately in a professional manner
4. Be flexible and adaptable to all procedures made by a Meet Referee or Head Starter that may differ from the suggested guidelines offered in this document
5. Confirm assignments, rotations and invigilating schedule with the Head Starter:
  - Be aware how heats will run – fly-overs, cleared pool, etc.
  - Be aware of any event flighting or events or heats alternating by gender that affect starting rotations
  - Confirm the meet procedures for Starters that may include additional responsibilities, including:
    - timer instruction: be aware of timing system (number of buttons and watches or cameras) and provide instruction to timers at the designated time established by meet director
    - a rotation involving stroke or turn judging, taking order-of-finish, distance counting, ringing the bell for the lead swimmer in a distance heat, relay take-off judging or head timer responsibilities
  - Be aware of swimmers with disabilities who may require special starting accommodations. *Know the rules and procedures*
6. Confirm meet protocol and procedures for the Starter-Deck Referee (DR) teams and with the individual Deck Referees with whom you are teamed:
  - Be aware when jurisdiction will be turned over to Starter, indicated by Deck Referee’s out-stretched arm
  - Confirm how Starter will be notified of “No Shows” and “Declared False Starts” prior to event start
  - Confirm how to make Deck Referees aware of next-up swimmers behind the blocks affected by suit malfunctions, cap or goggle issues or unexpected empty lanes
7. Pre-Meet and Pre-Session:
  - Become familiar with the starting system by checking the equipment during the session warm-up period
    - There are a variety of microphones in use. Practice with the mike during warm-ups to feel comfortable with the device
    - Some microphones display a green light when the timing system is ready for the next start. When outdoors, confirm you can clearly see the green light and be prepared to notify the DR when the green light has not been displayed
  - Check your voice level in the microphone with another Starter monitoring the audio level in all lane speakers
  - Perform a test start to get a feel for how sensitive the starting button may be
  - Find your optimum deck positions for both forward and back starts so that all swimmers can be clearly and individually viewed
  - Find out where the Deck Referee will stand adjacent to your position. Ask him or her to extend their arm so that it can be seen in your peripheral vision, without blocking your view of the swimmers. Make sure you and the DR are standing close enough that you can converse quietly. It may be about swimmer issues, green lights, step down requests, etc.
  - Be prepared with a master starter heat sheet if you have been asked to use one for marking all false starts, no shows, declared false starts, and any other notes. Also acquire an OOF (Order Of Finish) heat sheet, if the meet’s procedures call for the off-duty starter to take OOF
8. During the Start:
  - Assume your deck position to start the upcoming heat prior to the finish of the current heat. In some cases, the previous event’s results are scrolled on the scoreboard, allowing for a bit more time to take position
  - Show that you are relaxed and confident in your starting ability with your body language
  - On the long whistle when the swimmers are stepping up (second long whistle for the back start), show that you are prepared for starting by having the microphone in a “ready” position
    - Make sure the microphone can’t fall in the water or someone doesn’t trip over the cord and unplug it from the starting unit either by holding the cord with your free hand or stepping on the cord
  - When all swimmers have stepped on the blocks the Deck Referee will turn over jurisdiction to the Starter
  - BE PATIENT when allowing all swimmers to assume the position on the blocks they want to use for the start. Watch to see their feet are in the final chosen position. The swimmers will then show you when they’re ready to hear the “Take Your Mark” instruction
    - If “track style” starting platforms are used, swimmers may require a bit more time to assume their position
    - If “backstroke ledges” are used, ensure each swimmer’s toes are in direct contact with the end wall or timing pad prior to the start, but not curled over the top of the pad, gutter or end wall.
  - Deliver the “Take Your Mark” instruction in a calm, conversational tone that’s loud enough for the swimmers to hear over any possible crowd noise, but not so loud the instruction sounds like a shouted command. Use a cadence that is inviting with a slight falling in pitch



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2

- SWIMMERS START THE HEATS – NOT THE STARTER!* BE PATIENT - when allowing the swimmers to show you they are ready for the starting signal
- When that “sweet spot” moment is achieved and the swimmers are stationary, push the starting button
- After the start keep the microphone in a “ready” position in case the heat needs to be recalled
- Watch the swimmers until all heads have surfaced. Then replace the microphone to a position where it can’t be bumped and the cord isn’t in a traffic zone that could cause tripping
- Step out of the starting area to allow more room for Deck Referee, Chief Judge and Stroke Judge
  - Avoid conversing with the Deck Referee unless it involves a possible false start or another timely matter
- Using the Starter’s heat sheet, confirm the next heat’s swimmers are reporting to the assigned lanes. Note on the heat sheet any “no shows”, “declared false starts”, false starts or other matters for which there should be a record
- Begin preparations to start the next heat

### 9. Use the False Start Protocol:

Remember the definition of a false start: *Any swimmer **starting** before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a false start occurred.*

- After the start and the microphone is replaced, calmly mark the Starter heat sheet to indicate which heat and lane the false start was observed. Double-check that mark for accuracy of heat and lane
  - Any mark can be used as long as the Deck Referee can tell a particular heat and lane has been indicated, whether it’s circling the lane number, underlining the lane number and name, placing a visible dot next to the lane, etc.
- Show the marked heat sheet to the Deck Referee and implement the procedure discussed prior to the start of the meet. It may include pointing out the heat and lane, as well as verbally indicating a false start was observed. The Deck Referee should also show the Starter his/her marked heat sheet as confirmation of a false start. Under no circumstance should a false start confirmation be based solely on a discussion
- When a Chief Judge is available, they will fill out the disqualification form and hand it to the Starter for signature. Double check the event, heat, lane and, possibly the name and team, have been correctly noted and the false start box was checked before signing and handing the form back to the Chief Judge
- When a Chief Judge is not available, the Starter completes and signs the disqualification form before handing it to the Referee for final sign-off
- If necessary, note any peculiarities to the false start on the heat sheet for later reference; possibly when advising a coach or swimmer of the observed action

### 10. When Using Other Commands;

- To address the athletes with the microphone, refer to the swimmers as “Ladies” and “Gentlemen”
- Remember to use “Please” and “Thank you”
- If it is necessary to stand the field after the TYM instruction, for both forward and backward starts, say, “Stand *please*”
- If the Deck Referee asks for the swimmers to step off the blocks, say, “Ladies (Gentlemen), step down please”
- If the swimmers are taking a prolonged amount of time to leave the pool after their swim (before or after the next start) say, “Thank you Ladies/Gentlemen.” If more instruction is needed, say, “Ladies/Gentlemen, please clear the pool”
- Use of the “Relax please Ladies/Gentlemen” instruction means it will be a prolonged period before the starting sequence will begin. The “Relax” instruction should not be used in place of a “Stand Please” instruction for backstroke starts
- If a swimmer’s toes are curled over the top of the pad prior to the start of the backstroke, address the swimmer by saying, “Lane 7, toes please”

### Tips and Tricks

- Don’t hesitate to use the recall option if you feel an external noise (ex. coach’s whistle) or motion (activity around the starting blocks) has interfered with a swimmer’s ability to achieve a fair start
- All officials make mistakes. Don’t allow an inadvertent mistake to inhibit your performance. When mistakes occur, intervene, if possible. Take responsibility for your mistakes, learn from them, forgive yourself, and move on
- The Starter displays confidence (and not over-confidence) in his/her ability to start well anywhere, anytime, anyplace
- It is not unusual for Starters at high level meets to feel a certain level of anxiety or nervousness. While a certain amount of nervousness has been shown to enhance performance, public displays of anxiety can interfere with the ability to act (addressing swimmers on the microphone, asking heats to stand please, etc.) and may generate increased anxiety in others on the deck, including the swimmers. Championship starters have learned to use their anxiety to aide deck performance
- BE CONFIDENT AND RELAXED. There are (too) many opinions about starting, even at the highest levels. The Championship Starter has learned when to listen to opinions, suggestions and feedback, and when to ignore them
- Work as a teammate with the Deck Referees and Chief Judges. Confirm the Referee has her/his whistle and the Chief Judge has a pen

