



Swimming Terms 101

General Swimming Terms

AGE GROUP SWIMMING - The program through which USA Swimming provides fair and open competition for its younger members (14 & under). It is designed to encourage maximum participation, provide an educational experience, enhance physical and mental conditioning, and develop a rich base of swimming talent.

ATTACHED - A registered swimmer who is attached to a registered USA Swimming swim team.

FINA - Federation Internationale de National de Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming.

LSC – Local Swim Committee, the governing body that oversees swimming at the local level. There are 59 LSC's in the country. Our LSC is South Carolina Swimming, Inc.

MASTERS SWIMMING - A program for swimmers aged 19 and older. Masters swimming is open to all levels of experience and includes the full spectrum from people learning to swim for fitness, to triathletes, all the way up to those competing at the national level. Age groups are in five-year increments.

SANCTION – A competition or time trial must be sanctioned (approved) by USA Swimming (through the Local Swim Committee) for the times swum to count and to be used in other sanctioned meets.

SHORT COURSE (SC) - A pool 25 yards/meters in length. USA Swimming conducts the majority of its fall and winter competitions in short course yards. Internationally, all short course competitions are in meters.

SOUTH CAROLINA SWIMMING, INC. – The name of the Local Swimming Committee (LSC), charged by USA Swimming to govern competitive swimming in the state of South Carolina.

TIME STANDARDS – USA Swimming establishes motivational time standards for each age group every four years. The current standards will be in place until August 31, 2016 and are available on [USA Swimming's website](#). Time standards and age determine the type of meet in which a swimmer may participate. Age group standards progress from (slower to faster) B, BB,

A, AA, AAA, and AAAA. In addition, there are specific time standards for various championship meets that will be provided as appropriate for your swimmer.

UNATTACHED – A registered swimmer who is not attached to a registered USA swim team. If a swimmer changes teams, that swimmer must swim unattached for 120 days from the last day of he/she swam in competition representing the former team.

USA SWIMMING, INC. – The National Governing Body that regulates our sport. All SwimMAC swimmers are registered with USA Swimming and each has been assigned an identification number. This USA Swimming registration expires at the end of each year. This is the organization that sends swimmers to the Olympic Games. USA Swimming is a member of FINA.

USA SWIMMING CARD/NUMBER - A membership card with a unique number assigned to a swimmer when he/she joins USA Swimming. The formula for deriving a swimmer's USA Swimming number includes the birth date (6 digit format MM/DD/YY), first three letters of the first name, middle initial, and first four letters of the last name. For example: John A. Smith was born September 1, 1959. His USA Swimming number would be: 090159johasmit

Swimming Pool Terms

BACKSTROKE FLAGS - Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately five yards/meters from the wall that notify backstroke swimmers that they are approaching the end of the pool.

BUTTON - The manual timing system stopping device that records a back-up time in case the touch pad malfunctioned. The button is at the end of a wire, plugged into a deck terminal box. It is the timers' responsibility to push the button as the swimmer finishes the race. Sometimes referred to as a plunger.

CIRCLE SWIMMING - Swimming to the right of the black line so that you 'circle' the lane. This is the usual method for practices and warm-ups.

15-METER MARK - Marks on the sides of the pool and on the lane lines 15 meters from the ends of the pool. In freestyle, backstroke and butterfly events, the swimmer must surface at or before these marks.

LAP COUNTER – A set of plastic numbers submerged at the far end of the pool to help swimmers in distance freestyle events keep track of laps. A volunteer counter (usually a parent or teammate) flips the numbers after each lap and places them in the water while the competitor swims toward them. The numbers are pulled out before the swimmer completes his/her flip turn.

LENGTH/LAP - Technically, a length is once across the pool; a lap is across and back. However most coaches use the terms interchangeably to mean simply once across the pool. Thus, 4 lengths in a 25 yard pool would be swimming across the pool 4 times, totaling 100 yards.

Laps per Short Course Distance

Distance	Lengths	Laps
25 yds	1	0
50 yds	2	1
100 yds	4	2
200 yds	8	4
500 yds	20	10
1000 yds	40	20
1650 yds	66	33

Laps per Long Course Distance

Distance	Lengths	Laps
50 m	1	0
100 m	2	1
200 m	4	2
400 m	8	4
800 m	16	8
1500 m	32	16

LONG COURSE - A pool 50 meters in length. USA Swimming conducts most of its summer competition in long course and is the format for the Olympics Games.

OPEN WATER SWIMS – Swimming events conducted in a natural body of water, such as a lake, river or ocean.

SHORT COURSE (SC) - A pool 25 yards/meters in length. USA Swimming conducts most of its fall and winter competitions in short course yards.

TOUCH PAD - A large pad at the end of each lane that registers a swimmer's touch and communicates electronically to the timing system.

Swimming Meet Terms

CHAMPIONSHIP MEET - The meet held at the end of a season. Qualification times are usually necessary to enter meet.

CHECK-IN - The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded meet. Sometimes referred to as positive check in, the coach will mark each swimmer's name on a list posted by the meet host. Once a swimmer is checked in they must swim the event or they will be scratched from his/her next event.

CIRCLE SEED - In a meet with both preliminary and finals sessions, the fastest three heats of each event in prelims is circle seeded. That means the fastest swimmer is in the center lane in the fastest heat, the second fastest swimmer is in the center lane in the next-fastest heat, the

third fastest swimmer is in the center lane in the third-fastest heat. The fourth fastest swimmer will swim in the fastest heat next to the fastest-seeded swimmer. The fifth fastest swimmer will swim in the next-fastest heat next to the second fastest-seeded swimmer, and so on until the three heats are filled up. As opposed to the normal slowest to fastest seeding in the rest to the heats (used in a Timed Finals format).

CLERK OF COURSE - The USA Swimming-certified official responsible for deck seeding and organizing swimmers into heats (usually this role is filled by a parent-volunteer). Also, where scratches and relay cards are turned in, and on-going meet information is available for the coaches.

DECK SEEDING - The process of organizing swimmers into events, heats, and lanes (by the Clerk of Course) at the meet as it progresses (as opposed to pre-seeding prior to the meet).

DISQUALIFICATION - The loss of points and a time due to an infraction of the rules that govern the meet.

DIVE OVER STARTS - Start procedures at a meet in which swimmers of the previous heat remain in the water, close to the wall, during the start of the next heat. Usually used in senior sessions/meets to save time and/or allow swimmers to rest before exiting the pool.

DQ - Abbreviation for a disqualification.

8 & UNDER CHAMPIONSHIPS - A year-end meet for swimmers that are eight and under. There are no time standards for this meet.

FALSE START - Occurs when a swimmer is moving at the start of a race, prior to the starting signal. In USA Swimming, one false start will result in disqualification. A false start does require dual confirmation by the starter and the deck referee to be upheld.

HEAT - In competitions, each event (e.g., 11-12 girls 50 freestyle) will be divided into heats of swimmers based on the number of lanes available and the swimmers' times. In most competitions, the heats progress from slowest to fastest.

HEAT SHEETS - A printed program of events including the entry time, assigned heat and lane for each swimmer in an event. Generally sold at most meets.

IM – Shortened name for Individual Medley; an event in which the swimmer must do all four strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle.

MARSHAL - The officials who control the crowd and swimmer flow at a swim meet. They are primarily responsible for safety in the venue and are usually trained parent volunteers.

MEDLEY RELAY - A four-person relay in which one swimmer is assigned each of the four strokes in the following order: backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle. No swimmer may swim more than one leg of the relay.

MEET REFEREE - The head official at a swim meet that makes all final decisions based upon USA Swimming rules.

NT - Abbreviation for No Time. It is used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swum that event before and/or does not have an official time of record.

OFFICIAL - An observer on the deck of a pool at sanctioned and approved competitions that enforce USA Swimming rules. There are stroke and turn judges, administrative officials and referees, starters, timers and deck referees.

PALMETTO CHAMPIONSHIPS - Championship meet for swimmers who have achieved sectional-qualifying times. This is typically the last short course meet of the season. There are two versions of this meet: Upper State Palmetto Championship and Lower State Palmetto Championship

PERSONAL BEST - Often called a 'PR' (personal record), the best time a swimmer has achieved so far in a given event.

PRELIMINARIES (PRELIMS) - Also called trials. Races in which swimmers qualify for the finals to typically be swum later in the day.

PROOF OF TIME - A requirement some meets have to make certain that swimmers have legally met the time standards for that meet. Monetary fines are sometimes assessed for a failed swim at meets if the entry time can't be proven.

PSYCH SHEET - A list of the order of events by session with swimmers listed according to their entry times (usually fastest to slowest). It does not show heats. The psych sheet is usually provided electronically prior to the meet.

QUALIFYING TIMES - Published times that must be achieved during a given period in order to enter certain meets.

SCRATCH - To withdraw from an event (with the forfeit of the entry fee), only to be done by the coaching staff.

SECTIONALS - Championship meet after state championships for swimmers achieving higher qualifying times. Sectional meets encompass the entire southeastern US and are conducted as Age Group Sectionals (14 & under) and Senior Sectionals (no age restriction)

SEED TIMES - The time a swimmer uses to enter a meet. This time determines one's heat and lane in a particular event.

SESSION - Portion of meet distinctly separated from other portions by time (usually a morning or afternoon set of events for different age groups).

SPLIT - A time taken at an intermediate distance, e.g., a 50 yard time for a 100 yard race, or the time of one individual in a relay.

STARTER - A certified official responsible for starting each event and ensuring that each start is fair for all participants.

STROKE AND TURN JUDGE - A Certified Official that walks the deck or stands at the end of the pool during a meet to certify the legality of individual strokes and turns.

SWIM-OFF - A tie-breaking swim between competitors. Usually used in a prelims and finals format to determine which swimmer advances to the finals, or to determine the order of priority of tied alternates.

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS - South Carolina Swimming's season-ending championship meet for the following age groups – 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-18. There are qualifying standards for this meet. The short course state championships are in February while the long course state championships are in July.

TIMED FINALS - A session or event where heats are swum and the final placing is determined by the times achieved in all of the heats. 10 & Under sessions are always timed finals. Many non-championship meets are timed finals for all swimmers.

WARM-DOWN - Swimming used by a swimmer after a practice, set or race to rid the body of excess lactic acid, and to gradually reduce the heart rate and respiration.

WARM-UP - Swimming used by a swimmer prior to a practice, set or race to get muscles loose and warm and gradually increase heart rate and respiration.