



Swim Team – Glossary of Swimming Terms

This is a Glossary of those strange and wacky words we use in the sport of swimming. You may or may not find these words in the English Dictionary, and if you do, the definitions will probably be radically different than the ones listed in this Glossary.

"A"	Time classification for a swimmer: NAGT "A".
"AA"	Time classification for a swimmer.
"AAA"	Time classification for a swimmer.
"AAAA"	Time classification for a swimmer. This is the fastest time standard listed on the NAGT chart. Times faster than this are approaching National Cuts or Top 16 Times consideration.
Age Group	Division of swimmers according to age. The National Age Group divisions are: 10-under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18. Some LSCs divide the swimmers into more convenient divisions specific to their situations: (i.e.) 8-under, 13 –over, 15-over, Junior, Senior.
Alternate	In a Prelims/Finals meet, after the finalists are determined, the next two fastest swimmers (other than the finalists) are designated as alternates. The faster of the two becomes first alternate and the next becomes second alternate. If a finalist cannot participate in a race, the alternates are called to take their place in a lane, often on a moment's notice.
Anchor	The final swimmer in a relay. Also a term coaches use for the beginning of all four strokes indicating the "high elbow", "catch," or "early vertical forearm."
Approved Meet	A meet conducted with sufficient USA Swimming officials to certify conformance to USA Swimming rules. The meet may include competitors who are not USA Swimming members. The meet may be a competition sanctioned at the LSC level with the added approval of USA Swimming because both member and non-member athletes will be competing.
ASCA	The American Swim Coaches Association. The professional organization for swim coaches throughout the nation. Certifying coaches and offering many services for coaches' education and career advancement.
"B"	Time classification for a swimmer: NAGT "B".
"BB"	Time classification for a swimmer: NAGT "BB".
B-Meet	Swim meet, which requires swimmers to have previously achieved a "B" time standard in the events they wish to enter. Some meets, often called 'developmental' meets, have no bottom cut time allowing "C" swimmers also to compete.



Backstroke	One of the four competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on your back. Backstroke is the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the Individual Medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meters, 100 yards/meters, and 200 yards/meters. (LSCs with 8 & under divisions offer the 25 yard back)
Blocks	The starting platforms located behind each lane. Some pools have blocks at the deeper end of the pool, and some pools have blocks at both ends. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.
BOD	Board of Directors of the Local Swim Committee (LSC) or USA Swimming (USA-S).
Bonus Final	Refers to a third heat of finals in a prelims/finals meet format that typically allows the 17 th through 24 th fastest qualifiers an opportunity to swim again. Also called the C Final. Meets usually only swim C or bonus finals if the timeline allows.
Breaststroke	One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the Individual Medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meters, 100 yards/meters, and 200 yards/meters. (LSCs with 8 & under divisions offer the 25 yard breast).
Butterfly	One of the four competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed 'fly') is the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the Individual Medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meters, 100 yards/meters, and 200 yards/meters. (LSCs with 8 & under divisions offer the 25 yard butterfly).
Camp	A swimming function offered by USA-S, your LSC, or a USA-S coach. There are many types of camps for just about every level of swimmer. When selecting a camp, ask for your coach's advice as to what will be the best for the swimmer, or call USA-S swimming for details on the many camps they offer.
Cap (swim)	The latex, silicone or lycra covering worn on the head of swimmers. The colors and team logos adorning these caps are limitless.
Carbohydrates	The main source of food energy used by athletes. Refer to a Nutritional Manual for more information.
Championship Meet	The meet(s) held at the end of long or short course season. Typically qualification times are to enter these meets.



Championship
Finals

The top six or eight swimmers (depending on the number of lanes) in a Prelims/Finals meet. After the Prelims sessions, these swimmers qualify to return to the finals. They are the fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held. Also refers to the A finals heat in an ABC finals format.

Check-In

The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded meet. Sometimes referred to as positive check in, the swimmer must mark their name on a list posted by the meet host. The swimmer essentially confirms that "I am here and intend to swim these events." This process allows meet managers to weed out no-show entries and collapse events into fewer heats.

Circle Seeding

A method of seeding swimmers when they are participating in a prelims/finals event. The fastest 18 to 24 swimmers are seeded in the last three heats, with the fastest swimmers being in the inside lanes. (i.e.) Lane 4 in the final three heats. See rule book for exact method for seeding depending on the lanes in the pool.

Clinic

A scheduled meeting for the purpose of instruction. (i.e.) Official's clinic, Coach's clinic.

Closed Competition

Swim meet which is only open to the members of an organization or group. Summer club swim meets are considered to be "Closed Competition."

Club

A registered swim team that is a dues-paying member of USA Swimming and the local LSC.

Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct that both swimmers and coaches are required to sign at certain USA-S/LSC sponsored events. The Code is not strict and involves common sense and proper behavior.

Consolation Finals

After the fastest six or eight swimmers, the next six or eight swimmers (depending on the number of lanes) in a Prelims/Finals meet who, after the Prelims swim, qualify to return to the finals. Consolations are the second-fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held and are conducted before the Championship heat. Also called the B final in an ABC finals format.

Convention

United States Aquatic Sports annual, week long, meeting where all rules changes are decided and working committees are established. Representatives are sent by each LSC to make up the voting body.

Course

Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. Long Course = 50 meters. Short course = 25 yards



Deadline	The date meet entries must be "postmarked" by, to be accepted by the meet host. Making the meet deadline does not guarantee acceptance into a meet since many meets are "full" weeks before the entry deadline.
Deck	The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an "authorized" USA Swimming member may be on deck during a swim competition.
Deck Entries	Accepting entries into swimming events on the first day or later day of a meet.
Deck Seeding	Heat and lane assignments are posted after swimmers have checked in have "scratched" (indicated they will not participate in the event.)
Dehydration	The abnormal depletion of body fluids (water). The most common cause of swimmers cramps and sick feelings.
Developmental	Classification of a swim meet or competition, typically held early in the season. The purpose of a developmental meet is to allow all levels of swimmers to compete in a low pressure environment.
Distance	How far a swimmer swims. Race distances for short course are: 25 yards (1 length), 50 yards (2 lengths), 100 yards (4 lengths), 200 yards (8 lengths), 400 yards (16 lengths), 500 yards (20 lengths), 1000 yards (40 lengths), 1650 yards (66 lengths), Race distances for long course pools are 50 meters (1 length), 100 meters (2 lengths), 200 meters (4 lengths), 400 meters (8 lengths), 800 meters (16 lengths), 1500 meters (30 lengths).
Disqualification	A swimmer or relay team's performance is not counted because of a rules infraction. A disqualification is shown when an official raises on arm with open hand above their head.
Dive	Entering the water headfirst. Diving is not allowed during warm-ups except at the designated time, in specific time, in specific lanes that are monitored by the swimmers coach.
Diving Well	A separate pool or a pool set off to the side of the competition pool. This pool has deeper water and diving boards/platforms. During a meet, this area may be designated as a warm-down pool with proper supervision.
Division I-II-III	NCAA member colleges and universities are assigned divisions to compete in, depending on the school's total enrollment. Division I being the large universities and Division III being the smaller colleges.
Dropped Time	When a swimmer goes faster than their previous performance in a particular event, they have 'dropped time.'
Dry-land	The training exercises and various strength programs swimmers do out of the water.



Dry Side	That part of the Code book (rule book) that deals with the "Administrative" Regulations of Competition.
Dual Meet	Type of meet where two teams/clubs compete against each other.
Electronic Timing	Timing System operated on DC current (battery). The timing system usually employs touch pads in the water, junction boxes on the deck with connecting cables, buttons for back-up timing, and a computer console that prints out the results of each race. Some systems are hooked up to a scoreboard that displays swimmers names and teams.
Entry	An individual, relay team, or club roster's event list in a swim competition.
Entry Chairperson	The host club's designated person who is responsible for receiving, and making sure the entries have met the deadline.
Entry Fees	The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the LSC and type of meet.
Entry Limit	Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept, or a time limit they cannot exceed. Once an entry limit has been reached, a meet will be closed and all other entries returned.
Electronic Timing	Timing system operated on DC current (battery). The timing system usually has touchpads in the water, junction boxes on the deck with hook up cables, buttons for backup timing, and a computer-type console that prints out the results of each race. Some systems are hooked up to a scoreboard that displays swimmers.
Event	A race or stroke over a given distance. An event equals 1 preliminary with its final, or 1 timed final.
False Start	When a swimmer leaves the starting block before the horn or gun. One false start will disqualify a swimmer or a relay team, although the starter or referee may disallow the false start due to unusual circumstances.
False Start Rope	A recall rope spanning the width of the racing pool dropped into the water to stop swimmers who were not aware of a false start. The rope is positioned about halfway for yard pools and about 50 feet from the starting end of meter pools. Once the swimmers are stopped by the rope, they return to the blocks to re-start the race.
Fastest to Slowest	A seeding method used on the longer events held at the end of a session. The fastest seeded swimmers participate in the first heats followed by the next fastest and so on.



Fees	Money paid by swimmers for services. (i.e.) Practice fees, registration fee, USA-S membership fee, etc.
FINA	The international governing body for the sport of swimming. FINA hold World Championship meets each year. USA Swimming is the national governing body for the sport in the U.S.
Finals	The final race of each event. See "Consolation Finals", "Timed Finals", etc.
Final Results	The printed or computer-generated copy of the results of each race of a swim meet. Hosts typically post results on deck and in spectator areas at meets, and provide visiting coaches with an electronic file of results at the completion of a meet.
Fins	vLarge rubber flipper-type devices that fit on a swimmers feet. Used in swim practice, not competition.
Flags	Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately 15 feet from the wall. Backstrokers use these as a gauge as they approach the wall for their turn or finish.
Freestyle	One of the four competitive racing strokes. Freestyle (nicknamed Free) is the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the Individual Medley. Racing distances are 50 yards/meters, 100 yards/meters, 200 yards/meters, 400 meters/500yards, 800 meters/1000 yards, 1500 meters/1650 yards. (LSCs with 8 & under divisions offer the 25 yard free).
Goals	The short- and long-range targets for swimmers to aim for.
Goggles	Glasses-type devices worn by swimmers to keep their eyes from being irritated by the chlorine in the water.
Gun (of Bell) Lap	The part of a freestyle distance race (400 meters or longer) when the swimmer has two lengths plus five yards to go. The starter fires a gunshot (or rings a bell) over the lane of the lead swimmer when the swimmer is at the backstroke flags.
Heats	Swim meets are broken down into a series of races called 'heats' because too many swimmers enter to all compete in the pool at the same time. Each event is separated into heats of six or eight swimmers racing at a time (based on the number of lanes in the pool). Swimmers are seeded into heats by their entry times to allow each heat to be competitive. The slowest swimmers typically swim first, with the fastest eight swimming in the last heat of an event. Swimmers times are recorded and processed into an overall result for each event.
Heat Award	A ribbon, token or coupon to the winner of a single heat at an age group swim meet.



Heat Sheet	The pre-meet printed listings of swimmers' seed times in the various events at a swim meet. These sheets vary in accuracy, since coaches submit swimmers' times many weeks before the meet and swimmers scratch out of events at the last minute. Heat sheets are usually sold at the admissions table and are used mainly to make sure the swimmer has been properly entered in all events. Spectators can look at the seeding prior to a race and swimmers can see their order of events. See also "Psych Sheet."
High Point	An award given to the swimmer scoring the most points in a given age group at a swim meet. All meets do not offer high point awards; check the pre meet information.
HOD	House of Delegates. The ruling body of an LSC composed of the designated representative of each club plus the board of directors (BOD) of the LSC. One vote per club and board member. Also refers to the national USAS convention meeting
Horn	A sounding device used in place of a gun, mainly with a fully automatic timing system.
Illegal	Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification.
Individual Medley	A swimming event requiring all four of the competitive strokes on consecutive lengths of the race. The order must be: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Freestyle with equal distances of each stroke. Distance offered: 100 yards, 200 yards/meters, and 400 yards/meters.
IMX	IMX is a motivational program that allows swimmers across the nation to compare themselves to the thousands of other athletes in their age group. All you have to do is swim a combination of events, at least one time per season, and USA Swimming will automatically give you your ranking.
IM Ready	A stepping stone program to IMX where swimmers compete in a series of five events at shorter distances and achieve a score. In this program swimmers are not ranked.
Interval	A specific elapsed time for swimming or rest used during swim practice.
Invitational	Type of meet that requires a club to request an invitation to attend the meet.
Jump	An illegal start done by the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th member of a relay team. The swimmer on the block breaks contact with the block before the swimmer in the water touches the wall.
Junior Nationals	A USA-S Championship meet for swimmers 18 years old or less. Qualification times are necessary.
Kick Board	A flotation device used by swimmers during practice.



Lane	The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim. (ie) Lane 1 or Lane 2.
Lane Lines	Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from the starting end to the turning end of a pool, used for separating each lane and reducing the waves caused by racing swimmers.
Lap	One length of the course. Sometimes may also mean down and back (two lengths of the course).
Lap Counter	The large numbered cards (or the person turning the cards) used during the freestyle events 500 yards or longer. Counting is done from the end opposite the starting end. The numbers on the cards are "odd numbers" only with the final lap being designated by a bright orange card.
Leg	The part of a relay event swum by a single team member. A single stroke in the IM.
Long Course	Fifty meters. Olympic competition is conducted long course. High School competition is conducted short course (25 yards). Swim seasons are broken into short course meets during the fall and winter, and long course meets in the late spring and summer.
LSC	Local Swim Committee. The local level administrative division of the corporation (USA-S) with supervisory responsibilities within certain geographic boundaries designated by the Corporation. There are 59 LSCs.
Malfunction	A mechanical or electronic failure – not a human failure by the swimmer.
Mark	A starter's command to swimmers to take their final starting position on the block before a race.
Marshall	The adult(s) (or officials) who control the crowd and swimmer flow at a swim meet.
Meet	A series of events held in one program.
Meet Director	The official in charge of the administration of a meet. The person directing the "dry side" of the meet.
Meters	The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specifications using the metric system. Long Course meters is 50 meters, short course meters is 25 meters.
NAGT	National Age Group Time Standard
Nationals	USA Swimming National Championship meets conducted in March/April (short course) and August (long course).
Non-Conforming Time	A short course time submitted to qualify for a long course meet, or vice versa.
NT	No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swam that event before.



Observed Meet	A meet that is not conducted according to USA Swimming rules (high school, YMCA) where a request for observation has been processed and approved in advance. Sufficient USA Swimming officials are present to certify that the athletes' swims are in compliance with USA Swimming technical rules.
Observed Swim	A swim observed by assigned USA Swimming officials for conformance with USA Swimming technical rules in a meet conducted under other than USA Swimming rules.
Officials	The certified adult volunteers who operate the many facets of a swim competition on deck.
Olympic Trials	The USA-S sanctioned long course swim meet held the year of the Olympic Games to decide what swimmers will represent the USA on our Olympic Team. Qualification times are faster than Senior Nationals. OT
Official Time.	The swimmers event time recorded to one hundredth of a second (.01).
Open Competition	Competition which any qualified club, organization, or individual may enter.
Pace Clock	The electronic clocks or large clocks with highly visible numbers and second hands, positioned at the ends or sides of a swimming pool so the swimmers can read their times during warm-ups or swim practice.
Paddle	Colored plastic devices worn on the swimmers hands during swim practice.
Plunger	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. There are usually three buttons on the plunger as the swimmer touches the pad.
Positive Check-In	The procedure required before a swimmer swims an event in a deck-seeded or pre-seeded meet. The swimmer must mark their name on a list posted by the meet host. (See: Check-In)
Practice	The scheduled workouts swimmers attend with their swim team/club.
Prelims	Session of a Prelims/Finals meet in which the qualification heats are conducted.
Prelims-Finals	Type of meet with two sessions of competition per day. The preliminary heats are usually held in the morning or early afternoon sessions. The fastest six or eight swimmers (consolation heat) return in the evening to compete in the Finals session. A swimmer who has qualified in the Consolation Finals may not place in the Championship Finals even if their finals time would place them and vice versa.



Pre-seeded	A meet conducted without a bull pen in which a swimmer knows what lane and heat they are in by looking at the meet heat sheet or posted meet program.
Psych Sheet	An entry sheet showing all swimmers entered into each individual event. Sometimes referred to as a "Heat Sheet" or meet program. However, a "heat sheet" would show not only every swimmer in an event, but also what heat and lane they are swimming in.
Pull Buoy	A flotation device used for pulling by swimmers in practice.
Qualifying Times	Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer. See "A" "AA" (etc.) times.
Recall Rope	A rope across the width of the racing pool for the purpose of stopping swimmers who were not aware of a false start. The rope is about ½ way for yard pools and about 50 feet from the starting end on meter pools.
Referee	The head official at a swim meet in charge of all the "Wet Side" administration and decisions.
Relays	A swimming event in which 4 swimmers participate as a relay team each swimmer swimming an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays: 1) Medley relay- One swimmer swims Backstroke, one swimmer swims breaststroke, one swimmer swims Butterfly, one swimmer swims freestyle, in the order. 2) Freestyle relay – Each swimmer swims freestyle. Free relays are conducted over 200 yards/meters, and 800 yards/meters distances.
Sanction	A permit issued by an LSC to a USA-S group member to conduct an event or meet.
Sanction Fee	The amount paid by a USA-S group member to an LSC for issuing a sanction.
Sanctioned Meet	A meet that is approved by the LSC in which it is held. Meet must be conducted according to USA Swimming rules. All participants, including coaches, athletes and officials, must be USA Swimming members.
Schedule	USA-S or LSC list of meets with dates, meet host, meet location, type of meet, and contacts address and phone.
Scratch	To withdraw from an event after having declared an intention to participate. Some meets have scratch deadlines and specific scratch rules, and if not followed, swimmer can be disqualified from remaining events.
Seed	Assign the swimmers heats and lanes according to their submitted or preliminary times.



Seeding	Deck Seeding – swimmers are called to report to the clerk of the course. After scratches are determined, the event is seeded. Pre Seeding – swimmers are arranged in heats according to submitted times, usually a day prior to the meet.
Senior Meet	A meet that is for senior level swimmers and is not divided into age groups. Qualification times are usually necessary and will vary depending on the level of the meet.
Senior Nationals	A USA-S National Championship meet for swimmers of any age as long as the qualification times are met.
Session	Portion of meet distinctly separated from other portions by locale, time, type of competition, or age group.
Short course	A 25 yard or 25 meter pool.
Speeding ticket	Card of certificate proving swimmer has made a specific time in an event. The card lists the distance, stroke, swimmers time, date and place of meet and swimmers name.
Splash	The USA Swimming magazine that is mailed bi-monthly. A benefit of being a member of USA Swimming.
Split	A portion of an event, shorter than the total distance that is being timed. (ie) A swimmer's first 50 of a 100 race. The time is taken at the 50 as the swimmer swims the 100 race. It is common to take double splits for the longer races.
Start	The beginning of a race. The dive used to begin a race.
Starter	The official in charge of signaling the beginning of a race and insuring that all swimmers have a fair takeoff.
State	A meet held twice a year (short course and long course) sponsored by the LSC. In larger LSCs it is common to hold a championship senior meet and age group meet separately. Typically qualification times are necessary.
State Qualifier	A swimmer who has made the necessary cut off times to enter the state meet.
Stand-up	The command given by the starter or referee to release the swimmers from their starting position.
Step-Down	The command given by the starter or the referee to have the swimmers move off the blocks. Usually this command is an indication everything is not right for the race to start.
Stroke	There are 4 competitive strokes: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle.
Stroke Judge	The official positioned at the side of the pool, walking the length of the course as the swimmers race. If the Stroke Judge sees something illegal, they report to the referee and the swimmer may be disqualified.



Submitted Time	Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets.
Swim-off	In a Prelims/Finals type competition, a race after the scheduled event to break a tie. The only circumstance that warrants a swim-off is to determine which swimmer makes finals or an alternate, otherwise ties stand.
SWIMS	USA Swimming system that keeps track of every time swum by all swimmers. Available through the USA-S website.
Taper	The resting phase of a senior swimmer at the end of the season before the championship meet.
Timed Finals	Competition in which only heats are swum and final placings are determined by those times.
Time Standard	A time set by a meet or LSC or USA-S (etc) that a swimmer must achieve for qualification or recognition.
Timer	The volunteers sitting behind the starting blocks/finish end of pool, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.
Time Trial	An event or series of events where a swimmer may achieve or better a required time standard.
Top 10	A list of times compiled by the LSC or USA-S that recognizes the top 10 swimmers in each single age group (boys & girls) by each event and distance.
Touch Out	To reach the touchpad and finish first in a close race.
Touch Pad	The removable plate (on the end of pools) that is connected to an automatic timing system. A swimmer must properly touch the touchpad to register an official time in a race.
Unattached	An athlete USA member who competes, but does not represent a club or team. (Abbr. UN)
Unofficial Time	The time displayed on a read out board or read over the intercom by the announcer immediately after the race. After the time has been checked, it will become the official time.
USA-S	The governing body of swimming--USA Swimming.
USA Swimming	The national governing body of the sport headquartered in Colorado Springs.
USA-S ID Number	A 14-part number assigned to a swimmer after they have filled out the proper forms and paid their annual dues. The first 6 parts are numbers of a swimmer's birthdate: Month/Day/2-Digit Year using zeros as place holders. The next three spaces are the first three letters of the athlete's legal first name. The next letter is the middle initial, followed by the first four letters of the swimmer's last name. For example: USA-S ID# for swimmer Suzanne Eileen Nelson and born Aug.27, 1976 = 082776SUZENELS.



USOTC	United States Olympic Training Center located in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
VCC	Virtual Club Championships. The VCC recognizes and highlight clubs that are developing athletes and achieving success at multiple levels emphasizing the team element in club swimming. This program serves as a key part of the Athlete Development & Performance component of the Club Recognition Program.
Warm-down	The recovery swimming a swimmer does after a race when pool space is available.
Warm-up	The practice and “loosing” up session a swimmer does before the meet or their event.
Watch	The hand held device used by timers and coaches for timing a swimmers races and taking splits.
Whistle	The sound a starter/referee makes to signal for quiet before they give the command to start the race.
Yards	The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the American system. A short course yard pool is 25 yards (75 feet) in length.
Yardage	The distance a swimmer races are swims in practice. Total yardage can be calculated for each practice session.
Zones	The country is divided up into 4 major zones: Easter- Southern-Central – Western. At the end of the long course season the Zone Administration sponsors a championship age group meet for swimmers who achieve the Zone standards.