

(Excerpts from the [2020 USA Swimming Rules & Regulations](#) handbook)

ARTICLE 101

INDIVIDUAL STROKES AND RELAYS

101.1 STARTS

.1 Equipment — A loudspeaker start system conforming to 103.18, with or without an underwater recall device, and an electronic strobe signal visible to all manual timers for forward and backstroke starts, shall be the preferred starting device.

.2 The Start

A. At the commencement of each heat, the Referee shall signal to the swimmers by a short series of whistles to remove all clothing except for swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take and maintain their positions on the starting platform, the deck, or in the water. In backstroke and medley relay events, at the Referee's first long whistle, the swimmers shall immediately enter the water and at the second long whistle shall return without undue delay to the starting position.

B. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are under the Starter's control.

C. On the Starter's command "take your mark," the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position, in the forward start, with at least one foot at the front of the starting platform or the deck. Swimmers starting in the water must have at least one hand in contact with the wall or starting platform. When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.

D. When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command "take your mark," the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command "stand up" upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.

E. A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.

.3 False Starts

A. 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 violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks.

B. If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall. If the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a

violation occurred, the swimmer or swimmers who have false started shall be disqualified upon completion of the race.

C. If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.

D. A swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the "stand up" command.

E. Declared false start: swimmers reporting to the Referee prior to the start of their race and declaring their intent not to compete will be disqualified except as noted in 207.11.6D(1).

.4 Warning Signal — With the exception of relays, in events 500 yards or longer, the Starter or a designee shall sound a warning signal over the water at the finish end of the lane of the leading swimmer when that swimmer has two lengths plus five yards or five meters to swim. As an alternative, a bell warning signal may be given over each lane by a lane judge or timer for that lane.

.5 Deliberate Delay or Misconduct

A. The Starter shall report a swimmer to the Referee for delaying the start, for willfully disobeying an order or for any other misconduct taking place at the start, but only the Referee may disqualify a swimmer for such delay, willful disobedience or misconduct.

B. The Referee shall disqualify a swimmer who fails to appear at the starting platform ready to swim in time for the initial start of his/her heat.

C. Such disqualification shall not be charged as a false start.

101.2 BREASTSTROKE

.1 Start — The forward start shall be used.

.2 Stroke — After the start and after each turn when the swimmer leaves the wall, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm stroke and one leg kick in that order.

All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.

The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast on, under, or over the water.

The elbows shall be under water except for the final stroke before the turn, during the turn and for the final stroke at the finish. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The

hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn.

During each complete cycle, some part of the swimmer's head shall break the surface of the water. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer may take one arm stroke completely back to the legs. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke.

.3 Kick — After the start and each turn, at any time prior to the first breaststroke kick, a single butterfly kick is permitted. Following which, all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.

The feet must be turned outwards during the propulsive part of the kick. Scissors, alternating movements or downward butterfly kicks are not permitted except as provided herein. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly kick.

.4 Turns and Finish — At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. At the last stroke before the turn and at the finish, an arm stroke not followed by a leg kick is permitted.

The head may be submerged after the last arm pull prior to the touch, provided it breaks the surface of the water at some point during the last complete or incomplete cycle preceding the touch.

101.3 BUTTERFLY

.1 Start — The forward start shall be used.

.2 Stroke — After the start and after each turn, the swimmer's shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast. The swimmer is permitted one or more leg kicks, but only one arm pull under water, which must bring the swimmer to the surface. It shall be permissible for a swimmer to be completely submerged for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface. The swimmer must remain on the surface until the next turn or finish. From the beginning of the first arm pull, the body shall be kept on the breast except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Both arms must be brought forward simultaneously over the water and pulled back simultaneously under the water throughout the race.

.3 Kick — All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. The position of the legs or the feet need not be on the same level, but they shall not alternate in relation to each other. A scissors or breaststroke kicking movement is not permitted.

.4 Turns — At each turn the body shall be on the breast. The touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Once a touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner desired. The shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall.

.5 Finish — At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface.

101.4 BACKSTROKE

.1 Start — The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited. When using a backstroke ledge at the start, the toes of both feet must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad. Bending the toes over the top of the touchpad is prohibited.

.2 Stroke — The swimmer shall push off on his back and continue swimming on the back throughout the race. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it is permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.

.3 Turns — Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. During the turn the shoulders may be turned past the vertical toward the breast after which an immediate continuous single arm pull or immediate continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. The swimmer must have returned to a position on the back upon leaving the wall.

.4 Finish — Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back.

101.5 FREESTYLE

.1 Start — The forward start shall be used.

.2 Stroke — In an event designated freestyle, the swimmer may swim any style, except that in a medley relay or an individual medley event, freestyle means any style other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it shall be permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and each turn. By that point the head must have broken the surface.

.3 Turns — Upon completion of each length the swimmer must touch the wall.

.4 Finish — The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his person touches the wall after completing the prescribed distance.

101.6 INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY — The swimmer shall swim the prescribed distance in the following order: the first one-fourth, butterfly; the second one-fourth, backstroke; the third one-fourth, breaststroke; and the last one-fourth, freestyle.

.1 Start — The forward start shall be used.

.2 Stroke — The stroke for each one-fourth of the designated distance shall follow the prescribed rules for that stroke, except in the freestyle, the swimmer must be on the breast except when executing a turn.

.3 Turns

A. Intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke, except that in the freestyle turn, the swimmer must return to the breast before any kick or stroke.

B. The turns when changing from one stroke to another shall conform to the finish rules for the stroke just completed, and shall be as follows:

(1) Butterfly to Backstroke — The swimmer must touch as described in 101.3.5. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner, but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the back when the swimmer leaves the wall.

(2) Backstroke to Breaststroke — The swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall and the prescribed breaststroke form must be attained prior to the first arm stroke.

(3) Breaststroke to Freestyle — The swimmer must touch as described in 101.2.4. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner and must return to the breast before any kick or stroke.

.4 Finish — The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his/her person touches the wall after the prescribed distance.

101.7 RELAYS

.1 Freestyle Relay — Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance using any desired stroke(s). Freestyle finish rules apply.

.2 Medley Relay — Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance in the following order: first, backstroke; second, breaststroke; third, butterfly; and fourth, freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke used as described in 101.6 (Individual Medley) shall govern where applicable. At the end of each leg, the finish rule for each stroke applies in each case.

.3 Mixed Gender Relays — must consist of two (2) males and two (2) females.

.4 Rules Pertaining to Relay Races

A. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg in any relay event.

B. When automatic relay take-off judging is used, each swimmer must touch the touchplate or pad in his/her lane at the end of the course to have finished his/her leg of the relay race.

C. In relay races a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her teammate has concluded his/her leg.

D. Any relay team member and his/her relay team shall be disqualified from a race if a team member other than the swimmer designated to swim that leg enters the pool in the area where the race is being conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race. Exception: When an in-the-water start is required or such start is approved by the Referee.

E. Each relay team member shall leave the water immediately upon finishing his/her leg, except the last member.

F. In relay races, the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the starting platform (ground or deck) before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified.

G. In relay races involving in-the-water starts, the team of a swimmer who has lost touch with the end of the course before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified, unless the swimmer in default returns to the original starting point at the wall.

H. On relays, the second, third and fourth swimmers are prohibited from starting from the top of the adjustable back plate. A swimmer must have at least part of one foot in contact with the starting platform in front of the adjustable back plate during a relay exchange.