

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A TIMER

Timers are a significant resource at swim meets and play a very important role in the success of the swimmers and in the smooth operation of the meet. Some host teams use their members as timers, some bring in outside volunteers, and some rely on parents from participating clubs to share the responsibility. You may be asked to volunteer as a timer for meets, sometime during the season. If you are asked to time, please volunteer your services promptly and graciously (usually for one hour shifts per session, if everyone helps). Be courteous to your fellow volunteers by being on time for shift relief and share the responsibility equally, during the meet and from meet to meet.

While timers are volunteers, they are actually officials - so it's important to know the responsibilities, rules, and procedures of timing. Timers have 2 responsibilities: 1) make sure the right swimmer is in the right event, the right heat, and the right lane and 2) provide accurate backup times for every swim.

- USA Swim sanctioned meets use 3 timing systems: *automatic* (electronic touchpads), *semi-automatic* (buttons which stop the automatically started clock), and *manual* (digital watches). Usually, there are 2 timers per lane: one operates a button and a watch, while the other operates a button and writes the watch time on the cards or lane timer slips. The person with the clipboard is the Head Lane Timer. VCSL meets at normally at venues which do not utilize automatic timing systems, which makes the use of two timers per lane a requirement to get accurate times.
- Swimmers line up behind the starting blocks by lanes/heat for their swims. The Head Lane Timer ensures the correct swimmer is present to swim by checking the name of the swimmer against the card, lane timer slip, or heat sheet. Perform this check prior to the Referee's series of short whistles (that notifies the swimmers and timers it's time for the next heat). At the series of short whistles, make sure your swimmer is ready to swim and standing behind the block. When the Referee blows the long whistle (that signals the swimmers to step up onto the blocks), make sure your swimmer is stepping up. Sometimes it's confusing and difficult to hear - you must be alert and attentive. If a swimmer misses their heat, they can be disqualified. If there's a problem, get the Referee's attention immediately.
- Once all the swimmers are on the blocks, the Referee will turn the heat over to the Starter. The Starter will only say "Take your mark", then sound the start signal. The Referee and Starter are located on the side of the pool along with the Start Console. The Start Console emits the audio start signal and a simultaneous visual flash. Start your watch on the flash, not on the sound (do not push the button). If you miss the flash, start your watch on the sound of the start signal. Find a spot near your lane where you can see. If your watch fails to start (or stops during the race), raise it over your head and get the attention of the Chief Timer (usually called Head Timer). He/She will bring you another watch. Always start your watch for every heat, even if you don't have a swimmer in your lane. It may be needed by another timer.
- If your swimmer misses their heat, write "NS" on the card or lane timer sheet. If your swimmer gets out of the pool before the end of their race, write "DNF" on the card or lane timer sheet. During the race, count the laps of your swimmer. If it's 200Y/M or longer, mark them on the card, lane timer slip, or heat sheet, so you don't lose count. Don't rely on the scoreboard or lane counter! You need this information to determine when it's the last lap.
- Stop your watch and push the button at the end of the race when **any** part of your swimmer's body touches **any** part of the wall. Don't worry if it's legal or not - that's the S&T Judge's responsibility. Get right up to the edge of the pool and look down for the touch ... don't be afraid to get wet. Also, don't anticipate the touch. Push the button only once - that's all it takes. Every time you push it, a new time is recorded by the computer. Once you stop the watch and push the button, step back away from the blocks and record the watch time. Write the time to the hundredth of a second without rounding (i.e., 33.49). If you missed the finish, write "NT" on the card or lane timer slip. Don't try to match your time to the time on the scoreboard - it shouldn't be the same. If there's a big discrepancy, report it to the Chief Timer. A Runner will collect the card or lane timer slips after each heat or event, respectively.

- At the end of the race, things get very crowded at the blocks - 2 or 3 timers, an official, and some screaming swimmers. Move the swimmers back and work with the official to share the space. Also if your swimmer is having difficulty getting out of the pool after the race, help them.
- If the swimmer misses the touchpad or hits it late, write that (and any other anomaly) on the card or lane timer slip.
- For relays, check the name of each swimmer and make sure they swim in that order. If they don't, make a note on the card and notify the Referee.
- Stay back behind the blocks, except when stopping your watch and pushing your button at the end of the race. If you get between the blocks at the start, you may block the Starter's and/or Referee's line of sight to the heat. Your movement could also distract them or a swimmer during the start.
- For 25Y/50M events, your swimmer may start at the opposite end of the pool from where you are standing. In this case, make sure to check your swimmer's name at the end of the race. If it's not the right swimmer, write their name on the card or lane timer slip and notify the Chief Timer.
- Some meets use overhead starts - swimmers in the previous heat remain in the water for the start of the subsequent heat. This saves time and gives the swimmers a little rest at the end of their race. You may occasionally have to remind your swimmer to stay in the water. Things will be moving pretty quickly, so you must pay attention to the whistles and where you are in the race. The Referee's short whistles will come before the race is over (usually when the swimmers are about halfway out on the last lap) and the long whistle will come when the last swimmer touches the wall. You have to get your swimmer up, stop the watch and hit the button, record the watch time, clear the watch, and get ready for the start quickly. It takes teamwork. If we are not using overhead starts, make sure your swimmer quickly moves back behind the blocks - if they want their times, give it to them there, not up at the edge of the pool.
- If you need a break to go to the restroom, notify the Chief Timer. He/She will get a relief timer for your lane.

It's very important that you take your responsibility seriously. The swimmers work hard and are giving it their best shot. They deserve the same in return. You help keep the meet flowing smoothly by making sure swimmers are ready for their races. And, if using an automatic timing system, it usually operates correctly and provides the swimmers their Official Times, often the Timing Judge needs your backup times to determine the Official Time when the system malfunctions.