



WELCOME TO THE VIRGINIA GATORS!

Welcome!

We first want say how excited we are that you decided to join our team. We don't take your decision lightly and can't wait to start this journey with you.

Swimming promotes healthy bodies and minds, creates opportunities for life-long friendships, and is (maybe most importantly) fun. However, it can also be confusing at times, especially if you aren't familiar with the sport. That's why we created this guide!

This guide contains information that will help you navigate your first swim meet, and provide definitions for words you might hear around the pool. If you have any questions, reach out to parents of older swimmers and/or the Gator Board.

Love,
The Gator Family

A GUIDE TO YOUR FIRST SWIM MEET

Meets are a great opportunity for swimmers to see that their hard work in practice is paying off. Because there is a good amount of waiting between events, swimmers also have ample time to hang out and have some fun. Please help your child focus on their own races and improving their times. Worry about other swimmers going faster than them is a waste of time and energy! Swimming is a great sport for a lot of reasons, one of them being the focus on self-improvement over winning.

MEET ENTRIES

Swimmers are entered in events a couple days to a week before the meet. Your swimmer's coach knows which events your child is ready for. Depending on the meet, the coach or the parent will enter the swimmer in their events. If you are unsure of the races that your child is able to successfully complete, reach out to his or her coach.

WHAT TO BRING

Please make sure that your child has a tight-fitting swimsuit, Gator swim cap, and goggles. If possible, it is useful to have a practice suit and a meet suit. Bringing an extra cap and pair of goggles to meets is a good idea, as caps have been known to tear and goggles break prior to a race. Also, please bring several towels and a sweatshirt or light jacket. One towel is not enough as kids will be getting in and out of the water. You will also want to bring water or other drinks and some light snacks—meets usually last 2.5 to 3.5 hours. Please note that snacks are usually (but not always) for sale at the meet. Bigger meets sometimes have a swim shop where goggles, caps, and suits can be purchased.

Parents can bring foldable (camp) chairs. There is usually some bleacher seating, but not always enough to accommodate all the spectators. Spectators should wear light clothing as it will get warm during the meet.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARRIVE

When you get to the pool, please have your child find a coach who will check them in. Each swimming race (event) has a number. Your child will know which events they are swimming, and you can find the event numbers in the heat sheet (which you purchase at the meet for a few dollars or find on an app called "Meet Mobile"). Normally, parents write the event numbers that each child will be swimming on the child's arm with a

sharpie marker. That way your child can keep track of which events s/he is swimming. Next, swimmers will get in the water to warm up with their team before the meet starts.

After warm-ups, we ask that the kids sit in a designated area with their teammates so that we can find them before their races. Sometimes younger kids (8 and under or 10 and under) are “staged” in an area called the Clerk of Course. The Clerk of Course sets up the younger kids and gets them to the blocks. When it is time for a younger (or new) swimmer’s event, a coach will direct the child to where s/he needs to go. Older and more experienced swimmers will get to the blocks themselves. The most important thing is that the kids are in a place where we can find them and that they are paying attention.

Swim meets are fun AND chaotic!

If you haven’t swum competitively before, you may be struck by how chaotic the meets appear. That’s the nature of swim meets. Some kids will be nervous about swimming in the meet. The best thing to tell them is that the coaches put them in their event(s) because they know they can do it. Also, you can remind your child that swimming is really about doing their own personal best—for some kids this means simply finishing the race, for others it means getting a best time. It doesn’t matter whether they win, come in second, or come in last. Even very accomplished swimmers got beat when they began. If your child is very nervous about the meet, please bring them to talk to a coach—they might be able to help!

WHERE TO BUY SWIM GEAR

The Virginia Gators are affiliated with TYR and we have a team portal on the website found [HERE](#). You get a discount from TYR when you shop through the portal, and the Gators get a portion of the sale. Win-win! TYR carries practice suits, racing suits, caps & goggles, backpacks, equipment (kickboards, pull buoys, fins), parkas, apparel, etc.

The norm is to order swimsuits online. Most girls wear sizes ranging from 20 to 32. Generally, a size 20 or 22 corresponds to a girl size 6 or 8, a 24 to a size 8 or 10, a 26 to size 10 or 12, a 28 to size 12 or 14, and a 30 for a size 14-16. Sizing depends somewhat on the suit brand and most will provide sizing charts (when in doubt, measure!). Newer swimmers tend to like their suits a little looser, while more experienced swimmers buy them much smaller.

Boys suits are a bit easier to size because the size represents waist circumference. Generally, 6-year-olds wear a size 18 or 20, 8-year-olds a 20 or 22, etc. Jammers are the knee length tight suits that most new swimmers are comfortable wearing. Briefs are smaller and have made a comeback, but before buying make sure that your child feels comfortable wearing it! (Briefs fit like very tight underwear).

Goggle brands that fit younger kids are *TYR Swimple*, *TYR Black Hawks*, *Speedo Skoogles*, and *Sporti Cabo Jr.* (for the smallest kids). For bigger kids (10 and over), *TYR Black Ops youth or junior* and *Speedo Vanquisher Jr.* are great choices. Even bigger kids (generally 13 and older) fit into *TYR Black Ops Women*, *TYR Black Ops*, *Vanquisher Women's* or *Vanquisher* goggles (*Women's* fit are slightly smaller than the regular adult fit). If your child wears glasses, TYR, Speedo, and Sporti have inexpensive optical goggles.

New swimmers need a training suit, goggles, and a swim cap. Once they are hooked on the sport, a TYR swim backpack is really useful (it fits lots of towels for big meets) as is a parka (pool decks can be chilly—even in summer). If you are looking for swim-related gifts, swimmers love swim related t-shirts (you can find a lot of them at swimoutlet.com or Amazon) and fun bag tags (for their swim backpack).

SWIMMING GLOSSARY

EVENT

An event is an individual swim race broken down by distance (e.g., 50, 100, 200, 500) and stroke (backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle, IM). Events are also broken down by age and gender. Swimmers typically swim 1-5 events in a swim meet, and most meets have a daily limit. Events are numbered. Events can be individual or relays.

HEAT

A heat is a group of swimmers who are swimming at the same time. Every event has several heats. Generally, heats are swum slowest to fastest (and swimmers with no time or “NT” are in the first heat).

LANE

Each swimmer is assigned a lane. Lanes are separated by lane lines, and swimmers start by diving off the blocks or the side in their lane. Swimmers are usually arranged in heats with the fastest swimmers in the middle lanes.

AGE GROUP SWIMMING

You will often hear swimmers referred to as “age groupers” or a meet is designated as an “age group meet.” This means that races are arranged by age groups and swimmers are usually 14 years of age and under. Swimmers will be competing against children in their age group. Standard age groups are: 6 and under, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14. Senior swimmers are usually considered 15 and over, though some meets implement 15-16 and 17-18 age groups.

SEED TIME

Seed time is the fastest time a swimmer has swum in an event prior to the submission of entries for the meet. This is the time entered for the swimmer for the event, and is a good goal to try to beat. It also factors into lane placement and heat number

WARM UP

Right before the meet begins, swimmers get in the pool and practice for a short time with their team. This helps swimmers loosen up, get used to the pool that they are swimming in, and fine tune starts and turns. A coach generally runs the warm-up and will tell your child what to do.

HEAT SHEET

Heat sheets contain information regarding the events, heats, and lanes that swimmers are assigned to. The heat sheet tells you which heat and lane your child is swimming in. Heat sheets are often sold at meets for a couple of dollars, or they are included in meet information presented in Meet Mobile (an app that is super helpful if your child sticks with swimming).

PSYCH SHEET

Whereas the heat sheet is arranged by heats and lanes, a psych sheet is a simple listing of an event that shows swimmers ranked in a specific event in a particular meet. The Psych Sheet includes each event with the swimmers listed in that event in the order of seed time from fastest to slowest. Names, ages, times, and teams are usually listed in a Psych Sheet.

CLERK OF COURSE

Some meets will have a clerk of course area for younger swimmers (8 and under or 10 and under) at meets. Young swimmers report to the clerk of course prior to their event. The people who are running the clerk of course put the swimmers in the order that they are swimming according to heats and lanes (swimmers usually sit in chairs). The clerk of course then walks each heat up to the blocks.

SHORT COURSE

meets that are swum in a 25 yard (SCY) or 25 meter pool (SCM). Meets running from September to March are short course meets and are usually swum in a 25 yard pool. The Gator Aquatic Center houses a 25 yard short course pool.

LONG COURSE

meets are held in a 50 meter pool (LCM). Thus, the shortest distance in a long course meet is 50 meters. Long course season is in the summer and meets are frequently held at outdoor pools. The pool at Fallon Park is a long course, 50 meter pool.

QUALIFYING TIMES

Some meets will have qualifying times. To be entered in the meet, the swimmer must have swum a particular time in a given event. An example of a meet that requires qualifying times is the Virginia Age Group Championship.

Below is a link to the times that qualify swimmers for the Virginia state championship meet. Note that there are different times based on the age group and meet format. Swimmers can qualify with times that have been achieved in a short course yard pool (SCY), a short course meter pool (SCM), or a long course meter pool (LCM). You can find the current Virginia Age Group Champs Qualifying times [HERE](#).

There are faster standards for Senior swimmers (those who are 15 and over). The Senior Championship qualifying times for seniors can be found [HERE](#).

AGE GROUP MOTIVATIONAL STANDARDS

Every couple of years USA Swimming sets time standards to help swimmers in goal setting. The time standards set varying marks for swimmers of every age group, ranging from B to AAAA based on relative speed within the age group. Each age group has B standards, BB standards, A standards, AA standards, AAA standards and AAAA standards to give swimmers benchmarks for goal-setting and to track improvement. Motivational times are set for both long and short course. You can find the current standards [HERE](#).

RELAY

Some meets will include relays where groups of 4 swimmers from one team compete against other teams' relays. Some of the relays are all freestyle, and some (the medley relays) include one child swimming each of the four strokes. The order of the medley relay is backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle. Coaches usually get splits for each child, and the time for the swimmer who goes first is an official time (because they have a flat start, not a rolling relay start). Done well, a relay start is faster than a flat start because the swimmer who is diving in can be moving before the swimmer in the water touches the wall. However, the toes of the swimmer who is diving in must be touching the block when the swimmer in the water touches the wall. Otherwise the relay is disqualified. Coaches work on relay starts in practices so each swimmer knows how relays work and when they should dive in.

IM

IM stands for Individual Medley. In this race, individual swimmers swim all four strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle. IM races can range from 100 yards/meters (1 length of each stroke) to 400 yards/meters (4 lengths of each stroke).

SCRATCH

A scratch is when a swimmer enters an event, but decides not to swim the race the day of the meet. Scratches are not encouraged and need to go through the coaches.

DQ

DQ stands for disqualified. The most common reasons that swimmers are DQ'd are stroke infractions, illegal turns/finishes, and false starts. Every swimmer gets DQ'd at some point in their swimming career. The swimmer is not told directly by the official (but the official raises their hand while the race is happening). Rather, the official gives one of the team coaches a DQ slip that contains the reason for the disqualification. Coaches use this information to work on strokes and turns to make sure that the swimmer is legal next time!

FALSE START

Right before swimmers dive in, the official says "take your mark." At that point swimmers grab the block (or pull up in the case of backstroke). Once swimmers are in position, they must not move. If they dive in early or wiggle around, the official might declare a false start (which is a type of disqualification).

MEET INFORMATION

You will receive meet information several weeks prior to a meet (usually via email). The meet announcement is usually attached to the email. The meet announcement includes information regarding events, awards, warm-up times, start times, etc. Note that event entries are always due well before the meet. You will be told the due date for meet entries. You can also find information regarding sanctioned VA meets at the official VA swimming website [HERE](#).

MEET MOBILE

Meet Mobile is a useful app that you can download to your smartphone. You can search meet mobile for particular meets and then see what your child is swimming. Meet mobile also displays results of each race in (close to) real time. Most swim meets are uploaded to meet mobile. For more information regarding the Meet Mobile app, click [HERE](#)!

TYPES OF MEETS

Some meets are very small intersquad or dual meets. Other meets are big prelim/finals meets. Generally, championship meets are prelim/finals meets. Depending on age group, prelims can be in the morning or in the afternoon. Finals are usually in the evening, and depending on the size of the meet, the top 8 to 32 swimmers will advance to finals. Prelim/finals meets are more common for ages 11 and over.

TECHNICAL SUITS

Technical suits or "fast suits" are swim suits that are made specifically for racing. In 2020, technical suits were banned for swimmers 12 and under. You can find technical suit restrictions [HERE](#).

Older swimmers most often wear technical suits at championship meets. All the major swim suit producers (e.g., TYR, Speedo, Arena, etc) make technical suits in a range of price points. Generally tech suits range from \$100 to \$600 dollars and last (when worn only at big meets and taken care of properly) about one year. If you are looking for a tech suit, know that Gators can buy them at a discounted price through our TYR representative/portal.

UNDERWATERS

Sometimes you will hear someone say “she has great underwaters!” This refers to the kicking that is done off the start or after a turn before the swimmer breaks the surface of the water. Underwaters have been referred to as the “fifth stroke” because of their importance for fast swimming.

“CALL FOR TIMERS”

Parent volunteers are needed for any swim meet to go smoothly. The most common way that parents can help is by timing. Timing is really easy and you have an excellent vantage point to watch your swimmer. At the beginning of a meet, you will often hear a call for timers. This means that they need a couple more people to help out. If it is your child’s first meet, you probably want to be available for them. However, once your child has done a couple meets, sign up to be a timer. At the beginning of the meet there is always a short timers’ meeting where the head official explains the duties and answers questions. Again, it is easy and you have the best seat in the house!

Did you hear a term that wasn’t mentioned above? If yes, check out the following link containing a comprehensive list of swim term [HERE](#).