



Know the Rules!



The rules are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition. The explanations below are intended to help parents and swimmers understand the technical rules of our sport. They are a cursory overview. For specific language on any rules, consult *USA Swimming Rules and Regulations*.

Starts

For Breaststroke, Butterfly, Freestyle, Individual Medley, and Freestyle Relay events, swimmers must use a forward start from the blocks, from the deck, or in the water. For Backstroke and Medley Relay events, swimmers must use a backstroke start from in the water.

For forward starts, on the Take Your Mark command, the swimmer must promptly assume their start position facing the turn end with one foot at the front of the block (or hand in contact with the wall if in the water). The swimmer shall remain stationary until the Start signal is sounded.

For backstroke starts, on the Take Your Mark command, the swimmer must promptly assume their start position facing the start end with both hands placed on the gutter or starting grips and both feet placed on the wall. The swimmer cannot stand in or on the gutter, place toes above the lip of the gutter or bend the toes over the lip of the gutter before or after the start. The swimmer shall remain stationary until the Start signal is sounded.

A false start occurs when a swimmer leaves their mark (starts) prior to the Start signal sounding. Swimmers are responsible for their own starts (can't be affected by actions of other swimmers).

Common disqualifications: delay of meet, false start

Breaststroke

After the start and after each turn, once the swimmer leaves the wall, the swimmer's body shall be kept on the breast.

The hands shall not be brought past the hip line except during the first arm pull of each pullout. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward on the second arm stroke of the pullout.

Breaststroke is a cycle stroke and it shall be one arm stroke followed by one leg kick. Any movement of the arms must be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement. The rules define the horizontal plane as the surface of the water. The elbows must remain in contact with the water except for the last stroke into the turn or finish. The swimmer must touch the wall with two hands at the same time during turns and finishes.

During the pullout, the swimmer may execute a single butterfly kick during or at the completion of the first arm pull. If a butterfly kick is used, the swimmer must follow it with a breaststroke kick. All movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement. The feet must be turned outward during the propulsive part of the kick. A scissors, alternating, or downward butterfly kick is not permitted, except as mentioned above.

Common disqualifications: kick prior to pull, hands past the hipline, two strokes under water, illegal kicks, illegal touches, arms or legs not in the same plane, non-simultaneous arms

Butterfly

During the stroke, the arms must be brought forward over the water and pulled back simultaneously. The arm is defined as the portion of the body which extends from the shoulder to the wrist. Over the water means the arm, as defined above, must break the surface of the water during the recovery phase of each stroke. The swimmer must touch the wall with two hands at the same time during turns and finishes.

After the start and each turn, the head must break the surface of the water by the 15-meter mark. Once the swimmer is on the surface, they must remain on the surface throughout the swim, except after the turn and at the finish (defined as the touch at the end of the race).

All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. A scissor, breaststroke or alternating kick is not allowed.

Common disqualifications: head not up by 15M, underwater recovery, illegal kicks, illegal touches, non-simultaneous arms, not on breast off wall, submerged during the swim/prior to the turn/prior to the finish

Backstroke

The swimmer shall push off the wall on their back and remain on their back throughout the race.

After the start and each turn, the head must break the surface of the water by the 15-meter mark. Once the swimmer is on the surface, they must remain on the surface throughout the swim, except after the turn and at the finish.

Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. During the turn the swimmer is allowed to roll to their breast and take a continuous single arm pull or simultaneous double arm pull to initiate the turn. When the pulling hand comes to a rest - usually at the hip line - a flip turn shall be initiated. After each turn, once the swimmer leaves the wall, the swimmer's body shall be kept on the back.

At the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on their back.

Common disqualifications: head not up by 15M, delay initiating the pull, delay initiating the turn, multiple strokes, no touch at turn, not on back off wall, pulling on lane line, standing on the bottom, submerged during the swim/prior to the turn/prior to the finish, past vertical during the swim /at the finish

Freestyle

The swimmer may swim any style they desire in a freestyle event. After the start and each turn, the head must break the surface of the water by the 15-meter mark. Once the swimmer is on the surface, they must remain on the surface throughout the swim, except after the turn and at the finish. Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. If a swimmer chooses to swim butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke in a freestyle event, their time will be recorded as a freestyle time.

Common disqualifications: head not up by 15M, no touch at turn, pulling on lane line, walking or pushing off the bottom, submerged during the swim/prior to the turn/prior to the finish

Individual Medley

The swimmer shall swim the prescribed distance in the following order: one-fourth butterfly, one-fourth backstroke, one-fourth breaststroke and one-fourth freestyle according to the rules of each stroke.

Intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the rules of that stroke. The turns when changing from one stroke to another shall conform to the finish rules for the stroke that is being completed and the starting rules of the next stroke.

In the freestyle leg of the individual medley, the swimmer may not use one of the other three strokes.

Common disqualifications: strokes out of order, stroke infractions from above

Relays

The relay is a race by a team of four swimmers, each swimming for one-fourth of the prescribed distance.

For freestyle relays, the rules for freestyle apply. For medley relays, the stroke order is backstroke, butterfly, breaststroke and freestyle and the rules for each stroke apply. In the freestyle leg of the medley relay, the swimmer may not use one of the other three strokes.

For exchanges between swimmers, the swimmer on the blocks must remain in contact with the block (or wall if using an in-water start) until the incoming swimmer touches the wall.

Common disqualifications: strokes out of order, swimmers out of order, stroke infractions from above, early takeoff during exchange