

# Swimming Terminology

**Age Group:** Division of swimmers according to age, usually in two-year bands.

**Alternate Breathing:** In freestyle swimming, breathing to the right side then swimming three strokes and breathing to the left side, then swimming three strokes and breathing to the right side, etc.

**Anaerobic Training:** Training that improves your efficiency of your body's energy, producing systems that do not require oxygen and can increase your muscular strength and tolerance for acid-base imbalances (such as the production of lactic acid) during high intensity effort.

**Anchor:** The final swimmer in a relay. Also, refers to the point in the stroke pattern where the hand feels the most resistance and begins effective propulsive movement.

**Angle of Attack:** The position or degree of angle that the hand enters the water.

**Backstroke:** One of the 4 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 I. M.

**Balance:** Refers to body position. Proper balance implies that your hips and head position are equally close to the surface of the water as you swim, as well as rolling equally to each side during the freestyle and backstroke.

**Beep:** The starting sound from an electronic timing system.

**Blocks:** The starting platforms located behind each lane. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable, but also incorporate a bar to allow swimmers to perform backstroke starts.

**Body Position:** The way your body sits in the water during swimming. Ideal body position requires that your body is as straight and long and as close to the surface of the water as possible.

**Body Roll:** Refers to freestyle and backstroke swimming, rolling from the left of your body to the right side and back again, etc. Swimming "flat" would be the sensation of swimming directly on your stomach all the time.

**Bottom:** The floor of the pool. In some pools these are movable to allow variation in the depth and use of the pool.

**Breaststroke:** One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swum as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the I.M.

**Butterfly:** One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed FLY) is swum as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the I.M.

**Cap:** The silicone or latex covering worn on the head of swimmers. The colors and team logo adorning these caps are limitless. National caps, State caps, award caps, plain practice caps, etc.

**Cards:** Entry cards handed to the swimmer by the coaches or meet runners and given to the timer behind the lane. Cards usually list the swimmers name, ASA number, seed time, event

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number, event description, and the lane and heat number the swimmer will swim in. Each event has a separate card.

**Catch:** The point in the stroke pattern where the hand feels the most resistance and begins effective propulsive movement.

**Circle Swim:** Done when there are more than two swimmers in a lane. Swimmers swim up on the right side staying close to the lane line and return on the other in the same fashion. Always stay to the right of the black centre line. Each swimmer leaves 5 seconds apart so there is space between each person in the lane. This is referred to as lane etiquette, which includes other matters involving common courtesy.

**Clock:** The big clock on the wall or deck is used for interval training. The red hand goes around every minute (60 seconds). The 60 is sometimes referred to as the "top" and the 30 as the "bottom." Learn to calculate your times. Swimmers who watch the clock and know their times improve the most: they get feedback, learn pace, and improve technique.

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

**Deadline:** The date meet entries must be submitted to the host team for them to be accepted. Making the meet deadline may not guarantee acceptance into a meet since some meet events can be 'full' before the entry deadline.

**Deck Level:** This is a system of re-circulating water along the sides of a pool, at the water line or just below the level of the water. It generates a continuous flow out of the pool and into the filtration system, which is a design that is very successful at preventing waves reflecting off the side of the pool.

**Deck:** The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an 'authorized' person may be on the deck during a swim competition.

**Dehydration:** The abnormal depletion of body fluids (water). This is the most common cause of swimmers cramps and sick feelings.

**Descending:** Intervals or swims that decrease in time, i.e. 1:15, 1:10, 1:05, 1:00.

**Disqualified:** A swimmer's performance is not counted due to a rule infraction.

**Distance Freestyle:** Mostly distances greater than 200 yards/meters.

**Distance:** *Short course* are: 25 yards (1 length), 50 yards (2 lengths), 100 yards (4 lengths), 200 yards (8 lengths), 400 yards (16 lengths), 800 yards (32 lengths), and 1500 yards (60 lengths). *Long course* 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).

**Dive:** Entering the water head first at the start of the race.

**Diving Pit:** 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 swim-down pool with proper supervision.

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**Drag suit:** A second loose fitting swim suit worn by swimmers in workout and warm-up to add a certain amount of weight and resistance to the flow of the water around the swimmer.

**Dropped: Time:** When a swimmer goes faster than their previous performance they have 'dropped their time'.

**Dry land:** The exercises and various strength programs swimmers do out of the water.

**Electronic Timing:** Timing system operated electronically. The timing system usually has touch pads in the water, junction boxes on the pool side with hook up cables, buttons for backup timing, and a computer type console that prints out the results of each race. Some systems are linked to a scoreboard that displays each swimmer's time.

**Eligible to Compete:** The status of a member swimmer that means they are registered and have met all the requirements.

**Entry Fees:** The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies, depending on the type of meet.

**Entry Limit:** Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept before the meet will be closed and all other entries returned.

**Entry:** An individual, relay team, or team event list into a swim competition. Also refers to how the hand enters the water at the beginning of the stroke (freestyle, backstroke and butterfly).

**Event:** A race or stroke over a given distance.

**FINA:** The international rules-making organization for the sport of swimming.

**False Start Rope:** A recall rope across the width of the racing pool for the purpose of stopping swimmers who were not aware of a false start.

**False Start:** This occurs when a swimmer leaves the starting block, or is moving on the block, before the starter starts the race.

**Final Results:** The results of each race of a swim meet that is sent to each participating team.

**Final:** The championship final of an event in which the fastest eight swimmers from the heats compete.

**Finish:** The final propulsive phase of the arm stroke before the hand leaves the water.

**Fins:** Large rubber or other material fin type devices that fit on a swimmer's feet, and used during training to aid development of kick and ankle flexibility.

**Flags:** Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately 5 yards/meters from the wall to allow backstroke swimmers to determine where the end of the pool is.

**Freestyle:** One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Freestyle (or Free) is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the I.M. There are no rules governing the form of the stroke.

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**Gallery:** The viewing area for spectators during the swimming competition.

**Goals:** Short-range and long-range targets set by swimmers, and approved by coaches, to help swimmers reach their objectives.

**Goggles:** Eyewear worn by swimmers in the pool to protect the swimmers' eyes from the effects of chlorine in the water. Also improves vision underwater.

**Gravity Wave:** Wave action caused by the swimmers' bodies moving through the water. Gravity waves move down and forward from the swimmer, bouncing off the bottom of the pool and returning to the surface in the form of turbulence.

**Gun:** The blank-firing pistol used by the starter to start races.

**Gutter:** The area at the edges of the pool in which water overflows and is re-circulated into the pool. Deep gutters catch surface wave and don't allow them to wash back into the pool and affect races. Alternatively, a pool may have no gutter and be deck level.

**Heats:** A division of an event when there are too many swimmers in the event to all compete at the same time. The results are compiled by swimmers' time swum, after all heats of the event are completed.

**High Elbow:** May refer to keeping a high elbow in the recovery phase of freestyle, which encourages better balance and body roll. High elbow can refer to the pull phase of freestyle where the elbow remains in a higher position over the hand, giving the sensation of reaching over a barrel when pulling through the water.

**Horn:** A sounding device used in place of a gun. Used mainly with a fully automatic timing system.

**Hypoxia Training:** Practicing breath control with a decreased concentration of oxygen that causes the constriction of blood vessels, which in turn help muscles work more efficiently with the oxygen that is available.

**IM:** Individual Medley, all four competitive strokes in the order of butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

**Interval Training:** Consists of repeated bouts of moderate to high-intensity activity separated by brief rest periods of approximately 20-40 seconds.

**Interval:** A specific elapsed time for swimming and rest used during swim practice.

**Kick Board:** A flotation device used during training where the swimmers use only their legs to propel them forward.

**Kick:** The leg movements of a swimmer.

**Lactic Acid:** In the absence of oxygen, as with anaerobic training, your body will breakdown muscle sugar (glycogen) using a process that produces an acidic by-product waste called lactate acid. Your muscles may start to burn or ache as lactate acid accumulates and your body can't keep up with removing it from your muscle stores.

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**Lane Lines:** Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from the starting end to the turning end for the purpose of separating each lane.

**Lane Ropes:** The dividers used to delineate the individual lanes. These are made of individual finned disks strung on a cable which rotate on the cable when hit by a wave. The rotating disks dissipate surface tension waves in a competitive pool.

**Lane:** The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim during a race.

**Lap Counter:** The large numbered cards (or the person turning the cards) used during the freestyle events of 400 yards/meters or longer. Counting is done from the starting end.

**Late Entries:** Meet entries from a team that are received by the meet host after the entry deadline. These entries are usually not accepted and are returned to sender.

**Leg:** The part of a relay event swum by a single team member.

**Length:** The extent of the competitive course from end to end.

**Long Course:** A 50-meter pool. The Olympic games, as well as all major international competitions, are conducted in a long course (50 meter) pool.

**Lycra:** A stretch material used to make competitive swim suits and swim caps.

**Marks:** The command to swimmers to take their starting position at the beginning of a race.

**Marshal:** An official who helps control the crowd and swimmer flow at a swim meet.

**Medals:** Awards given to the swimmers at meets. They vary in size and design and method of presentation.

**Meet Director:** The person in charge of the administration of the meet.

**Mile:** The slang referring to the 1500 meter or the 1650 yard freestyle, both of which are slightly short of a mile.

**NQT:** National Qualifying Time

**NT:** No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swum that event before.

**Negative Split:** The second half of the swim is swum faster than the first half. For example, in a 100 yard swim, the first 50 yards is swum in 30 seconds, while the second 50 yards is swum in less than 30 seconds.

**Novice:** A beginner or someone who does not have experience.

**Officials:** The certified, or qualified adult volunteers, who operate the many facets of a swim competition. Examples are starter, timers, and judges that watch for rules infractions..

**Open Event:** Any age swimmer may compete in the event.

**PB:** Short for 'Personal Best', it is the best performance a swimmer has personally done in a particular event.

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**Pace Clock:** The 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.

**Plaque:** A type of award (wall plaque) given to swimmers at a meet.

**Prelim:** Short for preliminary, also called heats, are those races in which swimmers attempt to qualify for the championship final in a specific event.

**Qualifying Times:** Published times a swimmer must equal or beat to enter championship meets. They also can be the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer.

**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.

**Recovery:** The phase of a stroke where the arm travels over the water.

**Referee:** The head official at a swim meet.

**Relay Exchange:** The exchange between the swimmer in the water and the next swimmer on the relay team. A perfect exchange will simultaneously have the finishing swimmer's hand on the touch pad and the next swimmer's feet just touching the starting block with the rest of the his/her body extended over the water.

**Relay:** A swimming event in which 4 swimmers participate as a team, with each swimmer swimming an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays. The first type is Medley Relay, where the first swimmer swims backstroke, the second swims breaststroke, the third swims butterfly, and the fourth (anchor) swims freestyle, in that order. Freestyle Relay is the other type, where all 4 swimmers swim freestyle.

**Ribbons:** Awards in a variety of sizes, styles, and colors, sometimes given at swim meets.

**Roll:** To move on the starting blocks prior to the starting signal. A roll is usually caught by the starter and called a false start, which disqualifies that swimmer.

**S-Pull Pattern:** A method of pulling in freestyle swimming that encourages and outward and inward sweeping motion of the hand and arms rather than a straight back (point A to point B) motion. Allows for the arms to travel a greater distance through the water and results in greater distance per stroke. The "S" pull pattern also encourages better body roll.

**Scratch:** To withdraw from an event after having declared an intention to participate. This practice should be avoided, as it does not reflect well on either the swimmer or the team.

**Seed Time:** This time is the personal best time for the swimmer submitted by the team when entries were submitted to the host team. Swimmers are assigned to heats and lanes according to this time. In most meets, faster swimmers are assigned to later heats in a multiple-heat event. Also, the fastest swimmers in a heat are assigned to the middle lanes.

**Senior Meet:** Championship meets for older swimmers, usually starting at age 15.

**Session:** Portion of meet distinctly separated from other portions by time.

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**Set:** Swim workouts are divided up into sets of swims in a particular stroke, style, and distance, such as kick sets, pull sets, distance sets, sprint sets, and I.M. sets. Sets are given in terms of the distance to be swum, calculated in yards or meters depending on the pool. Therefore, a "set" of "25s" means swimming one length of the pool before resting, "50 s" means two lengths, and so on.

**Shave:** The process of removing all arm, leg, and exposed torso hair, to decrease the drag or resistance of the body moving through the water. Usually used only at very important meets.

**Short Course:** The use of a 25-yard pool.

**Skin Suit:** A slang term for a swimsuit designed to have minimum drag in the water. While many swimmers use the traditional knitted lycra, the newest suit is woven lycra, called a "paper" suit because of its texture.

**Split:** In a race, a timed portion that is shorter than the total distance of the race.

**Stand Up:** The command given by the starter or referee to release the swimmers from their starting position.

**Starter:** The official in charge of signaling the beginning of a race and ensuring that all swimmers have a fair take-off.

**Start:** The beginning of a race. The dive used to begin a race.

**Step Down:** The command given by the Starter or Referee to have the swimmers move back off the blocks. Usually this command is a good indication everything is not right for the race to start.

**Stroke Judge:** The official positioned at the side of the pool, walking the length of the course as the swimmers race. The stroke judge is required to determine that each swimmer is carrying out his or her stroke within the rules, and will disqualify any who aren't.

**Submitted Time:** Seed times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets. For national championships, they must have been achieved in designated meets.

**Swim-off:** In a competition, a race after the scheduled event to break a tie and determine which swimmer will advance to the final.

**Taper:** The resting phase of a swimmer at the end of the season before a big meet. Reduces training volume and intensity to allow body and mind a break from the rigors of intense training. This coupled with quality rest will allow a swimmer's body time to repair itself and to restore its energy reserves. Studies have found tapering to produce a marked increase in muscle strength.

**Time Trial:** An event or series of events where a swimmer may achieve or better a required qualifying time.

**Timer:** The volunteers standing behind the starting blocks, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.

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**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 and send the time electronically to the timing system and the electronic scoreboard.

**Touch:** The finish of the race.

**Trophy:** Type of award given to teams and swimmers at meets.

**Turnover:** The number of times a swimmer's arms turn over in a given distance or time during a race.

**Two Beat Kick:** Used for training and racing in distance events of 800 yards/meters and greater.

**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.

**Warm-down:** Time period after a race used by the swimmer to rid the body of excess lactic acid generated during a race.

**Warm-up:** The practice and loosening session a swimmer does before the meet or during a meet after a long delay. This is essential to avoid injury.

**Stopwatch:** The hand held device used by timers during a meet. For races of 50 yards or longer, if the electronic system fails, the 2 timers in each lane are averaged to get the official time for the swimmer. In short races of 25 yards, the stopwatches are the only source of official timing.

**Whistle:** The sound a starter/referee makes to signal for quiet before they give the command to start the race.

**Yardage:** The distance a swimmer swims in practice sessions.

**Zoomer:** A special fin used for swimming and kicking.