

Glossary of Swimming Terms

A-Grade Meet Graded : swim meet which requires swimmers to have previously achieved an 'A, time' standard in the events they wish to enter.

ASA: The Amateur Swimming Association - the governing body of British swimming.

ASCA: The American Swim Coaches Association.

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 the to 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.

Anchor: 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.

Ascending: intervals or swims that increase in repeat time or decrease in speed

B-Grade Meet: Swim meet which sometimes requires swimmers to have previously achieved a 'B' time standard in the events they wish to enter, but which will not allow swimmers to win medals if they go faster than a certain time.

Backstroke: One of the 4 competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on your back. Backstroke is swum as the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the I. M.

BAGCATS: British Age Group Categories. In order to support the new approach to age group competition for the younger competitors, it is necessary to introduce a new point scoring system into British Swimming. The system comprises two elements: British Comparative Performance Tables & British Age Group Correction Factors.

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.

Bilateral 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 the to right side, etc.

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 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 re 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.

CQT: County Qualifying Time.

Camp: There are many types of training camps for just about every level of swimmer. Normally organised by the individual clubs.

Cap: The silicone or latex covering worn on the head of swimmers. The colours and team logos adorning these caps are limitless. National Caps, County Team Caps, award caps, plain practice caps, etc.

Carbohydrates: The main source of food energy used by athletes.

Cards: Entry cards either 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 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.

Chlorine: The chemical used by most pools to kill the bacteria in water and keep it clear and safe to swim in.

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.

Colorado: A brand of automatic timing system.

Consolation: Finals After the fastest 6 or 8 swimmers, the next 6 or 8 swimmers (depending on the number of pool lanes) in a heat/finals meet who, after the heat swim, qualify to return to the finals. Consolation or B finals are the second fastest heat of finals when multiple heats are held and are conducted before the Championship heat. These have largely been replaced at major meets by semi-finals.

Course: Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. (i.e.) Long Course = 50 metres / Short Course = 25 metres.

Deadline: The date meet entries must be 'post marked' or 'in' by, to be accepted by the meet host/club. Making the meet deadline may not guarantee acceptance into a meet since many meets are 'full' weeks before the entry deadline.

Deck Level: a system of recirculating water in a pool where the side of the pool is at or just below the level of the water. This generated a continuous flow out of the pool and into the filtration system. This design 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 'authorised' person may be on the deck during a swim competition.

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

Descending: intervals or swims that decrease in time (1:15, 1:10, 1:05, 1:00, :55).

Descend: To swim each repeat in a faster time than the previous. Ex. 4 x 50 yard on a 1 minute interval. Do #1 in 50 seconds, #2 in 48 seconds, #3 in 46 seconds and #4 faster than 46 seconds

Development: A classification of meet or competition. The purpose of a developmental meet is to allow all levels of swimmers to compete in a lower pressure environment.

Disqualified: A swimmers performance is not counted because of a rules infraction.

Dist Fr: Distance freestyle, mostly distances greater than 200 yards/meters

Distance: How far a swimmer swims. Distances for short course are: 25 metres (1 length), 50 metres (2 lengths), 100 metres (4 lengths), 200 metres (8 lengths), 400 metres (16 lengths), 800 metres (32 lengths), 1500 metres (60 lengths). Distances for long course are: 50 metres (1 length), 100 metres (2 lengths), 200 metres (4 lengths), 400 metres (8 lengths), 800 metres (16 lengths), 1500 metres (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.

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 Elbow: would be the opposite of the high elbow and ineffective for powerful propulsion through the water.

Dropped: Time When a swimmer goes faster than the previous performance they have 'dropped their time' or PBs

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

Electronic Timing: Timing system operated electronically. The timing system usually has touchpads 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 swimmers time.

Eligible to compete: The status of a member swimmer that means they are registered and have met all the requirements. In the UK this implies registration with the ASA

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 Club event list into a swim competition.

Entry: dealing with 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. An event equals 1 heat with its final, or 1 timed final.

FINA: Federation Internationale de National de Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming.

FINA: The international, rules making organisation, 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: occurs when a swimmer leaves the starting block, or is moving on the block, before the starter starts the race.

Final Results: The printed copy of the results of each race of a swim meet.

Finals: The final race of each event to determine the overall classification.

Final: the championship final of an event in which the fastest eight swimmers from the heats or semi-finals 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 swimmers feet. Used in 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 metres from the wall. to allow backstroke swimmers to determine where the end of the pool is

Four Beat Kick: 4 leg movements per arm stroke in freestyle. Similarly 2 and 6 beat kicks may be used.

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.

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

Goals: Short and Long range targets set by swimmers, and agreed by the coaches, to aim for.

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 considerably!

Gravity wave: wave action caused by the swimmers' bodies moving through the water. Gravity wave move down and forward from the swimmer, bounce off the bottom of the pool and return to the surface in the form of turbulence.

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

Gutter: the area at the edges of the pool in which water overflows and is recirculated 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

Hats: See 'caps'.

Heats: A division of an event when there are too many swimmers to 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 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 (breath control): training with a decreased concentration of oxygen that causes the constriction of blood vessels which, in turn, help muscles work more efficiently with what oxygen is available.

I.M.: Individual Medley, all four competitive strokes in the order of Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle

IM: short for individual medley, an event in which the swimmer uses all four competitive strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Insurance: The ASA offers 'accident insurance coverage' which is automatic when swimmers, pay their ASA membership fee. Many restrictions apply, so check with your club for detailed information.

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.

Interval: The time given to complete a given distance, plus rest. For example

Juniors: 16 and under at 31st December in the year of competition.

Kick Board: A flotation device used by swimmers during training when swimming with legs only.

Kick: The leg movements of a swimmer.

Lactate: see lactic acid

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.

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. (i.e.) Lane 1 or Lane 2. Pools with starting blocks at only one end: As the swimmers stand behind the blocks, lanes should be numbered from Right (lane 1) to Left (lane 6).

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

Lap: One length of the course.

Late Entries: Meet entries from a club or individual 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. A single stroke in the IM.

Length: Technically, a length is once across the pool; a lap is across and back. However most coaches use the terms interchangeably to mean simply once across the pool. Thus, 4 lengths in a 25 yard pool would be swimming across the pool 4 times, totaling 100 yards.

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

Log Book: A log of everything to do with swimming, including all training sessions and event best times. To be kept by the swimmer him/herself.

Long Course: A 50 metre pool.

Long Course: a 50 metre long pool. The Olympic Games as well as all major international competitions are conducted long course. See also short course

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

Marks: The command to take your starting position.

Marshall(s): The adult(s) (official) who control(s) 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/Promoter: The person in charge of the administration of the meet.

Meet: A series of events held in one programme. Also known as a Gala.

Mid Fr: Middle distance freestyle, mostly distances between 100 yards/meters and 300

Mile: The slang referring to the 1500 metre 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.

Nationals: ASA senior, junior and age group meets conducted each year.

Negative Split: The second half of the swim is swum faster than the first half. Ex. 100 yard swim negative splitting-if the first 50 yards is swum around 60 seconds, then the second 50 must be swum faster than 60 seconds.

Negative split: a race strategy in the distance freestyle events in which a swimmer covers the second half of the race faster than the first half.

Neurological System Training: training that focuses on improving the reaction time at the site at which the motor neuron communicates with the muscle fiber. Super short sprints or spin drills help train this system.

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

OT Official Time: The swimmers event time recorded to one hundredth of a second (.01).

Officials: The certified, or qualified adult volunteers, who operate the many facets of a swim competition.

Official: an judge on the poolside. Various judges watch the swimmer's strokes, turns and finishes or are timers and starters.

Olympic Trials: The ASA sanctioned long course swim meet held the year of the Olympic Games to decide which swimmers will represent the UK on our Olympic Team. Qualification times are faster than Senior Nationals.

Omega: A brand of automatic timing system.

Open Competition: Meet Competition which any qualified club, organisation, or individual may enter.

PB: 'Personal Best' - The best time a swimmer has done so far in a particular stroke/event

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: Handpaddles Coloured plastic devices worn on the swimmers hands during swim practice.

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

Pool: The facility in which swimming competition is conducted.

Practice: Training The scheduled work-outs a swimmers attends with their swim team/club.

Prelim: short for preliminary, also called heats. Those races in which swimmers qualify for the championship and consolation finals in the events.

Pull Buoy: A flotation device used for pulling by swimmers in practice. A website for UK swimming.

Qual/Dist: The first half of the workout is distance Freestyle, the second half is sprints.

Qualifying: Times Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer. See CQT, NQT etc.

Race: Any single swimming competition. (i.e.) preliminary, final, timed final.

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 the arm stroke where the arm travels over the water.

Referee: The head official at a swim meet.

Registered: (ASA) It is necessary for all swimmers to be registered if racing in any meets.

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 starting swimmer's feet just touching the starting block with the rest of the starting swimmer's body extended over the water.

Relays: A swimming event in which 4 swimmers participate as a relay team each swimmer swimming an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays: 1.) Medley relay - One swimmer swims Backstroke, one swimmer swims Breaststroke, one swimmer swims Butterfly, one swimmer swims Freestyle, in that order. Medley relays are conducted over 200m and 400m distances. 2.) Freestyle relay - Each swimmer swims freestyle. Free relays are conducted over 200m, 400m, and 800m distances.

Rest Area: A designated area (such as a gymnasium) that is set aside for swimmers to rest during a meet.

Ribbons: Awards in a variety of sizes, styles, and colours, 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, but swimmers will often try to guess the starter's cadence and get a good start. Similar to illegal procedure in football.

S-Pull Pattern: a method of pulling in freestyle swimming that encourages an 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.

Safety: The responsible and careful actions of those participating in a swim meet. Listen to the safety notices read out at galas.

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

Seed: Assign the swimmers heats and lanes according to their submitted or preliminary times.

Senior Meet: A meet that is for senior level swimmers and is not divided into age groups. Qualification times are usually necessary and will vary depending on the level of the meet.

Senior Nationals: Long and Short courses are held each year.

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

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, I.M. sets, etc. Sets are given in terms of the distance to be swum, calculated in yards or meters depending on the pool. Therefore, a "set" of "25,s" means swimming one length of the pool before resting, "50's" means two lengths, and so on. Learn to think of your swimming in terms of yards or meters and not in terms of laps or lengths.

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.

Shave: prior to a major competition a swimmer will shave his or her entire body. The removal of the hair provides less resistance between skin and water and heightens a swimmer's sensations in the water. A degree of psychological advantage may also be gained.

Short Course: A 25 yard or more usually a 25 metre pool.

Simultaneously: A term used in the rules of butterfly and breaststroke, meaning at the same time.

Six Beat Kick: 6 leg movements during 1 freestyle stroke (both arms) for racing.

Skinsuit: 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. There are continually new styles and fabrics put out on the market.

Split: A portion of an event, shorter than the total distance, that is timed. (i.e.) A swimmers first 25 or 50 time is taken as the swimmer swims the 100 race. It is common to take multiple splits for the longer distances.

Split: a swimmer's intermediate time in a race. Splits are registered every 50 meters (or 25 yards depending on the pool and the equipment on hand) and are used to determine if a swimmer is on record pace.

Sports Medicine and Science: a comprehensive use of science and technology to develop better training methods for athletes. In U.S. Swimming, the sports medicine and science program deals with everything from blood and respiratory condition to the biomechanics of the swimmer to proper nutrition.

Stand-up: The command given by the Starter or Referee to release the swimmers from their starting position.

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

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

Stations: Separate portions of a dryland or weight circuit.

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

Still Water: Water that has no current caused by a filter system or no waves caused by swimmers.

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.

Stroke: There are 4 competitive strokes: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle.

Submitted Time: Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets. For national championships they must be achieved in Designated Meets

Suit: The racing costume worn by the swimmer, in the water, during competition. These have developed from trunks to full body suits in recent years.

Swim-off: In a Heat/Finals type competition, a race after the scheduled event to break a tie. The only circumstance that warrants a Swim-off is to determine which swimmer makes finals.

Taper: The resting phase of a senior swimmer at the end of the season before a big meet.

Taper: reducing training volume and intensity to allow your body and mind a break from the rigours of intense training. This coupled with quality rest allow your body time to repair itself and to restore its energy reserves to prepare you for competition. Studies have found tapering to produce a marked increase in muscle strength.

Taper: the resting process in training for swimming competition. During the middle of the swimming season a swimmer may work out 10 to 15 thousand meters (8 to 10 miles) each day. As major competition draws near, the swimmer will "taper" off the distances swum each day. A perfectly designed taper will enable the swimmer to compete at their peak capability and is one of the most difficult aspects of swim coaching.

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

Timer: The volunteers sitting behind the starting blocks/finish end of pool, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.

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.

Touchpad: the area at the end of each lane in the pool where a swimmer's time is registered and sent electronically to the timing system then the scoreboard.

Touch: the finish of the race.

Trainer: in the U.S.

Travel Fund: A sum of money set aside for a swimmer to use for travel expenses and entry fees to specified meets.

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

Turnover: the number of times a swimmer's arms turn over (cycle) in a given distance or time during a race.

Two Beat Kick: used for distance events, 800m plus for training and racing.

USS: United States Swimming, Inc., the national governing body for amateur competitive swimming in America.

Uniform: The various parts of clothing a swimmer wears at a meet. May include: Parka, Warm-up jacket, Team bag, track suit, hat, goggles, T-shirt, etc.

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.

Vertical: At right angle to the normal water level.

Vitamins: The building blocks of the body. Vitamins do not supply energy, but are necessary for proper health.

Warm down: used by the swimmer to rid the body of excess lactic acid generated during a race.

Warm-down: The loosening a swimmer does after a race when pool space is available. Essential to avoid injury.

Warm-up: The practice and loosening session a swimmer does before the meet or their event is swam. Essential to avoid injury.

Warm-up: used by the swimmer before the race to get their muscles loose and ready to race.

Watch: The hand held device used by timers and coaches for timing a swimmers races and taking splits.

Water: For the purpose of filling swimming pools and swimmers drinking to properly hydrate themselves.

Weights: The various barbells, benches, machines used by swimmers during their dryland programme. Training sessions in the 'Weights Room' (aka weights)

Whipping Area: A room on or near the pool side for the swimmers to relax before they compete in finals.

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

Work Out: The practice sessions a swimmer attends.

Yardage: The distance a swimmer races or swims in practice. Total yardage can be calculated for each practice session.

Zoomer: A special fin used for swimming and kicking. Ask us for more information.