

Swimming Terminology

- Alternate - In a Prelims/Finals meet, after the finalists are decided, the next two fastest swimmers other than the finalist are designated as alternates. The faster of the 2 being first alternate and the next being second alternate. If a finalist cannot participate, the alternates are called to take their place, often on moment's notice.
- Age Group - Division of swimmers according to age. The National Age Group divisions are: 10-under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18. Some LSC's have divided the swimmers into more convenient divisions specific to their situations: (ie) 8-under, 13-Over, 15-Over, Junior, Senior.
- Anchor - The final swimmer in a relay. Also, the point in the stroke pattern where the hand feels the most resistance and begins effective propulsive movement.
- Body Position - The way the swimmers body sits in the water, ideally as straight, long and close to the surface of the water as possible.
- Bull Pen - The staging area where swimmers wait to receive their lane and heat assignments for a swimming event. Area is usually away from the pool and has rows of chairs for the swimmers to sit. The Clerk of the Course is in charge of the Bull Pen.
- Burn Out - The point when competitive swimmers tire from swimming, possibly through over-stress or pressure.
- Cards - A card that is either handed to the swimmer in the bull pen or given to the timer behind the lane. Cards usually list the swimmers name, USA Swimming number, seed time, event number, event description, and the lane and heat number the swimmer will swim in. Backup times are written on these cards. Each swim has a separate card. Cards are NOT used at all meets.
- Circle Seed - A method of seeding swimmers when they are participating in a prelims/finals event. The fastest 18 to 24 swimmers are seeded in the last three heats, with the fastest swimmers being in the inside lanes. (ie) Lane 4 in the final 3 heats.
- Circle Swim - When there are more than two swimmers in a lane during practice, swimmers swim up on the right hand side, staying close to the lane line, and return on the other side ensuring that there is 5 seconds apart between the swimmer in front. This eliminates the risk of swimmers crashing into each other.
- Cut - A qualifying time for a competitive event.
- Deck - The area around a swimming pool reserved for swimmer, coaches and judges.
- Disqualification - A swimmers performance is not counted because of a rules infraction. A disqualification is shown by an official raising one arm with open hand above their head. If you have questions about a disqualification, see the coach. Never approach the official.
- Distance Freestyle - Freestyle competitive events at distances of 400 m or more.
- Flip Turn - A type of turn used in front crawl and backstroke. As the swimmer approaches the wall, they tuck their body into a somersault, roll toward the wall and push off with their feet.
- Flutter Kick - The alternating kick used in backstroke and front crawl, usually 6 kicks per cycle.
- Heat - A division of an event used to cut the number of participants, when a single race to determine the winner would mean too many swimmers competing at the same time (example: 12 swimmers, only 8 lanes).
- High Elbow - Refers to the recovery phase of the front crawl, where keeping a high elbow encourages better balance and body roll. Also refers to the pull stage of the stroke, where the elbow remains in a higher position over the hand, giving the sensation of reaching over a barrel when pulling through the water.
- Hypoxic Breathing - Breath control swimming such as underwater swimming or breathing every fifth or seventh stroke in Front crawl.

- Individual Medley - A combination of the four competitive swimming strokes swum in the following order; Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle.
- Lane - The section of a pool, distinguished by lane lines, in which a swimmer is assigned to swim.
- Lead-off - The swimmer to execute the first leg of the relay.
- Length - A completed lap either up or down the pool. This may be a distance of 25 m or 50 m depending upon the size of the pool.
- Negative Split - When the second half of the race is swum faster than the first half.
- Pace - The speed that corresponds with a race distance, e.g. 1:20 (1 minute 20 seconds) per 100m.
- Qualifying Time (QT) - A specified time that must be achieved for the swimmer to enter a competitive event.
- Relay Exchange - The exchange between the swimmer in the water finishing the leg and the next swimmer on the relay team. A smooth exchange requires the finishing swimmer's hand to touch the touch pad at the same time as the starting swimmer's sets off from the starting block.
- Sculling - A technique executed for balance or to stay in one place through a back and forth motion of the hands.
- Shave down - The act of shaving off body hair just before the race in order to reduce water drag. This is done during taper only.
- Seed - To assign a swimmer to a heat or lane according to their qualifying time.
- Split times - The times taken for each individual section of a race.
- Start Position - The position taken by the swimmer at the beginning of the race. The swimmer is required to have at least one foot at the front of the starting block and remain motionless until the start signal sounds. The most common position has the swimmer bent over, knees bent and feet shoulder width apart. Some swimmers prefer a track start with one foot forward and one foot back.
- Stroke Shortening - To counter the slowing down of a stroke as swimmers begin to tire, they may increase the frequency of their stroke rate without increasing their overall speed.
- Stroke Rate - The amount of time taken to complete a single cycle of a stroke.
- Taper - Reducing the intensity of training just before a race so that the swimmer may be fresh and in peak condition for the event.
- Touch - The finishing point of a race.
- Turnover - The number of times a swimmer completes one cycle of a stroke during a race.
- Unofficial time - The time displayed on a scoreboard or read over the PA system immediately after a race. After being checked and adjusted (if necessary), this will become the official time of a swimmer.
- Warm-down - A slower, longer swim as an essential injury prevention technique, used by the swimmer after a race to rid the body of excess lactic acid.
- Yardage - The distance a swimmer races or swims during the totality of their practice.