

GGSL Rules and Regulations 2026

WWW.USASWIMMING.ORG – web site for 2026 USA Swimming Rules (click on *Officials*, then *Rules & Policies*, and then *2025 Rule Book PDF, see pages 23-28*). This site also has links to great rules videos. There are no significant changes to the stroke regulations in this version from prior years.

Senior Meet Official

Overall, in charge of the meet. Responsible for pool management, safety, and proactively addresses unsportsmanlike conduct. Maintains order around the pool and timers.

Ensures teams, coaches and parent reps are settled and communicates information to each regarding meet execution. Fields questions during the meet from coaches and parent reps.

Issues final decision regarding any disqualifications. Questions calls if you feel it is warranted.

Check in with the scorers, coaches and both parent reps throughout the meet to see how things are running.

Ensures meets are run with consideration of incoming weather, darkness, etc. Heats may need to get cut and exhibition events postponed/cancelled to ensure an official meet can be scored/recorded. A meet is considered official if it reaches halftime in the meet schedule (following the 18U Girls Backstroke first heat/event 22).

Meets with timers, starter and stroke and turn officials prior to the start of the meet to review pool specific and overall meet plan.

Timing

- GGSL uses a manual timing system with three watches per lane, each operated by a separate timer.
- All times are to the 0.01 place. Watches with thousandths place shall be ignored and not rounded.
- If two of the three times match, that shall be the time.
- If the three watches disagree, the intermediate watch (middle time) shall be the time for that event.
- If only two watches are available, the time shall be the average of those two watches.
- If only one watch is available, that shall be the time (in this event the time would not be eligible for record consideration)

Timers

- When assigning lanes for timers, the single card writer (with the board) shall be of the team swimming in that lane, the other two timers shall be from the other team.
- Between heats ensure your watches are reset and cleared for the next event.

- As the starter calls swimmers to step up ensure you are ready to time, if there is an issue, please raise your hand.
- Upon the start, press the start button on the watch when you see the strobe light, use the noise secondary.
- Immediately check your watch to ensure it started and is running. If you need a backup watch, call for backup and the head timer will deliver a watch to you. You are still timing using the backup watch.
- Press the stop button on the watch when the swimmer touches the wall. If the swimmer breaks the plane of the wall (going into a gutter) stop the watch when the plane is broken as if it was the wall.
- It is not the timer's job to determine if a touch is legal or not, nor is it the job of a timer to catch heads on backstroke.
- Please secure your cell phone and do not get distracted from the swimmers in your lane.

Starter

Communicates the event and heat to swimmers, coaches and parents.

Ensures that the pool deck is ready for the next heat to start (minimal crowd noise).

Balance the pace of the meet, speed is not critical, order is.

Verifies that timers and judges are ready for the upcoming heat.

Calls swimmers to the start "Swimmers step up"

Gives command "Take your mark"

If all swimmers are stationary ready to swim, shall give the starting signal. Do not establish a rhythm, and do not hold swimmers in position too long.

If a swimmer does not respond to the "take your make" command, starter shall command "Stand Up." If a swimmer goes in the water off a "stand up" command, it shall not be counted as a false start.

If a swimmer starts prior to the starter starting a race (any movement), a false start shall be signaled and charged to the swimmer in the lane where the false start occurred. In the GGSL we allow one false start per swimmer. If the swimmer false starts a second time the heat shall continue, and that swimmer shall be disqualified for two false starts. The DQ shall be recorded as two false starts.

If the recall signal happens inadvertently, no false start will be charged to any swimmer, and the heat shall be re-swum.

If a swimmer fails to respond to a recall signal the heat will be re-swum after a short break for the swimmers to recover. If this happens, the senior meet official shall work with both coaches and the starter to arrange this as soon as practical to keep the meet running on schedule.

Stroke and Turn

Benefit of any doubt will always be with the swimmer.

Do not read more into the rules than is written.

Rules are enforced to ensure that no swimmer has an unfair advantage over any other swimmer competing in the same event.

To make a DQ call if you see an infraction that does not meet the stroke definitions below, simply raise your hand for a few seconds and return to judging other lanes within your jurisdiction. You are not required to make a call if you do raise your hand, you may change your mind.

Jurisdiction

Pools should be divided equally between designated stroke and turn officials regarding lane and or end of pool jurisdiction. Each pool is set up differently and the Senior Meet Official of the home team shall decide this. If a break-in official is being trained as an observer, only the certified official can make a call. Prior to the start of the meet, it shall be agreed upon by the stroke and turn officials and senior meet official as to lane responsibilities and jurisdiction, which may include joint, concurrent and coordinated responsibility and jurisdiction. All swimmers shall have fair, equitable and uniform conditions of judging. A disqualification can only be made by the official within whose jurisdiction the infraction has been committed.

When you make a call, you need to be able to articulate to the senior meet official three things:

- **What did you see? Describe it.**
- **Where were you? Your position on the pool deck and that of the swimmer.**
- **What was the infraction or rule broken? Articulate the infraction.**

If at any point after you made a call and there is any doubt as to what you saw or thought you saw, the benefit goes to the swimmer and the call shall not be made. In addition, there is no issue with requesting a few minutes to discuss a situation with the other stroke and turn official or the senior meet official regarding the specific issue.

Give equal observation to all lanes in your jurisdiction, even the empty ones.

If you DQ a swimmer, mark their timecard by checking the DQ box, and writing down the violation in sufficient detail for the coach to use to help correct the swimmer.

General Rules:

- Swimmers must start and finish in the same lane
- Standing on the bottom during a freestyle race shall not disqualify a swimmer, but a person must not leave the pool, or walk, or spring from the bottom.
- Standing on the bottom during breaststroke, butterfly, or backstroke shall result in a disqualification.
- Grasping lane dividers to assist forward motion is not permitted.

- “Sloppy” swimming is not necessarily illegal swimming, it may be inefficient through the water, and still meet the criteria described below.

Freestyle:

Start – The forward start shall be used.

Stroke - Swimmer may swim any style (except in medley relay or individual medley – freestyle means any other stroke other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke). Must break the surface of the water by 15 meters from start and turn

Turns – some part of the body must touch the wall

Finish – any part of the body touches the wall

Backstroke:

Start – Line up in the water facing the starting end with both hands on the gutter or “legs” of an assisting swimmer. Feet and toes must be in contact with the end wall, but not in the gutter.

Stroke – swimmer shall push off on his back and continue swimming on the back throughout the race. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface prior to 15 meters after the start and turn.

Turns – upon completion of each length some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. During the turn the shoulders may be turned past the vertical towards the breast after which an immediate continuous single arm pull or immediate simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. Swimmer must have returned to the back upon leaving the wall.

Finish – Swimmer must touch the wall on the back

Breaststroke:

Start – The forward start shall be used.

Stroke – After the start and after each turn when the swimmer leaves the wall, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm cycle and one leg kick in that order

All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.

The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast on, under or over the water. The elbows shall be underwater except for the final stroke before the turn, during the turn and for the final stroke at the finish. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn.

During each complete cycle, some part of the swimmer’s head shall break the surface of the water. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer may take one arm stroke completely

back to the legs. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke.

Kick – After the start and each turn, at any time prior to the first breaststroke kick a single butterfly kick is permitted. Following which, all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.

The feet must be turned outwards during the propulsive part of the kick. Scissors, alternating movements or downward butterfly kicks are not permitted except as provided herein. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly kick.

Turns and Finish – At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. At the last stroke before the turn and at the finish an arm stroke not followed by a leg kick is permitted. The head may be submerged after the last arm pull prior to the touch, provided it breaks the surface of the water at some point during the last complete or incomplete cycle preceding the touch.

Butterfly:

Start – The forward start shall be used.

Stroke – After the start and after each turn, the swimmer's shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast. The swimmer is permitted one or more leg kicks, but only one arm pull under water, which must bring the swimmer to the surface. It shall be permissible for a swimmer to be completely submerged for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface. The swimmer must remain on the surface until the next turn or finish. From the beginning of the first arm pull, the body shall be kept on the breast except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Both arms must be brought forward simultaneously over the water and pulled back simultaneously under the water throughout the race.

Kick – All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. The position of the legs or the feet need not be on the same level, but they shall not alternate in relation to each other. A scissors or breaststroke kicking movement is not permitted.

Turns – At each turn the body shall be on the breast. The touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Once a touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner desired. The shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall.

Finish – At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface.

Individual Medley:

Start – The forward start shall be used.

Stroke – prescribed rules for each stroke apply, order is butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and then freestyle. For freestyle leg swimmer must be on the breast and shall be swum in any stroke other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke.

Turns – *Fly to Back* - once legal touch, swimmer may turn in any manner, shoulders must be towards the back upon leaving the wall. *Back to Breast* – must touch the wall on the back, once legal touch, swimmer may turn in any manner, shoulders must be towards the breast upon leaving the wall. *Breast to Free* – once legal touch, swimmer may turn in any manner and be on breast before any kick or stroke.

Finish – any part of the person touches the wall.

Relay Rules:

- Only one leg per swimmer
- Other than the first swimmer, they shall not start until the previous swimmer has concluded the leg.
- In a relay race the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the starting platform (ground or deck) before the preceding swimmer touches the wall shall be disqualified. (GGSL requires dual verification/confirmation for these calls to be upheld). Observe the toes departing the platform and then look for the touching fingers/hands.
- Running starts are not permitted on any leg of the relay. For acceptable footwork on a relay start, see this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtYIU5Cxygg>

Each relay team member shall leave the pool immediately upon finishing their leg except the last swimmer.

Freestyle Relay – prescribed rules for freestyle apply for each leg.

Medley Relay – prescribed rules to each stroke, turn and finish apply. The order shall be Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Freestyle. The freestyle leg shall be swum in any stroke other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke.

Tape in Competition:

The use of tape, kinesiology tape and compression sleeves will be permitted to treat a documented medical condition. Documentation from a physician or certified athletic trainer to use tape, kinesiology tape or compression sleeves would be presented to the referee. The prescribed course of treatment would set forth a minimally invasive taping plan to support the athlete's medical condition.

Glossary:

ARM — that part of the body that extends from the shoulder to the wrist.

BODY — the torso, including shoulders and hips.

FINISH — the instant that a swimmer touches the wall at the end of the prescribed distance.

FORWARD START — an entry made while facing the course.

MAY — permissive, not mandatory.

ON THE BACK — position of the body when the shoulders are at or past vertical towards the back.

ON THE BREAST — position of the body when the shoulders are at or past vertical towards the breast.

PROPULSIVE — having power to propel.

SCISSOR KICK — use of the top of the instep of one foot and the bottom of the other foot in the propulsive part of the kick.

SHALL — mandatory.

SHOULD — recommended but not mandatory.

SIMULTANEOUSLY — occurring at the same time.

TOUCH — contact with the end of the course.

TURN — a point where the swimmers reverse or change direction.

VERTICAL — perpendicular to the water surface.

WALL — vertical portion of the pool, contiguous surfaces of the deck and overflow gutter, the front portion of the starting block or platform, or the touchpad at the end of the course.