

Why are there so many rules?

There are two primary purposes for the rules used in competitive swimming. The first is to differentiate between the various styles or strokes performed. The second is to try to guaranty a fair competition. Most rules can be traced to one of these two reasons and, in some cases, both.

What rules "differentiate" the strokes?

Rules that define the type of leg or arm motions to be used or the position that the body is to be in for a stroke are usually there to separate that stroke from the others. As a result, many of these types of rules don't always seem to make sense unless you remember that their purpose is to "define" a stroke.

What rules try to "guaranty" a fair competition?

Rules that require a swimmer to use a particular type of start or to touch the wall in a specific manner or rules that prevent the swimmer from pushing off the bottom or pulling on a lane rope would fall into this category. These rules are often the same for two or more strokes as they don't deal with how the swimmer performs the stroke itself.

What are the rules for swimming the Breaststroke?



The Breaststroke is the most technically difficult stroke to perform; therefore, it has the most rules related to it. The primary rules that define the Breaststroke are:

- Arm movements:
 - All movements of the arms are to be done simultaneously and in the same horizontal plane.
 - The hands may not go past the hips except for the first arm stroke of each length.
 - The hands must be pushed forward from the chest (between the points of the shoulders) simultaneously below, at or above the surface of the water.
 - Except for the last pull prior to touching the wall, the swimmer's elbows must remain in contact with the water (as opposed to the Butterfly where the elbows must break the surface of the water to establish an "over the water" recovery)
- Leg movements:
 - All movements of the legs are to be done simultaneously.
 - Propulsion from the legs must come from the sole or instep of the foot; pushing water with the top of the foot is prohibited.
- Body position:
 - The swimmer must leave the wall on their breast (shoulders at or past 90° toward their breast).
 - From the time the hands come apart on the first pull until the final pull before the swimmer touches the wall, the swimmer's hands must pull in the same horizontal plane.
 - Some part of the swimmer's head must break the calm surface of the water once on every complete cycle of the arms and legs.
- Other:
 - The swimmer is allowed one complete pull (past the hips) and one complete kick (in that order) prior to surfacing at the start of each length. They are allowed to begin the second pull (up to the widest point of the pull) prior to the head breaking the surface of the water.

- Breaststroke is the only stroke that requires a "cycling" of the arms and legs in a specific pattern; the swimmer must begin each length with a pull and there must be only one pull followed by one kick in each stroke cycle.
- The swimmer must touch the wall simultaneously with both hands at the end of each length.

The Butterfly and Breaststroke look a lot alike - why?

Until the 1950's, there were only three competitive strokes - the Freestyle, Backstroke and Breaststroke. The Butterfly evolved as a type of Breaststroke, initially an over the water arm stroke with a "frog" type kick. Eventually, swimmers started using the "dolphin" kick and the "Over Water Recovery" Breaststroke became substantially faster than a traditional Breaststroke. The officials of swimming decided that, in order to "level the playing field," the new form should become its own distinct stroke and the Butterfly was born. Many of the rules for these two strokes are there to enforce this division of them.

What are the rules for swimming the Butterfly?



Because of its roots in Breaststroke, the Butterfly has almost as many rules pertaining to it as the Breaststroke. The primary rules that define the Butterfly are:

- Arm movements:
 - All movements of the arms are to be done simultaneously (but not in the same horizontal plane).
 - All forward movement of the hands must be done above the surface of the water for the entire race (as determined by the elbows breaking the surface of the water during the forward movement of the arms).
- Leg movements:
 - All movements of the legs are to be done simultaneously.
 - The legs must remain in the same position relative to each other during all up and down movements; i.e., a "flutter" kick where the feet change their position relative to each other is prohibited.
 - Propulsion from the legs must come from the top of the foot; pushing water with the sole or instep of the foot is prohibited.
- Body position:
 - The swimmer must leave the wall on their breast (shoulders at or past 90° toward their breast).
 - From the time the hands come apart on the first pull until the swimmer touches the wall, the shoulders must remain level in the same horizontal plane.
 - Some part of the swimmer's head must break the calm surface of the water prior to the head reaching the fifteen (15) meter point of each length.
- Other:
 - The swimmer is allowed an unlimited number of kicks prior to surfacing at the start of each length. They are allowed to begin their arm pull prior to the head breaking the surface of the water but must bring the arms forward over the surface of the water.
 - The swimmer may kick as often as he/she likes in each arm stroke cycle.
 - The swimmer must touch the wall simultaneously with both hands at the end of each length.

What are the rules for swimming the Backstroke?



The primary rules that define the Backstroke are:

- The swimmer may move their arms and legs in any pattern they choose; they are not required to even use their arms and/or legs at all!
- Swimmers must start in the water, facing the wall, with their hands gripping the wall or hand grips of the starting block.
- The swimmer must leave the wall on their back (shoulders at or past 90° toward their back) and **remain** on their back until they complete each length of the pool.
- The swimmer must finish the race by touching the wall with some part of their body while still on their back

The most complicated part of the Backstroke rules have to do with the turns:

- When executing a turn in Backstroke, the swimmer is allowed to leave their back during the final arm stroke.
- Once off their back:
 - The swimmer is allowed to complete that arm stroke by moving both hands to his/her hips (either through a single or double arm pull).
 - The swimmer must execute the turn in a "continuous turning action."
 - The phrase "continuous turning action" precludes the swimmer kicking, pulling, sculling or gliding into the wall as these are not turning actions.
 - If the swimmer performs the turn too far away from the wall for the feet to touch, he/she is not allowed to scull back as this violates the 'continuous turning action' as above.
- As an alternative, the swimmer may touch the wall on their back and turn in any manner desired (the "continuous turning action" is only a requirement if a swimmer rolls past vertical prior to touching the wall).
- The swimmer must leave the wall on their back (see above).

What are the rules for swimming the Freestyle?



The Freestyle is just that - a "free" style. As a result, there are very few rules to define the Freestyle. They are:

- The swimmer may move their arms and legs in any pattern they choose; they are not required to even use their arms and/or legs at all!
- Swimmers must use a forward start
- The swimmer must touch the wall with some part of their body at the end of each length in order.

That's it for Freestyle!

What is an Individual Medley race?

An Individual Medley (IM) race requires a swimmer to complete the race using all four strokes in a designated order. The primary rules for the Individual Medley are:

- The swimmer must complete the prescribed distance by swimming 1/4 of it in each of the four strokes in the order of Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle.
- The rules relating to each particular stroke apply to that portion of the race from the time the feet leave the wall until the portion is completed with a legal finish.
- In the SJSSL, all IM races are four lengths; therefore, there are no turns in the race; each quarter must be completed in accordance with the finish rules for that stroke. This means that the backstroke turn rules do NOT apply and a swimmer must touch the wall on their back at the end of the backstroke length.
- For the IM, Freestyle is restricted to a stroke other than a Butterfly, Backstroke or Breaststroke (but a Butterfly pull with a Breaststroke kick, for example, would be legal).

What rules are there for relay races?



Relay races are certainly the swimmers' favorite events! There are two types of relay races in the SJSSL meets - Freestyle and Medley. In general, the rules for the strokes carry over into the relay events. The additional rules are:

- All relay teams must be made up of four (4) different swimmers, each swimming 1/4 of the total distance.
- The Medley Relay requires the swimming of all four strokes in the order of Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly and Freestyle.
- Like the IM, the Freestyle portion of the Medley Relay is restricted to a stroke other than a Butterfly, Backstroke or Breaststroke (but a Butterfly pull with a Breaststroke kick, for example, would be legal).
- In the Freestyle Relay, each swimmer could do a different "style" if they desire.
- The exchange from one swimmer to another requires that some portion of the body of the swimmer starting their "leg" remain in contact with the starting platform or edge of the pool until the swimmer finishing their leg touches the wall. The departing swimmer *may be in motion* provided he/she doesn't lose contact (usually with their toes) of the starting platform or edge prior to the touch of the incoming swimmer.

Are there any rules that apply to all of the strokes?

As hinted at earlier, there are some rules that apply across the board regardless of the stroke being swum. The primary ones are:

- A swimmer must start and finish the race in their assigned lane.
- A swimmer may not walk on or push off of the bottom of the pool.
- A swimmer may not pull on the lane rope.
- With the exception of Freestyle, once a swimmer has started a length, he/she may not stand on the bottom of the pool or hang on the lane rope prior to completing that length with a legal touch as this requires that they break the body position and/or other stroke rules.
- For any turn, once a swimmer has performed a legal touch of the wall, he/she may turn in any manner provided they do not leave the pool or walk on or push off of the bottom of the pool.
- Any attempt by a swimmer to gain an unfair advantage over or interfere with another swimmer is prohibited.

What is a "False" Start?



A "False" Start is defined as an attempt by a swimmer to gain an advantage over the other swimmers by anticipating the starting signal and/or starting to move prior to that signal. The rules require that all swimmers be motionless at the start of a race.

This definition can create quite a bit of controversy because it requires the officials to determine the swimmer's intent; i.e., a deliberate attempt to gain an advantage. In many cases, the official will decide that, if the movement by the swimmer did indeed give them an advantage (usually by moving forward off the blocks), the swimmer committed a false start. If the movement of the swimmer did not gain an advantage (like rocking back on his/her heels) and it did not hamper another swimmer's start, then the official will usually let this type of movement go.

If the official gives the command "Stand" or "Stand Up", any swimmer that was motionless is relieved of the false start rule's application; however, if the official issued the command in response to a particular swimmer's forward movement or leaning, that swimmer may still be disqualified despite the "Stand" command as the reason the command was issued was in response to that swimmer attempting to gain an advantage.

What does a "DQ" listed in the results after a swimmer's name mean?

What about "NS"?

These are swimming shorthand indicating that the swimmer didn't complete that race properly. The "DQ" is short for "DisQualification" and indicates that that swimmer has violated one or more of the rules for performing that event's stroke. The "NS" stands for "No Show" and indicates that that swimmer was entered in the event but did not compete. If a swimmer or coach indicates a swimmer is not going to compete in an event to the Clerk of Course prior to the event beginning, the swimmer will be classified as a "Scratch" or "Scratching the Event" and will have the shorthand representation of "SCR" after their name.

What are the most common reasons for a swimmer being disqualified ("DQ'ed")?

That will depend on the stroke being performed. Listed below is the top 2 or 3 reasons for each stroke:

- Butterfly:
 - One hand touch on a turn or finish
 - Flutter, Breaststroke or "scissor" kicking
 - Underwater recovery of the arms
- Backstroke:
 - A "non-continuous" turn (the swimmer violated the "continuous turning action" requirement for performing the turn).
 - Swimmer being off their back leaving the wall or during a race.
 - Swimmer rolling their shoulders past vertical (90°) prior to touching the wall at the finish
- Breaststroke:
 - One hand touch
 - Flutter, Butterfly or "scissor" kicking
 - Two (2) pulls underwater at the start of a race
 - Violation of the "cycle" requirement by kicking first or kicking or pulling twice within a single cycle.
- Freestyle:
 - Not touching the wall at a turn

- Individual Medley (in addition to those above for the particular strokes):
 - Performing the Backstroke "turn" (i.e., rolling off the back prior to finishing) for the Backstroke to Breaststroke transition
 - Swimming the strokes out of order
 - Leaving the wall in with the shoulders in the wrong position (not on the back for Backstroke or not on the breast for the Breaststroke)
- Relays (in addition to those above for the particular strokes):
 - Early takeoff by the second, third or fourth swimmer
 - Swimming the strokes out of order

In addition, swimmers can be disqualified in all events for a "false" or early start at the beginning of the race. Sometimes this will prevent the swimmer from competing (if it occurs before the start signal is given). In other cases, the swimmer will be disqualified while swimming the race (if the false start occurred as the start signal was given) just as if he/she had violated a stroke rule