

USA Swimming Rules for Swimming the Strokes

These are the USA Swimming rules, as presented in the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations, 2004 Edition. The starting rules have been modified for MCSL (no starting blocks). The backstroke turn has been modified to "collegiate" rules.

1. MCSL Starting Rules

- a. Forward Start. The Referee issues a short series of whistle chirps after the last swimmer has touched (also to get ready for the first event) to alert the next heat to get ready. When the Referee is ready to continue, the Referee blows a single long whistle blast. This signals the swimmers to step up to the edge of the swimming pool (if they haven't already done so). When the referee is ready he/she signals the Starter by extending an arm towards the starter. The starter, upon receiving clearance from the Referee, directs the swimmers to "take your mark." The swimmers must immediately respond by assuming a starting position with at least one foot to the front of the deck. Sufficient time should follow "take your mark" to enable swimmers to assume starting positions, but no swimmer shall be in motion immediately before the starting signal is given.
- b. The In-water Forward Start. For starts in water depth of less than 4 feet, and for all relay take offs at the opposite end of the pool, swimmers shall start in the water with at least one hand on the wall or on the deck. To initiate the start, the swimmer shall push off the wall, but shall not push off the pool bottom.
For in-water starts at the start of a race, at least one of the swimmer's feet shall be in contact with the wall after the Take Your Mark command.
A back stroke start may not be used. Towels may not be used.
- c. Back Start. The Referee issues a short series of whistle chirps after the last swimmer has touched (also to get ready for the first event) to alert the next heat to get ready. When the Referee is ready to continue, the Referee blows a single long whistle blast. This signals the swimmers to step into the pool. One more long whistle blast is then issued to signal the swimmers to get into position. The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the edge, on the gutter or on one assistant's legs, no higher than mid calf. The heels of the person providing such assistance shall not extend beyond the edge of the pool. The swimmer's feet may be placed in any position on the vertical surface of the pool. Prior to the command "take your mark" and until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer's heels shall be in contact with the surface of the water. Standing on, or curling toes over, the edge of the pool, the gutter or a skimmer is not permitted at any time. A false start may be charged to any swimmer who fails to maintain his feet and/or hands in a legal position after appropriate warning. NOTE: A swimmer who curls toes over an edge after the starting signal commits a stroke violation, not a starting violation and may only be disqualified by a Stroke & Turn.

2. Breaststroke

- a. Start - The forward start shall be used.
- b. Stroke - From the beginning of the first arm stroke after the start and after each turn, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm stroke 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 under water 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.

- c. Kick - After the start and each turn, a single downward butterfly kick followed by a breast stroke kick is permitted while wholly submerged. 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. A scissors, flutter or downward butterfly kick is not permitted except as provided herein. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly kick.
- d. Turns and Finish - At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. 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.

3. Butterfly Stroke

- a. Start - The forward start shall be used.
- b. 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 him 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 swimmer's body shall be kept on the breast. Both arms must be brought forward over the water and pulled back simultaneously.
- c. Kick - All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. The position of the legs and 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.
- d. Turns - At each turn the body shall be on the breast. The touch shall be made with both hands 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.
- e. Finish - At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above or below the water surface.

4. Backstroke

- a. The Back Start shall be used.
- b. Stroke - Standing in or on the gutter or curling the toes over the lip of the gutter immediately after the start is not permitted. The 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 of the water throughout the race, except it shall be permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.
- c. Turns - The turn requires that some part of the swimmer's body contact the end wall. After the swimmer's head has passed the backstroke flag, prior to

the turn, the swimmer's upper shoulder may (but is not required to) rotate past vertical toward the breast before the touch provided such rotation is accomplished by an initiation of the turning action or continuation into the wall. The initiation of the turning action shall be accomplished by a single-arm or simultaneous double-arm pull, or in the absence of such pulls, by a downward, underwater movement of the head. After the initiation of the turning action, no additional arm pulls may be started; however kicking and gliding actions are permitted. The swimmer shall assume a position on the back before the feet leave the wall.

- d. Finish - Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. The body may be submerged at the touch.

5. Freestyle

- a. Start - The forward start shall be used.
- b. Stroke - In an event designated freestyle the swimmer may swim any style, except that in a medley relay or an individual medley event, freestyle means any style other than butterfly, breaststroke, or backstroke. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it shall be permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and each turn. By that point the head must have broken the surface.
- c. Turns - Upon completion of each length the swimmer must touch the wall.
- d. Finish - The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his person touches the wall after completing the prescribed distance.

6. Individual Medley

The swimmer shall swim the prescribed distance in the following order: the first one-fourth, butterfly; the second one-fourth, backstroke; the third one-fourth, breaststroke; and the last one-fourth, freestyle.

- a. Start - The forward start shall be used.
- b. Stroke - The stroke for each one-fourth of the designated distance shall follow the prescribed rules for each stroke.
- c. Turns
 - 1. The intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke.
 - 2. The turns when changing from one stroke to another shall conform to the finish rules for the stroke just completed, and shall be as follows:
 - 3. Butterfly to Backstroke - The swimmer must touch as described in 2 d above. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner, but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the back when the swimmer leaves the wall.
 - 4. Backstroke to Breaststroke - The swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. Once a legal touch has been made the swimmer may turn in any manner, but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall and the prescribed form must be attained prior to the first arm stroke.
 - 5. Breaststroke to Freestyle - The swimmer must touch as described in 1 d above. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner.
- d. Finish - The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his/her person touches the wall after the prescribed distance.

7. Relays

- a. Freestyle Relay - Swimmers on each team swim the prescribed distance using any desired stroke(s). Freestyle finish rules apply.
- b. Medley Relay - Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance continuously in the following order: backstroke, breast-

stroke, butterfly, freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke shall govern, where applicable. At the end of each leg, the finish rule for each stroke applies in each case.

c. Rules pertaining to relay races:

1. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg in any relay event.
2. In relay races a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her teammate has concluded his/her leg.
3. Any relay team member and his/her relay team shall be disqualified from a race if a team member other than the swimmer designated to swim that leg shall jump into or enter the pool in the area where the race is being conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race.
4. Each relay team member shall leave the water promptly upon finishing his/her leg, except the last member.
5. In relay races, the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the deck (for Forward Starts) or whose body has lost contact with the wall (for in-water relay starts) before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified.
6. A swimmer may take not more than one step during the forward start of his/her relay leg to bring him/her to the edge of the pool.
7. The 250 Meter Crescendo shall start in the shallow end with an in-water forward start. All 100 meter medley events shall start in the shallow end. The Mixed 8 & Under 100 meter freestyle relay may start in the shallow or the deep end. All swimmers starting their leg of a relay in the shallow end must use an in water start. For those pools with no shallow end (4 feet or deeper in both ends), a "shallow" end must be designated. There must be two in water starts for each 100 meter relay and one in water start for the 250 meter Crescendo (first swimmer) in the shallow or so designated end. This rule does not apply to the All-Star Relay Meets.