

**USA SWIMMING**  
**VIDEO**  
**FOR**  
**OFFICIATING CHAMPIONSHIP SWIMMING**  
**April 1, 2002**

**MISSION**

*It is important that officials working meets across the country have a clear and consistent knowledge of the rules and understand the swim mechanics for each stroke.*

*USA Swimming has produced a video promoting its use for developing consistency among officials. The video is broken down into the following segments:*

- *Butterfly*
- *Backstroke*
- *Breaststroke*
- *Freestyle*
- *Individual Medley*
- *Medley Relay*
- *Freestyle Relay*

*The video script begins with an explanation of the purpose of the video and an overview explaining the contents of the video and how each segment will be presented.*

*Each segment contains a section which quotes the applicable portion of the rules from the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations, a section discussing the swim mechanics, and a section covering observation of the stroke.*

*The attached materials are divided into chapters which parallel the swim video segments. The materials may be used to follow along or to guide discussions after viewing the selected segment.*

*It is not important that the chapters be taken in the order presented but may be used in a random order or individually for each chapter.*

## **Officiating Championship Swimming**

**I. Purpose of Video** -It is important that we review the mission and objectives for use of this video.

**A. Mission**

1. To promote the use of the “Officiating Swimming Video” to achieve consistency among the officials working meets across the country.
2. For officials to have a clear and consistent knowledge of the rules.
3. To have an understanding of the swim mechanics for each stroke.

**B. Objectives**

1. To clarify proper interpretation of the rules as they pertain to the most common disqualification calls made.
  - a. The non-continuous turning motion during the backstroke turns.
  - b. A downward butterfly-type kick in breaststroke.
  - c. Arms not on the same horizontal plane at the first (and/or subsequent) armpull in breaststroke.
  - d. The body being past vertical toward the breast prior to the touch on the backstroke to breaststroke turn in the individual medley.
  - e. The head not breaking the surface by the 15meter mark as required in butterfly, backstroke, and freestyle.
  - f. Early take-offs on a relay exchange.

**II. Overview** This section should briefly explain the contents of the video highlighting how each of the segments will be covered.

**A. Segments to be covered.**

- a. Butterfly
- b. Backstroke
- c. Breaststroke
- d. Freestyle
- e. Individual Medley
- f. Medley Relay
- g. Freestyle Relay

**B. Rules as defined in the USA Swimming Rules & Regulations** - The rules section of each segment quotes the rules from the rule book and shows them in italics.

**C. Swim Mechanics**-A description of what you will see when swimmers execute the stroke.

**C. Observation**-A description of what each stroke looks like from observation position.

**D. Jurisdiction**-It should be noted that jurisdiction will not be discussed since it varies as prescribed by the meet referee for each particular meet.

## A. Butterfly

### 1. Starts

#### a) Rules

*“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.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

- 1) The swimmers usually remain on their breast with the hands extended forward while kicking with a butterfly-type kick.
- 2) Some swimmers kick out on the start while on their side. This position is legal as long as the swimmer remains past vertical toward the breast.
- 3) When the hands begin the first pull it must bring the swimmer to the surface.

#### c) Observation

- 1) From the end of the pool the official should observe the swimmer from over the lane. It is important for you to determine “with certainty” that the swimmer is past vertical toward the breast if the side kick-out is used and that the distortion from the water surface and the movement of water did not interfere with the observation.
- 2) From the side of the pool it is not always possible to observe the swimmers until they break the surface of the water at or before the 15-meter mark.

### 2. Swim

#### a) Rules

**Stroke** *“From the beginning of the first arm pull, the body shall be kept on the breast. Both arms must be brought forward over the water and pulled back simultaneously.”*

**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.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

- 1) The stroke requires over the water recovery of the arms.
- 2) The swimmer shall use a butterfly kick with no scissors or breaststroke kicking movements.
- 3) Rounding motion of the feet is allowed as long as the toes are pointed backward or inward.

**c) Observation**

- 1) From the side of the pool the stroke judge should have a clear view of all swimmers within their jurisdiction, (usually slightly behind the slowest swimmer).
- 2) One foot may be higher than the other as long as the feet do not alternate position in a stroke cycle.

**3. Turns/Finish**

**a) Rules**

**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.”*

**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.”*

**b) Swim Mechanics**

- 1) Two hand simultaneous touch.
- 2) Shoulder position not relevant.
- 3) Remain on breast until touch.
- 4) No under water recovery.

**c) Observation**

- 1) From the side of the pool the stroke judge should observe the swimmers to assure proper kick.
- 2) From the end of the pool the turn judge should observe the swimmer into the wall. When the eyes shift from the full body to observe the simultaneous two hand touch the judge should not look back.

## B. Backstroke

### 1. Starts

#### a) Rules

*“The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Prior to the command “take your mark” and until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer’s feet, including the toes, shall be placed under the surface of the water. Standing in or on the gutter or curling the toes over the lip of the gutter is not permitted at any time before the start. A backstroke starting block may not be used.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

Some swimmers will kick out from the start while on their side. This is legal but the swimmer must remain past vertical toward the back during this portion of the race.

#### c) Observation

At some competitions a turn judge may be assigned to observe the swimmer’s toes after the start of the race. The position of the hands and the toes before the start are the responsibility of the Starter.

### 2. Swim

#### a) Rules

*“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.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

Backstroke is essentially “freestyle on the back.”

#### c) Observation

- 1) From the end of the pool the turn judge shall observe that the swimmer remains on the back.
- 2) From the side of the pool the stroke judge shall observe the head breaking the surface at or prior to the 15 meter mark and that some part of the body remains on the surface throughout the race.

### 3. Turns

#### a) Rules

*“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 toward the breast after which a continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to execute the turn. Once the body has left the position on the back, any kick or arm pull must be part of the continuous turning action. The swimmer must have returned to a position on the back upon leaving the wall.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

At the turn, three (3) things can happen:

1) The swimmer touches the wall while on their back. They may turn in any manner they want as long as they are past vertical towards the back when their feet leave the wall.

2) The swimmer begins to turn past the vertical towards the breast, but touches the wall with some part of their body (including the hand, arm, forehead, chin, etc.) before going into the turn. As long as their turning motion was continuous once they went past vertical towards the breast, it's still legal, and they may turn in any manner they want as long as they're past vertical towards the back when their feet leave the wall. If, however, they go past vertical towards the breast, and stick their arm out but don't immediately begin a pulling motion, that's a DQ for “non-continuous turning action.”

(3) The swimmer turns past vertical towards the breast and executes a single or simultaneous double armpull to initiate their turn. Once the arm(s) has (have) stopped moving (and you're *sure* it [they] has [have] stopped moving), the swimmer must be doing *something* to initiate their turn. If they're not doing something to initiate the turn as soon as their arms stop moving, that's a DQ. They can kick throughout the turn, as long as it's part of a continuous turning action. They must touch the wall (usually with their feet) and they must be past vertical towards the back when their feet leave the wall. If they miss the wall, they cannot “scull” back to touch the wall as that reverse motion would constitute a “non-continuous turning action.”

#### c) Observation

As the turn judge, you should stand over the lane looking down to at the swimmers to observe the turns. Once a swimmer passes vertical toward the breast, you should observe that all actions of the swimmer were associated with a continuous turning action and that the swimmer is past vertical toward the back when their feet leave the wall.

### 4. Finish

#### a) Rules

*“Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. The body may be submerged at the touch..”*

**b) Swim Mechanics**

A swimmer may swim in any manner desired while remaining on their back and must remain on their back until the finish of the race.

**c) Observation**

As a turn judge, it is important to watch the swimmers as they approach the wall at the turns and at the finish of the race. If, while watching a swimmer as they come into your jurisdiction, you see the swimmer's body go totally submerged, that's a DQ. When you transition your attention from watching the swim to watching the swimmer's shoulders at the touch, do not look back.

## C. Breaststroke

### 1. Start

#### a) Rules

*“From the beginning of the first armstroke after the start and after each turn the body shall be kept on the breast. The arms shall move simultaneously and in the same horizontal plane without any alternating movement. The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast, on, under, or over the water. The elbows shall be under the water except for final stroke before the turn, during the turn, and the last stroke at the finish of the prescribed distance. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The hands shall not be brought beyond the hipline, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn. Some part of the swimmer’s head shall break the surface of the water at least once during each complete cycle of one arm stroke and one leg kick, in that order, except after the after the start and each turn the swimmer may take one armstroke completely back to the legs and one leg kick while wholly submerged. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

A downward butterfly kick or alternating kick is the most common disqualification call during the start of the breaststroke. It is important to observe the timing of the movement of the legs. As the swimmer executes the first armpull past the hipline, the legs will have an upward and downward movement with the movement of the water under the body. This is part of the natural undulation of the body (particularly exaggerated with big bodies) and not necessarily a downward butterfly kick.

The position of the shoulders is not relevant when the swimmer executes the first armpull except the swimmer must be past vertical toward the breast. The arms must be on the same horizontal plane for this first armpull.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The turn judge at the start end of the pool should stand at the appropriate signal and walk forward after the start of the race. They should watch the swimmer during the pull out observing the first armpull, which may be past the hipline, the leg kick, followed by the second armpull. At the widest part of the second armpull the head must break the surface of the water. If the hands turn inward beginning the recovery portion of the next armpull prior to the head breaking the surface of the water, that’s a disqualification.

### 2. Swim

#### a) Rules

*“The arms shall move simultaneously and in the same horizontal plane without any alternating movement. The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast, on, under, or over the water. The elbows shall be under the water except for the final stroke before the turn, during the turn, and the last stroke at the finish of the prescribed distance. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The hands shall not be brought beyond the hipline, except during the first stroke cycle after the start and each turn. Some part of the swimmer’s head shall break the surface of the water at least once during each complete cycle of one arm stroke and one leg kick, in that order...”*



**b) Swim Mechanics**

The recovery motion of the arms may be made above, at or below the surface of the water, but must be made inside the limits of the shoulders (“from the breast”). The elbows must stay “wet” (in contact with the froth and foam and not completely out of the water) during the recovery phase of the armpull throughout the race except at the turn and at the finish. However, it’s OK if the elbows clear the water during the pullback part of the stroke. As in butterfly the position of the feet is the key to judging the breaststroke kick. If the toes are pointed outward during the propulsive part of the kick, that’s a legal breaststroke kick. If the toes are pointed straight back or inwards, that’s a butterfly kick and a DQ in the breaststroke.

It is important to remember that some, if not most, elite swimmers will have a significant linear undulating motion as they race through the water. This may result in their feet breaking the surface of the water, often accompanied by a “roostertail” of spray, as they begin the recovery phase of their kick. This is NOT, however, a DQ UNLESS accompanied by a distinctive downward butterfly kick! USA Swimming rules do not require a “flexion of the knees” for a butterfly kick so be sure to remember that ***“the benefit of any doubt always goes to the swimmer.”***

**c) Positioning and Jurisdiction**

The stroke judge on the side of the pool has jurisdiction over the swimmer from the head breaking the surface of the water to the completion of each length. If FINA jurisdiction rules are used in the meet, the stroke judge on the side of the pool has jurisdiction after the first armpull including the kick and second armpull, at which point the head must break the surface of the water at the widest reach of the arms.

When walking the side of the pool, the stroke judge should be slightly behind the swimmers so that they can observe the entire swimmer, not just the feet. As the swimmers finish their leg kicks (which might result in the feet rising upward out of the water), you should observe the legs. If the knees are being drawn up and feet begin to separate to begin the recovery portion of the next stroke cycle, there is no DQ. If there is a downward butterfly-type kick with the legs, or a downward “flipper kick” of the feet prior to the legs being drawn up for the recovery portion of the next kick cycle, then a DQ should be called.

### 3. Turns/Finish

#### a) Rules

Turns-”At the turn, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. 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 any part of the last complete or incomplete cycle preceding the touch. 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 and the form prescribed above must be attained from the beginning of the first arm stroke.”

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. 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 any part of the last complete or incomplete stroke cycle preceding the touch.”

#### b) Swim Mechanics

“Hand-over-hand” touch is OK since you probably can’t see if the intertwined fingers are touching or not. Be very aware of the “swipe” touch where one hand clearly touches the wall but the second hand quickly (but simultaneously) just barely swipes at the wall and begins the turning action. Elite swimmers are really good at it and sometimes you’re not sure if they touched the second hand at all. Once again, “***only call what you see, not what you don’t see.***” After the final pull into the wall at turns and finishes, the shoulders do not have to be level. In fact, the only thing that you have to watch the shoulders for is to see if they go past the vertical towards the back prior to the touch at the turns and/or finish.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The turns/finish are in the jurisdiction of both the stroke judge and the turn judge. The stroke judge should observe the swimmer into the wall/finish watching the lower portion of the body verifying that a proper kick is executed. The turn judge should be positioned over the lane watching the upper portion of the swimmer’s body for the proper touch.

## D. Freestyle

### 1. Start

#### a) Rules

*“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.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

Any stroke or combination of strokes (including “dog paddle”) may be used. Freestyle is freestyle; i.e., anything goes, including doing other strokes during the race and even changing strokes in the middle of the race. UNLESS it’s in the Individual Medley or the Medley Relay (more on that later). The head must break the surface of the water at or before the 15 meter mark.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The stroke judge should stand at the 15 meter mark to ensure that the heads of all of the swimmers break the surface of the water by the most generous of all the 15 meter marks on the lane lines.

### 2. Swim

#### a) Rules

*‘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.’*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

Some part of the body must remain on the surface throughout the rest of the swim, except for the first 15 meters after each turn. Any stroke or combination of strokes may be used.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The stroke judge should make sure that the swimmer does not go completely submerged, pull on the lane lines, and/or push off of the bottom of the pool during the swim.

a) **Rules**

**Turns** *“Upon completion of each length the swimmer must touch the wall.”*

**Finish** *“The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his person touches the wall after completing the prescribed distance.”*

b) **Swim Mechanics**

The swimmers may turn in any manner they want as long as they touch the wall at the end of each length of the race. The touch at the finish may be made with any part of the body (including the forehead). Some part of the body must touch the wall at the end of each length of the race and a swimmer can go back and “save themselves” if they miss the touch during a turn. The DQ for missing the wall is not “officially” called until the swimmer touches the opposite end of the pool from the wall that they missed. The call should be made when it happens—the call always can be taken back when the swimmer returns to save themselves.

c) **Positioning and Jurisdiction**

The turn judge should stand over the lane(s) or at the corners of the pool to observe the touch at the turns and finish.

## E. Individual Medley

### 1. Start

#### a) Rules

The rules governing the start of the Individual Medley are the same as the butterfly start.

#### b) Swim Mechanics

The swim mechanics for the start are the same as outlined for the butterfly.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The positioning and jurisdiction are the same as outlined for the butterfly.

### 2. Swim/Turns/Finish

#### a) Rules

*“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.”*

*“Stroke-The stroke for each one-fourth of the designated distance shall follow the prescribed rules for that stroke.”*

*Turns-Intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke. 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:*

*Butterfly to backstroke-The swimmer must touch as described in (Butterfly rules). 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.*

*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 breaststroke form must be attained prior to the first arm stroke.*

*Breaststroke to freestyle-The swimmer must touch as described in (Breaststroke rules). Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner.*

*Finish-The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his/her person touches the wall after the prescribed distance.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

USA Swimming and FINA have interpreted the judging of the freestyle leg by saying that “the swimmer shall have swum a sufficient distance to allow the Judge (Turn or Stroke) to determine that he/she has swum ‘in the style’ of one of the previous three (3) strokes” before a DQ is called for the stroke infraction. That now precludes a DQ for the swimmer that momentarily uses the butterfly kick off of the wall and then transitions into a normal freestyle as well as the swimmer who is momentarily on their back as they leave the wall for the freestyle leg and is rolling over to begin the normal freestyle.

Be aware of the “cross-over” transition from the backstroke to the breaststroke. Many elite swimmers use this technique of bringing their lead arm directly over their heads and making the touch just before their shoulders get past vertical towards the breast as they make the turn. If you are watching several lanes or are not paying strict attention to the turn, you might only see the swimmer doing the turn and be tempted to DQ them for not finishing the backstroke leg on their backs. Remember, “***only call what you see. not what you don’t see.***” Only call the DQ if you’re positive that the swimmer did not touch the wall before going past the vertical towards the breast. Similarly, be aware of the “swipe” touch at the finish of the breaststroke leg before the transition to the freestyle.

c) **Positioning and Jurisdiction**

The position for observing each leg of the individual medley and associated jurisdictions are the same as outlined for each stroke.

## F. Medley Relay

### 1. Start

#### a) Rules

The rules governing the start of the medley relay are the same as the backstroke start.

#### b) Swim Mechanics

The swim mechanics for the start are the same as for the backstroke as outlined above.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The positioning and jurisdiction for the start is the same as for the backstroke as outlined above.

### 2. Swim/Turns/Finish

#### a) Rules

*“Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance continuously in the following order: first backstroke; second, breaststroke; third, butterfly; fourth, freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke used shall govern where applicable: At the end of each leg, the finish rule for each stroke applies in each case.”*

#### b) Swim Mechanics

As in the IM, freestyle is defined as any stroke other than the previous three. Once again, the USA Swimming and FINA interpretations on the judging of the freestyle leg preclude a DQ for the swimmer that momentarily uses the butterfly kick off of the wall during the freestyle turn and then transitions into a normal freestyle as well as the swimmer who is momentarily on their back as they leave the wall for the freestyle turn and is rolling over to begin the normal freestyle.

#### c) Positioning and Jurisdiction

The stroke and turn judges should be in the same positions as outlined for each stroke and assume the same jurisdictions as well. One (1) relay take-off judge should be at each side of the pool (usually the off-duty starter and/or an off-duty deck referee) and the other relay takeoff judges are positioned by their assigned lanes.

The key to relay take-offs is to watch the feet of the next swimmer on the blocks. Look to see where they are before they take off-- are they already at the front of the blocks or are they at the back ready to do a “step up” take off? When the feet of the swimmer on the blocks leaves the starting platform, look down to the pool level to see if the incoming swimmer has touched the wall yet - “toenails to fingernails.” If the exchange is good, circle the outgoing swimmer's number on your relay take-off slip (What, you don't have one? Then mark it on a piece of paper!); if the exchange is bad, put an “X” through the number of the swimmer that took off early. Remember, most relay take-offs are judged with “double confirmation” from two (2) different vantage points (usually next to the blocks and from the side of the pool), so do **not** raise your hand for an early takeoff DQ - it still has to be confirmed by another takeoff judge. If, however, there are not enough officials for dual confirmation (particularly true in the Medley Relay where you need Stroke & Turn Judges as well as Relay Take-off Judges), then a single Relay Take-off Judge may be used and the DQ for Early Take-off must be signaled by raising the hand.

## G. Freestyle Relay

### 1: Start

a) **Rules**

The rules governing the start of the freestyle relay are the same as the freestyle start.

b) **Swim Mechanics**

The swim mechanics for the freestyle relay are the same as outlined for freestyle above.

c) **Positioning and Jurisdiction**

The observation techniques for the freestyle relay are the same as outlined for freestyle above.

### 2. Swim/Turns/Finish

a) **Rules**

There are no rules except touch the wall at each turn and the finish (the same as for the individual freestyle). Each relay swimmer shall swim a fourth of the distance and no swimmer may swim more than one (1) leg of the race.

b) **Swim Mechanics**

The swim mechanics for the freestyle relay are the same as outlined for freestyle above.

c) **Positioning and Jurisdiction**

The positioning and jurisdiction for the freestyle relay are the same as outlined for freestyle above. However, the turn judge only needs to watch the intermediate turns since the relay take-off judge will (hopefully) see the touch at the end of each leg of the race during the relay exchange.

The relay take-off positioning and jurisdictions are the same as outlined above in the Medley Relay section.