

# GUIDE TO OFFICIATING

## CHAPTER 5 - STROKE & TURN, RELAY TAKE-OFF JUDGE

### INTRODUCTION

Well run meets and good competitive results are directly related to good officiating. Thorough knowledge of the rules, coupled with fair and consistent application of them, make a good official. To confidently work on deck, a Stroke & Turn Judge must study the rules, attending training sessions and working regularly at meets.

Officials should always keep in mind that the swimmers have worked hard to achieve their successes and deserve a fair and equitable competition. Officials must apply the rules intelligently at all times, using common sense and good judgement. The rules of swimming are intended to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition. Officials must work hard to fully understand the rules and their responsibilities in applying them.

The authority of Stroke/Turn/Relay Take-off Judges (like that of the Referee and Starter) to disqualify a swimmer makes these positions particularly important. To function properly, one dominant principle must prevail:

*"Fairness to all competitors, giving the benefit of the doubt,  
in every instance, to the swimmer."*

The rules of swimming define the acceptable form for each stroke. Many variations of form are possible and may still comply with the letter of the rules. Decisions regarding the form of strokes and turns must, therefore, be subject to flexible judgment and common sense. "Ugly isn't necessarily illegal."

### I. BASIC CONCEPTS

**a) Take officiating seriously and work hard at it.** Competitors have a right to expect officials to know the rules and interpret them correctly, fairly and courteously.

1. Study USA Swimming's official rulebook.
2. Uniformly apply rules regardless of the level of athletes.
3. Call violations as seen; don't guess or anticipate.
4. Be fair and consistent; always give the swimmer the benefit of any doubt.
5. Disregard club affiliation.
6. Exercise good judgment.

**b) Work regularly at the job.**

1. Officials need practice, just as competitors do.
2. Working regularly builds confidence.
3. Attend training sessions regularly to keep up with rule changes and new interpretations.
4. There is no substitute for experience.



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#### **c) Be professional in manner.**

1. Fairness to all competitors must dictate actions.
2. Dress properly.
3. Make decisions quickly and decisively.
4. Don't smoke within venue.
5. Avoid coaching swimmers.
6. Refrain from cheering--control your emotions.
7. Don't fraternize with swimmers, coaches or spectators during competition.
8. Admit a mistake if wrong; competitor's welfare is more important than your own ego.

#### **d) Uniform. (Varies in LSC's)**

1. Men: navy blue slacks (no jeans) or shorts, white polo shirt and rubber soled white shoes.
2. Women: navy blue skirt, slacks (no jeans) or shorts with white polo shirt and rubber soled white shoes.  
(Officials look much more "official" if dressed properly.)

## **II. RESPONSIBILITIES**

**STROKE JUDGE** -- ensures that the rules relating to the style of swimming designated for the event are being observed.

**TURN JUDGE** -- ensures that, when turning or finishing, the swimmer complies with the turning and finishing rules applicable to the stroke used.

**RELAY TAKE-OFF JUDGE** -- ensures that a relay swimmer does not leave the starting platform before the preceding swimmer has touched the end of the pool.

The Referee (or, at the Referee's discretion, the Chief Judge) assigns and instructs Stroke and Turn Judges and Relay Take-off Judges. Before the competition begins, the Referee determines the respective areas of stroke and turn responsibility as well as jurisdiction.

#### **Position:**

The Referee will assign each Stroke and Turn Judge an area of responsibility before the competition begins. This will include the manner and sequence in which he wants the judges to move to different areas.

**Stroke Judge** -- At the start, the Stroke Judge is responsible for observing the swimmers at the 15 meter mark for all strokes except the breaststroke.

After the start, the Stroke Judge walks the sides of the pool, preferably abreast of swimmers during all strokes except freestyle. The breaststroke and butterfly are best judged by walking slightly behind the swimmers. Judges should walk at a pace that is sufficient to stay with the swimmers. If the field spreads out, the stroke judge should maintain a position slightly ahead of the trailing swimmers while maintaining contact with the lead swimmer(s). If there are two (2) stroke judges working one side of the pool (usually



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in long course meets), a "lead-lag" observation pattern could be utilized as the field spreads out; i.e., the leading stroke judge takes jurisdiction over the faster swimmer(s) while the following stroke judge takes jurisdiction over the slower swimmer(s). After each turn, the stroke judges switch jurisdictions as they begin to walk in the opposite direction. Teamwork and coordination are important between the two (2) stroke judges to ensure that all of the swimmers are observed on a fair and equitable basis.

The stroke judge must clearly be in position to watch swimmers in the backstroke, butterfly, and freestyle events who are submerged after the start or any turn to ensure that their heads surface before the 15-meter mark.

**Turn Judge** -- The Turn Judges are positioned at either end of the pool.

Turns and finishes are best judged from the ends of the pool directly over the lane if possible. If a judge must observe more than one lane (the norm for most meets at the LSC level), the official will have to adjust his position to best observe all assigned lanes.

A Turn Judge at the starting end of the pool must position himself so he can step forward quickly to observe the first stroke and kick in the breaststroke, butterfly or individual medley events as soon as the starting signal is given and the swimmers leave the blocks. (NOTE: A judge in this situation must not block the Timers' view of the Starter, the starting device, or the Starter's view of the swimmers.)

The Stroke and Turn Judge's responsibilities begin after the start. Any action prior to the start is the Starter's responsibility or, in the case of relay take-offs, it may be the Relay Take-off Judge's responsibility. Each Stroke and Turn Judge should observe the start; however, his duties commence immediately after the start.

There are two positions for **Relay Take-off Judge**: one stands immediately beside the starting block (the LANE judge) while the other looks across the lanes from the side of the pool (the SIDE judge). Depending on the number of people available and the lanes to watch a side judge could be assigned 2 but not more than 4 lanes and lane judges (depending on availability) could be assigned to watch from 1 to 4 lanes. It is preferable to have the lane judges watch fewer lanes than the side judges if a choice on assignment must be made. For example one side judge watching lanes 1-4 and a lane judge watching lanes 1&2 and a lane judge watching 3&4, instead of the other way around.

Finally, where limited personnel or the pool's configuration does not permit the ideal arrangement of officials, common sense and equity in judgment must prevail.

### III. REPORTING VIOLATIONS

1. Only the Referee or a Stroke and Turn Judge can disqualify for stroke, turn or finish violations. A Relay Take-off Judge is the only official, other than the Referee, who can disqualify for an infraction of the relay take-off rule.
2. Upon observing an infraction in their jurisdiction, the Stroke/Turn Judge or Referee shall immediately raise one hand overhead with open palm. (This requirement is intended to encourage officials to act decisively and to preclude consultation with other officials or reflection on the consequences of a call.) If the official does not raise his hand



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immediately following an infraction, the Referee should not allow the disqualification unless the Referee personally observed it. However, since "double confirmation" on an early relay take-off is required, a Relay Take-off Judge does NOT indicate an observed early take-off with a raised hand.

3. Report violations, in writing, to the Referee, detailing the event, heat number, lane number and violation. Use the standard USA Swimming DQ form (if available) and be specific in describing the violation utilizing the language of the rulebook.
4. Be prepared to accurately answer the "3 Questions" from the Chief Judge or the Referee, if asked, with the language of the rulebook - "Where were you? (Jurisdiction)," "What did you see? (Description)," and "What rule was broken? (Infraction)." Take a deep breath and think carefully before answering - try to visualize the swim in your mind, remembering that when you watched the swimmer approach you that their right arm was on your left, etc. And finally, do not take it as a personal offense if your DQ call is overturned - you did your job and the Referee must do her job, too.
5. The Referee, Chief Judge or designated official must make every reasonable effort to seek out the swimmer or his coach and inform the individual of the reason for the disqualification. **Never suggest to a swimmer or coach that a swimmer "came close" to being disqualified; "close" is perfectly legal!**  
(NOTE: Officials should never give advice or talk to swimmers or coaches except to explain a disqualification actually cited.)

#### Disqualifications:

1. Can be made only by the official within whose jurisdiction the infraction has been committed.
2. Must be based on personal observation.
3. Give the swimmer the benefit of any doubt.
4. Disregard the opinion of others.
5. Apply simple test: BE SURE THE VIOLATION OCCURRED, UNDERSTAND CLEARLY WHAT IT IS AND BE PREPARED TO EXPLAIN IT.
6. Any swimmer who acts in an unsafe or unsportsmanlike manner observed by the Stroke/Turn Judge may be considered for disciplinary action at the Referee's discretion.
7. Swimming across lanes does not disqualify a swimmer unless interference occurs at the Referee's discretion; however, the Stroke/Turn Judge should report any observed interference to the Referee. The swimmer must start and finish in the same lane.



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8. Standing on the pool's bottom during a freestyle race shall not disqualify a swimmer unless he leaves the pool or walks or springs from the bottom. (NOTE: other than at the turn, standing on the bottom after the start and before the finish of any *other* stroke shall constitute a disqualification.)
9. A swimmer not entered in a race who enters the pool or course in the area in which a race is being conducted before all swimmers therein have completed the race shall be barred from the next individual event in which he is entered on that day or the next meet day, whichever is first (Referee decision). A competitor who dips his goggles in the water or splashes water on the face or body prior to his next event shall not be considered "entering the pool" unless the Referee concludes such an action interferes with the competition.
10. No swimmer is permitted to wear or use any device or substance to help his speed or buoyancy during race. Goggles may be worn and rubdown oil applied if not considered excessive by the Referee.
11. Relay disqualifications (NOTE: all these calls are Referee's or, in some cases, Relay Take-off Judge's decisions):
  1. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg in any relay event.
  2. A swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his teammate has concluded his leg.
  3. Any relay team member and his relay team shall be disqualified 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.

## IV OFFICIATING STROKE

### 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.



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- 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.”*



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**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. Standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited.”*

**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**

*“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.



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- 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. 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 extend the arm 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 arm pull 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.



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### 4. Finish

a) **Rules**

*“Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back.”*

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. 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.*

*After the start and each turn, a single downward butterfly kick followed by a breaststroke 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.”*

*\*After the start and each turn a single downward butterfly kick followed by a breaststroke kick is permitted. The swimmer does not need to be completely submerged*

b) **Swim Mechanics**

An 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 arm pull past the hipline, the swimmer is permitted one downward butterfly kick followed by a breaststroke kick.

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

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 arm pull, which may be past the hipline, the leg kick, followed by the



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second arm pull. At the widest part of the second arm pull the head must break the surface of the water. If the hands turn inward beginning the recovery portion of the next arm pull prior to the head breaking the surface of the water, that's a disqualification.

#### 2. Swim

##### a) Rules

*“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.”*

##### 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 arm pull 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 (other than during the first stroke after the start and each turn).

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 frequently 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 arm pull including the kick and second arm pull, 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



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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

*”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.”*

*\*After the start and each turn a single downward butterfly kick followed by a breaststroke kick is permitted. The swimmer does not need to be completely submerged*

##### 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 and 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



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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.



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**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 briefly 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



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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 take-off judges are positioned by their assigned lanes.



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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**

*"Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance using any desired stroke(s). Freestyle finish rules apply."*

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



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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.

The USA Swimming Rules and Regulations Committee is emphasizing that "The key to a proper interpretation of the backstroke rule is the phrase 'continuous turning action,' i.e., a uniform, unbroken motion with no pauses. After the upper shoulder rotates beyond the vertical toward the breast, a continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. There shall be no kick, arm pull, or flotation that is independent of the turn. The position of the head is not relevant."

To assist judges in evaluating the submerging portion of the rule, each of the lane lines **must** be marked at the 15-meter (16.4 yard) distances from each end. Stroke judges should be positioned to ensure that the swimmer's head breaks the water surface prior to the 15-meter marks and some part of the body remains surfaced until the swimmer executes the next turn.



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#### V. A Philosophy of Stroke/Turn/Relay Take-off Officiating: Mental Traps

It is not very difficult to acquire the technical knowledge required to judge the strokes and turns or finishes. A judge will gain that knowledge and become proficient with practice. The challenge, however, is to apply that knowledge **professionally**. Whether we recognize it or not, all of us, as human beings, are influenced by a wide variety of factors when we try to make judgments. We have this marvelous thing called a brain, which allows us to apply "reason" whenever we make judgments. Yet, when using this capacity, we have to be careful not to apply human reason in such a way that it causes us to make poor or "sloppy" judgments. Over the years, various examples of this, often stemming from well intentioned but misguided rationale, have surfaced. Some examples of the "mental traps" that have surfaced in stroke and turn officiating over the years are:

##### 1. Advantage vs. disadvantage (as a basis for making a judgment)?

The question of whether swimmer advantage / disadvantage should influence the official judgment of stroke, turn and finish violations has been the subject of much debate. Some authorities have used the term, "unfair advantage," in decisions relating to specific situations. Unfortunately, this has also caused considerable apprehension and/or misinterpretation about the intent of this phrase. There is no intent that this concept be applied broadly to all situations, thus justifying inaction by officials in not calling violations such as missed turns, touches, etc., because "no advantage was gained." This type of negative interpretation only leads to "sloppy" officiating and, unfortunately, gives an official an excuse for inadequate performance. Obviously, "unfair advantage" may be used to explain one reason why an action is an infraction. Still, a violation of the rules should be noted and the competitor disqualified whether an advantage is gained or not. Therefore, caution should be exercised in any application of this rationale, to preclude its use as a "crutch" for poor officiating.

##### 2. The "Twice Theory."

Some judges feel they should wait until an infraction happens more than once before they call it. They rationalize this position in all sorts of ways (e.g., "That clears up any doubt." "That confirms that it wasn't a simple mistake by the swimmer." etc.) Frankly, all of these, again, are crutches and excuses for uncertain and poor officiating. There is no basis for waiting to see an infraction happen twice and, in fact, it often won't. The official must simply be certain of what he saw and make the call as soon as it is observed. If there is any doubt about the violation, then don't make the call! (Remember, the swimmer gets the benefit of any doubt.) But, by the same token, don't then concentrate on that one swimmer to see if he commits the suspected infraction again. Continue to give all the competitors uniform coverage in observing their performance.

##### 3. "We don't disqualify 8 & Unders" (the age group may change to 10 & Unders).

People who take this position often rationalize it by saying they don't want to cause "mental trauma" to a youngster. They usually go on to say they have no problems "socking it to a 13 & Older." While this may sound good, it is grounded in some clearly erroneous and extraneous beliefs. First, it views the judge's role as punitive. That's completely wrong. Rather, a disqualification should be viewed as a) "protecting the other athletes" in the competition, and b) "educating" the athlete who commits the infraction so he/she won't do it again. Secondly, it assumes that everyone in the identified age group is a "beginner" while those in the older age groups are "experienced" and, therefore, should be held to



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a stricter standard. Yet, this is also often erroneous. Athletes enter the sport at various ages and some 8 & Unders (having competed for a year or more) are far more "experienced" than some teenagers who are just entering the sport. In any event, experience is irrelevant. Finally, the idea that disqualifying an 8 & Under will "traumatize the child's psyche" is ludicrous. It clearly ignores the fact that youngsters are constantly being corrected during their early, formative years; that's how they learn.

#### **4. "Don't ask me to judge my child."**

Advocates of this usually fall into one of two categories. First, "I don't want anyone to think my child got by with some infraction because I was judging." Second, "I don't want to have to explain to my child why he/she was disqualified." Yet, this goes to the central element of being a "professional" judge. The Referee must know that the judge treats everyone in the field the same - "fairly and equitably." - all the time. The Referee must be confident that a judge will identify an infraction regardless of the effect upon his child, his team (club), his LSC. This is probably the ultimate test of the judge's impartiality, and referees should not let judges "off the hook" on this basis. To the judge, this is the time when he must separate himself from his parental role and accept the responsibility of being a USA Swimming judge.

#### **5. Don't Infer (Extrapolate)**

Succinctly put, this simply means: you can only call what you see, NOT what you deduct. You must actually see the swimmer miss the wall with his right hand on the turn, not assume he missed it because, by the time you looked, he was touching the wall with his left hand and was already turning. You must actually see the breaststroker take the second arm pull and be past the widest part of that second stroke before his head surfaces, not assume that it took two pulls to get that far out in the pool when you saw his head surface. Another way of putting this: don't look for reasons to disqualify. If you see the infraction and it is clear, report it, but if you are uncertain, remember that the benefit of any doubt must go to the athlete.

#### **Conduct:**

1. No outward manifestations during a race regarding illegality of competitor except raised hand.
2. Do not cheer, coach or swap disqualifications; control your emotions.
3. Do not fraternize with swimmers, coaches or spectators; disregard club affiliation and personal relationships.
4. Do not concentrate on frequent violators to the exclusion of others.
5. Give undivided attention -- start to finish.
6. If uncertain of role, consult with the Referee.



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**VI. JUDGING SWIMMERS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES**

1. Judge, in accordance with USA Swimming rules, any part of the body that is used.
2. Do not judge a part of the body that cannot be used.
3. Base your judgment on actual rule, not the swimmer's technique.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

Officiating can be an enjoyable experience. It is not designed to win popularity contests; however, the self satisfaction of having participated and having done a good job is very rewarding. Unfortunately, "sloppy" and uninformed officials rarely recognize their inadequacies, but fellow officials, coaches and swimmers do. Consequently, all officials must continually reassess their own performances. This can best be done by regularly reviewing the rules and training material and by attending retraining sessions.

The new or inexperienced official often asks, "How long will it take me to become a good Stroke and Turn Judge?" Obviously, it depends upon the individual but, rest assured, it won't happen overnight or without effort. Knowing the rules and attending training sessions are very important, but experience gained by working at meets is the only real teacher. Only experience can build the confidence the Stroke and Turn Judge requires before his or her performance becomes "automatic." Even then, it is essential that the judge continuously review the rules and regularly attend retraining sessions.

