

Potomac Valley Swimming

Stroke and Turn Judge

Introduction

Stroke and turn judges are the eyes of the referee on deck. Other than the referee, stroke and turn officials are the only officials who can make a call without dual confirmation, and the referee very rarely exercises this authority. Referees and chief judges will ask questions when a stroke and turn judge makes a call, but the referee can only overrule the call on a point of rule interpretation, or for an action which the referee has personally observed.

Well run meets and good competitive results are directly related to good officiating. This requires a thorough knowledge of the rules and the ability to apply them fairly and consistently. It can only be attained by studying the rules, attending training sessions, and working regularly at meets.

Officials must never overlook one important fact—the swimmers have worked hard to become competitive. They all deserve an equal chance. Officials must not, either by inaction or an irresponsible or inappropriate decision, disrupt the equity and fairness of the competition

Swimming has a particularly severe penalty for a violation of the technical rules: disqualification from the event. If an athlete is disqualified, it's as if the swimmer never swam the event at all. The athlete is not assigned a position in the standings, and the time in which they finished is not recorded. It is for this reason that **the benefit of the doubt must always go to the swimmer.**

That is not to say that stroke and turn officials should not make calls. The purpose of stroke and turn officials is to observe, but not scrutinize, the competition for compliance with the technical rules of swimming. If a stroke and turn official

clearly observes an infraction, then he/she should report it. The rationale for calling violations is not to punish the violator, but to be fair, and to protect the other swimmers in the race.

Basic Concepts

Take officiating seriously and work hard at it. Competitors have the right to expect officials to know the rules and interpret them correctly, fairly and courteously. Stroke and turn officials should:

1. Study USA Swimming Official Rules book regularly.
2. Uniformly interpret and apply rules.
3. Call violations when seen, but don't guess or anticipate.
4. Be fair and consistent; always give the swimmer the benefit of any doubt.
5. Disregard club affiliation.

Work regularly at the job.

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

Be professional in your manner. A good official should:

1. Make decisions quickly and decisively.
2. Not smoke or eat on deck.
3. Not coach the swimmers.
4. Refrain from cheering and control his/her emotions.
5. Not fraternize with swimmers, coaches or spectators during competition. Disregard club affiliation and personal relationships.
6. Not display outward signs during race regarding illegality of a competitor except a raised hand.

7. Not concentrate on frequent violators to the exclusion of others.
8. Give undivided attention—from start to finish.
9. Admit a mistake; if you made a wrong call, the competitor's welfare is more important than your own ego.
10. If uncertain of your role, consult with the chief judge or referee.

A Professional Look

It is important that officials look professional while on deck, i.e., neatly dressed and well-groomed. At most meets, the PVS uniform for officials is: navy blue slacks (but no jeans), shorts, or skirt, white polo shirt, and predominantly white deck shoes or athletic shoes. At Finals of a championship meet, the uniform will typically be a light blue oxford shirt with navy blue pants or skirt.

For more information regarding the expectations for officials, please see the **PVS Officials Code of Conduct**.

Responsibilities

The referee or, at the referee's discretion, the chief judge assigns and instructs stroke and turn judges. Before the competition begins, the referee or chief judge determines the respective areas of stroke and turn judge responsibility and jurisdiction. These may include joint, concurrent, or coordinated responsibility and jurisdiction.

Once assigned a position on deck, stroke and turn judges should remain there until relieved or excused by the referee or chief judge. If offered relief from a relief official, stroke and turn judges should leave the deck, returning at the end of the defined relief period. If a stroke and turn judge needs to leave the deck and a relief official is not available, they should first notify the referee or chief judge.

The stroke and turn judges' responsibilities begin immediately after the start. Any action prior to the start is the responsibility of the starter. Each stroke and turn judge should observe the start since their duties commence immediately after the start.

Depending upon the meet, an official may either be assigned as a stroke judge, a turn judge, or a stroke and turn judge.

Stroke and Turn Judges

At short course (25 yard) pools, PVS generally uses combined stroke and turn judges. These judges are typically positioned at the ends of the pool, stepping to the edge of the pool deck to observe. Stroke and turn judges will usually remain at the ends of the pool, except for Freestyle and Backstroke events.

During Freestyle events, stroke and turn officials will often be positioned at the corners of the pool where they can observe touches at each turn. The turn officials at the starting end of the pool should step away at the start and the finish of the race. This is especially important for the turn official that is standing at the corner from which the referee and starter are starting the race.

For Backstroke starts, the stroke and turn officials at the starting end that judge lane 1 and the highest numbered lane (e.g., lane 8 or 10) may be asked to walk to the sides of the deck and to "wrap around" to the corners at the start to observe the position of the swimmers' toes after the starting signal has been sounded. When at the corners, the judges should observe the lanes in the closest half of the pool (e.g., lanes 1-4 in an 8 lane pool). After observing the start, the stroke and turn officials would then return to their assigned position to judge the remainder of the race.

Combined stroke and turn judges will usually have jurisdiction over an assigned set of lanes for the entire pool or the closest half. The jurisdiction will be defined by the referee or chief judge during the session briefing.

At long course (50 meter) pools and at some short course pools, separate stroke judges and turn judges will be assigned.

Turn judges are positioned at the starting and turning ends of the pool, stepping to the edge of the pool deck to observe. Their responsibility is to observe whether, when turning or finishing, the swimmer complies with the turn and finish rules.

Stroke judges observe whether the rules relating to the style of swimming designated for the event are being observed. They are positioned on the sides of the pool.

Turn judges will typically have jurisdiction over the starts, turns, and finishes, while the stroke judges will often have wall-to-wall jurisdiction.

In some cases, unique pool configurations may necessitate alterations of these jurisdictions. The jurisdiction will be assigned at the briefing prior to the session.

15-Meter Mark: If assigned to observe the 15-meter mark for Freestyle, Backstroke, and Butterfly, stroke judges should look straight across the pool, using the markers on the lane lines as a point of reference. If the floats are not perfectly aligned, judging should be based on the marker that is the farthest from the end of the pool.

Positioning

Stroke judges observe while walking on the sides of the pool. During Backstroke, Butterfly and Freestyle, they observe the 15-meter mark to judge where the swimmer surfaces.

Breaststroke and Butterfly are best judged by walking abreast or slightly behind the swimmers. If the field starts to spread out, the judge should try to maintain a position that allows him/her to observe all the swimmers in the jurisdiction, as best as possible. Should sufficient officials be available to allow two stroke judges per side, lead/lag judging may be used.

Lead/Lag judging uses four stroke judges, two judges walking each side of the pool. When there are sufficient judges, this method provides more consistent observation of all swimmers. In a typical wall-to-wall jurisdiction, the lead judge normally starts at the 15m mark while the lag judge is positioned between the 15m mark and the start end. As the heat begins, the lag judge watches the initial strokes and kicks while the lead judge observes that the swimmers conform to the 15m rule (except in Breaststroke). Once the swimmers have all passed the 15m mark, both judges follow them down the course, observing strokes and

kicks. As the swimmers separate, the two judges likewise separate to maintain balanced observation, typically with lead judge observing the two lead swimmers in the jurisdiction while the lag judge observes the two lag swimmers (assuming an eight-lane pool and assuming the swimmers have not separated 3-1 or 1-3). As the swimmers approach the turn end of the pool, the lag judge stops at the turn end 15m mark while the lead judge continues the observation into the turn and the initial actions of the second leg of the race. As the swimmers head back toward the start end, the lag judge becomes lead and the lead judge becomes lag. This coordination continues until the race finishes.

Turn (or combined stroke and turn) officials at the starting end of the pool should position themselves behind the starting blocks when the next heat is being started. They should move quickly to the edge of the pool immediately following the starting signal. After all swimmers have left the stroke and turn judge's jurisdiction, the official should step away again. The stroke and turn judge should return to the edge of the pool as the athletes reenter the judge's jurisdiction.

Stroke and turn judges should provide a consistent level of observation for all heats. Occasionally, there will be empty lanes in a judge's jurisdiction. When this occurs, the judge should still observe the empty lanes as if someone were swimming in them. Otherwise, some athletes would be observed more than others.

Reporting Violations

Upon observing an infraction in their jurisdiction, stroke and turn judges shall immediately raise one hand overhead with open palm. This is intended to require 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/her hand, there can be no disqualification.

Violations shall be reported in writing using the slips that are provided. These slips should detail the event, heat number, lane number and violation.

At some meets, the chief judge will complete the disqualification slip and present it to the stroke and

turn judge. The judge should review all information for accuracy, and then print his/her name on the line marked "Signature".

At other meets, stroke and turn judges will complete the disqualification report themselves. It is necessary to familiarize yourself with these slips prior to the session.

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. Must be based on violation of a rule in the USA Swimming Rulebook.
4. The swimmer should always be given the benefit of any doubt.
5. Be sure that a violation occurred, understand clearly what it is, and be prepared to explain it.

Relay Take-Offs

When observing relay take-offs, the feet of the departing swimmer should be observed first. Once the feet have lost contact with the starting block, then the touch of the incoming swimmer should be observed. If the touch has been made, then the exchange is good. If the touch has not been made, then the take-off was early. These exchanges are generally recorded on slips that are provided - circle the exchange if it is good or mark an X through the exchange if it was early. No hand should be raised; the official should not give any indication other than to mark the exchange on the slip.

Some Definitions (for more, see the Rulebook)

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

Horizontal — parallel to the surface of the water.

On the Back — position of the body when the shoulders are at or past vertical towards the back.

On the Breast — position of the body when the shoulders are at or past vertical towards the breast.

Propulsive — having power to propel.

Scissor Kick — use of the top of the instep of one foot and the bottom of the other foot in the propulsive part of the kick

Touch — contact with the end of the course

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

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

Freestyle

1. **Start:** The forward start shall be used.

2. Stroke:

a. 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.

b. 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. (Note: completely re-submerging thereafter, except when entering a turn, is violation.)

3. **Turns:** Upon completion of each length some part of the swimmer's body must touch the wall. (Note: a hand touch is not required!)

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

5. Common violation:

a. Failure to touch at the turn. NOTE: If the touch is not made, the official should continue to watch. The swimmer may either reach back or swim back and make a legal touch any time prior to completing the next length of the pool.

Backstroke

1. Start:

- a. The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips.
- b. 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. (Note: if the toes or feet were in an illegal position before the start, there should not be a disqualification. It is the starter's responsibility to correct illegal position of the feet or toes prior to the start.)

2. Stroke:

- a. The swimmer shall push off on the back and continue swimming on the back throughout the race. (Note the definition of "on the back.")
- b. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it is 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 after each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.

3. Turns:

- a. Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall.
- b. During the turn the shoulders may be turned past the vertical toward the breast after which an immediate continuous single arm pull or a immediate continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. (Note: if the swimmer is too close to the wall, they do not need to do a flip turn but may touch the wall to turn.)
- c. The swimmer must have returned to a position on the back upon leaving the wall. (Note the definition of "on the back.")
4. **Finish:** Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. (Note the definition of "on the back.")

5. Common violations:

- a. Turning the shoulders past vertical on the turn and pausing prior to beginning an arm pull.
- b. Turning shoulders past vertical on the turn, taking a single or simultaneous double arm pull, and pausing prior to continuing the turn.
- c. Turning shoulders past vertical on the turn, and taking more than one single or simultaneous double arm pull.
- d. When shoulders have turned past vertical on the turn, swimmer missing touch on the wall and sculling back to touch.
- e. Failure to return to or past vertical toward the back when the swimmer leaves the wall on the turn.
- f. Shoulders past vertical towards the breast at the finish.

Notes:

Backstroke is essentially Freestyle on the back. There are no restrictions on arm or leg movement except if the swimmer turns on the breast as part of a turning action.

If the swimmer turns past vertical towards the breast at a turn, a flip turn is not required. If the swimmer begins to turn past vertical towards the breast, but touches the wall with some part of their body (hand, arm, head, etc.) before going into the turn, it is legal as long as their turning motion was continuous. They may then turn in any manner they want as long as they're at or past vertical towards the back when their feet leave the wall.

Breaststroke

1. **Start:** The forward start shall be used.

2. Stroke:

- a. After the start and after each turn when the swimmer leaves the wall, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as

the body is on the breast when leaving the wall.
(Note the definition of “on the breast.”)

- b. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm stroke and one leg kick in that order.
- c. All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.
- d. 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.
- e. The hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn.
- f. During each complete cycle, some part of the swimmer’s head shall break the surface of the water.
- g. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer may take one arm stroke completely back to the legs.
- h. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke.

3. Kick:

- a. After the start and each turn, at any time prior to the first breaststroke kick, a single butterfly kick is permitted.
- b. Following which, all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.
- c. The feet must be turned outward during the propulsive part of the kick.
- d. Scissors, alternating, or downward butterfly kicks are not permitted except as provided herein.

- e. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly kick.

4. Turns and Finish:

- a. At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. (Note: the hands need not be on the same level. The hands can touch as long as they do are not stacked.)
- b. At the last stroke before the turn and at the finish an arm stroke not followed by a leg kick is permitted.
- c. 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.

5. Common violations:

- a. At the start or after a turn, more than one downward butterfly kick.
- b. At the start or after a turn, head still below the water surface when the hands begin to turn inward at the widest part of the second arm stroke.
- c. Downward butterfly kicks during the swim.
- d. Not moving the arms in the same horizontal plane throughout the race (including the turns and the finish.)
- e. Non-simultaneous or one-hand touch on turns or finish. (Hands need not be on the same level. On the turns, be alert for a legal, quick touch—can be mistakenly interpreted as a one-hand touch. You should stand so that you can observe the entire wall.)
- f. Alternating or scissors kick.
- g. Body not at or past the vertical towards the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall after a turn.

Significant Aspects of Judging Breaststroke

The first arm pull after the start and each turn may bring the hands all the way back to the legs. Thereafter, they can be brought back no further than the hipline. What constitutes the “hipline,” however, is not defined. Therefore, judges should allow swimmers to pull to anyplace in the general area of the hips. The intent is to observe that, throughout the race, the swimmer does not glide underwater with the hands flat or nearly flat against the side of the body, as is normal after the initial pull at the start and after each turn. The swimmer should be given the benefit of any doubt relating to the position of the hipline.

After the first stroke and kick on the start and after each turn, the head must break the water surface before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second arm stroke. The hands do not have to stay in the water on the recovery. They may be recovered over the water; however, they must still be pushed forward together from the breast and the elbows must, at least, touch the water surface, except when reaching for the wall at a turn or the finish.

The head does not have to stay above the water level throughout the race. After the first underwater arm stroke and kick, the head need only come above the water once during each stroke cycle, but it actually has to break the water surface. The swimmer is permitted to “dive” under the water during each cycle, as long as a butterfly kick is not used to facilitate the diving action as this is part of the stroke, not a start or turn.

On turns or at the finish, swimmers do not have to touch with both hands at the same level. The hands must, however, touch simultaneously. Stroke and turn judges should stand at the edge of the pool when observing turns and finishes so that they can see the entire wall.

Butterfly

1. **Start:** The forward start shall be used.
2. **Stroke:**
 - a. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer’s shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast.
 - b. The swimmer is permitted one or more leg kicks, but only one arm pull under water, which must bring the swimmer to the surface.
 - c. 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.
 - d. The swimmer must remain on the surface until the next turn or finish.
 - e. From the beginning of the first arm pull, the body shall be kept on the breast except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. (Note definition of “on the breast.”)
 - f. Both arms must be brought forward simultaneously over the water and pulled back simultaneously under the water throughout the race. (Note the definition of “arm.” It is not necessary for the entire arm to come out of the water, but the entire arm – from wrist to shoulder – must break the calm water surface.)
3. **Kick:**
 - a. All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous.
 - b. 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. (Note: the feet may be crossed, or one may be higher than the other, provided no alternating action is introduced.)
 - c. A scissors, alternating, or breaststroke kicking movement is not permitted.

4. Turns:

- a. At each turn the body shall be on the breast. (Note the definition of “on the breast.”)
 - b. The touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. (Note: the hands need not be on the same level. The hands can touch as long as they are not stacked.)
 - c. Once a touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner desired.
 - d. The shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall.
5. **Finish:** At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. (Note: the hands need not be on the same level. The hands can touch as long as they are not stacked.)

6. Common violations:

- a. Hand touch not simultaneous or one-hand touch. Be alert for a legal, quick touch: can mistakenly be misinterpreted as a one-hand touch. You should stand so that you can observe the entire wall.
- b. Entire arm – from wrist to shoulder – not breaking the calm water surface.
- c. Arm recovery not over the water final after pull at the turn or finish (usually characterized by short pull and an underwater, stabbing touch).
- d. Non-simultaneous arm movement.
- e. Alternating kicking movement.
- f. Scissors or breaststroke kicking movement.

Individual Medley

1. 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. (Note: In the IM, “Freestyle” means any other stroke than the Butterfly, Backstroke, or Breaststroke.)

2. Stroke. The stroke for each one-fourth of the designated distance shall follow the prescribed rules for that stroke, except that in the Freestyle, the swimmer must be on the breast, except when executing a turn.

3. Turns

a. Intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke, except that in the Freestyle turn, the swimmer must return to the breast before any kick or stroke.

b. 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:

(1) Butterfly to Backstroke — The swimmer must touch as described for Butterfly. 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.

(2) 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.

(3) Breaststroke to Freestyle — The swimmer must touch as described for Breaststroke. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner, but must return to the breast before any kick or stroke.

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

Notes on the Individual Medley

There are three ways in which a swimmer might transition from Backstroke to Breaststroke: (1) an open turn, where they finish on their back and then rotate towards the breast; this is the most commonly used turning style, (2) a “bucket” turn, where they finish on their back and then flip backwards with their legs towards the wall; this is the second most commonly used turning style, and (3) a “crossover” turn, where they bring their lead arm directly over their heads and make the touch just before their shoulders get past vertical towards the breast as they make the turn. Regardless of the style used, the Backstroke must be finished on the back. If the shoulders are observed to rotate past vertical towards the breast prior to when the athlete contacts the wall, a disqualification should be called.

Relays

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

2. Medley - Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance in the following order: first, Backstroke; second, Breaststroke; third, Butterfly; and fourth, Freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke used as described in 101.6 (Individual Medley). At the end of each leg, the finish rule for each stroke applies in each case.

3. All Relays

a. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg in any relay event.

b. In relay races a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her team-mate has concluded his/her leg.

c. 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 enters the pool in the area where the race is being conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race. Exception: When an in-the-water start is required or such start is approved by the Referee.

d. Each relay team member shall leave the water immediately upon finishing his/her leg, except the last member.

e. In relay races the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the starting platform (ground or deck) before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified.

f. In relay races involving in-the-water starts, the team of a swimmer who has lost touch with the end of the course before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified, unless the swimmer in default returns to the original starting point at the wall.

Judging Swimmers with Disabilities

Disability is defined as a permanent physical or cognitive disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The referee or chief judge will inform you if you will be judging a swimmer with a disability. They will also inform you what rules accommodations (if any) have been approved for this swimmer.

In judging the stroke or kick of a swimmer with a physical disability, the referee and stroke & turn judge should follow the general rule that: if a part of the body is absent or cannot be used, it is not judged; if it is used during the stroke or kick, it should be judged in accordance with the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.

Judgments should be made based on the actual rule — not on the swimmer’s technique. For example, the Breaststroke swimmer with one arm or leg shorter than the other, may have a non-symmetrical stroke or kick, but as long as the arm or leg action is simultaneous, it would meet that portion of the rule.

