



Special Olympics Minnesota Swimming Handbook

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CONTENTS

Events	3
Rules of Competition	5
Assistance Needed Definitions	7
Sportsmanship	7

COACH CERTIFICATION RATIO TABLE

The updated coach certification ratio tables can be found in the Special Olympics Minnesota Coaches Portal under policies and fact sheets, or here: [Coach Ratio Table](#)

MORE INFORMATION

Practice ideas, skill assessment/development, and rules can be found in the SOI Quick Start Guides and SOI Rules for each respective sport can be found at www.specialolympics.org/sports.aspx

EVENTS

Please note that all swimming events and distances may not be offered at every regional competition.

Freestyle

Athletes may start in either a front or back position and may use any stroke style. Athletes may switch strokes during the race and does not have to be a recognized stroke. However, athletes may not walk during freestyle events.

Distances offered (meters): 400, 200, 100, 50, 25, 15

Backstroke

This stroke is also sometimes considered the back crawl. Some athletes prefer backstroke because their faces are out of the water and breathing is not an issue. Similarities to the front crawl are useful when beginning swimmers are reminded of a skill or part of a skill which may be familiar to them.

Athletes must start with two feet and two hands touching the wall and have an alternating arm motion with a flutter kick. The most common disqualifications are flipping to the stomach, or non-alternating strokes for more than 1.5 strokes.

Distances offered (meters): 200, 100, 50, 25

Breaststroke

When swimming the breaststroke, the athlete is prone in the water, and the arm and leg actions are symmetrical. The athlete breathes in at the beginning of each arm stroke.

Breaststroke is the only competitive stroke where the arm recovery is conducted underwater and where a greater amount of frontal resistance is experienced. The arm action is an out sweep, down sweep, in sweep and up sweep with recovery in a streamline position.

The leg kick is probably the most difficult of all kicks for swimmers to master. The leg action is simultaneous and is sometimes described as a whip kick. In addition to the breathing, the correct timing of the arms and legs is particularly important.

Athletes must start with two feet and at least one hand touching the wall. At each turn and the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously. The most common disqualifications are for one-handed touches and using a flutter kick.

Distances offered (meters): 200, 100, 50, 25

Butterfly

The butterfly stroke is generally taught after the swimmer has established basic skills in the other three competitive strokes. The stroke relies on good timing and simultaneous arm and leg actions. The stroke is best taught by breaking it down into three phases: kick, arm action out of the water, and breathing.

Athletes must start with two feet and at least one hand touching the wall. At each turn and the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously. The most common disqualifications are for one handed touch, using a flutter kick, and non-simultaneous arm motions.

Distances offered (meters): 100, 50, 25

Individual Medley

The swimmer must change strokes throughout the race using the correct turns and tempo for each of the strokes. In the individual medley event, the swimmer must swim the race using the four competitive strokes in the correct order (butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle). The athlete swims each stroke for one-fourth of the race.

Distance offered (meters): 100

Flotation Races

Each athlete registered in a flotation event is responsible for having their own flotation device. Athletes signed up for a flotation race are **not allowed to have assistance for the race**. If an athlete needs assistance in the pool during the race (in addition to flotation device), they must register for an Assisted Swim race (see below).

The flotation device must be U.S. Coast Guard approved and support the athlete with their face out of the water. Flotation devices such as aqua joggers or other waist belts, kickboards, inner tubes, or floats that wrap around the arms are not allowed. **Athletes with an unapproved flotation device will not be allowed to participate.**

Distances offered (meters): 50, 25, 15

Assisted Swim Races

Each athlete is responsible for having their own coach/assistant. The assistant may touch, guide, or direct the athlete in the pool but may not assist the athlete's forward movement. The swimmer **is allowed to use a flotation device** (see above for specifications). The assistant may be in the pool or on the deck. Make sure to notify the state office if special considerations need to be made for athletes with visual impairments.

Distances offered (meters): 50, 25, 15

*There is a 5-minute maximum time for flotation and assisted races.

Freestyle Relay

Each athlete will swim one 25-meter leg or one 50-meter leg of the race using any stroke style. Athletes who participate in the 25-meter flotation or assisted race can compete in the 4x25 relay with a flotation device. If a relay athlete needs assistance, please include that information with registration.

For relay exchanges, swimmers in positions 1, 2 and 3 must touch the wall prior to the next swimmer leaving the wall. Athletes must be in the pool to start, no dive starts.

To create an equitable system to allow for relay substitutions but maintain the integrity of the divisioning process, we will allow a relay team to make one substitution. The newly created team may swim any time slower than their qualifying score, but only 5% faster. If a team making a substitution swims more than 5% faster than their qualifying score, they will receive a participation ribbon.

Distances offered (meters): 4x25, 4x50

Unified Freestyle Relay

Unified relay teams must have two athletes and two Unified partners. Teams must have competed as a relay team at a regional competition to compete at state.

- Each relay is only allowed one substitution, regardless of if it is an athlete or Unified partner.
- Athlete substitutions are allowed at the regional and state level and will swim under the rules outlined under the Freestyle Relay noted above.
- If a Unified partner has an excused absence at the regional level, another Unified partner may sub in the day of the competition, but they must be registered for that competition. The relay team will receive a participation award. The regional qualifying score will be used for state divisioning, and the original relay team registered for regional will swim at state. This would count as the relay's one substitution.
- Unified partner substitutions are not allowed at state.

Distances offered (meters): 4x25, 4x50

RULES OF COMPETITION

Safety Considerations

There should be at least one certified lifeguard on duty for every 25 swimmers.

If no relief lifeguard is available, the pool must be cleared, even for a short duration, when a lifeguard must leave the poolside.

If a lifeguard cannot be present, the event/practice must be cancelled.

Competition Details

All starts will consist of two commands. "Take your marks" will be followed by the start signal when all swimmers are stationary.

A closed competition policy, which includes staging and competition areas, will be enforced. This is being done to provide a more controlled and manageable competition. We do, however, realize that a small percentage of athletes may need individualized assistance to perform to the best of their ability. In cases when the individual performance of an athlete may be affected or when their behavior may affect the performance of other athletes, coaches will be allowed to accompany those athletes in the competition areas otherwise considered closed.

To maximize pool time, some divisions will be run simultaneously in the pool.

Special Olympics Minnesota will not provide finish line towels. Some competitions may provide a plastic caddy for each athlete in which to place any personal items (towels, glasses, deck shoes, etc.). Volunteers will bring caddies to the finish line for athletes.

As a rule, please bring athletes to staging at least 15 minutes prior to their scheduled start time but note staging postings in case we are running ahead or behind schedule.

If an athlete refuses to enter the pool, event management reserves the right to start the race without that athlete.

Event Details

If during competition an athlete touches the ground, that is allowed. Athletes can use this or the lane ropes for a break but cannot propel themselves forward from the ground or rope. If athletes propel themselves forward, they will be disqualified and receive a participation ribbon.

Walking events are only available at some regional competitions. Check with sports@somn.org if interested in seeing where they are offered.

In any unassisted events, athletes must swim the full distance without assistance. All events are unassisted unless titled assisted. In flotation races, athletes may use a flotation device but do not have assistance.

Special Olympics recommends practicing relays in the same order in which you will compete. Order of teammates submitted at registration can change if needed.

Athletes may enter three individual events and one relay. Unified partners can register for one 4x25 team and one 4x50 team.

Although the pool depth would not allow it in some events, we will continue to not offer diving starts at the regional or state level.

Coaches need to include qualifying scores for each event that an athlete is registered for. At state competition, divisions are based on the results from regional competitions.

ASSISTANCE NEEDED DEFINITIONS

All teams must provide assistance with their own registered Level 1 coaches.

- **Entry/Exit:** Assisting the athlete getting into or out of the pool. The assistant does not stay in the pool during the race.
- **Touch Start:** Athlete requires someone to tap them to indicate the start of race.
- **Visual Start:** Athlete requires a visual prompt to indicate the start of race.
- **Staging:** Athlete needs an assistant present with them throughout the staging process (assistant not allowed beyond staging area).
- **On-Deck:** Athlete needs someone on the deck at the start or finish line during the actual race. The assistance is also allowed in staging. If an athlete needs someone along the pool side during the race, please contact sports@somn.org.
- **Outside Lane:** Athlete requires a lane next to the wall of the pool. For example, an athlete may have a seizure and needs someone close by.
- **Middle Lane:** Athlete requires middle lane of pool. For example, crowd could significantly distract athlete.
- **Pool Lift:** Athlete needs a mechanical lift to get them into and out of the water.

SPORTSMANSHIP

Good sportsmanship is both the coach's and athlete's commitment to fair play, ethical behavior, and integrity. In perception and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes by leading by example.

Competitive Effort

- Put forth maximum effort during each event
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform in competition
- Always finish a race; Never quit

Fair Play Always

- Comply with the rules
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play
- Respect the decision of the officials
- Strategy discussions with any athlete or partner are prohibited once race begins
 - If an official determines that a coach, partner, or spectator is violating this rule, the official may sanction the offending individual. Sanctions may include verbal warning, citing the coach/partner with unsportsmanlike conduct, or expulsion from the games.