

U.S. Masters Swimming

Self-Training Guide to Refereeing

Introduction

This guide is written as an introduction to the role of the referee at swim meets sanctioned by U.S. Masters Swimming (USMS). Its audience is the official currently certified by USMS as both a starter and a stroke and turn official who wishes to become certified by USMS as a referee.

While the written tests taken by a prospective referee primarily require study of both the USMS and USA Swimming rule books, this manual serves as a practical guide to the actual operations on a pool deck during a meet. It is intended as the formal preparation for working alongside a mentoring official during actual meets. While the prospective referee is expected to have gained some knowledge of meet process during his/her time working as a starter, this manual covers items that are unique to the referee's role.

It is highly recommended to completely read this guide and outline any questions you may have of your mentoring official *prior* to your first deck session. However, it is not necessary to review this manual prior to taking the required tests.

A note about gender: The use of masculine and feminine genders are mixed more or less at random throughout this document in reference to both the referee and other deck personnel. Consistent gender is maintained in sections only where it may be helpful in clarifying references to a particular person.

A note about common practice versus rules: Except for the specific requirements of the rules, as cited below, everything described in this manual is common practice. However, common does not mean universal! Some LMSCs have developed different practices that work in that LMSC's context; for example, the routing of disqualification slips or who is responsible for order of finish. As part of your training process, you will need to be attentive to such differences. Always remember: *Everything that is not a rule can be modified to meet the needs of an LMSC, a pool, a specific meet, the skill set of the officiating team, and/or circumstances.*

1. Masters Referee: Some Basics

Officials maintain the fair and equitable conditions of competition to promote uniform conditions, ensuring no swimmer has an advantage over another.

The referee's principal function is to see that the swimming rules are enforced during the meet and to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that all swimmers have uniform and fair competitive conditions. He/she, above all, must know and understand the rules under which the swim meet is being conducted. USMS has a very similar but distinct rule book and procedures from USA Swimming, FINA, the NCAA, the NFHS, and YMCA.

The referee must know the current rules and their interpretation. He must have a copy of the current USMS rule book, study it, and bring it to the meet. She must also attend clinics when available, consult with other knowledgeable officials, and learn the nuances that prompted the rules.

The best way to stay out of trouble is to stick to the rules. Deviating from the rules, no matter how well intentioned, invites requests for more deviations and, most likely, protests and challenges to the referee's decisions.

The success of every meet depends on the officials' integrity, knowledge, concern, and regard for the competitive interest of the swimmers.

One set of rules applies to all swimmers, regardless of ability level, age, or physical capabilities. The bottom-line test of the rules is to give swimmers "the benefit of the doubt," meaning that a rule violation must be clearly visible to the person making the call.

Officials do not judge style. As a stroke and turn judge, you should have quickly learned that "ugly is not necessarily illegal." A corollary is that beautiful may be illegal. Judge rule violations *solely* by the adherence to the written rules and interpretations, not to the style of the athlete.

Demonstrate impartiality and professionalism on deck. This does not mean you cannot be in a position of authority over acquaintances, friends, or even family members. In contrast, it means that everyone around you realizes that you are applying the same standards to all. Applying the rules more carefully to a swimmer that you know is just as unprofessional as applying the rules with more leniency to that person.

Refereeing, once you learn the basics, is fun,

BUT learning to be a referee takes time and experience!

Your development begins as you work as a starter. Observe your deck referee and begin to understand how the two roles complement and support each other.

There is more to learn than you can get in a clinic or even in multiple training sessions on deck. As a result, you should always be learning and seeking out new experiences at different meets. The more people you work with, both as a starter and as a referee, the more you can incorporate into your own personal skill set.

Refereeing can be as much art as science. All meets and most referees are different. Be patient and ask questions of your trainers and others.

Important things referees promote:

- **Safety:** The safety of athletes is the highest priority. NEVER sacrifice safety for any reason!
- **Fairness:** Ensure fair competition for all.
- **Positivity:** Create a positive atmosphere for everyone including athletes, officials, volunteers, etc.
- **Mentoring:** Train and mentor other officials.

The different roles of the Referee

There are three primary roles of the referee. These roles are different enough that USA Swimming recognizes them as three different certification paths and usually has three different people fill the roles at meets.

- Deck—In charge of the water
- Administrative—In charge of the timing/entry/scoring table
- Meet—In charge of the meet

At many Masters meets, however, there may be only one referee who consequently has a part in all three roles. As a result, in Masters Swimming some of the work of these three roles is often filled by non-officials, including the meet director and meet volunteers. While this enables the meet to run effectively, remember that in the end, the referee *is responsible* for the results of all three aspects and must make sure that others are performing their jobs within the rules and standards.

Qualities of a Good Referee

Team Player	Delegator
Professional	Compassionate

Communicator	Calm
Confident	Experienced
Knowledgeable	Proactive
Interpersonal	Skilled
Fair	

This is a long list! It is yet another reminder of the value of mentoring and experience in becoming a certified referee.

The referee should make his decisions without undue delay and decisively, being confident that he is knowledgeable and is being completely fair to the individuals involved. The binding principle in rendering judgments is the following:

Violations that clearly occurred should be called, but the benefit of any doubt must go to the competitor!

A tip in making the tough decisions is to adopt a helpful rather than a punitive attitude toward rules enforcement. Officials are not on the deck to see how many competitors they can disqualify. They are simply there to ensure that the competition is fair and equitable.

2. The Rules of Refereeing

Rule 103.6 – The Referee

103.6.1 A. Shall have full authority over all officials. B. Shall assign and instruct all officials. C. Shall enforce all applicable rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet ... D. Can overrule any meet official on a point of rule interpretation or on a judgment decision pertaining to an action that the referee has personally observed.

103.6.2 Has the authority to disqualify a swimmer(s) for any violation of the rules that the referee personally observes and ... shall at the same time raise one hand overhead ...

103.6.3 Shall signal the starter before each race that all officials are in position, that the course is clear, and that the competition can begin.

103.6.5 Shall give a decision on any point where the opinions of the judges differ and shall have authority to intercede in a competition at any stage to ensure that fair racing conditions are observed.

103.6.7 Shall make an immediate investigation when an apparent malfunction of the automatic or semiautomatic timing equipment has occurred ...

103.6.9 May modify any rule for a competitive swimmer who has a disability ...

103.6.10 Shall establish the necessary administrative and officiating procedures to conform to articles 102.10.3 and 102.10.4 when conducting events from alternate ends of a 50-meter course or conducting freestyle events longer than 200 meters two-to-a-lane ...

All other activities of the referee have been developed from this set of basic statements or other requirements stated in the rule book.

3. Deck Responsibilities of the Referee

Basic Responsibilities

- Safety of athletes in or near the pool
- In charge of the timeline
- Partner to the starter
- In charge of the competition in the pool

Safety of Athletes

Everything we do is imbued with safety concerns. For example, the use of the whistles tells the starter that all is clear and the course and swimmers are ready for a race to occur.

At all times, the referee will maintain an observation of the deck for unsafe situations or behaviors. Depending on the pool, there may or may not be lifeguards. Be sure to be aware of the safety protocol that guards and meet personnel will follow. While the meet director is responsible for creating a safety plan, as the senior authority and representative of USMS and the LMSC, you may be called on to act at any time if an unsafe situation should arise.

At all times, and especially when there are athletes in the water, the referee must maintain “Eyes on the Pool.” If at any time the referee’s attention must be diverted from the water, request that the starter “Take the Deck” and maintain that attention until the referee can return to the role.

In Charge of the Timeline

Deck referees are responsible for managing the timeline for a session and for controlling the pace of the meet.

Masters meets, in general, run at a slower pace than USA Swimming meets. However, there is still significant variation. Some need to be slowly run, often those with small sessions, a preponderance of older swimmers, and/or tight deck conditions. Some need to be faster, even at the Masters level, including those with larger sessions. This is often the case in LMSC or national championship meets.

Always strive for consistency in pacing regardless of what speed you are maintaining. The meet referee will usually provide guidance on the whistle timing.

Partner to the Starter

The deck referee must work as a team with the starter, not as two individuals. Always meet prior to the start of a session and review the following points:

- The starter picks his spot first, the referee then positions herself where there is good visual contact.
- The referee's position is based on the best place to observe the start, the competition, and the finish. The referee may move during the heat to accomplish this.
- The team must review false start procedures and what constitutes a false start. It is especially important for the starter and referee to discuss false start procedures in advance.
- Discuss how much independence the starter should have, especially regarding using the microphone. Some referees prefer to have the starter use the microphone to help manage swimmers on their own, while others only want the starter to talk when instructed by the referee. Decide what besides "take your mark" should the starter say and when.

Remember that your job is to help keep your starter calm and focused.

Do not let problems with DQ slips or concern about timeline spill over to the start sequence. Once you've given the multiple whistles, your attention should be on your starter and your athletes at the blocks. Everything else can wait, except safety concerns.

Be starter friendly! Never rush your starter and protect your starter from interference by others. Once you have handed the heat to the starter, time stops until the start signal is given.

In Charge of the Competition in the Pool

The competition in the pool consists of the start, the swim, the finish, and “dry-side” activities principally including processing disqualifications.

The Start Sequence

Whistle *clearly* and *crisply*, but try to avoid “shrillness.”

Initiate the heat with multiple short whistles to notify swimmers to get ready to swim—multiple bursts, short and crisp. The announcer or starter should then announce the event and heat. Masters does not generally use “flyover starts” except in long course meets.

If any swimmers for the heat do not step forward ready to swim, it is often but not a required practice to have the starter make a “call” for the swimmer, e.g., “Lane 3, John Doe, American Aquatics.” Give any missing swimmers adequate time to get to the blocks, but do not delay the heat excessively. In Masters competition, if an athlete misses his/her heat it is usually not allowed for the athlete to make up the swim in another heat, although local practices vary. The primary exception to this is when it can be clearly proven that timers, officials, or confusion with the scoreboard/announcer was a deciding factor. This is why it is important to take time to make sure all athletes present move up for the appropriate heat. Many athletes could be competing for the first time and are unfamiliar with whistle commands.

Once you are satisfied all swimmers have presented themselves or are not going to, blow a single long whistle to signal swimmers to get onto the blocks, to the front edge of the deck for a deck start, or to get in the water. The latter is relatively common in Masters meets. Swimmers starting on the blocks or from the deck are required to place at least one foot at the front of the starting platform or the edge of the deck after the long whistle. Unlike USA Swimming, the starter shall not issue the “take your mark” command until all swimmers have complied with the correct foot placement.

Forward Starts

Your goal is to have the next heat ready to start in a timely manner after the heat in the water has finished and exited the pool. Adjust your timing using the short and long whistles to maintain a good “pace” to the meet without rushing or dragging.

Many Masters swimmers get on the blocks with the short whistles, so time whistles to allow the announcer to speak and alert the next heat but not before the previous heat swimmers are mostly clear of the course. Then if all else is ready you can blow the long whistle once all swimmers from the previous heat have exited and cleared the area around the blocks. You also need to give swimmers an adequate opportunity to enter water for an in-water start.

Do not rush your starter or the athletes—this is a slower pace than a USA Swimming meet! Be consistent from heat to heat, adjusting for individual athlete abilities.

Backstroke Starts

Because the starter is responsible for observing the swimmers' toes at the start, she may move closer to the start end of pool for backstroke events than for events that utilize the forward start. The referee may also need to move closer as well to remain in good contact with the starter.

Once the last swimmer from the previous heat completes the swim, you should blow the short whistles to announce the upcoming heat. Allow athletes time to secure caps and goggles and/or remove clothing and the previous heat to clear the pool before blowing the first long whistle for entry into the pool. Linger swimmers may need to cross lanes to access a ladder. Do not rush getting the next heat in, as it can lead to athletes hanging on the blocks waiting for others to exit.

Blow a second long whistle to signal swimmers to take their starting position. This should normally occur as soon as all swimmers have surfaced and returned to the wall.

Extending the Arm

When the referee is comfortable that the heat or race is ready to begin, he will extend an arm toward the starter to turn the swimmers over to her. The referee should be prompt in turning the heat over to the starter. It is the starter's job to ensure the readiness of swimmers, not the referee's! This includes the responsibility of the starter to correct foot position on the block or deck *prior* to issuing the "take your mark" command.

Turn the heat over when all swimmers are on the blocks and getting themselves ready, and you are certain there are no late arrivals or swimmers uncertain about the heat.

With backstroke, after the second long whistle, turn the field over when swimmers in the water are in front of the end of the pool and getting themselves in position.

Remember that once the deck referee has extended her arm to the starter, the swimmers are in the starter's jurisdiction and remain there until the race is started. However, there may be circumstances where the deck referee will need to use the long whistle again to signal for the swimmers to step back up on the block. This is likely if there has been an extended wait and the swimmers have been stepped down to allow a problem to be solved. (If the starter stands the field, that alone does not require another long whistle.)

False Starts

The rules state, "When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal" (103.8.5C), and "Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the referee independently observes and confirms the starter's observation" (103.8.6A).

In practical interpretation, this means that a swimmer establishes a stationary vertical plane at the front of the block (edge of deck, in the water). Breaking that plane before the starting signal is considered false start. Vertical movement alone is not a false start.

Watch for *horizontal* movement relative to that *vertical* plane—*not twitching muscles, back feet, wiggly butts, etc.*

In USMS meets, most of the movement you'll see on the blocks is for attaining and maintaining balance, not intentional false start motion. Learn to recognize the difference and do not call this movement a false start.

See Appendix A for additional false start discussion.

Dealing with Distractions

Once the referee has given the field to the starter, if the starter observes anything that may impact the start of a race such as a loud noise or flash, the swimmers should be stood and the starter should address the referee as to the reason. Depending on how disruptive the issue was, the start sequence may need to be started again with a long whistle. Circumstances will dictate.

If something occurs during the start that impacts the race, the heat, or the swimmers, the referee can instruct the starter to recall the race. The referee may also instruct the starter to initiate a recall if in the referee's opinion, an unfair starting opportunity has occurred that the starter has not observed.

During the Heat and Finishes

With the start of the race, the referee should step away from the starter and direct himself toward the swimmers in the water and so that he observes the entire pool.

Observe swimmers, the pool as a whole, and your other officials. Be attentive for an official raising his arm to indicate a potential disqualification. During distance events (400 meters or longer) consider using a count sheet or other marking system to confirm that each swimmer has swum the appropriate distance—do not rely solely on swimmers' count boards!

At the end of the heat, the referee should record the order of finish on his heat sheet if he has time and can clearly observe the finish. Do this even if the starter or someone else has been assigned this task as it could prove helpful if there are questions on the heat.

Disqualifications

This section is a restatement of section 102.13 of the rule book and included for your convenience.

1. Only the official within whose assigned jurisdiction an infraction has been committed can make a disqualification. The referee or designated official making a disqualification shall make every reasonable effort to seek out the swimmer or his coach and inform him as to the reason for the disqualification.
2. Any swimmer who acts in an unsportsmanlike or unsafe manner within the swimming venue may be considered for appropriate action by the referee.
3. Swimmer must start and finish the race in the assigned lanes.
4. Swimmers may not grasp the lane lines to assist their forward motion.
5. Standing on the bottom during a freestyle race *does not* disqualify a swimmer, but the swimmer must not leave the pool or walk or spring from the bottom.
6. Obstructing another swimmer by swimming across a lane, or otherwise interfering, shall disqualify the offender, subject to the referee's discretion.
7. A swimmer who has completed his/her race may warm down in his/her assigned lane while other swimmers finish the heat, provided doing so does not delay the start of the next heat.
8. Any swimmer who delays the start by entering the water or by willfully or deliberately disobeying a starter's command to step on the blocks or to take a starting position, or for any other misconduct taking place at the start, can be disqualified from the event by the starter with the concurrence of the referee. Charge such a disqualification to "delay of meet," not to a false start.
9. Dipping goggles in the water or splashing water on the face or body prior to the next heat *is not* considered entering the pool unless such action interferes with the competition.

10. Should a foul endanger the chance of success of a swimmer, the referee may allow the affected swimmer to re-swim the event. In case of collusion to foul another swimmer, the referee may, at his discretion, disqualify the swimmer for whose aid the foul was committed, as well as the swimmer doing the fouling.

11. No swimmer may wear or use any device or substance to help speed, pace, buoyancy, or endurance during a race. Goggles can be worn and rubdown oil may be applied if the referee deems it not excessive. As of 2018, this has been interpreted as to ban the use of any type of compressive tape, even if used for medical purposes. Non-compressive tape only may be permitted by the referee if used to address a medical condition and brought to the attention of the referee at the start of the meet/session. Band-aids are not considered "tape" and are not of concern.

12. The referee or starter can recall and restart any race without charging a false start if, in their judgment, equitable conditions for all swimmers did not exist at the start.

13. A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the starter's responsibility; she may impose the appropriate penalty before the starting signal is given. This is most commonly applied in the backstroke start. The starter should not permit an athlete to start if his/her toes are curled over the edge of the pool deck or gutter, but instead instruct the swimmer to lower his/her toes.

14. The time and/or place of any swimmer or relay team disqualified either during or immediately following an event shall not be recorded in the results of that event. If awards have been made prior to the disqualification, they shall be returned and awarded to the proper recipient(s) and, if points have been scored by those disqualified, the event shall be rescored.

15. The time and/or place officially recorded for a swimmer shall not be nullified for violations occurring subsequent to such a performance.

Handling Disqualification Slips

Rule #1: Safety! Continue to watch the event in the water.

Place slips in an appropriate order to review and record on your heat sheet. Check DQ slips carefully. A slip must accurately describe the disqualification and be written in accordance with the rule. Check the event number, heat, and lane to make sure it is correct. All DQ slips from the deck should come to you for review and signature.

Mark the infraction in your shorthand on the referee heat sheet. Be sure you understand what is written. Print your name on the referee line of the DQ slip and turn in to the table.

While unusual at USMS meets, if you do get overwhelmed with DQs, ask for help or pause the meet momentarily to catch up.

Administrative Responsibilities of the Referee

Referees are part of the administrative team as well!

Introduce yourself to the timing operator, computer operator, announcer, and/or administrative official (if present). Depending on the meet, these roles may be merged into a smaller number of people. Find out how they are used to working. You want them to do things the way they're comfortable as long as they don't conflict with anyone else.

Discuss with the announcer when he/she will talk. It is important that the deck referee's whistles and starter's voice take precedence over the announcer.

Determine what the paperwork flow of DQ slips and heat results should be. Where will deck referees place DQ slips? Where will the person reviewing times find the timing data? There are many different ways this can happen based on how people have been trained and the "normal" process in the LMSC, so advance discussion is critical to ensuring that no confusion results.

How will the deck referee know when timing system is reset and ready for the next heat? Again, this depends on standard practice as well as the capabilities of the systems.

How should the deck referee/starter and the timing team handle irregularities? For example, should the starter call out the lane for no shows or wait for the deck referee to identify lanes needing to be called? Who will handle swimmers who missed their heats or late additions to the heat sheet?

Managing Timing

When an apparent malfunction occurs in automatic or semi-automatic electronic officiating equipment, the meet referee must have an investigation made to determine whether the swimmer finished in accordance with the rules and/or if there was an actual equipment malfunction. However, it is often the case that the timing team members are the first ones aware of any timing problems.

This investigation is rarely conducted by the active deck referee as it would greatly distract from the working of the deck. The exception would be if the timing system has a failure that requires the meet to be stopped. At the Masters level, reviewing of timing problems is often performed by the meet referee, a certified administrative official, or a non-certified person who has been trained in the administrative role.

This person should verify all timing revisions made by the timing operator, intermediary, or any other meet personnel to validate that the times are corrected consistent with the USMS rules. The meet referee is ultimately responsible for correct timing and will work with the deck team to determine who has the ability to best perform this function.

Meet Responsibilities of the Referee

The meet referee works in tandem with the meet director to take charge of all aspects of the meet.

The meet referee is, among other things, the designated independent observer who confirms that the meet director follows all requirements of the USMS rule book and sanction agreement. At the same time, the meet referee plays her own part in ensuring the success of the meet, including the following:

- Safety
- Fairness
- Rules and the procedures to implement them, which include staffing and paperwork

In Charge of the Event

Prior to the session beginning, the meet referee or their designee should make sure that all coordination tasks are taken care of.

This includes the “officials meeting” where assignments are made, rules are reviewed, and protocols, jurisdiction, and rotations are explained.

Admin staff: Handling deck entries, timing resets, closing events

Seeding

While this function is often performed by the meet director or his designated person, the meet referee must ensure that the meet is correctly seeded according to the rules.

Among the key requirements that must be observed are the following:

- Minimum of three (3) swimmers seeded in each heat—another heat may not be full in order to preserve the minimum number of swimmers. (covered in testing).

- Masters meets are frequently seeded slow to fast. However, when a distance event is swum last, that event is more frequently seeded fast to slow. The rules do not require any particular order of heats for the typical timed finals meet. This is defined in the meet announcement and must be followed.
- In smaller meets it is very typical to intermingle men and women of any age and seed the entire field simply according to time. Some meets prefer to segregate men's and women's heats, especially larger meets. Only at national championships are heats typically segregated by age group as well as gender.

Swimmers with Disabilities

Article 107, "Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers with a Disability in USMS Meets," grants the meet referee the authority to modify the rules for a swimmer with a disability.

The referee may allow for modifications and/or interpretations of the rules, based on each swimmer's individual disability characteristics. It is the responsibility of the swimmer to provide appropriate information to the meet management, to contact the referee on arrival, and to bring someone to assist, if needed. The entire officiating team should be made aware of any adaptations made, if possible.

Generally, swimmers with disabilities know the routine and rules, but be patient and make sure you do everything you can for the athlete under the rules.

Note that many older Masters swimmers may require accommodations similar to swimmers with formally-defined disabilities.

General Guidelines for Swimmers with Disabilities

- May need more time getting on the blocks
- May need more time assuming starting position
- May sit on the starting platform for forward starts (note that *all* swimmers may choose to start from a standing position on the deck or from in the water in a forward-start event, without notifying the referee or starter in advance)
- May need more time to get out of the pool

Be patient. Focus, but don't fixate. Try not to create situations where the heat should be stood. Hold the same expectations of all swimmers within their ability.

Hearing-Impaired Swimmers

Start: The swimmer may want to change lanes to see the strobe better, and the referee may reassign lanes to accommodate that request. (This may either be a lane closer or farther from the starting signal, depending on the swimmer's needs.) The starter **shall** use hand signals (see Article 107) upon request. The swimmer **may** also have coach or assistant using signals on other side of pool or behind blocks.

Referee should be positioned close to the starter if possible for better communication. However, this may not always be possible.

Vision-Impaired Swimmers

Start: The swimmer may want to be in a lane closer to a speaker to hear the start clearly. The swimmer may need help getting to the blocks and/or getting up on the blocks and may need an assistant to let him/her know when to start

Turn: May have an assistant to let them know when to turn. The assistant may touch their head or shoulder with a "tapper" (a pole with a soft ball at the end) when the swimmer is approximately two strokes away from the wall. An audible device shall NOT be used.

Relays: An assistant may signal a visually impaired swimmer when to enter the water on exchanges with a "go" command and/or a light touch (but NOT a push).

Cognitively-Impaired Swimmers

The swimmer may have an assistant on deck when necessary. No specific adaptations of the rules are likely necessary but patience should be observed, as with all swimmers.

Physically-Impaired Swimmers

With physically impaired swimmers, the fundamental rule is to judge the stroke and turn based on the arm or leg (or portion thereof) that is performing the action. If a limb is missing or immobile, the rules cannot apply to that limb.

Judging conforms to the actual rule, not to the swimmer's technique. This does not permit an athlete to violate a rule, but does require the official to allow any form of a stroke that is NOT in violation of the rule.

One specific adaptation that applies to breaststroke and butterfly is that if the swimmer is unable to push off the wall with the legs (because of immobility or absence), one asymmetric stroke is permitted to allow to swimmer to return to the "on the breast" position.

Working With Coaches

At the Masters level, many athletes are self-coached and should be awarded the same courtesies as credentialed coaches. Usually questions about disqualifications are seeking to understand the rule/violation better, not challenges to the call itself. When challenges occur, consider these points:

Coaches are advocates for their swimmers and are usually looking out for interests of their swimmers before any other consideration.

Keep the communication lines open and value their input without being overly deferential. We are here to support the efforts of all swimmers to excel in a fair and impartial environment.

If a coach comes to you with an issue:

- Listen carefully and completely—don't try to provide an answer prematurely. Remain calm and avoid becoming defensive. *Understand* what the issue is about and *then investigate*.
- Use your entire team—ask for advice from other officials as needed, keeping the confidentiality of those involved intact.
 1. Talk to chief judges and stroke and turn judges about the call
 2. Confer with other referees
 3. Check the rule book
- Make your decision based on the best information you can get. Be firm but fair—it is *your* decision.

Do the best you can for the athlete and also the meet. Allow the coach to question decisions, but don't get involved in long arguments—gather the information from the official who made the call and respond back to the coach in a timely manner.

Managing the Meet

Before the Meet

- Review rules, particularly any recent USMS changes or interpretations.
- Check meet announcement for specific provisions pertaining to the meet and follow them.
- Wear uniform as defined by the LMSC.

- Don't forget your whistle and credentials.
- Bring a copy of current year's USMS rule book. You may also bring a copy of checklists and summary notes from the various clinics.
- Display confidence—officiating regularly builds confidence.

Before the Session

- Arrive prior to the scheduled start of warm-ups.
- Check in at the officials' table and with the meet director.
 1. Check the list of officials attending to ensure all key positions are filled and, if not, take action to get them filled.
 2. Check with the meet director about any problems or concerns. Are you using a radio or runner system? Anything to make the meet run more smoothly. Where will the meet director be during meet?
- Make sure that the pool is ready. This includes making sure that the blocks and bulkheads are tight, the pads are in, the volume of starting speakers is checked, and that a test start is conducted prior to the beginning the session. Ensure that backstroke flags are installed properly. If a recall rope is available, test it.
- As officials arrive, check their credentials
- Conduct an officials' briefing—begin with introductions and welcome
 1. Stroke Briefing: Stay up to date with rules interpretations.
 2. Protocol Briefing: Confirm the process for getting DQ slips to the deck referee. Will there be runners or should stroke and turn officials bring slips directly to the corner? Is a chief judge available? State the jurisdiction for the different officials. Be clear as to who "calls" belong to—especially with small officiating crews—such as who observes 15-meter violations. Should start-end turn officials wrap for the backstroke start and/or provide hand signals to the starter?
 3. Deck staffing, assignments, and rotations/break plans.
 4. GIVE CLEAR DIRECTIONS—BE CERTAIN EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS

- Ensure start and pace lanes are opened at the proper time. You may need to clear multiple lanes during the “peak” demand for start lanes. The meet director should be prepared to assist with this process including providing appropriate signage.

Rules for Staffing Meets

The absolute minimum is two officials—referee/stroke and turn and starter/stroke and turn. **NO SINGLE PERSON MAY REFEREE AND START!** Without two officials, the meet does not qualify as a sanctioned meet. While the meet can still take place, no times may be submitted for any records or Top 10 swims.

The ideal *minimum* is a referee, starter, two to four stroke and turn officials, and a combination meet referee/admin official. With this complement, stroke and turn officials can rotate for breaks, and the meet referee can confirm times as well as rotate into the corner if the deck referee or starter need a break.

The ideal staffing is two or more referee/starter teams, separate admin official, 6-plus stroke and turn officials, and a meet referee. This level of staffing is pretty rare outside LMSC championship meets.

Timers—The requirements depend on timing system.

- Automatic timing (pads): The required minimum is one person per lane, operating both a button and a stopwatch. It is usually preferred to use two button operators, one of whom also operates a stopwatch.
- Semi-automatic timing (buttons): The required minimum is two people per lane, each operating a button, one operating a watch. Three per lane is better—each can operate both a button and a watch if available.
- Manual timing (watches): The required minimum is two people per lane, each operating a watch. Again, three is highly desirable as it allows for better redundant timing data in the event of a human error.

Approaches to Staffing the Deck

The staffing approach depends on pool configurations and staffing levels. Be certain your officials understand what you are doing for the meet and why.

Establish fair and equitable conditions for the competition by the consistent placement of stroke and turn judges. If the judges cannot walk the full length of the pool because of either pool design or insufficient personnel, assign them so as to ensure that all swimmers are observed as equally as possible.

Lightly staffed decks usually depend on turn judges only, with jurisdiction for their lanes to the mid-point of the pool.

The 15-meter rule in backstroke, butterfly, and freestyle makes it important that officials be positioned to observe possible violations. When there are sufficient officials to be assigned as stroke (side) judges, observing the 15-meter mark becomes their responsibility. In short course (SCY/SCM), turn end turn judges often are asked to start at the 15-meter mark, then walk to the corner/end of the pool when the athletes have all surfaced and continue judging from there.

Be sure you have relief plans so officials have a chance to eat, drink, and attend to personal needs. This can be as simple as “breaking down” to two corners on freestyle events or reducing coverage during some stroke events. It’s also common with very small officials’ teams to schedule breaks during the meet timeline. (Often this is done before or after relays, as there is frequently a desire for swimmer breaks at that point as well.)

Make certain people understand how relief will be done and rotations, if used.

Protests

There are four types of protests: (1) protests of eligibility; (2) protests against judgment decisions of any official; (3) protests concerning interpretation of Part 1 or the rule book glossary; and (4) protests regarding any other aspect of the competition itself. Formal protests are quite rare. Although the questioning of a DQ slip is more common, it does not usually rate as a formal protest.

Protests regarding the eligibility of any swimmer to compete or to represent an organization in any race are made in writing to the meet director or referee, before the race is held. If the question cannot be immediately resolved, the protested swimmer may compete under protest. If this occurs, it should be announced before the race. The meet committee must refer such protest to the LMSC Board.

Only the meet referee can consider protests against judgment decisions of deck referees, starters, stroke and turn, or relay take-off judges. The referee should not overrule any such decision unless he has personally observed the alleged violation or unless the official making the decision provides a rationale that is clearly incorrect under the current rules or the violation cannot be clearly and/or consistently explained. The meet referee’s decision is final in such protests.

Protests regarding the interpretation of the rule book (part 1 and the glossary) are not made to the meet referee but are submitted to the chair of the USMS Rules Committee. They must be submitted within 10 days of the meet.

Any protest resulting from other aspects of the competition is made to the meet referee within 30 minutes of the race in which the violation took place. If the protest cannot be resolved immediately, the protester may file a written protest with the LMSC chair and subsequently to the USMS Rules Committee chair.

Postmeet Responsibilities

It is a swimmer's responsibility to provide a split request form to the meet referee if he/she wishes to have a split recorded as an official time. These forms must be completed by the end of each session, with the exception of backstroke and relay lead-off splits which must be completed *prior* to the swim to allow the deck referee to validate the finish properly.

Remain 30 minutes after the end of the session to be sure no protest is being made. During this time, welcome input from coaches and swimmers regarding how they felt the session went, possible improvements, etc.

Complete record forms for world, USMS, or in some cases LMSC records as needed.

If requested, critique meet with the meet director (both positives and negatives). This may better take place at a slightly later time if the meet director has many other tasks to complete.

Certification Process

Prerequisites

- Certified by USMS as a starter and stroke and turn official.
- Work a minimum number of sessions in starter role (four is the current requirement).
- Obtain and maintain membership in USMS.
- Contact LMSC Officials chair to indicate interest in referee training and determine if LMSC has additional requirements. If there is no LMSC Officials chair, contact USMSOfficials@gmail.com.

Testing—Three required tests

- USA Swimming Referee test
- USA Swimming Timing Judge test
- USMS Officials Supplemental test

The first two tests use the USA Swimming rule book and USA Swimming website. The third test is specific to the USMS rule book (especially Appendix B) and uses the USMS testing site.

On-Deck Training

- Once the tests are passed, you will be issued a trainee card by the USMS Officials Committee.
- Work with your LMSC Officials chair to identify meets at which training can be conducted.
- Must be mentored at a minimum of two meets, but standard is “train to competence” so more than two sessions might be needed.
- Your training referees and the LMSC Officials chair must agree that you are ready to run a deck as the meet referee before recommending certification. During this time, you may be in a position of working as a fully capable deck referee while acquiring competence at the meet referee skills.
- Once your training is complete, your LMSC Officials chair will contact the USMS Officials Committee recommending referee certification and an updated USMS officials credential card will be issued.