

2009 STSL Guidance for Starters

Note: no STSL teams currently use recall ropes for false starts. References to recall ropes in [brackets] below are retained for completeness.

A. Philosophy

1. Thank you for volunteering. STSL cannot exist without competent officials. Officiating is very rewarding and educational.
2. Your primary job is to ensure all swimmers have a fair and equitable start. Be calm and consistent with your starts. Keep your words to a minimum; too much talk is very distracting to the swimmer.
3. You must take your job seriously; understand the rules and how they are applied. An annual certification is suggested, consisting of attendance at an STSL officials clinic. Submit questions to the STSL Vice President.
4. The benefit of the doubt always goes to the swimmer. Be confident and consistent in your calls. Do not be concerned that you might be DQ'ing your best friend's child; it is your obligation if you see a violation. The coaches and swimmers know that DQ's are not to be taken personally.
5. Have fun and make the meet enjoyable for the swimmers and spectators. Remember, you're there for the kids.

B. Prior to Meet

1. Review the starting rules the night before or when convenient prior to the meet.
2. Arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the meet. Report to the Meet Director/Referee and identify yourself as the Starter.
3. The Meet Director will designate your area on the pool deck. This is customarily on the corner to the right of the starting blocks. Generally, the lane closest to the Starter is designated as Lane 1. Position yourself so you can see all swimmers equally well.
4. Secure the starting device from the home team Team Rep or Team Manager along with the necessary accessories (clipboard, pencils, heat sheet). Make sure the starting device is working properly.
5. Test the audio equipment that you will use during the meet. [If a recall rope will be used, make sure that it is secure and can be released quickly. Check to see whether a volunteer has been designated to operate the recall rope and, if so, instruct them accordingly.]
6. Be present at your assigned position 5 minutes prior to the beginning of the meet.

C. During the Meet

1. You control the overall tempo of the meet by the manner in which the individual heats are started. Take your cues from the Head Timer, the Stroke and Turn judges, and the Clerk of Course. Establish a pace that is comfortable to all participants without rushing. Make sure all officials (including timers) are ready before starting the next heat.
2. Be prudent in announcing the correct event and heat, not only to the swimmers on the blocks (your primary responsibility), but also to the Timers and Judges at the meet.
3. In announcing the beginning of each new event, use a suggested phrase such as, "The

next event is 7 and 8 girls 25-yard breaststroke; heat 1 step up, please.” Make the appropriate announcement for each age group, sex, and event.

4. Each subsequent heat can be placed on the blocks using the simple command of, “Heat 2 step up, please”.
5. For backstroke events, swimmers are instructed to “Step in, please,” followed by, “Place your feet.”
6. Once you have placed the swimmers on the blocks, briefly survey the Judges and Timers to see that they are ready for the next heat.

Note: If you wish, you can ask, “Timers and Judges ready?” This may be helpful if you notice a lot of scrambling among the timers for various reasons, or if you want this step to remind yourself to scan the timers and judges to judge for yourself. Note that this will slow the meet down – more than you might think – and the timers, not you, are now in control of the tempo.

7. Keep your commands to the swimmers to an absolute minimum in order to avoid confusing them.

Once all swimmers are on the blocks (or in the water) and awaiting your instructions, you may find it appropriate to re-announce the stroke and distance. For example, you may say, “50 yard butterfly.” As above, this slows the tempo of the meet. Use your judgment as to whether the swimmers really need the reminder.

8. After a brief pause, the next command is, “Take your mark.” Ideally, the swimmers should assume a starting position in unison, and thereafter remain stationary. In reality, they will assume a starting position at different rates of speed. If you feel that the interval between the responses of the first and last swimmers is too long, thus handicapping the first swimmer, instruct the swimmers to, “Stand, please,” and remind the heat as a group to “Come down together.” Any swimmer reacting to the “stand” command by entering the water shall not be charged with a false start. The “stand” command should also be used if a swimmer appears to be in motion after taking their mark. If that swimmer is unable to stand after the “stand” command, and enters the water, even if he falls in, he shall be charged with a false start. If a swimmer goes in, step the heat off the blocks and inform the offending swimmer of the false start. Then step them up again. Finally, the Starter may use the “stand” command if he is uncomfortable with any aspect of the start.

Delivery of the “Take your mark” command is very important. It should be said in a monotone, or slightly lowering the word “mark”. Imagine saying “close the door.” It should be consistent from heat to heat. It should be steady, not sing-song. It should not be too slow or too fast; the swimmers response to the speed of your command unconsciously determines the speed at which they take their mark. If you say it too slowly, they take too long assuming their position and often come down at different rates, putting the first swimmer(s) down at a disadvantage. If you say it too quickly, they can come down too fast and lose their balance; if they lose their balance and fall in because of a poor command delivery, do not charge them with a false start—it was your fault. The more you practice, the better you will get.

9. Once all swimmers have take their marks and are stationary, activate the starting

device. There will probably be some jiggling, especially with the younger swimmers, but if they appear ready, send them. If however, just prior to activating the starting device, a swimmer begins a forward motion, sound the recall device [and drop the recall rope] in conjunction with a false start.

Use these arm signals for hearing-impaired swimmers, even if they do not appear to be watching you:

“Step up, please” – arm held straight up overhead

“Take your mark” – arm lowered to horizontal position, straight out from body

“Go” – arm snapped down from horizontal position to thigh.

10. If, in your judgment, an immediate restart would not permit some of the swimmers to “catch their breath”, you may elect to start the next heat or two and restart the original heat thereafter. This is tricky, however, because you must be sure to inform the Coaches, Clerk of Course, Meet Director, Judges, and Timers, so that everyone is recording the appropriate heat number.
11. Once the original heat is back on the starting blocks, announce the lane in which the false start occurred and record it for future reference. If you are unsure of the lane number, announce, “No false start.” Remember, in STSL a single false start does not disqualify a swimmer. A second false start by the same swimmer in the same event is a disqualification.
12. Continue to watch the swimmers for 2-3 seconds after they have entered the water in case there is some indication there was not a fair and equitable start, or something interferes with the swim (e.g., the recall rope falls into the water). If this occurs, recall the heat. A swimmer who is left standing on the blocks is not reason enough to recall the heat, unless you believe that the swimmer could not hear the starting signal properly or was being talked to by another official.
13. Be meticulous in keeping track of the appropriate heat numbers and combined heats on your heat sheet. Likewise, make sure that the starting device is ready for the next heat.
14. Do not engage in conversation with any swimmer, parent, or coach over starting. Let the meet director or referee handle any problems. If the meet director or referee asks you to do something different or to change pace, do not take it personally, and heed his/her instruction.
15. At the end of the meet, pack up the starting device and return it to the host team.

Adapted with permission from training materials of the Durham (NC) Summer Swim League