Swimming Vocabulary & Terms to Know

- Alternate – In a Prelims/Finals meet, after the finalists are decided, the next two fastest swimmers other than the finalists are designated as alternates. The faster of the 2 being first alternate and the next being second alternate. If a finalist cannot participate, the alternate is called to take their place, often on a moment's notice.
- Anchor - The final swimmer in a relay.
- AUTO - Automatic Regional Qualifying Time
- Backstroke – One of the 4 competitive racing strokes, basically any style of swimming on your back. Backstroke is swum, as the first stroke in the Medley Relay and second stroke in the I.M.
- Beep – The starting sound from an electronic computerized timing system.
- Bell Lap – The part of a freestyle distance race (400 meters or longer) when the swimmer has 2 lengths plus 5 yards to go. The starter rings a bell over the lane of the lead swimmer when the swimmer is at the backstroke flags.
- Blocks – The starting platforms located behind each lane. Some pools have blocks at the deeper end of the pool, and some pools have blocks at both ends. Blocks have a variety of designs and can be permanent or removable.
- Breaststroke – One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Breaststroke is swum as the second stroke in the Medley Relay and the third stroke in the I.M.
- Butterfly – One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Butterfly (nicknamed the FLY) is swum, as the third stroke in the Medley Relay and first stroke in the I.M.
- Cap – The latex or silicone covering worn on the head of swimmers.
- CONS - Consideration Regional Qualifying Time - top times taken after the automatic cutoff until a heat has been filled
- Course – Designated distance (length of pool) for swimming competition. (I.e.) Long Course = 50 meters / Short Course = 25 yards or 25 meters.
- Deck – The area around the swimming pool reserved for swimmers, officials, and coaches. No one but an "authorized" USS member may be on the deck during a swim competition.
- Disqualified – A swimmers performance is not counted because of a rules infraction. A disqualification is shown by an official raising one arm with open hand above their head.
- Distance – How far a swimmer swims. Distances for short course are: 25 yards (1 length), 50 yards (2 lengths), 100 yards (4 lengths), 200 yards (8 lengths), 400 yards (16 lengths), 500 yards (20 lengths), 1,000 yards (40 lengths), 1,650 yards (66 lengths). Distances for long course are: 50

meters (1 length), 100 meters (2 lengths), 200 meters (4 lengths), 400 meters (8 lengths), 800 meters (16 lengths), 1,500 meters (30 lengths).

- Dive – Entering the water headfirst. Diving is not allowed during warm-ups except at the designated time, in specific lanes that are monitored by the swimmers' coach.
- Dropped Time – When a swimmer goes faster than their previous performance they have "dropped their time".
- Dryland – The exercises and various strength programs swimmers do out of the water.
- Entry – An Individual, Relay team, or Club roster's event list into a swim competition.
- Entry Limit – Each meet will usually have a limit of total swimmers they can accept, or a time limit they cannot exceed. Once an entry limit has been reached, a meet will be closed and all other entries returned.
- Event – A race or stroke over a given distance. An event equals 1 preliminary with its final, or 1 timed final.
- Exhibition - Swimming for a time and not eligible for earning points.
- False Start – When a swimmer leaves the starting block before the horn or gun. One false start will disqualify a swimmer or a relay team, although the starter or referee may disallow the false start due to unusual circumstances.
- Final Results – The printed copy of the results of each race of a swim meet.
- Finals – The final race of each event.
- Fins – Large rubber fin type devices that fit on a swimmers feet. Used in swim practice, not competition.
- Flags – Pennants that are suspended over the width of each end of the pool approximately 15 feet from the wall.
- Freestyle – One of the 4 competitive racing strokes. Freestyle (nicknamed Free) is swum as the fourth stroke in the Medley Relay and fourth stroke in the I.M.
- Goals - The short and long range targets for swimmers to aim for.
- Goggles – Glasses type devices worn by swimmers to keep their eyes from being irritated by the chlorine in the water.
- Hand Paddle – Colored plastic devices worn on the swimmers hands during swim practice.
- Heat Sheet – The pre-meet printed listings of swimmers seed times in the various events at a swim meet.

- Heats – A division of an event when there are too many swimmers to compete at the same time. The results are compiled by the swimmer's time swam, after all heats of the event are completed.
- Horn – A sounding device used in place of a gun. Used mainly with a fully automatic timing system.
- Illegal – Doing something against the rules that is cause for disqualification.
- IM – Individual Medley is a swimming event that uses all 4 of the competitive strokes on consecutive lengths of the race. The order must be: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Freestyle. Equal distances must be swum of each stroke.
- Interval – A specific period of time used for swimming or rest during swim practice.
- Jump – An illegal start done by the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th member of a relay team. The swimmer on the block breaks contact with the block before the swimmer in the water touches the wall.
- Kick – The leg movements of a swimmer. A popular word to "yell" to encourage swimmers during a race.
- Kick Board – A flotation device used by swimmers during practice. A lightweight object used with great accuracy by coaches.
- Lane – The specific area in which a swimmer is assigned to swim. (i.e.) Lane 1 or Lane 2. Pools with starting blocks at only one end: As the swimmers stand behind the blocks, lanes are numbered from Right (lane 1) to Left (Lane 6).
- Lane Lines – Continuous floating markers attached to a cable stretched from the starting end to the turning end for the purpose of separating each lane and quieting the waves caused by racing swimmers.
- Lap – One length of the course. Sometimes may also mean down and back (2 lengths) of the course.
- Lap Counter – The large numbered cards (or the person turning the cards) used during the freestyle events 500 yards or longer. Counting is done from the end opposite the starting end. The numbers on the cards are "odd numbers" only with the final lap being designated by a bright orange card.
- Leg – The part of a relay event swam by a single team member. A single stroke in the IM. Length – The extent of the competitive course from end to end. See lap.
- Mark – The command to take your starting position.
- Meet – A series of events held in one program.
- Meters – The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the metric system. Long course meters is 50 meters, short course meters is 25 meters.

- NT – No Time. The abbreviation used on a heat sheet to designate that the swimmer has not swam that event before.
- Officials – The certified, adult volunteers, who operate the many facets of a swim competition.
- Pace Clock – The large clocks with highly visible numbers and second hands, positioned at the ends or sides of a swimming pool so the swimmers can read their times during warm-ups or swim practice.
- Personal Best – When a swimmer goes faster than their previous performance they have "dropped their time".
- Practice – The scheduled workouts a swimmer attends with their swim team/club.
- Prelims – Session of a Prelims/Finals meet in which the qualification heats are conducted. Prelims-Finals – Type of meet with two sessions. The preliminary heats are usually held in the morning session. The fastest 6 or 8 (Championship Heat) swimmers, and the next fastest 6 or 8 swimmers (Consolation Heat) return in the evening to compete in the Finals. A swimmer who has qualified in the Consolation Finals may not place in the Championship Finals even if their finals time would place them so.
- Psych Sheet – Another name for a "Heat Sheet" or meet program.
- Pull Buoy – A flotation device used for pulling by swimmers in practice.
- Qualifying Times – Published times necessary to enter certain meets, or the times necessary to achieve a specific category of swimmer.
- Race – Any single swimming competition. (I.e.) preliminary, final, timed final.
- Referee – The head official at a swim meet in charge of all of the "Wet Side" administration and decisions.
- Relays – A swimming event in which 4 swimmers participate as a relay team each swimmer swimming an equal distance of the race. There are two types of relays: 1.) Medley relay - One swimmer swims Backstroke, one swimmer swims Breaststroke, one swimmer swims Butterfly, one swimmer swims Freestyle, in that order. 2.) Freestyle relay - Each swimmer swims freestyle.
- Scratch – To withdraw from an event after having declared an intention to participate. Some meets have scratch deadlines and specific scratch rules, and if not followed, swimmer can be disqualified from remaining events.
- Seed – Assign the swimmers heats and lanes according to their submitted or preliminary times. Seeding – Pre Seeding swimmers are arranged in heats according to submitted times, usually a day prior to the meet.
- Shave – The process of removing all arm, leg, and exposed torso hair, to decrease the "drag" or resistance of the body moving through the water. Used only by seniors at very important (Championship) meets.

- Short Course – A 25 yard or 25 meter pool.
- Split – A portion of an event, shorter than the total distance, that is timed. (i.e.) A swimmer's first 50 time is taken as the swimmer swims the 100 race. It is common to take multiple splits for the longer distances.
- Sprint - swimming as fast as possible
- Stand-up – The command given by the Starter or Referee to release the swimmers from their starting position.
- Start – The beginning of a race. The dive used to begin a race.
- Starter – The official in charge of signaling the beginning of a race and insuring that all swimmers have a fair takeoff.
- Stations – Separate portions of a dry land or weight circuit.
- Step-Down – The command given by the Starter or Referee to have the swimmers move off the blocks. Usually this command is a good indication everything is not right for the race to start.
- Stroke – There are 4 competitive strokes: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Freestyle.
- Stroke Judge – The official positioned at the side of the pool, walking the length of the course as the swimmers race. If the Stroke Judge sees something illegal, they report to the referee and the swimmer may be disqualified.
- Submitted Time – Times used to enter swimmers in meets. These times must have been achieved by the swimmer at previous meets.
- Suit – The racing uniform worn by the swimmer, in the water, during competition.
- Taper – The resting phase of a senior swimmer at the end of the season before the championship meet.
- Timer – The volunteers sitting behind the starting blocks/finish end of pool, who are responsible for getting watch times on events and activating the backup buttons for the timing system.
- Unofficial Time – The time displayed on a read out board or read over the intercom by the announcer immediately after the race. After the time has been checked, it will become the official time.
- Watch – The hand held device used by timers and coaches for timing a swimmer's races and taking splits.
- Yardage – The distance a swimmer races or swims in practice. Total yardage can be calculated for each practice session.
- Yards – The measurement of the length of a swimming pool that was built per specs using the American system. A short course yard pool is 25 yards (75 feet) in length.