

# ARTICLE 105

*Guidelines for officiating swimmers with a disability in USA Swimming meets*

## 105.1 GENERAL

### Authority

The USA Swimming Rules & Regulations grant the Referee the authority to modify the rules for the swimmer with a disability. Disability is defined as a permanent physical or cognitive disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This section contains guidelines and suggestions for making such modifications. Reference 701.24 for Open Water competitions.

### Referee Responsibilities

- **Swimmer** - The swimmer (or the swimmer's coach) is responsible for notifying the Referee, prior to the competition, of any disability of the swimmer and of the requested modification. The swimmer/coach shall provide a Personal Assistant(s) or any equipment (tappers, deck mats, etc.) if required.
- **Referee** - The Referee's responsibilities include:
  1. Determining if the requested modifications are appropriate and can be met.
  2. Instructing the Starter and Stroke & Turn officials as to the accommodations to be made for that swimmer.



### Modifications

Aids to buoyancy or speed are not allowed (See 102.8.1E). Some of the modifications which the Referee may make to accommodate the swimmer with a disability are:

- A change in starting position.
- Reassignment of lanes within a heat, e.g., exchanging Lanes 2 and 7.
- Allowing the swimmer to have a Personal Assistant(s). A Personal Assistant that meets any of the requirements of Corporate By law 2.6.6 shall be a member of USA Swimming. Other allowable modifications are further described in this section under the type of disability.

## 105.2 BLIND AND VISION LOSS

### Start

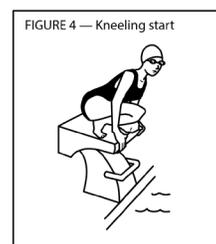
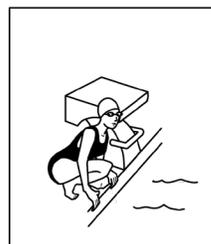
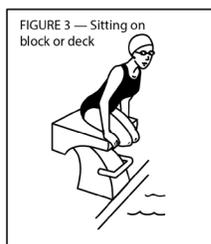
With an audible starting system, no modification is usually required for a swimmer who is blind or has vision loss. A swimmer may, however, require assistance getting to and on the block. Should the swimmer feel insecure starting from the block or deck, an in-the-water start is allowed.

### Turns and Finishes

A swimmer who is blind or has vision loss is permitted to have Personal Assistants ("tappers" who use poles with soft-tipped ends to tap the swimmer as notification of turns and the finish). Sound devices shall not be used. It is the swimmer's responsibility to provide the tapper(s), who shall be positioned within the confines of the swimmer's lane at the ends of the pool.

### Relay Take-Offs

A physical touch may be required to signal the relay swimmer when his/her teammate has touched the wall. The specific method may be tailored to the swimmer's preference so long as it does not aid the swimmer's take-off or interfere with the timing.



## 105.3 DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

### Start

Swimmers who are deaf or hard of hearing require a visual starting signal, i.e., a strobe light and/or Starter's arm signals. The Referee may reassign lanes within the swimmer's heat, i.e., exchanging one lane for another, so that the strobe light or Starter's arm signal can more readily be seen by the swimmer who is deaf or hard of hearing. Standard Starter's arm signals are shown in Figures 1 and 2. A recall rope is required in the event of a recall, provided the meet host is notified by the entry deadline that a swimmer who is deaf or hard of hearing will be participating.

### Strobe Light Location

The Starter shall advise the swimmers about the location of the strobe light and the light shall be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start. For backstroke starts, the light should be positioned so that the swimmers don't have to turn their heads to look backwards.

## 105.4 COGNITIVELY DISABLED

### Assistance

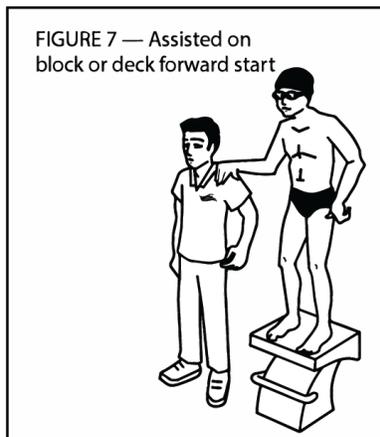
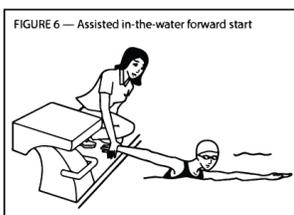
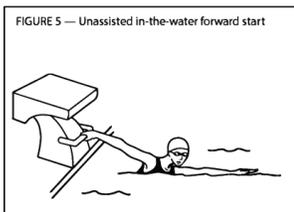
A swimmer with a cognitive disability may be permitted to have a Personal Assistant on the deck when necessary. Specific circumstances may allow rule modifications as communicated and approved in accordance with Rule 105.1.2 to be granted. Patience and clarity in communication is often required for a swimmer with a cognitive disability.

## 105.5 PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

### Start (Figure 3-7)

Swimmers with physical disabilities:

- May take longer to assume their starting position;
- May have difficulty holding the starting platform or pool end for a start;
- May need assistance from someone on the deck to maintain a starting position;



- May use a modified starting position on the blocks, deck or in the water.
- Shall use a forward start for freestyle, breaststroke and butterfly. The Referee, however, may allow modifications such as the following:
  1. *The swimmer may start from a sitting position on the block or on the deck*
  2. *The swimmer may assume a starting position in the water, with or without assistance;*
  3. *If the swimmer cannot use a hand and/or foot to maintain contact with the wall, some other part of the body may be used.*
  4. *For breaststroke and butterfly, after the start and after each turn, a swimmer who is unable to push off with the leg(s) may perform one arm stroke that need not be simultaneous or on the horizontal plane to attain the breast position.*

Examples of modified starting positions are shown in Figures 3 through 7."

### Stroke/Kick

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 & 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. No flotation devices should be permitted.

### Turn/Finishes

#### Strobe Light Location

The Starter shall advise the swimmers about the location of the strobe light and the light shall be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start. For backstroke starts, the light should be positioned so that the swimmers don't have to turn their heads to look backwards.

### Relay

Relay swimmers who cannot exit the water immediately may be allowed to remain in the lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other swimmers or the timing equipment.



## PROTOCOL FOR OFFICIATING A SWIMMER WITH A DISABILITY

- The coach notifies the Meet Committee/Meet Referee when a swimmer with a disability is entered into a meet and requests the necessary accommodations.
- The Meet Referee communicates with the coach and makes any reasonable accommodation(s) for the swimmer.
- The Meet Referee is responsible for communicating the swimmer's events and accommodation(s) to assigned Officials before the meet.

- Stroke and Turn Officials observe swims per established meet protocol. If you observe something in violation of the rules, raise your hand.
- It is the responsibility of the CJ and/or the Deck Referee to vet any call from an Official for a swimmer with a disability.

LSC Logo Here

LSC Officials Chair Name

LSC Officials Chair Title

LSC Officials Chair Email Address

LSC Disability Chair Name

LSC Disability Chair Title

LSC Disability Chair Email Address

### USA SWIMMING NATIONAL DISABILITY SUB-COMMITTEE

#### *Mission*

USA Swimming encourages people with disabilities to participate in the sport of swimming and facilitates their inclusion in USA Swimming programs through education and collaboration.

#### *DEI Support*

USA Swimming  
[Inclusion@usaswimming.org](mailto:Inclusion@usaswimming.org)

*\*This is meant to be a quick reference and not a complete document of rules and regulations governing USA swimmers with disabilities. Please refer to the complete USA Swimming Rules and Regulations for a comprehensive interpretation of Article 105.*



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