

OFFICIALS CERTIFICATION STANDARDS—FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

This FAQ document is intended to help as we implement the new certification standards. Remember, not every possible scenario is in here. This FAQ is a tool for the LSC Officials Chair to use to help us “do what we do.” *That is, “apply the rules” as best as we can.* We will work through the exceptions if they occur.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Q1. When did the new certification standards become effective?

A. The new certification standards became effective February 1, 2024.

Q2. Can an LSC continue with its previous certification program?

A. No, every LSC should have already adopted the new certification standards.

Q3. If an apprentice official began training under an LSC’s previous certification standards, can they continue training under the old standards or must they transition to the new standards?

A. There should no longer be any apprentices training under an LSC’s previous certification standards. All new apprentices after February 1, 2024, must use the new standards.

Q4. What happens to currently certified officials who have not met all the training requirements of the new standards? For example, a Referee who does not hold Administrative Official certification.

A. The official will be grandfathered in without having to meet the new requirements. The official should be encouraged, but not required, to obtain the training they may be missing with the new certification standards.

Q5. Can any Referee now be assigned as a Meet Referee?

A. Yes. If your LSC assigns MRs, they can select the MR that best meets the needs of athletes and the LSC from the pool of certified Referees.

Q6. Can a team assign a Meet Referee that does not have much experience in the role?

- A. Yes, although a Referee can always decline an assignment or ask for support. A sanction cannot be withheld solely on the basis of perceived inexperience of the assigned Meet Referee if they are certified as a Referee.

PREREQUISITES TO ON-DECK TRAINING

Q7. Is registration, either as an “Apprentice Official” or as a non-athlete member in the “Official” category required before on-deck training can begin? (Q&A revised 06/11/2025)

- A. Yes. In order to get on deck, an Apprentice Official has two options.

The first option is to register as an Apprentice Official. In this case, they can go out on deck and begin their on-deck training. They have 60 days to complete their Athlete Protection Training (APT), Concussion Protocol Training (CPT), and background check (BGC). By day 61, they must become a non-athlete member in the “Official” category, which requires APT, CPT, and BGC to be completed before stepping on deck. (NOTE: Not all LSCs utilize the Apprentice Official category)

The second option is to register as a non-athlete official member, complete their APT, CPT, and BGC before stepping on deck. A non-athlete Official membership cannot be Coach (including Provisional or Junior), Other, or Administrators.

Until registration is completed as per one of the two above options, a trainee is not allowed on deck and the trainee’s training sessions cannot be tracked in the Officials Tracking System (OTS).

Q8. As a parent, may I use my athlete’s account to register and complete the requirements? (Q&A added 06/11/2025)

- A. No. An athlete account is not a non-athlete membership account. A parent must create a separate account and register with USA Swimming as either an “Apprentice Officials” or as a non-athlete member in the “Official” category as indicated above. All requirements, APT, background, and clinics/testing link to the non-athlete account.

Q9. Does the required clinic and certification test need to be completed prior to beginning the on-deck training sessions?

- A. No, but completing the clinic early in the process will provide a foundation for the on-deck training. Certification cannot be completed until the clinic is completed.

CLINICS AND TESTING

Q10. What online certification clinics are available through the USA Swimming University? (Q&A revised 05/23/2025)

- A. The *Foundations of Officiating, Stroke and Turn, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official* courses are all available online.

Q11. Is the *Foundations of Officiating* clinic a required clinic? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. Yes, apprentices new to USA Swimming and starting off as either Stroke and Turn Judge apprentices or Administrative Official apprentices must take the *Foundations of Officiating* Clinic in addition to the position-specific clinic.

Q12. Are the USA Swimming-based online clinics required or can LSCs offer their own clinics?

- A. Only the online clinics are recognized for the required training. LSCs are encouraged to continue to offer SUPPLEMENTAL training; however, it cannot be required as part of certification.

Q13. Can an apprentice attend a Chief Judge clinic given by any LSC or can they be restricted to attending only clinics available in their home LSC? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. LSCs are free to determine if an out-of-LSC clinic is acceptable or not.

Q14. How does the availability of online clinics affect the requirement for taking position-specific tests (05/23/2025)?

- A. Each online clinic incorporates test questions throughout and at the conclusion of the clinic. Stand-alone tests are no longer available.

Q15. How long does an apprentice have to complete their training after having taken the required position-specific clinic? (Q&A added 05/08/2024)

- A. Certification must be completed within one year from the month in which the clinic was taken.

TRAINING AND EVALUATION TRACKING TEMPLATES

Q16. Will position-specific training and evaluation tracking sheet/card templates be provided?

- A. Yes, training and evaluation tracking templates have been made available for Stroke and Turn, Chief Judge, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official apprentices.

The use of these templates is not mandatory and LSCs may choose to develop their own templates.

Q17. Is it required that the “Professional Documents” for Stroke and Turn Judge, Chief Judge, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official be used as the outline for evaluating Apprentice Officials? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. No. The “Professional Documents” should be viewed as one more tool that can be used to convey information to the Apprentice Official. The goal of the apprenticeship is not to create experts, but rather certified officials who have a basic knowledge of the position. The “Professional Documents” might, for example, be used as a starting point for having a discussion about how much more there is to learn in the position once the Apprentice Official is certified in the position.

Q18. Will Action Plan templates be provided by USA Swimming? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. No. LSCs are expected to develop an Action Plan that is individualized based on the apprentices needs. There are many scenarios that may generate an Action Plan. LSCs should make sure the Action Plan is directed towards helping the apprentice become successful at the entry level.

Q19. Can LSCs require specific items for check off (RTOs, 12&U session, 13&O session)?

- A. Yes, if this helps identify the best path for training. However, not attending a certain session is not a reason to deny certification. If an official can demonstrate knowledge of the rules and the performance requirements outlined in the Professional Document and templates, and they have completed all other certification requirements, they must be certified.

TRAINING SESSIONS

Q20. What are the minimum requirements for a session to count as a Training Session? *(Q&A revised 05/08/2024)*

- A. The session must meet the following criteria: (1) it must include strokes and/or relays; (2) it must not be a Time Trial; (3) it must not be comprised of only freestyle events, even if including both individual freestyle events and freestyle relays; and (4) it must occur at a meet which is either a sanctioned USA Swimming meet or a YMCA meet for which an LSC has issued an approval (as defined in USA Swimming Rule 202.6).

Q21. Is there a minimum session length?

- A. No, there is no minimum session length.

Q22. Can training cover more than two different meets?

- A. Training must occur over a minimum of four sessions and a minimum of two meets. The Apprentice may choose to complete their sessions over two, three, or four meets.

Q23. Can an apprentice train simultaneously for two different positions? For example, can a certified Stroke and Turn Judge, who aspires to be a Referee, train simultaneously for Starter and Administrative Official? *(Q&A added 04/02/2024)*

- A. Yes, as long as any required prerequisites to train in those positions are met. In the given example, the apprentice would have to complete certification at both Starter and Administrative Official before they could become an apprentice for Referee. This path is not recommended as there are many concepts that need to be learned for each roll.

Q24. If an apprentice has not had the opportunity to observe a particular item (eg, relay take-offs, cross-over turn during the back-to-breast transition of the Individual Medley) during one of their training sessions, should the apprenticeship be extended until they have had an opportunity to do so? *(Q&A added 04/02/2024)*

- A. No. An apprentice need not observe every specific item on an LSC's training card, but they should be able to describe or demonstrate their knowledge of the item.

Q25. As an apprentice is not allowed to make disqualifications during their apprentice sessions, how can we judge on being “comfortable making calls as appropriate” or being able to “correctly communicate a disqualification.” Can we demand, per an Action Plan, that they work an additional session and make calls? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Much like the previous Q&A, judging these elements requires creativity. For example, when an apprentice sees what they believe to be an infraction, they could be asked to say “hand” rather than having them raise their hand, and they could then describe the call to their mentor. The current training standards for a Stroke and Turn Judge specifically state that an apprentice cannot make a disqualification during their apprentice sessions. Therefore, they cannot be asked to do so, either in their initial training sessions or as part of an Action Plan.

Q26. Can an Apprentice request more than the minimum number of sessions?

A. Yes. They may request additional sessions before asking to be certified, but they cannot be required to attend more sessions unless provided with a written Action Plan that specifies any additional steps needed to complete certification.

Q27. Can an LSC limit or exclude training at meets such as their Age Group Championships or Senior Championships? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

A. Yes, an LSC may designate that their LSC Championship meets are expressly excluded as training sessions.

Q28. Can an LSC limit or exclude training at non-LSC Championship meets, especially at those meets designated as Officials Qualifying Meets (OQMs) (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)?

A. No, training may only be excluded at LSC Championship meets. It is suggested that creative ways be found to incorporate training as requested while not negatively impacting the athletes or interrupting the attention of the meet officials (eg, an observation and discussion-only session for a Starter Apprentice).

Q29. Can training be limited or excluded at Sectional Championships or Zone Championships (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)?

A. Yes, as these meets are sanctioned at the LSC level, they may be considered as LSC Championship meets and training may be expressly excluded.

Q30. Can Officials train in any LSC? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

A. Yes, as long as the Training Session requirements are met.

Q31. What if an Apprentice does not submit their paperwork within two weeks of their last training session?

- A. It is the responsibility of the apprentice to submit their paperwork for review following their final training session. The two-week “clock” starts ticking once they submit the paperwork. If an apprentice is slow in submitting the paperwork, it would be best practice for a Certifier to reach out to the apprentice to encourage the submission.

OFFICIALS TRACKING SYSTEM/CERTIFICATIONS

Q32. Is clinic completion trackable in OTS?

- A. Yes, clinics offered through the USA Swimming University are tracked in the system and completion is shown in OTS.

Q33. Are test results shown in OTS?

- A. LSC officials with administrative privileges in OTS can view test results in one of two ways. First, under the “LSC Reporting” tab and then by selecting “LSC Officials Courses Taken,” they can generate a report for specific tests that shows the completion date for tests that have been passed. Second, when viewing an individual’s profile within OTS, clicking on “Online Tests” will display the individual’s testing history including the date a test was completed and if it was passed.

Q34. How should certification dates be recorded in OTS? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

- A. The certification expiration date for officials shall be: (1) the December 31st two years after the year of certification if the certification occurred between January 1st and June 30th of the year of certification; or (2) December 31st three years after the year of certification if the certification occurred between July 1st and December 31st of the year of certification. Note that all certifications will be set to expire on December 31.

Examples:

An official who certifies between 1/1/2024 and 6/30/24 would be given a certification expiration date of 12/31/2026.

An official who certifies between 7/1/2024 and 12/31/2024 would be given a certification expiration date of 12/31/2027.

Q35. How will certifications be tracked in OTS?

- A. Certifications will include Stroke and Turn (ST), Chief Judge (CJ), Starter (SR), Referee (DR), and Administrative Official (AO).

Q36. When will the USA Swimming App (both Apple and Android versions) be able to display an official's certification as was done with Deck Pass? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. This feature is actively being developed.

An official needing to prove their credentials at a meet would need to logon to their USA Swimming account in a web browser and go to "My Official History" to display this information.

A Meet Referee can obtain this information by doing the following: logon to their USA Swimming account in a web browser; click on "My OTS Meets," add any meet officials to the meet; click the "Reporting" pill; and then run the "OTS Meet Participation Report."

Q37. Is there a Meet Referee (MR) certification?

A. No. MR certifications have been remapped to Referee. The MR designation will still be used when reporting sessions worked for a meet. Sessions reported as MR will count towards Referee sessions.

Q38. Is there an Administrative Referee (AR) certification?

A. No. AR certifications were remapped to AO. The AR designation can still be used when reporting sessions worked for a meet. Sessions reported as AR will count towards Referee sessions, whereas sessions reported as AO will count towards AO sessions.

Q39. What happened to Clerk of Course (CC), Computer Operator (CO), Timing Equipment Operator (TO), and Timing Judge (TJ)?

A. They have been remapped to AO. The positions still exist in OTS for use when reporting what role was performed during the sessions worked.

Q40. How should the role of Administrative Official (AO) or Administrative Referee (AR) be entered for a meet? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. The sessions for an AO (LSC-certified or N2-level) should be entered into OTS as AO (or CC, CO, TO, Entry Chair) for both timed finals meets and prelims/finals meets.

The sessions for an LSC-certified Referee or N2- or N3-level Administrative Referee should be entered into OTS as AO for timed finals meets and as AR for prelims/finals meets.

Q41. For Referees who are working towards certification at the N2 or N3 level, do sessions worked as an AO count toward the session prerequisites. (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. Yes, 8 AO sessions will count towards the required 16 total sessions for N2 evaluation, and the AR sessions will count toward the 8 sessions required at prelims/finals meets for N2, N3i, and N3f evaluations.

LSC TRAINERS/CERTIFIERS

Q42. Who can train an Apprentice?

- A. Trainers should be officials with at least a year of experience in the role.

Q43. If there is no one with one year's experience, can an Apprentice still receive on-deck training?

- A. Yes. The Referee will assign an Official with the highest level of experience to mentor during that session.

Q44. If the number of apprentices seeking mentoring at a given session of a meet exceeds the threshold at which effective mentoring can be given, is it acceptable to turn the apprentice away or must they be provided with training? (Q&A Added 04/02/2024)

- A. Yes, it is acceptable to turn the apprentice away, although that should not be done without an explanation as to why the training cannot be provided. Having a frank discussion about what can or cannot be accomplished at a given session can help the apprentice understand why training at a given session is not advisable or practical. This may also be an opportunity to be creative in figuring out how training can be provided. We should default to trying to find ways in which meaningful training opportunities can be provided, rather than defaulting to practices that limit training opportunities.

Q45. Who can be a Certifier?

- A. The LSC Officials Chair selects individuals who can verify that an apprentice official demonstrates the requisite knowledge and is able to satisfactorily perform the position's duties. Certifiers should be experienced officials who can articulate clearly and succinctly areas of competency, deficiency, and action steps to achieve certification.

Q46. Must the Certifier be in attendance at apprentice sessions?

- A. No. The Certifier may seek input from MRs, the apprentice, or trainers to determine if the apprentice is ready for certification.

RECERTIFICATION

Q47. Can OTS display the certified positions, number of sessions worked in each position, test results, and registration status for each apprentice or certified official? If so, who has access to this information? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. Yes, all this information is available in OTS. Every registered apprentice and certified official has access to their own information. In addition, LSC Officials Chairs and their designees have access to this information for every apprentice and certified official in their respective LSC. Thus, individuals can easily check the status of all these items for themselves and LSC Officials Chairs and their designees have the information they need to certify or recertify individual officials.

Q48. Must an Official holding multiple certifications meet the recertification requirements for EACH position?

- A. No. Officials will need to recertify at their highest level. Referee recertifies ST, AO, and SR. CJ is also recertified if the official is a CJ.

Q49. How does the Chief Judge certification fit? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

- A. CJ is a standalone certification. It was kept because it fits in with the progression to National N2/N3 Certification. It is not a requirement for LSCs to offer CJ certification. Referee will recertify CJ if the official is a CJ. SR will not recertify CJ. An official who is both a CJ and a Starter, but not a Referee, will have to recertify as both a CJ and a Starter.

Q50. Are there separate certification and recertification courses for each position?

- A. No. Each position will use the same course for both initial certification and recertification.

Q51. When does the recertification test need to be taken? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. The recertification test needs to be taken prior to the date on which the official is recertified (most often just prior to the expiration of the certification). It must also be taken within the time frame of the current certification period.

OPTIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

Q52. Are LSCs allowed to establish training programs for positions other than ST, CJ, SR, DR, and AO (eg, clerk of course [CC], computer operators [CO], timing equipment operators [TO], or Meet Referee [MR])? Can these positions be certified positions? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, an LSC can train Apprentice Officials for additional positions.

Positions such as CC, CO, or TO would be certified as an AO and their meet role shown as CC, CO, or TO. Although an LSC may choose to use AOs who have specialized, the individual specialties cannot be used as required prerequisites for the AO position.

LSCs may choose to offer Referees additional optional training in how to effectively serve as a Meet Referee. This training cannot, however, be required for the Referee to serve in the position of Meet Referee. It is important to note that just because someone is certified as a Referee, does not mean that the individual must accept an invitation to act as a Meet Referee, nor does an LSC that assigns Meet Referees to meets have an obligation to assign inexperienced Referees as Meet Referees.

Q53. Can CCs, COs and TOs continue to be used without becoming AOs? If not certified as an AO, can LSCs require that these positions be independently certified? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, LSCs can continue to use CCs, COs, and TOs who are not certified as AOs; however, a certified AO must be present to oversee their work. Anyone not becoming an AO is not required to become a registered member of USA Swimming and would not appear in OTS. LSCs may provide optional training for CCs, COs, and TOs, but LSCs cannot require certification in these positions in order to earn their AO certification.

USE OF NON-USA SWIMMING SANCTIONED MEETS (eg, YMCA, NCAA, HS, USMS) FOR TRAINING AND RECERTIFICATION PURPOSES

Q54. Do sessions worked at YMCA meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. Only if they are APPROVED USA Swimming meets.

Q55. Do sessions worked at NCAA meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

A. Training Sessions cannot be done at NCAA meets; however, up to 25% of an official's total required Qualified Recertification Sessions can be done at an NCAA National or Conference Championship meet.

Q56. Do sessions worked at High School meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

A. No.

Q57. Do sessions worked at Masters (USMS) meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. No.

Q58. Do sessions worked at observed meets (these are frequently high school meets) count towards the required certification and renewal sessions? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. No.

CERTIFYING OFFICIALS WHO ORIGINALLY CERTIFIED AS YMCA OFFICIALS

Q59. How do we move forward with regards to the Y teams and their certifications? (Q&A revised 05/08/2024)

A. The USA Swimming Officials' Committee and YMCA Officials' Committee Agreement for Reciprocity in Regard to Certification was revised 4/5/2024. A YMCA official will need to request reciprocity, prove YMCA status, and then shadow half the required training sessions for the position in which they are requesting certification through reciprocity.

WHAT IS NOT AFFECTED

Q60. Does this standardization affect Open Water?

A. No.

Q61. Does this affect the National Certifications (N2, N3)?

A. Not currently.

Q62. Can our LSC require that a minimum number of sessions be worked, either as a trainee or certified official, before reimbursing an official for their registration and background check.

A. Yes, the LSC can set its own standards for its reimbursement program; however, the LSC cannot require a greater number of training sessions than set by the "LSC Standards for Officiating."