

1. Description

Introduce prospective USA Swimming Starters to the fundamental aspects of starting swimming and provide a platform of classroom training and, when facilities are available, relaxed-environment, hands-on practice to these candidates.

2. Goals

To educate prospective USA Swimming Starters about the philosophies behind and responsibilities of starting, the technical aspects of starting, and the subsequent steps necessary to continue training and pursue certification. An ideal clinic will also offer relaxed-environment, hands-on practice. These areas include:

- A. Understanding the role of and philosophies surrounding the Starter at swimming competitions
- B. Understanding the rules surrounding the start of the race
- C. Understanding the elements of the start and techniques behind a successful start
- D. Developing good habits and a routine
- E. Providing an opportunity to develop basic skills in a hands-on, low-pressure environment

3. Prerequisites for Clinic Instructor

The clinic instructor should be a certified Starter that has significant experience as a Starter at the LSC level.

4. Prerequisites for Clinic Attendees

Attendees should be experienced stroke and turn officials with an interest in further developing their skills as an official. The ideal Starter candidate should officiate frequently enough where he/she will be able to practice and gain experience in order to develop proficiency in the skill.

5. Materials for Students

- A. "The Professional Starter" document (most current version)
- B. Handout of pages 2-8 of this clinic manual (distribute at conclusion of clinic)

6. Optional Materials for Instructors

- A. Computer
- B. Projector or Computer-to-TV Capabilities
- C. Supplementary PowerPoint
- D. USA Swimming Rulebook
- E. Student Materials
- F. Charged Starting Unit (if offering hands-on practice)
- G. Swimmers/A Swim Practice (if offering hands-on practice)

Clinic Instruction Plan

Focus Area	Time
Introduction	5 minutes
Philosophy of Starting	10 minutes
Starting Rules	5 minutes
Elements of the Start/Techniques of Starting	15 minutes
Developing Good Habits and a Routine	10 minutes
Questions	5 minutes
Hands-On, Relaxed-Environment Practice	40 minutes
Total Time	1.5 hours

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- A. Introduce self and any co-instructors
- B. Welcome all participants and thank them for their interest in becoming a certified Starter
- C. Provide overview of clinic structure (refer to instruction plan above)
- D. Encourage participants to be engaged and ask questions as necessary—we want this to be an educational and beneficial experience for all participants

II. Philosophy of Starting (10 minutes)

- A. A Required Part of Sanctioned Competition
 1. USA Swimming Rules require a *minimum* of a Referee, Administrative Official, Starter, and *at least* two Stroke and Turn Judges.
 2. Meets run far more optimally and swimmers are benefitted by more fair competition when more than the minimum number of officials are present. Having multiple certified Starters at a meet allows for everyone to stay fresh as opposed to becoming fatigued.
- B. Goal: Ensure a Fair Start for All Swimmers
 1. Knowing when the field is ready to assume the starting position
 2. Knowing when the field is ready to receive the starting signal
 3. Knowing when it is necessary to intervene so that these two goals may be realized

C. The Mindset of a Starter

1. THE STARTER is reading the field, to determine when THE FIELD is ready to start. Not the other way around.
2. PATIENCE is critical to a successful start.
3. The swimmers are going to be nervous. The Starter must control his or her nerves and consistently deliver sound starts in the hopes that the swimmers will be able to control theirs.
4. The Starter is one small part of the race and of the officiating team. He or she should do the job to the best of his or her ability and not wander astray from these responsibilities.
5. If the Starter is doing his or her job well, the swimmers likely will not notice him/her.

III. Starting Rules (5 minutes)**A. From Section 101.2 of the USA Swimming Rulebook**

1. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are under the Starter's control.
2. On the Starter's command "take your mark", the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position, in the forward start, with at least one foot at the front of the starting platform or the deck. Swimmers starting in the water must have at least one hand in contact with the wall or starting platform. When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.
3. When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command "take your mark," the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command "stand up" upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.
4. A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.

IV. Elements of the Start/Techniques of Starting

- A. There are two fundamental parts to the start in the sense that there are two things that the Starter must be aware of and closely watching.
 1. Knowing when the field is ready to assume the starting position
 2. Knowing when the field is ready to receive the starting signal

B. Before each heat

1. The Starter should be looking at the next heat of swimmers lined up behind the blocks and take notice as to whether all of the swimmers supposed to be in the heat are present. Depending on the Referee's preference, he or she may ask the Starter to notify him/her if swimmers appear to be missing or if anything appears to be irregular.
2. The Referee will blow a series of short chirpy whistles—The next heat should prepare to swim as their heat will begin soon (i.e. remove all clothing except for swimwear).
3. The Referee will blow a long whistle signaling the swimmers to step up onto the blocks (or to step into the pool if the swimmer is using an in-water start). The Referee will blow a second long whistle for the backstroke events to signal to the swimmers to place their feet.
4. The Starter should have the microphone in position and be ready to begin the starting sequence at the long whistle.

C. "The First Part of The Start"—Once the Swimmers are on the Blocks (Or Have Placed Their Feet)

1. Be patient with the swimmers as they settle into position.
2. It will likely take them longer to get into position than it might look. The swimmers are off of the ground, the blocks might be wet and slippery, and the swimmers might have to adjust their goggles. Allow the swimmers time to "settle in" on the blocks and become comfortable.
3. It is the responsibility of the Starter to ensure, for forward starts, that the swimmer has one foot at the front of the block, and, for backstroke starts, that toes are not curled around the lip of the gutter.
4. Once the field is in position, the command is ready to be given.

D. Giving the Command—"Take Your Mark"

1. The command should be delivered in a conversational tone that comes off as an invitation for the swimmers to take their mark. The Starter is not ordering the swimmers, but rather inviting them.
2. Deliver the command in a slightly descending tone.
3. The command is a statement, not a question, and should be delivered in a relaxed, but confident way.
4. It may be helpful to practice with statements such as "Close the door," "Pass the salt," and "I love you."

E. "The Second Part of the Start"

1. Wait for the swimmers to become stationary.
2. Stationary does NOT necessarily mean motionless. Muscle twitches, wiggly bottoms, etc. are okay. The stationary swimmer establishes a vertical plane at the FRONT of the block.
3. Once the swimmers are stationary, press the button to sound the starting signal.

F. If Things Do Not Go as Planned

1. If the field does not become stationary in a reasonable amount of time, if distractions are present, or if anything "just doesn't feel right," stand the field.
2. The stand command is given as "Stand, please" and should be delivered in a more quiet tone than the original command and extremely calmly as to avoid "scaring the swimmers in" to the pool.
3. Wait several seconds to allow the field to regroup and refocus. When the field appears ready to assume the position, give the command and send the swimmers when they are ready.
4. If there are still issues following the second try, it is appropriate to stand the field again; ask them to step down if necessary, and, if necessary confer with the Referee to see if it is necessary to talk to a certain swimmer, address an issue, etc.
5. Taking the extra time to be patient and ensure that every swimmer receives a fair start makes an immeasurable difference in the swimmers' races; it is always worth the extra time to ensure that the job is done correctly.
6. DO NOT develop a fixed timing pattern for starts. Send the field when they are ready, not after a robotic period of time.

G. Once the Heat has Started

1. The Starter should hold the microphone open and remain in position to recall the heat if necessary until the swimmers heads have broken the surface of the water.
2. The Starter may recall a heat for any reason if he/she feels that anything caused the swimmers to not have a fair start. No swimmer shall be disqualified for a false start if a heat is recalled.
3. The Starter should mark the empty lanes in the designated Starter program that he or she is using as well as make any other necessary notes.

H. The False Start

1. A false start is a swimmer starting early—a swimmer breaking his/her stationary position—the vertical plane at the front of the block.
2. If the Starter observes a false start, he/she should make a note of it in the Starter heat sheet. He/she should approach the Referee and compare programs to see if the Referee made the same observation. There should be no discussion of what was observed, just a comparison of programs.
3. If a potential false start occurs early enough in the starting sequence, the Starter should stand the heat, and, if the Referee confirms the false start, he/she should remove the swimmer prior to the continuation of the race. If the Starter does not stand the heat and continues with the starting sequence, the swimmer is disqualified at the end of the race.

V. Developing Good Habits and a Routine (10 minutes)

A. Where to Stand

1. The Starter should choose a spot to stand within approximately 5 meters of the start of the pool.
2. He/she should stand where he/she can observe the entire field but also distinguish between individual swimmers.
3. The Starter will first choose his/her preferred spot, and the Referee will position him/her self in response to where the Starter would like to stand.

B. Becoming Familiar with the Equipment

1. Every microphone is different! The Starter should test and practice with the microphone before the session start so that he/she is comfortable and familiar with it when the actual meet starts.
2. Test the volume of the starting system and work with a partner to ensure that the commands can be heard from all lanes.

- C. Other Things to Say (And Not to Say)
1. Refer to the swimmers as “ladies” and “gentlemen.”
 2. Do not ad-lib any commands and *never* deviate the language of “Take your mark,” and “Stand, please.” “Stand, please,” is always delivered using that language, even in backstroke.
 3. “Relax, please” or “Swimmers, relax” may be used to notify the field when there will be an extended pause before the starting sequence for an equipment malfunction, etc.
 4. “Lane __, toes, please,” can be used to enforce the proper starting position for backstroke.
 5. Do not give any extra commands (such as instructing swimmers to clear the pool) unless asked to by the Referee. If asked to clear the pool, use the phrase, “Thank you, ladies (gentlemen).”
- D. Other Responsibilities of the Starter
1. The Starter may be asked to brief the timers.
 2. The Starter may be asked to sound the warning signal in distance events when the leading swimmer has two lengths plus five yards or five meters remaining to swim.
- E. Practice!
1. The more practice a Starter has, the more comfortable he or she will become.
 2. Starters are still stroke and turn judges and should expect to continue to regularly work in that position, as well.

VI. Questions (5 minutes)

- A. Accept any remaining questions from clinic participants.
- B. Reassure participants that all of the information discussed in the clinic will be further elaborated on and become much more clear during on-deck training.
- C. This concludes the classroom portion of the training clinic.

VII. Hands-On, Relaxed Environment Practice (40 minutes)

This is an optional part of the clinic and would take place on deck at a pool. It is an opportunity for trainees to put into practice and experience many of the topics discussed in the classroom portion of the clinic. It also allows candidates to develop an initial familiarity with the equipment and with the process of starting so that the initial uncomfortable feeling will be mitigated when pursuing on-deck training at an actual meet with competing swimmers.

The coaches leading the swim practice should brief the swimmers that they will be helping train new Starters and that it will be the very first time that these individuals have ever started, meaning that there will be some irregularities.

A Sample Agenda for this Practice:

1. Show the equipment to the trainees and explain its functions and controls.
2. Demonstrate use of the equipment and allow the trainees to practice using the equipment.
3. Help each trainee determine where he/she would like to stand at this particular venue. Guide them to choosing spots where they can see both the entire field as well as distinguish between individual lanes as outlined above.
4. Demonstrate several forward starts (with swimmers) with the trainees standing immediately behind the instructor so that they are able to observe the field from the same perspective as the instructor.
5. Allow each trainee to practice several forward starts with actual swimmers. Stand immediately behind the trainee and provide feedback as necessary. Rotate through all the trainees, but allow each trainee to do enough starts in each set so that he/she can begin to develop a rhythm.
6. Demonstrate and allow trainees to practice the backstroke start.
7. Offer constructive feedback as necessary and reassure trainees that they will become much more comfortable with starting as they continue with on-deck training. Be positive and encouraging at all times.

The clinic leader should thank both the coaches and the swimmers for their time and participation, as well as for their role in helping train the next generation of USA Swimming Starters. Thank all clinic attendees for their volunteer involvement with USA Swimming and motivate them to continue with on-deck training to pursue Starter certification.