

Swim Meet Timing

For those of you who have never timed at a swim meet before, or even those who are old pros, this guideline is the “who, what, why, and how to” for all things related to swim meet timing. Everyone should take a few moments to review these notes, to insure that all LVSC timers know what is expected, that they are not alone, and that they are appreciated and supported!



First and foremost, thank you for getting your child involved in swimming! Timing is actually quite FUN! You have the best seats in the house. You get to see starts and finishes up-close and personal. You feel the energy and occasional nervousness of swimmers first-hand. And nothing beats the excitement of team mates jumping up and down cheering as the final leg of a relay comes in!

Timing is an important job. Swimming is somewhat of a unique sport in that winning races is great, but more often it is the swimmer's times that determine how far he will go in the sport. Swimmers can win at novice meets, win at local meets, and still not qualify for the Junior Olympics because they do not meet the qualifying times. This is why timing is so important, not only to the team, but to each individual swimmer.

Timing is fun, often wet, but very easy....

There are many individuals on the pool deck at a meet:

- Swimmers
- Timers
- Starter
- Stroke and Turn Judges
- Administration Table
- Runners
- Head Timer
- Coaches

Almost all of these roles are volunteers. The officials, judges, administrative staff, runners, and timers all volunteer their time to ensure the meet is official and the times achieved by the hard-working kids are valid.

All levels of meets, including novice, age group, high school, college, and national, require volunteer timers.

Las Vegas Swim Club typically fills 2-4 timing chairs at a regular meet, at each session. If you have a swimmer who is competing in the meet, someone associated with the swimmer must sign up for a minimum of 1 timing slot per meet (typically 1.5 hours per slot). The person timing can be a parent, guardian, older sibling, relative, or friend – anyone who can sit and stand for an hour or so, and operate a stopwatch and/or write times on a form. Timing assignments are tracked by the board of directors via the LVSC website. Swimmers who compete in 4 meets without a lane timing job assigned to their account will have a \$25 penalty charged to the account invoice.

Instructions for Timers



1. The week just prior to a swim meet, an email will be sent out informing you that job signups have been posted on the website. You will need to be logged into the website to access this area. The email will typically contain a link to the specific event. It can also be found next to the “Edit Commitment” button of each meet, *only once jobs have been posted to the event.*
2. Sign up for at least one timing slot. Lane number and times are provided when you sign up. As a courtesy to your fellow swim parents, if you have a swimmer competing later in the session, please sign up for the later time slots.
3. When you arrive at the pool for the meet, your swimmer will be busy checking with the coach and warming up. This is a great time to get organized and double check on your timing responsibilities. LVSC usually has tents set up outside each venue (exception is UNLV). You are welcome to bring chairs and sit in this area. This is where you will find timing information and board members, if you have questions or require assistance.
4. Please don’t be late for your assigned shift. The meet cannot start without timers in the chairs. Likewise, if you are late to your shift, that means another volunteer is covering extra time for you.
5. Once you get to your assigned lane, you will either have a “pickle” (stops the electronic timing for your lane), a watch, or a clipboard. Or you may have a combination of two of the items.
6. If you are not familiar with your role, ask the person next to you! Remember, once upon a time someone needed to explain what a pickle was to them, too. If you have questions, you can also ask the more experienced parents in the LVSC area – they’re happy to help out because the more people helping with timing the better!
7. After the start of each heat, prepare for the next heat by checking for the next swimmer. They are usually hanging out behind the timing chairs. You can call out their name or double check their cap for a last name.
8. Be focused on the start and finish of each race. Timing is what swimmers are judged upon. Focus – it is only for a split second! Please do not allow your cell phone or someone around your area to distract you during this time. Your child can still come to you before or after their event, just be sure to have her wait until the next heat has started.
9. If you miss the start on the stopwatch, raise your hand high or stand up to signal the Head Timer (usually standing by the starter). The head timer will come over and bring you a watch that was correctly started. Don’t be ashamed if this happens. Watches malfunction and no one is perfect. It is more important to get an accurate time for the swimmer
10. Once the swimmer in your lane has finished, provide the time to the person with the clipboard and timing sheets. Or, if you are the “scribe,” be prepared to write the times down quickly and legibly once the swimmer has finished.
11. Get ready for the next heat by resetting the stopwatch and sitting back down.

Thoughts, Hints, and Tips



1. Timing is a very important part of running a swim meet. While one always hopes the automated timing system works and that the manual backup systems are never needed, there are times when the computer will post an error, requiring the admin table to pull the manual times from the watches.
2. All swim parents time at swim meets! This is the nature of the sport. And they really are the best seats available.
3. We all started out the same way – wanting to be by our kids, wanting to assist them in getting ready, wanting to coach them into doing well. This does not develop the self-sufficiency of the swimmer, which, in turn, fosters self-esteem. The quicker the swimmer develops their self-esteem in these small tasks, the quicker they become self-motivated to improve and the quicker they will progress to the higher levels of swimming. This ultimately allows the swimmer to gain more satisfaction from their sport.
4. As a general rule, swim meets are WET! Sandals, sports shoes, or flip-flops are recommended. Please do not wear anything that can be damaged by pool water.
5. Whether you are punching a pickle or stopping a watch, it is very important that you stand at the edge of the pool looking straight down the wall to see the swimmer actually touch the wall, in order to get an accurate time.
6. When operating a pickle or stopwatch, it is best to push the buttons with your index finger, not your thumb. Your index finger has the fastest and most consistent reaction time of all your digits.
7. When operating a stopwatch at the beginning of the race, always start it on the flash of the strobe on the top of the starting horn. Light travels faster than sound, so the reaction time is more accurate with the light. It also can be quite noisy at the starting lines and it is very easy to miss or be late if you depend on the horn.
8. Feel free to help the swimmers in your lane. Many of the younger or newer swimmers may be uncertain when to get on the block or out of the pool.
9. Finally, have FUN, encourage the kids, and enjoy your view!