

Guidelines for timing (electronic and traditional)

TSA rules are silent on the issue of timing other than noting that the first place judge is responsible for obtaining the first place time of main events for the purpose of determining team and pool records. (102.16).

We nevertheless realize that timing is often used to determine seeding for the next meet and help swimmers gauge their improvement. The vast majority of our teams time races. Traditionally, teams assign timers to the lanes that their main event swimmers are assigned to. To speed up the meet, non-main event swimmers are often assigned to available lanes. Oftentimes that means that a swimmer is racing in the “wrong” team’s lane. Whether using electronic devices or stopwatches, this presents a few easy-to-overcome challenges.

Using all available lanes – Filling all available lanes is common sense that benefits everyone by minimizing the number of races in a meet, thus allowing the meet to finish sooner. Meets that drag on for hours aren’t a lot of fun and present a hardship to young swimmers, to those who need to go to school the next day, and to anyone competing in meets held at small pools which lack permanent lights. It also increases the risk that the teams will need to come back the following day to finish a meet delayed too long by thunder.

TSA rules recognize the need to depart from standard odd/even lane assignments in two sections of the rulebook:

102.4.3 When a club cannot fill out its assigned lanes in a second or later heat, the other club, having filled out its own lanes, may place additional swimmers in open lanes.

And here. . .

102.1.5 The home club TSA representative shall be responsible for decisions regarding the combining of events, provided that at least one open lane shall exist between the events. The visiting club may agree to dispense with the requirement for an open lane between events swum together. **Events should be combined in the interests of time when extra lanes are available.**

TSA rules also prohibit unnecessary delays (which can be caused by malfunctioning timing equipment)

102.7 Change of Program and Postponement

.2 Meets will start at 6:00 p.m. on their scheduled evening. The inclement weather date will be the next day that is not a legal holiday, starting at 6:00 p.m.

.3 The start of a meet may not be delayed by more than 30 minutes for reasons other than inclement weather. Delays within a meet, other than weather related, that do not have a bearing on the completion of scheduled races, must not last longer than 10 minutes.

This last rule is new for 2014 and comes in response (partly) to electronic timing delays.

Best Practices for using available lanes and getting each swimmer a time

- 1) **Body mark all swimmers** – Body marking refers to the practice of assigning a swimmer a number that is written in indelible ink on their arms. Timers need not know who is swimming in their lane, they just write the time and the number. Some teams that have become dependent on using electronic timing have stopped doing this. But if non-body marked swimmers end up in different lanes than they have been originally assigned to, you will need some way to match the time to the swimmer.
- 2) **Hand out stopwatches and clipboards to all timers – regardless of whether electronic timing devices are used** – Stopwatches are used in USA Swimming as a backup to electronic timing. In summer league, a key reason to use them is if the alternative is to stop the meet because of a malfunction. Jotting times on a piece of paper (most electronic timing devices will show the time on the unit) along with the swimmer’s number also serves as a backup in the event the person swimming in the lane is not the one that is seeded in the computer system. Make this a habit for every meet.
- 3) **Malfunctioning stopwatches and timing systems are not an excuse for delaying a meet.** As mentioned above, the meet may not be delayed by more than 30 minutes for reasons other than inclement weather. This rule was added in 2014: “Delays within a meet, other than weather related, that do not have a bearing on the completion of scheduled races, must not last longer than 10 minutes.” (Rule 102.7)
- 4) **Recognize that “pre-seeding” has its limits at a summer swim meet.** Summer league swimming is recreational. Swimmers don’t always show up. They get sick at the last minute, are stuck at work (teens), their parents get stuck in traffic or they change their mind. You should always be prepared to accommodate, in real time, the absence of a swimmer who was scheduled to race or the appearance on the block of a swimmer who was NOT originally scheduled to race.
- 5) **Discuss pre-seeding, use of electronic timing devices and other issues related to this well in advance of the meet (at least two weeks).**

If you use electronic timing and are the visiting team -- Be respectful of the wishes of the host team, as they are ultimately tasked with running an efficient meet. Discuss your desire to bring your electronic timing equipment to a host’s pool well in advance. Make sure there are no compatibility issues with equipment they might be using. While having the ability to combine events and collapse heats on the fly is extremely helpful, if the changes can’t be entered into the computer before the race you need an alternate method of matching up swimmer to time. Having the Clerk of Course jot down a swimmer’s name on their seeding sheet works well. Finally, be respectful of the facility – it might not have a covered area near the starter or an electrical outlet. Plan to bring what you need and discuss, well in advance, where you can set up your equipment.

If you use electronic timing and are the home team – Your role as host doesn’t mean you can choose to run an inefficient meet in order not to “mess up the pre-seeding”. If the team you are swimming does not want to pre-seed the meet, you can request that they send you a spreadsheet that shows numbers of swimmers per age/gender/event. For example, if the team visiting you has 8 swimmers entered in the girls’ 7-8 freestyle event and your team has 16, knowing just that will help you pre-seed that event to minimize the number of heats.

- 6) **If you offer to loan your electronic timing devices to a team with the promise to send a file with the times data MAKE GOOD ON THAT PROMISE.** Some teams will not take you up on this offer because they've been burned in the past. Making good on the promise means that you make sure you send them a file within 24 hours, in whatever format was previously agreed upon (such as a Team Manager zip file or a USA Swimming SDIF file).
- 7) **Regardless of whether electronic timing or stopwatches are used – tell your timers to time everyone that comes down their lane.**
 - If you use stopwatches, don't print out timer sheets with children's names or numbers on them. As counterintuitive as it sounds it cuts down on errors (for your team and the opposing team) to just have a grid that lists the event (boy/girl and age group). Write the swimmer's number and time under the proper heading.
 - Consider adding your team initials to the children's numbers for AWAY meets only. Timers can record the time and star it to indicate that it is the time of a swimmer from the opposing team. Make arrangements to either jot down the times after the meet or scan the timing sheets and email them to each other.
 - Even if you are using electronic devices make sure you have paper, clipboard and pencil. When you have a swimmer that isn't from your team you can jot the information down to pass along.
- 8) **Catching "on the fly" changes.** If you are using electronic timing and are concerned about getting accurate times when kids are swimming in different lanes than what is loaded into the computer all you need is a volunteer to log the changes on a print-out of the heat sheet. Suzie Jones – Lane 6 – Heat 5 has been moved? Then scribble next to her name where she was moved to.
- 9) **If you use electronic timing do not import race results before resetting the system for the next race.** This unnecessarily slows down the meet. The starter should not be repeatedly waiting for you to reset the equipment. If you are a visiting team and this is happening repeatedly, the hosting team can request you revert to using stopwatches. You can wait until after the meet to import the results of all the races, or you can set up a second volunteer on a different computer and transfer the results files there periodically to be processed during the meet.

Tips for running an efficient meet using all available lanes

- Lane and heat reassignments are best handled by experienced Clerks of Course who are on the lookout for open lanes and given the authority to manage the process by their TSA Reps. These individuals need to understand the rules for combining events and collapsing heats, work together with their counterpart and communicate with the Starter. This is not a good volunteer job for a new parent.
- The biggest time savings comes from reducing the number of races by combining relay events. If the meet is not pre-seeded, both Clerks should meet prior to the start of the meet to determine options for combining the medley and freestyle relays in age groups where this is possible. This information needs to be communicated to the Starter, who should in turn alert the Place Judges.

- The Starter needs to announce any combined events in advance. “The 13-14 boys and girls medley relays will be a combined event. Judges, this is a combined event.” The Place Judges need to divvy up who is judging which group of lanes.
- Discuss ahead of time waiving the rule to put an empty lane between combined events if necessary.
- In 5-lane pools, the 5th lane will often be used as a “heat” lane in order to speed up the meet. The Starter will say “Lane 5 is a heat” to alert the Place Judges.
- For small teams with very few older swimmers, it is OK to combine boys and girls for heats. Again, the Starter must know and must announce the changes.
- The freestyle event in a given age group establishes a pattern in the way that lanes will be assigned to each team across the various heats of that event, and that pattern will usually be repeated in all the other strokes. Most teams have the same number of kids (by gender and age group) swimming each of the next three events and the lane-filling reassignments that worked for the freestyle will often work for each of the remaining strokes.
- If swimmers are given their lane assignments before the meet begins, make sure they understand that they might be re-assigned once they reach the Clerk of Course area (make sure parents, coaches and other volunteers understand this as well). Assure them they will get a time.
- Although this doesn’t save time, don’t forget to make sure no one is swimming by themselves. If you are about to reach the final heat for an event and only one swimmer is scheduled to swim in that heat, make sure to pull back one swimmer from the previous heat so they will have someone to race.

Tips for lining up swimmers to facilitate lane-filling

It is easier to line up swimmers (and if necessary, alter that lineup) if the swimmers have a basic understanding of what is happening. If a Clerk of Course is trying to do it all, there is no time to manage heat combinations.

If you use pre-seeding share the information with swimmers – Post or email the heat information so the swimmers can jot down the information on their hands, arms or legs and let them do as much of the work of getting themselves lined up as possible. Make sure they understand that they might be re-assigned and (for older swimmers) help them understand why.

If you don’t pre-seed make sure kid pushers send swimmers to you in the order in which they will swim – Consider posting a list of the order of swimming for each event so they kids can line themselves up.

Make sure relay swimmers know that their events might be combined – Teenagers like to saunter over to the blocks at the last possible second. Make sure they understand that the relays might be combined and that they therefore need to arrive at the Clerk of Course area earlier.