

MCSL Stroke and Turn Briefing*

*Adapted from USA Swimming Officials' Briefing – June 2026

Welcome – General Comments

- Assignments – Jurisdiction – Protocol – Pool irregularities – Any swimmers with disabilities

Freestyle

Start – Forward Start

Stroke/Kick – Any stroke or kick may be used. Throughout the race, some part of the body must break the surface, except for at the start and after each turn, where the swimmer may be submerged for not more than 15 meters. At that point, the head must break the surface. Use far end backstroke flags.

Turns / Finish – At the completion of each length and at the finish of the race, the touch can be made with any part of the body. After the head has passed the final backstroke flags, the swimmer may be completely submerged while reaching for the finish. The touch can be made with any part of the body.

Other – Swimmer must not leave the pool, or walk, or spring from the bottom of the pool ... MAY stand on the bottom of pool (a violation in all other strokes) ... must not pull or push on the lane lines or side walls for forward propulsion.

Backstroke

Start – Start in the water with back to the course ... Before or after the start, feet must not be in or on the gutter or skimmer and they cannot be above or curled over the lip.

Stroke/Kick – The swimmer must remain on the back (shoulders at or past vertical towards the back). Any stroke or kick may be used. Throughout the race, some part of the body must break the surface, except for the start and after each turn, where the swimmer may be submerged for not more than 15 meters. At that point, the head must break the surface. Use far end backstroke flags.

Turns – Some part of the body must touch the end of the racing course at a turn and finish ... MAY turn on the breast while executing the turn if head past backstroke flags ... Only one single arm stroke or one simultaneous double arm stroke allowed while on breast ... Kicking/gliding actions are permitted.

Finish - After the head has passed the final backstroke flags, the swimmer may be completely submerged while reaching for the finish. The touch can be made with any part of the body. Must finish on the back.

Breaststroke

Start – Forward Start

Stroke – The swimmer must remain on the breast (shoulders at or past vertical towards the breast). The cycle is one arm pull and one leg kick in that order. The arm pull cannot bring the hands past the hipline, except for the first arm pull after the start and after each turn. The recovery of the hands can be on, under or above the water. The elbows must remain under water except for the last stroke before the turn or finish. All arm movements must be simultaneous. The head must break the surface by the widest point of the second stroke and must break the surface during each complete cycle.

Kick – Breaststroke kick - The feet must be turned out during the propulsive part of the kick and all leg movements must be simultaneous. No alternating, scissors or butterfly kicks are allowed, except after the start and after each turn, a single butterfly kick is permitted prior to the first breaststroke kick.

Turns / Finish – After each turn, the swimmer must be on the breast when the feet leave the wall. The touch must be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. The last stroke before the turn or at the finish may be an arm stroke only. The head may be submerged after the last arm pull prior to the touch, but it must break the surface at some point during the last complete or incomplete stroke cycle preceding the touch.

Butterfly

Start – Forward Start

Stroke – The swimmer must remain on the breast (shoulders at or past vertical towards the breast). Multiple kicks are permitted, but the first arm pull must bring the swimmer to the surface. The arms (shoulder to wrist) must be brought forward over the water and pulled back under the water. All arm movements must be simultaneous. Throughout the race, some part of the body must break the surface, except for the start and after each turn, where the swimmer may be submerged for not more than 15 meters. At that point, the head must break the surface. Use far end backstroke flags.

Kick – Butterfly kick - All leg movements must be simultaneous up and down. No alternating, scissors, or breaststroke kicks are allowed.

Turns / Finish – After each turn, the swimmer must be on the breast when the feet leave the wall. After the head has passed the final backstroke flags, the swimmer may be completely submerged while reaching for the finish. The touch must be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface.

Individual Medley

Start – Forward Start

Stroke – The swimmer must swim all four strokes in this order: Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle. The rules for each stroke apply. During the freestyle leg, the swimmer cannot swim in the style of the previous three strokes and the swimmer must remain on the breast.

Kick – The rules for each stroke apply.

Turns/Finish – Intermediate turns must follow the turn rules for each stroke. During freestyle turns, the swimmer may rotate past vertical toward the back, but must return to the breast prior to any kick or stroke. Transition turns between strokes must follow finish and start rules for each stroke. During the breaststroke to freestyle turn, the swimmer must return to the breast prior to any kick or stroke.

Medley Relay

Each team must swim all four strokes in this order: Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Freestyle. The rules for each stroke apply. Each swimmer must swim one-fourth of the event distance. During the freestyle leg, the swimmer cannot swim in the style of the previous three strokes, and except for turns, the swimmer must remain on the breast. During the turns, the swimmer may rotate past vertical toward the back, but must return to the breast prior to any kick or stroke.

Relay Take-Off

Watch the feet of the outgoing swimmer. Once the outgoing swimmer loses contact with the deck or wall, look to see if the incoming swimmer has touched the wall. If the incoming swimmer has not touched, it is an early take-off.