



OREGON SWIMMING, INC. STARTER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

1. Attend starter's clinic using predefined materials with an approved trainer prior to starting training.
2. All training for the OSI certification must be at OSI sanctioned meets by OSI certified officials.
3. After each session worked, trainer/official completes a starter evaluation form (rubric) and discusses with the trainee.
4. Work as a starter a minimum of 30 hours on deck.
 - a. 50% of hours at 12 & under sessions.
 - b. 50% of hours at 13 & over sessions.
 - c. At least 10 hours in **ABC** or **BC** venue
5. During the 30 hours on deck training the following responsibilities will be followed:
 - a. Preset up hardware training completed within the first 4 hours.
 - b. First 6 hours – voice control and false starts.
 - c. After 6 hours eligible for full function and authority at trainer/referee discretion.
6. After minimum of 30 hours has been completed, two final evaluations must be met.
 - a. 10 observed starts by 2 different OSI certified trainers
7. If trainee fails either of the final evaluations s/he is not eligible for further evaluation until another session with a different trainer.
8. After receiving 2 "passing" final evaluations, trainee sends 2 final evaluation forms (rubrics) and Training Record to Area Officials Chair.
9. Trainee takes online starter's test after approval from AOC.

Quick Reference Guide for Starter Commands

In the interest of a uniformity of commands within Oregon Swimming, the following commands/statements should be used:

Please step up (in)
Take your mark
Stand please
Please hold your position
Please respond promptly to the command
Please respond promptly and hold your position
Step down please
Stand down or Relax please
I have a potential (for false start)



STARTER TRAINING CLINIC OREGON SWIMMING, INC.

INTRODUCTION

USA Swimming starting procedures involve both the whistle protocol for having swimmers step onto the blocks (into the water for backstroke) and the no false start protocol. All OSI referees and starters must be familiar with these procedures.

The starter is one of the most important officials on the deck. As starter you are in direct contact with the swimmers during a critical phase of the race – the start. Your actions can clearly affect the swimmer's performance. Therefore, this position cannot be taken casually. Starting should be constantly practiced and improved.

The best starter is the one that no one can remember at the end of the meet. This shows that the starts were clean, consistent and fair and no one in the facility has a reason to notice you.

The starter must always remember that although you need to help the referee with the smooth running of the meet, it is the referee's responsibility to make the final decisions. A good rule is to always check with the referee prior to making any changes, or decisions as there may be factors which the referee has been addressing which you are not aware.

The starter may be asked to conduct a timers briefing or to ensure that the head timer briefs the timers correctly on all the essential points prior to the start of the meet.

During the training period, the starter trainee should attend both 12 & under and 13 & over meets. The physical development of the different age groups requires the starter to develop different perspectives to achieve the same fair impartial start for all the swimmers. B and C level swimmers may require a different perspective and level of patience than a group of A level swimmers due to their lack of experience. Because of these different perspectives and skills, the trainee should attempt to work a wide variety of meets and skill levels during their training to help develop and refine their ability as a competent starter.

Starters must be guided by the same principles that guide all officials. ***Provide fair and equitable competition and the swimmer always gets the benefit of the doubt.***

PREPARATION

The role of the starter has many of the same prerequisites as the stroke and turn position. As a starter you should always:

- Take officiating seriously and work hard at it.
- Work regularly at the job and always be open to continually trying to improve.
- Be professional in manner.
- Always be in the proper attire for an official.

EQUIPMENT

Upon arriving on the deck, the starter should locate and ensure that the equipment you will rely upon is present and in good working order. The starter's equipment includes:

- Starting device – an electronic timing system starting device (with a horn starting signal and a strobe light). The starting device should be located so that the strobe light is clearly visible to both the timers and the swimmers. The speakers should be located so the swimmers can easily hear the starting command and signal. A starter's pistol may be used for starting if that is the only starting device available due to a complete failure of the electronic timing system.
- Recall devices – for the starter, it is the recall signal (a warbling sound) produced by the electronic timing system when the starting button is held down, or multiple shots in quick succession if a starter's pistol is used.
- Copy of events to be swim and a pen/pencil.
- Disqualification slips.
- Backstroke flags in position over the pool and properly secured.
- Recall rope in place and working correctly with a quick release mechanism.
- Starting blocks in place and secure.

- If electronic timing is being used, work with ET to ensure that the pads are in the water after warm-ups and the pads and buttons are working correctly.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

The starter shall:

- Stand within 10 feet of the starting end of the pool at a point where he will have a clear view of the swimmers.
- Ensure that the strobe flash is clearly visible to the timers.
- Upon the signal from the referee (an outstretched arm following the long whistle), assume full control of the swimmers until a fair start has been achieved.
- Use the minimal commands necessary so that the swimmers always experience standard, predictable starting commands.
- Notify swimmers of the event and heat to be swim only if no announcer is used or the referee requests it.
- If necessary, use the supplementary commands, such as Place your Feet for backstroke starts or to advise the heat when a swimmer is attempting to achieve an initial distance time.
- Do not use optional instructions such as:
 - a. Stroke(s) to be used and the order of swimming them.
 - b. Number of pool lengths to be swum.
 - c. Notifying relay swimmers that all but the last swimmer must leave the pool immediately upon completion of their leg.
- The referee may modify the starting rules to adapt them for disabled swimmers.
- Mark off the heats as they are swum and note the empty lanes and order of finish.

STARTING

Forward Start

When the referee is ready to initiate the starting sequence, he will blow a series of short sharp whistles to warn the swimmers to remove any excess clothing and position themselves behind the blocks. This will be followed by a single long whistle to signal the swimmers to either step up on the block, move to the edge of the pool if they do not intend to use the block, or enter the water if they intend to do an in the water start. Once the referee is satisfied that the swimmers are prepared for a start, the referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the starter that the swimmers are under the starter's control.

On receiving clearance from the referee, check to see that all of the swimmers are on the blocks or in the water and that they are ready. If the swimmers have failed to respond to the referee's whistle, the starter may direct the swimmers to step onto the starting block or platform with the simple command "*Please step up*". This command should be issued only when it is obvious the swimmers are not going to step up onto the block or the edge of the pool. Often swimmers will respond with no extra commands required if they are given a few more seconds. With experience, the starter will get a good feel for when the extra command should be given. As a guiding principle, the starter should be patient and not rush the swimmers. It is the starter's responsibility to ensure the swimmers receive equal opportunity for a good start, and rushing the swimmers may detract from their starting preparation. If upon having the heat turned over to you, you notice something that does not look right, raise the issue with the referee to be sure they did not miss something.

Pause until you feel you have control of the start and feel the swimmers are ready. Then in a conversational tone say "*Take your mark*".

Once the command has been given, swimmers must have at least one foot on the forward edge of the starting block (or pool edge if they are starting off the deck) for a forward diving start. While almost all swimmers will move to assume a crouched starting position upon the command, there is no requirement to do so if at least one foot is already at the forward edge.

Say only the mandatory wording unless one or more swimmers is in an improper starting position. If there is a need to make a correction, the first call will be to the entire field by saying "*Swimmers, feet please*". Subsequent reminders would address the specific lane(s). Use concise terminology whenever possible.

Sufficient time should follow the phrase "*Take your mark*" to enable the swimmers to assume their starting positions and to ensure that no swimmer is in motion immediately before the starting signal is given. When all swimmers are stationary and in a starting position, give the starting signal.

The command "*Take your mark*" should be given in a flat descending tone so that even if the swimmers cannot clearly hear the words, the tone of the command encourages them to come down or prepare for the start. A good example of the

required tone is to practice the phrase "Close the door" in a flat descending tone as this is typically the same tone the starter should adopt.

Occasionally some of the field will assume a solid and stationary starting position while others will be slow to respond to the command or not assume a stationary position, thus making the initial group wait for them to get ready to start. If you believe that any of the swimmers have been disadvantaged by being made to wait for the start while the others prepare, issue the command "*Stand please*". If this command is issued, it should be in a gentle and rising tone so that it "brings them up" and does not startle the swimmers causing them to enter the water.

Allow a brief pause (time to take a deep breath and exhale) before re-issuing the command "*Take your mark*". It may be necessary to issue the commands "*Please respond promptly*" or "*Please respond promptly and hold your position*".

The ability of a starter to determine when all swimmers in a heat are stationary is a unique one. For every start, the starter must assume responsibility for doing everything possible to ensure that the start is fair for all the competitors. If you believe one or more swimmers left early, do not recall the heat. Rather note the lane(s) of the offending swimmer(s). The starter must then initiate a dialogue with the referee with the statement "*I have a potential (false start)*". Remember, a false start is only charged when the referee confirms the starter's observation of the swimmer's movement. A swimmer must not be charged with a false start if it was caused by some external provocation such as a sudden noise, a camera flash or even poor starting technique. If it is recognized that external factors were present at a start, the heat should be recalled immediately. In the rare decision to recall a heat, the starter assumes responsibility for the start and no swimmer is charged with a false start.

Backstroke Start

The swimmers should enter the water on the referee's long whistle which will follow the short whistles. If they have not done so and the referee indicates the swimmer(s) are taking too long, say "*Step in please*". The swimmers shall line up in the water, facing the starting end with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Upon the referee's second long whistle, the swimmers should place their feet. If they have not done so, you may say "Place your feet". For younger inexperienced swimmers the extra command may cause more confusion than it alleviates, so always be careful to keep the commands to a minimum.

Prior to the command "*Take your mark*" and until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer's feet including the toes must be in the proper position. The swimmers are not permitted to stand in or on the gutter or to curl their toes over the lip of the gutter. If the swimmer assumes an illegal position after the starting signal is given, it is a stroke violation, not a starting violation.

A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position after the start. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the starter's responsibility. If not corrected before the starting signal is given, no penalty may be imposed.

Relay starts

Relay starts for the lead-off swimmer are the same as all other starts. The starts of subsequent legs of the relay are the responsibility of the relay take-off judge.

Deliberate Delay or Misconduct

The starter, with the referee concurrence, may disqualify any swimmer from the event who delays the start by entering the water or by willfully or deliberately disobeying a starter's command to step up on the blocks, assume a legal starting position, or for any other misconduct taking place at the start. Such disqualifications shall not be charged as a false start.

A record shall be kept of swimmers scheduled to swim who fail to report for deck seeded events. It is the referee's responsibility to determine if the swimmer will be barred from either their next event or the remainder of the meet, based on the meet information and the OSI scratch policy. The starter should be familiar with the OSI scratch rules for championship, deck and pre-seeded meets in order to assist the referee as these meets have different scratch procedures and policies.

False starts

When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command "*Take your mark*" or false starts before the starting signal is given, the starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command, "Stand" or "Stand Please", upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks. Any swimmer who enters the water or a backstroke who leaves the starting area shall be charged with a false start, except that a swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the command "Stand". When the "Stand" command is given, it is the swimmers choice if they remain in the crouched position and relax or stand up. The starter needs to be aware of the possibility and difference between the fact that the swimmer did not hear or understand the command and the fact that he made a choice to remain in a crouched or bent over position since it is more comfortable for them than standing on the sloping starting block. If the starter believes the swimmers may not have heard the command to "Stand" due to background noise, repeat the command a second time, but it should not need to be repeated beyond this.

All swimmers leaving their starting position before the starting signal is given shall be charged with a false start. In backstroke or medley relay events a swimmer may be disqualified if they fail to maintain feet and/or hands in a legal position after the first warning.

The starter may charge a swimmer with a false start only if the referee or an officially designated deck referee has observed the violation and confirms that the violation occurred. A referee **may** call a false start without an independent confirmation; however such a unilateral ruling should only be made when a truly blatant violation occurs.

Recalling a start

The starter recalls a heat only in the event of a bad/unfair start (camera flash, noise, significant distraction). In the case of such a recall, there is no false start.

If there is movement at the start, the heat is allowed to proceed and any involved swimmers disqualified at the conclusion of the race. This includes swimmers who may have been drawn off by the offending swimmer. However, if you accidentally recall the heat, there is no false start.

If the starter decides to recall a race because of an unfair start, it should be done immediately. The starter should press and hold the start button to sound the recall device. To ensure all the swimmers hear the recall, the recall should be initiated before the swimmers enter the water on forward starts. This does not allow the starter a lot of thought or process times, so practice being instantly clear in your mind that the start was a good start or a bad start due to yourself or some noise or distraction in the venue.

Documenting the start

Once the race has started, the referee and the starter should independently record the lane(s) he observed having committed a false start and indicate on his heat sheet the offending lane or indicate on his heat sheet if there were no false starts. The starter then informs the referee of any false starts observed with the phrase "I have a potential false start". If the referee confirms seeing a false start in the lanes the starter has indicated, those swimmers will be charged with a false start. By doing this after every heat, you are not notifying the spectators and coaches in the venue of a possible false start on a particular heat since your actions will be consistent every time.

The referee should also directly notify any swimmer or their coach of a disqualification immediately after the race. Because of the amount of activity on the deck and outstanding issues waiting their attention, the referee may ask the starter to notify a swimmer of a false start at the completion of the swim. If this is the case, the swimmer must be presented with the completed disqualification slip signed by both the referee and the starter to clearly show a dual confirmation was observed and the swimmer should be clearly informed they have been "disqualified for a false start". When chief judges are used, they will notify the swimmer of the disqualification.

Last lap warning

In all individual events 500 yards or longer, the starter or designee shall sound a warning signal (usually a bell or a starter pistol) over the water at the finish end of the lane of the leading swimmer when that swimmer has two lengths plus five yards (meters) to swim. Typically this is when the swimmer is passing underneath the backstroke flags. If using a bell, the bell should be rung from the time the swimmer passes under the backstroke flags coming into the wall until he passes back under the flags again going out from the wall.

Order of finish

Occasionally there will be a pad failure or timers will miss a finish due to a distraction. When this occurs, electronic timing personnel will approach the referee to see in what order the swimmers finished. This is so the ET can ascertain the swimmer will be placed in the correct order if the time which has been reconstructed is used as the official time. To ensure the order of finish is available, the starter typically records this on their heat sheet.

STARTING DISABLED SWIMMERS

Starters need to be familiar with the procedures for starting athletes with disabilities. The USA Swimming rulebook – Article 105 – addresses officiating swimmers with disabilities. Referees and starters need to be familiar with the guidelines and become proficient in their use.

For deaf or hard of hearing swimmers it is important that the strobe be placed so the swimmer can see it easily and that it be kept in the agreed upon position. OSI has strobes with a long cable to allow them to be placed near the starting block of the disabled swimmer so they can see it without having to turn their head toward the edge of the pool. Some swimmers bring their own strobe and cord. If you have questions about its effect on the starting system, run a test start. (It is the responsibility of meet management to request these additional strobes from OSI for use during the meet if they are aware a swimmer with hearing difficulties has been entered in the meet.)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Before the meet starts

- Does the referee need your assistance before the meet? If they do, you may be required to help the meet director and ensure a head timer has been appointed. The starter should also ensure that the announcer starts calling for timers while the referee is in the coaches meeting and assist the head timer to ensure the timers are properly briefed.
- If an electronic timing system is available, work with the ET staff to make sure the equipment including the pads and buttons are operational.
- What is the likely traffic flow on the deck? Take steps to make sure swimmers and others cannot walk in front of you and the referee during a start.
- What additional instructions should you give? Ask the referee how they want you to handle the situation when swimmers do not step up (or in) on the long whistle following the short whistles.
- What recall procedures will be used? Discuss with the referee and make sure you know what the procedure will be.
- Does the referee want you to do order of finish?
- Decide where you need to stand on the deck to observe the start. You need to establish your starting position and the referee will adjust accordingly. Will your position be different for backstroke starts? Will the referee assist you in making sure the feet are in a legal position? How will he signal you if there are problems?
- Are there relays in this meet? If so, will dual confirmation be used for judging relay exchanges? Does the referee expect you to participate in this? If so, from where?
- Does the referee expect you to handle any extra duties (e.g. act as a stroke and turn judge)?

During the meet

- Breathe steadily. Take a calm breath as the swimmers are settling. Your calm or lack of it will transmit to the swimmers.
- Hold your focus steadily on the center lanes of the pool so the outer lanes are within your peripheral vision. Do not move your eyes from lane to lane as this requires you to move your range of vision away from the full field.
- Keep track of the event and heat number. Mark off each heat on your heat sheet as it is swum.
- Record the order of finish as each heat is completed.
- Before the meet starts, *if some or all of the events are not pre-seeded*, coordinate with the computer operator and/or administrative referee and ask to be advised how many actual heats there will be.
- It is the swimmer's responsibility to report to the clerk of course (positive check in) area when used in time for the proper lane assignment. If there is no positive check in area or lane assignments have been posted following a check-in the swimmers are responsible for ensuring that they are at their lane, ready to swim, when it is time for their heat. You may need to help them find the correct lane if a reseeding has taken place.

- If swimmers get on the blocks or in the water before the referee's whistle, do what the referee directs. We do not want swimmers commanded off the blocks only to be put back up in quick order.
- When moving the electronic starting system to the opposite end of the pool from the timers for 25 yard/meter or 50 meter events, ensure no one obstructs the timers' view of the strobe light. Often stroke and turn judges and coaches forget this. OSI now has strobes which are external to the starting system that can be positioned higher.
- Be prepared to give hand signals with your voice commands for hearing impaired swimmers.
- A calm conversational tone and voice inflection is *critical*. Speak **clearly, distinctly and slowly**. Do NOT shout or "bark" commands. That only tends to cause false starts.
- Do NOT preface the "Take your mark" command with any other words or phrases such as "Swimmers", "Swimmers ready", "Ladies", "Gentlemen", or "shake it out now"!
- If one or more swimmers enter the pool before the starting device sounds or before the command to "Stand" all such swimmers should normally be charged with a false start unless the starter takes responsibility for the start.
- Do NOT attempt to compete with excessive spectator noise during the start. Insist on **reasonable** quiet.
- Avoid using a fixed timing pattern to your starting routine. Varying your starting pattern a little each start makes it more difficult for swimmers to anticipate when you will start and hence get an unfair advantage.
- Continue to watch the swimmers until all have surfaced after each start. Observe to make sure there is no doubt it was a fair start and all swimmers have surfaced safely.
- When an electronic timing system is being used, inform the electronic timers about empty lanes, swimmers in the wrong lanes and any last minute additions by the referee.
- Always check the pool and be sure all the swimmers from the preceding race have completed before doing anything that would cause swimmers in the next heat to either enter the water or step up on the starting blocks.
- With distance events, keep an eye on the lap counters to ensure they are correctly informing the swimmers of the laps swum/remaining and take corrective action if necessary.
- Always be courteous to the swimmers – you are there because of them – not the other way around.

Common starting problems

- Swimmers not paying attention to the starter and taking their position late or not at all.
- Swimmer continues to move toward a starting position and never makes it. Eventually falls off balance.
- Swimmer thinks they have the starter's starting pattern figured out and try to jump the start.
- Swimmer very slowly assumes a starting position, hoping to start on recoil just as the starting device is activated and thereby gaining a split-second advantage.
- Novice swimmers who do not change their starting position in response to the "Take your mark" command. The rules do NOT specify what the starting position should be other than at least one foot must be at the forward edge of the starting block. A swimmer does not have to crouch down. The swimmer is only required to be stationary immediately prior to the start.
- Starter uncomfortable because a swimmer(s) are looking at them. Swimmers are not required to look straight ahead – this would be very difficult for a hearing impaired swimmer. A swimmer may look at the starter of anywhere else prior to the start.
- Starter gets flustered and jittery. Starts to force poor or false starts.
- Starter getting the laps mixed up in the distance events. If the event requires a warning signal, count the laps yourself. DO NOT depend on the timer or the counter at the other end of the pool. USA Swimming does not require that each swimmer have a lap counter at the opposite end. In addition, USA Swimming lap counters may visually signal laps to their swimmer in either ascending or descending order, and they may signal from the sides rather than the ends of the pool. OSI has forms for keeping track of the number of lengths swum. Use them. It is best to track each swimmer to make sure you spot a lead change versus lapping. Stay focused. If you don't, you will lose count and run the risk of signaling the bell lap at the wrong time or over the wrong lane.

Always remember one dominant principle "be fair and courteous to all competitors and always give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer".



OREGON SWIMMING, INC.
Training Record for Starter Trainee

Name _____ Address _____ Club _____

Phone _____ EmailAddress _____

STAGE ONE: INTRODUCTION CLINIC

Clinic Date _____ Trainer Signature _____

STAGE TWO: HARDWARE PRESETUP AND STARTING ONLY (Voice Control/False starts for first six hours)

Session One: Date: _____ Meet: _____ H_Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Two: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

STAGE THREE: FULL FUNCTION GUIDED PRACTICE (full function/authority at discretion of trainer/referee)

Session Three: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Four: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Five: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Six: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Seven: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

Session Eight: Date: _____ Meet: _____ Hours: _____ Trainer _____ (yes/no)

STAGE FOUR: TWO FINAL EVALUATIONS: 10 OBSERVED STARTS (Two different Trainers, can be same meet.)

Evaluation 1 Date: _____ Meet: _____ Pass Yes/No Trainer _____

Evaluation 2 Date: _____ Meet: _____ Pass Yes/No Trainer _____

SESSION SUMMARY: Trainers initial and date below for any requirement(s) met during a session

Table with 4 columns: Init. Date Hrs and 4 rows: ABC or BC Session, 12 & Under Session, 13 & Over Session, each with a minimum 10 hrs. requirement.

Ready to test: Area Official's Chair Signature _____ Date _____