

Racing Start Safety Certification Protocol

PROPOSAL

Combined Forward and Backstroke





TEACHING RACING STARTS SAFELY

Before You Teach, Be Sure:

1. Swimmers can jump feet first into deep water, surface, turn around, level off and swim 10 feet.
2. Swimmers can demonstrate correct hand, arm and head position. Practice a tight streamline on dryland.
3. Swimmers can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push and glide underwater on their front for forward starts and on their back for backstroke starts.
4. You and the swimmers know the water depth. USA Swimming requires that you teach in a minimum of 6 foot depth.
5. Starting blocks are tightly secured to the pool deck and meet size and height regulations.
6. For backstroke start practice, have the swimmers slip into the water feet first with one hand on the deck. Swimmers should not grasp backstroke start bar while entering the pool.
7. Always be sure the landing area is clear of other nearby swimmers.
8. Prior to certification, all racing starts must take place from a position in the water, regardless of pool depth. Subsequent to certification, practicing of racing starts may take place in water depth of four (4) feet (1.22 meters) and deeper.
9. Local, state and municipal statutes, ordinances, rules and regulations, may have depth limitations in conflict with this section. The LSC and all Member Clubs should check for this at all times.

Teaching Forward Starts:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step by step progression BEFORE using the starting blocks.
PREQUISITE: Swimmers can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push and glide underwater on their front.
STEP 1: Sitting
STEP 2: Kneeling
STEP 3: Compact
STEP 4: Stride
STEP 5: Shallow Angle Start
2. Make sure swimmers can enter water with control at each step before moving to the next step.
3. Always have swimmers hold arms fully extended overhead during entry. Do not perform entries with arms at sides.
4. Do not perform entries over stationary objects like poles, lane lines or kickboards. (Note: Coaches with additional training might use advanced techniques in water at least 12 feet deep with experienced swimmers, by having them practice over a soft item, such as a noodle.)
5. **Note:** Local, state and municipal statutes, ordinances, rules and regulations, may have depth limitations in conflict with this section. The LSC and all Member Clubs should check for this at all times.

Teaching Backstroke Starts Without the Ledge:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step by step progression BEFORE using the starting blocks.
PREREQUISITE: Swimmer can hold their arms in a tight streamline on a forceful push from the side and glide underwater on their back and adjust their hands to come to the surface at an angle.
CERTIFICATION CRITERIA: The swimmer gets into position with the hands grasping either the gutter or the lowest bar on the blocks, as close as possible to the water's surface. The swimmer performs a shallow backstroke racing start following the steps listed on page 4.
ADVANCED: Once certified, coach may teach swimmer to use the backstroke bar, if in the coach's opinion the athlete is tall enough and strong enough to handle this skill safely.
2. Always have swimmers hold arms fully extended overhead during entry.
3. Do not perform entries over stationary objects like poles, lane lines or kickboards. (Note: Coaches with additional training might use advanced techniques with experienced swimmers, by having them practice over a soft item, such as a noodle, in water at least 12 feet deep.)

Teaching Backstroke Starts With the Ledge:

1. Instruct swimmers in the step by step progression BEFORE using the ledge starting blocks.
PREREQUISITE: Swimmer is certified for backstroke starts without the ledge
CERTIFICATION CRITERIA: The swimmer gets into position with the hands grasping either the gutter or the lowest bar on the blocks, as close as possible to the water's surface. The swimmer performs a shallow backstroke racing start following the steps listed on page 4.
ADVANCED: Once certified, coach may teach swimmer to use the backstroke bar, if in the coach's opinion the athlete is tall enough and strong enough to handle this skill safely.
NOTE: Research has shown that older, larger, stronger swimmers can generate more height, and consequently, the risk of reaching greater depths with the ledge is more pronounced with these athletes.
2. Always have swimmers hold arms fully extended overhead during entry. Do not perform entries with arms at sides.

Teach Your Swimmers the "Do's and Do Not's" for starts:

DO:

1. Use starting blocks and backstroke ledges only during controlled swim practice, instruction, supervised warm-up or competition.
2. Know the water depth and location of pool floor slopes. Use feet first entry if unsure.
3. Use feet first entry in warm-up and always enter at the starting end of the pool.
4. Look before entering the pool.
5. Enter the water only with permission of marshal at a meet or the coach at practice.
6. Use a shallow angle entry and hold arms fully extended overhead.
7. For backstroke start practice, have the swimmers slip into the water feet first with one hand on the deck.

DO NOT:

1. Start a water entry until the preceding swimmer has come to the surface and moved away from the entry area.
2. Do a head first entry into cloudy water
3. Fool around on the starting blocks or the pool edge
4. Attempt to abort a poor start or a false start by somersaulting, pulling up quickly or rolling to the side
5. Attempt a somersault or flip entry into a competition pool
6. Enter head first with the arms at the side.
7. For backstroke start practice, swimmers should not grasp backstroke start bar while entering the pool.

Teaching Backstroke Start (Detailed Protocol)

1. Grasp the pool edge at water level with both hands and place your feet on the wall, either parallel or slightly staggered. Arms should be straight and relaxed, eyes looking forward at the wall. Athletes that are older, larger, or stronger, that are comfortable reaching a bar on the starting block can do so, with the feet placed near the surface of the water.



2. On the command “Take your mark,” bend your arms and legs to pull your body up and closer to the wall. Swimmers learning the start should just pull up slightly to a level that their strength can handle. Swimmers that are comfortable enough and strong enough to grip the bar can pull up more, with the hips at the surface of the water or just above.

Adjust the angle of your back so that your body is positioned ideally to jump off the wall while not slipping. With your back perpendicular to the water, you may be less likely to slip but your legs may be too tightly bent to get the best jump. To get to this position, bend your legs more to bring the hips closer to the wall or bend your arms less. Alternatively, with your back leaning towards the wall, you may be more likely to slip, but it may be easier to extend your legs to push away from the wall. To do this, bend your legs less to have your hips further from the wall or bend your arms more. This position may be better suited with a wedge.



Start position – Back Perpendicular



Start position – Leaning Forward

The backstroke start position should be individual to each athlete, their strengths, and comfort. Try experimenting with different combinations of knee bend, arm bend, and back angle to find the best position for you.

3. On the starting signal, throw your head back to a neutral position. Simultaneously press your hands from the edge or block and straight back over your head. Push forcefully with your legs to jump upward and away from the wall while arching your back and driving your body, hands first, up over the water. Kick your feet up to ensure they get over the water and you get into full streamline.
4. Tip your head back and get into a streamlined position. The goal is to have a clean entry and maximize forward speed by not going too deep. Your hands should enter before your back, and your back should enter before your legs. To improve your entry position and depth, adjust how high and away you jump off the wall, and work on kicking your feet up. A higher jump may lead to a cleaner entry, but may also be deeper too which is not preferred.



5. Once in the water, adjust the angle of your hands and/or head for a horizontal streamlined glide. Straighten your back, to avoid a rear somersault.

NOTE: These pictures for backstroke are screenshots will have to be taken over and/or release forms signed.

Teaching Forward Start (Detailed Protocol)

(From Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches manual)

Sitting Position



Fig. 7-3 Headfirst entry from sitting position.

Sit on the edge of the pool with your feet on the edge of the gutter or against the side of the pool.

1. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-3).
2. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
3. Lean forward, try to touch the water and push with your legs.
4. Straighten your body and extend both legs upon entering the water.
5. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.

Kneeling Position



Fig. 7-4 Headfirst entry from kneeling position.

1. Kneel on the pool deck with one leg while gripping the pool edge with the toes of your other foot. The foot of your kneeling leg should be in a position to help push from the deck.
2. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-4).
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Lean forward, try to touch the water and push with your legs.
5. Straighten your body and extend both legs upon entering the water.
6. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.

Compact Position



Fig. 7-5 Headfirst entry from compact position.

1. Starting from the kneeling position, lift up so that both knees are flexed and off the deck. The toes of your leading foot grip the edge of the pool and your back foot is in a position to help push from the deck. Keep your knees bent so that you stay close to the water.
2. Extend your arms over your head (Fig. 7-5).
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Lean forward as though you are trying to touch the surface of the water and use your legs to push off the deck.
5. Straighten your legs and bring them together so that your body is in a straight line as you enter the water.
6. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.

Stride Position



Fig. 7-6 Headfirst entry from stride position.

1. Stand upright with one leg forward and one leg back, with the toes of your leading foot gripping the edge of the pool.
2. Extend your arms above your head.
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. Bend your legs only slightly while also bending at the waist toward the water (Fig. 7-6).
5. Lift your back leg until it is in a straight line with the rest of your body. Keep your forward leg as straight as possible as you lean forward.
6. Bring your legs together as you enter the water.
7. Angle your hands toward the surface of the water to steer up.

Shallow-angle Start



Fig. 7-7A To gain momentum for the dive, swing your arms backward and upward, letting your heels rise as your body begins to move forward.



Fig. 7-7B Enter the water at an angle no greater than 45°.

1. Stand on the edge of the pool with your feet about shoulder-width apart and your toes gripping the edge of the pool.
2. Flex your hips and knees and bend forward until your upper back is nearly parallel to the pool deck.
3. Focus on a target that will allow you to enter the water at roughly a 45° angle.
4. To gain momentum for the dive, swing your arms backward and upward, letting your heels rise and your body start to move forward (Fig. 7-7A).
5. When your arms reach their maximum backward extension, immediately swing them forward. Forcefully extend your hips, knees, ankles and toes, one after another, to drive your body forward in a line of flight over and nearly parallel to the surface of the water.
6. Keep your body stretched, with your arms angled slightly down and your hands interlocked in front.
7. Before entering the water, drop your head slightly between your outstretched arms.
8. Enter the water at an angle no greater than 45° to the surface of the water (Fig. 7-7B).
9. Once underwater, use your hands and head to steer your body upward toward the surface. Keep your body fully extended and streamlined while gliding underwater. Before losing too much speed, start your leg kick to rise to the



RACING START CERTIFICATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why did the USA Swimming Board of Directors implement the Racing Start Certification Checklist?

The experience of the United States Sports Insurance Company (“USSIC”) and a recent racing start study commissioned by USSIC observe that teaching racing starts can potentially result in serious injury if not performed correctly. In response to these observations, the USA Swimming Board made changes to the existing six-foot depth rule for teaching racing starts. Those changes included making clear that the definition of teaching racing starts includes all racing start training until the swimmer’s coach certifies that the swimmer has the skill to perform a shallow racing start on demand into four feet of water. The Racing Start Certification Checklist establishes criteria for that certification.

2. Who must be racing start certified?

a. Forward Racing Start

1) For swimmers with less than one year experience and for swimmers age 10 years and under:

The swimmer must have satisfactorily completed the appropriate forward racing start learning progression as set forth in the Racing Start Certification Checklists. The American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual has the Forward Racing Start Checklist and will include the backstroke learning progression after a 2018 update.

2) For swimmers with more than one year experience and/or swimmers age 11 and older:

Certification is based on the coach’s observation that the swimmer is capable of safely controlling the depth of his or her racing starts.

b. Backstroke Racing Start Without the Ledge

Backstroke Start Certification without the ledge is required for all ages. Prior to certification, all backstroke racing starts without the use of the ledge must take place from a position in the water at least 6 feet deep. Subsequent to certification, practicing of racing starts may take place in water depth of four (4) feet (1.22 meters) and deeper.

c. Backstroke Racing Start With the Ledge

If an athlete will use the ledge in competition, certification with the ledge is required for all ages. If an athlete will not use the ledge in competition, certification with the ledge is not required. Prior to certification, all backstroke racing starts must take place from a position in the water at least 6 feet deep. Subsequent to certification, practicing of backstroke racing starts with the ledge may take place in water depth of four (4) feet (1.22 meters) and deeper.

NOTE: In all cases, the certification is based on the coach’s professional judgment—it is not and cannot be a guarantee.

3. What if a swimmer is certified at one club and then transfers to another?

The swimmer must be recertified at the new club.

4. Who is responsible for keeping copies of certification forms?

Each club is responsible for retaining, for three years, an electronic or paper certification form for each of its swimmers. There is no requirement that these forms be sent to an LSC or to officials responsible for any competition.

5. Does the certification process impose more liability on coaches?

No. A coach's liability is already based on the coach's exercise of good professional judgment in deciding whether a swimmer has the skills necessary to safely perform a racing start into less than six feet of water (including racing starts into the USA Swimming minimum starting depth of four feet). Certification simply documents that for each swimmer, such professional judgment was exercised. Similarly, coaches are also already responsible for following the progression set forth in the American Red Cross Safety Training Manual to teach racing starts to young or novice swimmers. Certification documents that the steps in the American Red Cross Safety Training Manual have been followed.

6. Why isn't there an age stipulation for backstroke starts like there are for forward starts?

Research has shown that older, larger, or stronger swimmers can generate more height with the ledge, and consequently, the risk of reaching greater depths with the ledge is more pronounced with these athletes.

7. What if my team does not have access to the Ledge for certification?

While this may seem a burden, the safety of all our athletes is the primary concern.

- a) An LSC could sponsor a clinic where clubs could come and coaches could work with their swimmers to teach, and certify them, on the ledge at a facility where a ledge, or ledges, are available. It may be possible for the LSC to purchase several ledges for this purpose.
- b) Several teams could share the purchase price of a ledge and share use of the ledge for practices.
- c) While swimmers can technically be certified during a meet warm-up (with at least a 6' depth), it would be a disruptive to attempt to certify a whole team in a sprint lane. Particularly in early season meets, host clubs can set a time prior to the meet warm-ups (day before or just before) when coaches can come work with their swimmers so they can become certified.



FORWARD

Racing Start Certification

BACKSTROKE

Racing Start Certification

Name	Age	FORWARD					Date Completed	BACKSTROKE			
		1	2	3	4	5		NO LEDGE		WITH LEDGE	
		Sitting	Kneeling	Compact	Stride	Shallow Start		Water Level	Date Completed	Bar Grip	Date Completed
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