

Guidelines for Clerks of Course

The Clerk of Course job is critical to running an efficient meet. The ideal Clerk can work with the opposing team's Clerk, Kid Pushers, the Starter and TSA Rep to get all the children to the blocks in a timely manner and consolidate heats (where appropriate) to save time. The best training to be a Clerk is to work as a Kid Pusher.

What the Clerk Needs to Do Before the Meet

Understand the system your team uses to line up swimmers – Teams can pre-seed using a spreadsheet or a program (such as Hy-Tek Meet Manager). In this case each swimmer is assigned a lane and heat before the meet begins. A paper copy of the lineup is printed for the Clerk to use. The alternative method is to assign children to the main event (point scoring) races and then flow the children in from fastest to slowest for the rest of the event using a chart that order the children for each event. For more information on the alternative method see the fourth page of this [document](#).

Familiarize yourself with the rules of seeding – Regardless of whether your swimmers are pre-seeded, you need to understand the TSA seeding rules (102.4):

.1 Coaches shall assign swimmers to lanes, always placing the faster swimmers in the centermost lanes.

.2 The visiting club will swim in lanes two, four (and six) in pools with eight or fewer lanes. The home club will swim in lanes one, three, (and five) in pools with six or fewer lanes, and in lanes three, five, and seven in eight-lane pools. In ten-lane pools, the visiting club will swim in lanes four, six, and eight, while the home club will swim in lanes three, five, and seven.

In addition, TSA has limits to the number of swimmers who can participate in main (scored) events. TSA allows 6-and-under swimmers to compete in only two individual main event races. Older swimmers can compete in only three individual main event races.

If pre-seeding, make sure you can read the chart – Ask for a copy of the chart before the first meet you work, read it and ask the TSA Rep, Meet Director or Coach for clarification if there is any confusion about which row or column refers to heats and which refers to lanes.

Understand how the swimmer lineup is communicated – TSA recommends that the swimmer lineup, be it pre-seeded or a list of swimmers in the order they will swim, be widely disseminated to the team before the meet starts. An email can be sent to parents with the lineup, it can be posted on the website, or it can be posted at the pool. Having the children understand where they are supposed to go (with the understanding that things can change) is a great help. At minimum, the Kid Pushers need copies of the lineup. If your team only provides a lineup to the Clerk, discuss ways to get the information out more broadly.

Familiarize yourself with the pool's layout – TSA rules stipulate that lanes should be numbered from right to left as the swimmers stand facing the course. Some teams number the course differently (for instance, if what would be Lane 1 is not usable). Make sure you understand if your pool – or the opponent's pool – is numbered outside the norm.

Find out what system your team uses for handling event entry forms – Event entry forms (pink or blue slips) are filled in with the swimmers' names for main event swims only. These slips are used at several steps during the meet. The slips should be matched against the pre-seeding or swimmer lineup chart before the races begin (in case of discrepancies). The slips need to be sent individually or in a batch mode (several slips at one time) to the Recorder before the race begins. TSA recommends that teams not require the Clerk to rely exclusively on the slips for lining up main event swimmers as this can delay the slip being sent to the Recorder. TSA rules allow the slips to be sent to the recorder in a batch before the races begin. This is helpful for teams that don't have enough volunteers to run the slips over more frequently. The downside is that if a change has to be made to a slip before the race begins (a swimmer is a no-show), the TSA Rep needs to get involved – removing the slip and penciling in the change before the race begins and making sure the Clerk knows about the change.

Communicate with the Kid Pushers-- It typically works best to have the Kid Pushers do more than just bring the kids to you. Ideally, they should start assigning them to their seats. Clerks, if you try to do it all yourself, you'll get frazzled.

Ask the TSA Rep if the normal order of swimming is being followed for the evening – TSA Reps can decide (together) to swim all the 6-and-under events first. They might also swim "main events" only first if there has already been a weather delay or if the weather is threatening. These are TSA Rep decisions. This should be reflected in your seeding or meet lineup chart.

Ask the TSA Rep how event and heat combinations are going to work – More on that below.

A final note: Don't "baby" the swimmers. Children as young as 7 can learn to read a seeding chart (or understand how to lineup in the order they'll be placed in their lanes). This is another reason to communicate the lineup ahead of time.

The 5:50 PM Scramble

Familiarize yourself with the order of events. It is the same for every meet:

Events shall be swum, alternating between boys' events and girls' events and starting with the youngest boys' age group swimming the event, in the following order (102.1.2):

.A Medley Relay

.B Freestyle

.C Backstroke

.D Breaststroke

.E Butterfly

.F Freestyle Relay

The first event of the evening is the medley relay. This is the most difficult race to line kids up for because the swimmers within 7-8 and 9-10 relay teams need to be lined up at *both* ends of the pool in a specific order. The medley order is alphabetical so it helps to memorize it: backstroke, breaststroke, (butter)fly, and freestyle.

For 7-8 and 9-10 relays the back and fly swimmers are lined up on the starting block end of the pool. The Breast and free swimmers go on the opposite end.

Line up the 7-8 relays at 5:55 –To do this, you need to make sure the Coach gets them out of pool by 5:45. Make sure your team communicates the early lineup time to parents, swimmers and volunteers. It usually helps to have one Kid Pusher organize the breaststroke and freestyle swimmers while the other lines up the backstroke and butterfly racers.

After that it gets easier (usually). 😊

Making the Meet Go Faster

In the perfect world, you would swim against a team with the same number of children in each event as your team has. That rarely happens. Instead, something like this occurs:

Main event – Each team fills all of its assigned lanes.

Heat 2 – Each team fills all of its assigned lanes.

Heats 3 and 4 (and sometimes 5 and 6) – Only one team has swimmers. The other team has run out of 9-10 boys or 13-14 girls, or whatever age group is swimming.

Or:

One team has just one 15-18 girls relay but no 15-18 boys relay. The other team has the opposite. Thus, two races are held with just one team competing in each.

Swimming heat after heat with just three swimmers in a six-lane pool really slows down the meet. The same goes for relays with just one relay team in the pool.

TSA has rules and guidelines that address combining heats (and even main events) to avoid this problem.

To understand how to combine you need to understand the difference between events and heats. An event is a specific age/gender/stroke race (e.g., the 13-14 girls freestyle relay). Events can be combined per rule 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 Reps have received a lot of education on the importance of combining events and heats to save time. It should not be an event-by-event decision. At the officials' meeting you can ask or they will tell you that relays, for instance, will be combined where appropriate.

When two events are combined several other volunteers need to know about it. If your TSA Rep puts you in charge of organizing event combinations you need to alert the Starter so he/she can announce that it is a “Combined Event”. This tips off the Place Judges to split the lane judging and lets the Recorder know there will be four or more slips to fill out with race results.

Heats are races within an event. No TSA Rep permission is needed to combine heats (rule 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.

OK, This is Starting to Seem Pretty Difficult

The first hour can be somewhat busy, but you will see a pattern emerge.

Heat combinations – The pattern established during the freestyle will usually be repeated in all 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.

Event combinations – This typically involves just the relays, and mostly for the older age groups. The event combinations used for the medley relay can often be used again for the freestyle relay. The medley relay combinations can be worked out before the meet gets going. The freestyle relay combinations can be worked out when the 7-8s are swimming the butterfly.

Other notes on combining and clerking:

- In 5-lane pools, the fifth 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Moving the Swimmers to the Blocks

- Swimmers should advance to the blocks as soon as the race in front of them is in the pool.
- If someone doesn't move to the block, make eye contact with the starter, or raise your arm. They might not know that someone is missing.
- If the TSA Reps have agreed to dive-overs (where the finishing swimmers stay in the pool until the next heat dives over them) remind the swimmers as they approach the blocks.
- If you have an open lane during the main event make sure the heat swimmer who is due to go in the next race doesn't end up in that race. If they do, it is not that big of a deal as long as the starter is alerted and an announcement is made "Judges, Lane 6 was a Heat Swim".
- One way to tell if a swimmer has moved into the wrong space is if you have a girl lined up next to five boys. Unless this was planned, the girl is in the wrong spot.
- If you've got time, don't shy away from giving the little ones some TLC. Coaches are not allowed in the line-up area. And most teams also block the area off so parents can't get in there. If you see a young swimmer struggling with their goggles or cap, lend them a hand.

Pre-seeding Ahead of the Meet

Some teams like to pre-seed the meet ahead of time, particularly if they use electronic timing devices. This is optional and is a decision the TSA Reps make. Pre-seeding does not mean that there will not be opportunities to combine heats. 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.

Timing and the Clerk's Role

It's 6:20 on Tuesday night and the medley relay is starting to wrap up. During the Officials' Meeting, event combinations were discussed and you and your counterpart combined relays where possible to save time. Now you notice that they have many more 6-and-under boys than you do. You tell your counterpart that they can have all the lanes after the second heat. They say: "We can't do that, it will mess up getting times for our swimmers." IMMEDIATELY CONTACT YOUR TSA REP.

Timing is optional in TSA. The only instance where a time must be captured is for the first place finisher of each main event (and that's only for pool and team records). Most teams do time their swimmers by placing timers on each of their lanes.

When you move swimmers to the opponent's lane, you do risk that the timer on that lane won't get a time. But that isn't the Clerk's concern. The TSA Rep will address this issue.

It also doesn't matter if the team is using electronic timing. If they are, they should keep a second Clerk available to jot down lane changes as they are made so the swimmer and the time can be matched up later. But again, they should know this. For more information about timing, read these [guidelines](#).