

UNITED STATES ARTISTIC SWIMMING



WELCOME TO COACHING MANUAL

Part 3

June, 2021

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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ABOUT USA ARTISTIC SWIMMING – GOVERNANCE

NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY – USA ARTISTIC SWIMMING

United States Artistic Swimming is recognized as the national governing body for the sport of Artistic Swimming in the United States of America, responsible for the conduct and administration of the sport throughout the country.

In the structure of the organization, there are:

- Group members
- Athlete members
- Non-athlete members

Under the heading of Group members is the Club member -- which is defined as a artistic swimming club, educational institution or other organization that participates in competition sanctioned by the Corporation. All of its athletes and coaches must be members of the Corporation.

Athlete members are persons who join the Corporation in order to participate in events sanctioned by the Corporation. Athletes must meet the rules of eligibility set forth in Article 20. (See the USAAS Code 2017 available on the website)

Under Non athlete members - Professional members are coaches, judges, instructors, officials and administrators participating in the sport of Artistic Swimming.

LOCAL ARTISTIC SWIMMING COMMITTEE (LSSC)

When beginning your club, you will be involved with the Local Artistic Swimming Committee (LSSC) organized in each of the associations/territories listed in the Code. The LSSC conducts competitions and other programs such as Level Testing, Judges training, Coaches training and more. The LSSC Administrative chairman for your association will be your guide and the Officers of the association are very helpful in Education and Technical matters.

See the list of LSSC Associations and Territories in 6.03 of the USAAS Code.

ABOUT COMPETITION

When you are developing your team program, it is important to be aware of the competition schedule and determine whether your team is competing and in what competitions will they compete.

This section will help you understand about competitions to make the best decisions for your program:

- ❖ How to learn about competition options
- ❖ Different types of competitions
- ❖ How meet announcements are made and how you would register your team
- ❖ Coach's responsibilities and focus at competitions

HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT COMPETITIONS

When you start a program and join USA Artistic Swimming, your local artistic swimming Association (LASC) and your Zone, you will have a number of resources available to you.

- ❖ USA Artistic Swimming provides an event schedule on their website of all national competitions and many smaller competitions (all competitions must be sanctioned through USA Artistic Swimming).
- ❖ Each Zone will create a schedule for their meets, usually at the USA Artistic Swimming Convention in early fall.
- ❖ Next your local Association(s) will create the schedule for the local competitions, both at the Association and Regional level (a Region is a combination of Associations). Usually this schedule is in place by October, although it is possible for additional competitions or events to be added later.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COMPETITION

The number of competitions that your team participates in can depend on a number of variables:

- ❖ Number of swimmers at each level or category
- ❖ Location of competitions
- ❖ Level of interest and involvement from your athletes and families
- ❖ Competitions are divided into a number of different levels, or categories, and within each category there are different age groups. When there are swimmers from more than one age group in a routine, the age of the oldest swimmer is the age group that the routine competes in.
- ❖ Novice Level – usually new swimmers during their first year of learning artistic swimming and competing.
 - Age groups are determined by your local region, but are likely to be similar to 8 & under, 9-10, 11-12 and 13 & Over (and are determined by the local region)



- Types of routines include:
 - Solo (1 swimmers)
 - Duet (2 swimmers)
 - Trio (3 swimmers)
 - Team (4-8 swimmers)
 - Novice competitions usually include both figures and technical routines – so both types of skills should be focused on during practice
 - Novice figures are set by the National Governing Body (NGB). There are 2 compulsory figures and 2 groups of two additional figures. One of the two groups is drawn prior to the meet, so swimmers must know all 6 figures. Note: see Welcome to Coaching Part 2 for current Novice Figures.
 - Novice competitions are Invitational meets -- which means there is not another level to qualify for. Usually these competitions are at the Association level, but it is possible to be invited outside of your Association or for Associations to combine for meet management.
- ❖ Intermediate Level – usually swimmers that have competed at the Novice level and are ready for the next challenge.
- Age groups determined by your zone, but are likely to be similar to 10 & under, 11-12, 13 -15 & 16 & O
 - Types of routines included for Intermediate are:
 - Solo
 - Duet
 - Trio
 - Team
 - Combo
 - Intermediate competition includes figures and free routines with technical elements.
 - Intermediate figure groups are determined by the NGB. However, there are two compulsory figures and 2 groups of two additional figures. One of the two groups is drawn prior to the meet, so swimmers must know all 6 figures.
 - Although it varies by Zone and Region, Intermediate swimmers typically qualify for Regional Championships based on placement in their association. In some Zones, Intermediate swimmers can also qualify for Zone-level competitions. There is not a national competition for Intermediate swimmers.
 - Intermediate swimmers can also compete in Invitationals in their Association, Region or even out of state.



❖ Age Group Level

- Age Group Competition is the next step up for artistic swimmers.
- There are four different age groups with three different sets of rules and figure groups:
 - 12 & Under
 - 13-15
 - 16-17
 - 18-19
- Types of routines include the following:
 - Solo
 - Duet
 - Team
 - Combo routine – only for 13-15 and 16-19 age groups – combo routines have 4-10 swimmers and a unique set of rules
- Competitions include figures for 12 & U and 13-15, technical routines for 16-17 & 18-19 and free routines for all age groups.
- Age Group swimmers can compete at the Association, Regional, Zone and National levels.
- To qualify for the Junior Olympic National competition: from the Association Championships the top 3 Duets, Teams and Combos and top 2 Solos from each age group will advance to the Regional Championships. From Regionals the top 3 Duets, Teams and Combos as well as top 2 Solos from each age group will advance to the Junior Olympic Nationals. This competition is the largest meet in the United States and is usually held the end of June/first part of July.

❖ Junior/Senior Competition

- Next level up from age group for 15 & older athletes, though 13-14 year old athletes can compete in Combo routines
- Many swimmers can do both age group and junior and/or senior competitions
- By the time your swimmers qualify at this level you will be up to speed on competition levels.

Meet Announcements and Registration Information

In preparation for a meet, the hosting team, in coordination with the managing organization (association, zone, national), will create a preliminary meet announcement.

This will include key information about the meet:

- ❖ Location
- ❖ Dates
- ❖ Meet Managers
- ❖ Facility information - pool dimensions, locker room facilities, food options
- ❖ Qualification information
- ❖ Awards
- ❖ Tentative meet schedule
- ❖ Travel support – hotel options and directions

- ❖ Registration directions
 - How to register all your athletes for the correct events
 - How to share your music
 - How to share this information
 - Where to send meet fees
 - Other opportunities for honoring your athletes at the meet

Note: Some meets will require a pre-meet registration to get a preview of the number of routines and to better plan for the meet. It is very important to submit your pre-meet registration by the deadline, and ideally as quickly as possible to ensure that you receive meet information.

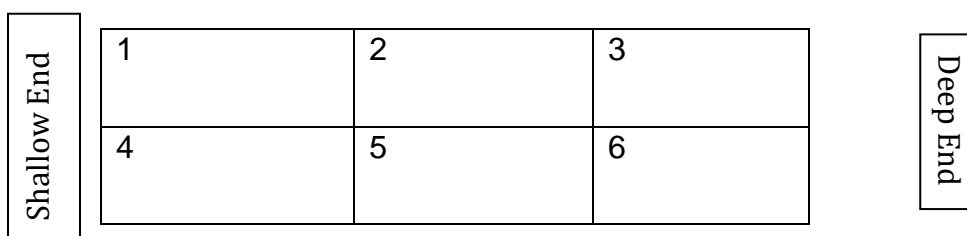
Once all registrations have been submitted, the meet host will publish a final schedule adjusted for the actual number of swimmers. Make sure to review that schedule and inform your athletes and parents what time they need to arrive and any other meet details. Often the draw for the competition will also happen prior to the meet. You need to review it and again share the information with your team. It is your responsibility as a coach to ensure that all your athletes are entered and drawn correctly. Note that in many cases, the meet will move ahead of the final schedule. So it is important that the athletes are aware of this and don't miss their events!

Coaches' Responsibility at Meets

Coaches have a lot of responsibilities at meets. It is important that you are aware of these and prepare appropriately. When you read the final schedule, take note of a number of key times in the schedule:

- ❖ Coaches' Meeting – this is usually near the beginning of the meet, but at times there may be a coaches' meeting each day or at the start of a new category.
 - During the meeting you will discuss any particulars for that meet
 - It is your opportunity to learn key details about how the competition will work
 - It is also a chance to bring up any issues, concerns or questions.
- ❖ Warm-ups for each event – prior to any competition there is going to be a warm-up period. Read the schedule carefully!
 - Often warm-ups include time for lap swimming and then time for figure or routine warm-ups.
 - Sometimes, if a category is large it could be divided into multiple warm-up groups, so it is important to understand which warm-up is for your swimmer(s).
 - Be mindful of how much time you have for a warm-up and make sure to focus on what is most important first.
- ❖ During lap warm-up have swimmers start with basic swimming laps and then do synchro skills laps based on what your swimmers do to warm-up and what would be helpful for the event. It helps if your swimmers know what they are supposed to be doing for warm-up (on land and in the water) before they get to the competition.

- ❖ During the “warm-up” time, how you handle that will depend on the event and how the warm-up is structured:
 - For figure warm-up coaches need to establish a location at the pool where their swimmers should meet to work on their figures. (Note: Many coaches grab these locations during lap warm-up so that they have a good spot to work with their swimmers.) Swimmers will have to find a space, sometimes away from the wall towards the center of the pool, where they can do the full figure without knocking into someone. Swimmers should make sure to look at their coach as soon as they finish and coaches should decide what the swimmer should do next to get the most out of the warm-up time.
 - For small routine warm-up, the pool is usually open to swim through the routine. The key is to focus on what you need to work on as a coach and athletes, but also to be respectful of the other swimmers. So at times you have to wait to take your turn in a particular place. Depending on your swimmers and their goals, you may have them swim through their full routine, or you may have them focus on some key parts or elements of their routine. One of the things that is useful to focus on is getting them oriented without goggles to the competition pool.
 - For teams and combo routines, the competition will often organize the warm-up by time and spot in the pool and routines will rotate through usually 3 locations, or the team might be assigned a specific zone for the entire warm up. Be sure to check for any guidelines or diagrams. Below is an example of a zoned warm up.
 - See diagram below



- Within your warm-up time, you will be assigned a starting position – (1-6)
- Let’s say you are assigned #4 as your starting number, you will start at the shallow end, left side (looking from the deep end). Depending on how the rotation is defined for the meet, you will then go to spot 6 and then to spot 5.
- As part of the warm-up information, you will learn how much time you will have in each location. It is usually around 5 minutes.
- You should think about which skills make sense in each location:
 - Often when you are in the deep end location, part of what you work on is the jump in to the first lift or pattern or both

- Other lifts and complicated patterns, floats, transitions, should be done in the location that best represents where that is in your routine
- With limited time, it is recommended that you work from most important to less important so that you review the most crucial pieces first and ensure those are covered.

No matter what, communication is going to be key. Whether it is with your other coaches, athletes, parents, coaches in the Association, officials, etc – this is what will keep a competition running smoothly and help to avoid any hiccups or headaches along the way!



COMPETITION SUITS AND EQUIPMENT

One of the fun parts of competing for many young athletes are the sparkly, glamorous competition suits. Competition suits can enhance the artistic impression of the routine by reflecting the theme or the music. But make no mistake, artistic swimmers are athletes and so competition gear must reflect that. Below are some guidelines to what your swimmer will need for competition.

WHAT TO WEAR FOR COMPETITION

Different competitions and events have different requirements. Note that for most athletes, nose clips are a requirement for any event other than Level testing dry land!

FIGURE COMPETITIONS AND MASTER TECHNICAL ROUTINES

- ❖ A solid black suit devoid of club or national team emblems
 - A brand logo is ok
 - Suits can be purchased from any major retailer and are not commonly custom made
- ❖ A solid white swim cap
- ❖ Goggles are permitted during figures and Masters routines



GRADE LEVEL COMPETITION

- ❖ Water testing – solid black suit devoid of club and national team emblems and solid white cap (see *Figure Competition*). Goggles are permitted for speed swimming and figure testing only.
- ❖ Land testing – tight, black shorts over black swimsuit. Long hair should be pulled back away from face

FREE ROUTINES AND NON-MASTERS TECHNICAL ROUTINES

For routines, swimmers wear suits that will enhance their routine, and wear their hair either gelled (also known as “knocked”) into a bun with a headpiece that matches the suit or a swim cap. Goggles are not permitted in competition except under special medical circumstances.

ROUTINE SUITS

Routine suits are a chance to be creative and wear a suit that enhances the performance of your routine. Questions to ask when picking out a routine suit include:

- ❖ Is the suit appropriate?
 - All routine suits should be “in good moral taste” and must conform to current concept of the appropriate, as determined by the meet referee. If suits are deemed too revealing or offensive, swimmers will be asked to change before being allowed to compete!
- ❖ Will the suit interfere with the athlete’s swimming?
 - Loose suits and suits with fringe or sleeves get in the way of the athlete’s performance. Avoid too much fabric or semi-detached embellishment, and have the athletes try the suits at practice before performing.
- ❖ Does this suit enhance the performance?

- ❖ Suits that flatter the athletes, that are exciting in design or embellishment, and that connect the audience to the music or choreography will enhance the performance for spectators and judges

HEADWEAR

For competitions and performance, artistic swimmers typically wear their hair pulled back in a tight bun, held in place with bobby pins and unflavored gelatin (such as Knox). Typically they wear a decorative headpiece, although they may also forgo the gelling and wear a swim cap. Master athletes often choose a swim cap instead of knoxed hair.



HOW TO MAKE OR BUY ROUTINE SUITS AND HEADPIECES

If you google “artistic swimming headpieces” or “artistic swimming suits” you will find numerous photos, Pinterest Boards and other sites for inspiration. A few links are included in the Table of Contents.

CUSTOM SUIT DESIGNER

This is the most expensive option. There are routine suit makers all over the country. The best way to find one in your area is to talk to local coaches. If you find a suit maker you want to work with, they have varied ways of fitting and designing custom suits for your athletes. Some measure athletes in person, some send fit kits. Some ask for design input, others like to design suits and send ideas. Some will embellish the suits, others will do it for an extra cost, and some will only sew the basic suit. Some will also design and sew headpieces, while others focus only on the swimsuits.

Suit making gets very busy during the competitive season. It’s best to contact them early – in summer or early fall. Suits from custom suit makers usually cost between \$75 and \$250 depending on how elaborate the design and how much embellishment your request.

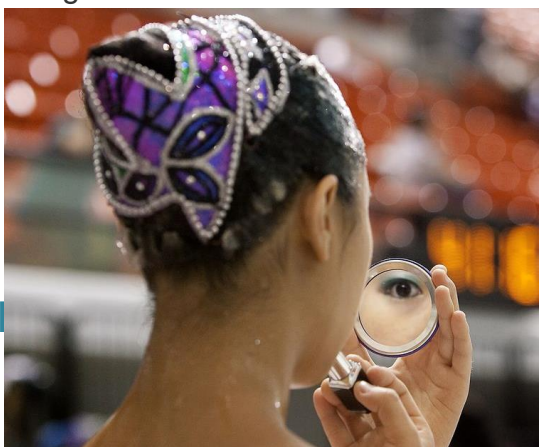
CUSTOMIZE AN OFF-THE-RACK SUIT

Many clubs chose to use suits they buy in a store or online and then customize them.

Some options for customizing an off-the-rack suit are:

- ❖ Alterations: Change the neckline, move the straps, raise the leg openings, etc.
- ❖ Embellishment: Stretch the suit on cardboard or a rectangle of PVC pipe. Use E6000 glue to add crystals or sequins, or draw patterns with the glue and pour on glitter.

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In addition to coaches, one of the most important roles in Artistic Swimming is that of the Judge. Many coaches are also certified Judges under USA Artistic Swimming. Judges can also be unaffiliated, which means they are independent and not associated with any particular team.

Pursuing a judges' rating while coaching can also enhance your coaching skills since you will learn to see and critique your swimmers through a judges' eye. Ages 15 & up are welcome to become Level 1F, 1, 2F & 2 Judges, must be 15 years old, Level 3F and above must be 18 years and older.

Judging Levels

The levels of judging in the USA are:

Level 1F/1: Association (Novice/Intermediate/12U Age Group)

Level 2F/2: Regional (12U, 13-15 and Junior Age Group + Combos)

Level 3F/3: Zone

Level 4JO/4: National

Level 5 & 6: International

A Level 1F, 2F, and 3F indicates a judges' rating for figures only. Otherwise, Judges are certified to judge figures, free routines, and technical routines.

Process for Becoming a Judge

For each level, a written test and a practical test must be passed in order to pass that level. The chart below shows how to go about testing at each level.

Study guides and further information about how to get and retain a level, are available on the USA Artistic Swimming website. See Officials Certification Policy (Appendix G), Click [HERE](#)) in the USA Artistic Swimming Rulebook for the full Officials Certification Policy or Judges Resources (Click [HERE](#)) for more information.

	WHO ADMINISTERS	WRITTEN TEST	PRACTICE JUDGING	MENTORING /ORALS
LEVEL 1/1F	Association Officials' Chair	Online or in-person/ Open book	At Association Level Championship or Invitational	No
LEVEL 2/2F	Association Officials' Chair	Online or in-person/ Open book	At Association/Regional Level Championship or Invitational	No
LEVEL 3/3F	Zone Officials' Chair	Open book in-person– 2 hour time limit	At Zone Level Championship	Yes
LEVEL 4	National Officials' Chair	Open book in-person – 2 hour time limit	At National level Championship	Yes

Staying Up to Date

Every four years, judges will need to complete a mandatory update to reflect an update in Rules, Figures and Elements.

In addition, judges must retest or move up a level every two years. Except for Levels 1F & 1, after retesting 3 times in the same level (over a 4-year period), they become a retaining judge and simply need to attend an Update (required every 4 years) to remain at that level.