

SWIMMING RULES: COMMON ELEMENTS and DIFFERENCES (as of September 22, 2026)

COMMON ELEMENTS WITH GOVERNING BODIES	Start	Freestyle	Backstroke	Breaststroke	Butterfly	I.M.	Relays
	• Whistle preparatory commands; • Verbal preparatory "TAKE YOUR MARKS" • No recall; • Forward - after TYM's - foot/feet at front of block (see USMS); • Back - feet can be above water; not above lip of gutter or curling of toes over gutter. • Requires a stationary starting position.	• All common	• All common except backstroke turn and use of starting ledges - See NFHS	• All Common	• All Common	• All common except NFHS Backstroke turn.	
DIFFERENCES - see specific rule book for exact wording							
AQUA; USA-S; YMCA; NCAA	AQUA/USA-S/NCAA have video review of false start protocols. See POOL DEPTH COMPARISON chart for differences		• Backstroke ledge permitted. If adopted by State Association - See Below.				
NFHS	• Verbal or whistle preparatory commands - State option. • No provision for video review of false starts.		• Kick/glide is permitted before and after turning action. • Backstroke starting ledge device - if authorized by state assoc. adoption, in pools with a min of 6'(1.84m) depth measured from the starting end through 16 feet, 5 inches (5 meters) from the start end wall.			• See Backstroke differences.	
USMS	• Use back start for in-water free start; • At least one foot at front of block before TYM's • In water relay exchanges permitted. • At least one foot must remain in contact with the wall prior to the exchange				• Allow breaststroke or dolphin kick exclusively or interchangeably • Only one breaststroke or dolphin kick per arm pull permitted.	• See stroke differences.	