



Parents' Guide for Swimming Events

This guide has been put together to help parents and swimmers understand and prepare for the various swimming events they will be involved in.

The events have been broken down into categories with details for each. The last section is a general Q&A with information that applies to most Swimming events.

Hastings Seagull Swimming Club expects swimmers to attend all relevant squad sessions, and racing squads to always attend Club Championships and regularly attend Open Meets. Failure to do so could jeopardise your swimmers place in their racing squad.

General advice

As a general rule, young swimmers start by competing over 25m and 50m distances, building up to the 200m distances. At 10 years swimmers can take part in 400m events. At 11 (girls) or 12 (boys) swimmers can compete over 100m distances.

For some events there are no heats or finals, just Heat Declared Winner (HDW). Swimmers race against others with similar qualifying times but not necessarily the same age. The times are then recorded for each race and the winner is the quickest swimmer in that age group. Disqualifications are inevitable especially for the younger swimmer and for the more technical strokes. Your swimmer will be disappointed but should be praised for their race effort. In the long run it is better for them to be disqualified in the early stages of their career as they will quickly learn to get it right. They will have plenty of other opportunities to race again!

Swimming Events

1. **Mini Galas. (Individual)**
2. **Internal 'Fun' Galas. (Team)**
3. **League Galas. (Team)**
4. **Club Championships. (Individual)**
5. **Open or Graded Meets. (Individual)**
6. **County/ Regional and National Championships. (Individual)**
7. **Swimmers Q&A**
8. **Common Terms**

1. Mini Galas

These are the first competitions swimmers should enter and are held four times a year on a Thursday night between 18.00 and 19.00. They are for groups 3 – 6 and swimmers compete against other swimmers in their own group. All groups swim free style and backstroke. From group 5 they also swim breaststroke. The distance is 25 meters for groups 3 - 5; 50 metres for group 6; two strokes are swum at each event.

Groups 1 and 2 do not swim competitively but will still have normal lessons on these nights.

These fun nights are important as they introduce fun competitive swimming to the children.

Please always check the notice board for information about the swimming club; it is situated on the reception area and up in the viewing gallery on the wall.

Please do not leave your children unattended at the pool when they are in a learning group.

See the club website or the notice board for dates.

2. Internal 'Fun' Galas

Internal 'Fun' Galas are an introduction to team events in a friendly environment and are held for a number of reasons:

- To start with, it allows the swimmers to enjoy healthy competition in a 'fun' atmosphere.
- Secondly, once a year the club holds an internal gala in memory of previous Head Coach, Richard Grundy. All money raised on the night goes to the Isle of Wight Leukaemia Charity.
- Thirdly, it also enables new swimmers to get to know others within the club.

These galas are not meant to be as serious as a County Championship or even Club Championship, although times recorded do give an indication of swimmers' progress.

Usually, the entrants are arranged carefully into 3 'even' teams. Swimmers are matched as closely as possible to other swimmers with a similar personal best time to ensure that inexperienced swimmers are not daunted by the occasion.

Times Achieved provide qualifying times for forthcoming events or for squad progression.

This takes a lot of organising so if for any reason a swimmer who has put their name down for these galas cannot make it, please notify one of the organisers as soon as possible. The teams are led by team managers and it is their responsibility to organise their team on the night.

See the club website or notice board for dates.

3. League Galas

The club currently races in the both the Sussex League and the National Swimming League.

The Head Coach will select a team for each gala and a notification sheet will be put up on the club notice board. It is the swimmers and parents responsibility to then confirm whether they are available.

The age groups are (usually but not always) determined as age on the date of the gala so your swimmer will be swimming against other swimmers of a similar age who may be faster or slower. Swimmers will be told which event they will be swimming once they have arrived at poolside. Galas and League events take place in a single evening (normally Saturdays). The races are within age groups against five other clubs. The exact number of teams competing depends on the league and the number of lanes at the host pool.

You need to read the notice board each time you come training and regularly check the website. If you are selected to swim in a gala you must follow the instructions given on the team selection notice.

The club provides transport for League events for which there is a small fee collected on the night.

4. Club Championships

These are the club's own internal championships where swimmers compete against other swimmers in the same age group. They are held five times a year and **are very important**.

Entry is open to all swimmers in Group 7 and above. Swimmers may only swim the events for their particular age group together with the Open events which are open to all. The age group that the swimmers enter is determined by their age as at 31st December in that year.

Several weeks prior to each event a poster will be at the front desk inviting entries. No late entries will be accepted. One of the purposes of the Championships is to introduce young swimmers to competitions. Many young swimmers are very nervous about entering competition, so these provide a familiar and friendly environment to have a go!

Events up to and including 100M distances are run firstly in heats with the fastest six going through to a final. 200m distance races are run as HDW. The championships are run under ASA law and therefore some disqualifications can and will happen (for example – the one start rule for false starts).

Swimming is a unique sport in that winning is not always the purpose of the race. Most children enter to beat their own time called PB (personal best) As swimmers get older and make progress it is a fact that one or two swimmers will win more events than others, this is often when a swimmer becomes reluctant to enter events and say "I won't win anyway", this is when we should all be saying "see if you can get a PB (personal best)".

Every time the swimmer competes in a race you should keep a record of the time so that you can see how much they are improving. Beating your P.B (personal best) should be congratulated. **The coaches will use these times when choosing a swimming squad, or can be used to decide what level of competition your child can enter.**

Please encourage swimmers to stay poolside until the presentations have been made as it is not only good manners but correct etiquette.

Awards for the Club Championships will be given out at the Club Awards Night in December.

See the club website and notice board for dates.

5. Open or Graded Meets

An open meet is very different from other events in several ways, so requires a bit more preparation.

An open meet takes place over a longer period of time than other events, often a whole day or weekend rather than a single evening. Open meets are generally 'age on the day', so the age your swimmer will be on the last day of the event. Any swimmer who is age 9 or older can enter open meets provided they meet the entry qualification or consideration time for their age.

Open meets are graded with 'B/C' or 'L2/3' meets designed for swimmers who are developing and are not the fastest in their age group.

Level 2/3: These can have upper and lower qualifying times – swimmers must be faster than the lower limit but slower than the upper limit. These meets are usually suitable for children trying to qualify for the county/regional championships as the upper limits are normally set just above the relevant qualification times. This is a good level of competition to start at – assuming your child is not faster than the times published!

Level 1: These are the highest level of meets and only have lower qualification times – i.e. the swimmer must be faster than the entry times shown. These are suitable only for the top swimmers and are aimed at swimmers trying to obtain regional and national times.

For your swimmer, it is a great opportunity to compete in a wide range of strokes/distances against swimmers from many other clubs. It is also a chance to get new 'personal best' times, see how their swimming has improved and where they are seeded amongst the external competition.

Preparing entries

Details of the meet, such as the entry form and qualification times, are put on the club notice board, the club web site and emailed (if you are on the circulation list). Details can also usually be found on the host clubs web site.

Open meet events are in 'sessions' with the first session often requiring you to check in very early in the morning and the last session ending in to the evening! Session details can also usually be found on the host clubs web site.

If you are not sure which events to enter, speak to your swimmer's coach for advice but in general, especially for inexperienced swimmers, it is advisable for the initial open meets, to check which session each swim is in and to choose events that will not involve: a long day, long gaps in between or too many races in one session.

Please *clearly* mark which events you want to enter & return the form to the Competition Secretary with the correct amount of money made payable to Hastings Seagull Swimming Club. It is advisable to return the form before the closing date rather than on the very last day, so that any queries can be sorted out early. If you miss the closing date your swimmer will not be able to participate.

Acceptance

Even if your swimmer is inside the consideration or qualifying times their entry may not be accepted if the host club receives too many entrants. If this case the host club will reject entries starting with those nearest to the cut off time so check if you were near the qualifying times for that event.

Refunds will be given via Hastings Seagulls for rejected entries.

Card Meets

About a week before the meet you will usually receive cards from your squad rep/coach (see later for Cardless meets). They are postcard sized and colour coded blue for boys & pink for girls. The card will show your swimmer's name and date of birth, the stroke, distance and entry time for the event. Check all the cards to ensure that your swimmer has been entered in the correct events and that the information on the cards is correct. Speak to

the Competition Secretary as soon as possible if you think there are any errors.

Make sure you bring the cards with you to the meet and arrive early enough to 'post' them. They must be handed in, or "posted", at a specified time (usually the start time for warm-up) to confirm to the organisers that your swimmer will be competing. The last posting time, or box closing time, may be printed on the card but if you are not sure, double-check with your coach beforehand, to make sure you get to the pool on time. The 'posting box' is usually on poolside but may be by the entrance to the pool. If you can't find the box – ask either one of the organisers, a coach or even another parent.

Do not panic if you get to the meet and find you have forgotten your cards. Report to the officials before the published box closing time and they will be able to issue replacement cards. **If cards are not posted in time a swimmer runs the risk of not being able to compete.**

Cardless meets

Most Meets nowadays are cardless so you will not receive the pink and blue cards. You should take your ASA card along as you may be required to present it for identification and proof of ASA membership.

These meets require that your swimmer to sign against their name; 'sign in' for each event. As with posting cards, signing in is required by a certain time, usually before the warm up for each session but be aware some meets have a queue to sign in. The signing in sheets are usually found by the changing rooms and have one sheet per event, printed with the entry name in alphabetical order. If you are in more than one event in the session make sure you sign in for all events in that session. Often sheets for later sessions come out during the earlier session so if your swimmer has event in the later session they can sign in early and avoid the pre warm up rush.

On the day of the Open meet

(See also 'Swimmers Q&A' for general advice)

Warm up is usually 30 minutes to an hour before the event start and is usually separate for boys / girls and, depending on numbers, the older swimmers will often warm up after the younger ones. There is no diving during the warm up but towards the end of each warm up session, listen for the announcement, some lanes will be dedicated as sprint lanes where swimmers can dive in and sprint one length, getting out at the other end and walking back. The Coach will give your swimmer advice on how much warm up to do and what thing to concentrate on depending on the event they are swimming that day.

When the event starts, the poolside club coach/helper will whip (send the swimmer up for their race) the swimmers for the relevant event and send them down to the marshalling or 'Whipping' area. It is important that the swimmers learn to know roughly when they are due to swim so that they are ready.

Swimmers will be lined up in the whipping area in heat order and then asked to go forward and stand behind the relevant lane. The timekeeper for the lane will ask your swimmer to confirm their name. For a card open meet your swimmers card will be handed back to them in the Whipping area and they should hand the card to the timekeeper for their lane.

After your swimmers last event they may go home. Although it is advisable to tell the Coach, so he/she knows who is still on the poolside, your swimmer does not have to wait for the end of the event unless the Coach advises otherwise (eg taking part in a final which is always at the end of a session).

Results

When the races have been swum the times of each swimmer are recorded on the computer system which produces the final result sheet after all the races for a particular event have been swum. Results sheets are displayed around the poolside for the swimmers and around the spectator area for you to read as soon as it is possible to do so.

Speeding Tickets

For some lower graded open meets there are a set of upper cut-off times (usually UQT or UQT plus a few seconds), which swimming faster than these times earns a 'speeding-ticket'. Check the small print in the gala conditions, usually found on the host clubs website, to see if there will be speeding tickets and if so whether the cut of times are UQT or above. Getting a speeding ticket means that the swimmer is not eligible for medals (and is effectively disqualified) but it is a very positive indicator of a 'good time' for that race, in that age group. So your swimmer should be reassured that a speeding-ticket is a good thing as is a win or a placing or personal best time

6. County, Regional and National Championships

Ages for Championships are usually 'age on the last day of the meet'.

Entry forms can be found via the club website but will also be distributed via email if requested. Please clearly mark which events you want to enter & return the form to the Competition Secretary with the correct amount of money made payable to Hastings Seagull Swimming Club. It is advisable to return the form before the closing date rather than on the very last day, so that any queries can be sorted out early.

If you have not got a consideration time for an event but expect to get it in an event before the championship then please speak to your swimmer's coach for advice.

If you miss the closing date your swimmer will not be able to participate.

County Championships ('Counties')

These are the first major championships a competitive swimmer will encounter. They are held over a series of weekends in Feb/March and are similar to a Level 1 Open meet in that there are only lower consideration times.

However it is not an open meet because they are only open to swimmers of clubs affiliated to the relevant County ASA which for Hastings Seagulls is the Sussex ASA.

In the autumn of each year, the following years "county qualification times" are published on the Sussex ASA website. They alter a little each year (usually getting faster), but the previous years can be used as a guide. If your swimmer is faster than the time(s) published the club would expect your swimmer to compete.

Entry forms are available via the club website and should be returned to the Competition Secretary with the relevant payment (made out to Hastings Seagull Swimming Club).

Regional Championships

This is the next level of Championships after Counties and are held May/June. Clubs from the South East Region are eligible to enter swimmers for this event who have achieved regional qualification times (these are published on the South East Region website). This is a high level of competition and the club would expect swimmers obtaining these times to compete.

Qualifying times need to be achieved at recognised i.e. not internal, meets. An added complication is that at SERs (and Nationals), no qualifying times are set for the youngest age groups in 100-metre events - you can enter these only if you make the relevant 200-metre entry time. Although the meets are long-course, entries require shortcourse times.

Entry forms are available via the club website and should be returned to the Competition Secretary with the relevant payment (made out to Hastings Seagull Swimming Club).

National Championships

This is the top level of "age group" swimming for swimmers aged 11-13 (girls) and 11-14 (boys) followed by the National Youth Championship for girls 14+ and boys 15+. It is held in July and is open to all swimmers who achieve a national qualifying time in a Licensed Meet. These are available from the ASA website.

7.Swimmers Q&A

How should we prepare?

In the week before the meet, and at the end of each day of the meet, ensure that your swimmer refuels on top quality athlete's food containing complex carbohydrates. They should also be drinking plenty of fluids, to ensure their body's cells are fully hydrated.

It can add to the nerves before a race if a swimmer is worrying about a new pair of goggles that have just been bought because their usual ones broke. Where possible swimmers should refrain from trying out new costumes or goggles for the first time in a race. It is best for new items to be "experienced" during a training session so that any problems can be resolved ahead of the competition.

What equipment will be needed?

Swimmers usually take their bag with equipment on to pool side. However at large events many items end up in lost property or go missing so ensure everything is well marked and encourage your swimmer to put everything away in their bag when not using it especially during warm up and races. This will also have the advantage that they can find their goggles/hat quickly when they are needed for the race!

To enable identification of swimmers and to have a 'team' look, all swimmers are expected to wear a Hastings Seagull hat when swimming in external events.

It is a good idea to bring several swimming costumes to a long meet so your swimmer can get changed after a race (if there is time) and stay warm. They should also have at least one spare (tried) pair of goggles or spare straps and clips.

Your swimmer will be in and out of the water all day, so make sure you bring more than one towel. You might find it useful to get a swimmer's chamois. It allows the swimmer to dry off most of the moisture without soaking their usual towel, and saves your laundry basket!

What clothing will be needed?

Some pools can be draughty and it is important to keep warm between events, so bring plenty of warm clothes. Club kit – t-bags, club track suit – should be worn when possible. Don't forget a pair of poolshoes, or flip-flops or *clean* trainers & socks, as a lot of heat can be lost through bare feet on a cold poolside.

Don't forget, if they arrive in their poolside clothes, to make sure they have a dry set to go home in! It can also be useful to have a spare plastic bag for regular clothes and other belongings to keep them dry while the swim bag is on poolside.

What should the swimmer do when not swimming?

Swimmers are expected to stay on poolside during the each meet. They must not leave the poolside without a coaches express permission. Coaches need to speak to swimmers during the day for either race strategy advice or to send them up for marshalling to get ready for their race. If your swimmer wants to leave poolside, even if it's just to go to the toilet, they *must* let the Coach know to ensure that they don't miss their race. The Coach has a whole team to keep track of, which can be very difficult if swimmers keep 'disappearing' at crucial moments.

After their swim it is vital that your swimmer immediately sees the Coach and swim down if possible.

Although swimmers are encouraged to support their team-mates it can be helpful, especially for open meets, for them to bring something, such as a book, magazine or computer game, to keep them occupied during quieter moments. Do be aware that neither the club nor the venue can be held responsible for loss or damage to property so your swimmer should not bring valuables or things that can be damaged by being in a damp atmosphere.

What should the swimmer eat and drink?

On the day of the meet your swimmer may be on poolside for the whole day, so they need to be kept well stocked with small, easily digestible snacks, rather than having large meals. It is just as important to stay well hydrated, so provide plenty of fluids and encourage your swimmer to sip often at their drink during the day.

Although some venues have excellent catering facilities it is best not to rely on them, so bring a selection of food to keep your swimmer in top form throughout the day.

Food suggestions

Complex carbohydrates for 'grazing' throughout the day, e.g. small portions of:

- Pasta/Rice salad
- Muffins (sweet or savoury)
- Bread, Pitta bread, Bagels
- Pizza (but be careful of fatty toppings)
- Rice cakes
- Breakfast cereals or Cereal bars
- Bananas
- Popcorn

Jacket potatoes are also suitable if available at the venue's catering outlet.

Drinks suggestions

- Water
- Sports drinks
- Weak squash

Note: Fizzy drinks & glass containers of any kind are banned.

What should the parents do?

You have to make sure that your swimmer gets an early night before the gala and arrives at the pool in plenty of time

In the rush to get your swimmer ready it can be easy to forget your own needs, so don't forget to pack items for yourself. You might want to bring a comfortable cushion (some venues have very hard spectator seating), something to read, a pen or pencil to mark up your programme, and a separate picnic with plenty to drink. Some parents also like to bring a stopwatch but this is not essential as many venues have electronic time board and results will be printed and displayed at the venue during the sessions. It is worth noting your swimmers times for each event as disqualifications (DQ's) will not get an official time recorded but praise for a PB, even with a DQ, will help the disappointment.

Remember that if you intend to use photographic equipment (even a camera on a phone), you will need to sign the host clubs form before entering the facilities.

How can we see the Results?

Each time the swimmer swims the results will be fed back to the club and Hastings Seagull swimmers times will be posted on the club board and on the web site under News - > Results. Full results of external meets will be posted on the relevant hosting clubs/championship web site. This can take a few weeks so keep checking!

Are there trophies or medals?

The medal system and their quality will vary from event to event. Please see advice on individual events for guidance on awards.

What/Where are my PBs?

When the swimmer achieves a time that is better than their existing time for that stroke/distance it is recorded on the clubs PB database. PBs are recorded separately for 25m, short course (SC) pools and 50m long course (LC) pools.

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These PBs should be used to check against qualifying times for Open Meets and Championships.

PBs achieved in events where your swimmer is not representing Hastings Seagull Swimming Club i.e. schools galas, can be given to the club administrator who updates the database.

What are BAGCATS?

British Age Group Categories or BAGCat points are a system of points which are awarded for different swims. When a swimmer competes in a BAGCat event, their time is converted into points that take into account a swimmer's age and sex. A swimmer can take part in as many events in a season as they choose to, but only their highest points score in each swimming category will count towards their final BAGCat total.

For an event the overall position of a swimmer is the sum of the BEST point score in each of the 5 categories (50m events, 100m, FORM, Distance and IM (100IM for 9-11year olds and 200-400IM for older swimmers). It is therefore advisable to enter every category in the Age Groups if you can achieve the qualifying times. (N.B boys 12 and below and girls 11 and below don't swim the 100m individual events).

8. COMMON TERMS

Consideration or Qualification time - the slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

DQ'd and disq. - Abbreviation for disqualified on result sheets and time cards (See reason codes below)

Entry time - The time submitted by the club for a swimmer being entered in a gala. If entries are made well in advance, the entry time may not be the swimmers current PB

Form Stroke - One of the three strokes having specific requirements (ie. 200M, Breaststroke, Butterfly or Backstroke). Freestyle is not a Form Stroke but is used for distance events, such as 200/400/800 or 1500m depending on the swimmers age and sex.

Heat Declared Winner (HDW) - When no final is swum and the winner is declared on the times swum in the heats

I.M. - individual medley. The competitor swims all four strokes in the following order: - butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Licensed meets: This term has now replaced "designated meets". These are the only meets via which you can qualify for national **competitions**

Long course - Events held in a 50 m pool

LQT - Lower Qualification Time. The slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

Medley relay - Four swimmers each swim a different stroke. The order is always backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle.

PB - A swimmers personal best time for a given event.

One start rule – A swimmer only gets one chance to start ‘legally’, otherwise they are disqualified.

QT - Upper Qualification Time. The fastest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

Short course - Events held in a 25m pool

Squadron relay – Usually the last race of a gala. A freestyle relay consisting of one swimmer from each age group or one swimmer of each sex from each age group.

Disqualification Reasons

Turn	T			
Finish	FI			
Stroke	S	---->	Arms	A
			Head Position	H
			Legs	L
Start	ST			
Takeover	O	---->	Early Start	
			Stroke Change	M
Fouling	FO			
Wrong Lane	L			
Misconduct	M			
Equipment	E			
Did not finish	DNF			
Did not swim	DNS			

	DD	A	nL
Disqualification Reason			Length on which offence Occurred. N.B. length no. 1 given when length not known
Appeal Made		A	
Appeal Disallowed		X	

Sometimes a more detailed description is provided on the event results sheet.