

# *Jumping Into Open Water*



*Open Water Swimming Guide*

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## Introduction

“Open water swimming reached a new level of international exposure by becoming an official event at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China. Open water swimming offers the purest form of racing, where athletes are racing against their fellow competitors and not the clock. Race strategies, along with the conditions, are constantly changing which makes adaptability a key skill. Each race varies in length and course design, especially at the local level. USA Swimming’s Zone Championships feature a 5K and our national and international level events feature a 5K, 7.5K, 10K, and a 25K.” -USA Swimming

## Websites:

SCS Calendar:

<https://www.socalswim.org/meets/open-water>

USAS Calendar:

<https://www.usaswimming.org/events>

World Aquatics Calendar:

<https://www.fina.org/open-water/calendar?group=FINA&year=2023&month=latest&disciplines=OW>

USA Swimming Open Water Resources:

<https://www.usaswimming.org/swimmers-parents/swimmers/open-water#education>

USA Swimming Official Rules:

<https://www.usaswimming.org/swimmers-parents/learn-the-basics/rulebook>

World Aquatics Open Water Rules:

<https://www.fina.org/open-water/rules>

## Competitions

### ***Local Races***

- Local race calendar can be found on the SCS website. These include ocean festivals, masters races, and USA Triathlon events.

### ***USA Sanctioned Races***

- Zone Championships
- US Junior Nationals (April/May)
- US Nationals (April/May)
  - More information can be found on [usaswimming.org](http://usaswimming.org)

### ***International Races***

- World Aquatics World Cup Circuit
  - Calendar can be found on [fina.org](http://fina.org) (spread throughout the year)
- World Championships
- World University Games
- Pan Pacific Championships
- Pan American Games
- Olympic Games

**\*\*Full open water calendar will be updated & posted on the SCS website\*\***

## Rules

### **Basic Rules**

- Race Suit
  - Any FINA/World Aquatics approved tech suit is allowed, including full body tech suits
  - Wetsuits may be worn in water temperatures under 68°F
  - Air temperature and water temperature when added together shall not be less than 47.8° C (118° F) nor greater than 80.8° C (177.4° F)
- Race Start
  - Line up along the dock, or holding the rope in the water
  - Race starts on the blow of the whistle or air horn
- Racing
  - Swimmers may draft off each other
  - Swimmers cannot scratch, hit, push, or pull on another swimmer
  - Swimmers may stand but cannot jump or push off the bottom of the swim venue during the race
- Whistle vs Yellow card vs Red card
  - Whistle is to get the swimmers attention
    - This usually is to tell the swimmers to spread apart if they are too close/bumping into each other
  - Yellow card
    - 1st is warning, 2nd warning turns to red flag
    - This usually comes from a swimmer accidentally hitting or swimming on top of another swimmer
  - Red card
    - Disqualification
    - Purposeful punch or pull of another swimmer
- Buoy Turns
  - Must go around all turn buoys in the correct order & direction
  - Directional buoys can be passed on either side (these are usually smaller buoys in between the turn buoys)
- Feeding Station
  - Feeds must be given on a feed stick and cannot be thrown to the swimmer
- Finish
  - Swimmer must touch the front of the finish structure
    - If missed, swimmer must go back and touch the finish structure

\*\*Full 2023 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations can be found in Part 7 on pages 111-122\*\*

## Safety

Whether it's training or competition, safety is always a priority. Please be aware of the following recommendations whenever swimming open water:

### ***Know the Venue***

- Water Quality
  - Make sure the venue has been checked for water quality and is approved for swimming
- Water Temperature
  - USA Swimming's minimum temperature is 60.8 degrees and maximum temperature is 85 degrees
- Conditions
  - Be aware of currents, waves, strong winds, low visibility
- Boat Traffic
  - Try to swim in areas without boat traffic
  - Swim with a safety buoy to be more visible to possible boat traffic
- Marine Life
  - Find out if there is marine life that could be a safety issue
- Entry & Exit Points
  - Find a place where swimmers can safely enter and exit the water

### ***Develop a Swim Plan***

- Boundaries
  - Swim in a designated area with supervision
- Course
  - Use buoys or landmarks to create a structured swim course when training so swimmers don't collide into each other
- Breaks
  - Like pool training, remember to have hydration breaks

### ***Develop a Safety Plan***

- Supervision
  - There should be constant monitoring of the swimmers
  - Have a coach on a vessel following the swimmers
  - Have someone on shore ready to call 911
- Communication
  - Use radios and/or non-verbal communication between coaches in and out of the water
- Carry a first aid kit
- Always swim with a partner!

## Training

### ***Open Water in the Pool***

- General Training
  - Training for open water does not need to be much different from distance pool training
  - Practicing long sets that are 5km+ at least once a week is a good idea to get used to swimming straight for that long of a period
- Pool Open Water
  - Remove lane lines from the pool and swim around along the perimeter of the pool
    - Get creative by doing different distances, swimming in different directions, and practicing drills such as head up swimming (see below for more drills)
  - Practice your feeding in the pool before going to the race
  - Finishes
    - If you have a finish structure or something that can work like one, practice short sprint finishes
    - Have swimmers start in different positions

### ***Open Water Training in Open Water***

- If available, practice swimming in a lake, ocean, river, or quarry
  - Get comfortable swimming in an open body of water
  - Remember training in open water is much harder than swimming in a pool, so an average training session does not need to be as long as a pool session (no walls to rest on)
- Open Water Drills
  - Swimming in a line
    - Practice drafting by swimming directly behind someone
  - Switching leaders in a line
    - Person in the back of the line must race up to the front and become the new leader
  - Reaction drill
    - A group swims together and one person randomly starts to sprint to try to pull away
    - The other swimmers must be aware of the swimmer that takes off and should try to stay with them

## Race Preparation

### ***Meet Form***

- Before race day, review all the details in the meet form
  - Attend the pre race day meeting (if applicable)
  - Familiarize the race course maps

### ***What to Bring***

- ID
  - May need this for check in at certain competitions
- Goggles
  - Comfort & visibility is key
  - Race venues/conditions may change color/tint preferences
- Caps
  - 1 or 2 caps may be worn depending on preference
- Racing suit
  - Open water tech suits can extend to the ankles
  - Males may also wear shoulder straps
- Vaseline/Lanolin
  - Spread along the outlines of the suit and armpits to prevent chafing
- Gloves & Baby Wipes
  - Keep your hands clean from the Vaseline and to clean up after the race
- Duct Tape
  - Use this to help tape down your timing chip or even your cap to your head
- Race Feeds
  - See race feeds on page 9 for recommendations
- Pre Race Nutrition
  - Have water, snacks, and/or gels to eat before the race
- Feed Stick
  - This must be used by your coach to hand you your feeds during the race
- Sunscreen
  - Apply after you get numbered
- Towel
- Post Race Nutrition
  - Drink water and/or sport drinks to rehydrate
  - Protein shake or chocolate milk



## Race Feeds

**\*\*Feeding is only used during 7.5km and 10km races\*\***

### ***Feed Recommendations***

- Basic formula:
  - 16 oz of electrolytes, such as Gatorade
  - 1 GU/Powergel
  - Prepare 4-5 feeds before going to the venue (have extra)
- Bottle
  - Best bottle to use is the slim 20oz Gatorade bottles

### ***Feed Strategy***

- Regular feeding will help stay competitive at the end of the race
  - There is no limit on how many times you feed
  - For a 6 lap race, feeding 2-4 times is common
    - Some swimmers like to stick to a feed plan no matter what others do
    - Some swimmers are flexible and feed depending on what the pack or lead swimmers are doing
- Try to consume 20-40 oz of feeds during a 10km race
  - Do not go a full 10km without feeding!
- Feed early so you don't have to feed in the final 30 minutes

## Feed Station & Feed Stick

### ***Feed Station***

- Coaches
  - Coaches will have to get their feed stick approved before the start of the race
  - Only designated coaches may enter the feed area during the race
  - For most races, coaches may choose where they stand on the feed station; for some races it is randomly assigned
  - Wear something that will be noticeable for your swimmer so they can easily find you when swimming into the feed station
- Swimmers
  - If possible, get familiar with the feed station before the race
    - See how the feed station aligns with the course
  - If possible, communicate with your coach where they will be on the feed station for during the race
  - There is no time limit on how long you stay at the feed station

### ***Feed Stick***

- Rules
  - Must be under 15 ft long
  - The coach must use the feed stick to deliver the feed or new goggles/cap to the swimmer
- How to make
  - Buy a telescoping painters pole or anything similar to one
  - Buy a cup holder
    - The best is one that has a tube mount so you can just attach it to the pole, such as a Liquid Caddy Beverage Holder (found on Amazon)
    - If you can't find one with the tube mount, duct tape it to the end of the pole
  - Attach a flag or swim cap near the end of the pole to make it easily visible for the swimmer coming into the feed station

## Race Day

The following is an example timeline for a 9:00am race start:

6:00 AM	Wake up
6:30 AM	Breakfast
7:00 AM	Depart for venue
7:30 AM	Arrive at the venue. Check the water conditions
7:45 - 8:00 AM	Check in. Bring racing suit, cap, goggles, credential/ID
8:00 - 8:30 AM	Warm Up. Dynamic stretching or a quick warm up swim if available
8:30 AM	Suit on. Lanolin/vaseline applied. Timing chips secured.
8:50 AM	Final call room/pre-race briefing
8:58 AM	Walk out to the water
9:00 AM	Start
10:00 - 11:15 AM	Finish (depending on the distance)
11:30 AM	Awards & Drug Testing (if selected)

## Race Advice

### ***Sighting***

- If available, practice swimming the course before the start of the race
- If the buoys are hard to see, use a larger object in the distance to sight off
- Do not lift your head too often
  - Lifting your head repeatedly uses a lot of energy

### ***Finishes***

- Practice hitting the finish structure before the race
- Be aware of
  - The height of the structure
  - If there's waves at the finish
  - The angle of the finish chute coming off the main course
- During many races, it will come down to whoever has the quickest touch

### ***Wear your goggles over your cap***

- This will help keep your cap from slipping off your head. Second cap can be placed to better secure goggles.

### ***Have a Plan***

- Unlike pool swimming, it's not all about how fast you are. Open water involves strategy, so have a plan on how you want to race it.

### ***Only lead with a purpose***

- Leading eliminates benefits of drafting and forces you to sight more often

### ***Swim directly behind someone's feet***

- Do not leave too much space otherwise you won't get as much of a draft

### ***Always be aware of your surroundings***

- Breathe to both sides to see what others are doing

### ***Duct tape your timing chips***

- This will help make sure they stay on since you must finish the race with them on

### ***Expect the Unexpected***

- This is what makes open water swimming challenging. You never know what will happen, whether it's a race time change, sudden waves, big rain storm, random pushes from other swimmers, or a drifting turn buoy

### ***Stay Calm!***

- There can be a lot going on around you, so conserve mental and physical energy. Deep breaths

## Open Water Cheat Sheet

Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistle = Look at the official</li> <li>• Yellow flag = Warning</li> <li>• Red flag = DQ</li> <li>• FINA/World Aquatics approved race suit</li> <li>• Swim around all turn buoys</li> <li>• Don't push or jump off the bottom during a race</li> <li>• Don't pull, hit, push, or scratch other swimmers</li> <li>• Touch the front of the finish structure</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never swim alone</li> <li>• Know the venue - water quality, temp, conditions, boats</li> <li>• Safety plan - know your swim course/boundaries</li> <li>• Always have coach supervision</li> </ul>
Race Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the meet form &amp; course maps</li> <li>• ID, race suit, goggles, cap, vaseline, gloves, baby wipes, duct tape, feeds, pre &amp; post race nutrition, sunscreen</li> </ul>
Race Feeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only for 7.5 &amp; 10km</li> <li>• Mix 16 oz of electrolytes in slim bottle + 1 GU/Powergel</li> <li>• Make extras</li> </ul>
Feed Station & Feed Stick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must handoff the feed using the stick</li> <li>• Communicate where coach will be on the feed station</li> <li>• Make the coach &amp; feed stick easily spottable</li> <li>• Feed at minimum once</li> </ul>
Race Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrive roughly 1.5 hours early</li> <li>• Look at venue conditions, check in, warmup, suit up</li> <li>• Mandatory pre race briefing 10 minutes before race</li> </ul>
Race Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice finishes before the race</li> <li>• Don't lift head too often</li> <li>• Draft close behind someone</li> <li>• Lead with purpose</li> <li>• Expect the unexpected</li> <li>• Stay calm &amp; deep breaths</li> </ul>