

The “Professional” Starter -or- It’s more than three short words!

The “Professional” Starter should:

- **Know the rules** and the protocols, procedures, and philosophies for being a successful Starter
- **Be on time for each session and officials’ briefing, dressed appropriately in a professional manner**
- **Be flexible and adaptable to all procedures made by the Meet Referee or Head Starter that may differ from the suggested guidelines offered in this document**
- **Confirm assignments, rotations, and invigilating schedule with the Head Starter:**
 - Be aware how heats will run– fly-overs, cleared pool, flighting, or events or heats alternating by gender
 - Confirm the meet procedures for Starters that may include additional responsibilities, including:
 - Timer instruction– be aware of timing system (number of buttons and watches or cameras) and provide instruction to timers at the designated time established by meet director
 - a rotation involving stroke or turn judging, taking order-of-finish, distance counting, ringing the bell for the lead swimmer in a distance heat, relay take-off judging or head timer responsibilities
 - Be aware of swimmers with disabilities who have requested special starting accommodations and know the rules and procedures
- **Confirm meet protocol and procedures for the Starter-Deck Referee (DR) teams and with the individual Deck Referees with whom you are teamed:**
 - Work as a team with the Deck Referees and Chief Judges
 - Be aware when jurisdiction will be turned over to Starter, indicated by Deck Referee’s out-stretched arm
 - Confirm how to make Deck Referees aware of next-up swimmers behind the blocks affected by suit malfunctions, cap or goggle issues, or unexpected empty lanes
- **Pre-Meet and Pre-Session:**
 - Become familiar with the starting system by checking the equipment during the session warm-up period
 - There are a variety of microphones in use. Practice with the mic during warm-ups to feel comfortable with the device
 - Omega microphones display a green light when the timing system is ready for the next start. When outdoors, confirm you can clearly see the green light and be prepared to notify the DR when the green light has not been displayed
 - Check your voice level in the microphone with another Starter or Deck Referee monitoring the audio level in all lane speakers
 - After confirming with the equipment staff, perform a test start to get a feel for how sensitive the starting button may be
 - Find your optimal deck position for both forward and back starts so that the field of swimmers can be clearly viewed
 - Find out where the Deck Referee will stand adjacent to your position. Ask your DR to extend their arm so to confirm it can be seen in your peripheral vision without blocking your view of the swimmers. Make sure you and the DR are standing close enough that you can converse quietly. It may be about swimmer issues, green lights, step down requests, etc.
 - Be prepared with a master starter heat sheet if you have been asked to use one for marking all false starts, no shows, declared false starts, and any other notes. Also acquire an OOF (Order of Finish) heat sheet, if the meet’s procedures call for the off-duty starter to take OOF.
- **During the Start:**
 - Assume your deck position to start the upcoming heat prior to the finish of the current heat. In some cases, the previous event’s results are scrolled on the scoreboard, allowing for a bit more time to take position
 - Your body language should convey that you are relaxed and confident
 - On the long whistle (second long whistle for the back start), have the microphone in a “ready” position
 - Secure the cord by holding it if possible
 - When all swimmers have stepped on the blocks, the Deck Referee will turn over jurisdiction to the Starter

The “Professional” Starter -or- It’s more than three short words!

- Be patient when allowing all swimmers to assume the position on the blocks they want to use for the start. Watch to see their feet are in the final chosen position. The swimmers will then show you when they’re ready to hear the “Take Your Marks” (TYM) instruction
 - If track style starting platforms are used, swimmers may require a bit more time to assume their position
 - If backstroke ledges are used, ensure at least one toe from each foot is in direct contact with the end wall or timing pad prior to the start, but not above or curled over the top of the pad, gutter, or end wall
- Deliver the “Take Your Marks” instruction in a calm, conversational tone that’s loud enough for the swimmers to hear over any possible crowd noise, but not so loud the instruction sounds like a shouted command. Use a cadence that is inviting with a slight falling in pitch
- Swimmers start the heats, not the starter! Be patient. The swimmers will show you through their body language when they are ready to hear the “Take Your Marks” command, and by the field being set for the starting signal
- When that “sweet spot” moment is achieved, and the swimmers are stationary, push the start button
- After the start, watch all swimmers surface, and keep the mic in a position to recall should the need arise
- The microphone should be to a position where it can’t be bumped, dropped, or yanked out of your hand and the cord isn’t in a traffic zone that could cause tripping, or risk it being pulled from its resting location
- Step out of the starting area to allow more room for the Deck Referee, Chief Judge, and Stroke Judge
 - Avoid conversing with the DR unless it involves a possible false start or another timely matter
- Using the Starter’s heat sheet, confirm the next heat’s swimmers are reporting to the assigned lanes, being particularly careful if an event has been reseeded
- Note on the heat sheet any no shows, declared false starts, false starts, or other matters for which there should be a record.
- Begin preparations to start the next heat
- **Use the False Start Protocol:**
 - Remember the definition of a false start: *Any swimmer initiating a start before the signal may be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.*
 - After the start and the microphone is replaced, calmly mark the Starter heat sheet to indicate in which heat and lane the false start was observed. Double-check that mark for accuracy of heat and lane
 - Any mark can be used as long as the Deck Referee can tell a particular heat and lane has been indicated, whether it’s circling the lane number, underlining the lane number and name, placing a visible dot next to the lane, etc.
 - Show the marked heat sheet to the Deck Referee and implement the procedure discussed prior to the start of the meet. It should include pointing out the heat and lane, as well as verbally indicating a false start was observed. The Deck Referee should also show the Starter their marked heat sheet as confirmation of a false start. Under no circumstance should a false start confirmation be based solely on a discussion.
 - If a false start is dually confirmed, the Starter will fill out the disqualification form. Double check the event, heat, lane and, possibly the name and team, have been correctly noted and the false start box was checked before signing and handing the form to the Deck Referee
 - If necessary, note any peculiarities to the false start on the heat sheet for later reference, possibly when advising a coach or swimmer of the observed action
 - Don’t hesitate to use the recall option if you feel an external noise (ex. coach’s whistle) or motion (activity around the starting blocks) has interfered with a swimmer’s ability to achieve a fair start
- **When Using Other Commands;**
 - To address the athletes with the microphone, refer to the swimmers as “swimmers”
 - Remember to use “Please” and “Thank you”

The “Professional” Starter -or- It’s more than three short words!

- If it is necessary to release the field after the “Take Your Marks” instruction, for **both** forward and backstroke starts, say, “Stand please”
- If the Deck Referee asks for the swimmers to step off or drop off the blocks, say, “Step down please”
- The Deck Ref may request you clear pool by saying “Thank you, swimmers.” If swimmers do not respond, say, “Clear the pool please”
- “Relax please” instruction should be used only **before** “Take Your Marks” or **after** a “Stand please” and means there could be a prolonged delay before the starting sequence will begin again. Remember, the “Relax please” instruction should not be used in place of a “Stand please” instruction for backstroke starts.
- In backstroke, if a swimmer’s toes are curled over the top of the pad or gutter, or not in contact with the pad when ledges are used, address the swimmer by saying, “Lane 7, toes please”. Relax the field if the correction does not happen quickly
- After any “Relax please” or “Step down please” instruction, the Deck Referee should blow another long whistle to step swimmers back up on the blocks for a forward start or to return to the wall and place their feet for a backstroke start before the “Take Your Marks” command is given

Please refer to the Certification Requirements for Starter for information on N2 and N3 evaluations, certification, and recertification. <https://www.usaswimming.org/officials/national-certification-evaluation>