



Competitive Swimming – a guide for swimmers (and parents)

1. Introduction

If you are new to competitive swimming, then this guide has been designed to help you on your way. It may look a bit daunting at first, but don't worry as not all of the information will apply initially. As you continue to progress, then more of the information becomes relevant. The most important thing for newcomers to grasp is that competing is very much part of the belonging to a swimming club and hopefully the following will explain why.

2. Starting out

ADSC is a competitive swimming club. We encourage children to compete as we believe it is one of the key ways to make them swim correctly and faster. There are, however, several other benefits where you can:-

- See how much progress you have made.
- Put into practice what you have been learning in training.
- Stretch yourself
- Improve your Personal Best times (PBs).
- Achieve qualifying times for other galas and championships.
- Compete.
- Learn from watching better swimmers.
- Represent ADSC.
- Meet new people.
- Have fun.
- Win!

3. Going to a Gala

Going to your first gala can be quite a daunting experience. If you are new to competing in galas, the following information should help you prepare.

Bring the following:-

- Plenty of drinks (not fizzy) and healthy snacks (not meals – except during all day competitions)
- A change of costume and a couple of towels plus spare goggles and hats
- A “t-bag” club t-shirt to put on between races to keep warm
- Your club hat so we can identify you when you are at the start
- Pool shoes (eg flip flops) to wear around the poolside
- Something to keep you occupied during long competitions

You can order your t-shirt and hat from the club shop <http://www.adsc.org.uk/shop.htm>

Don't eat a large meal within 4 hours of the competition but drink plenty of water/hydration drinks throughout the day.

Arrive on time, about 10 minutes before the warm-up is going to start or when the bus is due to leave. If you are late there is a chance that the coach will give your swim to another swimmer as all team sheets have to be given in before the competition starts. For open meets and championships there are designated times that you will have to register or post your cards. If you are late you are unlikely to be able to swim and may also be fined.

Most pools have lockers. We strongly recommend leaving your bag and clothes in a locker and only take a small drawstring bag (with a drink, goggles, hat, towel) onto poolside. They insist on this (and pool shoes) at the County Championships.

All swimmers need to sit with the team (not with parents) only leaving poolside when you have agreed it with the coach and returning immediately. If you are not around you may miss your race.

During the Gala

The coaches will tell you when and how to warm up and then tell you what you will be swimming.

The coach will aim to talk to you before your event and when you need to go up as well as after your event. Always go and speak with the coach immediately after your race to tell them how you thought it went and find out what you can do to go faster next time.

You are responsible for your own belongings – so try not to leave anything behind! It is recommended that names be in clothing, footwear and bags.

Parents

When you arrive at a gala you will usually be asked for payment to enter and watch the races plus a programme may be charged in addition to the entrance fee. You are generally not allowed on the poolside unless that is where spectator seating is.

It is advisable to also to attend a competition with provisions for the day - some pools have a good cafeterias, but that can be expensive. Some pools have very limited eating and drinking facilities, so it is advisable to go prepared.

You should also be prepared for a long wait! Often a session can be between 2-3 hours, during which your child may only be in the water for a couple of minutes

4. Types of competitions

If you have a look at our fixtures list on the website you will see that we enter many different galas throughout the year. Most of them are inter club galas which are held on Saturday evenings but you will also see some Open Meets and the County Championships which are all day events held on Saturdays and Sundays. It is worth putting the galas you think you are likely to be swimming at into your family calendar at the start of the year.

ADSC Club Championships

For many swimmers this is their first taste of competitive swimming and a real must for any swimmer in the club who wants to compete. It is always held on a Sunday in November at the Aqua Vale Pool and is only open to swimmers in the club. It is a real friendly introduction for the newly competitive swimmer and a great chance to see all of the great swimmers in the club competing.

You have to enter the championships by completing the entry form and ticking what strokes you want to do. Points are awarded for top six finishes in your age group so the more events you swim the more points you have the chance of obtaining. The distance of each race depends very much on your age. Typically 8 year olds and younger will swim 25m (1 length), 9 to 12 year olds will swim 50m and 13 year

olds and older will swim 100m races. The only exception to this is the individual medley races (where all 4 strokes are swum). These are 100m for 9 to 12 year olds and 200m for 13 years and older.

The events are organised according to a swimmers time. So you sometimes get swimmers of different age groups in the same race. These races are as much about racing the clock than someone in the next lane – something swimmers will need to learn for when they progress further in competitive swimming. Medals are awarded for the top three swimmers in each age group (boys and girls) with the winner getting a trophy for a year and the chance to engrave their name alongside all of the great Aylesbury swimmers of the past. The swimmer in each age group (boys and girls) with the most points and the runner up are invited to the club awards night held in January. This is open to all swimmers and is a great opportunity to celebrate success and kick off the New Year.

Results are always posted on the website and swimmers times are entered into the overall ranking list which is then used by the coaches for the selections into other competitions.

Inter Club Galas

These are galas arranged by the host club between other clubs, generally local to each other. They take place on a Saturday. If the gala is in Leighton Buzzard, Amersham or Aylesbury then you will need someone to take you there. For all other places, the Club will normally hire a coach and you and your parents, if they want to, will be able to travel with the team. Our swimmers love this and they especially like it on the way home because we always stop off at McDonalds. The coach picks us up outside the surgery in Bedgrove and we charge just a small coach fare for you and your supporters.

The gala's programme usually has 4 or 5 age groups (age at the date of the gala) with typically 4 individual events and two relays (normally made up of 4 swimmers) for both boys and girls. The gala is won by the club who scores the most points in each race, where generally 6 points are awarded for a win, 5 for 2nd and so on. Quite often the gala has "No Faster Than" (NFT) times where points are only awarded if the swimmer is slower than the time. This may sound odd but what it is does is allow swimmers of similar standards to compete against one another. You always swim as fast as you can regardless of the NFT. Generally NFTs are used to grade the gala where an A grade gala is aimed at the fastest swimmers and a C Grade/Novice gala is aimed at the new competitive swimmers.

You get selected for the gala by the ADSC coaching team. They look at the gala's, age groups, NFTs and proximity to other galas with the aim of giving the majority of swimmers the opportunity to compete for the club in the year. It is the coach's job to try and pick the right team based on swimmers. It is your job to keep an eye on the website and let the coach know whether you can swim or not. Please do this as soon as you are able to as it really helps the coach find a replacement swimmer if you cannot attend.

Sometimes there is a trophy for the club who wins the gala. There rarely are any medals awarded at these galas though. These competitions are all about being part of a team.

Leagues

These are very similar in format to the inter club galas but are between a number of teams that make up a league or a division within a bigger league. They are generally over three rounds and points are awarded to clubs based on how well they do in each gala. Trophy's are awarded to clubs who win their respective league or division which may also mean a promotion to a higher division. We currently compete in 4 leagues; The National Arena League and Home Counties League are aimed at our top swimmers, The Chiltern League is a B graded league and finally the Milton Keynes Junior League is aimed at our top swimmers aged 9 to 12. Unlike inter club galas; the age of a swimmer is generally at the date of the final round of the league or the end of the year (eg Home Counties League)

Open Meets

These are run by a club and often take place over a whole day or weekend. They are often licensed and have entry qualifying times which you either need to be faster or slower than, depending on the standard of the meet. License 1 meets are aimed at AA grade Swimmers and License 3 meets are normally B grade. Open meets are generally the way swimmers achieve valid qualifying times for some of the bigger championships (explained in the next section). You have to be 9 years old to compete in them.

Open meets are similar to the club championships but often have swimmers from many clubs competing. In September and January, ADSC together with Thame, Didcot and Bourne End host the BBAT meet at the AquaVale.

Entry to Open Meets, like the club championships, is by completing an entry form. There is a cost associated with them with anything from £2 to £5 being charged per event. So choose wisely! Some meets use entry cards which are handed to swimmers a few days/weeks before the meet. These cards need to be handed in to the meet organisers before the warm up of the session.

Open meets are structured like the Club Championships where swimmers generally aim to get their fastest time and then see how it compares to other swimmers in their age group. Awards (generally medals) are made to swimmers in each event (some open meets give awards to the top 6 swimmers). If you go faster than the entry time then you often receive a "Speeding Certificate" instead of a medal – a great way to show off a new PB!

County Championships

The County Championships is the first big step in a swimmer's competitive swimming career. Just competing in them is a real achievement in itself as you need to have achieved a certain qualifying time to take part. They are open to swimmers aged 9 and over with the age being the date of the last day of the championships which is usually the second Sunday in March.

The Championships start in February with the long distance events (400, 800 and 1500m) and move into the first two weekends in March for the shorter distance events (50, 100, 200) and relays. It is only open to clubs affiliated to the Oxon & North Bucks County. There are about 16 clubs in total.

The journey to the County Championships starts in the second half of the year when any swims in licensed competitions can be counted. For swimmers aged 9 to 14 swimming events are structured around the BACAT system – details of which are explained in the separate BAGCATs document [BAGCATS explained](#). It is important to understand this system when considering what events to choose when entering open meets. For example there is much emphasis on the younger swimmers having good, efficient technique which is needed for a 200m swim. We therefore run our own BBAT open meet in September aimed at getting swimmers a qualifying time in these 200m events.

It is worth pointing out here the importance of maintaining good records of all your swims. Information about the date, venue, distance, stroke and time should be recorded. Not only is it useful when it comes to completing the County entry form but is also a great way of monitoring your progress. Although the results and rankings can be found on the website – they are not there forever. Attached to this document is a template you can use to record personal best times.

The County entry forms are handed out to swimmers we believe have a qualifying time in January and there is only a week to complete them and return them with a cheque (each event currently costs £4.50). Swimmers are then advised if their entry was accepted in February.

The main County Championships is usually held at the AquaVale and run in a similar way to an open meet. For swimmers aged 10 and over there are heats and finals for the 50m and 100m swims. Awards are usually for the top 8 swimmers with further awards going to the top juniors (16 and under) and seniors (over 16) and BACGAT age group swimmers (9 to 14). Swimmers who achieve a top 8 finish

also get awarded points that are used to determine the top club and top junior club in the championships.

South East Regional Championships

The second big step in a swimmer's competitive career is gain a time fast enough to compete in the Regional Championships. These championships are generally over two weekends in June (for swimmers aged 10-14) or at the beginning of May (for swimmers aged 14 and over). They are always in a long course (50m pool) either in Crawley, Aldershot or Portsmouth. They are open to all counties affiliated to the South East Region and includes; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the Channel Islands, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Sussex and the parts of Surrey and Kent that are outside of London

Medals are awarded to top three finishes in each age group and like the County Championships the BAGCATs system is used for swimmers aged 10 to 14 where further awards are made to the top 8 swimmers.

A valid qualifying time needs to be achieved between October and April/May when the entries are submitted. Your coach will be there to support you in choosing the appropriate meets to compete in and what events to target at what time. Generally the County Championships is the event that most swimmers achieve any Regional Qualifying Times. Details of the times are held on the South East Region website www.southeastswimming.org

National Championships

The final step is to gain a qualifying time that is fast enough to compete in the National Championships, something only 20 to 30 swimmers (1%) in each age group from across the country is capable of doing. National Qualifying times are available on the British Swimming website www.swimming.org

The championships are run over a number of days in August and are usually held in Sheffield.