

Welcome to the wonderful world of swimming. This guide will hopefully help explain some of the more confusing aspects of our sport, especially for new families.

PVAC is completely volunteer-run. We need around 25 parent-volunteers for each home swim meet (including snack bar, meet setup and breakdown) and even more for our invitational which is traditionally held the last Sunday in October. We need 12 volunteers for each away meet. We also need six volunteers for each home dive meet and four volunteers for each away dive meet. Because of that need, we do require each family to volunteer for a certain number of regular season meets and for championship meets. Volunteering may seem overwhelming or even scary, but be assured you will be properly trained for whatever volunteer spot you choose. We will offer volunteer training before each season and highly encourage parents to get involved.

We'll explain PVAC, our team and our league in more depth below, but first some basics about swimming. If you're familiar with the sport you can skip ahead to the section titled PVAC, SAL, and USA Swimming.

Competitive swimming and diving introduction for new families:

Swimming is a team sport made up of individual events and relays. **Perkiomen Valley Aquatic Club (PVAC)** is part of the **Suburban Aquatic League (SAL)** and also offers a **USA Swimming** program. There is much more info on SAL and USA Swimming in the next section.

Recommend equipment:

A swimmer should have goggles that fit well and aren't a distraction, a well-fitting suit that doesn't create a lot of drag in the water, and at least one towel. Swimmers with longer hair will need a swim cap (see below for more info on caps).

Suits:

- At the beginning of the season PVAC will facilitate orders for a "team suit." We will schedule a suit fitting at the high school. It is highly recommended all swimmers attend the fitting, especially new swimmers. The team suit is a racing suit and often fits more tightly than what your swimmer is accustomed to
- There is no requirement for a swimmer to purchase or wear the team suit at meets
- Swimmers can wear their team suit to practice, but chlorine will degrade the suit and it will stretch out so it's recommended to have a couple practice suits to save the team suit for meets
- Practice and competition suits can be found online and at most sporting goods stores. Traditional reputable swimming brands include but are not limited to TYR, Speedo, Nike, Dolfin, and Arena.
- Tech suits are not allowed for swimmers under 12 years old.

BOYS' SUITS:

Boys can wear what are called **briefs** or **jammers**. Briefs are what are typically referred to as “speedos.” Jammers are longer and cover the thigh. Which you choose comes down to personal preference and comfort. Boys’ suits generally are close to pants size. Avoid traditional swim trunks or board shorts, they don’t work well for swimming.

GIRLS’ SUITS:

Girls’ suits vary between different brands and sizing can be a challenge. There are also several different cuts with different strap thickness and different fit and body coverage. What you choose comes down to personal preference, and comfort should be a leading factor in the decision. A swim-focused shop like Toad Hollow in Paoli is valuable in finding sizes and brands that fit well. It’s best to avoid tie-back suits. While the rule is vague, some swim officials will rule them illegal for competition. Two piece suits like a bikini are not appropriate for training.

Swim caps:

Caps are not required but they are recommended. Swimmers with long hair will struggle without a cap.

- At the beginning of each season we will do a team cap order with the PVAC logo
- Caps are not required by rule but most swimmers wear them. They are necessary for swimmers with long hair
- There is no rule that requires your swimmer to wear a PVAC cap, they can compete in any cap they choose
- While it is more expensive to order a PVAC cap with your swimmer’s name on it, it’s recommended as caps can easily get confused on deck
- Last name is recommended for personalized caps but some people do choose first names
- You can find non-PVAC caps at most sporting goods stores and online. **Silicone caps are strongly, strongly recommended.** It is also strongly, strongly recommended to **avoid latex caps.**

Goggles:

There is a wide array of various goggles and styles at a wide array of prices. What you choose is personal preference. While there are many brands that work well, and we don’t want to promote a certain brand, a solid recommendation for a new swimmer would be Speedo Vanquishers. They’re available in adult and junior sizes. They are durable, reasonably priced, and come in many colors.

Competitive Swimming Overview:

Swimming competitions are called “**meets**.” There are also “**invitationals**.”

- Most of PVAC’s meets will be “**dual meets**,” meaning there are two teams competing against each other.
- There are also occasional tri-meets in our league, that means three teams are competing at the same meet
- Because of limited pool space, **boys and girls SAL meets are held separately.**

- There are also “invitationals” which are optional with an additional cost.
- PVAC also offers **USA Swimming**, which gives an opportunity for swimmers ten-and-older to swim different distances and events at bigger meets
- For a more specific explanation of USA Swimming, SAL meets, and invitationals, see the section PVAC, SAL, and USA Swimming.

A meet is divided into “events.” Each event is made of “heats.”

- The “**event**” is the entire group of swimmers based on age and stroke.
- An example of an event is “Girls 8-and-under 25 Freestyle” or “Boys 14-and-under 100 yard freestyle”
- A “**heat**” is the group of swimmers that are racing each other. For most of our meets, each “heat” will have up to six swimmers.
- The number of heats depends how many swimmers are in the event. If there are 24 girls swimming the 8 and under 25 free, then there would be four heats in a six lane pool.
- **When your swimmer gets the list of what they are swimming, it will have an event number, a heat number, and a lane assignment.**

For PVAC purposes, almost all the pools we swim in are 25-yards.

- **A 25-yard pool is called “Short Course Yards,” abbreviated “SCY”**
- There are also 25-meter pools, more common in summer swimming in this area
- A 25-meter pool is called “Short Course Meters,” abbreviated “SCM”
- There are also 50-meter pools, which you see in the Olympics and international swimming
- A 50-meter pool is called “Long Course Meters,” abbreviated “LCM”

In swimming, a “**lap**” is one length of the pool. Unlike other sports like running, a lap in swimming is NOT when you get back to where you started. The terms “lap” and “**length**” are interchangeable in swimming and mean the same thing. For almost all PVAC’s purposes, one lap and one length is one time down a 25-yard pool.

Most of the events we swim with PVAC are 25-yards (one length), 50-yards (two lengths), 100-yards (four lengths), and, for relays and older kids, 200-yards (eight lengths). There are other distances available in USA Swimming, which we’ll get to later.

The pool is divided into “**lanes**.” Most pools like ours at PVHS have six lanes. Some newer pools like North Penn and Upper Merion have 8 lanes. Souderton actually has 10 lanes, but they use 8 lanes for SAL meets.

- In a six lane pool, each team generally gets three lanes, one team will be in lanes 1,3,5, the other team will be in 2,4,6
- The fastest swimmers in the heat are put in lanes 3 and 4, then lanes 2 and 5, followed by 1 and 6.

The **age groups** are divided by 8 and under, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, and 15 and up.

- The birthdate used to determine age the entire SAL season is October 31st. That means whatever age the swimmer is on 10/31 is the age group they will compete in for the entire season.
- USA Swimming has a different age rule, the swimmer competes in whatever age they are on the day of the competition so a swimmer's age can change during the season or even during a two-day meet.

Swimming has four main strokes: **Backstroke**, **Breaststroke**, **Butterfly**, and **Freestyle**

- We'll get more specific about each stroke later but generally breaststroke and butterfly are the most difficult strokes for new swimmers to swim legally. It's very common for new swimmers to get disqualified in breaststroke and butterfly and is all part of the learning process.

There is also what's called the **Individual Medley**, abbreviated IM, where the swimmer swims $\frac{1}{4}$ of the race using each stroke. If it's a 100-yard IM, the swimmer will swim one length (25 yards) of Butterfly, one length of Backstroke, one length of Breaststroke, and one length of Freestyle. In a 200-yard IM, the swimmer would swim two lengths of each stroke.

In addition to individual events, there are also relays, a **Medley Relay** and a **Freestyle Relay**.

- In the medley relay, each swimmer swims one of the strokes for $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total distance of the relay starting with backstroke. If it's a 100-yard Medley relay, the first swimmer swims one length (25y) of backstroke, the second swimmer swims one length of breaststroke, the third swimmer swims one length of butterfly, the fourth swims one length of freestyle.
- In the free relay, each swimmers swims $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total distance. In a 100-yard free relay, each swimmer swims one lap (25y). In a 200-yard free relay, each swimmer would swim two lengths (50y).

For SAL meets, our coaches will decide what events each swimmer will swim. The swimmers will be notified before the meet what event, lane, and heat they are in.

The team aspect of swimming comes from points awarded in each event.

- In SAL meets, only swimmers in the first heat score points based on the order of finish.
- In individual events - 1st place: 6-points, 2nd place: 4-points, 3rd place: 3 points, 4th Place: 2 points, 5th place: 1 point.
- In relays, the team that gets 1st place scores 8 points, second place scores 4 points, and third place scores 2 points.
- Coaches will literally spend hours putting together a line-up to maximize points based on the team we are swimming against. It is a chess match.

A brief overview of each stroke, without getting too technical with the rules:

Backstroke: The swimmer must stay on their back for the entire race, except at the turn where they're allowed to flip over on their stomach right before they turn. The swimmer can kick or stroke however they want, as long as they stay on their back.

Breaststroke: The only stroke that has a required "cycle" of a stroke and a kick. The swimmer has to take one pull followed by one kick in each cycle. The head has to break the surface in each cycle, and the elbows have to stay under water on the recovery (when the arms come forward). Arms and legs have to mirror each other and the feet have to turn out in the kick, in what's often called a "frog kick."

Butterfly: The arms recover over the water and have to be in unison both over and under water. Feet have to stay together in what's called a "dolphin kick" or "fly kick"

Freestyle: As the name implies, the swimmer can pretty much do anything to get down the pool (aside from pushing off the bottom or pulling on the lane line). The stroke typically used is the "forward crawl" but it's rarely ever called "forward crawl" and is just "freestyle."

There are rules about freestyle in the IM and the Medley Relay, but we don't need to get into that now.

PVAC, SAL, and USA Swimming:

We are Perkiomen Valley Aquatic Club, better known as the **PVAC Piranhas**. Our colors are orange and black. Our home pool is at Perkiomen Valley High School. We also use Ursinus College's pool for practice. PVAC offers a wide range of opportunity for swimmers at all levels.

PVAC is part of the **Suburban Aquatic League**, also known as "S-A-L" or "Sal" like the name.

SAL was formed in the 1960s. It's currently made up of around 20 teams from Bucks, Montgomery, and Delaware County. The teams are divided into divisions, depending how many teams are in the league.

Starting on the first weekend in November, each Saturday (aside from holidays) each SAL team will face another team from their division in "**dual meets**" (two teams going head-to-head) in what SAL calls "**Regular Season Meets**" After the regular season, which usually ends in mid-December, there are one or two weekends of **team-championships** (usually early January) based on win/loss records, and also **championship meets** (usually late January) based on individual times.

Due to size of teams and limited space on deck, boys and girls swim separately, are scored separately, and the win-loss record is kept separately.

In an SAL meet, coaches decide what events each swimmer will compete in. Swimmers will be notified of their events before the meet.

Each swimmer can compete in a **maximum of four events, with at least one being a relay**. That means a max of three individual events and one relay, or two individual events and two relays.

-Each dual meet is head-to-head with points are awarded in the first heat of each event:

INDIVIDUAL PLACE	POINTS AWARDED	RELAYS	POINTS AWARDED
1st	6	1st	8
2nd	4	2nd	4
3rd	3	3rd	2
4th	2		
5th	1		

-Whichever team has more points at the end of the meet, wins the meet.

After the four weekends of the regular season, there are team championships and individual championships.

TEAM CHAMPS:

SAL calls the team championship meets Division Dual Meet Championships and League Dual Meet Championship.

- For team championships, teams are ranked based on their regular season head-to-head win/loss record then matched up with teams with similar records in other divisions

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPS:

For individual championships, the top times in each event in the entire league qualify for what are called **League Champs**, but more often simply called "**A-champs**."

- **This is a very fast, competitive league so it is quite an accomplishment to qualify for A-Champs.**
- There are 18-spots in each event at A-champs, but for a variety of reasons, swimmers who have a time in the top-25 have a chance to make it.
- Swimmers must swim in at least two dual meets to be eligible to swim at A-champs.

For swimmers who do not qualify for A-champs, there is "**Divisional Champs**", better known as "**B-champs**."

Any swimmer who qualified for an event at A-Champs cannot swim that event at B-champs

INVITATIONALS:

In addition to meets, there are also "invitationals."

- Invitationals are typically held on Sundays. Unlike dual meets, invitationals are optional. They are more individual-based and are not scored on a team basis.
- Also unlike dual meets, the swimmer gets to choose what events they swim at an invitational when they sign up.

- There are additional costs with invitationals. Each event has a fee, usually around \$5.
- There are some invitationals where the swimmer has to enter all events, like Hatboro-Horsham's.
- Invitationals are optional, swimmers get to choose what they swim, and are a chance to get in some extra events.

USA SWIMMING:

For swimmers nine-years-old and older, PVAC offers USA Swimming.

- USA Swimming is perfect for the swimmer who is very passionate about the sport with more opportunities to get in the pool
- PVAC's USA swimmers are expected to also compete in SAL meets, USA runs in conjunction with the SAL season
- USA Swimming offers additional competitive opportunities, including events and distances that are not included in SAL Swimming (for example, 500 yard freestyle, 200 yard IM)
- USA Swim meets allow the swimmer to choose their events. Available events vary by meet.
- USA meets are often held in much larger pools with larger crowds with swimmers from across the region, giving them a "big meet feel"
- USA swimming offers championship meets typically held in late February or March
- To compete in a USA Swimming meet, PVAC swimmers MUST register for PVAC's USA team.
- The swimmer must also register for USA Swimming through USA Swimming's site. But this must be done through PVAC. More instruction will be provided during registration.
- USA meet attendance is optional for swimmers who sign up for our USA team. Attendance at USA meets is not mandatory, meaning if a swimmer signs up for our USA team, they can choose what meets they attend and are not expected nor required to attend every USA meet
- PVAC's USA Swimming program is optional, with an additional fee to cover coaches and pool time.

We hope this helps. If you have any questions, please reach out to your coaches or to board members listed on website. Good luck and can't wait to see you on deck!