

An Introduction to Open Meets

The aim of this guide is to help those new to the world of competitive swimming with the basics of Open Meets. When my son first started to compete we really had no idea what we were supposed to do, what any of the 'technical terms' were or even how it all worked. Hopefully by the time you finish reading this you'll have a much better idea of what's what in the swimming world (and I'll try to keep it as short and light hearted as possible!)

First of all though: acronyms, rule makers and some common phrases...

British Swimming – these are the big guns, they are the governing body for all aquatic sport in Britain (diving, synchronised swimming, open water, water polo, and of course SWIMMING).

The ASA - next in the food chain is the Amateur Swimming Association, this is the governing body for English swimming, they hold all the records of swimmers in England

ASA Regulations – how you can and cannot swim in competition, basically the rules, if you break these you get disqualified – don't worry though, this is rare thanks to our excellent coaching staff.

ASA Rankings – these are a list of each individual swimmer's best times, also known as PB's or Personal Bests.

ASA Number – this is like an insurance number, it is generated when you join the club and allows you to compete in open meets, but don't worry you don't need to know it.

Open Meets – well that is what this whole thing is about so just keep on reading!



What is an Open Meet?

It is a competition organised by a Club which is open to members of other swimming clubs to enter. At East Grinstead these competitions are listed on the website and brought to swimmers and parent's attention by email. Our Head Coach decides which of the many and frequent Open Meets we as a Club will enter. Entries are coordinated by the Gala Secretary, by email, who aims to reply within 2 days so you know your entry has arrived.

On the day of the competition the swimmers all sit together on poolside with the Head Coach. You swim in a race with people who have a similar time to you regardless of age.

Medals are awarded in age categories, so unfortunately winning your heat doesn't necessarily mean that you win your age category. Don't despair though – getting medals isn't everything – we want everyone to have FUN!



The 'Technical Terms'...

Licensing and Levels

All Open Meets are Licensed at different levels ranging from 1–4. Level 1 is the highest and level 4 is the lowest. For example, Club Champs are licensed at level 4 whilst a level 1 meet will have qualifying times set so only the fastest swimmers are able to attend. However entering a level 3 meet doesn't mean you're slow – National swimmers still enter these!



Why do we need Licensed Open Meets?

To be licensed a Meet has to conform to standards set by the ASA, for example the number of qualified poolside officials.

The point of licencing is to make sure that people don't enter Counties, Regionals and Nationals with times that have been made up and to make sure that their technique and stroke is within ASA regulations. Only times achieved at licenced meets appear on the ASA Rankings database and licensed times are needed to enter Open Meets. You can see all your licensed times by going to the ASA Rankings website <https://www.swimmingresults.org/individualbest/> and searching by either your surname or ASA number.

Team Galas

Team galas, often referred to as B Grade galas are not licenced. The team is picked by the Head Coach.

Times set at these galas cannot be used to enter Counties, Regionals or Nationals and other Open Meets.

East Grinstead Swimming Club are involved in several team galas, these include the Sussex League, John Herbert Trophy Gala, Puffin Gala, Kingsland Paper Trophy.



Qualifying Times

These are probably the most difficult thing to understand when you are first starting out as they can be expressed in a number of different ways – which is less than helpful! Firstly they will be either short course (times achieved in a 25 metre pool) or Long Course (times achieved in a 50 metre pool). This will always be clearly stated.

They can then be:

- Upper Limit Times** – this means you have to be slower than the time stated to enter. Often meets with Upper Limit times will allow swimmers with no official time to enter.
- Lower Limit/Minimum Times** – this means you have to be faster than the time stated.
- Upper and Lower Limit Times** – here you have to be between the two times to enter.

Unfortunately, just because you meet an Open Meet entry time does not always guarantee acceptance of your entry. Sometimes meets are over-subscribed and swimmers get scratched.



I hope that this has proved useful to anyone who wants to start entering open meets. If you have any further questions your Senior Club Captains will be more than willing to help you (they don't bite so don't be shy!). You can find pictures of them on the Club website near the bottom; they are also at almost all open meets so if you're feeling a bit lonely or worried or scared talk to them – they've been through it all themselves remember!

