

OFFICIALS CERTIFICATION STANDARDS—FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

This FAQ document is intended to help as we implement the new certification standards. Remember, not every possible scenario is in here. This FAQ is a tool for the LSC Officials Chair to use to help us “do what we do.” *That is, “apply the rules” as best as we can.* We will work through the exceptions if they occur.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Q. When do the new certification standards become effective?

A. The new certification standards are effective February 1, 2024.

Q. Can an LSC continue with its current certification program?

A. No, every LSC must immediately adopt the new certification standards.

Q. If an apprentice official began training under an LSC’s previous certification standards, can they continue training under the old standards or must they transition to the new standards?

A. Any apprentice as of February 1, 2024, may choose to continue training under the old standards or switch to the new standards. The LSC may not require one standard over the other. All new apprentices after February 1, 2024, must use the new standards.

Q. What happens to currently certified officials who have not met all the training requirements of the new standards? For example, a Referee who does not hold Administrative Official certification.

A. The official will be grandfathered in without having to meet the new requirements. The official should be encouraged, but not required, to obtain the training they may be missing with the new certification standards.

Q. Can any Referee now be assigned as a Meet Referee?

A. Yes. If your LSC assigns MRs, they can select the MR that best meets the needs of athletes and the LSC from the pool of certified Referees.

Q. Can a team assign a Meet Referee that does not have much experience in the role?

A. Yes, although a Referee can always decline an assignment or ask for support. A sanction cannot be withheld solely on the basis of perceived inexperience of the assigned Meet Referee if they are certified as a Referee.

PREREQUISITES TO ON-DECK TRAINING

Q. Is registration, either as an “Apprentice Official” or as a non-athlete member in the “Official” category required before on-deck training can begin? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Yes. In order to get on deck, an Apprentice Official has two options.

The first option is to register as an Apprentice Official. In this case, they can go out on deck and begin their on-deck training. They have 60 days to complete their Athlete Protection Training (APT), Concussion Protocol Training (CPT), and background check (BGC). By day 61, they must become a non-athlete member in the “Official” category, which requires APT, CPT, and BGC to be completed before stepping on deck. (NOTE: Not all LSCs utilize the Apprentice Official category)

The second option is to register as a non-athlete official member, complete their APT, CPT, and BGC before stepping on deck. A non-athlete Official membership cannot be Coach (including Provisional or Junior), Other, or Administrators.

Q. Does the required clinic and certification test need to be completed prior to beginning the on-deck training sessions?

A. No, but completing the clinic early in the process will provide a foundation for the on-deck training. Certification cannot be completed until the clinic is completed.

CLINICS AND TESTING

Q. What online certification clinics will be available through USA Swimming and when will they be available? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Both the *Foundations of Officiating* and the *Stroke and Turn Certification* clinics are now available online.

The Starter and Administrative Official apprentice online clinics should be available by October 1, 2024.

The Referee apprentice online clinic will be released sometime in 2025.

Q. Is the *Foundations of Officiating* clinic a required clinic? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, apprentices new to USA Swimming and starting off as either Stroke and Turn Judge apprentices or Administrative Officials must take the *Foundations of Officiating* Clinic in addition to the position-specific clinic.

Q. Will the USA Swimming-based online clinics be required or will LSCs be allowed to offer their own clinics?

A. Once an online clinic becomes available, only that clinic will be recognized for the required training. LSCs are encouraged to continue to offer SUPPLEMENTAL training; however, it cannot be required as part of certification.

Q. Until a USA Swimming-based clinic is available, can an apprentice attend a clinic given by any LSC or can they be restricted to attending only clinics available in their home LSC? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Until a USA Swimming-based clinic is available, LSCs are free to determine if out-of-LSC clinics are acceptable or not.

Q. How will the availability of online clinics affect the requirement for taking position-specific tests?

A. Each online clinic will incorporate test questions throughout and at the conclusion of the clinic. Once the clinic becomes available, the stand-alone test at the USA Swimming University will be retired. Until then, the stand-alone tests will remain available and are required.

TRAINING AND EVALUATION TRACKING TEMPLATES

Q. Will position-specific training and evaluation tracking sheet/card templates be provided?

A. Yes, training and evaluation tracking templates have been made available for Stroke and Turn, Chief Judge, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official apprentices.

The use of these templates is not mandatory and LSCs may choose to develop their own templates.

Q. Is it required that the “Professional Documents” for Stroke and Turn Judge, Chief Judge, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official be used as the outline for evaluating Apprentice Officials? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. No. The “Professional Documents” should be viewed as one more tool that can be used to convey information to the Apprentice Official. The goal of the apprenticeship is not to create experts, but rather certified officials who have a basic knowledge of the position. The “Professional Documents” might, for example, be used as a starting point for having a discussion about how much more there is to learn in the position once the Apprentice Official is certified in the position.

Q. Will Action Plan templates be provided by USA Swimming? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. No. LSCs are expected to develop an Action Plan that is individualized based on the apprentices needs. There are many scenarios that may generate an Action Plan. LSCs should make sure the Action Plan is directed towards helping the official being successful at the entry level.

Q. Can LSCs require specific items for check off (RTOs, 12&U session, 13&O session)?

A. Yes, if this helps identify the best path for training. However, not attending a certain session is not a reason to deny certification. If an official can demonstrate knowledge of the rules and the performance requirements outlined in the Professional Document and templates, and they have completed all other certification requirements, they must be certified.

TRAINING SESSIONS

Q. What are the minimal requirements for a session to count as a training session?

A. A session must include technical strokes (Backstroke, Butterfly, Breaststroke, or Individual Medley) and/or relays.

Q. Is there a minimum session length?

A. No, there is no minimum session length.

Q. Do Time Trials count as a session?

A. No.

Q. Do Freestyle-only sessions count as a session?

A. No.

Q. Can training cover more than two different meets?

A. Training must occur over a minimum of four sessions and a minimum of two meets. The Apprentice may choose to complete their sessions over two, three, or four meets.

Q. Can an apprentice train simultaneously for two different positions? For example, can a certified Stroke and Turn Judge, who aspires to be a Referee, train simultaneously for Starter and Administrative Official? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, as long as any required prerequisites to train in those positions are met. In the given example, the apprentice would have to complete certification at both Starter and Administrative Official before they could become an apprentice for Referee. This path is not recommended as there are many concepts that need to be learned for each roll.

Q. If an apprentice has not had the opportunity to observe a particular item (eg, relay take-offs, cross-over turn during the back-to-breast transition of the Individual Medley) during one of their training sessions, should the apprenticeship be extended until they have had an opportunity to do so? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. No. An apprentice need not observe every specific item on an LSC's training card, but they should be able to describe or demonstrate their knowledge of the item.

Q. As an apprentice is not allowed to make disqualifications during their apprentice sessions, how can we judge on being "comfortable making calls as appropriate" or being able to "correctly communicate a disqualification." Can we demand, per an Action Plan, that they work an additional session and make calls? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Much like the previous Q&A, judging these elements requires creativity. For example, when an apprentice sees what they believe to be an infraction, they could be asked to say "hand" rather than having them raise their hand, and they could then describe the call to their mentor. The current training standards for a Stroke and Turn Judge specifically state that an apprentice cannot make a disqualification during their apprentice sessions. Therefore, they cannot be asked to do so, either in their initial training sessions or as part of an Action Plan.

Q. Can an Apprentice request more than the minimum number of sessions?

A. Yes. They may request additional sessions before asking to be certified, but they cannot be required to attend more sessions unless provided with a written Action Plan that specifies any additional steps needed to complete certification.

Q. Can an LSC limit or exclude training at meets such as their Age Group Championships or Senior Championships?

A. No, training cannot be limited or excluded at these meets. It is suggested that creative ways be found to incorporate training as requested while not negatively impacting the athletes or interrupting the attention of the meet officials (eg, an observation and discussion-only session for a Starter Apprentice).

Q. Can training be limited or excluded at Officials Qualifying Meets (OQMs), either at the LSC or Zone level?

A. Training cannot be limited or excluded at any LSC meets. It is suggested that creative ways be found to incorporate training as requested while not negatively impacting the athletes or interrupting the attention of the meet officials (eg, an observation and discussion-only session for a Starter Apprentice).

Q. Can Officials train in any LSC?

A. Yes. Any Sanctioned or Approved USA meet session will count.

Q. What if an Apprentice does not submit their paperwork within two weeks of their last training session?

A. It is the responsibility of the apprentice to submit their paperwork for review following their final training session. The two-week “clock” starts ticking once they submit the paperwork. If an apprentice is slow in submitting the paperwork, it would be best practice for a Certifier to reach out to the apprentice to encourage the submission.

OFFICIALS TRACKING SYSTEM/CERTIFICATIONS

Q. Will clinic completion be trackable in OTS?

A. Yes, clinics offered through the USA Swimming University will be tracked in the system and completion will be shown in OTS.

Q. Will test results be shown in OTS?

A. LSC officials with administrative privileges in OTS can view test results in one of two ways. First, under the “LSC Reporting” tab and then by selecting “LSC Officials Courses Taken,” they can generate a report for specific tests that shows the completion date for tests that have been passed. Second, when viewing an individual’s profile within OTS, clicking on “Online Tests” will display the individual’s testing history including the date a test was completed and if it was passed.

Q. How should certification dates be recorded in OTS? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Currently, December 31, 2026, will be used as the certification expiration date when entering 3-year certification periods. *[NOTE: More information will be coming soon on how certification dates will be set in the future.]*

Q. How will certifications be tracked in OTS?

A. Certifications will include Stroke and Turn (ST), Chief Judge (CJ), Starter (SR), Referee (DR), and Administrative Official (AO).

Q. When will the USA Swimming App (both Apple and Android versions) be able to display an official's certification as was done with Deck Pass? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Currently, there is no estimated delivery date for this capability.

An official needing to prove their credentials at a meet would need to logon to their USA Swimming account in a web browser and go to "My Official History" to display this information.

A Meet Referee can obtain this information by doing the following: logon to their USA Swimming account in a web browser; click on "My OTS Meets," add any meet officials to the meet; click the "Reporting" pill; and then run the "OTS Meet Participation Report."

Q. Is there a Meet Referee (MR) certification?

A. No. MR certifications have been remapped to Referee. The MR designation will still be used when reporting sessions worked for a meet. Sessions reported as MR will count towards Referee sessions.

Q. Is there an Administrative Referee (AR) certification?

A. No. AR certifications were remapped to AO. The AR designation can still be used when reporting sessions worked for a meet. Sessions reported as AR will count towards Referee sessions, whereas sessions reported as AO will count towards AO sessions.

Q. What happened to Clerk of Course (CC), Computer Operator (CO), Timing Equipment Operator (TO), and Timing Judge (TJ)?

A. They have been remapped to AO. The positions still exist in OTS for use when reporting what role was performed during the sessions worked.

Q. How should the role of Administrative Official (AO) or Administrative Referee (AR) be entered for a meet? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. The sessions for an AO (LSC-certified or N2-level) should be entered into OTS as AO (or CC, CO, TO, Entry Chair) for both timed finals meets and prelims/finals meets.

The sessions for an LSC-certified Referee or N2- or N3-level Administrative Referee should be entered into OTS as AO for timed finals meets and as AR for prelims/finals meets.

Q. For Referees who are working towards certification at the N2 or N3 level, do sessions worked as an AO count toward the session prerequisites. (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, 8 AO sessions will count towards the required 16 total sessions for N2 evaluation, and the AR sessions will count toward the 8 sessions required at prelims/finals meets for N2, N3i, and N3f evaluations.

LSC TRAINERS/CERTIFIERS

Q. Who can train an Apprentice?

A. Trainers should be officials with at least a year of experience in the role.

Q. If there is no one with one year's experience, can an Apprentice still receive on-deck training?

A. Yes. The Referee will assign an Official with the highest level of experience to mentor during that session.

Q. If the number of apprentices seeking mentoring at a given session of a meet exceeds the threshold at which effective mentoring can be given, is it acceptable to turn the apprentice away or must they be provided with training? (Q&A Added 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, it is acceptable to turn the apprentice away, although that should not be done without an explanation as to why the training cannot be provided. Having a frank discussion about what can or cannot be accomplished at a given session can help the apprentice understand why training at a given session is not advisable or practical. This may also be an opportunity to be creative in figuring out how training can be provided. We should default to trying to find ways in which meaningful training opportunities can be provided, rather than defaulting to practices that limit training opportunities.

Q. Who can be a Certifier?

A. The LSC Officials Chair selects individuals who can verify that an apprentice official demonstrates the requisite knowledge and is able to satisfactorily perform the position's duties. Certifiers should be experienced officials who can articulate clearly and succinctly areas of competency, deficiency, and action steps to achieve certification.

Q. Must the Certifier be in attendance at apprentice sessions?

A. No. The Certifier may seek input from MRs, the apprentice, or trainers to determine if the apprentice is ready for certification.

RECERTIFICATION

Q. Does the current version of OTS have the capability of displaying the certified positions, number of sessions worked in each position, test results, and registration status for each apprentice or certified official? If so, who has access to this information? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, all this information is available in OTS. Every registered apprentice and certified official has access to their own information. In addition, LSC Officials Chairs and their designees have access to this information for every apprentice and certified official in their respective LSC. Thus, individuals can easily check the status of all these items for themselves and LSC Officials Chairs and their designees have the information they need to certify or recertify individual officials.

Q. Must an Official holding multiple certifications meet the recertification requirements for EACH position?

A. No. Officials will need to recertify at their highest level. Referee recertifies ST, AO, and SR. CJ is also recertified if the official is a CJ.

Q. How does the Chief Judge certification fit? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. CJ is a standalone certification. It was kept because it fits in with the progression to National N2/N3 Certification. It is not a requirement for LSCs to offer CJ certification. Referee will recertify CJ if the official is a CJ. SR will not recertify CJ. An official who is both a CJ and a Starter, but not a Referee, will have to recertify as both a CJ and a Starter.

Q. Is the listed session number requirement for recertification as a Chief Judge correct (Guideline version: February 5, 2024)? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. This was an oversight during development, and it is pending revision by the USA Swimming Board of Directors. Until BOD approval is received, hopefully in April 2024, what is written is what stands.

Q. Will the required clinic and recertification clinics be merged into a single online course as is being done for initial certification?

A. Yes, this will be done for Stroke and Turn, Starter, Referee, and Administrative Official.

Q. When will the recertification clinic/testing modules be ready?

A. At a yet to be determined date.

Q. How should recertifications be handled until the recertification and testing modules are ready?

- A. Whether the recertification and testing modules are available or not, LSCs must follow the new guidelines for certification and recertification. If an online clinic/testing module is available, then its use is required. If an online clinic/testing module is not available, an LSC-designed clinic is acceptable, while the position-specific recertification test available at the USA Swimming University should be used.

Q. Should all certified officials in OTS now have a certification date set to 12/31/26? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. Not necessarily. The answer is LSC-dependent as in the past, different LSCs have had different certification periods (eg, 1-year, 2-year, 3-year). The certification date for any official who was certified or recertified prior to February 1, 2024, remains valid. The certification date for any official who certifies or recertifies on or after February 1, 2024, should be set at 12/31/26. *[NOTE: More information will be coming soon on how certification dates will be set in the future.]*

Q. When does the recertification test need to be taken? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

- A. The recertification test needs to be taken prior to the date on which the official is recertified (most often just prior to the expiration of the certification). It must also be taken within the time frame of the current certification period.

If an official was recertified prior to February 1, 2024, and was not required to take the test by their LSC under their old standards, the official does not have to take the test until their next recertification.

Any official recertifying after February 1, 2024, is required to take the recertification test.

OPTIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

Q. Are LSCs allowed to establish training programs for positions other than ST, CJ, SR, DR, and AO (eg, clerk of course (CC), computer operators (CO), timing equipment operators (TO), or Meet Referee [MR])? Can these positions be certified positions? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, an LSC can train Apprentice Officials for additional positions.

Positions such as CC, CO, or TO would be certified as an AO and their meet role shown as CC, CO, or TO. Although an LSC may choose to use AOs who have specialized, the individual specialties cannot be used as required prerequisites for the AO position.

LSCs may choose to offer Referees additional optional training in how to effectively serve as a Meet Referee. This training cannot, however, be required for the Referee to serve in the position of Meet Referee. It is important to note that just because someone is certified as a Referee, does not mean that the individual must accept an invitation to act as a Meet Referee, nor does an LSC that assigns Meet Referees to meets have an obligation to assign inexperienced Referees as Meet Referees.

Q. Can CCs, COs and TOs continue to be used without becoming AOs? If not certified as an AO, can LSCs require that these positions be independently certified? (Q&A revised 04/02/2024)

A. Yes, LSCs can continue to use CCs, COs, and TOs who are not certified as AOs; however, a certified AO must be present to oversee their work. Anyone not becoming an AO is not required to become a registered member of USA Swimming and would not appear in OTS. LSCs may provide optional training for CCs, COs, and TOs, but LSCs cannot require certification in these positions in order to earn their AO certification.

USE OF NON-USA SWIMMING SANCTIONED MEETS (eg, YMCA, NCAA, HS, USMS) FOR TRAINING PURPOSES

Q. Do sessions worked at YMCA meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. Only if they are APPROVED USA Swimming meets.

Q. Do sessions worked at NCAA meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. ONLY if they are APPROVED USA Swimming meets.

Q. Do sessions worked at High School meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. Only if they are APPROVED USA Swimming meets.

Q. Do sessions worked at Masters (USMS) meets count towards the required certification and renewal sessions?

A. No.

Q. Do sessions worked at observed meets (these are frequently high school meets) count towards the required certification and renewal sessions? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. No. OBSERVED meets are not run under USA Swimming Rules and Regulations and do not count.

CERTIFYING OFFICIALS WHO ORIGINALLY CERTIFIED AS YMCA OFFICIALS

Q. How do we move forward with regards to the Y teams and their certifications? (Q&A added 04/02/2024)

A. We have a reciprocity agreement with YMCA. The agreement is currently being updated to reflect the changes and will be posted online shortly. A YMCA official will need to request reciprocity, prove YMCA status, and then shadow half the required training sessions for the position in which they are requesting certification through reciprocity.

WHAT IS NOT AFFECTED

Q. Does this standardization affect Open Water?

A. No.

Q. Does this affect the National Certifications (N2, N3)?

A. Not currently.

Q. Can our LSC require that a minimum number of sessions be worked, either as a trainee or certified official, before reimbursing an official for their registration and background check.

A. Yes, the LSC can set its own standards for its reimbursement program; however, the LSC cannot require a greater number of training sessions than set by the "LSC Standards for Officiating."