

USA Swimming's Motivational Time Standards are designed to encourage swimmers of all levels to improve and achieve personal bests, regardless of their experience or age. These time standards are used to track progress and help swimmers set realistic goals as they advance in the sport. The motivational time standards are divided into multiple levels or "motivational cuts" that serve as benchmarks for swimmers to strive towards.

1. Purpose of Motivational Time Standards

The primary purpose of USA Swimming's motivational time standards is to provide a tiered system of performance levels that reward swimmers for improving their times over the course of their careers. These time standards serve as benchmarks for swimmers to measure their progress and motivate them to reach the next level of competition.

2. Levels of Motivational Time Standards

The motivational time standards are typically divided into several "cuts," which represent different levels of achievement based on the swimmer's age and event. These cuts are categorized as follows:

- **BB Time Standard:** This is often the first "motivational cut" swimmers aim for. It represents a significant improvement over beginner-level times and provides swimmers with a goal to strive for in their development.
- **A Time Standard:** The A Time Standard is higher than the BB level, indicating a more competitive level of performance. Swimmers who achieve the A cut are typically at a higher level of skill and ability.
- **AA Time Standard:** This is a higher performance benchmark that is often used to indicate an athlete is competing at a regional or state level.
- **AAA and AAAA Time Standards:** These are the highest levels of motivational standards, indicating swimmers who are performing at a highly competitive level, often in national or elite events.

Each of these time standards is established based on age group and event, so there are separate standards for various age groups (e.g., 10 & Under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18).

3. How Time Standards Are Set

USA Swimming sets these time standards based on data from swimmers' performances across the country. They are adjusted periodically to reflect the evolving landscape of competitive swimming. The goal is to ensure that the time standards remain challenging but achievable for swimmers at various levels, allowing for growth and improvement.

4. Benefits of Motivational Time Standards

The motivational time standards have several key benefits for swimmers and coaches:

- **Goal Setting:** Swimmers can set clear, measurable goals for themselves, working toward the next level of time standard.
- **Track Progress:** By achieving a higher motivational time cut, swimmers can track their progress and see how they compare to national and regional standards.
- **Recognition and Encouragement:** Swimmers who achieve these time standards receive recognition for their achievements, which can be motivating and encourage further improvement.
- **Competition Opportunities:** Achieving certain time standards may qualify swimmers for higher-level competitions such as regional, state, or national championships, opening up more opportunities for competition.

5. Progression and Advancement

As swimmers improve their times and achieve the various motivational cuts, they continue to move up through the levels. For instance, a swimmer might first achieve the BB cut in a given event, then progress to the A, AA, and eventually AAA or AAAA levels. This progression helps swimmers continually challenge themselves and provides a roadmap for growth in the sport.

6. Motivational Time Standards and Meet Eligibility

USA Swimming's motivational time standards are often used to determine eligibility for different meets. Swimmers who meet certain time standards may qualify for more competitive meets or events, while others may be eligible for "developmental" meets that are designed to help newer swimmers gain experience. These time standards also help meet organizers determine event seeding and classification.

Conclusion

USA Swimming's motivational time standards are an essential tool for swimmers of all ages and abilities. They provide structured goals, promote continuous improvement, and help swimmers reach higher levels of competition. By achieving various motivational cuts, swimmers can gauge their progress, set new targets, and gain access to a wider array of competitive opportunities.