



Why And When A Swimmer Gets Moved Up

adapted from "Why isn't my swimmer being moved up a group?" Olivier Poirier-Leroy

Program and technique assessments are done throughout the year with squad moves planned for Term 2/April and Term 4/October. There are a few different reasons that a swimmer graduates to the next group. Some are critical (attendance, ahem), while others, like gala times, aren't as important as you might think.

We find in most cases that parents are very anxious to move their kids up to the next squad and as coaches, we encourage you to show patience and trust the process. We move kids based on age, stroke, physical and emotional development. Here's a breakdown of some of the key considerations we take into account when moving a swimmer up:

SWIMMERS AGE

Three vertical bars of varying heights and colors (dark teal, medium teal, light teal) are positioned to the right of the section header.

Developmentally, it greatly benefits your child to train (and socialise) with swimmers their own age. Swimmers of a particularly young age, 8 years old, for example, should be kept together. As swimmers get older, age gets a little tricky, because a 17-year old who comes late to the sport will benefit more from training with people his own age than swimming with fast 12-and unders. But generally, it's important to remember that coaches will coach for age, and not for ability.

ATTENDANCE

This is about as basic a requirement as you can think of. Is the swimmer making all of their present swim workouts? Of course, poor attendance can sometimes be explained by factors outside of the pool (they have a bike race, or were playing in a concert), but when they miss for the sake of not wanting to be there or poor time management that is a different story.

Attendance is an easy and subjective way to measure commitment. Senior groups require more commitment, so you could say that this is a biggie factor in determining whether a swimmer should advance groups.

COACHABILITY

Does the swimmer do the sessions properly? Follow directions when instructed? Show up on time and is a positive influence on the group? How coachable is your little swimmer?

Ability and talent are of little value if the swimmer is spoiling team culture or disrupting practices. Coaches will be very resistant to reward a swimmer that resists instruction and negatively impacts the training environment by moving them up. Keep in mind that the next group will require more from the athlete, which sets the un-coachable swimmer on a collision course with failure.

TECHNIQUE

Proper stroke mechanics and understanding of the rules of the sport are important, but not a deal breaker when it comes to group advancement. But it is still a consideration. Has the swimmer progressed technically to the point that they are where they need to be? Are they completing races and practices with technique, starts and turns that will not get them DQ'd?

GALA TIMES

Although the scoreboard and medals might tell you otherwise, gala times are not really as important a factor as most swim parents would think. The results and what happens on race day acts as a limited snapshot of how your swimmer is doing in the water, but it doesn't always reflect what kind of attitude and commitment the swimmer is showing at practice.

Where meet times can start to influence decision-making is when it comes to qualifying for higher-level meets. For example, athletes that have Youth or Senior National Times are more likely to train together, regardless of age.

COMPATIBILITY

Can the swimmer keep up with the next group? Will they be able to compete a little bit with the other swimmers in their new group? Coaches operate at their best when the swimmers they coach are similar in ability & speed. If one swimmer is far behind, in terms of skill or conditioning, they will require specialised training apart from the rest of the group, cutting instruction time for the other swimmers.

Talk to your coach and get an idea of where your swimmer is at, what the next group demands, and base your expectations from there. Trust in the process. We understand the anxiety and pressure to want to move up groups as fast as possible. This desire is good, and will keep the swimmer hungry, even if it means they are feeling a little impatient at times.

And no, your child won't be getting left behind if they aren't being rushed through the groups.

Ultimately, moving up a group is a reward and not an entitlement. It's an acknowledgement that the swimmer has excelled at their current level and is now ready to move up.