

Advancement Through the VSI Officiating Ranks General Guidelines and Philosophy

VSI certification/recertification guidelines are some of the most comprehensive guidelines among all the LSCs. The guidelines are not meant to cover all potential situations, and in fact, the more detailed we attempt to make them, the more we find ourselves painted into a corner in some situations. Detailed rules have a habit of requiring even more detailed rules to handle odd/unusual situations, which in turn require even more rules. To some extent, the guidelines allow for some common sense judgments to be made by the regional chairs, based upon the unique circumstances in their areas. The following are some frequent questions that we encounter--

I'm relatively certain that I'd like to advance to _____ (fill-in the blank) or I'd like to obtain multiple certifications. What's the best way to go about doing this?

First, it is important to recognize that all officials should periodically assess their officiating skills. While a self-assessment can be very valuable, an assessment by more senior level officials including your Club Officials Chair, your Regional Officials Chair, and the Referees with whom you work can prove to be very valuable. Whether just starting off, or at any point in your officiating career, please share with these individuals your goals and your questions. While we can't promise any particular person that they will ultimately become certified at any particular position, we can offer suggestions to help with your professional development. The bottom line is that while recommendations are required to move on to some levels of officiating, expressing an interest in moving up through the ranks can only help us to identify those individuals that can and want to take on additional responsibility.

How long must I wait between certifying for one position and beginning to train for a new position?

As a general rule of thumb, individuals must be certified for one year in a position before they certify for a new position. This is meant to ensure that an individual actually spends some time acting in the capacity in which they've just certified. For example, if someone has just certified as a Stroke and Turn Judge, we find it best that they continue to hone their skills at that position for a period of time, rather than to immediately start training for another position. As many of our officials only work the required minimum number of sessions required for recertification (or not many more than that), immediately training for a new position may also mean that they will not attain a sufficient number of sessions to recertify at the original position. When combined with the fact that many of our officials only remain active for 2-3 years, we'd like to maximize the contribution that they can make to officiating.

There can be exceptions to this rule. Some individuals easily work 30-40 sessions a year, and can be ideal candidates for beginning training at additional positions on an accelerated schedule. This is best managed on a case by case basis, and should be discussed with the Regional Officials Chair.

Is any Stroke & Turn Judge with a minimum of one year experience eligible to train for Starter, or is training only by invitation of the Regional Officials Chair?

Unlike Stroke & Turn Judges, Starters are frequently expected to take on additional levels of responsibility at a meet. These responsibilities may include setting up the timing system, checking out the timing system prior to the start of the session, trouble shooting the timing system, and instructing the Timers. Thus, there are qualities that we are looking for in a Starter that go beyond simply having been certified for a year or more as a Stroke & Turn Judge. The ability to assume responsibilities and to act in a leadership capacity are thus especially important criteria in advancing individuals to Starter training. Likewise, a demonstrated willingness to work at meets throughout the individual's region is also an important criteria for advancement. These criteria also take on an additional important role in that candidates for Referee training must first have certified as Starters, and these are obviously traits that we are looking for in Referee candidates. To help ensure that well qualified candidates are advanced to Starter training, the recommendations of two Referees (at least one of whom should not be affiliated with the individual's club) are required.

Thus, given approximately equal experience, one Stroke & Turn Judge may be selected over another for advancement to Starter training based on the fact that one consistently shows up on time for stroke briefings, while the other is late; one frequently volunteers for additional responsibilities, while the other begs off any additional responsibilities; or one has a thorough understanding of the rules, while the other has only a superficial understanding of the rules. If the Regional Officials Chair feels that an individual seeking advancement to Starter is not particularly suited to a role as a Starter, it is also contingent upon the Regional Officials Chair to mentor that individual as to how they can improve skills such that they will be considered in the future.

Assuming that we can simultaneously manage the training of both a candidate with the obvious leadership/management skills and a candidate without obvious leadership/management skills, both might be advanced to training. As in all aspects of training, if either individual does not make adequate progress in their training, they should be advised of where they need to make improvements on an ongoing basis so that it doesn't come as a surprise if they aren't being advanced to certification.

In summary, to the extent that we can manage both "ideal" and "less than ideal" candidates, both might be given a shot at training. Maybe, we'll be surprised by the second individual stepping up and shining. But we've also got an obligation to provide honest, constructive criticism to our officials. If an individual is not being advanced because of specific deficiencies, we need to tell the person that, and they should be given an opportunity to improve. In some cases, that may be all it takes. We also need to be honest with folks that just because they begin starter training, that does not mean that we are under an obligation to ultimately certify them (this is true of all positions). There may be some who we let into training with some reservation, and maybe they need to be counseled after several sessions that unless certain aspects greatly improve, they will not be certified. Alternatively, they may rise to the occasion. There may also be some that we encourage to begin training, only to find that they fall flat on their faces.

Who can train for Referee?

Referee training is by invitation of the VSI Officials Committee Chair following recommendation of a Regional Officials Chair and subsequent recommendation of the Officials Committee. Because Referees have a huge responsibility in the overall conduct of a swim meet, the standards by which Referee candidates are selected are correspondingly high. A thorough understanding of the rules, the ability to effectively communicate with others, leadership potential, a record of having worked at meets hosted by different clubs, and the willingness to do whatever needs doing without complaint, are all factors that are heavily weighed in the evaluation process.

Sometimes it isn't possible to train at a particular session. Why is this?

We never want to turn a volunteer away, but there is a limit to the amount of effective training that can take place at a meet. As an example, there is only one timing system in use at most, if not all meets, at which training is allowed. A very experienced Timing System Operator might be able to manage the training of two individuals at the same session, while a less experienced Timing System Operator might be able to manage the training of only a single individual in a session, and a new Timing System Operator may not yet be comfortable training anyone. Every attempt is made by the Meet Referee and host club to accommodate as many trainees as possible. Priority is generally given to those individuals that sign up for specific sessions before a meet, although we always strive to balance the training needs of a specific individual against those of all the individuals seeking training at a given meet. For this reason, it is important that if a trainee will be attending a session for training purposes only (no swimmer in the session), that they make this known to the person coordinating officials for the meet as early as possible so that they will have the best chance of training. If it is not possible for them to train at the desired session, this information should be communicated to the trainee so that they do not travel to the session.

I started training and didn't finish within a year. Now I'm being told that I have to start over. Why don't I get credit for what I've already done?

It is important to keep in mind that learning is enhanced by repetition, and that repetition spread out over large periods of time is less effective than repetition in a more concentrated time period. It is generally felt that the minimum required number of training sessions within a one-year training period is the minimum that is required for good retention of the material. Circumstances differ and Regional Officials Chairs have discretion in how to handle these situations on a case-by-case basis. This also applies to the tests that are associated with particular positions. The tests are meant to be training tools that force the trainee to read and understand the rulebook. If it has been more than a year since a test was taken, and less than the minimal number of training sessions have been worked, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the trainee may need to refresh their knowledge of the rules.