

Swimming Skills

One of the most important elements of safety in the water is the ability to swim. Strong swimmers can swim a reasonable distance with a confident, steady stroke. But strong swimmers are not safe swimmers until they can make a safe water entry, swim a restful stroke, and maintain themselves in the water when hurt or exhausted.

Every First Class Scout has demonstrated that he is a strong, safe swimmer who has mastered certain in-water skills. The BSA swimmer test—required for First Class advancement—includes these in-water skills and represents the minimum level of ability for safe deepwater swimming. Consider the components of the test:

1. “Jump feetfirst into water over your head in depth, . . .”
You must be able to make an abrupt entry into deep water and begin swimming without any aids. Walking in from shallow water, easing in from the edge or down a ladder, pushing off from a pool’s side or bottom, and gaining forward momentum by diving do not satisfy this requirement.
2. “. . . swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; . . .”

You must be able to cover distance with a strong, confident stroke. The 75 yards must not be the outer limit of your ability. You should be able to complete the distance and still have enough stamina to avoid undue risks. Dog paddling and strokes repeatedly interrupted and restarted are insufficient, and underwater swimming is not allowed. The strokes listed above may include variations. Any strong sidestroke or breaststroke, or any strong overarm stroke—including the back crawl—is acceptable.

