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## AQUATICS: History of Swimming at the Olympic Games

*Reference document*

Introduction, key stages and evolution in the number of events from this discipline's beginnings to the present time.

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# Swimming

## Introduction

Swimming has featured on the programme of all the Summer Olympic Games. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only the “freestyle”, “breaststroke” and “backstroke” styles were present. It was only in [1956](#) that “butterfly” was introduced. Women’s swimming made its debut in [1912](#) and has been on the programme ever since. The women’s programme now has the same number of events as the men’s.

## Key stages

Entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>1894:</b> At the Paris Congress held in June, the desire was expressed for water sports (rowing, sailing and swimming) to be on the Olympic programme.</li></ul>
Women’s entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>1910:</b> In the minutes of the 13<sup>th</sup> IOC Session (Luxembourg), published in the Olympic Review (June 1910), it was announced that women would undoubtedly be accepted for swimming at the Games of the V Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912.</li><li>• <b>1911:</b> At the 14<sup>th</sup> IOC Session held in May in Budapest, a request was made to add a 300m and 400m (team) race for women on the programme of the Games of the V Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912. The Organising Committee promised to do its utmost to fulfil this request.</li><li>• <b>1912:</b> At the 15<sup>th</sup> IOC Session held in July in Stockholm, it was decided to divide the sports on the programme into three categories: indispensable, desirable and eligible. Swimming was among the first category.</li><li>• <b>1934:</b> At the 33<sup>rd</sup> IOC Session held in May in Athens, women’s participation in some sports was called into question. A vote was held, and women’s participation in swimming was accepted unanimously.</li></ul>
Butterfly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>1954:</b> At the 50<sup>th</sup> IOC Session held in Athens in May, it was decided that, for the Games of the XVI Olympiad in Melbourne in 1956, no new event would be accepted, with the exception of men’s and women’s butterfly, which would be added to the programme.</li></ul>
10km open water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>2005:</b> At the IOC Executive Board meeting in October in Lausanne, it was agreed to add the men’s and women’s 10km open water event for the programme of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing in 2008.</li></ul>



## Evolution in the number of events

- 1896: 4 events (men's)
- 1900: 7 events (men's)
- 1904: 10 events (men's)
- 1908: 6 events (men's)
- 1912: 9 events (7 men's and 2 women's)
- 1920: 10 events (7 men's and 3 women's)
- 1924-1952: 11 events (6 men's and 5 women's)
- 1956: 13 events (7 men's and 6 women's)
- 1960: 15 events (8 men's and 7 women's)
- 1964: 18 events (10 men's and 8 women's)
- 1968-1972: 29 events (15 men's and 14 women's)
- 1976-1980: 26 events (13 men's and 13 women's)
- 1984: 29 events (15 men's and 14 women's)
- 1988-1992: 31 events (16 men's and 15 women's)
- 1996-2004: 32 events (16 men's and 16 women's)
- 2008-2016: 34 events (17 men's and 17 women's)

[Find out more](#)



## Men's events

Swimming men	1896	1900	1904	1908	1912	1920	1924	1928	1932	1936	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	Total
50y freestyle																													1
50m freestyle																													8
100m freestyle (1)																													27
200m freestyle (2)																													15
400m freestyle (3)																													27
880y freestyle																													1
1500m freestyle (4)																													28
4000m freestyle																													1
100m freestyle for sailors																													1
Underwater swimming																													1
200m obstacle event																													1
200m team swimming																													1
100m backstroke (5)																													25
200m backstroke																													15
Plunge for distance																													1
440y breaststroke																													1
100m breaststroke																													13
200m breaststroke																													25
400m breaststroke																													2
100m butterfly																													13
200m butterfly																													16
200m medley																													11
400m medley																													14
4x50y freestyle relay																													1
4x100m freestyle relay																													12
4x200m freestyle relay																													25
4x100m medley relay																													15
Marathon 10km																													3
<b>Number of events men</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>

- (1) The distance of the 100m freestyle event was 100 yards (91.44m) in 1904
- (2) The distance of the 200m freestyle event was 220 yards (201.17m) in 1904
- (3) The distance of the 400m freestyle event was 500m in 1896 and 440 yards (402.34m) in 1904
- (4) The distance of the 1500m freestyle event was 1200m in 1896, 1000m in 1900 and 1 mile (1609.34m) in 1904
- (5) The distance of the 100m backstroke was 100 yards (91.44m) in 1904



## Women's events

Swimming women	1896	1900	1904	1908	1912	1920	1924	1928	1932	1936	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	Total	
50m freestyle																													8	
100m freestyle																														24
200m freestyle																														13
400m freestyle (1)																														23
800m freestyle																														13
100m backstroke																														22
200m backstroke																														13
100m breaststroke																														13
200m breaststroke																														22
100m butterfly																														16
200m butterfly																														13
200m medley																														11
400m medley																														14
4x100m freestyle relay																														24
4x200m freestyle relay																														6
4x100m medley relay																														15
Marathon 10km																														3
<b>Number of events women</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	

(1) The distance of the 400m freestyle event was 300m in 1920

## Total

Swimming	1896	1900	1904	1908	1912	1920	1924	1928	1932	1936	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	Total
<b>Number of events</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>

Grey column total = number of times on the programme