



PLAN A - Study Guide 2 – Starter

Module 2 – STARTER Program Learning/Performance Objectives

Junior Official Program Study Guides

The purpose of the Study Guides in this program are to help you acquire the knowledge needed to be able to understand and create a brief statement of the information that you will need for course completion and future knowledge. You might think of this Study Guide as a mini-outline to the different official positions that are contained in Track and Field competitions. Consider this Study Guide as a condensed version of all of the important information that you will need to complete the Junior Officials Program successfully.

Each Officials duties, skills and behaviors are contained in the 17 different Study Guides offered in this program. These Study Guides are a combination of

- Adopted USATF 2020 Competition Rules.
- Best Practices (those skills that describe “what works best” in a particular situation or environment). These Study Guides are data supported successes and researched supported over time, as offered by Track & Field officials in the quest for accountability for reliable methods.
- USATF Code of Ethics
- USATF Professional Guidelines

Procedures

Once you have the Study Guide in front of you, do more than just read it. Take the time to look at the material to understand what you will be asked to do. Start by reading the description to formulate a big-picture idea of what your Mentors assessment will look like. Then, review the list of concepts.

Quizzing yourself is a highly effective study technique. Make a copy of the Mentors Checklist and carry it with you to the meets so you can review the questions and answers periodically throughout the day and across several days/meets. Identify the questions that you don't know and quiz yourself on only those questions. Say your answers aloud.

The important skills needed in this Guide correspond to the Learning and Performance Objective numbers that begin with the abbreviation **S (Starter)**. **(S1 – S25)**

Ask questions of your Mentors, they are there to answer your questions and guide you to learning and performing as a USATF official.

Good Luck to you on your journey to become a USATF Certified Official!



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Study Guide Information

USATF Rule- 129 – STARTER AND RECALL STARTER

The Chief Starter shall:

- (a)** Allocate the duties of the start team judges, assigning the task of giving the start to the member of the team who, in the opinion of the Chief Starter, is best for the event.

(b) Supervise the duties to be performed by members of the team.

(c) Inform the Starter, after receiving the relevant order from the Competition Director or otherwise ascertaining, that everything is in order to initiate the start procedure (i.e., the applicable Timers, Judges, Photo Finish Operators and Wind Gauge Operator are ready).

(d) Act as an interlocutor between the technical staff of the timing equipment company and the judges.

(e) Keep all papers produced during the start procedure including all documents showing the reaction times and/or false start waveform images if available, and deliver these to the Competition Secretary.
- Times and/or false start waveform images if available, and deliver these to the Competition Secretary. Notification of warnings and disqualifications concerning the start may be made only by or under the direction of the Starter.
- The Starters shall be clearly identifiable and shall be positioned so that there is full visual control over all runners during the start of the race.

The following materials is excerpted from the *Starter Monograph – Eric Zemper (Michigan) – Best Practices Document- January 2018*

Characteristics of a Good Starter (S1)

The primary goal of any competent starter must be to ensure all runners receive a fair and equitable start for each race. This is now stated as the primary duty of the start team in USATF Rule 129.2. The Golden Rule for starters (and for all track and field officials) should be: No athlete is allowed to gain an unfair advantage, and no athlete should have to suffer an unfair disadvantage.

The atmosphere at the start of a race can be one of ease and calm or one of confusion, based on the approach and the actions of the starter at the starting line. A competent starter is able to take command and remain calm throughout the starting process.

This begins with the ability to give clear, precise instructions and the ability to give the starting commands in a strong but calm voice. This in turn will help relax the competitors and make them feel confident in the starter. If the athletes feel confident that the starter will provide a clean, fair start for everyone, without any quirks or distractions, that is one less thing they have to worry about, which allows them to focus more attention on their race.

A good self-evaluation check for the starter (and any other official) is that if you leave the meet unnoticed, your job has been well-done. The attention should always be on the athletes. Officials are there only for



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the purpose of ensuring the meet is conducted according to the rules, not to “grandstand” or draw attention away from the competitors.

Other characteristics of a good starter that often are mentioned include being physically fit, mentally alert, having good eyesight and reactions, the ability to concentrate and maintain complete focus, an enjoyment of working with youth, and a love of the sport.

Common sense and tact also are required. Because the starter is in complete control of the start of a race, and (with certain exceptions to be discussed later) the starter’s decisions cannot be appealed, they must have a complete and thorough knowledge of the rules regarding the starting of races, and an understanding of competition requirements and the needs of the athlete.

Since things can happen so quickly at the starting line, the starter must be decisive, but not brusque. A good starter must have a great deal of patience, and must be able to project an air of calmness at the starting line. It is not enough to be calm yourself; you must be able to project that sense of calmness to the athletes. On occasion a good sense of humor also is necessary.

A competent starter should be relaxed and never try to overwhelm the athletes with his or her presence. A competent starter also practices preventive officiating. If a starter sees a situation developing that could result in a problem, they should do something to correct the situation immediately, before it does become a problem. As should be the case with any other official, the competent starter always gives the athlete the benefit of the doubt. And no matter what the level of competition, whether a junior high meet, the Special Olympics, or a national championship, the starter should be able to project the feeling that these athletes are important and that this is the most important race ever started. Sam Bell, former track and field coach at Indiana University, described a good starter as “one who is friendly, and creates confidence and relaxation in the athletes. He must have complete knowledge of the rules and maintain control, yet never lose compassion for the athletes.”

Pre-Meet Activities (S2)

Leaving aside prior details like confirming the date and time of the meet with the meet director or coach, the first thing a starter should do on the day of a meet is to check the equipment bag. Make sure all the equipment needed for that day and the anticipated weather conditions is available (see the section at the end of this monograph on “Starter's Equipment - What's in the bag?”).

It is a good idea to arrive at the track at least an hour before the start of the first event, to allow time for an unhurried review of the track facility (especially if you have not worked at this particular track before). This includes checking for the correct location of all starting lines and the finish line, location of cables (if fully automatic timing [FAT] with a hardwired cable to the timing system is being used) and any other electronic equipment such as a sound system. This also would be a good time to preview and plan where the best positions will be to stand (or to place the starter’s stand) for the best view of each start (see the later section on Position of Starter and Recall Starters).

If the track does not have a 3 meter “walk up line” for the starting lines of the distance races, it is a good



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idea to carry a piece of white or yellow sidewalk chalk with you in a plastic baggie to make your own 3 meter marks on the track.

At this time it also is advisable to check with the meet director or referee to see if there are any last minute changes in the event schedule, or any special circumstances the starter needs to be aware of. Also, meet with the chief clerk to confirm the process for bringing athletes to the starting line and to review the instructions the athletes will be given by the clerks. Next, the starter and recall starters should get together for a pre-meet conference. If any members of the crew have not worked together before, this is the time for the starter to briefly review the positions of each recall starter for each type of race, and the communication signals between starter and recall starters (see later sections on these topics).

The chief or head starter should let everyone know who is assigned to start each race. If there is a complete novice on the crew, this individual might need to spend a couple of meets being exclusively a recall starter, observing and getting a “feel” for how everything works. Otherwise, it is a good practice for the starter to assign the responsibility of starting a few races in each meet to each of the recall starters on the crew. This can begin with starting distance races for novice starters, gradually taking on responsibility for starting races using starting blocks once they gain more experience and confidence.

The starter should act as a mentor to those on the crew who are new to starting, offering constructive advice and praising good technique and mechanics. It is helpful for the starter to give each member of the crew a 3x5 card with the event schedule printed on it, so each can make notes on assignments and have a handy reference during the meet for the event order and time schedule. If there is someone responsible for moving the starting blocks, that individual also should have a schedule card. The starter also should meet with the finish line crew.

If you have not worked with this set of finish line officials, it is a good idea to review the procedures you will use, and any whistle signals or arm signals you will use, so they know what to expect. (See the later section on communication between the start line and finish line.) When fully automatic timing is being used, check with the camera crew to confirm how they will let you know when they are ready for the next race, and how you will alert them that you are ready to start the next race. This also is the time to perform a test of the gun sensor, whether using a cable or a radio link, to ensure the entire system is operating correctly. Finally, if there is an announcer for the meet, check with this individual to work out the logistics of when to start announcing race participants’ names, so these announcements do not delay the start of the race. Usually this announcement should begin about two minutes before the scheduled start of the race, or right after you have given the order to remove the warm-up gear. And make sure the announcer understands that, once you have called the runners to their marks, an announcement should not begin until after the race has started (unless it is a call for quiet for the start). Communication between the starter crew, the finish line, the clerks and the announcer, and an understanding of the need to avoid delays are vital to keeping a meet running on time.

Recall Starters (S3)



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In small meets, particularly at the junior and senior high school level, a starter often may have to work without a recall starter. But if one or more recall starters are available, these individuals normally are responsible for assuming control of the athletes when they are brought to the start area by the clerks, doing last minute checks of bib numbers and uniforms, and ensuring each athlete is on the proper start line and in the proper lane or start position. In races using starting blocks, the recall starter should be prepared to assist athletes having problems setting their blocks.

USATF now stipulates that in youth competitions “The setting of a competitor’s starting blocks other than by the competitor or an individual designated by the starter is prohibited.” This most likely will be a recall starter. (This Rule 302.2(e) was added for youth meets to prevent delays caused by parents and coaches cluttering up the starting line while trying to help competitors set their blocks in Youth and Junior Olympic competitions.) When all is ready, the recall starter lets the starter know that the athletes are ready to begin the race, and then assumes the assigned position to observe the start, checking for proper foot placement on the blocks and for toes or fingers over the line, and watching for false starts.

Instructions to Competitors (S.4)

Most of the instructions regarding the race should have been provided to the athletes by the clerks in the Clerks Circle or by the line clerk, but the starter may want to give some brief instructions before the start of each race to ensure that your procedures and expectations are clear to every runner. These explanations should be given about 2-3 minutes prior to the start, and be kept brief so as not to unduly distract the runners as they prepare for their race.

The length of your comments will vary with the experience level of the competitors. With youth age group competitors, junior high school, and even high school competitors early in the season, you will want to be thorough and give instructions up to and including the finals. At the collegiate level somewhat briefer instructions are appropriate for the preliminary rounds, but the runners may need only a brief reminder for the finals. For elite athletes, generally no instructions are necessary from the starter, at most a brief reminder to hold steady and wait for the gun.

An example of a more thorough set of instructions appropriate for sprint races (400 meter or less) for youth, junior high school, or early season high school runners is as follows: “There will be two verbal commands and then the gun to start the race. Please stand behind your blocks and, when I give the command “**On your marks**”, come forward and get settled into your blocks without any delays. When everyone is settled, I will give the “**Set**” command. Come up to a full, complete set position without any hesitations or slow roll-ups, and then hold steady and wait for the gun. I will not surprise you with a quick gun; I will hold you until I am satisfied everyone is still and in control. **React to the gun; do not try to anticipate it to the point that you disqualify yourself. Are there any questions?**”

Because there are differences in the rules at various levels of competition regarding **the use of starting blocks**, there will be occasions where individual runners in the shorter races will not use starting blocks and may use a standing start. In such cases the starter should identify these athletes and give them additional instructions following the instructions to those using blocks.

These competitors should be informed that after the “**On your marks**” command they should toe the line



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and stand relaxed until the “Set” command, since it will take some time for those using blocks to get settled into their blocks. Upon the set command they should assume their final starting position and hold steady until the gun is fired.

Sometimes a runner in this situation will begin to move or fall forward before the gun, often because they lose their balance as a result of their feet being too close together. The starter or recall starter should call the competitors up, suggest to the runner having the problem that a wider stance might solve the problem, and start the command cycle again.

Position of Starter and Recall Starters (S5)

When the pre-race instructions are completed, the starter crew should move to their positions for the start of the race. The exact positions can vary considerably, depending on whether you are working alone or with one or more recall starters, and on the physical layout of the starting area.

There are two primary factors to keep in mind when deciding where to place the starter and any recall starters:

- The starter should, in most cases, be in a position where the entire field of runners can be seen in as narrow a field of vision as reasonably possible. This is an absolute must if the starter is working alone; in races with long staggered starts (e.g., 4x400, 4x200) it may be impossible to see all eight lanes and there will have to be at least one recall starter to cover part of the field.
- The starter ideally should be positioned so the sound of the gun travels roughly an equal distance to the runners in the inside and outside lanes. This factor normally is secondary to the visual factor, but it does become more critical in races with long staggers.

Sprint Races - Straightaway. (S6)

For the short sprint and hurdle races on a straightaway, there are two usual positions for the starter. To provide a good side view of all runners, the starter may stand about 3-4 meters in front of the start line and about 10-20 meters back from the inside edge of the track, preferably on an elevated stand (the position favored by Canadian and many European starters). This allows more of a side view of all competitors to be able to readily detect any forward movement prior to the gun, yet allows enough of an angle to be reasonably able to detect slow roll-ups.

Distance races (1500 M or longer). (S7)

For distance races the starter should stand about 4-5 meters in front of the starting line, either on the inside or the outside of the track, depending on personal preference, physical facilities or location of the sensor cable. For high school and collegiate meets, after the start of the race the starter should turn and view the runners for the first 100 meters (high school) or 50 meters (college) of the race, watching for the possibility of a recall because of a runner going down due to contact.

Starter's Stance and Mannerisms (S8)

The starter must be the primary calming influence at the starting line. Body language can be critical, and therefore you should always appear to be a person who is in control and enjoying your job. Your stance should be upright and comfortable, so all your concentration can be devoted to the runners at the starting



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line. Distracting mannerisms, such as unusual movements or voice commands, must be avoided. There normally is enough tension at the starting line without a starter adding to it. Examples of distracting mannerisms include:

- Stern, rigid, loud vocal commands. (See next section)
 - Pointing at the runners during the “On you marks” command.
 - Nervous vocal noises such as constantly clearing the throat.
 - One leg in front of the other, spread wide, and knees bent as if the starter is also getting into the blocks.
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- Showing favoritism to certain runners by putting your arm around their shoulders, wishing them luck, etc. (This does not mean you cannot have brief friendly chats with runners during pre-race preparations; just avoid doing or saying anything that could be interpreted as showing favoritism.)
 - Unusual vocal mannerisms. (See next section.)

Voice Commands (S9)

The importance of the starter’s voice control cannot be emphasized too much. A calm voice is one of the most important characteristics of the successful starter. The starter’s voice commands should be practiced regularly, so the volume and tone are consistent from the beginning to the final set command. Again, calmness is the key. Avoid unusual mannerisms, such as long, drawn out commands; this can be very distracting to athletes. Keep the commands in a normal conversational cadence. The “Set” command should never be forcefully or sharply spoken, nor should it be long and drawn out.

It can be quite disconcerting to the runners in the blocks to have a starter give the set command in a tone starting with a low “s” and finishing with a high “t,” or the opposite, a high “s” to a low “t.” It should be a crisp, normal spoken command, just loud enough to be easily heard by the runner furthest from the starter. Yelling the “Set” command also will always disrupt the atmosphere at the starting line.

Care must be taken to maintain a calm, consistent intonation throughout the command cycle in order for all the competitors to hear and comfortably react. You might try using a tape recorder when practicing voice commands (or during a meet) to get an accurate idea of how you sound. If there seems to be confusion or problems at the starting line, it could well be due to the vocal commands of the starter.

Arm Signals (S10)

Starter to finish line (and competitors). The use of arm signals by the starter during the command cycle is primarily for the benefit of the timers at the finish line, so they know when to expect the gun to start the race. However, arm signals also can be of assistance when it is difficult for the runners to hear because of crowd noise or if there is a runner with a hearing impairment among the competitors, or in cases where there is a significant distance between the starter and the runners and a sound system is not available.

For starting cross country races, the NCAA rule book has a specific procedure starters should use. (S11)

The starter should have a red flag and a whistle in addition to the gun. The starter stands in the middle of the starting area at least 50 meters in front of the starting line. After giving instructions on how the race will be started, the starter gives one blast on the whistle to call the runners to the starting line. With the gun in one hand and the red flag in the other, the starter holds both arms straight out at shoulder level



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and holds that position until all runners are on the line and steady. Then the flag and the gun are raised slowly to the vertical position, and then the gun is fired while simultaneously pulling the flag down.

The NCAA also recommends recall starters on each end of the starting line, plus a third recall starter behind the midpoint of the starting line to watch for fallen runners in the middle of the field of runners during the first 100 meters of the race, where it would be difficult for the recall starters on the sides to see them.

Relay races. (S12)

One additional area where the starter must be concerned with signals is the start of the 4x100 relay. Often it is difficult for the starter to see and know when the relay exchange zones are ready. It is recommended that before the meet the starter talk with the head umpire to arrange a simple signaling system.

One umpire in each of the three exchange zones should be designated to raise a yellow flag while the athletes are getting prepared, and then raise a white flag when everyone is ready. The umpire in the second exchange zone should not raise a white flag until the white flag is seen in the third exchange zone, and likewise the umpire in the first exchange zone should not raise a white flag until a white flag is seen in the second exchange zone. The starter should key on the umpire in the first exchange zone, knowing that when that white flag goes up all zones are ready for the start of the race.

Pulling the Trigger (S13)

Pulling the trigger to start the race is the sine qua non of the starter's trade. The starter should be very familiar with his or her gun, and know the feel of it and how much slack is in the trigger. It should feel comfortable in the hand, and have a fairly tight trigger. A hair trigger should be avoided in order to prevent firing a "fast gun" after the "Set" command. During the command cycle, the gun should be cocked just before the "On your marks" command is given.

The finger should be closed around the trigger, taking out any slack, just before the "Set" command is given. At this point the gun may be fired, or the pressure may be let up on the trigger if the runners must be called up off their marks. If the gun has a hair trigger, this is not as easy to do, because it is harder to let up pressure on the trigger without firing. If for any reason the gun fires before you intend it to, you should recall the race.

The starter should avoid jerking the trigger when firing, because the hand moves and this can be distracting to the timers. It also provides a visual cue to any runners who might happen to be watching the gun. The gun hand should be held still and solid throughout the command cycle until after the gun has fired and the runners are away.

Rotating Starters (S14)

If more than one head starter is used during a meet with preliminary and final rounds, it is generally advisable to assign the same starter to the same event throughout the preliminary and final rounds. Because of differences in voice and rhythm between starters, this is fairest to the athletes. In addition, the starter will be able to observe and learn the idiosyncrasies of the various athletes in the event, so the starter in later rounds will know what to expect and compensate for any such idiosyncrasies.



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Starters' Uniform (S15)

As with other officials, the uniform worn by the starters is determined by meet management. You wear whatever uniform meet management stipulates. In the absence of any requirements from meet management, it is strongly recommended that starters wear a red jacket/blazer or polo shirt. This has been the standard starters' uniform at the national level for several decades (it is what meet management at major meets often request), and it is recommended for use at all levels of competition.

A brightly colored sleeve on the gun arm also is recommended (only for the starter actually starting the race). For indoor meets, a red jacket or blazer should be used with a white dress shirt and dark tie. For outdoor meets, the red blazer, white shirt and dark tie should be used, or a red polo shirt (particularly in warmer weather). The slacks (or skirt/culottes for women) can be either black or khaki. However, black slacks are recommended, as they provide a crisper, more professional look with the red blazer or shirt. Black socks and shoes also should be worn with the black slacks.

Aside from being a tradition for many years in this country, this **distinctive uniform for the starters** is worn for several reasons:

- 1) so the starter is easy to spot by the hand timers at the finish line (despite all the wonderful electronics, there should always be human back-up timers; in 2009 IAAF and USATF rules stipulated that the number of timers at the finish line can be reduced to no less than four only when two independent FAT systems are being used);
- 2) to make the starter easier to spot as a service to the many spectators and coaches who time races themselves; and most importantly
- 3) to make it easier for the members of the starter crew to spot each other during the starting sequence. If the starters do not have a uniform distinctive from all the other officials and personnel in the area, it can be difficult for a head starter to quickly spot the rest of the crew among all the bodies around the track at a large meet when looking for the hand signals that pass among the starter crew during the starting commands.

Because of the need to avoid unnecessary delays during the starting sequence, this visual activity needs to be instantaneous, and the distinctive red starters' uniform makes this visual processing much easier. For these reasons the red blazer or shirt is the standard for starters, to provide them with a uniform that is easily and quickly spotted, yet is professional and not garish in appearance. It also fulfills the requirements of the USATF rule specifying that starters must be clearly identifiable among all other personnel at the starting line.

Ear Protection (S16)

It is highly recommended that the starter protects the ears from the sound of the gun blast while a live gun. Race after race, meet after meet, year after year, firing the starting gun will take its toll on the auditory nerves of the ear, eventually creating hearing loss, starting in the high frequency range.

Good earplugs are highly recommended, rather than cotton or inexpensive earplugs. They should be used in both ears, not just the ear closest to the gun. A good earplug should be comfortable in the ear and allow hearing normal conversation. They should not block out all sound, since it is important that the starter be able to hear noises that may distract the athletes during the start.



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Some starters use the earmuff or headphone type of ear protection often seen on target ranges. This is a reasonable alternative, as long as the individual does not have to wear radio headphones for communication purposes during the meet. When wearing radio headphones, earplugs still should be worn, since radio headphones are not designed to give sufficient noise protection to the ears. Another means of long-term protection of hearing for the starter is to use an open barrel pistol. Much of the noise will be directed straight upward with an open barrel pistol, rather than to the side (and toward the starter's ears) as with a closed barrel starter pistol.

Tests have shown that the decibel level at the head with an open barrel pistol is significantly lower than with a closed barrel pistol. However, with an open barrel pistol, you will have to go through the process of getting a weapons permit from the appropriate local law enforcement office. A potential problem is taking the open barrel pistol onto the campus of a high school with a "zero tolerance" policy on weapons. If the school administrators have not had the good sense to foresee the need for common sense exceptions like starter pistols for track meets, or feel they cannot take the responsibility to allow a reasonable exception to an inflexible policy, you will need to have a closed barrel pistol handy.

This situation has become pervasive enough that in 2009 the high school federation adopted a rule that only closed barrel starter pistols can be used at high school meets. An alternative is one of the new electronic starting pistols recently coming on the market. The manufacturers have not yet been able to reproduce the sharp, intense sound and impact of the blast from a black powder cartridge, and there have been reports of athletes not reacting as well to the electronic guns, while others have reported no problems adapting. In some cases an electronic "beep" is used, similar to the swimming start signal, instead of an imitation pistol shot. However, some have questioned whether this has as much impact outdoors as it does indoors in a swimming pool. But improvements are being made to the electronic tones, and the prices of these electronic starting pistols have been dropping, so it is entirely possible that in the not too distant future the traditional starter pistol with black powder shells will be a thing of the past, and we will all be using electronic pistols. (Having a "silent gun" with an electronic start signal going to speakers in each starting block, rather than through the air from a regular pistol, is seen as fairer for the athletes, particularly in staggered starts.

Safety (S17)

Safety precautions are not something starters are usually as concerned about, compared with other officials such as those doing the throwing events. However, the starter must still be aware of things like looking to make sure a runner is not headed on a collision course when stepping onto the track. Better yet, develop the habit of crossing the track behind the starting blocks when sprinters and hurdlers are warming up. When helping to set hurdles on the track, always check in both directions before moving anywhere after setting a hurdle. There always is the risk of a hurdler taking a practice run in the lane next to you.

If you must be on the track for any reason, try to stand on a lane line to reduce the risk of a full on impact by an athlete taking a practice start. If the location of a starting line requires the starter to be near an area where errant throwing implements could land, try to ensure there is a marshal or someone else in the area to act as an extra pair of eyes and warn the starter crew if necessary.



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Another safety concern to keep in mind is sun protection. While baseball caps have been the common outdoor headgear for starters, it would be wise to consider the use of a wide brimmed hat to help protect the face, neck and ears from the many hours of direct sun that starters often are subjected to during outdoor meets. Along with liberal use of a high SPF sun block on all parts of the head, neck, arms

and hands, this will help protect you from the long-term consequences of sun exposure. A couple of other good habits to adopt, particularly if you use an open barrel pistol, deal with protecting your pistol

from being “lifted” from your possession. Wear your pistol in a holster with the handle forward. This makes it more difficult for someone to take it out of the holster from behind you. When you are temporarily leaving the track area and going into areas with spectators, etc., leave your pistol with someone else on the starter team. This procedure is probably more important in larger meets occurring

in a stadium with larger crowds.

In Conclusion

Being a starter or a recall starter is a major responsibility in a track meet, and you can have a positive or a negative impact on the satisfaction and enjoyment an athlete will have in participating in the sport, depending on how well you do your job.

This monograph has attempted to present information on the major aspects of the mechanics and techniques of being a good starter. Practice the skills discussed here, observe other starters, take the time to practice voice commands and use a stopwatch to time your holds, stand in front of a mirror to observe your body language and arm signals. These will help with your mechanics.

However, it still boils down to knowing the rules and using common sense in applying them. Again, all actions and decisions should be focused on the good of all the athletes, the basic principle being to ensure that no athlete gains an unfair advantage over the other competitors, and no athlete has to compete under an unfair disadvantage.

USATF OFFICIALS BEST PRACTICES

Starter Duties, Preparations, & Rules

Personal Equipment (\$18)

Uniform prescribed for the meet

Red arm sleeve

Raingear, sunscreen, sunglasses, hat
(outdoors)

.32 caliber pistol; .22 caliber (indoor) w/ shells

Earplugs

Whistle on lanyard

Rule book (applicable book)

Water, small washcloth

Pencil and 3x5 cards or small notebook

Stepstool

DQ cards (red, red/black, red/white, yellow,
yellow/black, green)



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Duties (S19)

1. Ensure starting blocks are set up within the competitor's lane
2. Start races promptly after athletes have been turned over to the starter by the clerk of the course
3. Inform all competitors of warnings /or disqualifications through use of verbal communication and cards:
All: green – no violation; NCAA: yellow – warning, red – DQ; USATF Yellow/black - warning, red & Black – DQ, red/white – compete under protest
4. Be aware of rules for youth and masters athletes (302, 303, 332) - if applicable
5. Signal by bell/pistol the start of the last lap of the race (high school)

Pre-Meet Preparations (S20)

1. Arrive at least one hour early; attend officials meeting if conducted
2. Walk the track – be familiar with start/finish lines, exchange zones, location(s) for starter/recall starter, location of electronic equipment & power source, safety concerns, condition of blocks
3. Check with Meet Director and Referee - verify meet schedule, any specific equipment to be used (personal blocks, headphones/radio communication systems, etc.)
4. Check with Clerk of the Course - review schedule, review clerk/starter instructions so no overlap
5. Check with Head Finish Judge - verify signals between starter/finish judges (if any)
6. Check with timers - check all equipment, verify equipment locations and signals between starter & timer. Help conduct the zero gun test if using electronic timing.
7. Check with Announcer & Clerk to synchronize watches for time schedule of meet, and timing of PA announcements in regard to reporting & race starts, music
8. Meet with Starter crew, walk the track, review schedule, positions (straight-aways & turns), hand signals; synchronize watches, assign positions & duties; review how to discuss possible false starts & use of cards; review signage, TV, and microphone locations and stay clear.
9. Meet with television reps (if applicable) regarding timing, schedule; make necessary accommodations.

Starts (S21)

1. Starting blocks; crouch or standing start; false starts; DQs; and recalls: see rules below
2. Practice starts may not be made in conjunction with start commands and the gun – NCAA
3. After athletes are on their marks, give the command to “stand up” if all is not ready to proceed
4. If there are multiple starters, confer regarding any apparent false starts
5. Positioning of starter
 - a. Races started in lanes on the curve (staggered) – be equidistant from all runners – approx. 20 meters inside the curve, opposite middle lane start line. (Note: if a starter stands 25 meters away from lane 1 and 70 meters away from lane 8 when the gun is fired for a 400m race, Lane 1 will hear the sound in .08 seconds; Lane 8 will hear it in .21 seconds, a difference of .13 second). Recall starters, if used, are placed as assigned by the head starter to clearly see each competitor.



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- b. Races started on a straightaway or waterfall – be approx. 4 meters in front of the start line and 5 meters to the inside, to allow sight of all runners in a narrow field of view. Recall starters, if used, are placed at the opposite end of the start line.
6. Recall point - USATF 10m; NCAA 50m (see chart below). Location of point 50m from the start line for:
- a. 1500m – at mark in lane 1 for the 4th flight of the 400m hurdles
 - b. Mile – at mark in lane 1 for the first flight of the 400m hurdles, less 4.4m
 - c. 3000/5000m – at mark in lane 1 for the 7th flight of the 400m hurdles, less 5m
 - d. 10,000m – at mark in lane 1 for the first flight of the 400m hurdles, plus 5m

Safety Considerations (S22)

- 1. Always look before you step onto the track or into another lane as sprinters are getting blocks set
- 2. Throwing & jumping events – be aware of athletes beginning their approach/run-up (*particularly indoors*); coordinate with head officials of those events regarding your starts



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Starter Rules (S23)	
Blocks & Positions	
Use of personal blocks	IAAF: Technical Delegates decision; no damage to track no unfair advantage USATF & NCAA: Games Committee decision HS: Games Committee may provide blocks
Use of starting blocks required	IAAF & USATF: Required - races & 1st relay leg up to/including 400m; not allowed >400m NCAA: Optional - races < 800m & 1st relay leg < 600m; not allowed in other races HS: Not addressed
Crouch & 4 point start position required	IAAF & USATF: Required for races & 1st relay leg up to/including 400m; both hands & at least one knee in contact w/ground; both feet in contact w/foot plates NCAA: Not required; HS: Not addressed
The Start	
Runners delay in coming to a set position	IAAF & USATF: 1st - Warning, 2nd - DQ (by Start Referee) NCAA: 1st - Warning, 2nd - DQ; HS: Warning
False starts & disqualifications	All: 1st false start = DQ (but see below for exceptions)
False starts - Combined events	IAAF: 1st - Field, 2nd - DQ; USATF & NCAA: 2nd - DQ; HS: Not addressed
False starts - Youth ages 7 - 14	IAAF, NCAA, & HS: N/A; USATF Youth 7-14: 2nd - DQ
False starts - Youth ages 15-18	IAAF, NCAA & HS: N/A; USATF Youth 15-18: 1st - DQ
False starts - Masters	IAAF, NCAA & HS: N/A; USATF Masters: 2nd - DQ
Disqualification & warnings	IAAF: Cards: Red/Black - DQ; Yellow/black - Warning USATF: Cards: Red/Black - DQ; Red/White - Compete under protest; Yellow/black - Warning; Green - No violation NCAA: Cards: Red, yellow, green; or verbal communication HS: Not addressed
Practice starts on starter's command	IAAF, USATF, & HS: Not addressed NCAA: Not allowed in immediate area of starting line
Recalls	
Recall of races not started in lanes	IAAF: No recall unless part of unfair start USATF: Recall for unfair start or a fall wholly part of an unfair start, within 10 m of start line NCAA: Recall for an incident resulting from an unfair start within 50 m of start line HS: Runner falls in 1st 100m due to contact
Staggered Starts	
	Number of turns run in lanes/alleys:
400 m	IAAF, USATF, & NCAA: 2; HS: 2 *
800 m if start in lanes or alleys**	IAAF & USATF: 1; NCAA: 1 (2 Indoor); HS: 1 *
> 800 m if start in alleys**	IAAF, USATF, & NCAA: 1; HS: 1 *
4 x 100 Relay	IAAF, USATF, & NCAA: 2; HS: 2 *
4 x 200 Relay	IAAF & USATF: 4 (3 Indoor); NCAA: 4; HS: 4 *
4 x 400 Relay	IAAF, USATF, & NCAA: 3 (2 Indoor); HS: 3 *
Sprint medley	IAAF: Not addressed; USATF & NCAA: 3; HS: 3 *
* Check your state H. S. Association for possible modifications to the number of turns run in lanes.	
** Staggered Alleys	



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When # of runners is greater than # of lanes, split of groups:

IAAF, USATF, & NCAA: 2 groups; 2/3 on waterfall at start line (across entire track); and 1/3 on waterfall at the stagger
HS: Not addressed

RESOURCES:

Best Practices:

- Starter Duties, Preps & Rules, Jan 2018
- IAAF Starting Guidelines, June 2018
- Starter’s Case Book – Insights from Top Experts in T&F Starting 2008
- Starter information System April 2020
- Starters Monograph, Jan. 2019 – Eric Zemper
- All of the above can be found at:
<https://www.flipsnack.com/USATF/starting/full-view.html>
- USAFT Code of Ethics/ Professional Guidelines
[USATF Code of Ethics and Performance Guidelines](#)

Other Resources:

- [Chief Starter Assignment Considerations](#)
- [Starter Assignments Example: 2018 Stanford Invitational](#)
- [Starter Assignments Example: 2014 Paralympics](#)

Finish Line and Lap Scoring:

- Finish Line a/ Lap Scoring Best Practices and Resources can be found at:
<https://www.flipsnack.com/USATF/finish-line-lap-scoring/full-view.html>



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REMINDER MAP - Common Learning/Performance Objectives (PO's) for all Junior Official Participants

Mentors will be concentrating on the areas in gray to determine your Checklist and Field of Play Evaluation at the end of your individual time-line in the program

Code of Ethics/Performance Objectives (PO's)	PO #	Assessment Evaluation Criteria (P.O.'s)	PO #
Be fair, consistent, and impartial to ensure equitable treatment for all competitors.	PO1	Arrives on time for meetings and events.	AEC1
Have a thorough knowledge of the rules and procedures for the particular event or position assigned and review them prior to a competition.	PO2	Properly wears officials' uniform; presents a professional appearance.	AEC2
Cooperate with fellow officials to conduct competition in a safe and professional manner. Be courteous and avoid confrontations or making derogatory comments to athletes, coaches, spectators, or other officials.	PO3	Knows and applies rules correctly and consistently.	AEC3
Demonstrate respect and courtesy for other officials. Avoid interfering with duties assigned to other officials or publicly questioning the performance of other officials. Assist in correctly applying rules and support final decisions rendered by chief officials. Provide and accept performance feedback in a positive manner.	PO4	Treats all personnel with respect and professionalism	AEC4
Honor all assignments and agreements made for performance of officiating and support duties.	PO5	Communicates effectively with competitors.	AEC5
Not discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, or other protected characteristic.	PO6	Stays alert to the competition, potential problems, and the athletes.	AEC6
Not engage in harassment by making unwelcome advances, remarks, or display of materials where such would create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.	PO7	Works well with other officials for success of the crew.	AEC7
Not fraternize with athletes or coaches, provide tips or comments which could be construed as coaching for any athlete, nor cheer for or provide encouragement to particular athletes or teams during a competition.	PO8	Willing to pitch in and help wherever needed or directed.	AEC8
Not use tobacco products while in the field of competition, nor consume alcoholic products before or during a competition.	PO9	Has applicable rule books and necessary personal equipment.	AEC9
Not seek recognition or attention during a competition.	PO10	Correctly and efficiently prepares the venue; maintains safety	AEC10
Conduct an honest self-evaluation after each competition, to identify errors made and areas for improvement; and be receptive to	PO11	Conducts complete, accurate briefings for athletes.	AEC11



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suggestions for conducting events in the best possible manner in the future.			
Comply with the USA Track & Field Officials Code of Ethics	PO12	Effectively manages volunteers	AEC12
Be punctual in reporting for assigned officiating duties, including allowing adequate time for venue inspection and set-up prior to the warm-up period and competition.	PO13	Completes event forms properly and neatly	AEC13
Possess the appropriate rule book(s) for the competition.	PO14	Demonstrates good decision-making and problem-solving skills.	AEC14
Possess and maintain appropriate uniform items and wear the national uniform or other dress prescribed by meet management, and be prepared to continue duties in all types of weather.	PO15	Accepts & responds to feedback, contributes to post-event review	AEC15
Inspect assigned venues to ensure the safety of athletes, officials, and spectators. Correct or report apparent or suspected dangers to meet management before beginning a competition.	PO16		
Be calm, positive, and polite. Refrain from dialog with athletes and coaches regarding disputed calls or decisions, and instead refer them to the referee, protest table, or games committee for resolution. Report abusive behavior toward officials to meet management.	PO17		
Not use any electronic or photographic devices, including cell phones, while officiating.	PO18		
Assist in submitting competition results, cleaning the event area, and returning equipment. Before departing the site, determine if any other venues need officiating assistance.	PO19		
Attend periodic training sessions or clinics to maintain or update officiating skills. Assist, as appropriate, in developing and presenting training materials.	PO20		
Keep physically fit, and advise their association or coordinator of officials of physical limitations on their ability to perform any assigned duty.	PO21		
Mentor less experienced officials by sharing information and techniques, demonstrating use of equipment, identifying potential problems or issues and recommending solutions, and encouraging questions.	PO22		
Assist in recruiting new officials.	PO23		
Consider active involvement with the officials' committees of the local association and USATF.	PO24		
Make recommendations for rules changes as appropriate.	PO25		



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Study Guide 2 – Starter – Learning/Performance Objectives - Mentor Checklist

Participant's Name _____ Mentor Name _____

Evaluate applicable areas, based on assignment(s) for this meet/some areas will be Non-Applicable (NA)

INSTRUCTIONS: All items on this Checklist must be completed during the timeline of the program. Some participants are in the program for one-to-four years. All items/objectives should be checked when the item is successfully completed. Not all items will be completed at any particular meet but over a series of meets. Enter the date of the completed PO/LO, your initials for verification, and any comments that you may have. Make three (3) copies when the form is completed. Keep one (1) copy for yourself. Distribute one (1) to the participant. Send one (1) to your Certification chairperson or to your Junior Officials Program coordinator as per your specific Association designee. All Objectives must be met before submission. Note: Some of the items on the checklist maybe “Not Applicable (NA) but those items are very limited. Ex. A 14 year-old JOP Participant will not be a Starter at a meet or assigning other officials to duties .These type criteria will be marked NA. NA’s should be used sparingly.

Learning Objectives What should the JOP be able to explain or do?	PO #	Date Completed	Mentor Initials
USATF Rule 129	Rule		
Characteristics of a Good Starter	S1		
Pre-Meet Activities	S2		
Recall Starters	S3		
Instructions to Competitors	S4		
Position of Starter and Recall Starters	S5		
Sprint Races - Straightaways	S6		
Distance Races (1500 M or longer)	S7		
Starter Stance and Mannerisms	S8		
Voice Commands	S9		
Arm Signals	S10		
CC Races NCAA specific procedures	S11		
Relay Races	S12		
Pulling the Trigger	S13		
Rotating Starters	S14		
Starters' Uniform	S15		
Ear Protection	S16		
Safety	S17		
Personal Equipment	S18		
Duties	S19		
Pre-Meet Preparations	S20		



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Starts	S21		
Safety Considerations	S22		
Starter Rules Comparisons	S23		

Comments:



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Module 2- Starter – Program Learning/Performance – Mentor Assessment Field of Play Evaluation

Participant Name _____ Mentor Name _____

MENTORS – All items on this Checklist must be completed during the timeline of the program. Some participants are in the program from one-to-four years. All items/objectives should be checked when the item is successfully completed. Not all items will be completed at any particular meet but over a series of meets. Checkoff the rating that you give to the JOP Participant, enter the date of completion and enter your initials as a verification that the objective was completed. If you have assigned a rating of Fair* - Please add your rationale to the *Area for Improvement space. *Please submit a copy of this Field of Play Evaluation/Assessment final form with the completion dates and your Mentor signature, to the Association Certification Chairperson or JOP Designee in your Association.* Please make 3 copies -One (1) for your records, one (1)for the Association Chair/JOP Designee, and one (1) to give to the JOP Participant for their records. Hardcopies or electronic copies are acceptable. All Objectives must be met before submission.

Code of Ethics/Professional /Learning/Performance Objectives	PO#	Fair* (check)	Good (check)	Excellent (check)	Date Completed	Mentor Initials
1. Arrives on time for meetings and events.	AEC1					
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
2. Properly wears officials' uniform: presents a professional appearance.	AEC2	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
3. Knows and applies rules correctly and consistently.	AEC3	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
4. Treats all personnel with respect and professionalism.	AEC4	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
5. Communicates effectively with competitors.	AEC5	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						



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6. Stays alert to the competition, potential problems, and the athletes.	AEC6	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
7. Works well with other officials for success of the crew.	AEC7	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
8. Willing to pitch-in and help wherever needed or directed.	AEC8	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
9. Has applicable rulebooks and necessary personal equipment.	AEC9	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
10. Correctly and efficiently prepares the venue and maintains a high level of safety.	AEC10	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
11. Conducts complete, accurate briefings for athletes.	AEC11	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
12. Effectively works with volunteers.	AEC12	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
14. Completes event forms properly and neatly.	AEC13	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
15. Demonstrates good decision-making and problem-solving skills.	AEC14	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
15. Accepts and responds to feedback in an appropriate manner.	AEC15	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
17. Not discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race,	PO6	Fair*	Good	Excellent		



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color, religion, gender, national origin, age, athletic ability or other protected characteristic.						
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
18. Not engage in harassment by making unwelcome advances, remarks, or display of materials where such would create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.	PO7	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
19. Not use tobacco products while in the field of competition, nor consume alcoholic products before or during a competition.	PO9	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
20. Be calm, positive, and polite. Refrain from dialog with athletes and coaches regarding disputed calls or decisions, and instead refer them to the referee, protest table, or games committee for resolution. Report abusive behavior toward officials to meet management.	PO17	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
21. Not use any electronic or photographic devices, including cell phones, while officiating.	PO18	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
22. Keep physically fit, and advise their association or coordinator of officials of physical limitations on their ability to perform any assigned duty.	PO19	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
23. Presentation of JOP Log of meet experiences containing the number of Hours based on age group.	Program Requirement	Fair*	Good	Excellent		
*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):						
24. Presentation of Journal or "Briefcase of acquired materials indicating the participants knowledge of growth over the length of the program.	Program Requirement					



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*Area for Improvement (Fair or below):

Comments: _____

