



Special Olympics runs competitions just like every other sports organisation in the world. There are a few things that make our competitions a bit different. All coaches should understand these principles.

- Divisioning
- Quotas and Random Selection
- Maximum Effort Rule

This guide is adapted from a guide produced by Special Olympics Ireland. It gives coaches a quick and simple explanation of these principles. Share this guide with athletes, families, carers, teachers and friends. It will help to explain what makes Special Olympics different. They can also find out where to learn more about these areas.

Divisioning

Special Olympics provides training and competition opportunities for athletes of all ability levels. Every athlete is recognised for their performance. Divisioning is how we ensure athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability.

Three factors are considered in divisioning:

- Ability of Athlete/team
- Age of Athlete/team
- Gender of the athlete/team

Ability is the most important factor. Athletes and teams are divisioned using these steps:

Divide by Gender

Female athletes usually compete against female athletes. Male athletes compete against male athletes. There are a few exceptions to this. 1) Where NGB/IF or official Sport rules allow mixed gender teams (e.g. mixed doubles in tennis). 2) Where NGB/IF rules or official sport rules do not separate athletes by gender (e.g. Equestrian).

If a team has male and female athletes they may compete in a division with other mixed gender teams. If only one team is mixed gender, they may be required to compete in a male division.



Divide by Age

Once athletes are divided by gender, we divide them by age. For individual sports the age groups are: 8-11, 12-15, 16-21, 22-29, 30+. An athlete's age is taken as their age on the first day of the competition. For team sports the age groups are: 8-15, 16-21 and 22+. The team's age is decided by the age of the oldest athlete on the first day of competition.

Divide by Ability Level

The final step is to divide by ability. Athletes are divided by ability based on their time, distance or entry score. There should be a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 8 athletes or teams in each division. We aim for no more than 15% difference between the lowest and highest ability athlete or team in a division.

Every sport measures ability level in a different way. Read the Special Olympics Sport Rules for your sport to learn what measurements are used in your sport.

What to do if you have problems creating divisions?

Sometimes it is not possible to make good divisions using these rules. There may be too few athletes of:

- Similar ability
- Similar age
- Same gender

to make a competitive division. You may need to make some small changes to your divisions.

Here are some ways you can adapt divisions. Remember, any changes like this **MUST** be approved by the competition management

- Age groups can be broadened
- Genders may be mixed
- Ability range may be widened.



In some rare cases, a one or two person division may occur. This should always be an exception. At all times the aim is to offer a quality competitive experience for all our athletes. Refer to Special Olympics Rules Article 1 (Section 10) for more information.

Advancement, Quotas and Random Selection

Advancement

Divisioning gives athletes of all ability levels a chance to take part in SO Competition. In the same way, athletes of all abilities also have an equal chance to advance to the next level of competition. This applies to all athletes:

- Who took part in the previous highest level of competition. (E.g. Program level games prior to World Games).
- Whose sport/event is offered at the next level of competition.

Quota

A SO programme or GOC organises each SO competition. They decide the number of athletes/teams that may compete in a sport or event. This is known as the Quota.

The Quota is calculated based on:

- Competition venue (Size and Space)
- Time available to safely execute a high quality competition

Random Selection

Any athletes who fulfil these requirements are eligible for selection to compete in an event.

Priority for selection is always given based on the order of finish. This means that firstly, all first place finishers will be considered. Then all second place finishers are considered, then third place and so on until all eligible athletes have been exhausted.

Step 1: Identify which athletes are eligible to advance from the previous competition.

Step 2: Select the best option based on the number and finish places of eligible athletes.



Option A:

Total number of eligible 1st place finishers = quota for an event.

RESULT: All athletes advance.

Option B:

Total number of eligible 1st place finishers > quota for an event

RESULT: Athletes will be randomly selected from all eligible gold medallists.

Note: Some athletes who have won gold medals at an event will not advance to the competition. However, every athlete has an equal opportunity to advance.

Option C:

Total number of eligible 1st place finishers < quota for an event.

RESULT: All eligible gold medallists are selected. Remaining places are selected randomly from eligible 2nd place finishers. If all 2nd place finishers are selected, remaining places are selected randomly from 3rd place finishers. This process continues at each finishing place until the quota has been filled or all eligible athletes have been selected.

Note: It is possible to exhaust all eligible athletes before the quota is filled. In this case you must return unfilled quota to the competition organisers.

Maximum Effort Rule (MER)

In the past some athletes performed with less effort in divisioning rounds on purpose. They did this to be put in division with athletes of lower ability. They hoped it would help them to win a medal in their final round.

The maximum effort rule aims to stop this. It tells athletes to compete to the best of their ability in all rounds of competition. It helps to provide a fair competition for all athletes. Athletes who break this rule may be disqualified (DQd).



This rule applies for all athletes in all sports.

It is most easily applied in sports where performance can be timed or measured. Competition teams may apply *The Percentage Rule* or a *Jury Review*. In these sports, an athlete's performance or score is compared in the preliminary and final rounds of competition.

Percentage Rule: If an athlete's final score is 15% or more better than their divisioning score the athlete may be DQd.

Jury Review: An improvement of 15% will result in a Jury Review. The sport jury will review the performance and decide if the athlete should be DQd.

How can you help to avoid an MER DQ:

- **Record performances:** During the season, you should regularly record your athletes' performances.
- **Accurate Entry Scores:** Ensure the scores you submit on your athletes' entry forms are accurate and current.
- **Submit Improved Performance Score:** If your athlete has not performed to the best of their ability in divisioning, you can submit an improved performance score. This form can be filled in after preliminary rounds but before finals. Please check with your competition team for precise timelines.

15% is a guidance, not a rule. Each competition team may set a different % depending on the event or category of activity. You should always ask what % will be applied at a competition. The first Head Coaches meeting at your competition is the best place to get this information.