

Artistic swimming



Artistic swimming, **formerly** known as synchronised swimming, is an Olympic sport that combines swimming with the artistic movement of ballet. As the athletes have to perform their routines in a deep pool, without touching neither the sides nor the bottom of the pool, this sport requires breath control, strength, flexibility, and musicality.

■ The origins of artistic swimming

The idea of synchronised swimming first emerged in Europe in the late 19th century. Early forms of this sport saw swimmers performing **patterned** movements and figures in the water, often referred to as “ornamental swimming”. The sport then spread to the USA and Canada, where it gained great popularity in the 1940s and 1950s thanks to Esther Williams, a swimming champion who, after retiring from competitions, became an actress in the so-called “aquatic musicals”, where she performed ballet in the water. In the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, synchronised swimming appeared as an exhibition sport; it officially became an Olympic sport at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, initially only with solo and duet competitions. In 2017, the international governing body (FINA, now World Aquatics) officially changed the name from “synchronised swimming” to “artistic swimming”.

■ Rules and competitions

Competitions are judged based on two main components: technical merit and artistic impression, resulting in a total score out of 100 points.

In artistic swimming there are two types of routines: the **technical routine**, which requires all competitors to perform a set of compulsory elements in a specified order and in a given time, and the **free routine**, which has no compulsory elements and allows the athletes to demonstrate their creativity, originality, and technical skill through **lifts**, figures, and patterns.

Routines are performed in:

- solo: one swimmer;
- duet: two swimmers;
- mixed duet: one male and one female swimmer (introduced at the world championships in 2015);
- team: four to eight swimmers;
- acrobatic (acro) routine: a recent event focusing on acrobatic lifts, throws, and complex movements.

Penalties are given for violations such as: touching the bottom or the sides of the pool during the routine; failing to observe the time limit; not having the required number of swimmers in the pool in team competitions. Moreover, in the past, a penalty was given for using non-waterproof make-up, as it ran into the pool. Today, strict waterproof make-up is essential in competitions.

formerly: *precedentemente*

lift: *sollevamento*

patterned: *strutturato*

1  **Complete the sentences with no more than four words.**

1. Artistic swimming was known as until 2015.
2. This sport combines the disciplines of
3. The first evidence of the sport dates back to
4. Ester Williams was a former
5. In aquatic musicals, Williams performed
6. Artistic swimming became an official Olympic sport
7. The technical routine requires the performance of
8. The free routine involves performing
9. The mixed duet is made up of a swimmer.
10. Teams must be made of
11. If swimmers touch the bottom of the pool,
12. In the past, a penalty was also given for

2  **GROUP WORK** Artistic swimming has recently introduced male swimmers in competitions. Do you know any Italian ones? Search the Internet for information and tell the class.