Sports of the 2014 Winter Olympics
Get to know this season’s sports

For the complete photos with media resources, visit:
http://education.nationalgeographic.com/media/sports-2014-winter-olympics/

The 2014 Winter Olympics will take place in Sochi, Russia, from February 7 through February 23. Events are divided into 14 sports—15 if skeleton is counted as a separate sport from bobsleigh. (Here, we’re counting them as a single sport.) Some sports have multiple disciplines—men’s and women’s competitions, relay competitions, and races of different distances. Each discipline will have three medalists—gold, silver, and bronze.

The events in Sochi will take place in two main venues, nicknamed the “Mountain Complex” and the “Coastal Complex.”

Use this guide as a reference to help you better understand the skills and disciplines of the Winter Olympics.

Alpine Skiing
Biathlon
Bobsleigh
Cross-Country Skiing
Curling
Figure Skating
Freestyle Skiing
Ice Hockey
Luge
Nordic Combined
Short Track Speed Skating
Ski Jumping
Snowboarding
Speed Skating

Alpine Skiing (Site: Rosa Khutor Alpine Center, Mountain Complex)
Athletes will compete in ten alpine skiing disciplines in Sochi: men’s and women’s downhill, slalom, giant slalom, super-G, and alpine combined.

According to National Geographic magazine, “whoever first strapped on a pair of skis likely did so to hunt animals,” and skiing developed into a recreational sport about 200 years ago. Until the early 1900s, athletes had to climb up a hill in order to ski down it. When ski lifts were developed to take people up the slope, the sport became much more popular!
In **alpine skiing**, also called downhill skiing, athletes must pass through a series of gates as they race down the slope. Both the tips of the skis and the skier’s feet must pass between the gates. Racers can reach speeds of up to 162 kilometers (100 miles) an hour!

Alpine skiing has been a sport in the Olympics since 1936.

**Downhill**
The downhill event is the speed discipline of alpine skiing. Athletes descend through a course’s straightaways, steep turns, and small bumps (which require controlled jumps). Downhill skis are longer and wider than other skis.

**Slalom**
Slalom is the most technically demanding discipline in alpine skiing. The athlete must twist and turn through gates that are spaced very closely—apart only about 9 meters (30 feet) vertically and 2 meters (6.5 feet) horizontally.

**Giant Slalom**
A giant slalom course is longer and features more widely distributed gates. These features allow the athlete to pick up more speed than in a regular slalom course.

**Super-G**
Super-G is short for “super giant slalom.” This discipline combines the speed of downhill skiing and the technical precision of slalom and giant slalom.

**Alpine Combined**
As its name implies, the alpine combined event includes both slalom and downhill courses. The athlete completes one downhill and two slalom runs.

**Biathlon (Site: Laura Cross-Country Ski and Biathlon Center, Mountain Complex)**
Athletes will compete in 11 biathlon disciplines in Sochi. Male athletes will compete in 10-kilometer individual, 12.5-kilometer pursuit, 15-kilometer mass start, 20-kilometer individual, and relay events. Women will compete in 10-kilometer pursuit, 12.5-kilometer mass start, 15-kilometer individual, 7.5-kilometer individual, and relay events. There will also be a mixed relay.

Biathlon combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. The combination of hunting and skiing started as early as 2000 BCE, but not as a sport. It was a way for people in northern Europe to hunt for food. In the mid-16th century, Scandinavian armies began to use skis to travel quickly on snow to defend against their enemies.

The objective is to be the fastest to complete the course, skiing to the shooting range and hitting as many targets as possible.


**Individual**
In individual biathlon events (skied at different distances), the athlete skis in laps around a track, using their rifle at different shooting lanes. Athletes are required to shoot at targets while standing as well as prone (on their bellies).

**Pursuit**
In pursuit events, athletes’ start times are staggered by their time differences in a previous race. The first athlete to cross the finish line wins.

**Mass Start**
In mass start biathlon disciplines, all athletes start at the same time. Each athlete shoots at a designated shooting lane, and the first to cross the finish line wins.

**Relay**
Relay events involve teams of four athletes. Each athlete skis three laps and participates in two shooting rounds—one standing, one prone. Athletes are given eight bullets—if none of these hit the target, the athlete must ski a penalty loop for each missed target.
Mixed Relay
In this event, two women will ski and shoot targets before tagging two male teammates, who will then finish the relay.

New in 2014! In Sochi, the biathlon mixed relay will make its debut.

Bobsleigh (Sanki Olympic Sliding Center, Mountain Complex)
Athletes will compete in five bobsleigh disciplines in Sochi. Men will compete in four-person and two-person bobsleigh and individual skeleton. Women will compete in two-person bobsleigh and individual skeleton.

Bobsleigh
People have been using **sleds** (sleighs) for travel and fun for about 700 years. Racing sleds on steep and twisted tracks started about 150 years ago when British tourists began to sled on the snow-covered roads of the Alps. **Bobsleighs** are partly-enclosed sleds with blades called **runners**.

Racers start by pushing the sled for about 50 meters (164 feet). Then they jump on the sled and ride it while seated. The driver steers and the brakeman stops the sled at the end of the run.

Four-man bobsleigh teams competed in the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924. The two-man format started in 1932. There is currently no four-person bobsleigh race for women, but the two-person format began in 2002.

Skeleton
This sport got its name from its unusual metal sled. An early version of the sled was said to resemble a human skeleton. In **skeleton**, athletes lie flat on their bellies, head-first.

To start, sliders grasp the handles on the sides of the sled, run as fast as they can for approximately 50 meters (164 feet), then dive onto the sled. To steer, they shift their bodies very slightly.

Men competed in skeleton at the 1928 and 1948 Olympic Winter Games. It was reintroduced in 2002, becoming a permanent Olympic sport for individual men and women.

Cross-Country Skiing (Site: Laura Cross-Country Ski and Biathlon Center, Mountain Complex)
Athletes will compete in 12 cross-country skiing disciplines in Sochi. Men will compete in 15-kilometer individual, 10-kilometer relay, 50-kilometer individual, combined 15+15 kilometer mass start, 1.5-kilometer sprint, and team sprint. Women will compete in 10-kilometer individual, 30-kilometer individual, 5-kilometer relay, combined 7.5+7.5-kilometer mass start, 1.5-kilometer sprint, and team sprint.

Using wooden planks strapped to the feet has helped people to travel quickly on snow for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. The entire Swedish army was using skis by 1500. As early as 1767, the Norwegian army was having **cross-country skiing** competitions. The first event for civilians was held in Norway in 1843.

Racers compete individually and in teams using one of two basic techniques. In classic technique, athletes ski through pre-cut, parallel tracks in the snow. Both the heel and toe of a skier’s boots are attached to the skis, and skiers use wax on their skis to help them glide along.

In freestyle technique, skiers use shorter skis—up to almost 27 centimeters (11 inches) shorter. There are no tracks in the snow, and only the toe of the ski boot is secured to the ski. This allows the skier to go much faster than in classic technique. The skier propels him- or herself forward by pushing off the skis’ edge, similar to speed-skating. In fact, freestyle technique is often called “skate skiing.”

Cross-country skiing races for men were part of the first Winter Olympic Games in 1924. Events for women began in 1952.

Individual
Skiers use the freestyle technique. Individual races begin with staggered starts—an athlete starts 30 seconds after the previous racer. This means that the winner is not necessarily the one to cross the finish line first—it’s the skier with the best
Individual Sprint
Skiers use the classic technique. Individual cross-country skiing sprints are structured much like sprints in track-and-field competitions. Racers compete in heats to determine the finalists.

Team Sprint
Skiers use the freestyle technique. Team sprint consists of two skiers who race in two-lap relays around the track until both have completed six laps.

Combined Mass Start
Skiers use the classic technique. In this long-distance discipline, all skiers start the race at the same time. Unlike winding individual courses, the mass-start courses are usually enormous loops.

Relay
Cross-country skiing relays combine the classic and freestyle techniques. Four athletes make up a relay team. The first two racers use the classic technique, and the final two athletes use the freestyle technique.

Curling (Ice Cube Curling Center, Coastal Complex)
The game of curling is more than 500 years old. It involves groups of people sliding heavy stones across frozen water, such as a pond. The earliest written record of curling dates to 1541 in Scotland.

In curling tournaments, called bonspiels, four-person teams take turns pushing a 19.1-kilogram (42.1-pound) stone towards a series of circular targets painted on the floor. Team members sweep the ice in front of each stone with a special broom, to control its speed and direction—its "curl"—in order to get the stones as close to the center target (the "button") as possible.

Men competed in curling at the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924. However, curling was not part of the Olympics again until 1998. Today, the Olympics supports both a men’s and women’s competition.

Figure Skating (Adler Arena and Iceberg Skating Palace, Coastal Complex)
Athletes will compete in five figure skating disciplines in Sochi: individual men, individual women, ice dancing, pairs, and a team event.

Figure skating first appeared in the Summer Olympics of 1908. There were events for pairs and singles, just as there are today.

Individual
Originally, individual figure skating concentrated largely on performing certain elements, such as a figure eight, several times in exactly the same way. In the 1860s, Jackson Haines, an American skating in Vienna, Austria, changed everything. He brought in musicians to play on the ice while he skated. He wore interesting costumes. He performed carefully choreographed routines that included exciting new moves, such as spins.

Technical and artistic abilities are still the standards on which figure skaters are judged today. In all figure skating events, judges give the performers scores on technical and presentation abilities and those with the highest totals win.

Pairs
Just like individual skaters, pairs skaters (defined as "one lady and one man") are judged on technical and artistic accomplishment. Pairs skating features the partners performing the same skills in unison, as well as dramatic overhead lifts and "throw jumps."

Ice Dancing
Ice dancing is similar to pairs skating in many ways—both feature a male-female duo executing a choreographed routine. However, partners in ice dancing may never be more than two arm lengths apart, and most of the time are united in artistic “dance holds.” Ice dancing does not allow the overhead lifts or throws executed by pairs skaters.
The ice dancing competition began in 1976.

**Team Competition**
The team competition involves a team of six skaters: a pair, individual man, ice dancing pair, and individual woman. (No, they're not on the ice at the same time!)

*New in 2014!* The figure skating team competition, stretched over four days, will make its debut in Sochi.

**Freestyle Skiing (Site: Rosa Khutor Extreme Park, Mountain Complex)**
Athletes will compete in ten freestyle skiing disciplines in Sochi. Both men and women will compete in aerials, moguls, skicross, half-pipe, and slopestyle.

Originally a mix of alpine skiing and acrobatics, freestyle skiing developed as a competitive sport in the 1960s.

Freestyle skiing events began to be introduced to the Olympics in the early 1990s.

**Aerials**
An aerial skier glides down a short hill, ending in a jump of about (50 feet). In the air, the skier performs complex acrobatics—including flips, twists, and turns—before landing on their feet and skiing to the finish. Each trick is assigned a degree of complexity, and athletes are judged on their take-off, height, and landing, as well as acrobatic skill.

**Moguls**
A **mogul** is a small, steep hill covered by irregular bumps, requiring tightly controlled twists, turns, and jumps. Two large bumps on the course give the skier enough air to complete an acrobatic maneuver, such as a twist or flip. The athlete chooses one of about four courses to descend. Moguls are a timed event, so an athlete’s “air” score (evaluated by judges based on height, skill, and difficulty) is combined with their speed to determine a score.

**Skicross**
**Skicross** is a mass-start event, with heats of four skiers starting at the same time. The skicross course combines elements of both alpine, cross-country, and freestyle skiing—downhills, straightaways, slalom-like turns, and obstacles.

**Half-pipe**
Skiers perform jumps and acrobatics in a **half-pipe**—a large, U-shaped structure with ramps on either side. Athletes are judged on height, variation in tricks, difficulty, and acrobatic skill.

**Slopestyle**
**Slopestyle** courses are constructed with a variety of obstacles, including rails. Athletes perform jumps and acrobatics, and are judged on how they use the course, as well as variation in tricks, difficulty, and acrobatic skill.

*New in 2014!* Both the half-pipe and slopestyle disciplines will make their debut in Sochi.

**Ice Hockey (Bolshoi Ice Palace and Shayba Arena, Coastal Complex)**
The sport of using a stick to propel a snowball on ice was most likely brought to North America by the British in the 1600s or 1700s. In 1879, students at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, developed the first known set of **ice hockey** rules and organized competitions.

For both men and women, no more than six players may be on the ice while play is in progress. Each team tries to score as many goals as possible by getting the puck (a hard black rubber disc) past the other team’s goaltender and into the net.

Men's ice hockey made its Olympic debut at the 1920 Summer Games. It was moved to the Winter Games in 1924. Women's ice hockey debuted in 1998.

**Luge (Sanki Olympic Sliding Center, Mountain Complex)**
Athletes will compete in four luge disciplines in Sochi: singles men, singles women, doubles, and mixed team relay.
The word “luge” (pronounced loozh) comes from the French word for “sled.” On February 12, 1883, an event called “The Great International Sled Race” was held in Switzerland. A Swiss man and an Australian man tied for first place. They slid down a track at 25.9 kilometers per hour (16.2 miles per hour).

Luge races have grown much faster over the years. With the use of refrigerated tracks and aerodynamic equipment, speeds now regularly reach 140 kilometers (86.9 miles) an hour or more.

Luge for men, women and doubles debuted at the 1964 Olympics.

**Individual**

Sitting down on the luge, athletes push themselves along with spiked gloves before lying down on their backs with their feet pointed toward the finish line. Athletes use their legs and shoulders to steer. To brake, they sit up, put down their feet and pull up on the runners (the sled’s blades).

**Doubles**

Two athletes compete on a slightly larger sled in the doubles competition. Although the doubles event is open to both men and women, men traditionally partner with other men.

**Mixed Team Relay**

In the mixed team relay event, one man, one woman and a doubles pair form a team. An electronic pad at the bottom of the track is touched by a competitor, signaling a teammate at the top to start.

**New in 2014!** Sochi will mark the debut of the mixed-team relay.

**Nordic Combined (RusSki Gorky Jumping Center, Mountain Complex)**

Athletes will compete in three Nordic combined disciplines—individual, sprint, and team. Only men compete in Nordic combined disciplines.

In the 1800s, skiers throughout Norway gathered each winter for a series of ski carnivals. These consisted of athletic competitions combined with entertainment. A small group of outstanding athletes specialized in both cross-country skiing and ski jumping. Nordic combined includes elements from both of these sports.

As in cross-country skiing, there are two major techniques used in Nordic combined: classic and freestyle. In the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, the freestyle technique was used. In Sochi, the classic technique will be used.

Men have competed in Nordic combined individual events since the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924. The team event was introduced in 1988, and the sprint event in 2002.

**Individual and Sprint**

Nordic combined events are divided in two parts. In the first race, athletes glide down a hill to a large jump, which leads to a smaller slope. Athletes are judged for distance and style. The second race is the cross-country portion of the event, where athletes start in the order they finished in the ski-jump competition. A sprint is a shorter race, usually with only one initial ski jump.

**Team**

The Nordic combined team event is structured the same as the individual event. The cross-country skiing race is a relay—an athlete completes a five-kilometer race before touching their teammate to start his race.

**Short Track Speed Skating (Iceberg Skating Palace, Coastal Complex)**

Athletes will compete in eight short track speed skating disciplines in Sochi. Both men and women will compete in 1,200-meter, 1,000-meter, and 500-meter individual events. The men’s relay will race 5,000 meters, while the women’s relay will race 3,000 meters.

Speed skating dates back to 13th century Holland. Short track speed skating originated in 1905 in Canada and the United
States. It is called “short track” because the oval around which skaters race is 111.12-meters (364.6-feet) in diameter. (“Long track” speed skating uses a 400-meter oval.) The first known competition took place in 1909.

Skaters compete against each other, not the clock, as they race around the track, situated in an indoor hockey rink. Speed skating competitions do not take place outside because the wind can slow the skaters down!

In 1988, short track speed skating for men and women, individuals and teams, was a demonstration event at the Olympic Winter Games. In 1992, it was included as a full medal event.

**Ski Jumping (RusSki Gorky Jumping Center, Mountain Complex)**
Athletes will compete in four ski-jumping disciplines. Men will compete in 90-meter individual, 70-meter individual, and a 90-meter team event. Women will compete in a 70-meter individual event.

The first known ski jumper was a Norwegian lieutenant. In 1809, he launched himself 9.5 meters (31.2 feet) in the air before an audience of other soldiers. By 1862, ski jumpers were doing much larger jumps, going longer distances and competing in official contests.

Men’s ski jumping has been part of the Olympics since the first Winter Games in 1924. Competitors are evaluated by a jury on distance and style.

*Individual*
Ski jumping events are divided into “normal hill” and “large hill” disciplines. In each discipline, athletes ski down a ramp toward a lift, which propels them into the jump. The goal is to go as far as possible. Skiers are judged on distance and the style of the jump and landing.

*Team*
In the team event, each team has four jumpers.

*New in 2014!* Women will be participating in the ski jumping competition for the first time in Sochi.

**Snowboarding (Rosa Khutor Extreme Park, Mountain Complex)**
Athletes will compete in ten snowboarding events in Sochi. Both men and women will compete in giant parallel slalom, half-pipe, parallel slalom, slopestyle, and snowboard cross disciplines.

One of the fastest growing sports, snowboard combines elements of surfing, skateboarding, and skiing. Athletes perform stunts and skills using a single wide board strapped to their feet. The first official snowboarding competition was held in Colorado in 1981.

Two snowboard events—half-pipe and individual giant slalom—were introduced at the 1998 Winter Games. In 2002, parallel giant slalom replaced individual giant slalom. Snowboard cross, sometimes shortened to snowcross, was introduced in 2006.

*Parallel Slalom and Giant Parallel Slalom*
Athletes compete side-by-side as they race down a hill filled with narrowly placed gates and turns. The athletes actually run each race twice, once on the right side and once on the left. The giant parallel slalom is a longer race, with more widely spaced gates, allowing for more speed.

*Half-pipe*
Snowboarders perform jumps and acrobatics in a half-pipe—a large, U-shaped structure with ramps on either side. Riders are judged on the height and style of their tricks.

*Slopestyle*
Slopestyle courses, nicknamed “terrain parks” or “jib parks,” are constructed with a variety of obstacles. These obstacles include rails (nicknamed “jibs”), boxes, near-vertical cliffs, snow-covered vehicles, barrels, or “joy sticks”—a round object mounted on a long pole. Another obstacle is a “table top” or “picnic table,” where a wide box is mounted on rails. Athletes perform jumps and acrobatics, and are judged on how they use the course, as well as variation in tricks, difficulty, and
Snowboard Cross
In snowboard cross, four athletes start in a pack down a course, racing against each other over rolling terrain and a series of jumps and ramps. Snowboard cross is a race, so athletes must judge which tricks to perform—too many will slow them down.

New in 2014! Both the slopestyle and parallel slalom disciplines will make their debuts in Sochi.

Speed Skating (Adler Arena, Coastal Complex)
Athletes will compete in 12 speed skating disciplines in Sochi. Men will compete in 10,000-meter, 5,000-meter, 1,500-meter, 1,000-meter, and 500-meter individual events. Women will compete in a 5,000-meter, 3,000-meter, 1,500-meter, 1,000-meter, and 500-meter individual events. Both will also have team pursuits.

People were using iron skates on wooden soles as a mode of transportation on the frozen canals of Holland as early as the 13th century. Competitive racing began by 1676. The Dutch shared the concept of speed skating with other Europeans in the early 19th century.

Speed skating is the fastest human powered, non-mechanical aided sport in the world. Skaters can reach speeds of more than 60 kilometers (37.3 miles) an hour.

Men's speed skating has been included in the Olympics since the first Winter Games in 1924. Women's speed skating was a demonstration event at the 1932 games, and became a full medal event in 1960.

Individual
During the race, skaters must switch lanes every lap without interfering with their competitors.

Pursuit
Although speed skating pursuit is a team event, it is not a relay. All six team members start at the same time, and use drafting techniques (similar to team cycling events) to help each skater have the fastest time. The team has completed the pursuit when all six racers finish the race.

VOCABULARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alpine skiing</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport involving skiing down a mountain or hill. Also called downhill skiing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biathlon</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport involving cross-country skiing and rifle shooting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bobsleigh</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sled with a steering tool on the front and a braking tool on the back. Also called a bobsled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonspiel</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>curling competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choreograph</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>to plan and direct the movements of a dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cross-country skiing</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport where athletes on skis race across a relatively flat landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curling</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport in which athletes slide a large stone across ice to a series of targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>designate</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>to name or single out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>field of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>figure skating</strong></td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport performed on ice skates where athletes are judged on artistic and technical skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>half-pipe</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>hollow semi-circle construction used by skateboarders and snowboarders to take off for jumps and other tricks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ice dancing</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport where couples on ice skates perform choreographed routines based on ballroom dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ice hockey</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport played with two teams of six people on ice skates trying to score a goal by putting a puck in the opposing team's goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luge</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport in which an athlete rides a sled down a course, face-up and feet-first. Also, the name of the sled itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mogul</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>small hill or mound of snow that freestyle skiers must navigate over or around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic combined</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport involving cross-country skiing and ski jumping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympics</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>international sports competition divided into summer and winter games held every four years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relay</td>
<td>adjective, noun</td>
<td>type of team racing where athletes compete in sequence. Also called a relay race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short track speed skating</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>race around a 111.12-meter (364.6-foot) oval track on ice skates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skeleton</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>sport in which an athlete rides an open, bare sled down a course, stomach-down and feet-first. Also the name of the sled itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skicross</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>skiing competition where racers start at the top of a course at the same time. Also called Skier-X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slalom</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>skiing course where racers follow a zig-zag pattern through gates or poles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sled</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>vehicle used to travel across ice or snow, consisting of a flat platform mounted on blades called runners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slopestyle</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>winter sports competition in which athletes choose their own way through a course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snowboarding</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>art and sport of gliding across snow on a short piece of wood and/or fiberglass attached to the bottom of the athlete's foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speed skating</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>race around an oval track, where athletes compete on ice skates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**For Further Exploration**

**Articles & Profiles**
- ESPN: Olympic Sports

**Websites**
- Sochi 2014 Olympics
- Olympics: Sports

© 1996–2015 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved.