

First Feis Info

The information below was written as a guide for our first-time competitors. Please remember that your teacher must be your ultimate authority on all matters pertaining to your participation in Irish dance competitions.

Understanding the Feis syllabus

The Feis syllabus is published by the Feis committee, the group sponsoring the competition. Competitions are divided by experience level, age and type of dance. It is up to the entrant, with the aid of the teacher, to select the appropriate competition(s). Registration for a feis is done online through either FeisWorx or e-feis. Registration forms & payments can be mailed also. Usually the deadline for entries is several weeks before the competition, but it's not unusual for dancers to sign up late and pay a late fee. Here are the basics of how to read a syllabus:

1) Look for your child's experience level. If you've never been to a feis before, you'll be a beginner. (A list of all the levels are: *Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice, Prizewinner, Preliminary Championship and Open Championship.*)

Note: A competition **must** have **five** dancers *at least* for a dancer's status to change. In other words even if a dancer places

1st in a competition he or she cannot advance to the next level unless there are at least five dancers.

To advance to the next level the following placing must be obtained; Placing either 1st 2nd or 3rd in Beginner will allow a dancer to move on to Advanced Beginner. Placing 1st 2nd or 3rd in Advanced beginner will allow a dancer to move to Novice. Placing 1st in Novice will allow a dancer to move to Prizewinner.

Placing 1st in Prizewinner in a soft shoe & hard shoe dance will allow a dancer to advance to Preliminary Championships. In Preliminary championships there are *3 judges* instead of 1 and the scores of the soft shoe & hard shoe dances will be *added together to produce an overall score*. One must win two 1st places to advance to Open Championships. Open Championships is the *greatest status* an Irish dancer can obtain. These dancers are the ones that compete for Oireachtas, Nationals & World titles.

2) The first step upon registering for a feis is to look for your dancer's age level. The age levels are typically; under 5, under 6, under 7, under 8, under 9, under 10, under 11, under 12, under 13, under 14, under 15, 15 & over and Adult. In all cases the age of the competitor on **January 1st** of the year the competition is held will determine the age group. An adult dancer is one who began dancing over 18 years of age and did not dance as a juvenile.

3) The next step in registering is to look for your child's dances. Your dance teacher will tell you which dances are appropriate for which child. Most children will dance soft shoe (reel and jig) for their first competition. They will need to know two steps in that particular dance.

4) Complete and return the entry form. Once you identify the appropriate competition numbers, you can fill out the entry form. Before you send in your form, please make sure to read the feis rules to see if there are any you don't understand, or that make you question your selections. It's generally better to speak to your teacher if you have questions, rather than call the feis sponsor.

Preparing the dancer for the big day

What do I wear? Beginner girls wear their jumper, a white Peter Pan collar short sleeve shirt, poodle socks (can be bought at the Feis from a vendor), green trunks, headband and their ghillies . Beginner girls who are older might wish to wear the school dress instead of the jumper. Beginner boys will wear black pants, black socks, white shirt, green tie, and boys reel shoes. You should not wear your costume in the car, since it will wrinkle! It's fairly easy to change at a feis. Be careful when you drink or eat so you don't spill anything!

What do I do with my hair? The current fashion is for girls to wear *wigs (instant perfect curly hair in less than 5 min)*, or to

curl the hair and to pull it back off the face. The important thing to remember is that the hair should be neat. If you have short hair but long bangs, use your headband to pull hair out of your eyes.

Anything else? You should refrain from showy jewelry (i.e. large earrings, distracting necklaces or bracelets). Bring a few extra safety pins with you, and a piece of thin ribbon to tie your competitor number around your waist (if you forget don't worry, a vendor will probably be selling them). Check that you have all the pieces of your costume together, and that your shoes are in your bag.

When to arrive? Hopefully, the syllabus will state when your competition should begin. Beginner competitions may be first thing, or they may immediately follow figure (group) dancing, which often starts first thing. Competitions run on Irish Time, which means everything is approximate and usually *runs late*.

What to expect at the Feis

When you arrive: The first thing you need to do is pick up your competitor packet at the Registration Table. Your packet will include your competitor number which shows your competition number(s) on the reverse. Pick up a stage schedule so you can locate your competition number(s) and identify which stage you will be dancing. On your competitor number make a note next to each competition number which dance it is and on which stage so you know where to go when one dance is over.

How do the Stages work?

Check out the stages and figure out where and when your competitions are. Each stage is numbered or lettered, and each has a list of the competitions being held at that stage, in the order they will be run. As each competition finishes, the next one on the list will begin. DON'T WORRY if you seem to have a conflict where two competitions might be run at the same time. Because of this tendency to run competitions for the same age/ability group on different stages, officials are used to holding one competition while dancers finish in another. If you have questions about or issues with what is going on, ask the stage manager, one of the volunteers or another parent. NEVER speak to the judge.

How are competitions run?

Your child will be briefed at class on stage etiquette and what to expect when on stage, but here's what you can expect to see. All dancers are lined up facing the judge. If there are more children than can fit across the stage, they may make a *second line* behind the first. Two children from the same school should NOT stand next to each other. If they dance the same steps any mistake will be noticeable to the judge. The music will start, and at a nod from the judge the first two dancers step forward. In a beginner competition, usually the stage manager will be with them and assist them in starting properly. As soon as they have finished they will bow and the next two dancers begin, and so on down the line. You may certainly clap for your child, but please do not shout and distract the next pair of dancers (judges notice

this). When the entire line has finished, they will exit the stage and the next line (if required) will form. If the child's next competition is not immediately on that stage the child is free to leave the stage area.

How do you get the results?

Go to the Results board and look up your competition number. For all competitions below Championship level, results are posted in a *designated area*. It usually takes at least half an hour before results are posted, and can take a good deal longer. Winners are listed by competitor number so make sure you have your number handy. If you've won something, you should go to the Awards Room. You will need your competitor number so they can verify the right person is picking up your medal. Most beginner prizes are medals, not trophies. It is also usually where you can go to get your marks (competition scores), usually for a small fee. Sometimes marks are not available the same day and will be mailed to you.

Other useful information

There are usually vendors at dance competitions selling dance shoes, poodle socks, apparel, celtic jewelry and many items. As stated in the feis syllabus, absolutely NO VIDEOTAPING OF DANCING COMPETITIONS IS ALLOWED. Each teacher's Irish dance steps are considered proprietary material. There is

also no picture taking allowed during the competitions as the flash of a camera might distract a dancer.

Final reminders for beginner dancers

1) Check your shoelaces before going on stage! Double knots are MANDATORY!

2) Keep your chin up. Look at where the wall and ceiling meet. **Ignore** the other dancer on stage! Do your steps as you know them; if the other dancer starts or ends differently, assume the other dancer is WRONG.

3) If you make a mistake, or bump the other dancer, keep going. The judge may not have seen your mistake. Try not to make an "Oh no" face. Make good use of the stage. *Be confident* that you belong there, because you're prepared.

4) After your bow, look out for the other dancers as you go back to your place in the line so you don't get run over.

5) SMILE! You love dancing so let it show. A smile makes a dancer seem at ease & **confident** on stage. A smile also helps a dancer stand out & be remembered by the judge.