

IRISH DANCE COMPETITION LEVELS

MOVING THROUGH THE RANKS

WHO'S MAKING THE RULES?

The [Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America \(IDTANA\)](#) operates in tandem with [An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha \(CLRG\)](#) in Dublin, Ireland. The emphasis of the IDTANA is to promote Irish Dance throughout North America. The information in this document offers a summary of the IDTANA Dancing Competition Rules for the [Western U.S. Regional Council](#), and specific guidelines that pertain to students of the Rince Na Grá School of Irish Dance competing in solo dance events.

HOW IS EVERYTHING ORGANIZED?

Solo dance competition events at a feis are categorized according to skill level as follows: **Grades** (Beginner through Prizewinner), and **Championship** (Preliminary and Open). These are explained in detail below. Competition groups are further divided by age as determined by the age of the competitor on January 1 of the year in which the competition is held. For example, a dancer who will turn eight at any time during this calendar year was seven-years-old on January 1, therefore that dancer competes in the “Under 8” (U8) category for the entire calendar year.

GRADE LEVELS: BEGINNER THRU PRIZEWINNER

Solo dance competitors in the Grade levels will perform two steps for each dance entered. There are seven competition dances at Grade level, each a separate event: **reel, light jig, single or “hop” jig, slip jig, treble jig, hornpipe, and traditional set**. Four of these seven dances are considered the “main” dances: reels, slip jigs, treble jigs, and hornpipes. Placement in the other dances (light jigs, single jigs, traditional sets, or the occasional treble reel) only counts towards advancement in that specific dance from one grade level to the next, not from the grade levels to the championship levels. Grade level competitions require one adjudicator per event. Prizes are awarded in proportion to the number of entries and to the degree of proficiency shown.

First Feis

First Feis is a category for very young or very new dancers who want to experience a feis. You may only compete in the First Feis category one time. You may either have all of your dances in First Feis, or none of your dances. Regardless of whether you win first place in one, some, or all of your First Feis dances, you must compete in Beginner I in your second feis, even if your second feis is the very next day (referred to as “back-to-back feiseanna”).

Beginner Grade (also called “Beginner I”)

A first place finish will advance the dancer into the next grade (when there are 5-9 dancers). If there are ten or more dancers, and first or second place award will advance to the next grade. Talk to your teacher about what dances you are ready to perform. Typically, Beginner 1 competitors at Rince na Gra start with reels, light jigs, and possibly slip jigs.

Advanced Beginner Grade (also called “Beginner II”)

A first place finish will advance the dancer into the next grade (when there are 5-9 dancers). If there are ten or more dancers, a first or second place award will advance to the next grade. Beginner II competitors at Rince na Gra should be ready to compete in reels, slip jigs, light jigs, single jigs, treble jigs and hornpipes.

Novice Grade

A Novice is a competitor who has moved beyond the Beginner skills and is ready to perform more difficult steps in competition. For hard shoe dances (treble jig and hornpipe), Novice competitors are offered a choice of music tempo: “slow”(also known as Oireachtas speed), or “fast” (also known as traditional speed). In contrast, Beginner and Advanced Beginner hard shoe tempo is always traditional speed. A Novice who wins a 1st place will advance to the Prizewinner category in that particular dance. Novice dancers at Rince na Gra may also be ready to compete in a traditional set.

Prizewinner Grade

A Prizewinner is an advanced level competitor who has qualified out of the Novice grade. A dancer remains at Prizewinner Grade until qualified for Preliminary Championship by achieving a first place award in all four main dances.

Adult Beginner

An Adult Beginner is a competitor who started taking lessons after the age of 18 or has been out of conventional competitions for five years.

CHAMPIONSHIP LEVELS

Championship competitors will perform a minimum of two rounds of competition: one soft shoe round and one hard shoe round. Instead of the two steps performed for each dance at Grade levels, Championship competitors will perform either 3 reel steps or 2.5 slip jig steps for the soft shoe round (boys/men must perform reel for this round); and either 3 treble jig steps or 2.5 hornpipe steps, and often a set dance for the hard shoe round. Championship events require at least three adjudicators. Scoring for championship events is based on the Irish Point system (see “Understanding Championship Scoring” written by Jim Montague, www.broesler.com/scoring.htm). Prizes are awarded in proportion to the number of entries and to the degree of proficiency shown.

Preliminary Championship

In accordance with IDTANA rules, this event is open to a competitor who has placed 1st in the required soft shoe and hard shoe competitions at the Prizewinner level. A Rince na Grá student is expected to place 1st in all four Prizewinner Grade dances (reels, slip jigs, treble jigs and hornpipes). Prelim competitors are typically required to perform a soft shoe dance (reel or slip jig) and a hard shoe dance (treble jig or hornpipe). A feis often also requires a set dance as a third dance.

A dancer who has three Overall 1st place Preliminary Championship wins (with five or more dancers) will move to the Open Championship level. Upon achieving a 3rd overall win in Preliminary Championships, a dancer must move immediately to Open, even in the case of back-to-back Feiseanna. This includes two-round and three-round Preliminary Championships.

Open Championship

This is the highest level of competition. In accordance with IDTANA rules, a dancer must compete in Preliminary Championship in order to qualify for Open Championship, and must qualify via the method currently in place (i.e. three 1st place wins). Competitors are required to perform a soft shoe dance (reel or slip jig) and a hard shoe dance. A feis usually requires a third set dance, too.

Competitors who win 1st place in the Open Championship category cannot return to a Preliminary or Prizewinner Grade competition. However, if after competing for two full feis years at the Open Championship level a dancer has not placed 1st, 2nd, or 3rd, he/she may opt to return to Preliminary status, at the TCRG's discretion.

WHAT ARE “THE MAJORS”?

The Majors are events that offer only Championship competitions--no Grade level competitions. The three common Majors are the *Oireachtas* (aka Regional Championships), the North American Championships (aka Nationals), and the World Championships. Some of the other Majors that are open to foreign competitors are the All Irelands, the All Scotlands, the Great Britains and the British Nationals, to name a few.

Registration for majors is restricted to eligibility and sometimes geographical location. Only a TCRG may register students for a Major. Each competitor represents his/her Irish dance school, and TCRG's are expected to present students of appropriate dancing caliber, regardless of a student's competition level.

Open Champion and Preliminary Champion dancers are usually eligible to compete at **Oireachtas**. Rince na Grá may also allow Prizewinner Grade dancers who have consistent placements to compete at the Oireachtas if teacher discretion determines that the dancer has a reasonably high likelihood of obtaining a recall (i.e. making it to the final round).

To be eligible to compete at the **North American Championships**, dancers must be Open Champion level, or must have qualified at Oireachtas.

To be eligible to compete at the **World Championships**, dancers must compete at Oireachtas, regardless of their current competition status, and must qualify either at the Oireachtas or at Nationals (for us, the North American Championships).

HOW DOES A RINCE NA GRÁ DANCER PROGRESS THRU EACH LEVEL?

Eligibility for each competition level is determined by IDTANA rules and the TCRG's discretion. Dancers compete representing their school, and teachers are expected to present students of appropriate dancing caliber for the given level. If a teacher determines that a student is unprepared for a certain level, that student may need to refrain from competing in events at that level even if he/she is eligible.

Any dancer new to competing will enter the Beginner competitions if he/she is eligible for Beginner status, or the Advanced Beginner competitions if he/she has been taking lessons for longer than one year. At teacher's discretion, advanced level Rince na Grá students may be permitted to start competing at the Novice or Prizewinner level, even if they have never before competed in a feis, simply because these students are already performing the advanced level steps well.

In general, Rince na Grá students are encouraged to remain at the Grade level for which they are eligible for as long as possible. This allows time for the student to prepare the more difficult steps and skills in class that will be needed for the next level of competition. It is very common for dancers to have some of their dances at different Grades. Remember that being able to dance a difficult step is not the same thing as being ready to compete with that step. Teacher discretion prevails in regards to entry to the next competition level.

A FINAL WORD

Competition should motivate students to practice with increased discipline and to continually improve their dancing technique and skills. Hopefully, this will be rewarded with medals and trophies, but judging is subjective, competitions can be close, and results will vary. Keep it in perspective, and keep it fun!

Feiseanna are an opportunity for dancers to enjoy Irish Dancing in a unique way. Competition placements are more than outweighed by the character developed by the dancers. Friendships are built and strengthened within our Rince na Grá Family and the Irish Dance Community. The memories, life lessons learned, and friendships will last long after the dance shoes are hung up for the last time.