

ICG Guidelines: Ensuring Fair Competition

Adopted May 26, 2006

Update January 20, 2010

Mission

International Costumers Guild (ICG) members have developed these guidelines to promote fairness and equity in masquerade competition and judging. We hope these guidelines will help make both novice and accomplished costumers' experiences with masquerade competition and costuming more comfortable and enjoyable.

Context

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist masquerade directors in writing and implementing rules to ensure fair competition in the masquerades they run. These guidelines have been developed to serve international masquerade competitions, but they can be adapted and applied when writing rules for any costume competition at any convention.

While competition names may vary by event and venue (including names such as "Cosplay Competition" and "Costume Contest"), for consistency's sake we will refer to all staged competitions as "Masquerades."

A "Masquerade" is a staged show where entries are presented before an audience. These presentations may take the form of fashion walks or short theatrical vignettes. Entries may compete for awards in two major areas: presentation (based on how the costumes appear when presented), and workmanship (based on close examination of the costumes backstage).

Any competition that draws both entrants and audience from outside the host country can be considered an international competition. The ICG has voted to recognize the competitions at WorldCon, at Costume-Con and at Anime North. Information on official recognition is not within the scope of this document; for more information contact the ICG Corresponding Secretary (corr-secretary@costume.org).

While masquerade directors are our intended audience, we believe any participant (competitor, crew member or judge) in any masquerade should be able to learn from these guidelines.

Organization

The guidelines in this document are grouped into 6 sections.

- The Masquerade Director's Role
- Fair Judging Guidelines
- General Competition Guidelines
- Skill Division Guidelines
- Special Considerations for Costume Recreation
- Special Considerations for Historical Competitions

The Masquerade Director's Role

In any masquerade, the director's word is law. The rules you choose and the judgment calls you make set the tone for the entire masquerade.

In your official capacity as masquerade director we ask you to be considerate and fair in your interaction with staff and contestants. An important step in this direction is to write down all masquerade rules and make them available to all contestants and staff members before the event.

The guidelines we offer here can form the basis of a fair and equitable set of masquerade rules. Many of these guidelines (such as the definition of "professional") are intentionally vague. Our preference is to help you cultivate your sense of good judgment, rather than make decisions for you. Please adapt and interpret all guidelines in the manner that best fits your venue and your competitors.

Judging Guidelines

You cannot run a fair competition without respectable and impartial judges. Writing judging instructions and including them in your published rules is an important step in establishing the standard of impartiality you require, and in ensuring that your entrants also know what is expected of the judges.

A good judge brings his or her experiences and opinions to the table. Your judges should be given the freedom to recognize excellence and achievement in the way they see fit. Specific award names and quotas should not be mandated.

A judge should base his or her opinion of an entry only on what he or she sees on stage or in the workmanship judging area. Other influences, including comments from the MC, should be disregarded.

If an entry is replayed due to technical problems or crew error, a judge should do his or her best to disregard the first appearance.

Judges are expected to avoid conflicts of interest. A judge should inform you if he or she may be influenced by a personal or business relationship. It is your responsibility to consult with your judging panel to find an appropriate solution. Solutions may include a judge excusing himself or herself from deliberations where the competitor in question is involved, or removing himself or herself from the judging panel.

If any of your judges appear to be incapable of judging fairly and impartially, whether due to personal issues or intoxication, please remove them from the judging panel.

When interacting directly with competitors (either in an in-person workmanship judging situation or after the competition), judges, like masquerade directors, are asked to be fair and considerate.

A consistent award scheme is valuable in promoting fairness and equity between different competitions. "Excellence deserves award" is a good guiding principal for any judge. If an entry shows merit, it should be given an award. The ICG recommends two classes of awards, Minor and Major, and a standard naming convention for such awards. Whether an entry is given a major or minor award is at the discretion of the judging panel.

- Minor awards do not affect future division placement. We suggest that judging panels use "Honorable Mention" to identify minor awards.
- Major awards do affect future division placement, and may be named in any way the judges deem appropriate.

While most awards, major and minor, are judged purely on the merit of the entry in question, there is a group of major awards that is judged instead on the relative merit of the entry with respect to its competitors. These "competitive" awards most commonly include "Best in Division" and "Best in Show" and have a greater impact on future division placement than other major awards.

General Competition Guidelines

As masquerade director, it's your responsibility to see that your contestants are provided with quality technical support. This does not mean you must provide complicated and expensive theater tech; it does mean that your technical crew is expected to provide the sound and lighting promised to the contestant. Tech rehearsal is important because it's a chance for your contestants to work with your crew and make sure their needs are documented so they can be met.

If equipment problems or crew errors interfere with the presentation of an entry, you should offer the contestants an opportunity to re-run their entry with corrected lighting and/or sound cues.

Masquerade audiences (and directors and judges) rarely like to see the same costume over and over again year after year. To prevent this from happening, it's not uncommon for masquerade directors to implement some version of the "rerun rule." It's not just audience boredom, though, that drives masquerade directors to do this; there are questions of fairness associated with it.

It's unsporting to enter a costume that has won a major award in a larger masquerade with relatively stiff competition in the same division at a smaller masquerade with less competition. This is often disparagingly referred to as "sandbagging."

As masquerade director, it's your decision that will determine whether a costume can be entered in your masquerade. We feel that there are circumstances where costumes may be entered in multiple competitions:

- A costume that has not won an award in competition may be entered in another masquerade.
- A costume that has won a major award may be entered again in a competition of similar size at the discretion of the masquerade director (usually if the audience, judges and slate of competitors are significantly different).
- A costume that has won a major award in competition may be entered again in a larger competition.

A costume that has won a competitive award (see Judging Guidelines) in international competition should not be entered in competition at any other masquerade.

Fairness concerns about repeat entries may be offset if the competitor is willing to enter the costume in a more experienced skill division.

If you determine it would not be fair to enter a costume in competition in any division, please consider allowing the entrant to present the costume as an exhibition entry (not judged in competition).

Skill Division Guidelines

Competition with one's peers is the cornerstone of fairness. We believe it's unreasonable for somebody who is new to costuming to compete against competitors with years of masquerade experience for every award.

The ICG recommends a skill- and experience-based division of masquerade entrants into competition groups to ensure that both novice and experienced costumers have a reasonably equal chance to win one of the big competitive awards given in masquerades.

The division system is not intended to provide recognition; the awards themselves do that. It exists merely to promote fairness. Outside of any single competition, division ranking is meaningless.

The ICG has chosen a three-tier division system for large international competitions. If your competition is smaller or draws a narrower range of skills and experience, please adapt or dispose of this division system as appropriate.

The Novice division exists to encourage people who are new to costuming and masquerades to compete. The Journeyman division is an interim division for costumers who have consistently won awards in the Novice division, but who feel they are not yet ready to compete in the Master division. The Master division is open to any competitor who wishes to enter.

The ICG has also defined a "Junior/Youth" class so young costumers who participate in the design and construction of their own costumes need not compete against adults unless they wish to. We have chosen not to define an age limit for this class; you must make that decision for yourself.

For many masquerades, a simple two-tier system comprised of "Novice" and "Experienced" can be adequate and fair. Again, please consider what is most appropriate to your masquerade.

There is no committee or organization that tracks all costumers' wins for placement purposes. It's not practical or even possible. There are just too many competitions happening around the world. An entrant's placement in any division is based on a combination of the honor system and the discretion of the Masquerade director.

Because the skill divisions are designed to protect less experienced contestants from being forced into competition against more experienced competitors before they are ready, they are necessarily described in terms of restrictions. We offer the following suggested restrictions on who may not enter in each class:

Master:

- Any competitor may enter in the Master division

Journeyman:

- Professional costumers may not enter in the Journeyman division.
- A contestant who has competed and won in the Master division at an international competition may not enter in the Journeyman division.
- A contestant who has won "Best in Show" or "Best Journeyman" at an international competition may not enter in the Journeyman division.
- A contestant who has won more than three major awards in the Journeyman division in international competition may not enter in the Journeyman division
- Awards won at regional competitions may be counted towards placement at the discretion of the costumer and the masquerade director.
- Minor awards may be counted towards placement at the discretion of the costumer.

Novice:

- Professional costumers may not enter in the Novice division.
- A contestant who has competed and won in any division other than Novice at an international competition may not enter in the Novice division.
- A contestant who has won "Best in Show" or "Best Novice" at an international competition may not enter in the Novice division.
- A contestant who has won numerous major awards in the Novice division at international competitions is encouraged to enter in the Journeyman division
- Awards won at regional competitions may be counted towards division placement at the discretion of the costumer and the masquerade director.
- Minor awards may be counted towards placement at the discretion of the costumer.

Junior/Youth:

- A child wearing a costume designed and built entirely by an adult should be entered either in the adult's appropriate skill division or entered as an exhibition (out of competition) piece.

A competitor may always choose to compete in a higher division than that in which the masquerade director has placed him or her. He or she may not choose to compete in a lower division.

Major awards given in jest may or may not be counted at the discretion of the costumer. Such awards should be counted if the presentation in question was intentionally comic.

If an entry has won multiple awards in the same competition, only the highest award need count towards placement (see Judging Guidelines). For example, if all awards won by an entry are minor awards, the contestant must count one minor award. If major awards are included, the contestant must count one major award. If a competitive award is given, that award is most important when determining later placements.

Special Considerations for Costume Recreation

Some masquerade competitions and venues lend themselves to or actively promote the recreation of costumes from media and art. A "Recreation" must be based on at least one pictorial representation of the costume but it need not be based on a physical garment. Sources may include but are not by any means limited to costumes depicted in television and film (whether live-action or animated), two-dimensional art (illustrations, cover-art and photographs) and three-dimensional art (sculpture).

Judges cannot be expected to recognize every recreation costume and source. Your entrants should be encouraged to provide documentation showing or describing the costumes they are recreating, to aid your judges in evaluating the merits of their entries.

It is your responsibility to ensure that any submitted documentation is given to your judging panels. To provide a level playing field, it is best that you specify in your rules the minimum required documentation and maximum recommended documentation for an entry.

Because costume recreation can draw on skills that differ from those used when creating original designs, you may wish to instruct your judges to consider offering separate competitive awards for recreated and original designs.

Special Considerations for Historical Competitions

There are several ways in which historical competition is different from the masquerades presented at science fiction, fantasy and other media-focused conventions. Some of these differences call for special attention.

All entries in a historical competition are expected to have a basis in period costume or design; documentation that supports an entry's historical origin is suggested for all entries. Appropriate documentation can help the judges understand the nature of an entry and influence the judges' decisions. To provide a level playing field, it is best

that you specify in your rules the minimum required documentation and maximum recommended documentation for an entry.

To help the judges evaluate each entry on its own merit, entries may be categorized as either Historical Recreation (i.e. a faithful reproduction of a period garment) or Historical Interpretation (i.e. a design based on a period garment or style that may intentionally depart from the style of the period). Recreation and Interpretation categories may be judged separately at the discretion of the masquerade director.

Judging criteria are often very different in historical competition. An entrant's skill division placement in historical competition isn't directly linked to his or her placement in other convention masquerades. For example, a competitor may enter in the Novice division in the Historical Masquerade and in the Journeyman division in other competitions. As always, placement is at the discretion of the masquerade director.

Historical recreation and living history organizations often grant awards for costuming. These awards may be counted towards division placement (again, at the discretion of the costumer and the masquerade director). Some large organizations offer their own international awards. International historical costume awards, such as the SCA's Laurel in Costuming should be considered in placement. It is suggested that the recipient of such an international award should compete in the Master division when entering a historical competition.

If you have any questions or concerns about this document...

Your input is valued. If you have any questions or concerns about these guidelines, please contact the ICG Corresponding Secretary (corr-secretary@costume.org). Your correspondence will be referred to the appropriate officer or committee for review and consideration.