

IRISH DANCE COMPETITION LEVELS

INFORMATION FOR MOVING THROUGH THE RANKS...

GENERAL INFORMATION

The North American Feis Commission (NAFC) is the governing body for sanctioned competitions in our region. Only students of teachers certified by *An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha* (CLRG, or in English, the Irish Dancing Commission) are eligible to compete at sanctioned feiseanna. Teelin School of Irish Dance is part of the US Southern Region.

The information in this document offers a summary of the NAFC Dancing Competitions Rules for the Southern Region and specific guidelines that pertain to students of the Teelin School of Irish Dance competing in **solo dance** events. Dancers (and their parents) are encouraged to carefully read the syllabus of any feis in which they plan to enter. The complete competition dancing rules may also be found either at the NAFC website or at the Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America (IDTANA) Southern Region website (www.northamericanfeiscommission.org or www.idtana-southernregion.com).

Solo dance competition events at a feis are categorized by **Grade level** competitions and **Championship** competitions. Competition groups are further divided by age.

Age groupings are 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 8 at anytime during this calendar year was 7-years-old on January 1, therefore that dancer qualifies to compete in the "Under 8" (U8) competitions for the entire calendar year. (For the purposes of this rule a competitor whose birthday occurs on January 1 shall be deemed to be under the age attained on that date.)

WHAT ARE THE GRADE LEVEL COMPETITIONS AT A FEIS?

Solo dance competitors in the Grade levels will perform 2 steps of each event entered. There are five competition dances at Grade level, each a separate event: **reel, light jig, slip jig, treble jig** and **hornpipe**. Some feiseanna offer other special competitions such as treble reel or set dance, however, those events do not "count" toward competition level progression. (Note: A hop jig or single jig event may also be offered, but Teelin School does not teach steps for these dances, so Teelin students should not enter those events.)

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.

BEGINNER GRADE (sometimes called "Beginner I")

A Beginner is a competitor who has not yet taken a full year of Irish dance lessons, thereby giving beginners a full year with such status. Because the "feis year" (Jan-Dec) is different than the "school year" (Sept-June), dancers who began lessons in September may keep Beginner status until December of their second year of lessons. A Teelin student is expected to remain in Beginner category for as long as he/she is eligible unless otherwise told by his/her teacher. A Beginner must move into the Advanced Beginner category for all dance events the next calendar year.

ADVANCED BEGINNER GRADE (sometimes called "Beginner II")

An Advanced Beginner is a competitor who does not qualify as a Beginner (defined above), nor any subsequent levels. A Teelin student is expected to remain in Advanced Beginner category for as long as he/she is eligible unless otherwise told by

his/her teacher. An Advanced Beginner who wins 1st, 2nd or 3rd place will advance to the Novice category in that particular dance the next calendar year.

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. (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.

PRIZEWINNER GRADE (sometimes called "Open Grade")

A Prizewinner is an advanced level competitor who does not qualify as a Beginner, Advanced Beginner or as a Novice. A dancer remains at Prizewinner Grade until qualified for Preliminary Championship according to official NAFC rules and his/her dance teacher's guidelines.

ADULT BEGINNER

An Adult Beginner is a competitor who never took Irish dancing lessons as a juvenile and is over 18 years of age. Other **Adult Grades** follow the descriptions above, except that all adult hard shoe competitions are performed at traditional speed.

WHAT IS CHAMPIONSHIP LEVEL COMPETITION AT A FEIS?

Championship competitors will perform a minimum of two rounds of competition: one soft shoe round and one hard shoe round. Instead of the 2 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/or a set dance for the hard shoe round.

Entrants in any Championship event may not enter in any other regular grade solo events, but may enter in Figure Dances and/or special competitions for which they are eligible per the syllabus (e.g. traditional set, treble reel, non-traditional set dance).

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 NAFC rules, this event is open to a competitor who has placed 1st in both a soft shoe and hard shoe competition at the Prizewinner level. A Teelin student is expected to place 1st in all four Prizewinner Grade dances OR to earn a recall at Oireachtas (if permitted to compete at Oireachtas by teacher discretion) before competing in a Preliminary Championship. (Light jig is not performed in Championships, so the "four" dances are reel, slip jig, treble jig and hornpipe.)

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 can also opt to require a set dance as a third dance, or instead of the treble jig/hornpipe.

A dancer who wins two 1st place Preliminary Championship awards in one calendar year will move to Open Championship the following year (as of January). If the second 1st place win does not occur within the same feis year as the first win, as

soon as the second win is achieved the dancer must move up to Open Championship level immediately. (In the case of back-to-back Feiseanna only, which occur on successive days, the 1st place win in the first feis will not require a change of the dancer's status for the second feis.)

OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

This is the highest level of competition. In accordance with NAFC 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. two 1st place wins).

Competitors are required to perform a soft shoe dance (reel or slip jig) and a set dance. A feis can also opt to require a third dance (choice of treble jig or hornpipe).

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 teacher'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 (certified teacher) may register students for a Major. Each competitor represents his/her Irish dance school, and teachers 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**. Teelin may also allow Prizewinner Grade dancers who have consistent placements (including at least one 1st place in each of the dances that will be performed in their age group that year) to compete at the Oireachtas if teacher discretion determines that the dancer has a high likelihood of obtaining a recall (i.e. making it to the final round).

For more detailed information about Oireachtas, please see the Teelin publication entitled **Everything You Need to Know About an Oireachtas** available at www.teelin.com.

To be eligible to compete at the **North American Championships**, dancers must be Open Champion level, or must have qualified at Oireachtas. Teelin will only send dancers to the North American Championships if they have a high likelihood of obtaining a recall per teacher discretion.

Per NAFC rules, placing in the Oireachtas or the Nationals does not change the status of a competitor at feiseanna.

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). Teelin will only send dancers to the World Championships if they have a high likelihood of obtaining a recall per teacher discretion.

There are also three NAFC Championships: the Senior Belt (for ages 17&Over), the Junior Trophy (for ages 13-17) and the Minor Trophy (for Under 13). The date and venue of each

of these championships rotates annually, and is printed on the syllabus of each NAFC feis. Dancers are eligible to compete in the appropriate age category if they have won 1st place of an Open Championship competition at a sanctioned NAFC feis within one calendar year of the Belt/Trophy Championship.

HOW DOES A DANCER PROGRESS THROUGH EACH COMPETITION LEVEL?

Eligibility for each competition level is determined first by NAFC rules, and second by teacher 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.

The status of a dancer for Grade level competitions follows the eligibility for each Grade during the given calendar year. According to NAFC rules, the status of a dancer does not change unless there are five or more dancers in a competition. Therefore wins in events of less than five dancers will not count toward eligibility for the next Grade level. (In the case of repeated wins in age groups which tend to have small competition groups, teacher discretion may determine that the student is ready to progress to the next level.)

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. (Sometimes a "First Feis" competition is offered, which is open only to dancers competing for the first time.) At teacher's discretion, advanced level Teelin students may be permitted to start competing at the Novice level, even if they have never before competed in a feis, simply because these students are already performing the advanced level steps well.

Competitors have the option to remain in the same Grade level for the entire calendar year. When eligible to progress to the next Grade level in a particular dance (i.e. has won 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place in an Advanced Beginner competition, or has won 1st place in a Novice competition), the competitor must move that dance to the next Grade level on January 1.

In general, Teelin students are encouraged to remain at the Grade level for which they are eligible for as long as possible. This helps a dancer to build confidence in competition. More importantly, it also 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. If a Teelin student qualifies for the next Grade level and, per teacher discretion, is ready to perform the more difficult steps of the next Grade level, the student may be permitted to move that particular dance up before the end of the calendar year. **Check with your teacher before registering for a higher grade event at the next feis.** (Note: Knowing how to dance a more difficult step is NOT the same as being ready to perform that step in competition. Teacher discretion prevails in regards to entry to the next competition level.)

For Teelin students competing in Novice Grade events, a dancer who wins 1st place (in a competition with at least five dancers) is typically permitted to progress to Prizewinner Grade for that particular dance at the next feis. Check with your teacher to ask about changing your entry BEFORE the next feis. Again, this is at teacher's discretion, provided that the student is ready to perform the appropriate steps for Prizewinner Grade.

A dancer remains at Prizewinner Grade until qualified for Preliminary Championship; dancers do not "move up particular dances", as is the case in the previous Grade levels. Teelin students are expected to win 1st place in all four Prizewinner Grade events (reel, slip jig, treble jig, and hornpipe) to be eligible to advance to Preliminary Championship.

The Teelin School of Irish Dance offers an annual in-house competition which serves as an introduction to competing for Teelin students. It gives dancers the experience of performing in front of a judge in a smaller and more familiar environment than at a feis. The competition categories at the Teelin Irish Dance Festival (formerly called the "Teelin Competition") are NOT the same as those of a sanctioned feis; therefore results do not count toward progression in levels.

WHAT COSTUMES ARE PERMITTED AT EACH GRADE LEVEL?

Per the NAFC rules, "Dancers competing in First Feis (if offered), Beginner and Advanced Beginner grades must wear a class costume (for girls, Teelin School Dress or Advanced Beginner Dress), or a skirt and blouse. All other categories are excluded from this rule."

For guidelines that pertain specifically to Teelin dancers, please see the "Competition Costumes" page of the Teelin website, www.teelin.com.

Per to NAFC rules, make up is prohibited on a dancer in the Beginner or Advanced Beginner grades up to and including the Under 12 age group. Any Teelin dancer who chooses to wear make up is advised to do so modestly.

Appropriate Irish dance shoes are required of all dancers during competition. A competitor should wear modest attire when not dancing, and conduct becoming of a lady or gentleman is expected at all times, per both the NAFC rules and Teelin School guidelines.

WHAT'S THE HURRY?

There isn't one!!! Competition should motivate students to practice with increased discipline and to continually improve their dancing technique and skills. First and foremost, dancers should enjoy dancing well. Hopefully, this will be rewarded with medals and trophies, but judging is subjective, competitions can be close, and results will vary. **Success should not rely solely on competition results and awards.** Teelin dancers (and parents!), PLEASE remember to keep it in perspective, and keep it fun!

All Teelin dancers represent the Teelin School of Irish Dance. Dancers are expected to be courteous of ALL competitors, and particularly supportive of dancers from their own school, even when competing against each other in solo dance competitions. Anything contrary to these basic principles of team spirit will not be tolerated, and in extreme cases may result in a dancer not being permitted to compete representing the Teelin School of Irish Dance.

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

