

ICG Guidelines: Ensuring Fair Competition

Adopted May 24, 1992

Amended February 21, 1994

Amended May 26, 2006

Amended January 20, 2010

Amended [Date] 2019 [DRAFT: 9/13/2019]

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.

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 awards are based on how the costumes appear when presented onstage. Workmanship awards are based on close examination of the costumes backstage. Awards for research and documentation are also appropriate, particularly for historical and culturally significant costumes. Costumes assembled from “found items” where no craftsmanship was involved are eligible for Presentation awards.

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. While masquerade directors are our intended audience, we believe any participant (competitor, crew member or judge) in any masquerade can benefit from these guidelines.

Organization

The guidelines in this document are grouped into 6 sections:

- The Masquerade Director's Role
- Fair Judging
- General Competition
 - Facilities
 - Rehearsals
 - Archiving Competitions and Awards
- Masquerade Tiers
- Skill Divisions
- Special Considerations
 - Costume Re-creation
 - Historical Competitions
 - Documentation
 - Technical Workmanship Differences
 - Large Costumes
 - Re-entering Competitions

The Masquerade Director's Role

In any masquerade, the director's word is law. Your rules and judgment calls set the tone for the entire masquerade. A masquerade director should be considerate and fair when interacting 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 on the event website and/or through social media, as well as in hard copy at the event. These guidelines should form the basis of a fair and equitable set of masquerade rules. Many of these guidelines (such as the definition of "professional costumer") are intentionally vague. Our goal is to help you cultivate a sense of good judgment and fairness when applying the rules. Please adapt and interpret all guidelines in the manner that best fits your venue and competitors.

Fair Judging

You cannot run a fair competition without respectable and impartial judges. We recommend selecting judges who are knowledgeable in the field and have appropriate skills to judge craftsmanship and performance aspects.

Write instructions for judges and include the instructions in your published rules. This is an important step in establishing a standard of impartiality and transparency. Judging systems vary. It is good practice to state the judging system your event uses. For example, if the judges use a system of points to award merit, these points should be standard and consistent across all skill divisions.

Good judges bring their experience and opinions to the table. Judges should be given the freedom to recognize excellence and achievement in the way they see fit. You should not mandate specific award names and quotas, but should leave those decisions to the judges' discretion.

Judges should base their opinions of an entry only on what they see 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, judges should do their best to disregard the first appearance.

Judges are expected to avoid conflicts of interest. Judges should inform you if they may be influenced by a personal or business relationship. It is your responsibility to consult with the judging panel to find an appropriate solution. Solutions may include a judge's recusal from deliberations where the competitor in question is involved, or removing the judge from the judging panel entirely. In a situation requiring a judge's removal, we recommend using your discretion whether to replace the judge or continue the contest with fewer judges.

Judging should be based on the quality of technical workmanship and stage presentation.

Discrimination based on race, color, creed, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or body type with regard to the costumer or the costumed character's interpreted protected classes listed above is a detriment to the inclusive environments of masquerades and should not be tolerated. We recommend a zero tolerance policy for discrimination, which you should communicate to your masquerade staff, judges, and all participants on or off stage. Costuming is an art and art is open to interpretation. Discrimination stifles interpretation, creates a toxic environment, and should be grounds for removal from the event.

If any judges appear to be incapable of judging fairly and impartially, whether due to personal issues, social biases, lack of knowledge, inebriation, or intoxication, we recommend removal from the judging panel as the best approach.

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

Workmanship Judges must be considerate when inspecting a competitor's work. Always ask for permission before approaching or touching the competitor and costume.

A consistent award scheme is essential in promoting fairness and equity between different competitions. "Excellence deserves award" should be the guiding principle for any judge. If an entry shows merit, it should be given an award.

Competitions may have a significant number of competitors in a single division. Judges should not arbitrarily assign a competitor to a higher skill division merely to fill the ranks, without permission of the competitor. Instead, honor the competitor with a major award in their division.

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.

We suggest that judging panels use "Best [Descriptor]" or "Excellence in/for [Descriptor]" to identify major awards.

- Competitive awards using such titles as "Best in Division" and "Best in Show" are the only awards given relative to the other entries. These awards have the greatest impact on future division placement. Judges are not obligated to present a competitive award even if there is an entry in the category.

We generally advise against using a "Best" descriptor if the entry is the only one of its type. For example a "Best Historical Dress" award when there are no other Historical Dress entries is better acknowledged as "Excellence in Historical Dress."

General Competition Guidelines

Facilities

As masquerade director, you are responsible for providing your contestants with quality technical support. As soon as possible, you should publish the available technical specifications and amenities that will be available to contestants during the event.

These specifications should include: Stage dimensions, ADA accessibility accommodations, a diagram of the stage layout with access points and default entrance and exits clearly marked, lighting options, sound requirements, door heights/widths for all spaces where a contestant is required to enter and exit, and any other useful information you can provide regarding rules and regulations of the facility. Specifications should be posted on the event website, with links on social media and progress reports.

If possible, consider requesting your contestants' accessibility requirements and any limitations (mobility, hearing, vision, or other costume-related challenges) as a part of their initial registration form. The sooner you know what's required, the sooner you can arrange for accommodations.

It is good practice to allow the contestant to explain their needs and then find a way to address them, rather than assuming that a specific accommodation will work. Disabilities, like costumes, do not come with cookie-cutter solutions. Your contestants are the best judge of what will and will not work for them to access the stage safely.

Though some masquerades provide custom lighting cues, individualized soundtracks, and backdrop video projection to support the entries, a masquerade does not require complicated and expensive theater tech; however, should you choose to offer these options, you should ensure that your technical crew can provide the sound, lighting, and stage hands required to fulfill those options you do offer to your contestants.

Rehearsals

Tech rehearsal is a vital opportunity for your contestants to work with your crew, and Master of Ceremonies, to make sure their needs are documented so they can be met.

The tech and stage crews should mark cues, and the MC should review the entry and mark correct pronunciations as necessary.

If possible, provide contestants with additional rehearsal space (a room with the stage layout marked in tape will suffice) to keep your stage free for other activities during the event. Ensure that there is at least one outlet for contestants to practice with music.

If equipment problems or crew errors interfere with the presentation of an entry, you should offer the entry an opportunity to re-do with the tech errors corrected.

Archiving Competitions and Awards

Masquerades that publicly advertise their use of the ICG Guidelines are strongly encouraged to submit photos and names of their participants, including any awards won, so that their Masquerade entries can be included in the ICG Archives. Entries and awards should be archived, with photographs of the competitors in costume, on the event's social media, website, and print media. Other masquerade directors may also consider archiving their masquerade information with the ICG. Email the complete list of contestants and awards with any accompanying photos to the ICG recording secretary. Participants may opt to be included in the archives under their cosplay name or pseudonym, but should use the same name when entering in multiple Masquerades. Participants may opt out of including their name, or may choose to be included only as the costume name for the sake of anonymity. This is recommended in the case of costumers under the age of legal majority.

Masquerade Tier Guidelines

In these Guidelines, the word "tier" refers to the size and scope of a convention and, by extension, its masquerade. Masquerades draw a wide variety of entrants. The ICG recognizes four tiers of competition:

- Local: Small local competitions may be hosted by libraries, clubs, or conventions with attendees and entrants from a narrow area.
- Regional: Attendees and entrants come from a wider region; multiple metropolitan areas may participate in the convention.
- National: Large competitions draw attendees and entrants from around the country but don't generally attract attendees from outside the country.
- International: Any competition that draws both attendees and entrants from around the country and outside the host country's borders.

While competition at a larger tier competition does not reflect on a costumer's level of skill, and all costumers should be welcome to compete, awards that are won at a larger tier should be weighed more heavily when determining an entrant's skill division (see below). Masquerade directors may determine their competition tier based on their attendees and entrants, and advertise their tier as they see fit.

ICG-accredited International competitions meet the ICG's *Accrediting International Costume Competitions* criteria.

Skill Division Guidelines

Competition with one's peers is the cornerstone of fairness. We believe it is unreasonable for someone new to costuming to compete against other costumers who have years of masquerade experience for the same award.

The ICG recommends a skill/experience-based division of masquerade entrants into competition groups to ensure that both novice and experienced costumers have a reasonably equal chance to win the major and competitive awards given in masquerades. The skill divisions are designed to protect less experienced contestants from being forced into competition against more experienced competitors before they are ready, and are necessarily described in terms of restrictions.

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 suggests a three-level division system for large international competitions. If your competition is smaller or draws from a narrower range of costumer and technical skills and experience, please adapt 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. It is good practice to require anyone who is a known professional in the field, or has had exceptional success in past masquerades to enter as a Master in competition.

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. While the ICG has not defined the age range for competition in a Junior/Youth class, as it should be at the discretion of the masquerade director, it is commonly accepted that a person who has not yet reached the age of majority would be considered in such a category unless they wish to compete in any higher category.

For many masquerades, a simple two-level division system comprised of Novice and Experienced can be adequate and fair. Again, please consider what is most appropriate to the competitors who have registered for 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.

We offer the following suggested guidelines regarding competitor placement in each class:

Master:

- Any competitor may enter in the Master division.
- This is the division where professional costumers should compete.

Journeyman:

- Professional costumers may not enter in the Journeyman division.
- A contestant who has competed and won in the Master division at an equal or larger tier competition may not enter in the Journeyman division.
- A contestant who has won "Best in Show" or "Best Journeyman" at an equal or larger tier competition may not enter in the Journeyman division and should compete in the Master division.
- A contestant who has won more than three major awards in the Journeyman division at an equal or larger tier 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 may not enter in the Novice division.
- A contestant who has won a competitive award in an equal or larger tier competition may not enter in the Novice division.
- A contestant who has won numerous major awards in the Novice division 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 contestant who has not reached the age of majority and made, assembled, or designed the costume may compete in the Youth division.
- Costumes that are designed and built entirely by an adult should be entered for workmanship judging in the adult's appropriate skill division though the Youth is still eligible for Youth presentation awards.

Competitors may always choose to compete in a higher division than their previous awards indicate or in which the masquerade director has placed them. They may not choose to compete in a lower division.

Major awards given in jest are only counted at the discretion of the costumer. Such awards should be counted if the presentation in question was intentionally comic.

If a costumer has won multiple awards in the same competition for a single entry, only the highest award at that event need count towards placement (see Judging Guidelines). For example, if all awards won by an entry are minor awards, the contestant should count one minor award. If they also receive a major award, the contestant should count one major award.

Special Considerations

Costume Re-creation

Some masquerade competitions and venues lend themselves to or actively promote the re-creation of costumes from media and art. A "Re-creation" 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 are not expected to recognize every re-creation costume and source. You should encourage your entrants to provide documentation that shows or describes the costumes they are re-creating, to aid your judges in evaluating the merits of the entries. (See below.)

It is the masquerade director's responsibility to ensure that any submitted documentation is given to the 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. We recommend that judges take advantage of documentation and references, especially when they are not familiar with the source material, fandom, culture, or other category.

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.

Historical Competitions

There are several ways in which historical competition is different from the masquerades presented at science fiction, fantasy, anime, and other media-focused conventions.

All entries in historical competitions 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 historical competitions.

Documentation

Documentation can be a single reference photo, a more complete packet of references and progress photos, or even a thesis project providing justification and documentation for each creative decision along the way. Entrants should always be encouraged to provide documentation for the judges. When compiling the rules for your competition, you should include any minimum or maximum documentation requirements, and how many copies an entrant should provide.

Judges may offer special awards for research and documentation as they see fit.

Technical Workmanship

Masquerade entries often include a wide variety of workmanship techniques, including sewing, armor crafting, 3D printing, and embellishments of all sorts. Judges should be aware that bigger and flashier does not always mean better and more impressive, nor does the use of more advanced and niche technological advancements give a costumer an unfair advantage. Every technique comes with its own unique challenges and each entry should be judged by how well those challenges are met.

For example, a fabric arts based costume may be judged by the quality of their seam finishing, lining technique, and pattern drafting or alterations, while a 3D-printed prop can be judged by the print quality, layer smoothing, and finishing techniques, or if the entrant created their own digital 3D-modeling design.

With the constant advancement in technology and its use in costuming, it is not unusual to come across costumes made with materials or techniques with which judges may be unfamiliar. It is a good practice to utilize judges who specialize in different areas of costuming so that they can field questions from other judges regarding the nature of the materials used. For example, a fiber arts judge may not be familiar with thermoplastics or foam crafting, whereas an armor crafter may have little knowledge of fiber arts but be well versed in metal work, chainmail, and other armor styles including thermoplastics and foam. It is essential to ensure that judging remain fair and unbiased with regard to workmanship, no matter whether the judge is familiar with the material and technique or not. When in doubt, judges should award appropriately based on the workmanship done and the appearance or presentation of the costume.

Judges are encouraged to offer major and competitive awards like “Best Armor” or “Best Seamster” in Division as appropriate.

Large Costumes

A large costume is defined as a costume that exceeds or extends past the size of the costumers normal body size. Whether it's a form fitted costume with wings, or large suit of foam or

thermoplastic armor, mechanized battle mech, or immense dragon with puppetry, large costumes will require logistical decisions before the masquerade by the director and careful consideration when judging due to the number of components and scale of design and creation. Presenting and judging large costumes can be a daunting task, but can be made easier with appropriate consideration beforehand by incorporating the following recommendations into the masquerade rules and contestant information disseminated before the competition.

Costumers presenting large costumes should be encouraged to provide documentation of their fabrication process, including samples of materials during judging so that the judges can accurately form an opinion on the workmanship aspects. Costumers with large costumes should contact the masquerade director in advance to discuss their needs and possible accommodations so that reasonable efforts can be made to ensure the safety of the costumer, masquerade staff, other contestants, and spectators.

No matter what the large costume is that is being presented, if the contestant has not brought a handler with them to help navigate the stage environment, a volunteer should be assigned to them to ensure that they are appropriately accommodated and can enter and exit the stage area safely. Handlers can also assist with providing documentation to the judges or communicating answers if the costume impairs communication with the costumer.

Rehearsals with large costumes may be necessary to ensure that the contestant is able to accurately navigate the stage without assistance, or, the masquerade director may decide that the costume can only be presented offstage to accommodate for its size or safety requirements. Large costumes should not be disqualified simply because of their size, but should be displayed in a way that they can be safely seen and judged appropriately.

Masquerade directors may feel that the best time for large costumes is at the end of their competition, however, it may be very difficult for the costumer to wear the costume through the entire contest. If this is the case, utilizing a volunteer or handler to help the costumer remove pieces as necessary and then put them back on in advance of their appearance on stage may be required to ensure the safety of the costumer.

It is essential that all costumes be considered on their own individual merits and awarded appropriately, so it is imperative that judges take care to weigh the merits of large costumes as they would with costumes made in any other method or specialty.

Re-entering Competitions

It is unsporting for competitors 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. There are circumstances where costumes may be entered in multiple competitions, including:

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 major award in competition may be entered again in higher skill division.

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 that it would not be fair to allow a contestant to compete in any division of the masquerade competition, please consider allowing the entrant to present the costume as an exhibition entry (not judged in competition).

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

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

[General comment: We use these words interchangeably: Entrant, Contestant, Entry, Costume. We should be careful about consistency. I think I caught a bunch of them but I don't think I caught them all. Another reread, after these edits have been approved/rejected, should check for any inconsistencies in general. BRM]