

# FEIS TIPS BOOKLET



PRESENTED BY  
THE NASHVILLE MUSIC CITY FEIS

## Feis Competitions

Feis, pronounced "fesh" and spelled out as Feiseanna, is the Irish word for Irish dance competition. The term can include many aspects of Irish culture including dance, sports, music and storytelling, and Irish arts and crafts. Local Feis competitions can include several of these events in various combinations, however often there is only Irish step dancing.

At a Feis, there are many styles of dancing and levels of competition. Dancers can compete in the following solo dances: Reels, light jigs, slip jigs, single jigs, treble or hard jigs, hornpipes and set dances. Type of dance movements, type of dance shoe and musical timing 2/4, 4/4, 6/8, 9/8, etc categorize these dances. Usually these dances can be divided into seven levels of competition. All of these levels are divided by age, usually a one to two year span.

Each feis posts a syllabus a few months before the feis date. Our Feis website posts a syllabus each year and can be found at: <http://musiccityfeis.com> It is a good idea to enter the feis when the syllabus becomes available, please know there are NO refunds. Feis registration can be done via the mail by filling out an index card per the instructions on the syllabus, or electronically if the feis requires registration by efeis. There is an entrance fee for each feis, and it is considered a family fee of \$15 depending on the feis and is normally a mandatory fee added onto a dancer's total fees upon registration. Dancers do pay a fee per dance and can range from \$6-8 for solo dances and team entries. Championship level dances range from \$30-\$40 which could include 2 rounds of dances plus a set or the set may be offered separately for a fee \$10.

Feis competitions usually begin between 8 and 9a.m. There is usually an opening ceremony with the National Anthem sung. Depending on the venue, the Feis could be indoors or outdoors. There 3-6 stages running at the same time. The competition numbers are listed at each stage. The NMCF suggests dancers arrive at the competition a 1/2-hour before it begins to "map out" which dances will be performed at which stages. There may be a loud speaker announcing which dances are being performed at which stage throughout the day. Watch the stages, as sometimes you can't predict how fast they will move along (depends on judge, musician, size of the competitions, etc.). Also, try to get to know the other competitors in your competition, that way you can move from stage to stage together!

When the stagehand calls your competition, make sure your shoes are tied, socks are pulled up and your hair is fixed. Also, check to make sure costume is securely fastened. Line up for your competition and be sure you are not standing next to a fellow student from your school as they normally like them to be staggered out. The judge or stagehand may move you, because they want to make sure that you can dance without the help of your friends!

The stagehand will line you all up on the stage probably in lines of 15 to 20. Dancers perform 2 or 3 at a time & all dancers have to start to the music as soon as the previous two/three have completed their dance. If the person you are dancing with does not start when you start, do NOT stop. Most likely you are in the right & they were not paying attention, so just keep dancing. They will most likely start at the next 8 bar, but you will have the advantage because you actually started on time. Note: Please pay attention and count the number of bars to music and don't watch the other dancers, the people in the audience or your parents. Look directly at the judge, concentrate, & smile!

Also, there will be live musicians playing the accordion, piano, or violin or a combination of these instruments. Since it is live, the tempo can range from fast to slow depending on the musician, so it is very important that you listen to the music and dance accordingly. Dancers usually perform 2 steps of each dance although some Feis competitions designate that dancers only perform one step and you should pick the steps you have been working on and most comfortable with! After you have danced your two steps, bow to the judge and then bow to the musician and step back into line. Do NOT step off the stage until all competitors have finished competing. After you have competed, there will be a designated area to go to see how you have placed. Sometimes placements can be held stage side and this will be announced if that is the case. But before you receive the results, check out to see what stage you are competing at next. NMCF would not want you to miss another competition because you were checking on the previous competition results!

After you have finished competing and you have received your medals and/or trophies, make sure you stay around to watch your fellow dancers and most importantly, watch the champion dancers. It is really important to watch the progression of Irish dancing and all the cool things you will be able to learn! And most importantly have fun!

## Feis Categories:

The **First Feis** category is for all boys and girls who have never competed in a Feis before. This level is offered at most Feis competitions, but not all. Music City Feis now offers this category.

The **Beginner** level is open to boys and girls who have never won a first, second or third place in that particular dance at any Feis. Dances performed are the reel, the light jig, single jig, and the slip jig (girls only). Dancers move from stage to stage depending on the dance and receive individual awards for each dance.

The **Advanced Beginner** level is for dancers who have placed first, second or third at the Beginner level for that particular dance. Dances performed are the reel, light jig and slip jig (girls only). Dancers move from stage to stage depending on the dance and receive individual awards for each dance.

The **Novice** level is for dancers who have placed first or second at the Advanced Beginner level for that particular dance. Dances performed are the reel, jig (light or treble), slip jig (only for girls), and fast hornpipe. Dancers move from stage to stage depending on the dance and receive individual awards for each dance.

The **Prizewinner** level is for dancers who have placed first at the Novice level for each dance. Dances performed are the reel, treble jig, slow hornpipe, slip jig (girls only).

At the **Preliminary Championship** level dancers perform one soft-shoe and one hard shoe dance for a combined score. Dances performed are reel or slipjig and treble jig or hornpipe. Dancers do not move from stage to stage and receive only one award for their combined scores of all dances performed.

The final level is **Open Championship**. Dancers at this level regularly compete on a regional, national, world level. Dances performed are reel or slipjig and set piece. Some Feises have a treble jig or hornpipe competition before the set piece. Dancers do not move from stage to stage and receive only one award for their combined scores of all dances performed.

# What to Bring to A Feis

- The girls get hot in those dresses between dances. Some girls wear body suits underneath and bring shorts so they can hop out of the costumes during gaps in the dancing.
- It is a good idea to have a large, button-up shirt available to cover the girls' dresses for meals on the fly.
- Food is generally available for purchase at the feis, however a few snacks and a water bottle can be awfully handy (particularly when your dancer, who has refused to eat all day, suddenly cries "Starvation!" as she should be lining up for her next event). It is not a good idea to plan to run out for a meal during the day, as the schedule may change or your teacher may want to squeeze in some practice.
- Bring things for your dancers and their siblings to do between dances. Yes, they may never touch them, but at least you'll have an answer when they wail, "I'm bored." Books, cards, and one-piece games and crafts seem to be the favorites. Avoid noisy items, as noise is always a problem.
- Bring things for yourself to do, or perhaps more to the point, if you're dragging along a somewhat reluctant spouse, bring things for him or her to do. It has been our experience that the reluctant spouses do the most whining. This is a great opportunity to whip out that book, magazine, or crossword puzzle they won't let you throw out because they keep meaning to get to it when time permits.
- Videotaping and photography of the dancing is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED -NO EXCEPTIONS!** Okay, you probably could videotape the awards, although that is often easier said than done, considering the crowds. However, if you even walk around with a video camera in your hand during the dancing, a member of the feis staff will remind you that **YOU MAY NOT VIDEOTAPE OR PHOTOGRAPH THE DANCING!** This is a rule from on high (Dublin, that is). It is strictly enforced, to protect the propriety of the choreography. If you refuse to stop videotaping or photographing you may be asked to leave and your dancer may be disqualified from the dance he/she is in.

# What the Judge "Looks" For When Judging Solo Competitions

- **TIMING** -every step must be on time to every beat of the music (especially important in the hard shoes). This is the number one reason for not winning!
- **CROSSED FEET** -dancers must have one foot in front of the other with their toes facing outward (one knee when dancing).
- **NO MISTAKES** -whatever steps are performed on the RIGHT foot must be performed exactly the same way on the LEFT foot.
- **UP ON TOES** -in the soft shoes dances, dancers must be really up on their toes no heels touching the ground.
- **TOES ARE POINTED** -in the soft-shoes dances (reel, jig, slipjig) toes must be extremely pointed (some judges might call this toes not down). Judges never want to see the soles of the shoes.
- **START ON TIME TO MUSIC** -dancers must know when to start to the music. For First time Feisers and Beginners, Feiseanna will usually have one or two stagehands that help count-off.
- **ARMS DO NOT MOVE** -all dancers should make sure that they do not use their arms to perform the steps
- **GETTING ALL BEATS** -this is for the hard shoe dances (treble jigs, sets, hornpipes). Dancers must get all clicks and trebles clearly and to the beat of the music.
- **OVERALL APPEARANCE** -costume, hair, smiles, bowing

There are cases that a dancer may accidentally slip or fall and we encourage you to get right back up if you can or if you cannot the judge may stop the competition temporarily and may allow you to dance your dance again if you're not injured.

# Girl's Beginner/Advanced Beginner Feis Attire

When you are ready to compete in a Feis the following is a list of the items that you will need:

- 1 **School dresses or jumpers** –For beginners and first time Feisers, it is recommended that you wear a simple white blouse (described below) with a navy skirt or skirt of your school color or a school jumper depending on age. School dresses are usually worn from Advanced Beginner on up.
- 2 **White long sleeve blouse** purchased at JCPENNY ([www.jcpenny.com](http://www.jcpenny.com)) or a school uniform store. The blouse **must** have a rounded collar, NOT pointed. The shirt must be **IRONED** before day of feis and tucked into jumper.
- 3 **White poodle socks** – purchased at the studio.
- 4 **Sock Glue** – white poodle socks must be pulled up as high as they can go and sock glue put around calf to secure – it washes off with soap & water. Can be purchased at the studio.
- 5 **Tiaras -can be purchased from Claires or a feis** but we don't recommend fancy attire for beginners. The focus is on the dancing and not the costuming. This is good advice for all levels.
- 6 **Soft shoes (ghillies)** – can be purchased from [irishshoes.com](http://irishshoes.com).
- 7 **Safety Pins** or a thin ribbon to secure number
- 8 **Bobby Pins** to secure headband

# Wigs & Hair Curling Instructions

## Wigs

Wigs are recommended to be worn from Advanced Beginner on up. Beginner dancers are not required to have a wig and it may be better if you do not especially if this is your First Feis.

## **Girl's Curling Hair Instruction**

There is a long tradition that, when competing, a girl's hair is worn extremely curly and pulled back in a headband. This is done by curling the hair the night before or by wearing a wig.

## Hair Curling Instructions

**Remember:** all it takes is patience, endurance, & preferably, a sleeping child Practice is recommended before the day of the competition

## Equipment:

1. Alcohol -based mousse (this dries faster) (pre test in case child is allergic)
2. Dippity-Doo gel, White Rain mousse & hairspray
3. Rollers (made by Goody-available at Walgreens, etc)
4. Medium size -short hair or very curly hair
5. Small size -long hair or straight short hair
6. 50 to 60 rollers used, some kids it could take up to 100
7. \*soft spikes curlers can be also used & purchased at:
8. ([www.geocities.com/Eureka/Enterprises/8668/index.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Eureka/Enterprises/8668/index.htm))
9. Small rubber band or small flat barrette
10. Poodle Headband
11. End papers
12. One cooperative dancer with clean, VERY dry hair. If you roll the hair up wet, it will be wet when you take it out! Wear a button front shirt to sleep in



## **Instructions:**

1. Part Hair from back of ear over top of head to other ear, positioning small rubber band or barrette into ponytail on TOP OF HEAD so that it will be covered by headband when curlers are removed
2. Clip the "ponytail" out of the way and section off top flat part of head directly behind ponytail
3. Put some mousse in a small dish
4. Sections should be no longer than the length of your curler, widths definitely no wider, preferably narrower, in order to have a dry, snug curl.
5. It is much easier to remove the rollers if you make sure that the LATCH is on the top of the roller when you roll it, hinge on the bottom.
6. Dip your fingers in the mousse & put it down that whole length of the section of hair, making sure to get some on the VERY END.
7. Starting at the very end of the hair, roll it all the way to the top of the head, placing the roller vertically against the head.
8. Be sure to roll all the way from the end of the hair. Don't wrap the ends around the roller.
9. It doesn't matter in which direction you roll the hair.
10. Roll top section of hair with latch against part, or "ponytail," & hinge towards back of head.
11. Ponytail may be set after this section, or when entire head is done. Many rollers must be used in ponytail; when curlers in ponytail are pulled, they should be the same tightness as rest of hair, so be sure not to put too much hair on these rollers.
12. Use same technique as the top to set next section of hair, directly below top section. Circling sides & back of head
13. Again, take very thin sections of hair just the length of the roller all the way around head.
14. You should now have a row of rollers, laying up & down, circling the top section.
15. Start the next row directly under the first row.
16. This row should end up touching the bottom of the first row.
17. Keep this up until the whole head is rolled. There should be no gaps in the rollers. In other words, you will see no blank spaces where there is no roller.
18. Wrap the whole head in a hair net or scarf to keep the rollers in while sleeping

**Taking it Down:**

1. Make sure she is wearing something that she doesn't have to take off over her head.
2. Put headband around her neck.
3. Starting at the bottom row, unlatch each roller and pull it straight down.
4. Do not unroll the curl, just pull the roller out.
5. When you finish the bottom row, DON'T go to the row above it
6. Take each curl that is out of the roller, one at a time.
7. Split each curl into three or more sections and roll each section around your finger as you separate it.
8. This will give you many very thin curls for every roller you put in.
9. Spray each row as you finish it.
10. If your daughter has bangs, the bangs can stay down, just make sure they look nice...maybe a quick curling iron touch.
11. Pull headband up and pin it with at least six bobby pins

# IRISH DANCING FEIS CHECKLIST

## Girls:

- 1 Shoes – polished with black shoe polish – make sure laces are double-knotted
- 2 Pacific blue/turquoise skirt – pressed and ironed
- 3 White blouse – pressed and ironed – tucked into dance trunks
- 4 White poodle socks – clean and pulled up as high as they can go with sock glue.
- 5 Hair is curled (sleep with curlers over night) with some of it pulled back in a barrette (if needed) with headband tip pointing up – please use bobby pins to secure the headbands
- 6 No jewelry allowed to be worn
- 7 Bring safety pins to secure your competitor number
8. Face is Clean and absolutely NO hair in face.

## Boys:

- Shoes – polished with black shoe polish – make sure laces are doubled knotted
- Black dress pants – pressed and ironed – make sure they are not too short
- Black shirt – pressed and ironed – tucked into pants
- Black socks
- Black belt – silver buckle is OK
- Tie
- Hair is combed and looking nice

\*Come to the feis a little early to warm up by performing your exercises and then practice your steps. When your competition is called, line up. You will dance two at a time and the person you are dancing with will NOT be dancing the same steps as you.

## **FEIS Last Minute Reminders**

- SMILE
- STAY ON TIME TO MUSIC
- LIFT YOUR LEGS – ESPECIALLY IF THE MUSIC IS SLOW
- AVOID MISTAKES
- WATCH USING YOUR ARMS – POSTURE
- DON'T LOOK DOWN – LOOK AT THE JUDGE OR FIND SOMEONE OR SOMETHING TO LOOK AT
- BOW AT THE END OF YOUR DANCES
- WALK BACK QUICKLY INTO YOUR ORIGINAL POSITION IN LINE
- STAND STILL WHILE OTHER DANCERS ARE DANCING
- LOOK CONFIDENT!!!
- HAVE FUN AND RESPECT YOUR FELLOW DANCERS!

# The "Big" Competitions

## The North American Nationals, The Oireachtas, The World Championships, The All Scotlands, Great Britains, All Irelands, Australian Nationals, and the British Nationals.

The North American Championships are held yearly in different areas throughout North America. It is held the fourth of July weekend and dancers must have earned a recall in the Oireachtas in order to dance. Dancers from all over the world are invited to compete, so there will be a mix of dancers in every competition.

The Oireachtas, depending on location is held every year around the first weekend in December for Southern Region. It is a competition that qualifies dancers for the World Championships held in Ireland. Think of it like the Olympic trials -all dancers will be able to compete, but only the top few will qualify for the World Championships.

The World Irish Dancing Championships are held every year during Easter. The best dancers come from all over the world to compete. For years it has been held in Ireland, but that has finally changed and will be held in various countries including the US on a rotating basis.