

# CU BALLROOM COMPETITION GUIDE

*Adapted from the Boston University Ballroom Dance Team and The Holy Cross Ballroom Dance Team with additions by Rushan Guan and Crystal Song*

Gearing up for your first ballroom competition? Check out our guide below for more info about styles and levels, dressing for success, what to bring, and more!

## STYLES AND LEVELS

Most collegiate competitions allow dancers to compete in four different styles:

- International Standard: waltz, tango, foxtrot, quickstep, Viennese waltz
- International Latin: chacha, rumba, samba, jive, paso doble
- American Smooth: waltz, tango, foxtrot, Viennese waltz
- American Rhythm: chacha, rumba, bolero, swing, mambo

Competitors can register in one (or sometimes more) levels based on experience:

- Pre-Bronze/Newcomer
- Bronze/Beginner
- Silver/Intermediate
- Gold/Advanced
- Master of Syllabus (not frequently offered at collegiate competitions)
- Novice (not frequently offered at collegiate competitions)
- Pre-Championship
- Championship

## YCN POINTS SYSTEM

The YCN (Youth & College Network) recognizes five consecutive levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Pre-Championship, and Championship. The YCN points system awards points to couples based on how they place at competitions. This allows couples to measure their level of experience and register for competitions accordingly. Placing in the final of a certain level earns you points simultaneously in that level and the ones below it. Once you have earned 7 points in a level, you can no longer dance at that level.

Points are earned as follows:

*In the level you danced in:*

- 3 points for 1st place
- 2 points for 2nd place
- 1 point for 3rd place
- 1 point for 4th-6th place, if a quarter-final took place

*In the level below:*

- 6 points for 1st place
- 4 points for 2nd place
- 2 points for 3rd place
- 2 points for 4th-6th place, if a quarter-final took place

*For all levels below:*

- 7 points for 1st-6th place

To illustrate: placing 4th in Gold International Rumba with a quarter-final round will give you 1 point in Gold, 2 points in Silver, and 7 points in Bronze (thus automatically eliminating you from any Bronze International Rumba events).

It should be noted that while “dancing up” at competitions is sometimes permitted, “dancing down” is considered highly unethical, unfair to other competitors who now have to compete against more experienced dancers, and may result in your being called out by the panel of judges.

If you are going to your first competition and competing at the Newcomer or Bronze level, rest reassured: the people you are competing against will have the same amount of experience as you!

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT A COMPETITION

- Competitions are always on the weekends, and either one or two days long. Most start early in the morning, around 8:00 or 9:00 am.
- It is helpful to arrive early so you have the chance to warm up and test out the floor!
- Every couple is issued a number, which will be used to identify you in callbacks (usually displayed on a screen near the floor). Keep your number! If you are dancing more than one style, you will need it again.
- Each event is typically divided into multiple heats of approximately 20 couples each, which dance for 90 seconds. Judges mark the couples they want to callback. Successive rounds are danced, each with fewer and fewer heats as the number of couples decreases, all the way until the final round. Finalists are ranked in order, and rewarded with ribbons.
- Keep a hurry-up-and-wait mentality: very few schedules hold to form, with some running hours behind. Stay near the floor so as not to miss your events, and keep an eye on your partner -- you don't want to be scrambling trying to locate each other when your number is up.
- When not dancing, club members often claim a section of the spectator area and cheer for our couples on the floor: shouting out numbers can draw attention from the judges!
- We will usually make a GroupMe and use it to communicate important or urgent updates (i.e. location, itinerary changes). Please do not spam the GroupMe.
- **For overnight comps:** we will stay with hosts from the club holding the competition. We usually bring \$3 each to contribute to small thank-you gifts for our hosts.
- Overall, it will be a very long day, so get lots of sleep!

## DRESSING FOR SUCCESS: WHAT TO WEAR AND BRING

Advanced dancers often wear fancy dresses and tailcoats out on the floor. For newcomers, though, full-out costumes are not required and often not allowed. Below are some suggestions about clothing and styling for newcomers!

### Leaders

- Standard/Smooth:
  - white or black long-sleeved dress shirt with a tie
  - black dress slacks or tuxedo pants, nicely fitted
  - optional: black vest to accentuate the formal look, tie or bow-tie that matches your partner's attire
  - hair gelled back, aiming for a clean-cut and refined look
  - beards, sideburns, and goatees strongly discouraged
- Latin/Rhythm:
  - black or white tight-fitting shirt, preferably long-sleeved
  - black dress slacks or tuxedo pants, nicely fitted
  - hair gelled back, aiming for a clean-cut and refined look
  - beards, sideburns, and goatees strongly discouraged

### Follows

- Standard/Smooth:
  - long hair arranged nicely -- buns, French twists, or something similar
  - short hair gelled down
  - no loose hairs -- use lots of gel, hairspray, and bobby pins!
  - makeup heavier than everyday looks, especially on eyes and lips

- dress or skirt that falls below the knee and above the ankle, allowing for free movement -- remember that your partner steps between your legs
- nice elegant jewelry, such as pearl and rhinestone pieces that attract attention
- Latin/Rhythm:
  - neat and slicked back -- tight ponytails, braids, or buns
  - dramatic stage makeup -- think bold and sexy, accentuating the eyes
  - short dress or skirt that is not too restricting, ideally in a bright color to make you stand out in the crowd!
  - lots of accessories -- hair pins, glittery jewelry, flesh-tone fishnet stockings

## YOUR PACKING LIST

Including, but not limited to, the following:

- Costume(s) or other attire
- Accessories
- Makeup and hair products
- Shoes
- Water and snacks
- Money for food and transportation
- Camera if you have one
- For two-day competitions: sleeping bag, change of clothes, and toiletries
- CU Ballroom jacket to show your team spirit!

## WORKING THE FLOOR

To really get the judges' attention (and that callback!), you and your partner should be on point from the second you set foot on the floor to the second you step off. Judges are always watching, and sometimes they will grab your number as you're walking off the floor!

Here are a few dance-specific tips for cultivating the right mood!

- Waltz and Viennese waltz: elegance and grace; float across the floor angelically.
- Tango: serious and dramatic; leaders, your partner is a prize -- show her off.
- Foxtrot: like taking a leisurely Sunday stroll in the park; smile and look relaxed.
- Chacha and samba: flirty and sensual, a teasing game between partners.
- Rumba: steamy and romantic; gaze deep into each other's eyes.
- Jive: big smiles; look like you're having the most fun you've ever had in your life.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Everyone takes away something different from competitions. And of course, guidelines can't really encapsulate the full experience: the excitement of getting your first callback or dancing your first final, seeing that bright little ribbon in your hand, cheering for your teammates, collapsing onto the bus home at the end of the day.

If you don't get called back, don't get discouraged. Judging can be random and subjective; sometimes there are no answers. Just go out there, compete, and enjoy yourself!

This might all be a little overwhelming. But rest assured, there will always be advanced dancers around to answer questions, support you, and help out with last-minute hair issues.

If you're worried that you might not have what it takes to become an accomplished ballroom dancers, consider this quote:

*"Can't act. Slightly bald. Can dance a little."*

- anonymous studio verdict on Fred Astaire's original screen test, 1933.