

Newcomer Tid Bits

- When the weekend begins, grab a schedule or check the online schedule for the Workshops and Competitions that you want to attend.
- Social Dancing: don't be afraid to ask anyone to dance! We were ALL Newcomers at one time.
- Other than the marked reserved tables, all seating is open.
- If you have questions, ask any Newcomer Teachers or Mentors we introduce at the meeting.
- WCS events are one of the best ways to improve your dance, so HAVE FUN!
- It's about the JOURNEY, not the destination. The WCS community becomes family for many of us!

Newcomer Competitors

Jack & Jill...your partner is selected randomly

Strictly Swing...you sign up with your partner

Pro-Am Strictly Swing...You ask a Pro if they will do a Strictly Swing dance with you (a private lesson is commonly required.) Check carefully for divisions, since some events combine Newcomer and Novice

Funtests... There are generally several other contests that are more casual and fun. Check the schedule and rules to see if these contests would be fitting for you.

- **Check the schedule...** Identify your competition times and plan accordingly, allowing extra time.
- **BIB Numbers...** Don't forget your BIB number and safety pins. Don't lose your bib number. If you do, go to registration. (*Contest start will not be held for lost bibs.*)
 - ♦ Location: Regardless of gender, Follower bibs on lower back; Leader bibs on upper back.
 - ♦ Jack & Jills: Both Leaders & Followers wear bibs.
 - ♦ Strictly Swings: Only Leads (& all Ams in Pro-Am) wear bibs.
- **Be Early ...**Go to the ballroom early to warm-up. This helps calm your nerves.
- **Partners...**If you are doing a Strictly Swing, arrange to meet your partner in the ballroom.
- **Plan ahead...**Get a drink and run to the restroom before the contest.
- **Check in...** Locate the competitor line-up area and with the Floor Coordinator 10 minutes ahead of your competition.
- **Dress attire...** Appearance influences the judges. Blue jeans should be avoided, even when acceptable. Dress nicely to impress the judges and your partner. Costumes are not allowed in Jack & Jill and Strictly Swing Contests. Matching attire in SS is encouraged, but not required.
- **Avoid Wardrobe Malfunctions...**pick your clothing carefully. Bring an extra shirt if not sure.
- **Shoes...**Different dance floors have different speeds. If it's too fast, use a shoe brush on suede shoes or wear a different pair.
- **Hair & Jewelry...**Best to pull hair back. Avoid hair distractions or jewelry that can fall off or get caught.
- **BE ON TIME!...** Tardy dancers that arrive late could be scratched, and the contest will start without them.
- **Awards ...** Check the schedule for Awards schedule. If you cannot attend awards, arrange for someone to pick up any awards for you.

When in doubt ask someone! Finding a Competition Mentor is invaluable.

Tips for Strictly Swing & Jack & Jill Competitions

When I first began competing, I had no idea how much I didn't know. Many of us did not have mentors, coaches or "sponsors" to explain the competition process or protocol. We had to learn as we danced, and sometimes learning the hard way. As I began coaching students for competition, I found myself repeating a lot of the same pieces of advice. In order to encourage new dancers to explore the challenge of competition without the fear of the unknown, I compiled my own very extensive list of "*Things Competitors Should Know or Consider*" for new and experienced competitors. Not everything will apply to everybody but lots of things will apply to lots of people. I hope you find some useful info for your own purposes. – Jeanne DeGeyter

Basic Comparison of Jack & Jills and Strictly Swing Contests

The "Jack & Jill" or "Strictly Swing" Contests offer dancers the opportunity to put their social dance skills on the floor—most often in a group, called a heat. The basic differences between the two are simple and straightforward.

In a **Jack & Jill Contest**, you select neither your partner nor your music. They are both selected for you "on the contest floor."

In a **Strictly Swing Contest**, you select your partner, but the music is selected for you "on the floor" (most often by the DJ).

Both of these contests promote "choreography on the fly," good social dancing skills and proper lead, follow & dance technique. Dancers are encouraged to dance to the character, timing and hits of the music, rather than execute lengthy patterns "practiced" for presentation. Patterns that look like a routine, and obviously don't fit the music, are generally scored lower than creative, impromptu patterns that emphasize the music or lyrics. Couples are also judged on their "teamwork"—the ability to dance together. Finalists are selected in a variety of ways, so the contest rules are usually the best source for these details.

THINGS COMPETITORS SHOULD KNOW OR CONSIDER

Selecting a Partner for a Strictly Swing

1. Select a partner with a similar dance style and skill level as yourself.
2. Partners should agree on degree of commitment (time, money, contest, etc)
3. Select someone with whom you have already danced and enjoy his or her company.
4. Agree on which competition and category.
5. Be aware of differences and similarities in communication styles.

Eligibility, Rules and Registration

1. Be sure to read the rules for the specific event, contest and category to determine your eligibility to

compete in the category. If you have any questions, always contact your coach, club rep, or the event coordinator.

2. Always read the rules for dance restrictions, such as: lifts, drops, apart dancing, looking at the judges, costumes, etc.
3. Determine the registration requirements: forms, cost, deadline, etc.

Practicing for a Strictly Swing or Jack & Jill

1. Work on the feel and connection of your partnership primarily by social dancing.
2. Practice time should focus on improving the lead and follow of your existing dance skills and patterns. Focus

on proper execution of your basic framework and footwork—not patterns.

3. You may want to add a new pattern or step variation to your dance menu, but unless you “burn” it into your muscle memory on the social floor, chances are likely you won’t remember it. If other partners on the social floor don’t “get it” on the dance floor, chances may be that your own partner won’t remember it on the competition floor.

4. Focus on clean execution of all moves. If it doesn’t work every time in practice or on the social floor, be safe and don’t use it on the competition floor.

5. If possible, find a coach to help you focus on areas of improvement. Another dancer can also help by pointing out areas that may not “look” right.

Clothing

1. Costumes are usually not allowed in Strictly Swings or Jack and Jills. Costumes are generally defined as attire, which cannot be bought “off the rack,” but is custom-designed.

2. Matching attire is encouraged, but not required. Try to color-coordinate your appearance with your partner. Personal tip for the Jack and Jill Leaders: select solid colors for upper and lower. You have less chance of “clashing” with your partner, who may choose a flashier style and variety of colors.

3. If possible, take the time to review options and physically compare outfits.

4. Wear clothing that makes you “feel” your best and is comfortable.

5. Make sure your clothes are “danceable.” Avoid the embarrassment of: the falling tube top, pants that “ride” up the legs or fall off the hips, zippers that won’t stay locked, or pants so long that your heel or your partner’s heel gets caught.

6. Ties, belts and other garments that tend to fly should be secured.

Jewelry & Accessories

1. The safest rule is NOT to wear watches, bracelets or rings, which protrude and can catch clothing or harm your partner.

2. If you wear earrings, make sure they won’t fly off during spins.

3. Decorative belts should be secured to not fly off.

Don’t wear belts or jewelry that can hit your partner.

4. In West Coast Swing, hats are not generally normal attire on the competition floor, unless it is part of a costume. But, this does not mean hats are not allowed.

Hair

1. Hair should never be distracting to you, your partner, the judges or the audience.

2. It’s best to keep hair off the face and out of the eyes to avoid missed connections.

3. Ladies with long hair, make sure your hair does not become a weapon during spins.

4. Make sure clips, hair bands, bobby pins, etc, are secure, so not to distract you or fly off while dancing.

Bib Numbers

1. Don’t forget your BIB number and safety pins.

2. Don’t lose your bib number. If you do, go to registration for a replacement. (*Contest start times are not usually delayed for lost bibs.*)

Location: Regardless of gender, Followers place bibs on lower back; Leaders place bibs on upper back.

Jack & Jills: Both Leaders & Followers wear bibs.

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Prior to Competition time

1. Meet your partner 20-30 minutes ahead of the scheduled competition time, ready to dance.

2. Dance together just a song or two to warm-up and stretch as needed.

3. Arrive to the “staging area” as designated at least 5 minutes prior to start time (with your partner)

4. Don’t “practice.” What you don’t have now won’t happen.

5. Display good sportsmanship – wish the other competitors Good Luck.

Introduction and Entrance

1. Know your number, just in case names are not called.

2. Locate and pay attention to the floor coordinator

who will direct you on your order of dance.

3. Be aware that you are being judged from the moment you walk on to the floor.
4. Generally, Leaders escort their Followers "onto the floor, with Followers on their audience-side arm, or the right arm.
5. When dancing in Heats, pay attention to the direction provided by the contest staff or EmCee regarding position on the floor.
6. If dancing spotlight, it is generally polite to acknowledge the judges with a head nod.
7. Start in closed position, with the OPEN side to the audience

Dancing

1. ALWAYS start on beat.
2. If possible, be the first mover (on beat).
3. "Feel" the beat and rhythm in your movement BEFORE stepping.
4. If possible avoid the basic starter step—add a slight variation to it.
5. Start with a push basic and underarm, while developing the feel for the music and partnership.
6. Listen for breaks, hits or instrumentals, but don't try to overemphasize every single one.
7. Smile and enjoy the Dance, or at least give it 100% of your effort!
8. Vary your facial expressions—don't glue one on!
9. Don't dance patterns for the sake of the pattern. Don't create long amalgamations that restrict the ability to interpret the music. Dance shorter patterns that leave room for musical interpretation.
10. Be aware of other couples on the floor. Penalties may be assessed when couples collide.
11. Do not "move around the floor" so much as to distract other dancers.
12. Strictly swing is social dancing—dance with your partner, not the audience or judges.
13. Do not lip-synch the MUSIC, and do not sing.
14. Do not talk to your partner, other dancers, judges or spectators while dancing.
15. Do not count (out loud).
16. Do not try to attract the attention of a judge.
17. Don't out-dance your partner. Balance the partnership.
18. Look at your partner more often than you would

on the social floor. DON'T look Down!!

19. If an "oops" happens, don't draw attention to it. Smile bigger. A quick recovery may hide the error..
20. Time will be up before you know it, so make every step count.
21. Good clean basics danced TO the music WITH your partner will beat the "pattern monster" that has marginal execution.
22. Just "show what you know" not what you are working on. Don't try to recreate every workshop pattern you learned over the weekend or every new tip learned in a lesson. Focus on what you do well and what you remember.

Ending and Exit

1. If the music fades, finish dancing the pattern and create an effective "ending."
2. Don't just stop dancing—finish dancing.
3. Always bow to (acknowledge) the audience at the end of the dance or heat. If in a spotlight, Leaders present the follower first, and then bow.
4. Followers acknowledge the leader.
5. Bows can be more traditional (heads down, chin lowered).
6. In heated contests, dancers are generally directed by the EmCee to take a group bow.
7. Be aware that many judges continue their evaluation of you until you leave the floor.
8. Withhold all negative looks, comments or gestures while on the floor.

Assuming the Role of Partner, Performer and Competitor

1. Provide supportive and encouraging comments for your partner before and after the performance.
2. Whether in costume or wearing a number on your back, many extra eyes are on you, watching your every move.
3. Immediately after competing, many eyes are on you, your actions and your words.
4. Whether you are happy with your performance or ecstatic, graciously accept congratulations and recognitions from other dancers.
5. Restrict critical comments toward other dancers, judges or your partner.

Awards

1. Be aware of the time awards will be announced and be in the ballroom.
2. As awards are announced, if possible, stand by your partner, or be aware of where he/she is.
3. When possible, walk on the floor together.
4. Accept awards graciously, whether first or last.
5. Congratulate the other competitors before leaving the floor.
6. When congratulated, say "Thank you."
7. Pictures are usually taken, so wear whatever makes a good picture, and be prepared for a quick snapshot. Understand how to line-up and help the photograph.
8. If you are unable to attend awards, make arrangements for someone who can accept or pick up awards for you, if needed.
9. If you are not an award recipient, ALWAYS show good sportsmanship skills and congratulate the winners.