

# ICG Guidelines: Ensuring Fair Competition

## 2019 Draft

### Mission

International Costumers Guild (ICG) members have developed these guidelines to promote fairness and equity in masquerade competition and judging. 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. 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.

While masquerade directors are our intended audience, 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
  - Rehearsal
  - Documentation
  - Re-entering Competitions

- Archiving Competitions and Awards
- Masquerade Tiers
- Skill Divisions
- Special Considerations
  - Costume Recreation
  - Historical Competitions
  - Technical Workmanship Differences
  - Large Costumes

## The Masquerade Director's Role

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

## Fair Judging

A fair competition requires respectable and impartial judges. Take care when selecting judges to ensure they are knowledgeable in the field and have appropriate skills to judge craftsmanship and performance aspects. Write instructions for judges and include them in your published rules. This is an important step in establishing a standard of impartiality and transparency. While judging systems vary, it is good practice to state the judging system being utilized in your event. For example, if you will be utilizing a points system, the categories that points will be awarded and total number of points should be standard across all skill divisions.

A good judge brings their experiences and opinions to the table. Judges should be given the freedom to recognize excellence and achievement in the way they see fit. Specific award names and quotas should not be mandated by the masquerade director, and should be left to the judges discretion.

Judges should base their opinion of an entry only on what he or she sees 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, a judge should do their best to disregard the first appearance.

Judges are expected to avoid conflicts of interest. Judges should inform the masquerade director if they may be influenced by a personal or business relationship. This is known as a nepotism clause, and can be exercised by the judge, or required by the masquerade director if they know about the relationship prior to judging. It is the director's responsibility to consult with the judging panel to find an appropriate solution. Solutions may include a judge excusing himself or herself from deliberations where the competitor in question is involved, or being removed from the judging panel entirely. In a situation requiring that a judge be removed from the panel, the masquerade director may use his or her discretion 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 cannot be tolerated. It is recommended that a zero tolerance policy for discrimination be communicated to those staffing the masquerade, the judges, and participants. Costuming is an art and art is open to interpretation, discrimination stifles interpretation and creates a toxic environment and must not be permitted.

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, please remove them from the judging panel.

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 getting up closer 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 at a higher skill division. Instead, honor the competitor with a major award in their division.

The ICG recommends three 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. These awards may be given simply by mentioning them on stage during the awards ceremony, or designated by a certificate, but generally do not include any form of monetary award, award in kind or goods, or trophy.
- Major awards do affect future division placement. We suggest that judging panels use "Best [Descriptor]" or "Excellence in/for [Descriptor]" to identify major awards. These awards should be given on stage during an awards ceremony and designated with a certificate, trophy, award in kind or goods, or, at the discretion of the masquerade director and availability of such, a monetary award.

- 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 and Judges are not be obliged to present a competitive award even if there is an entry in the category.

It's generally advised to avoid 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

The masquerade director is responsible for providing the contestants with quality technical support. The masquerade director should publish what technical aspects and amenities are available to contestants as soon as possible. Stage dimensions and accessibility should also be provided to contestants upon request, though it is good practice to provide a description, and, when available, diagram of the stage layout on the event website or social media.

Stages should be ADA accessible if possible, and stage dimensions and access points should be available ahead of the masquerade so that contestant’s individual needs based on the nature of their disability or limitations of their costume (size, vision impediment, etc), can be determined and accommodated appropriately. 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, and the contestant will be 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. A technical crew is expected to provide the sound and lighting, and stage hands generally will help set a stage with props in advance of a presentation. The extent of the technical amenities along with preferred formats and method of turning in audio or video to the tech crew should be published ahead of time.

### Rehearsal

Tech rehearsal is a vital chance for the contestants to work with the masquerade director, 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 equipment problems or crew errors interfere with the presentation of an entry, you should offer the contestants an opportunity to re-run their entry with corrected lighting and/or sound cues.

## Documentation

Entrants are always encouraged to provide documentation for the judges. The masquerade director should publish any minimum or maximum requirements, and how many copies an entrant should provide. Documentation could be as simple as 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.

Judges may offer special awards for research and documentation as they see fit. It is appropriate for a judge to verify documentation and references, especially those involving costumes from a fandom, culture, or other category with which they are not familiar. For example, if a judge is unfamiliar with the character that the contestant is portraying, it is acceptable to ask for documentation that may not have been provided including a photo or visual reference, and it is appropriate for the judge to use their own electronic devices to find reference to that character or check citations. Judges must take great care to do the due diligence required to ensure that documentation is carefully reviewed and awarded on its merits.

## Re-entering Competitions

It's 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:

- 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 the masquerade director determines it would not be fair to enter a costume in competition in any division, please consider allowing the entrant to present the costume as an exhibition entry (not judged in competition).

## Archiving Competitions and Awards

Awards should be archived, with photographs of the competitor in costume, on the events social media, website, and print media. If a masquerade director wishes, these awards may also be

documented with the International Costumer's Guild archives by emailing a list of contestants and awards with accompanying photos to the ICG recording secretary. Masquerades that publicly advertise their use of the ICG Guidelines are required to submit photos and names of their participants, including any awards won, so that their Masquerade entries can be included in the International Costumers' Guild Archives. Participants can 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

Masquerades draw a wide variety of entrants and the ICG recognizes four tiers of competition. While a higher tier competition does not reflect on any costumer's level of skill and all costumers should be welcome to compete, awards won at a higher tier should be weighed more heavily when determining an entrant's skill division.

- **Local:** Local competitions may be hosted by libraries, clubs, or conventions with attendees and entrants from a narrow area.
- **Regional:** Competitors and audience members from the wider region or multiple metropolitan areas participate in the convention.
- **National:** Large competitions that draw entrants and audience from around the country.
- **International:** Any competition that draws both entrants and audience from around the country and outside the host country can be considered an international competition.

Masquerade directors may determine their tier based on their attendees and entrants, and advertise it as they see fit.

## 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 competitors with years of masquerade experience for every award.

The ICG recommends a skill and 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 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 has chosen a three-tier division system for large international competitions. If your competition is smaller or draws a narrower range of skills and experience, please adapt the 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, though it is good practice for masquerade directors 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-tier system comprised of **Novice** and **Experienced** can be adequate and fair. Again, please consider what is most appropriate to your masquerade.

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.

As there is no committee or organization that tracks all costumers' wins for placement purposes, at this time, 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 restrictions on who may not enter 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.
- 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.

- Minor awards may be counted towards placement at the discretion of the costumer.

### **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 him or her. 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 for the same entry, only the highest award need count towards placement (see Judging Guidelines). For example, if all awards from multiple masquerades won by an entry are minor awards, the contestant should count one minor award. If they are given multiple major awards, 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. 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 recreation costume and source. Entrants should be encouraged to provide documentation showing or describing the costumes they are recreating, to aid the judges in evaluating the merits of their entries.

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.

Because costume recreation can draw on skills that differ from those used when creating original designs, judges should 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 a historical competition 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 a historical competition.

## Technical Workmanship

Masquerade entries often include a wide variety of workmanship techniques whether it's sewing, armor crafting, 3D printing, or 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, and whether or not the entrant did their own digital work of 3d modeling.

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 the judge 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, 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 costumer's normal body size. Whether it's a form-fitted costume with wings, or a large suit of foam or thermoplastic armor, mechanized battle mech, or an 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.

## If you have any questions about this document...

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