

What is a Feis?

A feis is an Irish Dance Competition. It is loud, crowded, exciting, exasperating, exhilarating, fun, and tiring. A feis rarely runs on time.

Filling Out the Feis Entry Form

There are four things you must know when completing a feis registration form for your child.

1) Send in your forms early. Irish dancing is very popular and competitions reach their caps quickly. Many feisianna (plural of feis) use the “efeis” system or an online entering system.. Hey, we’re in the “know”!

2) Know the level at which your child is dancing. An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha (the governing body for Irish Dancing) has set guidelines for levels and level advancement. The T.C.R.G. (Certified Irish Dance Teacher) of your individual school can require stricter guidelines.

Beginner: A dancer who is in their first year. They have not taken Irish Dance classes with a certified teacher prior to September 1st of the current year. Summer beginner workshops do NOT affect beginner status.

Advanced Beginner: Dancers move to Advanced Beginner after completion of the Beginner level.

Novice A dancer who has placed 1st or 2nd as an Advanced Beginner in reel, light jig, and slip jig in a feis sanctioned by the North American Feis Commission (N.A.F.C.) of five competitors or more.

Prizewinner: A dancer who has placed 1st in all four required dances as a Novice dancer in a feis sanctioned by the N.A.F.C. of five competitors or more.

Preliminary Champion: A dancer who has placed 1st in all four required dances as a Prizewinner dancer in a feis sanctioned by the N.A.F.C. of five competitors or more.

Open Champion: A dancer who has placed 1st in two competitions sanctioned by the N.A.F.C. of five competitors or more.

With a few higher level exceptions, level advancement is not mandatory after the requirements are met.

3) Know your child's "feis age." The feis age is the age of your child as of January 1st of the current year (not necessarily the age that your child is at the time the form is completed). This can be confusing at first but ask a more seasoned parent or your teacher. For example, if your child was born on April 14, 2000, this year they would be dancing in the UNDER 11 category for the ENTIRE year even though they'll be 11 for much of it. The age is set for the entire year off of the New Year's day age.

4) Know the names of the dances in which your child is ready to compete (Check with your teacher to confirm readiness of your child).

As a rule, the dances are as follows-

Beginner: reel, light jig, slip jig

Advanced Beginner: reel, light jig, slip jig, and, if over 8 years old, treble jig and hornpipe

Novice, Prizewinner, Preliminary Champion, Open Champion: reel, slip jig, hornpipe, treble jig, traditional set, treble reel, and/or contemporary set



What to expect at a Feis.

At Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice, and Prizewinner levels, dancers will compete on a stage two or three-at-a-time and dance two full steps (right and left foot). Your dancer will NOT dance with someone from their own school, and the other dancers will be doing different steps. While it is important to be aware of the other dancers, they must learn to focus on their own steps without getting distracted by other dancers.

What are the Judges Looking for?

The main thing that the judges look for are body carriage (posture), step execution (not difficulty of steps), timing, foot turnout, and rhythm. These are the basics of Irish Dance and will be covered in classes.

Remember, Irish Dance is a subjective sport. What is important to one judge may not

be the focus of another. Stay positive, work hard, and keep the awards and placements in perspective.

Getting Ready-Curling Hair for Competition

Dancers are permitted to wear wigs.

It is traditional and required in Irish Dance to curl hair for competitions. Old fashioned foam curlers or Irish Spikes work best for curling your own hair. If you need help or recommendations with hair please refer to your teacher.



The Night Before

In your dance bag you will want to make sure you have:

- An extra pair of poodle socks
- Your softshoes and hardshoes
- Some black electrical tape (for your hardshoes)
- A Water Bottle and Some healthy snacks (Powerbars for energy, some fruit in little baggies)
- An Ace bandage - you never know what will happen!
- Poodle sock glue (works wonders!)
- A pen to write down all your stages and competition numbers
- A safety pin to pin your number on, or a hole puncher & some string to tie it on.
- Some money for the vendors
- Bobby Pins for the Wig.

What you want to make sure you do:

- Have your dress hanging somewhere where you'll find it first thing when you wake up
- Put your dance bag by the front door so you don't forget it
- Practice each of your dances 3-4 times to music. It's the display of your steps that matters now (are your feet crossed? Are your toes pointed?) and your timing.
- Wigs hold better on hair that isn't "freshly washed".
- Go to sleep a little earlier than usual in case you're really worked up (as most dancers get!)

Feis Day!

Take things slow. Get up early enough so that you don't have to rush. Eat something for breakfast and try to keep yourself as calm as possible. Don't worry about what will happen that day!

Some things you want to do are:

Pack your car: Dress and Dance Bag (shoes!)

- Fill up your water bottle with ice and water, then stick it by the door so you don't forget it (because if you don't you WILL forget it! I always do.)
- If you want to save time, put your poodle socks and softshoes on before you leave for the feis and then wear sandals over them when you go out. (Boys can do this too if they want with their shoes.)
- Leave your house early, giving yourself enough time to reach the feis at least 30 minutes before the solo dances begin

At the feis:

- Go to the registration desk and get your number
- Get your competition #'s and stages off of your number card and write them down
- Pin or string the number to your costume
- Go check out the locations of your stages so you have a mental picture of where you need to travel between dances
- Go to your first stage and listen to the music (if solos have begun already.) It's imperative that you get used to the music they're playing for your competition because it will probably differ from the music you danced to at class
- Practice your dance to the music that's being played once or twice
- Get dressed and ready for your competition.



When it's your turn to compete:

- Check in at your stage when your competition number is up on the board. Make sure you get there early and check in early so they don't mark you as not there!
- Try to look as secure as possible walking onto the stage; don't look like you're in panic mode!
- Walk onto the stage with your feet crossed, one in front of the other. This makes you look more confident and makes the judge think you know what you're doing

- Stand in line with your feet crossed, your back straight, and your shoulders back. Look like the champion you are!
- DON'T TALK IN LINE!!!
- When it's your turn to compete, step forward and to your left with your feet crossed one in front of the other. Try to smile. Remember to point your toe on “6” and get up onto your tippy toes on the 8th beat. Then dance your heart out!
- Don't look at those dancing next to you, it might make you out of step.
- Eye contact with the judge is important. This shows confidence on your part
- RELAX! Smile and have a good time! Put some serious spirit into your dancing! You're doing something you love so show it!
- When you're done, make sure you're facing the judge. Give a nice, deep bow with a great big SMILE and walk back into line with your feet crossed, one in front of the other.
- Walk off the stage with your feet crossed also and rigid arms. Never let yourself look sloppy until you're off the stage.



Things to always remember:

- Be prepared to lose. We all like to win, but sometimes you just don't. Don't go in thinking to yourself that you will just die if you don't place. Just being there at the feis is an accomplishment!
- Dance for the fun of it. Always tell yourself "Even if I don't place, I'll still have fun." You don't have to get first place to be the best dancer. If you have your heart in it, you're a champion in my book!
- Try to relax and have a good time while you're competing. No one is watching you to laugh at you. All the other dancers watching you are mentally cheering you on! They know what it feels like to be in your shoes.
- And if you're a beginner, don't be intimidated by the older, more advanced dancers. You'll be as good as or better than them someday! If you feel like you really want to do those pretty steps, try not to. Just be good at your own steps. I have that problem all the time. It's not fancy steps that make the good dancer, it's the dancer that does the simple steps well. I've seen dancers doing really advanced steps who execute them pitifully. Be good along the way and don't wish yourself into another level to be like them!