**Feis for first-timers**

**What is a Feis?**

Feis, pronounced *fesh*, is the Irish word we Irish dancers use to refer to our competitions. Translated literally, it means festival. It is loud, crowded, very crowded, exciting, exasperating, exhilarating, fun, and tiring. A feis rarely runs on time.

Feiseanna (plural for feis) used to consist of music, story telling, singing and of course, dancing. Although most modern feiseanna consist only of Irish dance competitions, some current feiseanna have music and other competitions held at them.

**How do I know when the next feis is?**

1) There is a list of upcoming competitions posted on the board at the studio.

2) Feisworx.com has a listing of most upcoming competitions along with schedules and other useful information. The week before the feis you can download the schedule and find your competition numbers from your registration to know what stage you will be on.

3) A FULL listing of all feiseanna occurring for the year in North America can be found at:

http://www.northamericanfeiscommission.org/

**How do I register?**

For all competitions, your dancer will be registered for you by Allison under the direction of Angela and Siobhan. All competitions are out of town and are at your own expense. A list with your dancer’s competition numbers and fees owed will be e-mailed out to you with payment details. Competition fees vary between $10-15 per dance depending on the dancer ad type of dance. You pay for each dance entered and also there is a door fee that you pay usually with the cost of registration. All fees are due into Allison as soon as the dancer is registered.

**Feis Age explained**

This is the question that most first time feis parents have.

Feis age is determined by the dancer’s age as of January 1 of the current year. So, if your Birthday is early January, you are in luck and you will have the advantage by dancing with younger dancers every year. If your birthday happens to be late in the year, then you will be with the older dancers. Example: The reason your child is dancing in for example the U7 (Under 7) age group even though they are 7 years old right now is because of “Feis age”.

**Competition Dances**
The dances in which your child is ready to compete (Check with your teacher to confirm readiness of your child).
Usually the dances are as follows-
**Beginner:** reel, light jig, single jig, slip jig(girls only!)
**Advanced Beginner:** reel, light jig, single jig, slip jig(girls only), treble jig and hornpipe
**Novice, Prizewinner,:** reel, light jig, single jig, slip jig, hornpipe, treble jig, traditional set or, treble reel

There are trophy dances in each of these levels depending on the feis of either slip jig special, reel special, treble jig special, hornpipe special.

**Preliminary Champion, Open Champion- dance a soft shoe round(reel or slip jig – 3steps) and a hard shoe round(treble jig or hornpipe – 3steps) and then a traditional or non-traditional set (1(right and left foot) step and set). The combined score determines the overall winner.**

**In Champion there are also trophy dances of treble reel, hornpipe, slip jig depending on the feis.**

**Day/Times**

If you are dancing solos, all of your dances will be on EITHER Saturday or, Sunday. If you are in Beginner to Prizewinner level (in other words, not at championship level) you will most likely be dancing on Sunday although some competitions switch days and do Beginner grades on Saturdays instead. Always double check the feis syllabus online before you make any solid plans or bookings.

Most competitions begin at 8:00 a.m. which means that you need to be there at 7:00 a.m.

Always arrive one hour prior to your competition start. If a feis is running early, they are permitted to run your competition up to an hour early.

Some families choose to stay at the hotel where the competition is being held for the sake of convenience but it is not mandatory. There are special feis rates for this if you book early. You can check the syllabus for this on our e-mail outs before a feis or directly on the Feisworx website. Give yourself extra time for traveling, parking and unloading, especially if a feis is downtown. Make sure you have money for parking, admission, a program (optional) vendors and food.

**Arriving at the feis**

 Upon arrival, check in at the registration table to pick up the ***number card*** your child will wear for the competition. On the back of the card is a list of all the dances that she/he will be dancing. You will have a ***schedule*** either e-mailed out to you or, you can find it online the week before the feis posted on Feisworx or on the feis website. Download and print the program and/or schedule before the feis and highlight your dances so that you can see approximately what time you will be dancing and what stage you are dancing on.

At the feis itself, the stages have a board with each competition number that will be danced on the stage that day posted in order. The current competition is always the first number posted since as each dance is completed, the numbers are crossed off or taken down. Please be sure to stay on top of things as the people running the stage can forget to take down the dance that has just been completed.

Before your dancer’s competition starts, have a look at each stage on which your child will be dancing. Sometimes you will have to switch stages. Some dances may overlap but the volunteer sidestage will make sure you get your turn.|Take note of the area next to the stage where the ***dancers line up***. This is called side stage. Only dancers are allowed side stage – NO PARENTS!! There will be a feis staff member there checking in the dancers for each event. Children should check in for each event as soon as the dancers in the preceding event walk out on stage. Direct your child to the person checking in the dancers. Pay attention to the announcements; they will announce which competition is about to take place and often, when they would like the next set of competitors to check in. **NOTE:** Events are grouped by age and skill level. Brand new dancers may dance their solo events one after the other on the same stage, but there is no guarantee this will be the case. (This does not include special events, such as a "First Feis Special," which may take place later in the day on a different stage.)

**What to expect at a Feis.**

There is one judge sitting at a table in front of each of the stages and the musicians are seated off to one side of the stage or room.

If it is your dancer’s first feis, they will most likely be dancing their Reel three times! First time parents and dancers always find this confusing. The reason they do their reel three times is that they will dance it for First Feis Reel, First feis Trophy Reel and then later on, they will dance their Reel at

the beginner level against dancers that it may or may not be their first feis.

Depending on the number of dancers, they are lined up with 10 dancers per line and brought out onto the stage all at the same time. Dancers will perform two or three at a time depending on the size of the competition and the judge’s preference.

Although the dancers will all be performing the same dance (ie: Reel) each school has their own choreography for each dance. So, don’t panic if your child is doing different steps then the child next to them. This is totally normal and correct.

Sometimes dancers from the same school can end up competing in the same competition. We discourage the dancers from our school from dancing together onstage for a few reasons.

One: they get to meet new friends if they have to stand next to other dancers and

Two: If both dancers are doing the exact same steps together, it is easier for the judge to see if one of them makes a mistake or is a better dancer than the other.

For first feis, beginner and sometimes advanced beginner competitions, there will be an experienced dancer or teacher on stage that will count your dancer in and tell them when to step out to prepare.

When a dancer is finished dancing, they bow and then return to the line at the back of the stage at the exact same spot they started, until all of the dancers onstage have finished dancing. At this time, the judge (Adjudicator) will signal when she/he is done with the scoring and they will ring a bell or nod their heads to dismiss the line. The dancers will then perform two bows (one to the judge and then one to the musician) before walking off the stage. Male dancers let all girls walk off 1st and go to back of line.

**What are the Judges Looking for**

A dancer's score at a competition is subjective and is to some extent based on a judge's particular style preferences but, the general things every judge is looking for are the same. And a dancer's mark will be based on the following:

**Timing**: The dancer’s timing with the music and whether or not their hard shoe rhythms are correct.

**Carriage:** Arms close to their body and straight.

Back straight and not bending forward on jumps and kicks

Shoulders back

Head straight ahead at all times, eyes straight ahead, and chin held level or slightly up.

**Steps:** Difficulty level of steps. But, please note that this is irrelevant if the dancer executes the steps poorly.

**Execution:** Feet crossed and knees crossed or close together (depending on the move)

Feet turned out

High up on toes

Knees fully straightened when lifting, jumping, pointing etc.

Back leg lifting fully up to the bum for jumps, lift backs, skip forwards, etc.

Toes fully pointed whenever off the ground

Flexibility

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.

**Results**

Results for dances are posted on the wall outside in the hallway usually 20-30 min after your child dances. If they placed they can go to the awards table and collect a medal. They will have to know their competition number and their dancer number. It is on the back of their card and your parent card. You will have to buy the lanyards the medals go on. They are usually for sale at one of the vendors in the hall for $1-2 each.

Any trophy dances or specials are awarded on stage usually after the groups are done. **All dancers must remain in dance dresses or vests and dance shoes in case they won in order to go on stage.** Dancers usually wait quietly at the front with friends from their school to hear results and celebrate with their friends. If you win 1st place you get a perpetual trophy that you get to keep for a year and return the following year at the feis.

At the end of the competition, you should pick up your dancers results that have their scores from the judges and any comments they may have for your dancer. You can only get these once **all** your dancers’ competition awards have been given out either on stage or on the wall. These are usually included in the door fee or may sometimes cost $5.00 depending on the feis. Angela and Siobhan like to see your dancer’s results later.

**Important Tips - Parents**

1) Cover your dancer’s costume with a dress cover or one of Dad’s old shirts when your dancer is not dancing. Or, better, have them take it off (but please don’t let them walk around in just bloomers)

2) **Expect Delays!** The amount of time it will take to complete a group of events can only be estimated. Estimates are based on the number of entrants, but it is often the case that schedules must be determined before all the entries are submitted. Often, you may have rushed to be ready for eight o'clock in the morning to wait around for an hour for a late start to a feis. Conversely, sometimes things run a little too well and competitions run ahead of schedule. The complexity of feis planning and the large number of involved parties make delays and waiting around for results common. Due to this, please plan to be at feis for the full day. That way, it helps avoid frustration.

3) Water is usually provided for dancers and their families although sometimes the jugs are not refilled frequently. Be sure to bring some back up water just in case. Some feiseanna will allow you to bring small coolers. Bring plenty of snacks and drinks as the vendors can often be expensive and often, there isn’t time to run out to get food.

4) Children must be supervised at all times. It's a good idea to bring things that will entertain siblings while your child is dancing. In consideration of the dancers and those who are watching, crying babies should be taken out of the ballroom or away from the area where the dancing is taking place.

5) ***You can video only 1st feis dances. VIDEO TAPING OF THE OTHER DANCING OR PHOTOGRAPHY WHILE DANCERS ARE PERFORMING IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED - NO EXCEPTIONS!*** Each school owns the rights to their school's choreography and therefore it is protected. You are may take photos during awards or when your dancer is not onstage.

**Important Tips - Dancers**

1) Be sure to get a good nights sleep two nights before the feis.

2) Eat healthy food with lots of energy the night before and the day of. Eg: Pasta

3) The day before, do at LEAST one full run of each and every dance you will be performing the next day. Be sure you get at least one GOOD run of each before finishing your practice.

4) Be sure to warm up (at least 10-15 minutes) AND stretch before you compete as nerves can make it harder to warm up and can make your muscles stiff which can lead to injury.

5) Please do not walk around with just bloomers on or your tummy showing. Although Irish dance is a close knit community and we can be lulled into a sense of security, you never know who may have come into the venue.

6) Bring a water bottle and stay hydrated.

7) If you can find your teacher, ask them to watch you run through one of your dances. It can help make you feel more confident. But, make sure you have plenty of time to make it to your competition on time!

**The Night Before**

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

* An extra pair of dance socks (clean and white. Sold at the feis)
* Your softshoes and hardshoes (**make sure they’re polished**)
* Some black electrical tape (for your hardshoes)
* A Water Bottle and Some healthy snacks/ sandwiches
* bandaids - you never know what will happen!
* sock glue (works wonders!)
* A pen to write down all your stages and competition numbers
* A safety pin to pin your number on.
* Some money for the vendors
* Bobby Pins(long and short) for the Wig.
* Little sewing kit (just in case)
* Black bootie shorts for under your dress
* Small hole punch to attach the number to the elastic
* Black elastic- to hold competition number

**What you want to make sure you do:**

* Have your dress/vest hanging somewhere where you'll find it first thing when you wake up and black bootie shorts
* Put your dance bag by the front door so you don't forget it
* Practice each of your dances 1-2 times to music. It's the display of your steps that matters now (are your feet crossed? Are your toes pointed?) and your timing. Read through your notes.
* **Girls** take a shower early so your mom can get the wig on or help with hair.  Do not wash your hair the night before a feis. The wig will hold better.
* 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**

* 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)
* Leave your house early, giving yourself enough time to reach the feis at least 1 hour before the solo dances begin

**At the feis:**

* Go to the registration desk and get your number (can be picked up the night before)
* 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
* Be aware that the music may sound different than what your dancer is used to
* Go to your first stage and find out what competition number they are on to judge how much time you have until your dancer has to dance
* Practice your dance to the music that's being played once or twice
* Get dressed and ready for your competition.
* **Make sure your dancers shoes are tied really well and won’t come untied , if you aren’t sure ask someone for help**

**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 confident as possible walking onto the stage; pretend you are not nervous!
* 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! SMILE!! **Never walk off the stage unless told to do so or you are going to be sick**
* DON'T TALK IN LINE!!! (or move, scratched.)
* When it's your turn to compete, step forward (someone will tape you and count you in) with your feet crossed one in front of the other. Smile. Remember to point your toe on the 6th beat and get up onto your tippy toes on the 8th beat. Then dance your heart out!
* **Don't look at the girls dancing next to you**, it might make you out of step.
* **If you mess up, KEEP GOING! Don’t stop. Just pretend you know what you’re doing and try to find your place again**
* 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. **Go to the exact same spot you came from before you dance!**
* **Never walk in front of another dancer, always go behind when returning to your spot**
* After all the dancers have finished the judge will ring a bell or nod and this is when the dancers bow to the judge and the musician. 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 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 good. 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!

**PREPARING FOR THE WORST**

No one likes to think of the following happening to them but, the truth is, that these things can happen to any competitor. The important thing is to be prepared, keep your head up and if at all possible, remember to **KEEP ON DANCING!**

**Falling**

If you do fall onstage, the rule is: Get up and keep dancing! Try and find your place in the music by continuing to say the step in your head even as you push yourself up from the ground. Obviously it takes practice to get good at this but, try your best.

If you do stand up to find yourself completely lost, do one two threes or, make it up until the beginning of the next step. DO NOT just give up and walk away as you will be disqualified. If you get up and dance, you won’t be docked any marks.

If you are hurt very badly onstage either from a fall or a slip and cannot dance, then do your best to move out of the way of the other dancer as they are not allowed to stop dancing unless the judge rings the bell.

But, not to worry, usually, if the judge sees that one dancer is badly injured, or if the judge sees a bad fall that ISN’T faked, they will ring the bell and stop the competition.

**Missing a dance**

If you arrive side stage and your competition is already running, do NOT freak out. Calmly talk to the volunteers side-stage and they will most likely put you onstage after the other competitors or, they will send you on up late. Never just head up onstage on your own as you may enter on the wrong side and/or distract the dancers currently onstage.

If you have missed your dance entirely, try to shrug it off and dance the rest of your dances to the best of your ability. Remember, the people working the feis are volunteers and are not there to be treated badly. Also, there will always be another feis where you can make sure you are on time.

**Falling items**

The most embarrassing occurrence of this is probably losing a wig onstage. Other things that can come lose are: Tiaras, shoelaces, shoes, capes, hairpins and, sometimes even a heel or a tip off of your hardshoe!

Obviously, some of these things are preventable and dancers should be very picky about double checking how securely everything is tied up and pined on before they head for the sage. Other things (such as a broken shoe or a projectile hairpin) are things that no one can predict.

In any case, your best bet is to try to forget about the object and keep dancing without tripping over it. If the object is dangling or obstructing your view, try to grab it with one quick motion and hold it by your side until you finish dancing.

If your shoe breaks in such a way that you cannot dance, there really is nothing you can do except hobble through your dance and hope that the judge notices and rings the bell. But, be very careful you do not injure yourself in the process.

**Making a mistake in your steps**

It happens to everyone: You are totally prepared, your hair is perfect, you’re smiling, you’ve just counted yourself in and you lift your leg to start the first perfect move and realize that your brain is empty!

The best way to beat this is to mentally rehearse each dance before going up onstage and then, while you are waiting in line counting yourself in, go through the first few movements of your step in your head so that you are ready when the time comes.

But, if you do blank out at any time onstage, the best thing to do is to keep going. Keep smiling and keep making up steps until the next set of eight starts. It is very rare that a judge will let you re-dance if you forget your steps unless you are either very young, or in beginner.

**If you start doing the wrong dance**

This usually only happens in the beginning stages so, usually if it happens and the dancer notices that they are doing the wrong dance, the judge will often ring the bell. The other option is to try to switch to the correct dance as soon as possible or, you can try to make the dance fit as best you can to that tune. The second option works very well for light jig and single jig but, not so well for slip jig or reel. 

**Bumps and bruises**

Since everyone onstage are from different schools and doing different choreographies, the chances of bumping into another dancer are quite high.

So, always try to be aware of where the other dancer is and do your best to avoid them. If you do bump, kick or get kicked by the other dancer, continue on dancing the best you can. If the other dancer falls, KEEP DANCING until the judge rings the bell or you will be disqualified. Unless you can really hear that the other dancer is in serious pain. In that case, you should probably stop dancing.

Judges will take off points for aggressive behavior or for purposely refusing to move out of the way to avoid a bump when the other dancer can’t see you. So, please, always be aware when onstage and use good stage manners.

**Things to Remember for Parents:**

* BREATHE!
* A Feis can run about 2 hours behind what the program says, so expect to be there longer than intended
* Bring **LOTS** of snacks and food (there is no food there and it is very expensive)
* Bring toys, electronics, etc. for your kids to occupy themselves
* You CANNOT take pictures/videos while your child is dancing
* Bring a camera to take pictures of your dancer AFTER they are done dancing and at awards
* Leave the first row of chairs empty for teachers
* Don’t lean on the light switch which is on the wall at the back of the room(they are sometimes not visible so be aware of where you are standing)
* Keep your dress/vest clean and away from food and drinks ( DO NOT put dresses/vest on the ground, or anywhere it could potentially get dirty)
* Things at feis’ are expensive, so if you planned on bringing $20, bring $60. You never know what you might need
* Parents are not allowed side stage once your dancers has checked in
* Remind you dancer to go find Siobhan or Angela to thank them for teaching your dancer
* Make your dancer go to the washroom BEFORE they start dancing as beginner dances usually run back-to-back and there will be no time
* **Make sure stickers are taken off your dancers shoes before they go on stage**

Please keep in mind that the point of a feis is not to go in there and win first every time. The point is to become a better dancer and better performer. It is not important whether or not you beat another dancer. What is important is that you achieve a better mark than at your last feis. Parents: It can certainly be tempting to tell your dancer to go and get first place as a pep talk, but please resist. If the competition becomes about something that is beyond your dancer’s control, or if they are pressured to achieve something they have no control over (winning first) then your dancer will perform poorly. We cannot control how the other dancers will perform or which dancer the judge will like best. The only thing your dancer can control is how they dance. So, if your dancer focuses on dancing the best they can and stays focused on having fun and completing a strong performance, your dancer will perform better and will have a more positive experience.

Please do not try to coach or teach your child at the feis or at home. Doing this can untrain things they have been working with your child to do and can confuse them. Teaching your child to dance is the teacher’s job. They are professionals and will do their very best to ensure your child is ready for the feis.

Please remember that all of our behavior at a feis or show (Parents, Teachers and students) is a reflection on our school, especially when the dancers are wearing the Knock costume. We value sportsmanlike behavior: Please do not speak negatively of any dancers, adjudicators, teachers or other schools. A good thing to remember is that you never know if someone’s Mom or teacher is sitting right behind or in front of you. At the same time, please refrain from making negative comments about our own dancers or school when you are at the feis. We are a small community and rumors get started fast. If you have a valid complaint, please bring it to myself Angela or Siobhan so that it can become constructive criticism.

Please be a graceful winner and a good loser (try congratulating your competitors).