

# The Making of an Outstanding Competition Routine

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*What do great routines have in common?*

*What is the process that you go through to decide your music selection for contest?*

*How can you improve your creativity in selecting this vital influence over the judges?*

*Do you give your choreographer direction in putting the piece together?*

*Does your choreographer work with the group and enhance it after it has been taught?*

Imagine a piece or dance that you used last year at contest. What made it distinctive or unique among the competition in your category? If you cannot answer that question, what can you do to improve upon your results next year?

*Lynn Singer, a national adjudicator and President of Spirit Direct, wanted to share with you the following thoughts on her judging philosophy. Use these as a guide in evaluating your own routines.*

1. I take inventory of the **"whole package"**... music, costuming, choreography, props (sets, poms, etc, if applicable) and the success of the presentation of those parts as a whole. If one area was weaker, what was it and why? What can I tell the groups that will help them strengthen that area the next time they rehearse?  
**And the breakdown of each area:**
  - ◆ Music: appropriate, emotional connection, audience response, proper tempo to accurately execute technical skills
  - ◆ Costuming: age-appropriate, fit, extension of the music, complimentary to choreography, enhances movement, visual effect
  - ◆ Choreography: utilizes the music? Variety of formations? Surprising? Fresh ideas?
  - ◆ Props: used well? Designed well?
  - ◆ Success of Presentation: did the above 4 areas all come together for one great performance? How was the technical execution?
2. I have a saying that goes through my head a lot after a performance is over.... **"Missed it by that much."** Usually it was a good performance, but missed that "wow" impact by an inch. It's usually genuine emotion or energy or lack of connection with the audience.
3. Not a new idea...**but...choreograph to the score sheet.** It's what the judges are using to evaluate you, so be sure you hit every area with strength. Different companies weigh things differently, so some adjustment of routines might be necessary from one competition company to the next.
4. I've said this on a lot of talk tapes..."Does what I'm seeing match what I'm hearing?" Another way of saying...does the choreography match the music and take full advantage of all of the musical opportunities (accents, syncopation, mood, etc.) available?



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5. Words I like to use when talking about showmanship and presentation..."relax into the piece," "release," "have fun," "dance joyfully," "connect and make eye contact with your audience," "bring us in to your performance..." all attempts at helping the dancers overcome a tentative or nervous looking performance.
  6. Be careful that your choreography doesn't become "formulaic." A build up in intensity in the music doesn't always mean fouette turns, just like a cymbal crash doesn't always mean grande jete. Pay attention to the musical cues, but think of different moves to incorporate at those moments so your choreography isn't predictable.
  7. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals. Drill fundamentals!

Now, it is YOUR turn to judge. Take a moment and peruse the information listed in Judging 101. Follow this format or make up your view other's routines, and as you view your own. Take a moment to judge every routine as YOU see it.

### *Judging 101*

1. Be open to whatever is presented to you. Engage your thoughts as to what the music, costume and the opening are trying to tell you. Does it have a theme?
2. Evaluate the dance energy quickly. Are the performers enjoying the presentation? Do they "get it" if the piece is somber or are they faceless? Is the energy of the pom reflected on their faces?
3. Concentrate on formation changes and use of floor. Are they creative in use of space and dancing to their transitions? Do they move for a reason and with the phrasing changes?
4. Are the performers doing work that is too hard for them or is it challenging yet "do-able"? Is the level of dance difficult yet mastered?
5. Is the choreography specific to the music? Are all of the musical accents being used in a unique and entertaining way? Is the choreography distinctive and not predictable?
6. Go back to #1-5 and repeat the process until the performance has ended.

Once the routine is complete, make notes on what you enjoy or will remember about the piece to compare it to others in the same category. Sum up your thoughts in five words or less.

