

Dancer's First Feis

This document applies to the New Mexico Feis and the New Mexico Chapter of the McTeggart School only! Don't assume that other Feis requirements are the same.

Feis (pronounced fesh) is Gaelic for festival. It is an Irish dance competition. Dancers will compete against other dancers of the same age and same dance level. Many feiseanna (plural for feis) may have different types of cultural competition including ours. Cultural competitions may include instrumental, vocal, recitation, art, and cooking/baking.

Just a word of encouragement, feiseanna can be lots of work, but they are LOTS of fun.

To register for the New Mexico State Championships and Feis go to www.feisworx.com. Use their "Feis info" link to see details about feiseanna. Each feis will have a syllabus available that gives specific information on that feis. To register you will first need to create a registrant, which is usually a parent if the dancer is a minor, under "New User." Then you add the dancer(s). You then choose which feis you want to register for. Ours is listed as the New Mexico State Championships and Feis. You register one dancer at a time. Feisworx will automatically use the dancer's birthday to offer the correct age group for your dancer to compete in. You need to select the dance level for each dance. Once you've completed the dance selection, follow the instructions to complete registration. When doing figures, you register at the age level of the oldest dancer of that figure team/group. The dance instructors will help organizing the teams for figures.

Be sure to meet the registration and payment deadlines to prevent late fees. Once you've paid and it has been processed, you can log on at Feisworx, go to the dancer information, click on "What's my competition?" and see how many dancers are in each of your registered dances.

You pay a flat fee at our feis for soft shoe competitions. Sign up for all the dances the dancer thinks will be ready at feis time. If there is a particular dance that is not ready at feis time, you don't have to dance that dance. Just don't check in for that dance at the competition.

There is a First Feis category. It is intended to be a low key, fun, first time experience for the dancer. Only the reel and light jig dances are offered. If the dancer wants to compete in the single jig and slip jig, register for the Beginner I category. If the dancer places in the First Feis dances, it doesn't count for moving up in feis levels. If the dancer places 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in their Beginner I category dances out of five competitors, they will compete at the Beginner II level at their next feis. The dancer can skip the First Feis category and do all their dances in the Beginner I category if they wish.

Outfit:

Option 1

headband
long sleeved, collared white blouse
red ribbon tie at collar
black skirt
black kick pants/bloomers
poodle socks
gillies - dance shoes

or

Option 2

headband
team dress
black kick pants/bloomers
shawl/scarf
brooches
poodle socks
gillies - dance shoes

When I needed a girl's long sleeved, collared white blouse, I could not find one. So I bought a boy's white long sleeved dress shirt, it worked out just fine.

The black skirt should be no shorter than 4 inches above the knee. The easiest way to check that is to have the dancer kneel on the floor. The skirt hem line should be no more than 4 inches off the floor. www.frenchtoast.com is a site that sells black school uniform skirts.

To obtain a team dress, you have three choices. One, find one used. Some dresses may be put up for sale at class at the studio. You can request ISDNM to put out in an e-mail that you are looking for a used team dress and what size is needed. The second way to obtain a team dress is have a seamstress make one for you. The third way is to make one yourself. Check at the table for instructions and to get access to the pattern.

Black kick pants/bloomers is a garment to go over the girl's underwear so she is modest when dancing. The local dance supply stores such as NM Dance wear generally carry them.

Poodle socks are available from most Irish dance suppliers. I've seen them for sale at NM Dance wear. There will be a vendor at our feis that carries them. Like any knee-hi sock, poodle socks may want to fall down some. Some people use double stick tape to help keep them up at their first feis. You can also buy sock glue. The vendors will have it available or just borrow from someone you know in the studio until you decide to get your own. When using sock glue, pull the sock up as high as it will go, fold down about one inch of the sock at the top, apply the sock glue all the way around the leg, fold the sock back up, and press down. When you do the second sock, try to make it even with the first one.

McTeggarts New Mexico have their own headband. Kerreen usually has them at her table at feiseanna or you can order one from her at www.kerreen.com. Until you get a McTeggart headband, you can use one that matches the outfit.

Hair for the girls is commonly curled. There are two choices. Curl the hair yourself or use a wig. There will be some dancers in the beginner levels that don't have their hair curled. It won't count against them as long as it is neat. However, they will be seeing the bulk of the dancers with curled hair and may want to be like them.

Wigs can be purchased from most Irish dance supply stores. Feiseanna will have vendors selling wigs. There are different styles of wigs including size of wig, the type of curl, and how the wig is anchored on the dancer. Just remember that the goal is to have the wig on securely so it does not fall off the dancer during competition. Vendors tend to be very helpful on wig instruction including how to put on the wig and care for the wig.

If you decide to purchase a wig, the $\frac{3}{4}$ cap style wig is easiest as opposed to a banana clip wig.

TIPS: For wigs that have the banana clip, take a small strand of the wig at the bottom and tuck it under the elastic of the headband or bobby pin it down. If you don't do that, when the dance does her jumps, the wig will bounce up high enough to show the bottom part of the dancer's head. I find I don't have to do this with the $\frac{3}{4}$ cap wig that has the combs at the top and bottom of the wig. Sometimes wearing a wig gave my daughters a headache. If they think they might be susceptible to one, I'd give them a pain killer. It is no fun dancing with a headache.

If you desire to curl the hair, use sponge curlers or spike curlers. Use LOTS of them. When you are done putting the curlers in, the dancer should look like she is getting a perm. Wash

the hair, avoid using conditioner, let it dry thoroughly, gel the hair as you put the curlers in. As you take them out, take out from the bottom up, take out 4-5 curlers, hair spray the curls, then another 4-5 curlers, etc. You want to use the stiffest, strongest hold hair spray you can get your hands on. You don't want the curls falling. I did some test runs before the feis so I was comfortable with what I was doing. I found I preferred to take the top, front hair, pony tail it at the top of the head behind where the hair band sits, put curlers in that hair. Then curl remaining hair. Leave the hair band in when you remove the curlers. It helped me get the desired smooth, pulled back look in front of the hair band.

List of what to bring:

If the dancer is coming in her outfit, be sure that she has everything on when leaving the house (see above outfit list). It would not be fun to discover she doesn't have her kick pants on just as she is about to dance.

Please note, this is just a suggested list. Every family comes up with their feis list that works best for them.

- entire outfit (see above list)
- cash (for vendors purchases, results sheet – explained later in document, food, etc.)
- Band-Aids
- medicine for headaches, muscle aches, etc.
- decongestant
- wig (if using one)
- hair bands
- bobby pins
- safety pins
- snacks (you don't want anything that will make a mess on her dance outfit)
- water bottle
- change of clothes
- pen or pencil

Prior to the feis get everything organized at home. Have your list of what you want to buy at the Irish dance supply vendor. Typically, that would be a McTeggart headband and poodle socks. Perhaps a number holder and sock glue.

About a half a week to a week before our feis, Feisworx will post the feis schedule on line. Feel free to print out that schedule. The schedule will also be in our program. Use that schedule to know when your dancer is going to dance and which stages he/she will be on. Keep in mind, these times are approximate. Most competitions say to be there and ready to dance 1 hour before the dancer's scheduled start time.

I like to print the schedule and highlight each dance my child is registered for. You will know what their competition numbers are from when you registered them. If you don't remember them, you can look them up on Feisworx.

What to expect at the feis. When you arrive, go to the registration table. They will have an envelope with two cards in it for the registered dancer. One card is to be worn by the dancer with their competitor number facing out. Attach it to the dance outfit in the front at the

waistline using safety pins, or you can purchase an inexpensive, clear plastic, competitor number holder from one of the vendors there. Information for the specific dances will be listed on the back side of that card and on the second card received in the registration packet.

Part of the packet will be an envelope and an explanation if you want a results sheet back. The results sheet will summarize their solo dances. It will give their score, how many dancers there were in that particular competition, how they placed if they did, and any comments the adjudicators may have made. Some adjudicators will make short comments which may be positive or negative. Other adjudicators don't make any comments at all. If you want a results sheet, follow the enclosed instructions. Commonly, you put the money in the envelope and turn it in at the registration table. Results sheets run about \$5 each. Feisworx also has complete results available online for a fee.

Feiseanna may vary some as to the dance schedule. Ours has the figure dances first and then the solo dances. They will start with the reels and then go to the light jigs, etc. Once all the competitions for soft shoe dances are done, they will go to hard shoe dances.

Please note that the dance level they compete at can be entirely different from the dance level they are in class. Moving up in class is based on the teacher. Moving up at a feis is placing out of a minimum of five competitors.

When you are settled in the ballroom, look at the dance card. It will give the dance number and which stage that competition is being held at. At each stage, there is a stand identifying which stage it is and a large 3-digit number. The 3-digit number is the competition number of the competition being done on that stage.

Some competition stage stands have two 3-digit numbers. The top number is for the dance that is being held on the stage at that moment. The bottom number is the next dance that will be held on that particular stage.

Note: The dance competition numbers are NOT the same as a competitor number. They are not to be confused with each other. Each dancer has their own competitor number which the judges use to identify the dancer when scoring. A dancer will get a new competitor number and card at each feis they go to. Each dance competition number represents a specific dance at that feis.

How to know when your child dances. Compare the dance number on your child's card to the schedule and what dance competition number is up on the stand. You will know exactly where they are in the competition. When they start the competition that is listed right before your dancer's competition, your dancer needs to go to the side of that stage and check in with the stage mom there. If the groups are small, I'd say under 5 competitors, send your dancer there even a little earlier. The stage mom will check the dancer in, she/he will line the dancers up, will tell them when it is time to walk in that line onto the stage, and they commonly will help the younger and/or beginner dancers get started when it is their turn to dance. Our class also practices the procedure of being lined up on the stage, dancing in pairs, bowing, and leaving the stage.

Sometimes they move slowly through the different competitions, and sometimes it moves quickly. It depends on the size of each dance competition group. It is important that you are constantly monitoring where they are at on your dancer's stage.

Pay attention when announcements are made. Sometimes they are instructing dancers to check in with the stage moms. Once in a while a dance is changed from one stage to another, but that is rare. They do not mix dances. In other words, they will not go on to light jigs until all the stages are done with the reel.

The stage moms are there to help the dancers. However, it can be a difficult job, particularly for the stage moms helping the younger dancers. If you or your dancer has any questions, don't hesitate to ask them. That is what they are there for. In turn, you can help the stage moms by watching where the competition is at using the schedule and keeping your dancer informed. Many times a stage mom will be telling the same dancer that their next competition is 5 dances away, 4 dances away, etc. while they are checking in dancers, getting dancers on the stage, etc.

What happens after your dancers has competed in a dance. We have volunteers that constantly go to the adjudicators' tables, collect the sheets the adjudicators use for scoring each dance, and take them back to Feisworx to enter the data. Once that is done, a sheet showing the results is posted at the results board. So give it some time and then check the results board to see how your dancer did. First look for their age group, then look for the dance competition number, and then check that sheet for your child's name and/or competitor number. If they are listed on the sheet, that means they placed in that dance. Go to the award's table and collect their medal. I've noticed the dancers catch on to this part of the feis very quickly ☺ You can pickup your results sheet when your dancer has completed in all their dances and all their results have been posted.

Feel free to take still pictures. Video taping and flash photography of the actual competition is prohibited.

TIPS:

-Be early. It gives the dancer a chance to stretch, warm-up, and a chance to practice on the dance stage. It gives you time to see the Irish dance supply vendor if you are needing anything. It will also give you the opportunity to deal with any last minute issues and get help with those issues if needed. Many competitions say that the dancer should be there and ready to compete 1 hour ahead of their scheduled competition.

-Remind your dancer that there will be other dancers there doing different choreography to the same dance. Our dancers need to focus on their own dance and not watch or follow other dancers.

-Your dancer should do the cleanest dance choreography they know and not necessarily the hardest. They will place better doing an easier choreography that is done well than a more difficult choreography done poorly.

-If the dancer forgets the steps they can try to continue or just bow and go back to their place in line. No big deal if that happens, they just can't expect to place.

-If they fall and aren't injured, they can get up and complete the dance best they can. If they are slightly injured and don't think they should continue dancing, they can bow and go back to their place in line. If they are injured and don't think they should try to get up, they need to stay put until help comes.

-DOUBLE KNOT those shoes. You don't want laces coming untied in the middle of a dance. It's not safe.

-If something falls off, keep dancing and retrieve it immediately after completing the dance and bowing to the adjudicator.

-Only the feis committee is allowed to approach the adjudicators or musicians.

-Don't wait until the last minute to register for a feis. You don't want the frustration of missing a deadline due to internet or website problems.

-There will be vendors at the feis. That is a good time to buy dance shoes if you need some. The dancer can try them on right then and there.

-There will be plenty of parents and dancers from our studio there who have been to a feis before. Don't hesitate to approach them if you need help with anything.

-Moving up from one level to the next at feiseanna. There must always be at least five competitors including your dancer. Beginner I must place 1st, 2nd, or 3rd and then they would compete at their next feis at the Beginner II level. Beginner II must place 1st or 2nd. Novice and up must place first. Sometimes a feis syllabus reads differently, but this is what Anne Hall requires of us.

-This is from my daughter. Good luck and have a great time!

Things the adjudicators look for:

-Pointed toes

-Turned out feet

-Timing

-Arms straight at the side with a light fist

-Upper body not moving/twisting/etc.

-It doesn't hurt when the dancer smiles.

If you have any issues regarding costumes or any questions, DON'T hesitate to ask at the table or anyone who has been doing this for a while -- even at the feis. We are happy to help you. All of us have been in your position and know it can be confusing. We want this to be an enjoyable experience for both you and your dancer!!!