# Education Support

American Dance

## Planning Ahead for Competition

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Dance team competitions have become the fourth season of the year for teams that perform at football games, basketball games, and spring shows. Now that it is part of the required curriculum for dance, it is an important area of focus for the dance team directors.

Preparation for contest should actually begin in the summer or early fall when the director is planning the activities for the entire year. In choosing the contest(s) the team attends, you will make a strategy of how your team can achieve their greatest level of success. For the seasoned contest team, the director will choose the two to four contests that will each be a stepping stone for the team's personal improvement.

For a first time participant, it is usually best to start by taking your officers to observe an early contest. There are many seasoned contest teams that know what to expect and how to approach the first contest where the beginner will need some preparation. Plan to stay for most of the day and especially through the awards so that they will know what to expect from going to and from dressing areas to sitting together in the stands and having a team representative retrieve the trophies during awards. These are small details that can make the difference in your team's confidence level going into the event.

Once the contests have been selected for your team, here are some steps to take during the season that will take you toward the best results:

September: Choose your contest(s). If you are new to contests, choose one that is possibly in January or early February to give you and your officers a chance to go to several contests to observe. Choose a contest for your team that will give them a chance to see other outstanding teams yet not so large as to overwhelm them for their first experience. If your team is seasoned, you will probably choose three or more contests. The first one should be in January or early February and will be considered the ice-breaker to test your routines for effectiveness. The second will be to measure the improvement from the first. The third will be to vault your team's confidence to its highest level. Ideally, give your team at least two weeks between each contest to polish

and correct any errors from the previous event. If you will be traveling out of town to contest, your parents club should be consulted to assist in fund-raising efforts to offset expenses, as well as submitting to various travel agencies for travel bids.

October-December: Select your music, props, costumes as well as set up any outside choreographers. This is a critical point in that these decisions will set the whole tone for your team's experience at contest. In selecting the music or theme, it is critical not to choose a tune that may be outdated or redundant by the time it is performed. If it is over used at a contest by many teams, it may draw a negative response from the crowd. If you are using an outside choreographer, allow him/her to be consulted to offer valuable input. Make sure to take the time and effort to have your music professionally prepared at the perfect temp.

If your parents are making the costumes or if you are having them professionally made, have them draw or make up several designs. It can also be helpful to have one of your team members "test" a prototype for its performability. Sometimes the greatest costume ideas have fallen apart on the floor during the performance or at the dress rehearsal when it is too late. Choose costume designs that are simple and effective and add the right look for your music and choreography. Remember that they will have to be transported easily as well as changed in and out several times during the course of a day. An easy costume change can lower your team's stress level at contest.

December- January: Depending on the length of your football season. It is best to start teaching the contest routines early. Remember that your team will have three to four to learn and perfect and your officers may have double that many (including solos, officers, ensembles). You and your officers will certainly want to choreograph some of your contest numbers and the team may want to choose a favorite instructor from camp to create a few of the routines. This will give your routine presentation a variety. Remember to make any small adjustments to the choreography to make the routine your style.

Make sure to begin with the most challenging routine as it will require the most memory time and polishing. Allow time for learning and basic polishing before you go on to the next routine. It is advisable to encourage your officers to schedule their own rehearsal time for their routines separate from the team's practice time and that the team events are the first priority. This would be a good time to reserve your school buses and give exact times a week prior to the contest.

January-February: After all routines are all taught, it is time to polish in small groups to fine tune the routines. You should hold auditions for each routine to select the best performers in each. Make sure that each team member is included in at least one routine provided they are grade eligible. Make sure to have alternates for each routine that know the routine well enough to step into any slot that might be vacated due to illness or ineligibility.

Once the selections are made, it is time to block the routine into its exact formations and patterns. Teach the girls to utilize only the basketball lines on the court

as other lines may not be on the performance floor on contest day. Also make sure to rotate your alternates into various positions during rehearsal so they will be ready if needed. Prior to the first contest, hold a special "show off" for parents and friends that will be your dress rehearsal. This will give the team an audience as well as an opportunity to perform in costume and preview any technical problems in advance. This would also be a good opportunity to have one or two critique judges come to give them scores and comments on their routines. Have any solos, officers or ensembles perform also. Make sure to time each routine to make sure that they fall into the time limit and ensure that the tempo is correct. This Show Off should take place at least two weeks prior to the first contest so there will be ample time to make any necessary changes.

Contest Day Preparation: Just before you go to contest, make sure to let your parents as well as team members know what you expect from them. It is always great to have a large showing of parents at contest and many will wear special shirts or jackets to display their support in school colors. Make sure to go over protocol for respect and kindness to other spectators and to support all teams at the contest. Type up a general guideline sheet that will tell the location of the contest, times, any house rules about dressing areas or food, and special instructions from you, the director.

Make a checklist of items that your team members will need to have with them at contest. Some extras besides their costumes: bobby pins, hair spray safety pins, hair bands, water bottle, whole fruit, crackers, sleeping bag or pillow (if a long day), zip lock bags, Bluetooth speaker (to practice). Encourage them to leave all valuables at home. Most contests will not offer a completely secure dressing area. Make sure that your team has cleaned their dressing area before departure. If your contest is out of town, be more specific with your guidelines and have an itinerary mapped out with plenty to keep everyone busy.

Your team can have a very positive experience through competitions. There are many contests that will provide them with a quality, positive and rewarding experience. Make sure that you have covered your plans well and that you are confident in yourself as well as your team.