



MARK OF EXCELLENCE RULES, REGULATIONS, AWARDS 2026

AGE DIVISIONS:

Mini: 5 and Under

Petite: 6-8 Years

Junior: 9-11 Years

Teen: 12-14 Years

Senior: 15-19 Years

Adult: 20 + Years ; Any routine with a performer age 20 or older will automatically perform in the Adult Division despite the average age, even if there is only ONE dancer age 20 & over.

Adult performances will receive critiques and comments only.

LEVELS OF COMPETITION:

Mark of Excellence offers **three levels of competition** for the dancer. Please use the guidelines listed as a guide to help you place each of your dancers fairly and appropriately.

Assigning Levels: Dancers' placement in each division is to be determined by the Directors and or Teacher's discretion. **The suggestion of hours is only a guide for each studio as they know each dancer.** Our registration system requires that each dancer be assigned a level.

Studio Directors select their dancers' levels ... however, based on the discretion of the judging panel, the routine may be bumped up to the next level. Any questions regarding group levels please call our office.

Beginner-(Mark of the Future) – This level is for the beginner dancer who dances less than 2 hours a week with two years or less of structured dance classes.

Intermediate Level -Three years or more of structured dance classes. Three (3) to five (5) hours of studio training per week.

Advanced Level -Three years or more of structured dance classes. Six (6) or more hours of studio advanced training per week.

Combining Levels of Dancers -- *Mark of Excellence National Talent Competition*-- each dancer is assigned point(s) to help determine the level of the group. Beginners receive One (1) point; Intermediate Level dancers receive Three (3) points and an Advanced dancer receives Six (6) points. The Level with the highest points determines the level they will compete.

Example: A Small Group of nine (9) dancers

Three (3) Beginner Level Dancers = 3 points

Five (5) Intermediate Level Dancers = 15 points

One (1) Advanced Level Dancer = 6 points

* The above group would compete in the **Intermediate Level**

Example: A Large Group of eighteen (18) dancers

Fourteen (14) Beginner Level Dancers = 14 points

Two (2) Intermediate Level Dancers = 6 points

Two (2) Advanced Level Dancers = 12 points

* The above group would compete in the **Beginner Level**

CATEGORIES OF COMPETITION:

Acro/Gymnastics, Adult, Ballet, Character, Clogging, Contemporary, Drill Team, Folkloric, Hip Hop, Improvisation, Jazz, Lyrical, Musical Theater, Modern, Open, Pantomime, Pointe, Pom- Pon, Production, Song & Dance, Student Choreography, Specialty, Tap and Inspire (Dancers with Exceptional Abilities). The Open and Specialty categories may include any of the above categories or any other form of dance not listed. **Extended Categories of Competition are available**

CATEGORY BREAKDOWN BY AGE:

5 years and under, 6 years, 7 years, 8 years, 9 years, 10 years, 11 years, 12 years, 13 years, 14 years, 15 years, 16 years, 17 years, 18 years, 19 years, 20+ years for ALL categories of competition.

The average age will determine the age of the group. EXAMPLE: Average age 11.0 to 11.9 = 11 years.

All ages are determined as of January 1, 2026

If requested ANY and All performers may be required to provide valid proof of age at the competition and could be subject to disqualification. Acts are not allowed to age up and must perform in the proper age division.

BUMP RULE:

The average age of each act must not drop more than one age division below the age of oldest dancer, regardless of the average age.

EXAMPLE: If an act averages in the junior age division but contains a senior age dancer age 15- 19, the act will compete in the teen age division.

This rule does not apply to the Production Category where you will use the average age.

GENERAL DIVISION OF ENTRIES:

Soloist..... Maximum of TWO Solos per dancer at a regional event

Duet/Trio.....(2-3 performers)

Small Group.... (4-9 performers)

Large Group.... (10-19 performers)

Line..... (20+ performers)

Production Line.(20+ performers)

Please note: Should an act drop below the minimum number of required dancers for the group size during the competition, the act will be judged and their award based on points; the act will not be eligible for the Top Ten awards.

TIME LIMITS:SOLOS & DUET/TRIOS **2:30**SMALL GROUPS **3:00**LARGE GROUP AND LINE **4:00**PRODUCTION **6:00**EXT. SOLOS & DUET/TRIOS **3:00**EXT. SMALL GROUPS **3:30**EXT. LARGE AND LINE **4:30**EXT. PRODUCTION **8:00**

You may purchase limited additional time in the extended categories for small, large, line and production groups **ONLY**, Please call our office for details.

Mark of Excellence proudly welcomes all acts; however, you must be affiliated with an active studio, register a minimum of five (5) entries with at least (5) individual dancers per regional or national competition and have the approval of the studio owner or Director. Please call our office with any questions regarding these entries.

Please check in on time. All dancers should be in the building and ready to compete at least **ONE** hour before their scheduled stage time.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

An exact time schedule will be emailed to each studio at least 7 days prior to the competition date. Schedules may vary from city to city depending on the number of acts and dancers registered. NO changes can be made once the schedule is sent out or at the Competition unless a Doctor's note is provided.

Entries will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis and will be limited to the amount of performance time available. **Mark of Excellence** reserves the right to add additional competition days or move the competition location due to unforeseen circumstances. This includes starting early on Fridays, if necessary.

Mark of Excellence Registration must be done at our website www.markofexcellencetalent.com and click on the registration link. No paper or faxed entries will be accepted. We accept Certified Check and ALL major credit cards. All checks must be received **30 days prior to event**. All returned checks will be charged a \$35.00 returned check fee. **Mark of Excellence reserves the right to refuse an entry at any anytime.**

METHOD OF ADJUDICATION:

Qualified judges will be selected to adjudicate each regional competition. **Mark of Excellence** selects judges with knowledge of all areas of dance. We select Studio Owners, Directors, Choreographers and Teachers who are all involved within studios on a day-to-day basis. They understand all the levels, as well as ages, and what goes into preparing dancers for competition. All scores and comments reflect the opinions of the judges and not necessarily the opinions of the **Mark of Excellence** Directors and Staff. We strive to help make each dancer the BEST they can be!

Adjudication Point System; with an adjudicated point system, there may be multiple duplicate awards presented within each age group in each category.

Technique (Max 40 pts) Execution (Max 30 pts) Showmanship (Max 20 pts)

Choreography (Max 5 pts) Costume (Max 5 pts)

Each level will have the following awards presented: EXTREME PLATINUM, PLATINUM, HIGH GOLD, and GOLD. Each level is based on the following scores:

Xtreme Platinum: (288.0 - 300.0) **Platinum** (280.0 - 287.9)

High Gold (272.0 - 279.9) **Gold** (267.0 - 271.9)

The judge's panel will break any or all ties for the HIGH POINT of each TOP TEN Finalist. All ties in the TOP TEN will be announced as tied for 2nd through 10th place. Each act will receive an individual score and audio critique. Scores and critiques will be available to the Studio Director ONLY.

GENERAL:

For the safety of everyone all dancers must perform on the stage surface. No performer is allowed to perform on any tables, furniture or equipment used by the Judges, Auditor, Master of Ceremonies, Video/Photo, or Award Areas including all riser areas. No item at any time may be intentionally thrown from the stage towards the judge's audience or staff. Any violation would be subject to the disqualification rule.

Mark of Excellence Standard of Conduct:

We at **MARK OF EXCELLENCE NATIONAL TALENT** understand the broad range of styles and appropriateness that all dancers are exposed to in our country: however, we expect each and every routine to be in good taste for our "family friendly" viewing audience.

Inappropriate routines are not acceptable and at a minimum, will have points deducted, or not be eligible for Top Ten, or at most, being disqualified. The appropriateness of the routine is subject to the discretion of the judges and may not necessarily reflect the opinion of the

Mark of Excellence staff.

VIDEO OR PHOTOGRAPHY:

For the protection of the children and the creativity of the choreography use of any type of camera is strictly prohibited. Absolutely no cameras are allowed during a performance on stage. A professional videographer and photographer will be available at each event.

MUSIC:

Performance music is accepted in the following formats: **Please upload music on your Studio Registration** and please bring back-up copies in either CD's, iPod's, iPads, USB flash drive and/or laptops. All audio resources are the responsibility of the Director and should be turned in two weeks BEFORE schedule comes out. Back-up resources should always be available at all competitions in an event of an emergency.

PROPS:

Props must be essential to the act and must be carried on stage by the performer or studio staff (instructor, parents etc.) Placement and setup of all props should be completed within 2 minutes. For extra assistance with props and set up please coordinate with our back stage

manager. No person or persons may support, assist or hold props during the performance, without being a part of the act by number and age.

Mark of Excellence wants each dancer and studio participating to have a clean and safe dancing surface. No substances in any form that could affect the dancing surface will be allowed. Please be considerate of the studios performing after you, ensuring that you clean the stage of all debris. IE; glitter, powder, flowers, feathers, etc. No dangerous props allowed on stage. This includes fire, live animals, metal swords, metal knives, glass or any items having sharp points or edges. **NO ROLLER BLADES, SKATES, SKATEBOARDS, etc.** No item may be intentionally thrown from the stage.

There are no height restrictions for a free standing prop, however, for safety reasons, a **dancer may not stand above 6 ft. on a scenic prop piece.** (riser, table, scaffolding, etc.) For all studios attending, any studio that unreasonably delays the competition or attempts to reschedule performance order without prior approval is subject to point deductions at the discretion of the judge's panel.

AWARDS:

All Final Awards will be posted on the Mark of Excellence National Talent Results page after the competition.

One placement award will be presented to each act in every category and age division. In addition to the daily adjudicated awards, TOP TEN finalists will be posted for the **BEGINNER, INTERMEDIATE** and **ADVANCED** levels for each division of competition. Soloists who have performed two solos will only be eligible for the TOP TEN with their highest scoring solo performance.

Prizes will be awarded as follows in Excellence Rewards: These rewards can be used as credit for the 2027 Regional competitions registrations.

Each Mini, Petite, Junior, Teen and Senior Solo High Point winner will receive \$100.00 Excellence Rewards

Each Mini, Petite, Junior, Teen and Senior Duet/Trio High Point winner will receive \$100.00 Excellence Rewards

Each Mini, Petite, Junior, Teen, Senior Small and Large Group High Point winner will receive \$125.00 Excellence Rewards

Each Mini, Petite, Junior, Teen and Senior Line High Point winner will receive \$150.00 Excellence Rewards

Adult performers will receive their appropriate recognition and placement award, along with judge's Critiques. Adult performers will not be eligible for any TOP TEN awards nor Excellence Rewards.

Mark of Excellence Group Excellence Award:

This prestigious award is presented to the group routine (including all small, large/lines/production in all ages) with the HIGHEST SCORE from the **Beginner Level**. One award will also be presented to the group (including all small, large and lines in all ages) with the HIGHEST SCORE from the **Intermediate Level**. One Award will also be presented to the group (including all small, large and lines in all ages) with the HIGHEST SCORE from the **Advanced Level**. In addition, the JUDGES will select a Group Excellence Entertainment Award. One award will be presented to the group (including all small, large and lines in all ages) this award is chosen from all group routines in all age divisions and all levels. Judges will be responsible to make the final decision on any ties for the highest score. A \$300.00 in Excellence Rewards for the following season will be awarded to each of the above Three Level Group Excellence Award winners. These Awards will be presented at the end of the competition after the final studio has performed.

Mark of Excellence Title Awards:

This is our TITLE AWARD selected for each level and age division. We will have a Title Award Winner and Runner Up. The cost for each solo for Title is \$40. The Mark of Excellence Title Winner is chosen by the judges panel based on the overall personality, entertainment and showmanship of the dancer. This decision is made separate from adjudicated and overall scores.

Mark of Excellence Solo Master:

An award will be presented in each age division to the most talented and outstanding performer registered as a soloist in Tap, Lyrical, Ballet, Hip Hop, Jazz, Musical Theater, Modern, Contemporary, Open, Specialty and Clogging category ONLY. You must be registered

to enter the MARK OF EXCELLENCE Solo Master competition prior to your solo performance. Please select the SOLO MASTER title when solo entries are submitted online. The fee to be eligible for the SOLO MASTER competition is \$40 per entry. This may be entered online or at the competition. Each winner of the SOLO MASTER for the above categories in each age division for the BEGINNER, INTERMEDIATE and ADVANCED LEVELS will be presented an appropriate award. Once again, the Solo Master is only available in the above categories.

Mark of Excellence Solo Costume Award:

An award will be presented to the most outstanding solo costume in each age division. The selection will be made by the judges on overall design, creativity, fit and workmanship. Each soloist is automatically entered when they register their solo. This includes the **Beginner Level, Intermediate Level** and **Advanced Level**. Winners will be presented an appropriate award.

Mark of Excellence Photogenic Award:

If you wish to enter the photogenic competition, you must do so at the competition. Do not mail in pictures or fees for photogenic entries. The fee for the photogenic award is **\$40.00** per entry. All individuals must be entered at least 20 acts prior the award ceremonies for each age division. You must be a registered competitor to be eligible for this award.

An award will be presented to the individual judged most photogenic in each age division of competition. Individuals must bring a 5x7 or 8x10 recent black and white or color photo with all your contact information on the back. This information should include your name, age, act number, and the name of studio you attend. It is the responsibility of each individual to pick up his or her photographs. No photos will be returned after competition. **Mark of Excellence** is not responsible for loss or damage to any photograph not picked up at the end of the competition.

The following Awards below will be given at our Final Awards segment at the completion of the competition.

Mark of Excellence Choreography Award:

At the discretion of our panel of judges CHOREOGRAPHY AWARDS will be presented for small groups, as well, as large groups and lines combined. Our panel of judges will select one BEGINNER, one INTERMEDIATE and one ADVANCED group from each level.

Mark of Excellence Judges Choice Award:

This award is created by the judges and allows them the opportunity to select and acknowledge special details of a group routine. Our panel of judges will select one BEGINNER, one INTERMEDIATE and one ADVANCED group from each level.

Mark of Excellence Group Costume Award:

All Small groups, Large groups and Lines combined are eligible for this award. The selection is made by the judges on overall design, creativity, fit and workmanship on all dancers. Our panel of judges will select one BEGINNER, one INTERMEDIATE and one ADVANCED group from each level.

Mark of Excellence Sportsmanship Award:

A special award will be presented to the studio and dancers who exhibit outstanding respect and sportsmanship within the competition weekend. This award will be selected by our judges and staff.

Additional awards will be given at the discretion of the judges.

Fees and Payments:

Change Fees: Once the schedule for the event is completed there will be **no changes made to the schedule** such as a change to song title, category, dancer, spelling etc. Also, any routine added after the event schedule will also be charged the change fee as well as regular entry fee amount **if space is available**. There is a \$50 fee per change request if changes are requested AFTER the schedule is completed.

Outstanding Balances: Any balance not paid 7-10 days prior to the event will not receive the schedule until balance is paid in full.

All entries and payments are due 30 days prior to the competition date.

Entries that are not paid at least 30 days prior may not be included in the prepared schedule. Additional entries may not be accepted once the competition has begun.

If you have not paid for your entries by the deadline date (30 days prior), we require payment by certified funds only. We cannot accept a studio or personal check for entries received after the deadline. No acts will be allowed to perform until paid in full. No entry is guaranteed until payment has been received and processed.

Your registration with **Mark of Excellence** demonstrates that you have read and fully accept our RULES, REGULATIONS, TERMS and CONDITIONS. Any violation of the above rules and regulations may result in the act/routine ineligible for the TOP TEN or OVERALL AWARDS.

Mark of Excellence National Finals:

By participating in our regional event, your studio and dancers qualify for our National Finals. For additional questions concerning national entries and qualifications please call our office.

I, agree, as the representative of the above studio, acknowledge that there is an assumed element of risk and therefore assume all risks and hazards incidental to the participation, and hereby release, resolve, indemnify and agree to hold harmless, **Mark of Excellence National Talent Competition**, its agents, employees, officers, and venues. Neither **Mark of Excellence National Talent Competition** nor said personals shall be held financially responsible for any injury, illness, theft or death, incurred as a direct result or indirect result of this activity.

Dancer/parent also grants permission to use photographs, video tape, or recording for any promotional purposes for website, social media, advertising without any obligation, compensation or written consent.

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS:

All categories are eligible for top 10

Acro / Gymnastics: Acrobatics blending with dance and aerial tricks.

Choreography should include gymnastic passes, headstands, chest rolls etc.

Ballet: Routine to include ballet technique with classical step, ballet slippers only. **Character:** A routine that portrays a certain character from Television, Movies or Broadway.

Contemporary: Incorporating both modern and lyrical movements with a strong ballet foundation of ballet.

Clogging: A folk dance otherwise known as flat-footing, foot-stomping, clog dancing or jigging.

Drill Team: Dances should demonstrate ensemble choreography with precision elements.

Folkloric: Ethnic and cultural styles of dance such as Spanish, Hawaiian, Irish Step, etc.

Hip Hop: Street dance styles, popping and locking, Breaking, Crumping, etc.

Improv: Dancers are given music and asked to improvise a piece of choreography in a jazz or lyrical genre.

Lyrical: Interpretive dance to the lyrics of the music with classical technique **Modern:** A routine of modern design based on the techniques of certain collaborators.

Musical Theater: A routine incorporating any style of dance to music from a Broadway Show or Movie Musical

Jazz: Routine to include jazz technique, including leaps and turns. **Open:** Any combination of the listed categories of competition.

Pom pom: Dances should demonstrate ensemble choreography with precision elements with Pom pom.

Pointe: Routine to include ballet technique with classical steps in pointe shoes

Song and Dance: A routine combining both vocal and dance skills. One cordless microphone will be provided.

Specialty: Any combination of the listed categories of competition. **Tap:** Both Rhythmic and Broadway Styles of Tap technique **Inspire:** Dancers with Exceptional Abilities.

Production: A group routine with 20 or more dancers performing varied styles of dance and acrobatics