



Dance Studio Competition Guide

Created by TutuTix & The Dance Exec

Introduction

Many dance studios choose to have a performance or competition team of some variety. Having a team allows students with a greater interest in dance or the performing arts the opportunity to explore their passion in a variety of performance and educational settings.

Before delving into the subject of dance competition teams, it's important to define exactly what your team will entail.

Will you attend competitions?

Will you attend conventions?

How many, of either?

What is the cost to be a participant on the competition team each year?

Participants and their parents must have a solid, firm knowledge of the details and should realize that they must be willing to commit to the team for an entire season.

From a studio perspective, the extra work required to manage a successful team is significant, and it should not be taken lightly. As a studio owner, you should over-prepare!

This guide will walk you through the procedure of creating a competition team (and competition system) that works for you and your studio.

Creating the Team

To create a team, you have to have interested dancers. You can find interested dancers in a variety of ways:

- 1) Audition
- 2) Invitation
- 3) Open acceptance
- 4) A combination of the above.

Around recital season, The Dance Exec's studio holds auditions for the upcoming season. If there are certain students that would benefit from being a part of the competition team, they are encouraged to audition.

Auditions are open to everyone, and as long as the students are prepared to handle the requirements of being a part of the group, everyone is accepted to a certain extent (even if that means only being a part of one or two group dances).

Our philosophy is that everyone can grow through this opportunity, and if a student shows interest and is willing to work, it would be a disservice to not allow him or her a spot on the team.

The auditioning students are given a required skill set prior to the audition date, so they know exactly upon what they are being judged. In addition to technical skills, the students must also learn and perform combinations, and they may be asked to demonstrate a variety of ballet skills and technical knowledge.

A panel of 3-5 judges scores the audition, and with their scores, recommendations are made for solos, duets, trios, small groups, guest artist choreography, etc.

The students are also scored on personal appearance (i.e. did the student follow the dress code that was set forth) and performance qualities (facial expressions, musicality, etc.). We also interview students individually to inquire about their interest level and to discuss personal goals.

In order to audition, the student and parents must submit a signed copy of the handbook for the year (which is published prior to auditions) and an audition form. The students are charged an audition fee.

After auditions, students are notified of their suggested routine roster within one week. Upon receipt of their proposed routine roster, the student may choose to accept or decline membership.

Determine a Yearly Schedule

When determining the mission of your team, it is important to consider what the team's yearly schedule will entail. At The Dance Exec's Studio, the team participates in competitive, educational, and community-based activities. This allows the students to have a well-rounded experience that focuses on their personal growth as dancers and citizens.

The calendar for the team is set for the following season when the new Competition Handbooks are released (typically in April or May). If a competition does not have their dates set, then we do not include them on our calendar.

People have to know the date requirements upfront in order to appropriately plan for the season. When the dates are distributed this far in advance, there are no excuses for missing events. Additionally, the studio only puts events on our calendar that are established and guaranteed to run.

Having an event cancelled makes you, the studio owner, look ill prepared and will make parents feel that the experience is unorganized. Remember, most parents are unfamiliar with the competitive dance world and are relying on you to create a memorable, beneficial experience for their dancers.

For some more ideas and suggestions on developing your studio's competitive schedule, check out [this article](#) on the TutuTix blog!

Payments and Financing

Being a part of a competition/performance team is expensive. There is absolutely no way to avoid the costs associated with being a part of a quality, competitive/performance-based dance organization. From costume costs to convention/competition fees to choreography costs to travel associated with events, the financial commitment can be significant.

In the past, in order to help parents alleviate the burden of large lump payments due throughout the year, The Dance Exec's Studio offered a monthly finance option (with no interest charged). Parents received a worksheet that assisted them in breaking down the costs associated with the team throughout the year.

While this worked for a considerable amount of time, the studio no longer offers this option, but it is certainly a viable option for making payments more manageable.

Many studios explore the options of non-profit booster clubs and fundraising. The Dance Exec's Studio also explored this avenue, but it did not work for our business. Fundraising takes time and commitment from parents and students in order to raise enough money to really impact the costs affiliated with the year (especially if you are dealing with a large team).

This level of commitment was not something that many of our families were willing to make. If individual students/parents choose to raise funds independently, that is perfectly fine! But for our studio, fundraising is not endorsed.

As far as scheduling payments, the amounts owed are given to the parents upfront. In the summer, parents are expected to pay for competitive costumes and the studio's summer intensive. Parents also pay for additional choreography fees upon initiation of the choreography. For workshops, competitions, etc., payments are typically due 6-8 weeks prior to the event.

When establishing payment due dates, make sure you allow yourself enough time (an extra week or two) to successfully collect payments from every party. As a studio owner, you should never pay a student's cost for an event, costume, etc. unless there is a written agreement of reimbursement (and, even then, you should approach the situation with great caution).

Studio Owners should note that there are often advantages for paying for events early, and if you can note that on your calendar, you can reap the benefits of early registration (rebates, teacher discounts, etc.).

Whatever methods you use for fee collection, it is your responsibility to plan ahead and guarantee that all registrations for external studio events are received in a timely manner.



The Rules

When you establish the infrastructure of your competitive team, it is important to know the rules and details of every event you attend.

You should know how each competition categorizes routines and styles, their awards system, and their levels of entry. Most importantly, you should be able to accurately communicate this information to your studio's parents and dancers.

When registering your dancers for competition, you must register them accurately. Know the qualifications and requirements of each division (e.g. if certain categories only allow two acrobatic tricks, then you should make sure the entry only has two or fewer acrobatic tricks). Most competitions have "age bump" rules, so if you have younger dancers participating with older dancers, the average age rule will likely apply.

Be prepared and knowledgeable about rules for varying events because parents will turn to you for guidance.

It is imperative that you register your dancers in the level where they belong. Many competitions have established different levels and formats based on competitive experience, hours in the classroom, and number of routines.

The levels work fairly well if teachers accurately enter their students. Entering a lower level in an attempt to "sweep" the awards is obviously not conducive in providing a progressive, educational competitive experience.

The same principle applies to conventions and putting students in aged divisions: the students should be placed into the age and division where they will best learn and grow. At The Dance Exec's Studio, we firmly believe that students should never be complacent.

The bottom line is that must know all of the requirements and expectations of the events you attend. Ultimately, you are the liaison and the facilitator between the event and your studio's students and parents. Be organized and prepared, and your competitive families will appreciate your effort.

Costuming

In the world of dance, there is a lot of debate regarding appropriate and inappropriate costuming choices for dancers. The Dance Exec believes that as long as the costume is conceptually based for the routine and represents a classy, tasteful appearance for the age and physique of the dancer(s), then you cannot go wrong.

With your competitive costuming, there are four primary options for purchasing costumes:

- 1. CUSTOM-MADE:** In today's competitive environment, a lot of studios are choosing to use elaborate custom-made and designed costumes. These costumes are expensive and are often in the \$250+ range. If you choose to pursue a custom costume, make sure that you are clear and specific in your design expectations and check the seamstress's portfolio to guarantee that the work you are requesting can be completed adequately and within your timeframe.
- 2. CUSTOM-MADE CONSIGNMENT:** For dancers that may not be willing to invest in the price of a custom costume, custom costume consignment sales/websites are a great way to obtain the custom look for a significantly lower price. Custom consignment costumes also ship quickly, so if you can find the look and size desired for your routine, this is a great, express option.
- 3. CATALOG ORDER:** There are a number of dance costume companies and catalogs that may have a costume that is fitting for your routine and concept. With costume catalogs, keep in mind that any other studio may also have the same costume, so it is important that accessories, added rhinestones, props, or the routine concept set it apart from others. Costume catalog costumes often take several months to ship, so make sure you allow plenty of time for the order to arrive.
- 4. STORE BOUGHT:** Some costumes for competition routines may be bought from local stores. Using this method, you can create creative, unique looks, but it does require time and patience to acquire all of the right pieces and sizes to complete the look.
- 5. ACCESSORIZING:** There are many methods of accessorizing that will push your costume to the next level. Using rhinestones, headpieces, and trimming, you can make a costume pop and have the "wow" factor.

With everything involved in organizing a competitive company, it is imperative that costumes arrive in a timely manner so that you can rehearse and make adjustments prior to competing. Planning ahead is key. Do not wait until the last minute to complete costumes—this will only lead to stress and anxiety among parents and students, and, as a result, yourself.

Setting the Choreography

The importance of having unique, original, appropriate, and eye-catching choreography for your team cannot be reiterated enough. At The Dance Exec's Studio, the company choreography is balanced between in-studio staff and guest artists. There are benefits to both; finding a balance is imperative in offering a well-rounded experience.

Benefits of In-Studio Choreography:

- Flexibility in time frame/rehearsal period
- Knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses
- Often, more affordable for students and parents
- Offers your staff the opportunity to be choreographically and artistically creative

Benefits of Guest Artist Choreography:

- Teaches students to be adaptable to different styles
- Challenges the students to learn quickly
- Gives students the opportunity to work in a privatized setting with industry professionals
- Motivates and inspires students

Ultimately, you have to decide how to structure your team, but by being diverse, you are giving your students insight to the industrial world of dance.

In your choreography, there also several other factors to consider:

- Are the music, lyrics, and /or theme of the piece appropriate for the students performing the routine?
- Does the piece have a concept or back-story that the students will easily grasp and enjoy performing?
- Is the piece an original concept, or is it uniquely inspired from something? Copying choreography is unacceptable.
- Can your dancers capably perform the skills within the piece? Less is more—make sure your dancers can consistently execute the movements in their routines.
- Do the props and movement for a piece make sense? The overall performance should be cohesive and everything should have an obvious purpose.

Your choreography schedule should be established so that the pieces have enough time for choreography, rehearsal, and cleaning. Sending unprepared dancers onstage is not advantageous for anyone.

It is also a good idea to keep a notebook nearby for brainstorming choreography ideas. Everyone has had the experience where a brilliant idea for a routine hits you. Document those notes even if it is not in the midst of the choreography season—you will undoubtedly be able to use it in the future.



Systemizing and Managing

Within your group, you have to create a systematization for organizing your teams. This includes explicitly detailing your expectations. You can break down the groups by age, skill, and/or interest level, and there should be specific requirements for each group. At The Dance Exec's Studio, we have created a thorough guide for our competitive company that is published a couple of months prior to the audition dates for the upcoming season.

Your studio's competitive team should know the details and standards of your expectations upfront. This way, if an issue arises during the competitive season, the consequences are explicitly detailed.

This certainly does not mean that situations of conflict will not exist and/or become easier (although, you would assume they would), but you have set forth your requirements and it is up to your dancers to follow them.

Stick to your rules with everyone, and you will have a cohesive unit that operates smoothly with dancers that are committed, passionate, and willing to work.

Aside from generalized rules and expectations, once convention and competition season begins, you should send out detailed information regarding each and every event. This alleviates stress and eliminates unnecessary, distracting questions during the events.

Remember, when you are conveying information about events, you can never be too specific. Be detailed, thorough, and share as much information as possible.

Parents need comfort in knowing the event and situation. Some parents may be new to competitions and convention and providing this information is helpful in letting them know how the weekend will run. Never assume that anyone knows anything.

In the same vein, when competition season arrives, reiterate your expectations. Distributing an "all you need to know" guide for competition season will help your parents prepare and understand the expectations for each event.

Conclusion

The Dance Exec's Guide to Creating & Managing a Competition Team has offered suggestions and tips for taking the organization of your competition team to the next level. You may incorporate one or all of the suggestions, but if you put passion, effort, time, and organization behind whatever you choose to do, you will always be successful. You will provide meaningful experiences and impact your students' lives.

What could be better than that?

Check out the links below for some more articles on topics like parent preparation, dancer nutrition, costume and makeup tips, and more!

[How to Get Ready for a Dance Competition: The Dance Parent's Competition Survival Guide](#)

[Stay-Put Tips for Dance Competition Makeup](#)

[5 Things to Consider When Preparing Solo Dance Choreography](#)

[Nutrition for Dancers: What to Eat Before Competitions](#)

[3 Team-Building Exercises for Your Dance Competition Team](#)