

Information  
Guidance  
Tips

# Handbook for New Competitors



European Same-Sex  
Dance Association

Useful information on  
entering your first same-sex  
dance competition

It's about having fun, being yourself and going for it!

# Thinking about competing? Your journey starts here...



*The same-sex dance competition environment is very friendly and inclusive. I can just be myself and feel comfortable dancing as who I am.*



- Yanni, Singapore  
(new competitor,  
Team UK)

Competing in same-sex ballroom and/or latin is a great way to improve your dancing, give yourself a goal to work towards, meet other people and have a darn good time.

It can be quite daunting taking your first step into competitive dancing. The aim of this booklet is to give you guidance and help ease some of your fears.

Inside you'll find some basic information about what same-sex competitions are all about, as well as some top tips from other new competitors who have already taken the leap.

- 1** The first thing to do is find a partner.  
Ask your dance teacher if they know anyone around your level who's looking. Or be brave and approach someone from your class. Posting in same-sex dance Facebook groups can also have good results. You're allowed to partner with anyone - amateur or professional - unless you want to enter the starter category. This is reserved for couples in which neither partner has competed before.
- 2** Next step, try and find some time to meet up.  
If you haven't danced with your prospective partner before, why not try some social dancing first and see if it's a good fit. It's also a good idea at this point to chat about what you want to get out of your competitive experience, to make sure you're on the same page. Think of partner-finding as dance-dating rather than dance-weddings...competition partnerships can change if it's not working.
- 3** If it's all looking good, the only thing left to do is practise.  
Going to group classes can be really helpful for learning new steps and technique in a social environment. You might also want to get some private lessons with a teacher who can provide more focused learning and help you choreograph a routine.

"Dance to express  
not to impress"  
- Barri (new competitor)

# General overview: About the dancing

“  
Competing in my  
first competition was  
amazing! Great people,  
great energy and lovely  
surroundings.”

- Irene, Netherlands  
(new competitor, Team NL)



## ? What categories can we choose from?

The first thing to do is decide whether you want to do ballroom, latin or both. Each competition has slightly different options, but there will always be Adult (and commonly Senior) events in Standard Ballroom and Latin.

The Standard Ballroom dances are

- Slow Waltz
- Tango
- Viennese Waltz
- Slow Foxtrot
- Quickstep

The Latin dances are:

- Cha Cha Cha
- Samba
- Rumba
- Paso Doble
- Jive

There may also be a Ten-Dance event (where all 10 latin and ballroom dances are performed), a Show Dance event (solo or group performances set to music that may incorporate lifts, drops and elements from other dance forms) and events for other non-standard dances.

Male couples and female couples dance in separate events, though sometimes there are opportunities for mixed couples to dance. Trans (including non-binary) dancers who do not feel that their gender identity falls into either category may choose which category they feel most comfortable dancing in.

## Which dances will we be expected to do? ?

Starters will be asked to do a maximum of two Ballroom (and/or two Latin) dances; D and C level competitors will dance three; B class four; and A class dance all five dances. The C and D class dances are Waltz, Quickstep and Tango for Ballroom; and Rumba, Jive and Cha Cha Cha for Latin (starters do two of these - usually Waltz and Quickstep/Cha Cha and Jive). Foxtrot and Samba are reserved for B and A class. Meanwhile, Viennese Waltz and Paso Doble are danced only by A class.

## ? Will we be dancing with couples of a similar level?

Yes. At the start of each competition you will dance a 'classification round.' Once the judges have seen you dance a few times, they'll assign you a class, usually between A and D (with A representing the highest level.) After that, you will be dancing amongst other couples in the same classification as you and competing for the title in your particular class. It should be noted that some competitions have a 'starter' class, in which there is no classification round. Couples where neither partner has competed before are eligible to enter the starter class.

# Logistics: Entering a competition

You can find a list of upcoming competitions on the ESSDA website:  
[www.essda.eu](http://www.essda.eu)

## ? Which competition?

Choosing which competition to enter first can be difficult, as there's a calendar full of same-sex dance comps every year in lots of different European locations. You may want to think about:

- Location (how far are you willing to travel?)
- Length (a short afternoon competition or a week-long event?)
- Price (what is your budget?)
- Language (ESSDA competitions use English, but others may not)

## ⚙️ Registration

When signing up, you'll be asked which events you'd like to enter in and which class you think you'll be in. If neither you nor your partner have competed before (excluding 'fun competitions') then you can enter the starter category. Otherwise you should indicate your expected class. Ask a teacher or more experienced competitor if you're unsure. It doesn't need to be exact, as you'll be classified on the day anyway - it's just helpful for the organisers to get a rough idea. You'll also be asked for your name, which will be listed in the programme. If you'd prefer your name not to be published, that's fine - just let the organisers know.



Darren Whitby & Vishesh Mehta, UK

## € How much will it cost?

When deciding on which competition to enter, it could be worth looking at the entrance fees, which can range from €20 to €250.

There may be discounted rates for members of ESSDA or other clubs, and for those who register early. There are sometimes outreach programmes associated with particular competitions to provide financial assistance to qualifying entrants. Find out more on the relevant competition webpage or the ESSDA website.



## Travel & accommodation

It's best to book your travel and accommodation early - hotel rooms near the venue will sell out very quickly and may get more expensive as the competition draws near. If you're on a budget, it's often possible for local dancers to host you (we're friendly like that). Get in touch with the competition organisers if you'd like help arranging hosting. For travel, sometimes the competition entrance fee will include a local travelcard to get around during your stay. Otherwise, check local travel routes and work out which tickets are best suited to the type of journeys you're likely to be taking.

“Everyone was very nice, caring and encouraging...even same-sex dance champions came to wish us good luck”

- Patrice, France  
(new competitor,  
Team FR)



# Preparations: Before the competition

Find the ESSDA competition rules at  
[www.essda.eu](http://www.essda.eu)

## How much training should we do?

In the run up to a competition many couples choose to have private lessons with a teacher to help them choreograph a routine and to work with them on technique. Whether or not that's the case for you, though, a key part of your preparation will likely revolve around practising.

How much practice time to commit varies widely from couple to couple. Some will dance on very little practice (or occasionally none at all!) where others will choose to practise once a month, weekly or even every day.

Finding a space with a good floor that is big enough for you to dance your style can be tricky - inquire with local dance schools to see if their spaces are available to hire, or if there are other competitors in your area, ask them where they practise. Community spaces such as town halls or schools can provide cheap practice space options too.



Petra Zimmermann & Caroline Privou,  
Germany

## What should we wear?

What you wear is pretty much up to you as long as it falls within 'accepted standards of decency and etiquette.' Some people buy special dancewear, which can be bought online or at highstreet dancewear shops if you have any locally. Many starters wear clothes they already own though.

Starters are discouraged from wearing very formal clothes such as tailsuits, but otherwise, anything goes. You'll see from photos of same-sex dance competitions that outfits differ a lot. Think about what styles you'd feel comfortable in and which colour combinations you like. It's also worth considering the steps and movements you're likely to have in your routines, and choosing clothes that won't get tangled, caught or cause bother.

As for shoes, don't wear trainers or anything with too much grip. If possible, buy specialist ballroom/latin shoes as they will have the correct soles to allow you to move easily on the floor.

*Don't stress too much about the outfit – wear something that you are comfortable with, is easy to move in and fits your personal style and gender expression.*

*- Krista & Eevi, Finland  
(new competitors, Team FI)*





Take it in turns to go for toilet breaks so you don't miss any announcements.

# Preparations: On the day

Accessibility details for each competition venue should be found on the relevant competition website or by contacting organisers.

*In all competitions dancers can be worried about the venue and conditions, spectators, health and fitness that day etc. I was more excited than worried though!*

*- Barri, UK  
(new competitor, Team UK)*

## What to bring

- Food and water
  - » snacks/energy bars & possibly a packed lunch depending on whether or not food will be available near the venue
- Fan and/or towel
  - » to keep you cool whilst dancing. There may be showers available after.
- Change of clothes
  - » e.g. a jumper to keep warm between dances (something that zips or buttons up is usually best, to avoid ruining hair/make-up) and/or something to wear once you've finished dancing
- Costume
  - » outfit, shoes (plus spares if you have them), shoe brush, accessories & any hair/makeup products you use
- Tickets
  - » competition tickets, plus tickets to any evening events if you're not planning on returning to your hotel/home first
- Plasters and medications
  - » plasters can be useful for shoes that start to rub, or other scrapes - and don't forget any other medications you need.

## Arriving

On arrival, register with the front desk. They will give you a programme for the day and a competition number (remember this - it will be used instead of your names all the way through). Your number should be worn on the back of the leader (or either partner if you role-switch).

## Getting ready

There will be changing rooms at the venue where you can get ready. There are separate changing rooms for men and women. These are usually communal. Some venues also offer gender-neutral and/or private changing rooms. Sometimes shower facilities are available too.

## Warming up

Warming up your muscles can help prevent injuries. Exercises might include stepping, jogging, arm swings, knee swings, ankle circles and gentle stretches. Do what works for you and make sure not to over-exert yourself. Ask your teacher or consult a specialist if you're not sure.

## Preparing to dance

Just before the competition starts, check which heat you're in. A list of couples and heats will be posted on a board (or sometimes simply announced.) Keep checking which group you're in after each round and listen for announcements of when your group is due to dance.

Some competitions offer a practice session for competitors. This may take place on the day of the competition or the day before. Check the programme before booking travel and accommodation if you would like the chance to practice.

Ask those around you  
if you get confused.

# On the floor: Things to note

It's worth practicing to music with the right tempo so that you know how fast or slow a rhythm to expect on the day.

## Music tempo

Competition music will follow a standard tempo for each dance. The standard bars and beats per minute for competition dances are as follows:

Slow Waltz:	28-30 / 84-90
Tango:	31-33 / 124-132
Viennese Waltz:	58-60 / 174-180
Slow Foxtrot:	28-30 / 112-120
Quickstep:	50-52 / 200-208

Cha Cha Cha:	30-32 / 120-128
Samba:	50-52 / 100-104
Rumba:	25-27 / 100-108
Paso Doble:	60-62 / 120-124
Jive:	42-44 / 168-176

## Song length

Generally, music will be played for one and a half to two minutes per dance. There are a few exceptions though:

- For the Paso Doble, music will be played to the first highlight, or occasionally the second highlight (this will be announced).
- During the first classification round, music may be played for longer to ensure judges have time to classify all couples.
- In the general look and second classification, music will be played for one minute.



Piia Korpi, Finland

## The judges

Judges tend to stand on the dancefloor, near the edge. They will usually spread themselves out along different sides and corners of the floor. Don't be put off by them and try to just dance as if they weren't watching!

Judges are usually people with a lot of experience as dancers, teachers and examiners. They have been specially trained to judge competitions. Judges in same-sex dance competitions may be from within the same-sex and equality dance communities, or from the mainstream circuits. Either way, they will be looking for a combination of qualities in competitor performances. These include:

- Timing and musicality
- Frame and posture
- Technique
- Choreography
- Relationship and connection

## Walking on and off

When your number is called, you can walk onto the dancefloor. If the organisers are short of time, they may just announce the heat number and allow all couples to enter the floor together.

Couples usually walk on hand-in-hand, often with one partner 'presenting' the other and placing them in their starting position.

After each dance, give a bow to the audience before taking your position for the next dance (or leaving the floor if it is the end of the round).

When leaving the floor, present yourselves just as well as when you entered - the performance isn't over until you've stepped off the floor.

Keep listening out  
as the programme  
can change.

# The competition: Schedule for the day

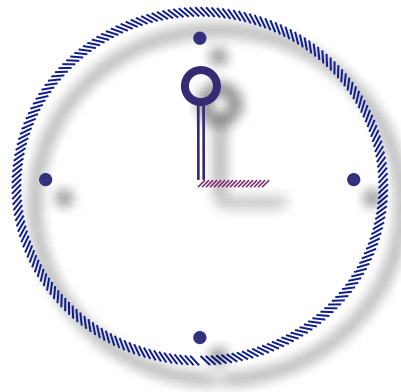
When you arrive you should be given a programme detailing the schedule for the day. Sometimes competitions can run late or have last minute changes to the programme, so listen to any announcements made on the day.

## GENERAL LOOK

Events may start by asking couples perform one dance all together, for the judges to get a feel for the overall standard.

## CLASSIFICATION

There can be up to two classification rounds depending on the number of couples. You'll be asked to perform three dances, during which the judges will determine your level (A-D). Starters do not dance a classification round, though they may be offered an unmarked warm-up round.



## ROUNDS & FINALS

Next comes a series of rounds, including quarter-finals and semi-finals. Depending on the number of competitors, rounds may be divided into heats. Six (sometimes seven) couples will then dance a final. Events with fewer competitors may go straight to finals, so listen out on the day. In Denmark finalists may be asked to dance twice, with each final marked equally.

## Order of dances:

- *Waltz, Tango, Viennese, Foxtrot, Quickstep*
- *Cha Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, Jive*  
(minus the ones you don't dance)

## PRIZE-GIVING

The timing of prize presentations varies with each competition. Sometimes it happens at the end of each class (particularly in Germany, where winners of one class are often invited to then dance in the class above too). Other times prizes will be given at the end of the event or day. Make sure to stay in costume until after prize-giving. Usually those winning 1st - 6th place will be awarded a certificate, medal, trophy or other prize. If you are awarded a prize, you may like to take a small bow to the audience before receiving your prize. It is then customary to thank your prize-giver, and stand in line with the other winners and runners up, before posing for photographs. If you have asked someone to take a photo of you, this is their time to do so.



# After you've danced: What happens next?

## Social dancing

After competitions have finished, a gala, ball or other social dance event is usually held. This is a chance for you to meet other dancers and do some informal dancing with other people in the community.



Feel free to ask other people to dance and, equally so, don't be afraid to accept dance requests - even if they are from more experienced dancers. We all have to start somewhere, and the same-sex dance crowd is generally very encouraging.

Social dance events may take place the same day as the competition or a day either side, so check the full programme before booking travel and accommodation if you'd like to attend.

## Aftercare

Dancing in a competition is fun and really rewarding, but it also takes a lot of energy and can be tiring. Don't forget to stretch, eat, hydrate, and rest up in whatever way works for you.

## Other activities

If the competition you enter is part of a wider sporting event, such as the Gay Games or the Eurogames, there may be other things going on before, during and after the dancing. These could include other sporting activities, ceremonies and workshops. Have a look at your programme to see if there's anything of interest, and make the most of your ticket.

## The community

Many people in the same-sex dance community stay in touch online. Join the ESSDA Facebook group, and your local same-sex dance community groups, to find out when and where results will be published and to access any photos that were taken over the course of the competition.

“After competing, I felt on top of the world!”



- Irene, Netherlands  
(new competitor, Team NL)

The most important thing of all... is to go out there and have fun!

# Top tips: From new competitors



**Yanni & Jo (UK) say:**

*"Come as yourself and dance your heart out"*

Some countries have national same-sex dance clubs you can join, such as:

- CEDA (Czech Republic)
- DVET (Germany)
- ETVOe (Austria)
- EDS (Switzerland)
- UKSSDC (UK)

**2**



**Patrice & Romain (France) say:**

*"Make it simple. Don't try to show off or do dance routines above your level. Just do the basics, the best you can"*

**3**



**Evi & Krista (Finland) say:**

*"Just go for it - you should try it so you know whether you'll like it. We think you probably will!"*

**Competitions to look out for:**

- Eurogames:
- Gay Games
- Out Games
- German Open
- Nordic Open

Regional events across Europe

Full event calendar available on the ESSDA website

With thanks to: Romain Drouet, Barri F.  
Krista Hannonen, Yanni Huang, Piia Korpi,  
Pete Meager, Vishesh Mehta, Patrice  
Naudier, Fevi Lappalainen, Caroline  
Privou, Tori Settle, Irene van Meggelen,  
Diana Vinke, Darren Whitby, Joanne  
Williams, Petra Zimmermann  
Photography: Cactus Capture



Website:  
[www.essda.eu](http://www.essda.eu)

Contact:  
[board@essda.eu](mailto:board@essda.eu)

Find us on Facebook & Twitter  
[@ESSDAdance](#)