

UCWDC® Judge Certification JUDGE METHODOLOGY

(Developed 2012 – 2019; Revised 2026)

The purpose of this document is to educate our judges and provide methods to identify key points which are important for all judges to consider when adjudicating at UCWDC competitions. The content of this document is designed to assist our judge pool to be “more on the same page”. These points should be used in conjunction with the experience and expertise that each judge already brings to the table.

General definitions for use of the Medals “Marks”:

“Honorable Mention”, or Medal Mark (“HM” or “M”): Failed Performance - given only on rare occasions where the appropriate expectations for the skill level for the ‘called’ dance are in no way performed. It was unrecognizable as the ‘called’ dance, or rules were broken to an egregious extent.

“Bronze”, or Medal Mark (“B”): Poor performance - not meeting the ‘minimum’ expectations for the skill level. For example, but not limited to, lack of the attempt at proper timing with proper strike and weight change (newcomer level), or accented ‘musical’ rhythm (novice level), or full-body required, repetitive motion (intermediate level), or individual dance character projecting an appropriate storyline (advanced level). Major vanilla issues in Line Dance.

“Silver”, or Medal Mark (“S”): Average performance – meeting the ‘minimum’ expectations for the skill level (a lower technical performance, “tech #1” score for the skill level). Vanilla issues in Line Dance.

“Gold”, or Medal Mark (“G”): Good performance – exceeding the ‘minimum’ expectations for the skill level (a higher technical performance, “tech #2” score for the skill level).

“Gold with Honors”, or Medal Mark (“GH” or “H”): Excellent performance – meeting the ‘highest’ expectations for the skill level (a more complete and consistent technical performance with artistry, thus deemed an “artistic” score for the skill level).

“Gold Graduate”, or Medal Mark (“GG”): Superior performance – meeting expectations, both consistently technical and artistic for the currently danced skill level, but also showing expectations that are above the danced skill level (a performance that meets technical and artistic expectations for the next higher skill level or above). This medal should be given when the judge determines that the dancer should be competing in at least the beginning of the next higher skill level for that dance.

Notes on mitigating considerations for divisions and skill levels:



The following is essential to the expectation and assessment of each judge. Judges need to use the ideas conveyed in this program *as a guideline for consistency*. Each judge will still need to continue applying their own judgment, because not all contestants will exhibit all the qualities outlined herein. We need a judge's perspective to be flexible and appropriate for each situation. *Judges should please use common sense when marking their ballots*. Judges must pay attention to a big-picture overall view of attributes in play at a certain skill level. Judges need to not take a single attribute, or lack thereof, so literally as to ignore the composite, complimentary balance of all attributes. Judges should take note of each contestant's developmental steps detailed and discovered at a *skill* level and come to an intuitive conclusion at this time of the assessed value of the skill(s) that the contestant has shown as having attempted or attained. These outlined steps are essentially *cumulative*, where one listed set of steps under consideration presumes the attempt or attainment of other sets of steps that proceed it in the Methodology outline. Methodology is intended to measure how far along the path of development in a dance the contestant has reached, relative to the destination that is the pinnacle of the dance, and the incremental use of medals gives you *step-by-step* information as a *guide* to this measurement.

The Silver and Gold medals will stress primarily the mechanical or technical aspect of the dance while the Gold with Honors medal will assess the emotional or artistic aspect of the dance. The Gold Graduate medal will include aspects of the dance that are above those that are expected at the level that is being judged. What is noted at the Gold Graduate level are two examples of skills (technical and artistic) that go beyond the expectations of the danced skill level but are not limited solely to these examples.

In Pro-Am, take into consideration that an Am student has the added responsibility when dancing the role of leader to initiate partnership, which is very different from a Pro teacher leading an Am follower; therefore, each judge should factor this into his or her medal placement judging Am leaders different than Am followers. Adjudicators are instructed that a "judge's hat" should be worn when assessing the performance and not a "teacher's hat". Teachers by profession are concerned with the minutia, or "little snapshots" of dance, trying to better the bigger picture performance one detail at a time. By personal and professional preference, Teachers also attack these details in a method and manner of order they each deem differently, according to their own plan for performance success. However, Judges are mandated to stay in the "bigger portrait" of the dance assessing the players depicted by much larger core-structure and dance-standard values. A Teacher has 1 hour to spend with one student, while a Judge has 90 seconds to assess up to eight students, or 120 seconds to assess up to 20 line dancers, thus big picture is the only fair way for Judges to view a dance performance.

Judges must keep in mind when judging a "Couples" dance division that two amateurs dancing as a couple may not be able to create the same result as those individuals who were dancing with their Pro in a Pro-Am environment, thus contestants need to be judged as a couple and not individually like in Pro-Am. Couples marks should reflect the composite culmination of the couple's shared lead/follow partnership. Also, a Couple seen on the floor can sometimes be visually noted as having one significantly better dancer and one lesser dancer in the pair, where the lack of competitive compatibility will seem less synergistic than another couple that is more well suited and complementary in skills. The better couple should be the one where the sum of the parts is easily

seen as greater than if the parts stood alone for assessment, especially if there is an imbalance in those parts. Judges should include this thought when choosing the appropriate mark.

When judging the youngest of divisions: Primary and Youth, or the eldest of divisions: Gold, Platinum & Pearl, judges should adhere to the following:

1. No use of Honorable Mention (“HM” or “M”) in their marks.
2. Place contestants fairly in the medal standing they deserve with regards to age and skill level. Because the young and the older dancers will more readily only show one level of physical ability (and not two levels as in other ages), then only one technical level will be assessed, and one artistic level will be assessed.
3. Gold, Platinum & Pearl divisions may have more physical limitations, perhaps less flexibility, less speed, less balance, etc., therefore, we need to be more lenient in our expectations for the skill level. Primary and Youth divisions may have more physical challenges, perhaps less coordination, less strength, less physical and emotional availability, etc. therefore we need to be lenient as well for these considerations. Posture, Frame, and Form may be less for either of these age groups at the ends of our age and skill spectrums.
4. In these cases, Bronze may represent (like Mention), that the dance was essentially unrecognizable, and Silver would represent not meeting the minimum expectations of the skill level. Adjusted thusly, then there will only be one “technical” mark for the skill level (Gold), and one “artistic” mark for the skill level (Gold with Honors). Gold Graduate will continue to be the mark that asserts that the performance was above and beyond the skill level danced (hence the judge sees the contestants should be dancing in a higher division).
5. Judges should be sure that they are aware of what age division and skill level is being assessed in each heat of competition. Judges must give extra care if multiple age divisions of skill levels are on the floor at the same time, co-mingled in the heat. If contestants are dancing 2 or more age divisions within a skill level, they should be independently judged each time with the considerations of the specific “age” danced. If contestants are also dancing 2 different skill levels (which is allowed by the rules), they should also be separately assessed based on the expectations of the specific “skill” danced. Scores, or marks, may be different in each “age” category, and for each “skill” level.
6. Additionally, for contestants dancing several divisions, without regard to age or skill, because judges only see “pieces” of the performances even though attempting to see the “big picture”, scores or marks may vary based on these separate vignettes where the contestants can visually show variances and/or errors not seen in the other performances.
7. Judges must continually improve their aptitude and abilities for finding a better method for looking at the floor during performances, and a better method for working the judge ballot. Over time, the dancers get better with their practice and performance, coaches get better with their intuitive instruction, and Judges must get better with their visual acuity and assessments. Judges must ask themselves as to how much they have trained year to year.

The notes highlighted in ‘yellow’ apply only to line dance. The notes highlighted in ‘blue’ apply only to partner dance.

Divisions and Skill Levels:

Syllabus, Newcomer, Starter Line Level

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Newcomer skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (Newcomer ‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Timing is seen as attempted
- Core Footwork is attempted
- Lead & Follow (**Partner Dance**)
- Core Pattern partnered ‘figures’ are seen, or (**Line Dance**) “Vanilla” patterns are seen

Gold Medal (Newcomer ‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Timing is seen as accomplished
- Posture & Frame are evident
- Balance & Grounding are evident
- Turn Technique is evident (as specific to the dance)

Gold with Honors Medal (Newcomer ‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Animation is natural & organic (not forced or fabricated; “Be Human”)
- Comfort and Confidence is seen (look like you are having a good time)
- Free Arm Positioning is seen (as specific to the dance)
- Use of Body Angles, or Sides in both Contra and Open positions

Gold Graduate Medal (over the Newcomer skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Timing is clear and consistent
- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed for Newcomer level
- Rhythm (the base-line expectation for Novice) is being seen
- Next level Artistry & Styling: coordination of arm lines, body shapes, and projected feelings for each dance is attempted.

Novice, or Div. III Level

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Novice skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (Novice ‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Rhythm is seen as attempted
- Floor-craft awareness (flow of dance, floor usage, floor etiquette, movement management)
- Timing variations in paired movements (**Partner Dance**)
- (**Line Dance**) “Vanilla” variations are performed correctly

Gold Medal (Novice ‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Rhythm is seen as accomplished
- Initial performance of phrase changes
- Coordinated use of body parts, i.e., head weight, arm use, levels of core and sides, leg use, including Smooth versus Rhythm turns, Smooth versus Rhythm mechanics
- Lead & Follow with regards to Smooth and Rhythm dances (**Partner Dance**), and (**Line Dance**) appropriate frame, posture, and carriage for Smooth and Rhythm dances

Gold with Honors Medal (Novice ‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Smooth vs. Rhythm styling, separating the dances by ‘style’ group, then by each dance
- Creation of cohesive and fluid “big-picture” partnered presentation to an audience (**Line Dance**) Presentation projected to audience
- Emotional Context: conveying ‘unique’ feelings that thematically accompany the dance

Gold Graduate Medal (over the Novice skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Rhythm is clear and consistent
- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed for Novice level
- Motion (the base-line expectation for Intermediate) is being seen
- Developing a partnered story, expressed in separate lead and follow parts. (**Line Dance**) More developed use of styling

Intermediate, or Div. II Level

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Intermediate skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (Intermediate ‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Motion is seen as attempted
- More varied use of designed footwork for different kinds of strike, weight change, size of base
- Varied use of body core that delivers ‘flight’ with speed changes: (acceleration and deceleration)

Gold Medal (Intermediate ‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Motion is seen as accomplished
- Correct use of Adagio and Theatre Arts
- Variety and contrast in identified Movements and Positions
- Difficulty in dance: concepts more tightly timed, tightly positioned, tightly partnered
(Line Dance) more complex variations, either to single movements, or phrase changes

Gold with Honors Medal (Intermediate ‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Roles are clearly seen, highly distinguishable, showing definitive roles in this ‘play’ of dance and music
- Multi-faceted feelings on display, from facial expression to body language (arms and hands)
- Fullness of styling concepts, that emanate from center, and extend or expand through time and space to reach an apex of presentation in the ‘just-right’ musical moment

Gold Graduate Medal (over the Intermediate skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Motion is clear and consistent
- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed for Intermediate level
- High-level, intricate ‘partnership’ seen in the physically fluid connection of two people
(Line Dance) more advanced use of dynamics
- Character (the base-line expectation for Advanced) with ‘Storyline’ is being seen

Advanced, Showcase, or Div. I Level

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Advanced skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (Advanced ‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Character is seen as attempted
- Using the floor as a stage, showing various speeds, heights, depths, and intertwining of partners, and choreography that expresses theatrical presentation that reaches deep into the audience, hence ‘bigger’ animation
- Ultimate complexity in Partnership that uses appropriate compression and extension relative to smooth and rhythm dances, that demonstrates a variety of holds, touches, and ‘signals’ in the sequencing of moves and positions (a shared not co-dependent experience)
(Line Dance) ultimate complexity in individual use of frame, center, balance, and carriage, for showcase, choreography that matches the musical structure

Gold Medal (Advanced ‘Technical Two’ level): “ Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Character is seen as accomplished
- Complex choreographic concepts showing contrast and texture of phrase structures, offering choreographic continuity with core concepts of the dance appropriately ‘spiced’ with elements of surprise, pizzazz, dramatic flair and flourish: a fully conceived dance performance
- Musical Interpretation relative to Classic or Showcase environments, and if Classic; matching to the mood of the music, and if Showcase, matching the melody of the music, having the ability to control the delivery of the choreography in phrase and floor-craft, dancing soft or hard, loud or quiet, fast or slow, as musically appropriate

Gold with Honors Medal (Advanced ‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Demonstration of the maximum Personality and Performance complete with the designed ‘characterization’ of the dancer’s, or dancers’, projected “storyline’ for the dance
- Ultimate blend of characterization into the integrity and structure of the ‘called’ dance, offering a display of emotional depth and development to the delivery of each separate line, shape, adagio piece, movement, and position
- Judges, as a member of the audience, were significantly engaged and emotionally affected by being part of the full characterization throughout the dance’s projected ‘storyline’

Gold Graduate Medal (over the Advanced skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Character is clear and consistent
- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed for Advanced level
- Contestants, having met all the expectations of all skill levels, and by virtue of the ‘story’s’ visual imagery, are now seen to have demonstrated a dance ability that approaches the level of a true ‘professional’ performance. Showing the technical and artistic excellence, consistency, and ingenuity commensurate with a ‘budding’ Masters or SuperStars ‘ascension’ performance.

Honky Tonk Line

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Newcomer/Novice skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Timing is seen as attempted
- Core Footwork is attempted
- “Vanilla” patterns are seen the majority of the dance

Gold Medal (‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Rhythm is seen as accomplished
- Initial performance of phrase changes
- Coordinated use of body parts, i.e., head weight, arm use, levels of core and sides, leg use

Gold with Honors Medal (‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Animation is natural & organic (not forced or fabricated)
- Comfort and Confidence is seen (look like you are having a good time)
- Free Arm Positioning is seen (as specific to the dance)
- Use of Body Angles, or Sides

Gold Graduate Medal (over the skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Timing is clear and consistent



- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed
- Rhythm is being seen
- Next level Artistry & Styling: coordination of arm lines, body shapes, and projected feelings for each dance is attempted.

Teams

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Timing and rhythm are evident
- Motion and Character are seen as attempted
- Using the floor as a stage, showing various speeds, heights, depths and choreography that expresses theatrical presentation that reaches deep into the audience, hence ‘bigger’ animation

Gold Medal (‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Timing, Rhythm, Motion & Character are seen as accomplished
- Complex choreographic concepts showing contrast and texture of phrase structures, offering choreographic continuity with core concepts of the dance appropriately ‘spiced’ with elements of surprise, pizzazz, dramatic flair and flourish
- Musical Interpretation: matching to the mood of the music, matching the melody of the music, dancing soft or hard, loud or quiet, fast or slow, as musically appropriate
- Changes of shapes and precision are attempted

Gold with Honors Medal (‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Demonstration of the maximum Personality and Performance complete with the designed ‘characterization’ of the dancer’s, or dancers’, projected “storyline’ for the dance
- Ultimate blend of characterization into the integrity and structure of the ‘called’ dance, offering a display of emotional depth and development to the delivery of each separate line, shape, adagio piece, movement, and position
- Changes of shapes and precision are seen as accomplished



Gold Graduate Medal (over the skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Character is clear and consistent
- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed
- Contestants, having met all the expectations of all skill levels, and by virtue of the ‘story’s’ visual imagery, are now seen to have demonstrated a dance ability that approaches the level of a true ‘professional’ performance. Showing the technical and artistic excellence, consistency, and performance

Choreography

Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level.

Silver Medal (‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Choreography appropriate to level stated
- Choreography matches music

Gold Medal (‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics expectations are met.

- Choreography has a variety of known steps
- Direction and flow of walls make sense
- Pattern structure has a natural flow

Gold with Honors Medal (‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”

- Dance is fun
- You would like to learn the dance

Gold Graduate Medal (over the Newcomer skill level): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met

- Could see the dance becoming a popular social dance
- Dance could be used as a competition dance

Crown, Masters, RisingStar, Superstar



Honorable Mention Medal (indiscriminate in delivering the dance): “Failed performance”, given only on rare occasions where appropriate expectations are in no way seen (or, too many rules are broken).

Bronze Medal (under the Advanced skill level): “Poor Performance”, given when less than the average (or minimum) expectations are seen for the skill level. Lacking in timing, rhythm, motion or character.

Silver Medal (‘Technical One’ level): “Average Performance”, given when the first level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Using the floor as a stage, showing various speeds, heights, depths, and intertwining of partners, and choreography that expresses theatrical presentation that reaches deep into the audience, hence ‘bigger’ animation
- Ultimate complexity in individual use of frame, center, balance, and carriage, choreography that matches the musical structure

Gold Medal (‘Technical Two’ level): “Good Performance”, given when the second level of dance mechanics (physical) expectations are met.

- Complex choreographic concepts showing contrast and texture of phrase structures, offering choreographic continuity with core concepts of the dance appropriately ‘spiced’ with elements of surprise, pizzazz, dramatic flair and flourish: a fully conceived dance performance
- Musical Interpretation: matching to the mood of the music, the melody of the music, having the ability to control the delivery of the choreography in phrase and floor-craft, dancing soft or hard, loud or quiet, fast or slow, as musically appropriate

Gold with Honors Medal (Advanced ‘Artistic’ level): “Excellent Performance”, given when dance theatrics (emotional) expectations are met.

- Demonstration of the maximum Personality and Performance complete with the designed ‘characterization’ of the dancer’s, or dancers’, projected “storyline’ for the dance
- Ultimate blend of characterization into the integrity and structure of the ‘called’ dance, offering a display of emotional depth and development to the delivery of each separate line, shape, adagio piece, movement, and position
- Judges, as a member of the audience, were significantly engaged and emotionally affected by being part of the full characterization throughout the dance’s projected ‘storyline’

Gold Graduate Medal (ultimate performance): Given when all dance expectations listed above are met, or expectations associated with the next skill level are seen.

- Technical (One & Two) and Artistic expectations are completed for the highest level
- Contestants, having met all the expectations of all skill levels, and by virtue of the ‘story’s’ visual imagery, are now seen to have demonstrated a dance ability of a true ‘professional’ performance, showing technical and artistic excellence and ultimate use of dance dynamics.