

Feis 101

A short course in surviving your first feis.

Sure, the dancing is important, but it's really all about the...

Hair

A girl's hair is traditionally worn in ringlets, the curlier the better. Hair is as unique as the individual. You will have to experiment to find what works best for your dancer but here are some recommendations. Prepare your dancer's hair no less than 12 hours in advance. Wash the hair (no conditioner!) and dry very thoroughly. Be warned... if there is the slightest dampness when the curlers are removed the curls will droop immediately. The following is a suggested list of ingredients to obtain the perfect "Dancer's Curls":

- Alcohol based mousse or super-gel (dries faster. Pretest in case of allergy)
- Sponge hair rollers (hard curlers don't work as well) - available at the Dollar Store... more hair needs more rollers
 - Short or naturally curly long hair use medium rollers (usually blue)
 - Long or straight hair use small rollers (usually pink)
- "Soft Spikes" or "Majik Wands" work best but are pricey - available at most feiseanna
 - Figure 50-60 rollers as a minimum
 - End papers
- Small hair elastic or flat barrette
 - Hair net
 - Headband

Take a deep breath. Part the hair from the back of the ear over the top of the head to the other ear. Use a small hair elastic or barrette to hold the ponytail on top of the head so the headband will cover it when the curlers are removed. Clip the ponytail up and out of the way. Section the hair off starting with the very top of the head directly behind the ponytail. Sections should be no wider than the width of the roller. The desired effect is lots of bouncy curls so you want to use many small sections of hair. Apply some mousse/gel to the whole section of hair all the way from scalp to the very end. Position the end paper, fold and starting at the very end of the section, roll the curler all the way to the scalp placing the roller vertically against the head. Be sure to roll all the way from the end.... don't wrap the end around the roller and don't forget to use the end papers. Direction in which you roll doesn't matter. Roll the top section with the latch end of the roller up and the hinged end down. The ponytail may be set after this section is done. This will take many, many rollers and each curl should be the same tightness when pulled, as the rest of the curlers, so be careful not to use too much hair in each. Use the same technique to do the section directly below the first and work your way around to the front on each side all the way to the front before going on to the next section below. Continue in this way until the whole head is rolled. When done there should be sets of concentric half circles surrounding the top section with no gaps between, above, or below each roller. Wrap the whole head in a hair net to keep everything in place while sleeping and traveling.

Taking the whole thing down

Be sure the dancer wears something that does not slip off over her head. At this point the dancer should actually be wearing her costume with a wrap or smock over it. Put the headband on over the neck. Starting at the bottom row, unlatch each roller and pull it straight down.... do not unroll it. As you remove each roller, split the curl into 3 or more strands and curl each around your finger as you separate it... this will multiply the curls for each roller. Use hairspray on each row as you finish then move on to the row above. If your dancer has bangs and is not on a team, the bangs can stay down...just make sure they look neat. A curling iron works well for this. If she is on a team and there are short hairs that won't work into the ponytail, brush them back into the hair and apply liberal amounts of hairspray to hold in place. Pull the headband up from the front and bobby pin in place. Now step back and admire your handy work. If you have any problems or questions, ask someone nearby. Chances are they or someone they know has been there and can help you. Although this procedure may be thought of as another one of "Mom's Jobs", do not exclude "Dad" from the all the fun. He's not just the guy who carries the cooler... he may be the next Vidal Sassoon!

When you arrive

A feis has been called organized chaos. Things get crowded fast with 700 or more competitors, their accompanying parents, grandparents, and friends not to mention the judges, feis workers, and associated personnel all in a confined area. Most feiseanna are scheduled to start about 9:00 AM. Given the nature of the event (and the fact that everyone is working on *Irish time*), feiseanna generally start late... but don't count on it. After paying the entry fee, admission fee for non-competitors, and the travel time, it is no fun to find you've missed your dancer's first scheduled competition. Folding chairs arranged around a blanket in an out-of-the-way corner will be a welcomed respite about midway through the day. Plan to arrive at least 30 to 60 minutes early to stake out your "spot". After setting up camp the first thing to do is check-in at the registration desk. Your competitor will be given a number card. This is to be worn by the dancer as their ID for the rest of the day. It is generally worn about the waist on a length of ribbon or pinned. On the back is the list of dances they are registered for. Check this against what you signed-up for to make sure they match. Next, check out the stage layout. There are generally 4 or more stages at a feis. Each stage will have a group of individual competitions assigned to it and they will be listed either in the program, on a sign at the stage, or both. There will be dances going on at each stage simultaneously. You will need to find which dance is at which stage and in what order. **REMEMBER: YOU, AND ONLY YOU, ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR GETTING TO YOUR ASSIGNED STAGE ON TIME.** Check your list of dances for possible conflicts between stages and dances. If you find that your dancer will be late to her next scheduled dance because of a conflict, tell the stage manager... they will help. Listen carefully to the PA announcements for cancellations and last minute schedule changes. When you arrive at the stage for a dance, check-in with the stage manager. They will have the dancers line up and be ready before the previous dance is complete. This is to save time. Competitors stand or sit quietly and calmly while waiting. **NEVER ATTEMPT TO SPEAK TO A JUDGE OR MUSICIAN.** All comments or questions must be addressed to the stage manager. At some feiseanna, the awards are announced at the end of each dance. More commonly, results are posted after being tabulated. Awards are most likely to be claimed at an awards table depending on the feis. Bring the competitor's ID number with you to claim an award. Most feiseanna allow for the competitor to have their scores and judge's comments sent to them after the event. You have to sign-up to have them mailed and there is generally a small fee.

The List

The following is a checklist of things to bring (and not to bring) to a feis. Not every item will apply to every feis but it will give you a place to start.

Shoes - Don't laugh unless you want to have to buy a new pair from a vendor (\$40+ for ghillies, \$165+ for hardshoes)

Bodysuit or cami-shirt and shorts - Between dances the costumes get hot. The bodysuit or cami-shirt can be worn under the dress and shorts slipped on during lulls in the action. Put your name and phone number inside shoes, dress, etc. Things have a much better chance of getting returned when they are identified.

A cover up - Something you can put on over the costume (not a pullover) to keep clean when there isn't time to change.

Repair Kit - A small sewing kit with appropriate colors of thread, safety pins, shoe polish, duct tape, spare shoelaces, bobby pins, brooch, and ribbon.

Folding chairs - The types that fold up and fit in a pouch are great.

Large thick blanket - Functions as a mattress, work area, etc.

Stocked cooler - Water bottles, sandwiches, high-energy snacks. Food is generally available from vendors but lines can be long and time precious. Running out to eat is seldom a possibility.

Activities to keep everyone occupied. Simple travel games, cards, books, knitting, coloring books, etc. Avoid games with a lot of pieces. They'll get lost.

A still camera - **USE OF VIDEO OR DIGITAL CAMERAS IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. VIDEOTAPING THE DANCING IS NOT ALLOWED.** This is a rule from the highest Feis Authority in Dublin and is strictly enforced to protect the choreography of individual teachers. Flash photography of dancing is also discouraged so as not to disrupt a competitor's concentration. Use your discretion and better judgment. And don't forget to save some film for poses with family, friends and all those medals and trophies!

What it's really all about

Yes, a feis is a competition but it is meant to be fun. Just having the courage to get up on stage and dance a complicated set of steps in front of a multitude of strangers, not to mention a judge, deserves an award in and of itself. Doing one's best, having fun, and making new friends is what it's really all about.