

WHAT DO JUDGES LOOK FOR IN A COSTUME

The judges will generally consider six things when looking at a costume: Documentation, Authenticity, Complexity, Workmanship, Presentation, and Overall Quality

Documentation is probably most relevant if you are doing a reproduction, not just a historical costume, but anything you are trying to do a direct copy of - so this includes film and TV repros too. But it also applies to original designs. Documentation is where you can show the judges why you made the costume the way you did. If your costume differs from the original – tell them why. If your costume is based on several garments from the same period in history – show them which garments gave you your inspiration. If your garment is an original design, then a paragraph explaining what you are wanting to represent, or why you chose to make this costume, could be useful too. And for repro costumes, remember that the judges may not have your dedication to the TV show/film/period of history – so they may not appreciate just how good a copy it is unless you can (at least) show them pictures as examples.

But don't write War & Peace. Your documentation will be handed to the judges a short while before the parade so they will only have a limited time to look at it – try for no more than four pages, maximum! One or two is usually sufficient.

Authenticity is one you people with original designs need not worry about – this is strictly for reproductions only.

Things they might consider are:

- If you are claiming your costume as a direct copy of a specific character or garment - how accurate is it?
- If you're trying for a particular look - is your fabric choice good? (eg. does it have the correct drape for the garment?).
- If you're doing a repro of a cartoon character - have you kept the proportion of the original? (This is quite hard to do for some of the characters)
- Have you patterned it well? (eg. are the seam lines in the same place, is it the same shape)?
- And does it have the correct accessories (it's the little things like accessories that can sometimes separate the winner from the rest of the competition).

Complexity is where the different levels of Novice, Journeyman (or Intermediate) and Master take effect. Very simply, how hard was the garment to make. Novices are not expected to make a costume as complex as a Master – and Masters are supposed to show they really know what they are doing! To give some examples: A Novice is not expected to have sewn 15,000 pearls on their costume, it would be impressive for a Journeyman, but pretty much par for the course for a Master. A Novice might have a small item of chain mail, say a coif or head-dress. A journeyman might have something a little larger (it took longer to do) or more decorated (a more complex pattern). The master would have a significant amount of chain mail (or would have hand riveted each link). Are you getting the idea?

Workmanship within the parade context is **not** where the judge is going to leap out of their chair and demand to see your seam treatment, or check if you glued your sequins on! But they will look at things like how the costume fits, are the seams obviously puckered, or if there is a trail of glue visible between your sequins. But if your seam splits while on stage, or your antennae fall off, then that will mark against you in this area.

Workmanship however, is the main part of the **Workmanship Award** (this is quite a separate competition to the Parade and is judged during the afternoon of the Ball). This is where the judge *will* look at your seams! The sorts of things the judge will be looking for are:

- Technical proficiency – how well the costume is constructed (for your level) and if the choice of material(s) is appropriate for the garment.
- Your Creativity and ability to solve any problems you encountered in the construction.
- And Documentation (how you did what you did and why) is especially valued in this competition.

Presentation is simply how you present your costume on stage. This doesn't mean you need to do an elaborate production. No, what they are really looking for is **have you shown them all of the costume**. If you shuffle on to the stage, stand there with your hands clasped in front of you and then back off the stage again, this will not impress the judges. However, you could walk all around the stage so they can see the front and back of the costume. Take off the jacket/outer layer if you want them to see the under layer too. If you have a flowing sleeve, move your arm(s) so they can see that it flows. If you want to draw attention to a particular part of your costume (say your head-dress) find some reason to move your hands to your head-dress, or at least above your head – people's eyes will follow the movement. Or you can do a silly dance – just make sure the judges get to see all of your costume (or at least the best bits).

The **Overall Quality** is where the judges get to be a bit more subjective. Kind of like bonus points. It's the Wow Factor. And this can vary between the judges – one judge could be impressed by the smooth tailoring of one costume, another because the costume was just incredibly cute. Maybe they couldn't resist the costume with all the glitter. Or the repro 17th century hussars uniform was just too perfect not to.

So there you have it – hopefully this gives you an insight into how your costume will be judged. And if you follow the information given here, it may just give you that edge that makes your costume the winner!