

Feature



The ICG Guidelines to Ensure Fair Competition Andrew Trembley*

A member of the committee that developed the current “ICG Guidelines to Ensure Fair Competition” offers his take on what the Guidelines are all about.

When it comes to masquerades, we all need to encourage people not just to take up the hobby of art and costume, but to actively continue in it, and grow. It’s what the ICG is all about.

Whether it’s running a good Green Room, supporting the entrants, putting together a contest that showcases the entrants for the audience, being an enthusiastic MC, providing high quality documentary videos and photographs of people’s work, it’s all about providing an environment where competitors are made as comfortable as they can be in a stressful, theatrical environment.

And that’s just the theater.

Most entrants, for their own sanity’s sake, talk about how the crowd reaction is the real award. But that doesn’t mean they don’t care about the horse ribbons, the

hastily-signed certificates, and the big plaques.

We need to care about *them* too. We’re putting a lot of community history and weight behind those inexpensive tokens that art the tangible recognition of the skills and accomplishments of those who enter.

And that’s why the “ICG Guidelines to Ensure Fair Competition” exist.

I’m not going to spend paragraphs and paragraphs rehashing the Guidelines. They’re short, they’re simple, and they cover the ground. I encourage you to [read them for yourself](#) on the ICG website. But I am going to call out the foundations they’re built upon.

Overcoming Bias

Impartiality and ethics go hand in hand. Judges aren’t going to be totally unbiased: they’re judging art, and that’s a subjective process. But they’re judging based on their opinions of the art, not on their opinions of the people who created it or are wearing it.

“I don’t like orange” is a reasonable bias, and is likely going to be balanced by other judges. “I don’t like Fred, he’s dating my ex” is not reasonable bias, and it’s up to the judge to work with the Masquerade Director to negate that bias.

Masquerade Directors also have to adhere to the same standards, first by creating rules that ensure impartiality, and then by ensuring that the rules are applied impartially by the judges and everyone else who works on the masquerade.

That the art of judging is a subjective process needs to be said again. We give our judges a great deal of latitude. They need it.

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Leveling the Playing Field

As is done in amateur sports, we create a mechanism to help level the playing field. The division system described in the Guidelines it isn’t a ranking system: it is a *handicapping system*, although one that is a little less precise than handicaps in golf or bowling.

We ask entrants to tally up their award history to figure out if they should be competing with the new folks, the people of middling experience, or the scary people who produce award-winning costume after award-winning costume that amaze everyone.

Anyone can compete with the scary people if they have the confidence to do so. Some do. It's more likely that we have to give a competitor a kick in the pants and say "You've been around for a while. Look at the judges who said your work is excellent. Look at the people you have been competing with: they're starting to think you might be scary too."

Winning awards builds confidence. Having the time to sit with judges and other competitors and just chat breaks down barriers. The scary people become less scary when they become your friends.

Applying the Guidelines

The point of the Guidelines is to ensure that everyone who enters a masquerade feels like they have been treated fairly: that the people who win awards feel they're worth something, and the people who don't win awards don't feel they're *not* worth something.

The Guidelines are written for masquerade directors, but I think that everyone should read them. I also think anyone entering a competition should think about them, and ask Masquerade Directors the tough questions about the rules for a masquerade and how they are being applied help to ensure fair competition.

The question is not, "Are you using the ICG Guidelines?" Because starting with that doesn't get you anywhere. Instead, I encourage you to ask the following

questions of any Masquerade Director and consider the answers that you receive.

- "What instructions are you giving your judges to ensure impartiality?"
- "Are you doing anything to level the playing field, or to encourage your judges to give awards to new people?"
- "Are the rules published somewhere? Can I read them before I enter?"
- Are the rules being communicated and followed by everyone involved in the masquerade?
- "Can you explain why you have a particular rule?"

Those are hard questions. Because the answers to those questions are more important than whether or not they say that they're using the ICG Guidelines, or even care about the ICG.

They're welcome to reinvent the wheel, just as long as when they're finished it's round and rolls smoothly. Let's keep the artform rolling along.

Andrew Trembley, is an accomplished costumer and photographer, and a leading figure in San Francisco Bay Area fandom. He and his husband, Kevin Roche, have been designing and making costumes and wearable art for most of their lives. Andy regularly contributes his photographic skills to conventions, masquerades, and arts organizations. He and Kevin have also run conventions, and participated in several convention bids.

The History and Future of the ICG Guidelines

Prior to 1981, first-time costumers had to compete with those who had won many times. Then a skill division system based on the number of wins was informally proposed by the late Peggy Kennedy, with four divisions. It was first used at the 1981 Worldcon masquerade.

In 1992, the ICG formally adopted "The International Costumers Guild Guidelines" based on those original informal guidelines. In 1994, those guidelines were updated based on two years of experience. It included three divisions plus Junior/Youth.

In 2004, the ICG Board of Directors chartered a committee to overhaul the 1994 Guidelines. They examined the Guidelines over the course of two years and replaced them by a version that focused on General Guidelines and Skill Division Guidelines instead of competition styles. In 2010, the 2006 version was updated again and replaced with the [current version](#), which can be found on the ICG website.

Now, in early 2016, the ICG Board of directors has chartered another committee to examine the current Guidelines in light of evolving best practices and to recommend revisions. The committee is expected to report its results by the end of 2016 for the ICG Board to consider.

Historical background on the ICG Guidelines was provided by Kathe Gust and Janet Wilson Anderson. The Editor is grateful for their kind contributions.