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## Guidelines for FCI Dog Dancing Judges



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## 1. Introduction

These guidelines are meant to help **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges in all countries find a common understanding and similar interpretation of the FCI Dog Dancing rules. They are not intended to change or add anything to the rules. Official proposals for the guidelines can be sent in via the delegates in the FCI Dog Dancing Commission. The proposals will be considered in the next meeting possible. **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges should always use the latest version of these guidelines.

The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges should always take into account that Dog Dancing should be enjoyable for the dog. An **FCI** Dog Dancing judge should always be fair and just. Personal feelings should not interfere with the judge's decisions. All **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges should be able to make quick, reliable decisions and shall always stand by their decisions.

## 2. Judging ethic and general appearance

An **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge is always impartial, and his conduct should always make this apparent to every competitor. The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge always bases his score solely on what he sees on the day, never on previous performances or other information gained beforehand. The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge should always treat the competitors with respect and remain attentive throughout the entire routine. The team is under the **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges' observation from the moment it enters the ring until both dog and handler have left the ring. The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges shouldn't discuss with each other during the routine unless it is absolutely mandatory (for example when deciding on an immediate disqualification). Trainee judges, also, should only be discussed with between routines, never during them and not until the **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge has finished scoring the routine.

An **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge should be consistent in his judging and keep his criteria level throughout the competition. The **FCI** Dog Dancing judge keeps strictly to the **FCI** Rules and Regulations. The Dog Dancing Judge will always watch each routine with equal positive expectations and if ever in doubt, the benefit should be given to the dog and handler. A Dog Dancing Judge should never agree to judge a greater number of teams in a day than he or she is confident to provide with even standard of evaluation. The amount should be negotiated with the organizers in advance, and the organizer will provide the **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges with sufficient breaks in order to help them maintain the quality of judging.

The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges maintain a professional attitude throughout the competition and do not engage in unnecessary discussions with the competitors at the ringside. Obviously, the head judge has a duty to inform the competitors about specific issues, like disqualification.

A Dog Dancing Judge will never criticize the decisions or behaviour of a colleague publicly. A Dog Dancing Judge is always aware that he/she should lead by example, even when he/she is not officiating. **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges never ask for a judging appointment, it is the organizers' task to invite the **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges.

A Dog Dancing Judge should be dressed according to the occasion: in Championship level competitions it is correct to show respect to the nature of the event by dressing appropriately. If a name tag, rosette or similar is provided by the organizer, the Dog Dancing Judge is expected to wear it. A Dog Dancing Judge should always behave properly as a worthy representative of the sport.

### 3. The Panel of Dog Dancing Judges

FCI Dog Dancing competitions are judged by a panel of **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges or Dog Dancing Judges from FCI cooperating partners to make sure that the evaluation is as fair as possible. The panel of **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges consists of 3 or 5 **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges, who are led by a head judge. Every Dog Dancing Judge does the scoring independently. If incidents occur that are not covered in these **FCI** regulations and guidelines, each Dog Dancing Judge decides how to score. If the matter is more general in nature it will be dealt with by the head judge or the chief steward depending on the matter. The head judge always acts as the highest authority during the competition. The **FCI** Dog Dancing Judges' decision is final and no competitor shall impugn the decisions.

#### 3.1. The Head Judge

The head judge has the responsibility to make the final decisions as defined in the **FCI** rules. It is expected that the head judge should discuss matters with his panel of Dog Dancing Judges whenever the matter is such, that they have the possibility to offer a valuable view on resolving it. The head judge must always be informed about matters affecting the end result of the competition. He should also be informed in case a Dog Dancing Judge is unable to fulfil his judging appointment. In addition, he must be aware of the national regulations regarding how to deal with incidents at the venue during the competition (for example aggressive dogs).

The organizer is the one to ask an **FCI** Dog Dancing Judge to take up the position of a head judge. This position should not be taken up lightly: the head judge should always be one of substantial experience and sufficient authority in making the decisions necessary.

The head judge is the one to lead the Dog Dancing Judges' meeting before competitions. This kind of a meeting should be held before judging an **FCI** championship competition but can also be held in other **FCI** international competitions.

In case an **FCI** competition has to be delayed, moved or cancelled during the days of the event due to a force majeure, the head judge and chief steward work together to make this decision. The head judge's responsibility in this case is to make sure that the competition can be conducted in a fair way according to the rules. In order to fulfil this responsibility, it is advisable for the head judge to check the competition area.

The head judge is the one to confirm the final results of the competition with his signature on the competitions report. The head judge's role can be divided between several judges during different classes according to national regulations.

#### 3.2 The Other Judges

The Dog Dancing Judges officiating at **FCI** Dog Dancing events have to be well aware of the **FCI** Dog Dancing rules and regulations and the sections of national rules, regulations and laws that apply. The organizers will provide the Dog Dancing Judges with the necessary information. The other Dog Dancing Judges' main responsibility is to focus on the scoring and provide the competitors with a fair evaluation.

## 4. Points awarded

Points are awarded in four different categories according to the FCI Dog Dancing rules. The maximum score a team can gain is 30 points. Points are gained from four different categories so that a team can gain a score between 0-9 in the three first categories and 0-3 in the fourth one. Each individual Dog Dancing Judge awards the points with one decimal (so the smallest difference you can make between two differing scores is 0.1).

### 4.1 Presentation

In the presentation category, a team can gain a maximum of 9 points. The following aspects are being evaluated:

- **Partnership and cooperation.** Ideal co-operation requires the dog to be attentive toward the handler at all time and the handler to be attentive towards the dog equally. This should always be achieved without the help of any props, toys or parts of costume. The team works together in a positive manner, both parties enjoy working and support each other throughout the routine.
- **Flow.** The team's work appears easy and effortless. There are no unintended breaks between the moves.
- **Responsiveness.** The dog responds to handling without hesitation. This means, that in addition to paying attention to what the handler is doing, the dog is motivated and constantly reacts to signalling.
- **Commands and signalling.** All the commands and signals that the handler is giving should be incorporated in the routine. Hand signals should not stand out from the choreography and overall movement of the handler. Vocal commands should never be angry or harsh in tone and a louder voice should only be used when necessary for the dog.
- **Presentation on the day.** The dog and handler should perform the routine fluently without struggling or obvious mistakes from beginning to end.
- **Correct execution of moves.** In HTM the heelwork is performed flawlessly according to the rules. In freestyle the dog executes the moves consistently, is able to perform the moves and the moves are well defined from a clear beginning to a controlled ending.

### 4.2 Content

In the content category, a team can gain a maximum of 9 points. The following aspects are being evaluated:

- **Focus on the dog.** The handler should never overshadow the dog. The main emphasis in the routine is always on the dog or the teamwork. The handler's movement should never attract more attention than the move the dog is doing simultaneously.
- **Evenly balanced use of the ring.** The team uses most of the ring space and moves in different shapes and patterns. Different areas of the ring are used evenly throughout the routine.
- **Comprehensive use of the ring.** The team should always cover as much of the ring as possible considering the size and speed of the dog. Even if a dog is covering a slightly smaller area of the ring, the ring use should be well and evenly balanced.
- **Balanced amount of moves so the routine is interesting but not too packed.** The different moves should be performed with balanced emphasis on all of them, so that none of the moves are used excessively compared to others. A routine is too packed if the dog struggles to keep up with the constant transitions. A heelwork routine should include enough of continuous movement in a position to the chosen direction, so that the quality of heelwork can be enjoyed. The balance between tricks and heelwork performed should be in accordance to the rules of the discipline

entered (25-75% or 75-25%). In HTM freestyle tricks only give you additional technical merit if they are used to show the dog's knowledge of the heelwork positions, since heelwork to music is all about presenting excellent heelwork.

- **Variety of moves.** The routine consists of a good variety of different types of moves. Variety can be achieved through different aspects: height of movement, stationary vs. moving tricks, distance to handler, positioning in relation to handler, speed, different directions in dog movement (backing, side-stepping...) etc. If a prop is included in the routine it should be well used: preferably having the dog perform various moves with it and/or use the prop as an essential part of conveying the theme. The prop should never be used to play with the dog or otherwise reward it. This kind of behaviour will result in substantial deductions. Any physical object brought in the ring by the handler will be considered a prop.
- **Difficulty of individual moves.** The difficulty of moves is considered from the point of view of elements included in the trick. If it consists of several elements that have to be combined into the final move, it is considered more difficult than if it consists of a single element.
- **Transitions and links between moves/not a series of disjointed moves.** The dog should be able to move from one exercise to another fluently. The routine should be planned so, that there should not be any abrupt stops after the moves. All the transitions should be fluid and all the links should be beautifully included in the routine.

### 4.3 Artistic Interpretation

In the artistic interpretation category, a team can gain a maximum of 9 points. The following aspects are being evaluated:

- **Visualization of concept.** The overall theme or idea and how the team presents it in their choreography. This means the routine can equally consist of a story or a dance theme. These options themselves should be valued equally. The idea of the routine should be clearly understandable for the Dog Dancing Judges. This means that the emotional journey of the routine should reflect the music and carry the Dog Dancing Judges through the story even without previous background information. The Dog Dancing Judge does not judge whether he knows or likes a certain theme – they judge whether the concept was interpreted.
- **Structure of the routine. *The way how the choreography is built, based on the music, in order to combine all the different elements of a good routine (the highlights, beginning and end of the routine, the concept, theme, placement in the ring etc.)***
- ***The routine must be well planned and have a clear structure. The dog should move throughout the routine, prolonged execution of static poses is not encouraged. Brief stays well incorporated in the routine are evaluated evenly with all other moves.***
- **The music suits the dog's pace and movement pattern.** The music is well chosen to reflect the dog's natural movement, temperament and character.
- **Punctuation (notation in the music).** The team performs the moves timed well together with the music. If the music has specific accents, these will be punctuated with movement.
- **Appropriate handler movement. The handler's movement should enhance the dogs' performance.** The handler's movement provides a good background for the dog's movement. The handler's movement is also combined with the music; his movement goes together with the theme, atmosphere and tempo of the music.
- **The routine reflects the emotions of the music.** The atmosphere of the music is portrayed through the dog's and handler's movement and the overall theme of the routine.
- **Proper usage of music.** The music chosen should be suitable for family audiences.

#### 4.4 Partnership and Well-being

In the **Partnership and Well-being category**, a team can gain a maximum of 3 points. The following aspects are being evaluated:

- **The routine emphasizes the qualities of the dog** (breed, personality, physical abilities, mental abilities etc.). The handler has considered the dog's body structure and temperament while choosing the moves. The dog's physical and mental characteristics are portrayed in a good light in the routine.
- **Health and safety of the dog.** When putting together a routine, the handler has considered the capabilities of the dog and does not demand of it anything that would cause it harm or discomfort. The dog is physically and mentally able to easily perform all the moves asked. None of the moves are repeated excessively or performed for substantial periods at a time. The handler has also considered the surface of the ring and the speed of the dog: if the floor surface doesn't allow performing some move safely, the handler has removed it to adjust the routine to the conditions available. Moves don't look wobbly or unstable. The dog looks in control of its body and movements at all times. Props are stable and without any danger so that the exercises can be performed safely. The handler's costume and the handler's movement are also safe for the dog. The dog doesn't show signs of excessive stress or significant signs of physical exertion. It is important that the Dog Dancing Judges be able to differentiate when a dog is over-excited and happy from when the dog is over-excited and stressed and begins to struggle in their confident performance.
- **Partnership.** If the dog struggles in any way during the routine, the handler must offer him support without delay. Companionship is reflected in the atmosphere of the team working together; there is nothing harsh or forceful about the handling, and the team portrays mutual respect towards one another.

**In the case of injury:** if the dog is injured during the routine, the head judge can stop the routine. The panel of Dog Dancing Judges may discuss on how to proceed in each individual case.

#### 5. Props

***If a prop is included in the routine it should be well used: preferably having the dog perform various moves with it and/or use the prop as an essential part of conveying the theme. Any physical object brought in the ring by the handler will be considered a prop.***

If the handler does not bring in/remove all the props by himself ***while entering/exiting the ring, the rest of the props*** must be brought in and removed by ***up to two people who can be helpers or the handler and one helper.***

***No item in itself is forbidden as a prop as long as it is essential for the routine and not dangerous for the dog. Different kinds of moves (retrieving, pulling, pushing, leaving it be etc.) can be used as a positive creative input in the routine as long as the dog doesn't become overly fixated with the prop or play with it. The routine should portray the dog working equally well with and without the prop. Ideally, the dog's enthusiasm to work remains constant before, during and after the moves portrayed with it. A prop should never be used to reward the dog – not even after the performance.***

## 6. Disqualification

Disqualification leads to termination of the performance and loss of all points awarded. The dog may not continue the program. The following will lead to disqualification without fail:

- **A different handler or dog participating.** If the dog or handler competing is not the same as was entered, the team will be disqualified.
- **An attempt to mislead the Dog Dancing Judges.** If a handler is caught trying to mislead the Dog Dancing Judges, they will be disqualified. For example, failing to inform the organizers that the bitch has come into season, would be such an incident.
- **Cheating.** If the handler fails to obey the regulations, he will be disqualified.
- **Not obeying doping rules.** If the team is found guilty of breaking the doping rules, they will be disqualified. This rule will also be applied after the competition if the doping tests taken during the competition come back positive after the competition.
- **Bringing food into the ring.**
- **If the dog is out of control and leaves the ring.**
- **If the dog urinates or defecates in the ring.**
- **If the handler explicitly turns the routine into a training round, the music will continue until the end.**
- **Any form of harsh handling (verbal or physical) is never tolerated.** Clear cases will lead to a disqualification, milder cases result in deductions.
- **If the dog attacks another dog or person in the venue or on the show grounds.** Attacks always lead to disqualification, but a Dog Dancing Judge can also instruct the handler in less severe cases on conduct at the venue.
- **The dog being on the lead in the ring during the competition.**
- **Double handling – assistance from outside the ring.**
- Touching the dog in order to control it *during the routine*.
- **If the handler/helpers take more than two minutes to either put up or remove the props, it will lead to disqualification.**
- **If the handler purposefully uses the prop to reward the dog it will lead to a disqualification.**
- **If the music exceeds four minutes.**

Any other violation of these rules may lead to disqualification.

## 7. Deductions

Any failure to meet the criteria of an ideal performance will lead to deductions in relation to the severity of the issue. The incidents listed below are only some examples of deductions, it is important to base the scoring on the categories described above (section 4).



- If the dog accidentally steps outside of the ring while continuously working, points will be deducted in a similar way to other moves inadequately performed.
- *If a dog initiates play with the prop, there will be a deduction in relation to the severity of the offence. There will also be a smaller deduction if the dog just accidentally shakes a prop and pays it no further attention during the routine. The dog should also never be pressured with any of the props.*
- *If the handler pets the dog during the choreography in order to soothe it, it will result in a deduction. Nevertheless, the handler is permitted to pet the dog in the ring in an encouraging manner before the music starts and after the music ends.*
- Excessive barking throughout the routine leads to a deduction which can be no more than 2 points. A few barks are allowed. Anything in between will be deducted according to the severity of the issue.

The scoring sheet does not include a specific section for deductions, so the deductions will be visible in the overall score of the category involved.

**These Guidelines were approved by the FCI General Committee in Budapest, May 2018.**

*The last changes in bold and italic characters were approved by the FCI General Committee on December 26, 2024. They are effective upon publication.*

## APPENDIX - Code of Conduct for FCI Dog Dancing Judges

Judges are role models: their behaviour before, during and after competitions and other events should be reflective of their standing. This includes amongst other things polite behaviour towards the competitors, the organisers and the public at all times as well as dressing to the occasion. In the eyes of a competitor, a judge is always a judge and should present themselves accordingly and should set a good example to the competitors (this includes handling their own dogs). While socializing with people at the competition venue, a judge must always be mindful that their conduct does not raise a question of the impartiality of their judging.

If a judge agrees to judge, they must honour that agreement (unless there is a force majeure situation). A judge will arrive at the location well in advance (at least 30 minutes before the first performance or earlier when agreed with the organisers).

A judge shall focus on the routine presented from beginning till end avoiding any unnecessary distractions to disturb their focus. This is especially important to respect the work of the team performing and to award everyone equal attention. A judge always strives to be impartial and avoid letting their personal preferences (regarding music, dog breed, handler...) affect their evaluation. To ensure impartial judging, a judge should not judge routines performed by immediate family or dogs that he owns, co-owns or are bred under their kennel name.

A judge should be aware that they not only represent themselves but also the FCI dog dancing judges' community. A judge should not comment the work of other judges to competitors or the public in order to maintain the integrity and credibility of all the judges. Constructive discussions amongst judges are encouraged. Judges should be aware of their presence online after all events (whether they themselves have been judging, competing or as audience): any negative commentary should be managed privately and as a general rule it is good to avoid commenting on individual routines. You can make an exception to this if you wish to comment a routine directly to the competitor, but the judge is not obliged to offer such commentary.

***This Code of Conduct was approved by the FCI General Committee, at the meeting held on November 22-23, 2022 (Madrid) and is effective upon publication.***