



**FISM**<sup>TM</sup>

Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques  
International Federation of Magic Societies

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## **FISM JUDGING GUIDELINES**

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### **Introduction**

One of the most important aims of FISM is to develop and elevate the Art of Magic and the World Championships are one of the ways to accomplish this.

Some people will argue that there can't be championships in the Arts as there are in Sports. Although to a certain extent they are right, the FISM competitions, as we know them, are a very valuable means of improving the quality of magic and thus giving it more credibility as one of the performing arts. Prizes are also given to such artists as musicians, painters, writers and architects.

Judging an artistic performance is never easy. It is necessary, but difficult to define objective criteria for judges to consider along with their subjective interpretation of the acts. Therefore, the choice of judges in a FISM jury is of the utmost importance. Not only should they be well grounded in all aspects of magic, but they also should have knowledge of performance and artistic work. Diversity in cultural background and age is of importance and preferably they should have had experience in judging other magic competitions.

In a sense, judging is composed of a number of things:

- comparing each performance with a set standard (criteria and rules),
- comparing each performance with all others in the competition, and
- comparing the acts with the top level magic has reached.

In FISM, competitors are primarily judged according criteria and rules, but they are also judged against each other and a judge will also have to try to compare the acts to a top level as FISM has developed over the years.

This makes this multiple judging process much more complicated, because an act performed on the first day, also has to be compared with performances on each of the following days.

Therefore, although not absolutely necessary, it is advisable to select judges who have watched former FISM competitions intensively. To be a fully qualified FISM Jury-member a person must have been a judge in a FISM jurypanel during a FISM World Championship of Magic at least twice.

### **Categories**

The categories used in a FISM competition are mentioned in the "FISM Contest Rules and Procedures" FISM competitions are limited to two main groups: Close-up and Stage. Parlour magic, mental magic and invention can be presented either on stage in the theatre, or in the close-up hall. There is a different judging panel for each of close-up and stage.

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The scoring sheet (attached) is the same for all eight categories (manipulation, general magic, stage illusions, micro magic, card magic, parlour magic, mental magic and invention) and there is no determined rating scale. The judges are free to weigh each category as they wish.

## Expedients

Unlike most systems, FISM has no rating scale for the six criteria on the scoring sheet. This allows the judges much more subjective freedom. At first glance, this might seem to make the judging easier, but in fact, that is not necessarily so. With over 100 acts to rate, it could be helpful to have some numerical guidelines in order to compare criteria, e.g. the technical skill of one candidate with that of another.

An example of rating the various criteria **could** be:

Magic Atmosphere 5%;  
Showmanship and Presentation 25%;  
Entertainment Value 20%;  
Artistic Impression and Routining 10%;  
Technical Skill / Handling 20%,  
Originality 20%.

These suggested percentages (each judge is free to use his own ratings) can be considered a first expedient to facilitate the judging process.

A second expedient can be the following.

According to the Rules, minimum marks for prizes are as follows:

- for a 3<sup>rd</sup> place standing, a candidate must obtain a score of at least 60%;
  - for a 2<sup>nd</sup> place standing, a candidate must obtain a score of at least 70%; and
  - for a 1<sup>st</sup> place standing, a candidate must achieve a score of at least 80%.
- To win a Grand Prix a minimum score of 85% is required.

These required minimum scores mean e.g. that when a judge gives a competitor a score of 70, he implicitly indicates that he considers the competitor worth a second prize.

If a judge gives a score of e.g. 68, this could mean: "I don't think that the contestant is up to a second prize, but I don't want to lower the average scores of all the judges too much and I don't mind if all the other judges want to award him a second prize anyhow."

If a judge gives a score of more than 84, e.g.86, it means that – to his opinion - the competitor can be awarded a Grand Prix.

The minimum score for 3<sup>rd</sup> place may seem low, but given the number of competitors this margin between 3<sup>rd</sup> place and 1<sup>st</sup> place is necessary. It happened previously that, giving too high a mark to the first contestant in a category, a judge already had scores of 100% by the end of the first day. Thus, 50% can be considered the score for an average performance.

## Criteria

Not all judging systems use the same criteria or give them the same meaning, so that even experienced judges can have difficulty when switching from one system to another. To make things as clear as possible, the following gives an interpretation of the FISM criteria.

### Magic Atmosphere

- ♠ Does the performer evoke a feeling of wonder, surprise and mystery in such a way that the audience cannot detect the secret or dexterous handling that causes it and therefore can only attribute it to magic?



- ♣ Is it an act that is primarily 'magic' in nature? Are magical events taking place throughout the act, or are they mainly supporting another form of entertainment?

## **Showmanship / Presentation**

Attention should be given to:

- ♣ **Presence:** projection of personality, command, confidence, appropriate energy etc.
- ♣ **Appearance:** wardrobe, costumes, stage setting, display of props etc.
- ♣ **Stagecraft:** movement, use of music and light, visibility of action, voice projection, handling of assistants, volunteers, live-stock, props etc.
- ♣ **Overall Impression:** - is the magic direct, logical and understandable?  
- is the character the magician plays in line with the magic he

performs and does he stay in character throughout the act?

## **Entertainment Value**

- ♣ How enjoyable is the act?
- ♣ How is the audience reacting?

## **Artistic Impression / Routining**

- ♣ How is the act structured?
- ♣ Does it flow smoothly from start to finish?
- ♣ Is the opening impression strong?
- ♣ Does the act build up to a recognizable finish?
- ♣ Is the program content (theme, choice of material) appropriate?
- ♣ As an Art form, does the act, in one way or another, appeal to the EMOTIONS of the audience?

**N.B.** According to the FISM Contest Rules and Procedures, a contestant must present a complete act (not a single trick) of between five and ten minutes in length. However, in the Invention and Stage Illusions categories, single effects are allowed.

## **Technical Skill / Handling**

One of the Frequently Asked Questions, is: "How should a person who executes easier sleights or moves perfectly, be judged against someone who elects to use moves or sleights of much greater difficulty, but performs them with above average ability, but not perfectly?"

You may have previously read this definition: "Magic is the absence of moves." However clever or ingenious a move is, if the audience can see it (or, in some cases, even feel or suspect it), something is wrong. It goes without saying that the risks in the manipulation category are much higher than in the other categories, but it's the magician's responsibility to determine the level at which he or she chooses to perform. Even though there is no rating scale, judges are not supposed to view all categories in the same way. That's one of the reasons why the choice of a category is very important for a contestant. (Even the best piano player can never win a Chopin contest playing Mozart.)

Points to consider:

- ♣ Does the performer show technical mastery of the props and sleights he uses?



♣ Is he performing material within his technical skill?

- ♣ Are there technical difficulties and, if so, how does he handle them?
- ♣ How skilled is he in the use of misdirection?
- ♣ Are there 'flashes' or 'exposures'?
- ♣ Is the audience fooled by some or most of the effects?
- ♣ Is his performance in accordance with his choice of category?

## **Originality**

In judging 'originality', it's wise to exercise some caution. No-one has ever seen or read everything. There's always a risk that what you think to be new, has been done before.

If, however, you are absolutely sure that something has been copied or 'stolen', then show it in your marks. Some judges may not be aware of this.

Questions to ask are:

- ♣ Is there anything new and creative in the effects, the method or the presentation?
- ♣ Are there any novel ideas?
- ♣ Does the magician portray an original type of character?
- ♣ Does he use unusual articles with a rationale?
- ♣ Are seemingly unrelated effects connected in a way that makes for creative effects?



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# FISM WORLDCHAMPIONSHIPS OF MAGIC 2006

## Contest Form



Judge \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Contestant** \_\_\_\_\_

Category \_\_\_\_\_ Society \_\_\_\_\_

**Score**  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Magic Atmosphere*

*Showmanship & Presentation*

*Entertainment Value*

*Artistic Impression & Routining*

*Technical skill / Handling*

*Originality*

*Comedic Presentation*

*Most Original Act*

# FISM WORLDCHAMPIONSHIPS OF MAGIC 2006

**Contestant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Score**  
\_\_\_\_\_

Category \_\_\_\_\_ Society \_\_\_\_\_

*Comedic Presentation*

*Most Original Act*



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Judge \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

