

The Ultimate Guide to Dance/Drill Team Tryout Secrets

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The Ultimate Guide to...

DANCE/DRILL TEAM TRYOUT SECRETS

The complete
guide to preparing
for your high
school dance
team auditions!



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Chapter One: Research the Team and Its Tryout Process

So, you are interested in trying out for a dance team? The first thing I have to say to you is: CONGRATULATIONS!! Dance teams, at any age or level, are a fantastic way to help you gain many advantages in life that will carry you towards a successful future. Some of those advantages include self-respect, respect for others, and the ability to work as a team. I can absolutely and positively say that being part of a dance team was the best thing that I could have ever done for myself. I commend you on taking the first step in seeking information on dance team tryouts.

About The Team

The first activity you need to do when interested in joining a dance team is to do some investigation. You might be surprised when you find out how much is really involved in being a member of a team! All teams are certainly not the same and they all have different aspects that make each team unique and special.

When it comes time to think about auditions, junior and high school dance teams typically will begin to recruit for new members. Sometimes an officer or veteran member will occupy a booth at school to answer questions, or you can always go straight to the team director for information. The important questions listed below will give you a strong knowledge base to guide you in your decision about joining the team.

Where does the dance team perform? This is important to know because some teams perform only at football and basketball games. There may also be several community events at which the team will perform such as town parades or Christmas celebrations. This will give you some idea of the time commitment that the team requires.

Are there tryouts for each routine performed? Seldom does the audition process end with the actual team tryouts. It is very typical to learn a

routine on Monday for a Friday football game and audition for the performance on Wednesday. Some teams also have policies that only new team members have to audition. This policy varies from team to team so learn all you can about the audition requirements throughout the year.

Does the team produce a spring show? A spring show production has become extremely popular with junior and high school dance teams and can involve everything from team, solo, and ensemble performances to productions that involve other school organizations or community groups. Needless to say, this is quite an undertaking and will require a great deal of time and team effort to make the production a success. Make sure you are ready and willing to give the kind of commitment that is required for such a production.

Does the team compete during contest season? It is very common for teams to engage in dance competitions during the spring months. Most teams will perform three team routines with the officers performing an additional two to three routines. In addition, there are opportunities to perform ensembles, duets, and solos. Competitions in recent years have exploded in popularity and attendance. As a competition judge for

many years and more recently as an administrator, I have been amazed at the ever-growing size of contests and the creativity of the teams. This is a very exciting time for dance groups, but you need to realize that there is a great deal of hard work and many hours that are required in order to produce a winning routine.

What kind of style does the team perform? Is it precision dance or more stylized? Do they prefer high kick routines rather than modern dance, or does the team have a pom squad style? This question is VERY important because you need to do an evaluation of what type of style you are most comfortable dancing and whether or not the team is a “good fit” for you.

How much does it cost to be a member? There is almost always a monetary cost involved in being a dance team member. The fees will typically include practice wear, camp tuition (possibly two camps for officers), contest fees, costume fees, etc. This should not scare you off, however. Many teams will fundraise, sometimes several times throughout the year, to raise money. Fundraisers have become more creative and successful over the past few years, and some teams can even raise enough money to finance their entire team for certain items such as costumes for contest or spring show. Additionally, school districts vary in what they

will or will not pay for when it comes to dance team activities. Fortunately, many districts are realizing the growing popularity of contests and spring shows and will have money earmarked for those events. Therefore, even though there is a cost involved, many teams try to minimize the costs as much as possible.

Now that you have asked some of the most important questions, there are some other questions you may want to ask to help round out your newfound information about the dance team. For instance, does the team have an annual banquet? Banquets are a great time for teams to “wrap up” the year, honor the seniors in high school teams, and typically give awards such as “Dancer of the Year” or “Most Improved Team Member.” Sometimes teams even wait to announce the new officers until this banquet.

Another question you may want to ask is whether or not there is a team trip. Some teams that do travel will alternate their trip years with contest season. If there is a team trip, there is always a great deal of fundraising that is involved to minimize the costs to the team members. Additionally, there are many teams that combine their team trip with contest season. The team will travel to a fun location, compete, and then stay an extra few days to take in the sights.

About the Tryouts

There are many varying ways that a dance team will conduct its tryouts. It is important that you familiarize yourself with everything involved so you will not have an unpleasant surprise halfway through the tryouts. The more you know about the process, the more comfortable and confident you will be when the big day arrives.

First of all, you need to learn about the tryout schedule. Does the process span over one week or two, or is it only a few days? Will the actual tryout day be held over a weekend or after school? Some teams will have a clinic prior to the actual tryout period. If this is the case, it is highly recommended that you attend the clinic. Not only will this give you a chance to evaluate the team, but you can also learn more about the style that they perform and any trademark skills that the team may have.

Ask questions about what types of routines and how many dances will be performed for the judges. It is very common to learn and perform both a jazz routine and a high kick routine. Most teams will also require that you perform both the left and right splits, and possibly execute various leaps or turns. It is a good idea to ask about the skills you will need to perform well in

advance of tryouts so that you may prepare accordingly. It is very difficult to learn how to properly execute a switch leap or a double turn without any advance preparation, but with the proper time and training, you have a better chance of mastering these difficult skills.

You might also wish to ask how the team will select the new members. Ask the director if he or she can supply you with a blank copy of the score sheet (an example of a generic score sheet is supplied in the Audition Day chapter). If you are able to obtain a score sheet, you can get an idea of the breakdown in points and what aspect will be focused on the most, i.e. a higher number of points for the high kick routine than the jazz routine, or vice versa. Also, ask the director if there is a specific number of places that are available or if the new members are chosen based on the break in scores. Most teams determine the new members by the break in the scores rather than by the exact number of places available on the team.

Tryout Requirements

As mentioned, some teams will hold a dance clinic prior to auditions. However, it is possible that there are additional requirements such as previous dance

training from either a dance studio or a dance class taken in school.

Any experience you may have always helps, but there are some teams that require a dance class that can be taken as a P.E. elective prior to auditioning for the team. If this is the case, make sure that you find out that information as soon as possible so you can register for the class and fulfill that requirement. Also, ask the director if there is a “reserve” dance team, or pep squad, that is required of new members. Reserve teams and junior varsity teams have grown in popularity over the years with larger high schools. These teams require all new members to have one year in the reserve team to “learn the ropes” before moving on to the varsity team.

Dance teams almost always have a grade point average that you must meet to be able to tryout. This requirement is important because you need to have a handle on your grades in order to juggle a hectic practice schedule and complete your schoolwork. Academics should always come first to the dance team, but the dance team should come second ONLY to academics. Make sure you are aware of the team policies and whether or not there is a certain GPA required. This is something you should become aware of

early on so you can determine if you can maintain the required grade standard and participate on the team.

Both junior and high school teams will schedule a meeting that you will need to attend with a parent or guardian prior to tryouts. Learn the date and time of this meeting and mark it down on your calendar. At this meeting, the director will go over pertinent information about the team including the time commitment and the cost of team membership. The director will also explain the fundraising options and any extra financial help that the school is willing to offer. This meeting is usually mandatory, and it is crucial that both you and your parent or guardian attend. You need to be certain that you and your family can handle all of the aspects that go along with being a member of the team. Additionally, it is always helpful to have the support of your family and friends behind you as you go through the tryout process.

Many teams require teachers to complete a recommendation or grade form that you must turn in prior to tryouts. Sometimes the director will supply your teachers with the appropriate form, but this is not always the case. You might be required to ask your teachers for a recommendation and supply them with the required form.

Make sure you are well aware of the deadline for the forms to be turned in to the director and do all that is possible to adhere to that schedule. It is always best to get off on the right foot with the director and missing a deadline right away is certainly not the best way!

Learn about the dress requirements for tryouts as soon as possible. For example, are you required to wear a certain type of leotard and tights, or should you wear a t-shirt and shorts? How about the shoes: jazz shoes or tennis shoes? Does the team require all black for tryouts or a different color? Finally, do the returning members wear something different for tryouts than the new candidates? These are all very important questions that need to be addressed immediately so that you can assemble your tryout uniform well in advance. The last thing you need to worry about on tryout day is whether or not you are wearing the correct attire.

Finally, ask the director for any other information regarding tryouts. As I mentioned earlier, all teams have a different tryout process and there may be additional requirements that go beyond this information. Knowledge is your best friend in this endeavor and you will feel empowered when you have all the answers you need.

The Team's Style

Some teams have a mixed style and will try a variety of dance types throughout the year. For example, a team may choose high kick and military routines for football season, perform hip hop and pom routines during basketball season, and then perform lyrical and stylized jazz routines during contest season. Of course the opposite might also be true and the team may have a trademark style that they adhere to faithfully.

A good idea to help you assess the team's style is to attend several team performances and see what style they favor. It is also helpful to attend different types of events as described above to see how different the style is from a football game to a basketball game. If the team does compete, learn what types of routines they are most likely to perform.

You may also want to videotape the team to determine if there is a certain skill or a trademark move that the team executes. By doing this, you can get a great idea of what is to be expected and what you will most likely encounter in the tryout dance. Be mindful of what you need to work on for tryouts and start a practice schedule as soon as possible. It certainly is never too early to start work on that important dance skill that the

team requires and then “wow” the judges at tryouts with your mastery of the element.

Mentors

If possible, locate a current member of the team who will be willing to help you prepare for tryouts. Most team members would be honored to help you with some of the skills that you need to work on. It is even possible that you could learn a routine that the team has performed. The director of the team might be able to recommend a team member who is willing to help, so do not be afraid to ask.

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