

PIPER'S COMPETITION CHECKLIST

ATTIRE

- Ghillies (shoes)
- Kilt Hose
- Flashes
- Sgian Dubh (optional)
- Kilt
- Kilt Belt
- Sporrán
- Shirt (short/long sleeve)
- Tie
- Waistcoat (vest)
- Kilt Jacket (optional)
- Glengarry
- Inverness
- Polo Shirt (as directed)

NECESSITIES

- Hat
- Sun glasses
- Jacket/gloves as needed
- Water/juice
- Chair(s)

NECESSITIES

- Bagpipes
 - Check all fittings
 - Chanter(s) with reed protector(s)
- Practice Chanter
- Registration/entry form/ ticket
- Competition music
- Supplies
 - Safety pins (pinned to the back of the kilt)
 - Drone/stock corks
 - Hemp (waxed and unwaxed)
 - Extra chanter reeds
 - Plumbers/Teflon tape
 - Ear plugs
 - Scissors/knife
 - Drone brushes
 - Extra moisture control
 - Tuner (optional)
- Driving directions

THE COMPETITION

Depart to the games early. Give yourself a comfortable amount of time to get to the games. You should be on-site about an hour before your first competition time. If you've never been at the piping competition there before (perhaps as a spectator), 90 minutes would be better. Add time for more unknowns—that is, if you don't have exact directions, if there might be bad traffic, if you have travelers in your car that might need breaks on the trip—then leave even earlier. It's much better to get there with extra time to kill than to have to race into an event unprepared.

The first order of business is to find the competition area. At most games, the ticket sellers, gatekeepers, parking attendants, and other staff will have no clue where the piping competition is. If you didn't find out where it is in advance, other pipers are a good bet, though some may be band players who don't compete. Solo competitions usually happen early in the day and band performances are usually later in the day. If you get to the games early—which is pretty typical anyway—you going to run into more solo players and less band members and that will increase your odds of asking someone who knows the answer you are looking for. Regardless, if you ask enough people carrying bagpipes, you'll get your answer.

Check in at the registration table as soon as you arrive at the competition to make sure you are registered. Try and arrive at least an hour before you are expected to play. You'll also be expected to check in with the "steward"—this person is usually holding a clipboard at the platform/playing area (also called the "boards") for each event. They are not usually the judge, who is usually sitting at a table in the playing area. Double check to make sure that you're not registered for something you didn't sign up for.

Check your playing area, especially if you play first. As the first player, you get to discover any problems with the "boards." Arrive early, look for any hazards beforehand, and just get a feel for the area, no matter what position you play.

Make sure your drone reeds are in tight and chanter reed is not loose. You don't want a drone reed dropping into the bag or your chanter unstable due to its reed moving.

Warm up your bagpipes with few tunes and/or exercises. If you don't, the tuning will be all over the place and so will your fingers. A practice chanter run can't hurt either, but get your pipes warm. Just remember to not overdo it. The last thing you want to do is push yourself to fatigue before you step on the boards. Warm up in the same conditions as the playing area, i.e. don't warm up in the sun if you'll be playing in the shade and vice versa. Most games don't have a designated tuning area, so follow the lead of other pipers—if they are tuning in up in the parking lot, that's probably a good place!

Double check your outfit. Make sure your hose are pulled up, your tie is snug, etc. Just do your best to project a professional, clean, efficient appearance. (Baseball cap, sunglasses, etc. are not considered proper competing attire.) Wear your kilt number to make the steward's job easier.

Make arrangements for minding your possessions. The judge and stewards are not security guards. If you are alone, find a place for your things where you will be comfortable leaving them. The last thing you want to do is be worrying that someone is going to steal your pipe case while you are trying to concentrate on playing.

Tune up with a friend or instructor. Get some help tuning. You probably aren't super experienced at this. And also try to get in some final fine drone tuning just before you play, as when the person immediately ahead of you is starting. Out of courtesy to any competing pipers, try and do it as far away as is practical.

Check how your event is progressing. Check with the steward periodically to see how the competition is going and how soon you will play. He/she will tell you when you are next. If you are toward the end of the event, the time may be dramatically different from the schedule. Events sometimes run early and sometimes run late. Make certain that you are at least a few minutes early to your competition area for your *true* performance time.

Dry your instrument, if necessary. Depending on the weather, your instrument, warm up time, how you blow, etc., you may wish to dry out your drone reeds (a dollar bill under the tongues works wonders) and swab out the drones. If you have a moisture control system in your instrument, you might check your system. Even without a moisture control system, this step may be unnecessary for many pipers.

Try to relax. This is probably the hardest thing to do. Close your eyes and take a few slow deep breaths and release all the tension in your body. You will play better if you aren't all tensed up. No one is going to repossess your home or eat your children if you don't do well! Remind yourself at the time that you are doing this for fun. Sure, you want to do well, but just let everything go and just play the tune.

Walk up to the judge when it is your turn. Verify with the steward that it's your turn. Wait at least ten to fifteen feet away while the judge is writing up the previous score sheet, and he/she will make eye contact with you to indicate it's okay to proceed. (Or once he/she starts shuffling papers, that's also a good sign it's time.) It's best to walk up, make eye contact, nod or salute, and formally say, "Good morning/afternoon. I'm [your name], and I'd like to play [tune name]." If not, the judge should ask your

name and your tune. Also, if you happen to know the judge, try and stay reasonably formal and don't boisterously shoot the breeze.

Take your time (to a point) and know the first notes. The judge expects you to take a few minutes to compose yourself, tune your instrument if necessary and play a bit of another tune to test the tuning. Face away from the judge when doing this. Run through part of the first line of the tune in your head. Think about which note you start on. If you do tune the drones yourself, it's best not to stop the pipes to verbally tell the judge you are ready—the drone reeds could settle differently after another strike-in. When you are fully prepared after a few minutes (or less) face the judge make eye contact and give him or her a nod or other indication that you are now ready to perform.

Play slower? Pipers often times get excited playing before people, especially a judge. The adrenaline usually results in a quicker tempo than wanted. Whatever you do, don't suddenly change the tempo in the middle of your tune if you realize you are playing too fast, just stick to it.

Focus. Avoid looking at (or listening) to the judge, crowd or friends. These are distractions. The only thing you are living at that moment is the tune. Try not to think about the embellishments. Think about where you are in the tune. Don't freak out if the judge starts writing, he/she may be writing something good. (Once I ruined a perfectly good performance by getting freaked out when the judge was just writing "playing confidently" on my sheet!) Don't listen to that voice in your head commenting on your playing. Shut it out and focus on where you are in the tune.

Pause before exiting. Stop playing then hold for a few seconds then respectfully exit the playing area. It's good to make eye contact with the judge, say "thank you," and exit with a salute or nod. You do not want to strike up a conversation with the judge at this point—unless they talk to you first. The judge must drive any conversation. If you have questions, find the judge *after* he/she has turned in that event's adjudication sheets.

Exit Gracefully. Don't swear, shake your head, or give any other negative signs. The judge knows what you did wrong—and right. And if he missed it, you don't want to give him any reason to think he did.

Don't forget to check results and get your evaluation. Results are usually posted within a couple hours. The grading sheets used by the judge are usually filed at the registration table—try not to pester them too often for your sheet, can you imagine every bagpiper asking several times if the results are out for an event? *After* results are posted, ask for your sheet(s) by event number. Sometimes you may not be able to read all the judge's comments—rather like doctor's prescriptions!—or have questions. You can try to find the judge and ask him/her when he/she is not judging another event.