

# What Grade Should I Compete?

As a student you have the opportunity to compete as a soloist at area competitions. You begin competing in Grade 5. **Grade V (five):** This is the beginner level. Competitors typically try to get through the tune without any glaring errors. Tunes are played very slowly. Most competitions require you to play a 4-part, 2/4 March. Yes...you play from memory in front of a judge.

Typically, you change grades when you register between seasons, usually around January. You *might* be able to change mid-season if you were to be blowing away all your competition, placing first in every event and the judges all giving you AGLs ("Above Grade Level") on your forms. It would be quite the rare thing indeed, but who knows. You might be a Mozart of piping. Associations strongly discourage and may even deny a mid-season change as it reeks a bit of havoc on the scoring bean-counters at the association, but it has been done.

After your season is over (or earlier if there's a prior cut-off for submissions), if you think you did well enough, write a letter to the competition/grading committee asking for an upgrade <http://www.pdcpd.org/mwpba/RegradePetition.pdf> . The important thing is, if you want to move up, **ask!** When you petition, you should send them copies of your score sheets, a letter of recommendation by your instructor and/or a judge and/or a well-known top piper. Committee members want to be convinced that you are capable of winning prizes in the next grade and that you won't be placed in a position for which you aren't ready and get frustrated and discouraged.

Now the bad news. If you placed high but competed against subpar pipers, you may not be ready to perform well at a higher grade. You have to understand that you may be one of the pipers that may never be ready to upgrade, whether it's lack of quality or quantity of practice, motor skills, proper instruction—whatever—it does happen too. You have to be ready to accept that also.

You should be playing the pipes for fun. If it's not fun, don't do it. Or at least change your approach or attitude about playing until it *is* fun. If you do want to advance and you are not and the judges' comments reflect that you are where you belong, you need to change the way you practice.

While it's exciting to win and advance grades, you should be competing to improve yourself, not to beat other players or to prove anything to anyone. It's easy to get caught up in the whole competition mentality and lose the focus: *music* and *entertainment*.