

Part One: Successful Dance Team Coaches

Over the last 30 years of being involved with dance teams in multiple capacities, I've noticed some commonalities among successful coaches. Keep in mind:

SUCCESS ≠ WINNING

To me, success is being good at your job, still enjoying being a coach, having a positive impact on everyone involved with your team, and knowing the WHY. (Why are you a dance team coach?)

SUCCESSFUL COACHES:

- Define success for themselves.
- Constantly redefine success.
- Are really organized and plan ahead.
- Set goals for each practice and performance.
- Run efficient practices that focus on improvement.
- Set a positive tone.
- Communicate effectively with choreographer.
- Is not afraid to tackle something new and out of their comfort zone.
- Build a support system of alumni, outside professionals, parents, and other coaches.
- Empower those around them by delegating.
- Handle conflict gracefully.
- Are still excited and engaged.
- Have goals for their team to achieve success outside of the competition arena.
- Set goals for competition that have nothing to do with trophies or placements.
- Interpret outcomes of competitions using internal parameters, not external results.
- Understand that payoff might not be immediate.

Why You Should Thank Your High School Dance Coach

Lauren Vogelsmeier in 500 Words On on Jul 13, 2015

As a former dancer, I can truly say there is no other feeling quite like the rush you get from performing. The bright lights on that football field on Friday night, the people in the crowd, and your heart racing as you wait for the music to begin inspire this indescribable feeling that is truly amazing. Recently I found myself reminiscing about "the good old days" (I'm not sure if I'm even old enough to use this phrase, but just go with it), and I thought to myself, how many times did I ever stop, for that split second, and think about who made this feeling that is just too good for words possible? I know I didn't then, but I am now.

You taught us the importance of hard work and dedication.

Nothing in life, or in dance, is just handed to us. We learned this lesson over and over when we failed to land that turn combination for the umpteenth time, or when we were put in the back row... again. You challenged us all in various ways whether we could do two pirouettes or 10. Most importantly, you stressed the need to honor our commitments and to be loyal to our team, just as you were loyal to us when we (or our crazy dance moms) probably drove you insane.

You taught us the meaning of the word "No."

You can't wear those costumes; you can't use that music; you can't do that move; no this, no that. Thanks for being the "bad guy" and teaching us that we don't always get what we want when we want it. It's a hard lesson to learn, but an even more difficult one to teach. While we didn't understand at first, we learned that we still need to respect others, even when they don't give us what we want.

You wanted us to be the very best, but still loved being our coach even when we weren't.

While winning isn't everything, winning is fun. A lot of fun. Much more fun than losing. While we had several first-place trophies, medals, and awards, sometimes we just fell short. At times it felt like the end of the world, but there you were, ready to pick us up again. You never used our shortcomings against us and didn't hold grudges; we just simply needed to try again.

We didn't thank you then, but we're thanking you now. Thanks for the laughs and the tears because we miss them dearly. Thanks for pursuing each and every one of us, even when we didn't believe in ourselves. Most importantly, though, thanks for teaching us to always wear a smile and point our toes.

Part Two: What Judges Are Looking For

- The best way to prepare for a competition is to spend time judging your own routine using the same scoresheet that will be used at the competition.
- Understand that dance team judging is an imperfect system. There are parts of it that are objective, but the performance is being interpreted by a human being with which you will not always agree.

IHSDTA scoresheets are divided into 4 sections:

OVERALL EFFECT 20 pts: How well routine is performed (showmanship) and “sold”

CHOREOGRAPHY 30 pts: The material that is performed

TECHNIQUE 25 pts: How well the skills included in the routine are performed

GROUP EXECUTION 25 pts: How well the team performs the routine as a unit

Because CHOREOGRAPHY has the most points assigned to it, that section needs to be addressed first, both in the planning stages of the routine, and in the tweaking stages of the routine. The other sections aren't too far behind, so they certainly can't be ignored.

The following pages are annotated IHSDTA scoresheets that will hopefully provide more insight into what a judge is looking for in each section.



Contest Site	_____
School	_____
Division	_____
Category	_____

POM SCORE SHEET

Overall Effect (20 pts)

Overall Impression

Teams ability to exhibit a dynamic and energetic routine
 Audience appropriateness of the music, costume and choreography
 Judges overall impression of the performance

Communication & Projection

Ability to evoke feeling from an audience; through use of high energy, showmanship, genuine expression and emotion

(10) Does the routine draw us in and keep our attention? Is there nothing distracting or questionable about music, costume, or choreo? Is the routine performed with confidence and not just with frozen smiles, but with eye contact as well? Was the audience engaged? Don't just go through the motions, make a connection with the audience and take them on the journey with you.

(10) _____

Choreography (30 pts)

Creativity & Musicality

Creative manipulation of pom movement within groups, levels, and various visual effects that compliment the music

Difficulty

Use of intricate pom movement and various skills with a challenging tempo

Formations & Transitions

Use of inventive formations and creative ways to move from one formation to another, allowing for seamless changes of positions

(10) Use all aspects of the music: lyrics tempo, accents and style. Have a strong beginning, middle and end. Include a peak moment or climax (the most memorable part of the routine). Pay attention to "shapes" and "pictures." Challenge yourself, but make difficulty level appropriate for your team. Don't make tempo so fast that you can't fully complete the moves. Formations shouldn't be forced. Dance through transitions. Trans and forms should flow, not be a series of starts and stops.

(10) _____

(10) _____

Technique (25 pts)

Execution of Pom Technique & Technical Skill

The mastering and execution of proper pom placement as well as correct dance technique as a team.

Strength & Control

The completion of strong and powerful pom motions with body control

(15) Pom placement = arms. Think "drill downs." Dance technique during a pom routine should still be done correctly: leaps, turns, good posture, extension through legs and feet.

(15) _____

(10) _____

Group Execution (25 pts)

Synchronization

Team uniformity of all movement throughout the routine and appropriate timing with the music

Spacing

The ability of participants to gauge and position themselves correct distances between each other in and throughout all formations

(15) Is everyone doing the exact same thing at the exact same time? No memory mistakes or timing errors.

(15) _____

(10) _____

TOTAL POINTS (100)	_____
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Judge Name _____	Judge Signature _____
(print full name)	
Comments:	



Contest Site	_____
School	_____
Division	_____
Category	_____

JAZZ, DUO & ENSEMBLE SCORE SHEET

Overall Effect (20 pts)

Overall Impression

Teams ability to exhibit a dynamic and energetic routine
 Audience appropriateness of the music, costume and choreography
 Judges overall impression of the performance

Communication & Projection

Ability to evoke feeling from an audience; through use of high energy, showmanship, genuine expression and emotion

(10) _____

(10) _____

Does the routine draw us in and keep our attention? Is there nothing distracting or questionable about music, costume, or choreo? Is the routine performed with confidence and not just with frozen smiles, but with eye contact as well? Was the audience engaged? Don't just go through the motions, make a connection with the audience and take them on the journey with you. The "story" or theme doesn't have to be lofty or morose. It can be light and happy. The performers just have to be invested in it.

Choreography (30 pts)

Creativity & Musicality

Use of original movement to compliment the music and create visual effects

Difficulty

Use of intricate and challenging skills/movements including various turns, leaps, jumps

Formations & Transitions

Use of inventive formations and creative ways to move from one formation to another, allowing for seamless changes and positions

(10) _____

(10) _____

(10) _____

Use all aspects of the music: lyrics tempo, accents and style. Have a strong beginning, middle and end. Include a peak moment or climax (the most memorable part of the routine). Pay attention to "shapes" and "pictures." Challenge yourself, but make difficulty level appropriate for your team. Don't make tempo so fast that you can't fully complete the moves. Formations shouldn't be forced. Dance through transitions. Trans and forms should flow, not be a series of starts and stops.

Technique (25 pts)

Execution of Style(s) & Technical Skill

The mastering and performance of all technical elements in accordance with the ability level of the entire team

Placement & Control

The proper control & correct placement/alignment of body and the ability to exhibit full extension and strength of movement

(15) _____

(10) _____

Posture is definitely noted. Perform through the chest and initiate from the core. Don't forget to utilize good technique below the waist as well. Legs and feet are easily spotted when looking for technique errors. Exhibit proper turn technique: spot, stay on releve, keep a tight passe connected to supporting leg. Utilize proper leap technique as well, extending through legs and feet and landing silently by utilizing core.

Group Execution (25 pts)

Synchronization

Team uniformity of all movement throughout the routine and appropriate timing with the music

Spacing

The ability of participants to gauge and position themselves correct distances between each other in and throughout all formations

(15) _____

(10) _____

Is everyone doing the exact same thing at the exact same time? No memory mistakes or timing errors.

TOTAL POINTS (100)	_____
---------------------------	-------

Judge Name _____	Judge Signature _____
(print full name)	
Comments:	



Contest Site	_____
School	_____
Division	_____
Category	_____

HIP HOP SCORE SHEET

Overall Effect (20 pts)

Overall Impression

Teams ability to exhibit a dynamic and energetic routine
 Audience appropriateness of the music, costume and choreography
 Judges overall impression of the performance

Communication & Projection

Ability to evoke feeling from an audience; through use of high energy, showmanship, genuine expression and emotion

(10)

(10)

Does the routine draw us in and keep our attention? Is there anything distracting or questionable about music, costume, or choreo? Is the routine performed with confidence and not just with frozen smiles, but with eye contact as well? Hip hop routines can utilize a more aggressive attitude. Was the audience engaged? Don't just go through the motions, make a connection with the audience and take them on the

Choreography (30 pts)

Creativity & Musicality

Use of original hip hop movements to compliment the music

Difficulty

Use of intricate and challenging skills/movement including various jumps, Stalls, and floor work

Formations & Transitions

Use of inventive formations and creative ways to move from one formation to another, allowing for seamless changes of positions

(10)

(10)

(10)

Use all aspects of the music: lyrics tempo, accents and style. Have a strong beginning, middle and end. Include a peak moment or climax (the most memorable part of the routine). Pay attention to "shapes" and "pictures." Challenge yourself, but make difficulty level appropriate for your team. Don't make tempo so fast that you can't fully complete the moves. Formations shouldn't be forced. Dance through transitions. Trans and forms should flow, not be a series of starts and stops.

Technique (25 pts)

Execution of Style(s) & Clarity of Movement

The mastering of rhythm and hip hop elements in accordance with the ability level of entire team

Placement & Control

The proper control & correct placement/alignment of body and the ability to Exhibit full extensions and strength of movement

(15)

(10)

Incorporates hip hop elements like floorwork and tricks. Moves performed with wide and low base and torso is utilized. Big movements initiated from core.

Group Execution (25 pts)

Synchronization

Team uniformity of all movement throughout the routine and Complimenting beats and rhythm of music

Spacing

The ability of the team to gauge and position themselves correct distances between each other in and throughout all formations

(15)

(10)

Is everyone doing the exact same thing at the exact same time? No memory mistakes or timing errors.

TOTAL POINTS (100)	_____
---------------------------	-------

Judge Name _____	Judge Signature _____
(print full name)	
Comments:	



Contest Site	_____
School	_____
Division	_____
Category	_____

HIGH KICK SCORE SHEET

Overall Effect (20 pts)

Overall Impression

Teams ability to exhibit a dynamic and energetic routine
 Audience appropriateness of the music, costume and choreography
 Judges overall impression of the performance

Communication & Projection

Ability to evoke feeling from an audience; through use of high energy, showmanship, genuine expression and emotion

(10) _____

(10) _____

Does the routine draw us in and keep our attention? Is there nothing distracting or questionable about music, costume, or choreo? Is the routine performed with confidence and not just with frozen smiles, but with eye contact as well? Was the audience engaged? Don't just go through the motions, make a connection with the audience and take them on the journey with you.

Choreography (30 pts)

Creativity & Variety of Kicks

Use of original and various movements and kicks to compliment the music

Difficulty

Use of intricate and challenging skills/movements including various footwork, visual effects, height of kicks, jumps and floor work

Formations & Transitions

Use of inventive formations allowing for seamless changes and positions

(10) _____

(10) _____

(10) _____

Create different "shapes" with variety of kick sequences. Challenge yourself but make difficulty level appropriate for your team. Standard traveling, but also include formation changes while kicking

Technique (25 pts)

Execution of Kicks & Technical Skill

The mastering and performance of all kicks and technical elements in accordance with the ability level of entire team including flexibility and extension

Placement & Control

The proper control & correct placement/alignment of body and the ability to exhibit full extension and strength of movement

(15) _____

(10) _____

Posture is noted: straight backs, perform through the chest, chins lifted. Hands while connecting to shoulders are also noted: thumbs tucked, fingers together. Feet on prep, during kick and when coming down from the kick should be pointed. Leg should be extended through straight knee and all the way through foot during kicks with the exclusion of developpe.

Group Execution (25 pts)

Synchronization

Team uniformity of all movement throughout the routine and appropriate timing with the music

Spacing

The ability of participants to gauge and position themselves correct distances between each other in and throughout all formations

(15) _____

(10) _____

Is everyone doing the exact same thing at the exact same time? No memory mistakes or timing errors.

TOTAL POINTS (100)	_____
---------------------------	-------

Judge Name _____	Judge Signature _____
(print full name)	
Comments:	

Possible Box 2 Box 3 Box 4 Box 5 Box 6

10	5.0-5.9	6.0-7.9	8.0-8.9	9.0-9.6	9.7-10
	5.0-5.2	6.0-6.6	8.0-8.2	9.0-9.2	9.7
	5.3-5.6	6.7-7.2	8.3-8.6	9.3-9.4	9.8-9.9
	5.7-5.9	7.3-7.9	8.7-8.9	9.5-9.6	10
15	7.5-8.9	9.0-11.9	12.0-13.4	13.5-14.5	14.6-15
	7.5-7.7	9.0-9.9	12.0-12.4	13.5-13.7	14.6-14.7
	8.0-8.4	10.0-10.9	12.5-12.9	13.8-14.1	14.8-14.9
	8.5-8.9	11.0-11.9	13.0-13.4	14.1-14.4	15
20	10.0-11.9	12.0-15.9	16.0-17.9	18.0-19.3	19.4-20
	10.0-10.6	12.0-13.3	16.0-16.6	18.0-18.4	19.4-19.6
	10.7-11.3	13.4-14.7	16.7-17.3	18.5-18.9	19.7-19.9
	11.4-11.9	14.8-15.9	17.4-17.9	18.9-19.3	20
100	50-59	60-79	80-89	90-96	97-100
	50-52	60-66	80-82	90-92	97
	53-56	67-72	83-86	93-94	98-99
	57-59	73-79	87-89	95-96	100

Box 2	Box 3	Box 4	Box 5	Box 6
DISCOVERS	KNOWS	UNDERSTANDS	APPLIES	SETS NEW STANDARDS
Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Dynamic	Elite
Inconsistent	Moderate	Excellent	Wide range	Superior
Basic	Aware	Well developed	Intricate	Highest effect
Inadequate	Average	Strongly defined	Superb	Stunning
Simplistic	Developing	Dimensional	Maximized	Superb
Lack of variety	Good	Consistent		
Incomplete	Work in Progress	Effective		
Weak	Strong awareness	More maturity		
	Clear personality	Greater variety		

Team Point Spreads										
	Overall Impression	Communication & Projection	Creativity, Musicality (variety in kicks)	Difficulty	Formations & Transitions	Execution of Style, Technique, Clarity of Movement, Technical Skill	Placement & Control	Synchronization	Spacing	Total
Possible	10	10	10	10	10	15	10	15	10	100
Box 2	5-5.9	5-5.9	5-5.9	5-5.9	5-5.9	7.5-8.9	5-5.9	7.5-8.9	5-5.9	50-59
Beginning	Boring, difficult to watch, inappropriate for audience	weak breath control & stamina, poor body language	incomplete, too much repetition, no variety	sub standard, basic	very little movement around the floor	weak execution of any skills	weak inconsistent	not listening to music, unaware of others	cannot tell what formations are	
Box 3	6-7.9	6-7.9	6-7.9	6-7.9	6-7.9	9-11.9	6-7.9	9-11.9	6-7.9	60-79
Intermediate	Just OK	Aware, average, evolving, clear personality	sporadically defined, some good things- WIP	developing, average	some form changes, but weak transitions	Evolving, WIP, learning to work together developing basic skills	moderate	timing good sometimes but not always with music	can see some formations	
Box 4	8-8.9	8-8.9	8-8.9	8-8.9	8-8.9	12-13.4	8-8.9	12-13.4	8-8.9	80-89
Advanced	enjoyable, holds attention	emotion consistent, appeals to audience	strongly defined, varied. Design clear, well developed	successful in content & skill	Good use of floor, transitions getting better	understanding of skills and how to execute increasing	effective, good alignment	working well together, timing good most of the time	Can see all formations but needs some clean up	
Box 5	9-9.6	9-9.6	9-9.6	9-9.6	9-9.6	13.5-14.5	9-9.6	13.5-14.5	9-9.6	90-97
Dynamic	really enjoyed it, couldn't look away	strong energy- team as a whole, maximized	dynamic, creative, original	intricate, good display of skills	great use of floor smooth transitions	Excellent use of skills displayed	impressive, good alignment, full extension	very few timing mistakes	Formations very good, very aware of others	
Box 6	9.7-10	9.7-10	9.7-10	9.7-10	9.7-10	14.6-15	9.7-10	14.6-15	9.7-10	97.1-100
Elite	That performance just rocked my world	Stunning, superior, evokes strong emotion from audience	creative, fully developed	Elite display of skills	great use of floor with seamless transitions	stunning in skills displayed and proper execution	superior control and strength	completely moving as one	Very clean and distinct formations	

Part Three: Improving Routines

Overall Effect Fixes:

- Video the routine and get closeups
- Preview the routine to a small group and have them give feedback
- Recognize the performers who are really “selling” it
- Video the one(s) who are doing a great job telling the story and have the rest of the team watch it so they can emulate
- Punch up the story arc: strong beginning, climax, strong end

Choreography Fixes:

- Strengthen story arc as mentioned above
- Get inspiration from video sources of similar performing venues and teams
- Take a close look at transitions. Are you just walking? Or walking with different arm motions each time? Switch it up by dancing through the transitions. Use transitions as an opportunity to make pictures with traffic patterns.
- What shapes are we making? Are we utilizing all parts of the floor? Are we using a variety of shapes in our formations?
- Flat parts can be fixed by adding dimension: levels, group work, have some team members face different directions
- Are all “planes” being utilized? Low with floor work and levels, high with lifts and leaps
- Add a “mini-lift” or “mini-turn combo.”
- Send a video of the routine to a trusted set of fresh eyes

Technique Fixes:

When you're short on time:

- Strategic placement of those that need improvement
- Strategic utilization of staging and group work to highlight the skill with those that can perform it well, and others support it with simpler choreo
- Slow down tempo of music a bit

When you have more time:

- A lot of sloppy technique is due to lack of stamina and endurance on the part of the dancers. Work on stamina from day one with progressions across the floor. Many teams will use leap combos that are in their competition routines as progressions.
- Do a before practice warm up that includes cardio (jump rope, jumping jacks, burpees, shuttle runs.)
- Perform the routine 3 times in a row, no stops.
- Don't allow the team members to collapse or sit between run-throughs.
- Coach's Eye app for iPhones and tablets (video analysis).

Group Execution Fixes:

- Sometimes synch can be improved by selective omission of some choreo
- Slow down the tempo of the music a bit
- Drill in sections. Practice any corrections given. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Video the routine and watch as a group.
- Coach's Eye app for iPhones and tablets (video analysis).