



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

Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques  
International Federation of Magic Societies

# Manual for the Jury of a FISM World Championship of Magic

## **1. Introduction**

This manual is based on the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*, which are a part of the *FISM Statutes* and are available on the FISM website ([www.fism.org](http://www.fism.org)).

The manual is not a replacement but an addition to said contest rules and procedures, with the purpose to provide some practical guidelines to ensure a correct and smooth running of the FISM World Championship of Magic.

## **2. Organization of the Jury**

According to the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*, at a FISM WCM there will be two judging panels to determine the prizes and awards. One panel judges the performances on stage and one panel judges the performances under close-up conditions.

The judging panels consist of seven to nine judges. One of the judges of each panel is the chairperson. For the second phase of the competition the Board of Directors may decide to add a non-magician, preferably an authority in the theatre or entertainment business, to the appropriate judging panel. (Article 7a of the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*)

A Jury President not giving scores to each competitor, presides over the two panels.

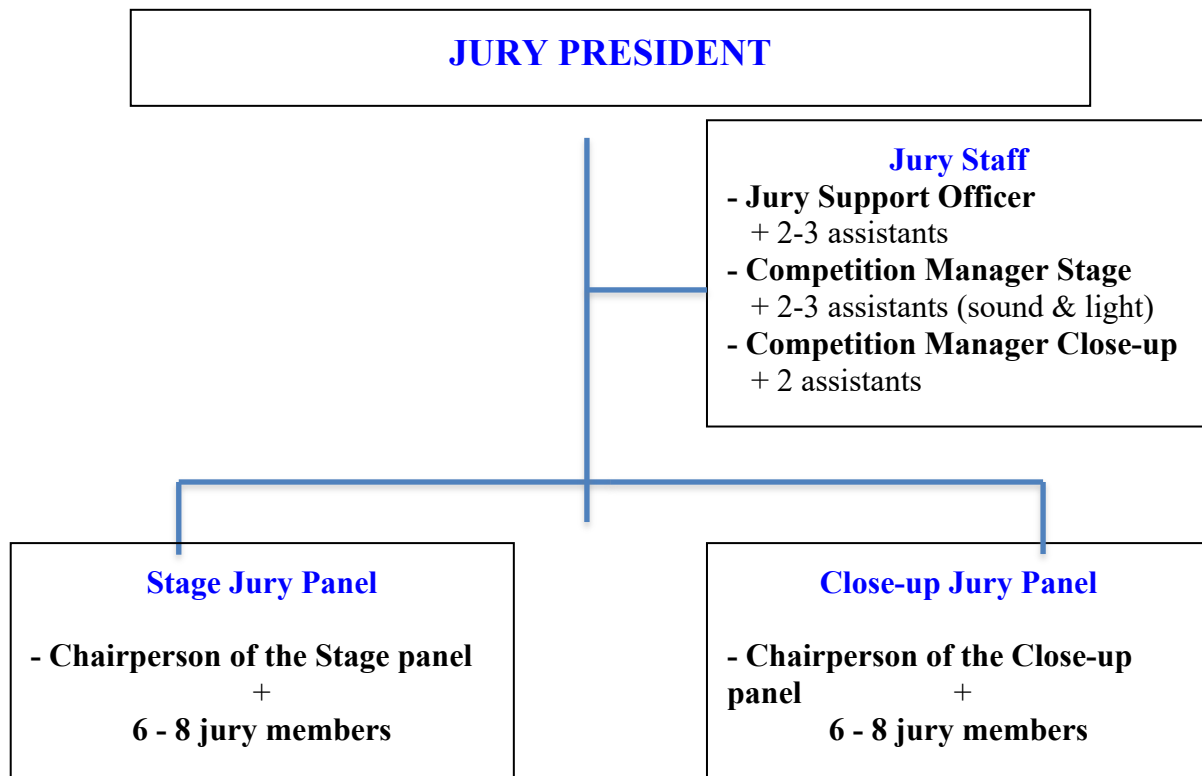
All judges, including the Jury President, are chosen by the Board of Directors. These choices should be based on the qualifications of the candidates in both the Art of Magic and that of judging magic performances. There should be a diversity of age, sex and cultural background. It will be wise to have judges from different continents represented in a FISM jury. For practical reasons the judges should be able to communicate in English.

The Board of Directors should also ensure continuity as well a renewal in consecutive FISM juries.

Preferably there will be only one judge for any one country.

The Jury President and the judging panels are supported by a Jury Staff, consisting of at least a Jury Support Officer (JSO) and a competition manager for each of the two panels.

An organizational chart of the complete Jury is depicted on page 2.



For the job descriptions of the Jury President, the Jury Support Officer, the Competition Managers and the Chairperson of the jury panels, see **Annex A**.

### **3. Judging guidelines**

#### 3.1 Introduction.

One of the most important aims of FISM is to develop and elevate the Art of Magic and the World Championship are one of the means to achieve this.

Some people will argue that in Arts there can't be competitions with differentiated prizes ( a 1<sup>st</sup> a 2<sup>nd</sup> and a 3<sup>rd</sup> prize) as there are e.g. in Sports. Although to a certain extent they are right, in the absence of a systematic schooling for the Art of Magic (unlike for some other Arts) the FISM championship is a very valuable means of encouraging magicians to compare their level with fellow magicians. This is a way to improve the quality of magic and thus gives it more credibility as one of the performing arts.

Judging an artistic performance is never easy. It is necessary, but difficult to define objective criteria for judges to consider along with subjective interpretation of the acts. Therefore, the choice of judges in a FISM jury is of the utmost importance. Not only should they have a good understanding of all aspects of magic and magic performances, they should also have knowledge of performance and artistic work. Diversity in cultural background, sex 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 comparisons:

- 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 achieved.

At a FISM World Championship, competitors are primarily judged according to 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 FISM has developed over the years.

This makes this multiple judging process complicated, even more so 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. One can only be considered to be a fully qualified FISM Jury-member after having been at least twice a judge in a FISM jury panel during a FISM World Championship of Magic.

### 3.2 Performing Conditions and Categories.

The categories used in a FISM championship/competition are mentioned in the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures* and are re-printed in this paragraph for the sake of completeness.

FISM competitions are limited to two main groups or performing conditions: **Stage** and **Close-up**. Under the Stage performing conditions there are 5 categories, whereas there are 3 categories in the Close-up group.

The **Stage Categories** are:

- *Manipulation*: A magic stage act wholly or largely based on sleight of hand.
- *General Magic*: A magic stage act which is, in most cases, a mix of several of the other categories. The props used are usually smaller than the ones used in a Stage Illusion act. Some performances using modern high-tech or video technology can also be categorized under this denomination.
- *Stage Illusions*: A magic stage act in which huge props are used (even when these are not visible to the audience). Often several people and/or animals are involved.
- *Mental Magic*: Branch of magic comprising demonstrations of apparent extraordinary or supernatural mental powers, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, telekinesis, super memory, lightning calculation and simulations of mediumistic phenomena.
- *Comedy Magic*: A magic stage act of which the main purpose is to make people laugh. However the emphasis is laid on the magic nature of the performance.

**Close-up Magic Performances** are:

acts, intended to be performed for small groups of people in close proximity. The contestant can be seated or standing behind a table, mostly with some members of the audience also seated at this table, but the act can also be presented standing up without any use of a table. The items used are generally small and most effects directly involve the spectators or participants.

Three categories are distinguished:

- *Card Magic*: the act is exclusively based on effects using playing cards.
- *Micro Magic*: although playing cards are not to be excluded, the act is of a more general nature.
- *Parlour Magic*: an act, midway between close-up and stage magic, meant to be performed for a group of people in a moderately sized room.

Contestants can also ask a magic invention to be judged. However, "Invention" is not a separate category. An invention has to be included in a performance in one of the eight categories. Special prizes

for "Invention" can be awarded in any one of the categories. There is no differentiation or hierarchy in awards for "Invention". In order to award a prize, the jury should consider the claimed invention to be at least a new effect or a new method or technique.

In judging the performances, a Jury member must check whether the performer has chosen the right category. If the Judges are of the shared opinion that it would be necessary to change his/her category, they are entitled to make such a change.

### 3.3 Criteria

Performances in a FISM championship/competition are judged against 6 criteria:

- magic atmosphere,
- showmanship/presentation,
- entertainment value,
- artistic impression/routining,
- technical skill/handling
- originality.

These FISM criteria can be interpreted as follows:

#### 3.3.1 Magic Atmosphere

This is a basic criterion in judging a MAGIC act. The act should be a magic act in the very first place; not a juggling act, a stand-up comedy act or a ventriloquism act, etc.

Questions to be asked:

- ♣ Are the effects thus that the audience cannot detect the secret or dexterous handling that causes it and therefore can only attribute them 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 (juggling, ventriloquism, acrobatics, etc.)?
- ♣ Does the act create an atmosphere of wonder and illusion?

#### 3.3.2 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, livestock, microphone, props etc.  
Please note that according to the 'FISM Contest Rules and Procedures', an act shall be disqualified in case of maltreatment of persons or animals
- ♣ *Overall Impression:*
  - is the magic direct, logical and easy to follow and to understand?
  - is the character the magician plays in line with the magic he/she performs and does he/she stay in character throughout the act?

### 3.3.3 Entertainment Value

- ♣ How enjoyable (or how boring) is the act?
- ♣ How is the audience reacting?
- ♣ Are the magic effects straightforward and easy to understand?
- ♣ To what extent the act fit in a general, live or TV entertainment program?

### 3.3.4 Artistic Impression / Routining

- ♣ Does the act evoke any emotion (joy, fear, sadness, laughter, etc.)?
- ♣ How is the act structured? (Is it an act and not a succession of separate tricks?)
- ♣ If a character or type (a cook, a fireman, a professor, a junky, etc.) is portrayed, are the effects in line with that type/personality and does the performer stay in character throughout the act?
- ♣ How strong is the opening impression? The end effect?
- ♣ Does it flow smoothly from start to finish?
- ♣ Does the act build up to a recognizable finish?
- ♣ Is the program content (theme, choice of material) appropriate?

### 3.3.5 Technical Skill / Handling

One of the Frequently Asked Questions, is: “How should a person who executes easy sleights or moves perfectly, be judged against someone who executes difficult moves or sleights well, 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/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.)

Considerations:

- ♣ Does the performer show technical mastery of the props and sleights he/she uses?
- ♣ Is the performing material within his/her technical skill?
- ♣ Are there technical difficulties and, if so, how does he/she handle them?
- ♣ Does the performer make good use of misdirection?
- ♣ Are there ‘flashes’ or ‘exposures’ of secret moves or sleights?
- ♣ Do some or most of the effects fool the audience?
- ♣ Is his/her performance in accordance with the choice of category?

### 3.3.6 Originality

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

If, however, you are absolutely sure that something has been copied or 'stolen', then show it in your marks.

Questions to be asked:

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

### 3.4 Marking an act

FISM has no determined rating scale. The judges are free to use their own ratings for each criterion and they are free to use different ratings per criterion for each category. E.g. a judge may give a maximum rating of 25 for "*Technical skill/handling*" for a performance in the category "*Manipulation*" and a maximum rating of 10 for an act in the category "*Mental Magic*".

At first glance, this might seem to make the judging easier, but in fact, that is not necessarily so.

In case of doubt, when challenged by the Jury President a judge has to explain his/her assessments of the six criteria.

With over 100 acts to rate, it could be helpful to have some guidelines to facilitate the judging procedure.

Such a guideline 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 final score of at least 60;
- for a 2<sup>nd</sup> place standing, a candidate must obtain a final score of at least 70;
- for a 1<sup>st</sup> place standing, a candidate must achieve a final score of at least 80.

NOTE: the "final score" is the rounded average of the scores as given by the judges.

E.g. if the total score of 9 judges for competitor A is 643, then his/her final score is  $643/9 = 71,44 = 71$

The required minimum scores mean e.g. that when a judge gives a competitor a score of 70, he/she implicitly indicates that he/she 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 final score too much and I don't mind if the majority of the judges want to award him a second prize.*"

In the same way a score of e.g. 72 could mean: "*For sure a second prize, but in my opinion certainly not a first prize*"

Generally speaking the meaning of the scores is depicted in Table 1.

Score	Meaning
<b>85-100</b>	<b>Excellent</b> Certainly Grand Prix level
<b>80-84</b>	<b>Very Good</b> 1st prize and GP level
<b>75-79</b>	<b>Good</b> 2nd prize level; 1st prize can be discussed
<b>70-74</b>	<b>Good</b> 2nd prize level, no 1st prize
<b>65-69</b>	<b>Adequate</b> 3rd prize level; a 2nd prize can be discussed
<b>60-64</b>	<b>Adequate</b> 3rd prize level, no 2nd prize
<b>55-59</b>	<b>Fair</b> almost up to a FISM prize
<b>50-54</b>	<b>Fair</b> not up to a FISM prize
<b>0-49</b>	<b>Below FISM level; disqualified</b>

Table 1 The general meaning of scores

### 3.5 Disqualification and the use of the "Red Light button"

A contestant **will** be disqualified

- when his/her act lasts less than 5 minutes or more than 10 minutes;
- when he/she presents an act that is obviously a copy of the act, or a significant or typical part of it, of another performer;
- when his/her final score is less than 50, meaning that his/her performance is "below FISM level".

A contestant **can** be disqualified (at the Jury's discretion) when his/her performance mainly depends on a pre-arrangement between the contestant and a volunteer or assistant in the know ("stooge"). After all it is a contest on the performance of **magic**. (See Article 4h of the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*) The use of a so-called "instant-stooge" (a spectator is secretly instructed by the performer while on stage) is allowed, as it may be considered a technique to achieve a magic effect. In case of doubt the competitor will be asked to explain the method used and, if necessary, to repeat the effect in front of the judging panel.

### ***Red Light button***

Article 7e of the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures* states:

Judges will each have access to a switch to activate the red lamp on the performing platform. If, after the first three minutes of an act, a judge is of the opinion that the performance is substantially below FISM standard or abusive, he/she can press his/her button at his/her discretion. In case of maltreatment of animals or if the performer is endangering the assistants or the audience, a jury member shall press the button immediately, without any time restraints. When at least 70% of the number of Judges has pressed their button, the red lamp will be activated and start flashing, meaning the contestant is disqualified. The Chairperson of the judging panel, if possible in close consideration with the jury President, then decides whether the curtain should be closed or not (or in a close-up performance, whether the act should be ended or not.)

Although this is an effective rule with no other purpose than to prevent low quality performances at a WORLD Championship of magic and the wrongly occupation of a slot in the competition, especially the closing of the curtain is controversial.

A practical guideline for the use of this rule is:

- a judge **can** press the button if he/she thinks the performance is substantially below FISM standard or abusive and he/she **should** do so immediately and without time restraint when the performer is endangering the assistants or the audience or when animals are maltreated.

## **4. Basic judging procedure**

The judging process is two-phased. In the first phase the jury will judge all the contestants' performances in order to determine who's eligible for the available prizes and awards as mentioned in the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*

The second phase is meant to elect the two Grand Prix winners.

**4.1** Basically the judging procedure for the **first phase** of the contest is as follows:

- a. each judge gives his/her fair and unbiased score (0 to 100) to a contestant's performance in accordance with the contest rules. Judges are not allowed to discuss their scores with each other. After each performance the marks of all judges are collected by the Jury Support Officer or one of his/her assistants.
- b. After the first competition session each panel will have a meeting, chaired by the panel chairperson. In this meeting views can be exchanged and questions be answered. The chairperson can decide to have additional meetings during the judging process.
- c. After all contestants in a category (Manipulation, Stage Illusions, etc.) have performed their act, each judge receives the ranking order of only his/her scores in that category. He/She is unaware of the scores of his/her fellow judges.

At this stage a judge may change the ranking order by changing his/her scores. The changed scores are then given to the Jury President.

d. Using the final scores as given by the judges, the computer system calculates the average score of each contestant and gives these in a ranking order to all judges. No individual scores are mentioned, just the average score and the ranking order, based on these averages.

e. In a meeting, chaired by the Jury President, the ranking order and the suggestions for the "most original act" and for "invention" are considered by the relevant jury panel. If the jury panel members are of the common opinion that the ranking order doesn't rightly reflect the performances, they can ask the Jury President to adapt the scores. The Jury President will only do so if he/she is of the opinion that the arguments are relevant and relate to the assessment criteria.

f. The final scores, as finally determined by the Jury President, are the only ones that will be made public and they are without appeal.

**4.2** The **second phase** of the contest is to award the Grand Prix to one of the 1st Prize winners of the Stage contest and to one of the 1st Prize winners of the Close-up contest. These 1st prize winners have to perform their act again in a final contest session.

According to the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures* the awarding of the Grand Prix is based on majority voting.

After the last performance, the judges will be asked to list all contestants in the order of their preference. Their number one gets (n) points, where n is the total number of contestants, number two on the list gets (n-1) points, number three (n-2) and so on.

The Jury President adds all the points of each contestant, as given by the judges.

The contestant with the highest total points will be awarded the Grand Prix.

In case of a tie (2 or more finalists have the same highest total points), the Grand Prix will be awarded to the finalists who has been given a "Nr 1" score by most of the judges.

## ANNEX A.

### Job descriptions

#### **1. Jury-President**

The Jury President is responsible for the proper application of the *FISM Contest Rules and Procedures*. He/She is responsible for the official and final jury results.  
He/She controls the Jury Staff.  
He/She is responsible to the Board of Directors.

In the period before the WCM he/she is the contact person for the judges. He/She takes care that the judges receive this manual and checks if the judges have read it and fully understand it.

Before the start of the competition the Jury President briefs the judges and he/she highlights some of the essential judging rules.

Although he/she doesn't give marks, he/she shall preferably watch all competitors, as in case of a tie, he/she shall arbitrate and his/her decision will be final.

He/She chairs all joined jury meetings and jury members need his/her approval if they want to change their scores after they have sent their final individual ratings to the Jury President, to be included in the overall score results.

The Jury President announces the prizes and awards during the "Awarding of the Prizes" ceremony and if necessary makes general comments about the competition or competitors.

#### **2. Chairpersons of the Jury Panels.**

They are responsible for the working procedures within their panel and of the whereabouts of their panel members.

The chairpersons have a thorough knowledge of the contest rules and procedures and take care that these are respected. In case of doubt they consult the Jury President.

The chairpersons organize and chair the meetings of their respective panels.

The Chairpersons of the jury panels are responsible to the Jury President.

#### **3. The Jury Support Officer.**

The Jury Support Officer is responsible to the Jury President and is helpful to the chairpersons of the Jury panels. He/She works in extensive and close cooperation with the Competition Managers.

His/Her job is comprehensive, not only during the championship itself but even more so during the months before the championship starts and after the championship.

His/Her main tasks are:

##### 3.1 In the months before the championship

- a. to set up a databank for contestants
- b. to fill a database with relevant information of contestants necessary for:
  - the jury and marking system
  - the screen projections
  - the running order in both stage and close-up competition (following information from the competition managers)
- c. to supply the organizer with the final lists of contestants in running order (for the programme)
- d. to supply the organizer with the screen projections of contestants in running order (stage and close-up)
- e. to prepare a time table list for registration of the length of the contest acts
- f. to prepare a back-up system for the scores processing software.

### 3.2 during the days of the championship:

- a. to organize the designated rooms for the jury members and the jury support room
- b. to organize procedures for the assistants:
  - timekeeper, collecting scores (stopwatches)
  - data input officer (computer literate, computers and printer)
- c. to brief the chairpersons on welfare arrangements (catering, etc) for jury members
- d. to install and tests the yellow/red lamp warning system for both jury panels
- e. to coordinate the screen projection with video/film/beamer team in each hall
- f. to coordinate the start of each act with the jury panel chairperson and the competition manager
- g. to supply pen-and-paper (and if necessary individual flashlights) to the jury members
- h. to take care of the technical equipment (lamp kit)

### 3.3 After the championship:

to write a final report for the Jury President, the chairpersons and the Board of Directors with observations and recommendations concerning the judging process.

## **4. Competition managers**

The competition managers are responsible to the Jury President and work in strict coordination and cooperation with the Jury Support Officer.

Their main task is to take care of a smooth execution of the performances of the contestants during the championship.

Some detailed tasks, referring to both Stage and Close-up conditions, are:

- a. having meetings with the Organizing Committee (OC) and representatives from the venue, concerning the stage and Close-up conditions and facilities;
- b. creation of Technical Information, based on information received from the OC and the BoD.
- c. creation of a Technical Request Form
- d. creation of a Music sheet Form
- e. e-mail and postal information exchange with contestants on Technical Requests
- f. creation and maintenance of a competitor database and the drafting of relevant reports about this for all parties
- g. creation of a Competitors List and the administration of the waiting list based on information received from the Jury President
- h. creation and distribution of Competitors' Confirmations
- i. creation and distribution of a rehearsal and performance schedule
- j. training of the stage/close-up crew
- k. organizing and conducting the rehearsals
- l. organizing and supervising the competition performances
- m. doing the same for the competitors in the 2nd phase of the competition as in the first phase
- n. documentation of the project for future WCMs.