



AN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE
ASSOCIATION PROGRAM

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2026 – 2027 Thespy® Rules

Official Rules of the International Thespian Excellence Awards



**Educational
Theatre**
Association®

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Welcome to another year of Thespys!

We are thrilled you are part of this community of artists, storytellers, and educators who believe in the power of theatre.

The International Thespian Excellence Awards (Thespys) celebrate student achievement while providing one of the most valuable opportunities in theatre education: meaningful, constructive feedback from experienced theatre professionals and educators. Every performance, presentation, portfolio, and design submission represents hours of creativity, collaboration, practice, and personal growth. We are honored to be part of that journey.

At its heart, Thespys is about learning. While recognition and ratings are certainly worth celebrating, they are only one part of the experience. The true value of Thespys lies in the opportunity to challenge yourself, receive thoughtful feedback, refine your craft, and continue growing as an artist. Whether you leave with new ideas, renewed confidence, or inspiration for your next project, we hope your experience encourages you to keep creating.

To educators: thank you for the countless hours you invest in mentoring, encouraging, and preparing your students. Your commitment creates opportunities that extend far beyond the stage, helping young people develop confidence, creativity, empathy, collaboration, and resilience. Your guidance is the foundation of every successful Thespy experience.

This handbook is designed to help you navigate every step of the process. Inside, you'll find detailed information to help students prepare successful submissions. We encourage you to review these guidelines carefully so everyone arrives informed, prepared, and ready to succeed.

Most importantly, remember that every Thespy represents a unique artistic voice. We celebrate diverse stories, perspectives, identities, and creative approaches. We encourage students to make thoughtful artistic choices, take creative risks, and present work that reflects their authentic talents and passions.

Thank you for being part of the Thespys community. We cannot wait to see the stories you tell, the characters you bring to life, the worlds you design, and the artistry you share. Your creativity continues to shape the future of theatre, and we are excited to celebrate your work.

Break a leg!

The Thespys Team

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Creating Dynamic Student Experiences in Theatre

The International Thespian Society

The International Thespian Society (ITS) is the only theatre honor society for middle and high school students in the United States. Affiliation brings credibility and distinction to students, theatre programs, and schools. It is a visible, positive symbol of the quality of your theatre program.

ITS recognizes, rewards, and encourages student achievement and celebrates the work of students in all aspects of theatre – performance and production. Each student is honored on an international level and gains access to opportunities and resource beyond those of their school.

The International Thespian Excellence Awards (Thespys®)

The International Thespian Excellence Awards program honors students by advancing them from regional to international levels of adjudication in 21 official categories spanning performance, technical theatre, filmmaking, and writing. Students are adjudicated by theatre educators and professionals on rubrics that reflect national standards in theatre education.

Overview & Eligibility

About the Thespy® Awards Program

Every year, thousands of students from Thespian troupes around the world participate in the Thespys. They progress from their school auditoriums to chapter qualifying events to the international stage.

Thespians are scored by a panel of adjudicators and earn Fair, Good, Excellent, and Superior ratings for their presentations. Those Thespians who earn Superior overall ratings (meaning the averaged score of all adjudicators falls in the Superior range) at a Qualifying Event are invited to the final round of adjudication at the International Thespian Festival. Thespians who earn Superior overall ratings during the final round of adjudication are celebrated for their achievement, and those Superior-rated Thespians who earn the highest scores in each category are presented with a Thespy Award.

Categories

The Thespy Awards recognizes the following 21 official categories of theatrical ability:

Performance

- Acting (Monologue, Contrasting Monologues, Two-Person Scene, Ensemble)
- Musical Theatre Performance (Solo, Duet, Ensemble)
- Musical Theatre Dance (Solo, Duet, Ensemble)

Technical Theatre & Writing

- Costume Construction
- Costume Design
- Lighting Design
- Makeup Design
- Playwriting
- Scenic Design
- Prop Construction
- Short Film
- Sound Design
- Stage Management
- Theatre Marketing

Eligibility

Any student wishing to participate in the Thespy Awards must meet the following criteria:

- Participants in the final round of adjudication must be inducted Thespians in active, chartered Thespian troupes.
- Participants must be inducted during or have active status in the academic year of competition. (The ITS academic year begins August 1 and concludes July 31.)

Participation

Chapter Qualifying Events

Students wishing to participate in the Thespy Awards program must begin by participating in a Chapter Qualifying Event. Often held at state Thespian festivals and conferences, these initial touchpoints for the Thespy Awards are run by chapter leadership in ITS's 40+ chapters around the world. Guidelines for sign-up and participation vary by region. The best way to learn about the Thespys in your chapter is to reach out to your chapter leadership and inquire about the local practices in your area.

Alternate Qualifying Event

While the primary way to qualify for the final round of Thespy adjudication is through a Chapter Qualifying Event, the Educational Theatre Association conducts an Alternate Qualifying Event to help ensure that all Thespians have the opportunity to participate in the Thespys program. Typically held virtually in the late winter/early spring, eligible students may submit entries to be adjudicated for advancement to the final round of adjudication at the International Thespian Festival (ITF) in June.

Visit schooltheatre.org/Thespys/alternate-qualifying-event for information on eligibility and participation.

Advancement to Finals

Thespians who earn Superior overall ratings in an approved Thespy category at a Qualifying Event are invited to the final round of Thespy Awards adjudication, held during ITF each year in June.

IN PERSON

To participate in the final round of adjudication in person, qualified Thespians must be registered for ITF, purchase the Thespy add-on, submit a Thespy Adjudication Form, and their Primary Adult Leader (PAL) must be checked in at event registration before registration closes on Sunday, June 27. Failure to arrive and be checked in by this time may result in disqualification.

Visit itf.schooltheatre.org for more information about registering students for ITF and the Thespy Awards.

VIRTUAL

Students unable to attend ITF in person can register for virtual adjudication and submit digital entries to be adjudicated in the final round. Students must be registered by their troupe director (or by an adult guardian if the student's troupe is not planning on attending ITF).

Thespians may submit entries in any approved Thespy category for which they earned a Superior overall rating at a Qualifying Event. Students may only advance to the final round in one (1) entry per category, even if multiple entries qualified. The advancing entry must be the same work used to qualify, though students are encouraged to refine their entry based on prior adjudication feedback.

On rare occasions, schools working together may want to submit an entry featuring students from more than one Thespian troupe. The PAL attending ITF with the participating students must email Thespys@schooltheatre.org to be considered. Approval from EdTA must be given *before* the PAL submits individual student registrations during the ITF registration process.

Final Round of Adjudication

Adjudication & Feedback

Adjudication will take place in person for any Thespian registered to attend ITF on site and digitally for virtual Thespy participation. Some categories require that materials be submitted digitally in advance of ITF even for those participating in person (like Playwriting). Read your category's specific rules carefully to ensure compliance with such rules.

Each entry will be reviewed by a panel of adjudicators. Adjudications in the final round take place in closed sessions. Video/audio recording are not allowed. Scores and feedback will be released to the person who originally submitted the Thespy registration(s) during the ITF registration process (this should be the PAL for the participating student). Details on when and how scores, ratings, and feedback are delivered will be communicated to participants in the weeks prior to the event.

Thespians participating virtually should optimize their entries for the digital format to receive the best feedback and scores and ensure permissions are set so all adjudicators can access the materials. Video submissions must be filmed specifically for the final round of Thespy adjudication – production videos of full performances or rehearsals are not allowed, and official program rules still apply to virtual submissions. ***Students cannot submit recordings of their qualifying event presentations.*** (See “Official Program Rules” and be sure to check out best practices for filming video submissions on the [FAQ page at Thespys.org](https://thespys.org/faq).)

Substitution Policy

Only inducted Thespians who earned Superior overall ratings at Qualifying Events are eligible to participate in the final round of adjudication at ITF. Substitutions are not permitted in any Solo, Monologue, Duet, Two-Person Scene, Technical, or Writing category. Qualified entries from the Ensemble Musical Theatre Performance, Ensemble Musical Theatre Dance, and Ensemble Acting categories may enter the final round of adjudication with fewer performers (if appropriate for the material) or with substitutions if some of the original students are unable to participate in person. This is not intended to allow completely different groups to perform at different levels of adjudication. Please contact Thespys@schooltheatre.org if your group needs to request a substitution. Substitutions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Recognition

The Thespy Awards are presented during the International Thespian Festival, where attendees gather to celebrate Thespians' hard work and achievement. As part of the festival programming, selected performances, technical designs, films, and plays may be showcased in various formats.

Superior-rated participants and Thespy Award winners (students who received the highest score in their category) will receive regalia that recognize their outstanding achievement.

Official Program Rules

The following rules are overarching and apply to all Thespy categories. Additional category-specific rules can be found at [Thespys.org](https://thespys.org). ***It is imperative that participants read and understand all rules in order to be successfully adjudicated at any Thespy Awards event.*** Failure to follow any of the rules in this document may result in disqualification.

Ideally, the following rules are the same at your Chapter Qualifying Event. However, be sure to check with your chapter Thespy official or chapter director to determine the rules for your Qualifying Event.

1. Approved Material

All participants must follow the official policies agreed upon by EdTA and the licensing companies who represent the works being used in Thespy adjudications. Obtaining the rights to produce a play or musical at a school as part of its theatrical season does not automatically grant students from that school permission to use selections from that title in Thespy adjudication. Be sure to follow these guidelines:

Musical Theatre Performance & Dance Categories

The performance of a song from a published musical score is considered fair use in Thespy adjudication so long as the licensing agency who holds the performance rights to the musical approves of its use. Visit schooltheatre.org/Thespys/approved-material to confirm performance eligibility.

Songs that are not from a published musical (e.g., songs from a musical film, pop songs that do not appear in a published musical) are not allowed in Thespy adjudication.

Acting Categories

The performance of a monologue or scene from a published work written for the theatre (play or musical) is considered fair use so long as the licensing agency who holds the performance rights to the work approves of its use. Visit schooltheatre.org/Thespys/approved-material to confirm performance eligibility.

Monologues and scenes that are not from a published play (e.g., from a monologue book or collection, poetry, works of fiction, screenplays) are not allowed in Thespy adjudication.

Technical Categories

Technical presentations of theoretical or realized production elements and designs for published plays and musicals are not subject to approval from licensing agencies and there are considered fair use for Thespy adjudication. Thespians must prepare technical presentations for published plays or musicals; designs and presentations for original works or for non-theatrical works (e.g., poetry, works of fiction, screenplays, television, concerts, or any other medium) are not permitted.

THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

As AI continues to evolve and become a regular part of creative processes, it is recommended that educational programs put in place policies and procedures as needed to ensure the responsible, ethical, and transparent use of AI generative tools.

Educators, coaches, advisors, and directors should work to balance the opportunities of generative AI with the need for preservation of the student's original voice. While further exploration of AI's role in the performing arts can offer exciting new possibilities, it is essential for all involved to remain mindful of the boundaries and responsibilities that come with this powerful technology.

In Thespy adjudications, AI may be used as a collaborative or starting tool as long as the processes and tools are clearly declared in the presentation of the work. AI-generated images, video, and audio must avoid the use of copyrighted material. The final creative products and the processes by which the participants arrived at those products should be completed by the participants themselves, with all choices justified if questioned by the adjudicators in the Q&A portion of the technical presentation.

2. Introduction

For all categories except Playwriting, Thespians must begin their presentation with an introduction. This is not part of the performance or presentation, but simply an opportunity for students to be themselves and address the adjudicators in a comfortable, polite, and brief manner. The introduction should include the following information:

- The Thespian's name (or names, for duet and ensemble categories)
- ITS troupe number
- Title of the selection being performed or work being showcased.

3. Time Limits

After the introduction, time begins with the first word, musical note, or acting beat (if it precedes the first word or note) of the presentation. At the end of the allotted time, the room monitor or adjudicator will raise their hand to indicate time is up. After 10 seconds, they will say, "Time." To avoid disqualification, students should bring their work to an immediate close when the "Time" is called. (See "Disqualification.")

Category	Time Limit
Monologue, Contrasting Monologues	3 minutes
Two-Person Scene, Ensemble Acting	5 minutes
Musical Theatre Performance & Dance (Solo, Duet, and Ensemble)	5 minutes
All Technical Categories	5-8 minutes + 4 minutes optional Q&A at the discretion of the adjudicators

4. Scenic Elements (Performance Categories)

Performance categories are limited to the scenic elements listed below. ***No other scenic elements, furniture, props, or set pieces are permitted*** and may lead to disqualification. All scenic elements must be used safely during the performance.

Category	Permitted Scenic Element(s)
Monologue, Contrasting Monologues	One (1) chair
Two-Person Scene	Two (2) chairs
Ensemble Acting	Up to six (6) chairs and one (1) table
Musical Theatre Solo (Dance and Performance)	One (1) chair
Musical Theatre Duet (Dance and Performance)	Two (2) chairs
Musical Theatre Ensemble (Dance and Performance)	Up to six (6) chairs and one (1) table

5. Required and Optional Materials (Tech/Design Categories)

Technical and design categories require participants to present supporting materials that demonstrate their artistic process, research, and design decisions. Each category includes **Required Materials**, which are necessary for a complete Thespy entry, as well as **Optional Materials**, which may provide additional context or enhance the presentation.

The table below summarizes the **Required Materials** for each technical and design category. Because expectations and submission details vary by category, participants and troupe directors should *carefully review the corresponding category page on the Thespy website for complete descriptions, specifications, formatting requirements, and presentation guidelines*. Participants are responsible for ensuring all required materials are included as outlined in the published guidelines.

Optional Materials are the same for all technical and design categories and may include photo boards, visual displays, or other presentation aids that help communicate the participant's artistic process and design choices. These materials are not required for successful adjudication but may provide adjudicators with additional context and insight into the participant's creative work.

Category	Required Materials
Costume Construction	• One completed constructed costume for a published theatrical work • Research • Pattern (with source citations if applicable) • Itemized expense sheet with receipts • Construction photo series documenting process and final costume

Category	Required Materials
Costume Design	• Five costume renderings • Design statement • Research • Budget • Preliminary sketches/concept drawings • Costume plot
Lighting Design	• Light plot • Design statement • Research • Instrument schedule/channel hookup • Magic sheet/cheat sheet • Sample script with cues • Cue list • Either: – Three light renderings (theoretical), or – Photo series/video of three realized cues
Makeup Design	• Five makeup renderings • Design statement • Research • Budget • Preliminary sketches • Application techniques • Makeup plot • For realized productions: application photo series

Category	Required Materials
Props Construction	• One completed constructed prop • Research (including play synopsis, given circumstances, props list, and visual research) • Materials list and construction methods • Itemized expense sheet with receipts • Construction photo series
Scenic Design	• Scale model (physical or digital) representing up to three scenes • Design statement • Research • Budget/constraints • Scale ground plan(s)
Sound Design	• Demonstration of 3–4 representative sound cues/effects • Design statement • Research • Design techniques/process • Sound cue sheet • Speaker plot • Sound reinforcement plan, signal flow, and/or mic plot (as applicable)
Stage Management	• 5–10 consecutive promptbook pages with blocking and technical cues • Duties performed • At least three examples of production paperwork (props list, costume change plot, rehearsal calendar, rehearsal reports, scene changes, line notes, etc.)

Category	Required Materials	
Theatre Marketing	• Design statement • Research • Responsibilities • Production details • Budget	• Design concept development • Final creative assets • Distribution plan • Press release • Outcomes (if realized)

6. Dress Code

During adjudication, dress simply and professionally. For performance categories, come as yourself, not as the character you are portraying. Avoid costumes, stage makeup, or character-specific hairstyles. Your focus should be on your performance, not on design elements that complement it. It is best to wear comfortable clothing that allows you to move freely.

7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Adjudicators evaluate performances and presentations based solely on the Thespy rubric. Factors like race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, body type, neurodiversity, or disability must not affect scoring. Thespians are encouraged to choose material that resonates with them, as long as the approved materials rules are followed. For example, students may perform roles of any gender, but may not change pronouns or scripted text without express written permission from the rights holder.

We also encourage Thespians and their teachers to select material with cultural awareness and responsiveness, ensuring respect for the voices and experiences represented in their chosen work. Students are urged to explore pieces that connect with their own identities or that they can approach with empathy, understanding, and care.

When engaging with material from a culture or perspective different from their own, students and educators should consider the historical and social context of the work and avoid choices that may result in cultural appropriation or misrepresentation.

Deaf or hard of hearing Thespians may use a conductor to guide tempo in Musical Theatre Performance and Dance categories. A revised rubric is available for these situations.

If you have questions about the adjudication process, need accommodations, or have concerns related to diversity, equity, inclusion, or accessibility (DEIA), please contact Thespys@schooltheatre.org.

8. Disqualification

Participants in the Thespy Awards may be disqualified for exceeding the time limit, performing material that does not appear in the official Approved Materials list, using a prop during their performance, recording a presentation, or failing to adhere to category-specific presentation/performance requirements. Adhering to these rules ensures a fair and consistent experience for all participants.

Direct all appeals, questions, and requests for clarification to Thespys@schooltheatre.org. Please include all relevant details including the name of the participant, their school's name, Thespian troupe number, location of the adjudication, and detailed information about the issue that led to the disqualification.