

What do Pageant Judges *Really* Look For?

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by

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The most common question I hear from contestants is "How do I know what THEY WANT me to say? The answer is you don't and don't waste precious brain power, energy and time trying to outthink the judges. All you can do is be Poised, Prepared, Practice, Plan, Primp and always have Perfect Posture. Your goal is to convince the judges to give you the most points in each category. You must possess a positive attitude and know in your heart that you are presenting yourself at your very best level.

Judges are just regular people chosen by the director because he or she has some area of expertise or experience that is valuable in the selection process. Agreeing to judge a local in the Miss America system is an honor and an awesome responsibility to the young women who enter the competition and place their trust in the integrity and objectivity of the scores.

Each judge has the best interest of each contestant in mind and genuinely wants all contestants to do their very best. Judges prepare their questions prior to the competition by reviewing and highlighting certain details on your fact sheet, familiarizing themselves with the criteria of each phase of competition, researching your platform issues to ask pertinent questions and keeping personal notes during the competition in order to make his best selection in the final ballot. It is a good thing when you see judges writing! During the interview, judges are exploring your ability to speak with excellent diction and grammar, and communicate effectively, voicing your opinions and comments with sincerity and honesty.

Good judges are decisive, impartial, consistent, appreciative of the arts and appreciative of community service endeavors.

Definition of Criteria: A standard of judgment; a principle for evaluation; form an opinion.

Does she have the character and mindset to serve the community?

Can she advocate for local issues?

Can she be a friend to local citizens and businesses?

Is she a role model to citizens of all ages?

Each judge receives your fact sheet and a photo plus, in some cases, a platform essay. The scoring range is 1-10 using whole numbers. Judges can give the same score to different contestants.

Judges mark their scores independently and confidentially at the moment a contestant completes a category of competition. There is no comparative judging in the Miss America system. He cannot go back and change a score. A judge's score sheet is a signed personal statement that he has given a fair score to each contestant.

In my mind, my base score is a 5 before you ever begin your category of competition. You go up or down from there. 1-2-3 not up to par – 4-5-6 average and 7-8-9 excellent and 10 is outstanding.

There are 5 categories of competition in the Miss America System:

Talent

Interview

Physical Fitness

Evening Wear

On-Stage Questions

In Miss Greater Richmond Teen and Preteen program, there are 4 categories and they are equal in value at 25% each. Talent, interview, physical fitness, evening wear and onstage question are combined.

Here are the Qualities & Attributes that Judges look for in **each** category:

- Is she a role model? Does she genuinely care about her role in life and her influence on others, and does she consciously make the effort to be her best self at all times?
- Is she capable of being an ambassador for the local program she represents, an ambassador for the Miss America Organization, and an ambassador for today's modern sophisticated young woman?
- Is she a physically beautiful woman with a confident and commanding presence?
- Is she genuinely talented? Does she have a balance of true technical talent and entertainment quality?
- Does she verbalize intellectually and is she an eloquent communicator with courage of her convictions?
- Is she an accomplished person who represents a composite of the best of a modern woman for her age?
- Is she a leader as demonstrated by her experiences on paper and verbalized in her interview?
- Does she possess personal pride in physical fitness and health?

Talent

Talent has the most value at 35% of the total score. As a judge I want to see a contestant's commitment and discipline to her stage performance. I want to see her enjoying her own talent performance and command of the stage or the piano or other instrument. Other important criteria are:

- Is this a true talent?

- Does she have entertainment ability?
- Can she execute and interpret her talent to the audience?
- Does she possess originality and technical skills? (executes technique and control)
- Does she have a strong stage presence, showmanship, projection?
- Is she showing her onstage personality?
- Total of all elements plus costume, voice, use of body, choreography, etc.

We know that contestants are not professional entertainers. They are showing judges and the audience an aspect of their character as well as performing arts aptitude. As a judge, we observe the execution of your talent, your technique, your synchronization, your ability to show me that you have a talent worthy of my high score.

I ask myself: Do I want to see this talent again? Wardrobe and costuming are important to the overall talent presentation BUT a great costume never covers up a bad talent and a great talent will never be ruined by a bad costume.

I do not want to see your underwear showing – no elastic, straps, strings, or tags. Make sure your talent costume fits your body properly to accommodate for your movements on stage.

Interview

Let's talk – interview which is 25% in the Miss America system – The basic tool for judges to begin an interview is the contestant's fact sheet with her personal achievements, future goals, and general overview of her personality and abilities. Also your photograph – the almighty first impression – both the resume and photo. No errors on your paperwork – not one. It glares as if highlighted with neon orange.

When I get my judges book, I take a red pen and mark every error on your fact sheet and essay. This paints a picture to me.

To quote Art McMaster, President and CEO of Miss America Organization, when asked -- How should a contestant prepare for interview? He said: "Contestants should NOT prepare for just the interview; she should prepare for the job itself. She must know who she is as a person and comfortable in her own skin. "

Judges know not to ask questions that are too personal or not in good taste, of course. If you get one of those questions, just politely say "I am uncomfortable answering your question."

Your interview is a conversation – an exchange of questions and answers, on the topic you know best – YOU. It is not a pop quiz. I judge how well the contestant states her opinions; it does not matter if her opinions differ from my own.

Criteria for Scoring Interview:

- What is my overall first impression?
- Is she natural and interesting? Is she an actress?

- Does she possess strong communication skills using her tone of voice, vocabulary and grammar?
- Does she have valid, realistic goals, opinions and responses?
- Is she showing me her real personality and physical beauty?
- Does she show me her leadership skills and a sense of pride about her accomplishments?
- Does she have knowledge and commitment to community service?
- Is she sincere about being Miss _____?
- Can she do the job?

I look for posture, straight with head up, walking proud, no leaning on the podium only resting hands lightly and using natural hand gestures for emphasis. Be cautious of being overly dramatic with too much hand movement – shows nervousness and generally being uncomfortable wanting this to be over. Does she shift her weight back and forth, sway or play with her jewelry, hair or fidget? Does she speak with enthusiasm and good diction, talking at a moderate pace so that the judges can comprehend her important answers? Otherwise, your awesome answers fly over top of my head. What did she say? I don't recall anything she said! That's not good for a high score beside your name.

Avoid speaking in a monotone or sing-song rhythm. Don't drop the final words at the end of your sentence – "and so on or things like that" Use some facial animation – otherwise you look boring, however, don't over exaggerate facial expressions – being an actress. Talk directly at the judges' panel but DO NOT STARE. Don't look at the floor or the ceiling. There are no answers printed there.

Physical Fitness:

Let's talk about criteria in physical fitness:

- The first impression – Is she really toned and physically fit?
- Is her posture and gait of her walk natural and strong?
- Does she possess beauty and attractiveness?
- Does she demonstrate confidence and stage presence?
- Does her swimsuit fit properly and compliment her body?

Do not use baby oil on your body for swimsuit competition. Just a body lotion applied normally works best under the lights. Baby oil looks greasy and shines under the lights making your body look heavier. You don't want to risk getting baby oil on your wardrobe.

As a judge, I do not want to see flab, cellulite, or anything that jiggles. I look for proper fit of the swimsuit front and back. I judge your physical fitness as you walk away from me. Don't suck in your tummy so that your rib cage protrudes. It makes you look unnatural. I like a natural arm swing and not a bend at the elbow so your arms swing looking like you are pumping up your walk. Swing your arms naturally. If you put your hand on your hip – put it on your hip and not at your waist.

Walk with energy but at a pace that I can focus solely on you. Please don't walk so fast that I blink and miss you. Again, I can't give you a high score if you are gone in a flash.

Evening Gown

Evening gown criteria:

- Overall First Impression
- Physical Beauty
- Sense of confidence and stage presence
- Walk posture, carriage and grace
- Style and personality
- Appropriately dressed
- The Total Look

Model your gown with grace and elegance – your gown is beautiful, you are beautiful. You should walk with the attitude “Look at me, I am beautiful.” Take your time in the spotlight. Let the judges’ panel and the audience embrace you with their eyes and applause.

Beware of shiny fabrics on evening gowns – I say this because the stage lights shine brightly on body parts that protrude – the bust and the butt. Also be cautious about bows and sashes that tie in the back hanging over your butt. They can make you look larger than you are and also jiggle when you walk.

On-Stage Questions

- Overall “First Impression”
- Confidence and stage presence
- Ability to speak with sincerity, personality and opinion
- Do people want to listen to her?
- Could she be a spokesperson for the Miss America Organization?

I look for her answer to the question – an exact answer to the question – not rambling – succinct answer to the question. Strive for simplicity, sincerity and clarity.

Do not say thank you at the end of your onstage question. The audience is politely seated and they have to listen to you – we are captive. Saying thank you means you don’t know how to end your answer. Exit proudly with perfect posture. This topic will be covered in more detail during the sessions after lunch.

The common factors in all of these criteria are: the first impression, sense of confidence, stage presence and posture.

I want to shift gears for a minute and talk about your photograph – the ones in the judges’ books and in the program book and in advertisements in the book. These photos are very important. You need to have the proper make-up on to accent your best features.

First impression – this is it!

Photographs

Your natural make-up is washed out in a photograph that has good lighting. When having photos taken, do the color photos first then darken your make-up for black & white photos. All make-up should be matte and absolutely no frost should ever be used in photos – on cheeks or eye shadows, or highlights.

Foundation should be beige or pink – no yellow shades. Blush should be a natural, healthy glow shade and not 2 stripes on your cheeks. Blush goes high on your cheek bones and blend, blend, blend.

Use eyeliner and mascara to keep your eyes from looking weak, small and fading out. Use a lip liner pencil to define your lip shape. Use color on your lips and not just a gloss. Rose, red or reddish brown photograph nicely and look good onstage, too. Only use gloss in a tiny amount in the center of your lip area. Little or no air brushing, please. You want your photo to look like you.

For black & white photos – your make-up should be intense. Use earth tones as contours and beige matt shadow as a highlighter. Use a strong lipstick color – light to medium shades do not show up and you want your lip line to be defined. Do not overuse gloss on lips – too shiny, greasy looking.

Hair for photographs and onstage – Too much hair on your face hides your features and causes shadows. Avoid severe styles – have a feminine hairstyle at all times. I will mark down your score because of stringy, flat, unstyled hair, hair that has dark roots, hair that is over processed, unhealthy.

Teeth are very important, too – should be clean and whitened. Do NOT put Vaseline on your teeth – that's a joke. It is just a mess, clogs in between your teeth and ruins your lipstick.

Nails – yes, we look at your hands – nails should be neatly manicured and the polish should be neutral, clear or a nice color.

Competition makes all of us better whether it is in a pageant, on an athletic field, or in the business world. Competition pushes us to be better people than we were before the competition began. Your pageant experience makes you the best in whatever you pursue in life ... even at my age – on a personal note, two weeks ago, I had 2 job interviews on Thursday and Friday, and by Monday I had 2 job offers. Once you conquer interview skills, you never forget them.

Judges really look for qualities all in one person: intelligence, ambition, attractive appearance, friendliness, articulation, maturity, academic achievement, personality, involvement in community, a perfect figure and a perfect walk, plus an entertaining talent, pageant savvy, tenacity and nerves of steel, poised, can handle pressure and has a contagious smile and good attitude.

*Who is the "real deal" ... the most consistent all-around lady?
That's who I am looking for every time I sit on a judges panel.*

Have I mentioned good posture throughout the entire competition and really in your every day life? Your posture gives the world the first impression of you. I can't emphasize that enough.

There are no shortcuts, no secrets, no tricks to ensure that you will win. Only Plan, Prepare, Practice, Poise, Primp and Posture!

Happy to answer questions.