

Guidelines for competitors – NPS competitions

General.

The committee felt that it would be helpful to offer competitors a few general guidelines, to ensure that they enter appropriate classes, and to list a few of the ‘typical’ tunes that might be expected at each playing standard. This is in no way intended to be a set tune list for any class, nor does it preclude the selection of favourite tunes by competitors. The class titles that follow are those of the NPS competition; whilst they **may** be applicable to other events, competitors should use their own judgement as to whether levels at other competitions are equivalent. For those inexperienced in competition, seeking the advice of an experienced player / judge would be the best way to proceed.

All tune examples are taken from the NPS First Tunebook, 3rd edition.

Novice.

This class is intended for those in their first season of competition, with necessarily limited repertoire and experience. Demonstrating control of the instrument – ability to tune, a steady bellows and bag action (to maintain constant pressure), and clean fingering are all that is required. Ornamentation and vibrato are not appropriate, nor is digital agility expected.

Because He was a Bonny Lad, Buttered Peas, Chevy Chase, Crooked Bawbee, Jimmy Allan, Lea Rigg, Mallorca, Noble Squire Dacre, Rothbury Hills, Whittingham Green Lane, Winster Gallop.

Beginners

By this stage difficulties with tuning and pressure should have been largely ironed out, and any evidence of open fingering removed. Progression to an exploration of more demanding tunes might be expected at beginner level, as might the **occasional** use of vibrato and grace notes. Whilst jigs and hornpipes etc. might well make an appearance in the beginners' competition repertoire, they would be slower than their dance speed and the keyword would be ‘steadiness’.

As above + Biddy the Bowl Wife, Bonny Cragside, The Cott, Herd on the Hill, Hesleyside Reel, Hexham Races, Holmes’ Fancy, My Deary sits ower late up, Proudlock’s Hornpipe, Saddle the Pony, Small Coals and Little Money, Sweet Hesleyside, Whinham’s Reel.

Intermediate

The particular constraints imposed by the rules of this class make it (in the common estimation) one of the most difficult intermediate classes to enter.

However, an intermediate player should be sufficiently removed from the technical difficulties of playing the pipes to be able to give some consideration to performance presentation, and the way a set of tunes fits together. Evidence of the development of a playing style, with appropriate ornamentation, should be apparent. Dance tunes should be brisker than in the beginners class, though accuracy and rhythm should never be sacrificed to speed. Key changes might be considered.

Archie’s Fancy, Blackthorn Stick, Blow the Wind Southerly, Canny Newcastle, Friendly Visit, Lads of Alwick, Lamb Skinet, Minstrel’s Fancy, Nancy, Redesdale Hornpipe, Roxburgh Castle, Whinshields Hornpipe

Advanced

Introduced to overcome the giant leap between intermediate standard and open class piping, the advanced class requires a key change, and consideration by the competitor of how to put a set of tunes together appropriately. The way the player relates to the ‘audience’ is also a factor; the development of performance skills being seen as important to aspiring solo pipers.

Open

The Open is primarily a performance class. The player is expected to use appropriate repertoire to demonstrate their mastery of technique and musicianship, as well as to perform their selection of tunes for the benefit of the audience. The requirement for a tune with variations, and a key change, should be tastefully incorporated into the competitor’s display. The actual selection of tunes, while based on the Northumbrian tradition, will naturally vary greatly, as players will have developed their own style and tastes.