

# AX26 Masquerade Rules & Guidelines

Updated: February 12, 2026

## General Info & Requirements

- Event Access.** Each participant must have a Valid 4-Day Anime Expo badge.  
All craftsmanship judging will take place on Day 1 and 2 of Anime Expo. Participants will have the opportunity to request their preferred craftsmanship judging day in the months leading up to Anime Expo.
- Juried Application.** All applications will be subject to a juried review. This applies to contestants who wish to participate in craftsmanship judging and Performance only entrants.
  - Craftsmanship applicants** are required to submit a **minimum of two (2)** progress photos of their costume from any angle at any stage of the construction. This does not count towards any craftsmanship judging; it is simply to show that work has begun.
  - Performance only applicants** are required to submit a draft script/outline of the performance that is planned, a video of a previous performance, or a short 30 second – 1 minute preview of the planned performance.
    - Please note:** Contestants that opt out of Craftsmanship judging will only be eligible for the Best Performance Award. Outfits worn during the performance must comply with the **Costume Rules & Guidelines** listed later in this document.
- Applicant Appearance.** Each applicant may only appear on stage **once** and submit one (1) entry. Stage ninjas may support multiple entries.
- Rehearsals.** On-stage rehearsals are not guaranteed. Please be prepared to adapt and perform without on-stage rehearsal time. If rehearsal time is granted, please be on time or else you will forfeit your rehearsal time.
- Group Entry.** Group entries may have a maximum of ten (10) cosplayers. Aids, escorts, and stage ninjas do not count towards the group maximum but should not outnumber the group entry. A group entry will be placed in the craftsmanship division appropriate for its **most** experienced member. For special circumstances, please contact the AX Masquerade Team at [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org).
- Onsite Check-in.** Each accepted entries must check-in at the AX Masquerade Office in person ten (10) minutes prior to their scheduled craftsmanship judging session. The AX Masquerade Team reserves the right to terminate entries that are late or have missed their check-in without prior notification or explanation. **Even entries that have elected not to participate in craftsmanship judging must check in on Day 1.**
- General Eligibility.** Current AX volunteers, Employees of the SPJA, and anyone who was an AX Volunteer within the past year are NOT eligible to compete in the masquerade.
- Submission Requirements.** Each accepted entry must submit the following by **May 29, 2026**. Failure to submit without notification may result in a disqualification:
  - Audio, Background Image/Video**

- **Your audio and its accompanying background image/video must be submitted via a single .MP4 file.**
  - The audio should be any sound(s) necessary to express your performance (i.e., music, pre-recorded dialogue, sound effects). Microphones will not be available on stage for contestants to use. More details can be found in **Performance Rules & Guidelines**.
    - Please note that all audios must **adhere to the Performance Rules & Guidelines**. Failure to comply with the published Rules & Guidelines may result in your file submission being rejected.
  - Contestants must submit an image or video that will be shown on the screen behind them during their performance. More details can be found in **Performance Rules & Guidelines**.
  - **Progress Photos**
    - Each contestant must submit a **minimum of two (2)** progress photos of their costume(s) from any angle at any stage of the construction. This does not count towards any craftsmanship judging; it is simply to show that work has begun.
9. **Use of Generative AI.** The use of generative AI is strictly prohibited. Entries discovered to have used generative AI in any of their entry assets (music, voice, text, image, video, etc.) will be disqualified.
10. **Sandbagging.** Costumes that have previously won any major award (Best in Division, Best in Show etc.) at a costume contest are not eligible for entry. Costumes that have won minor awards (Judge’s choice, Honorable Mention) are subject to review and must contact the AX Masquerade Team at [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org) when they apply AND must list their awards when applying.

*\*All information, rules, and guidelines are effective as of February 12, 2026.*

### **AX26 Masquerade Important Dates**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Detail/Description</b>
January 9, 2026	Masquerade Application Open
March 1, 2026	Masquerade Application Close
March 3 – 10, 2026	Masquerade Acceptance Notification Period
March 16 – 20, 2026	Waitlist Acceptance Notification Period
May 29, 2026	Audiovisual Asset Submission Deadline
June 30, 2026	Digital Build Book Submission Deadline

*\* Dates subject to change at SPJA’s discretion.*

## Divisions

Masquerade contestants may apply to any one of the divisions listed below. These divisions are based on experience and skill; they apply only to the costume maker(s), not the wearer, as they are for craftsmanship, not performance.

Note that the AX Masquerade Team and/or the judges reserve the right to reclassify any contestants if they feel you are under- or over-qualified for your declared skill level. You may appeal to be reclassified into another skill level. Appeals can be presented to the AX Masquerade Team but only one appeal is allowed.

Anime Expo 2026 Masquerade Divisions include:

### **Beginner**

- Contestants with some experience making costumes and no experience participating in a cosplay contest or masquerade.
  - If you're a Beginner who has crafted many costumes and accumulated significant craftsmanship experience and has yet to win any competition awards, we encourage you to enter as an Intermediate.
- May not have won "Best Beginner," "Best Intermediate," or honors of that caliber or above at any major costume competition.
- Entries with contestants under the age of 13 should compete in the Beginner class.

### **Intermediate**

- Contestants with some experience making costumes and/or participating in a masquerade experience.
- May have won a few awards at any costume competition. (Winning a previous award is not required to qualify for this division.)
- May not have won "Best Intermediate" or honors of that caliber or above at any major costume competition.

### **Masters**

- Contestants with a high level of skill and/or highly experienced.
- May have won many awards or at least one high-ranking award at any costume competition.
  - Winning a previous award is not required to qualify for this division
- Professional costumers must enter this division (those who make more than 50% of their income doing costume or seamstress related work).

Anime Expo usually does not count any Hall Awards, Judge's Awards, or Honorable Mentions when considering an individual's skill as a cosplayer depending on the circumstance.

If you need assistance, the AX Masquerade Team can help place you at the appropriate skill level. Email: [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org).

## Costume Rules & Guidelines

1. Costumes must be from a creative work of Japanese origin (i.e. anime, manga, video game, or tokusatsu etc.) or of obvious Japanese pop culture influence. Please feel free to contact the AX Masquerade Team for any inquiries at [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org).
2. Costumes based on fan-art, custom creations, or a design that deviates greatly from the original source should reach out to [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org) to be considered for eligibility for the competition. These will be handled on a case-by-case basis. The AX Masquerade Team reserves the right to deny eligibility.
3. For group entries, all costumes and props must be made by at least one member of the group to qualify for craftsmanship judging. Commercially acquired costume sets are still eligible for performance awards but are not eligible for craftsmanship awards. Found, salvaged, or altered costumes and props are still eligible for craftsmanship judging but must be altered by at least 60% with the exceptions being for footwear or items for safety.
4. All props must conform to [Anime Expo's Weapons Policy & Code of Conduct](#). Limited exceptions can be provided in extreme cases such as large mechas, multi-person costumes, or excessively large props.
5. Costumes should be self-contained and self-sufficient. Connections to electrical sockets will not be available. Please secure your own handler if you have a bulky costume that might require a handler to move or see. We will do our best to make sure every contestant appears on stage. If the costume is bulky, please be aware that we may not be able to get the contestant on the stage, but we may still let them perform. Please be prepared to walk up 4-6 stairs if a lift or ramp is not available.
6. Costumes that have previously won any major award (Best in Division, Best in Show etc.) at a costume contest are not eligible for entry. Costumes that have won minor awards (Judge's choice, Honorable Mention) are subject to review and must contact the AX Masquerade Team at [masquerade@anime-expo.org](mailto:masquerade@anime-expo.org) when they apply AND must list their awards when applying.
7. If a contestant is found to be misrepresenting their craftsmanship, previous awards, or originality of performance, they may face removal from the Masquerade, be stripped of any awards won, and/or be suspended from future Anime Expo Cosplay events at the sole discretion of SPJA.

## Performance Rules & Guidelines

Masquerade contestants can choose to enter as a group performance (dance, skit, color guard, etc.) or a solo performance (monologue, color guard, dance, skit, etc.) Both solo and group performances are expected to be entertaining, while displaying the costume(s) and embodying the character(s). Please be aware that tech rehearsals will not be guaranteed. As such, please be sure to check through our technical requirements and guidelines to make sure that your audio and video files will play properly.

### Requirements

- **Adhere to the time limit.**
  - Beginner and Intermediate entrants have 2 minutes
  - Master level entrants have 2 minutes and 30 seconds.
- MC introductions will not count towards the performance time.
- Audio and video submissions that exceed the time limit will be cut off at the exact time mark unless confirmed otherwise.
- **Audio/Visual.** Your audio and its accompanying background image/video must be submitted as a single **.MP4** file.
- **Audio Specs:** Any sound (i.e., music, pre-recorded dialogue, sound effects) necessary to express your performance.
  - Must be comparable to a PG rating – no profanity or offensive language. Bleeps or other forms of censoring are acceptable.
  - Must have a minimum of 192 bitrate.
  - Try to avoid audio quality defects (audio distortion, overdriven levels, low sample-rate/bitrate).
  - Must be **COPYRIGHT and ROYALTY FREE** or selected from the **SESAC Repertory**.
    - Copyright & Royalty Free Example: YouTube Audio Library
    - SESAC Repertory: <https://www.sesac.com/repertory/>
      - Entries using music from the SESAC Repertory will have their audio played regularly during their performance on-stage. **However, the entry will be muted on the AX Lite livestream due to licensing limitations.**
- **Background Image / Video Specs:** Any image/video necessary to express your performance.
  - 16:9 Aspect Ratio
    - 3840 x 2160 is acceptable, as is 1920 x 1080 (2:1 AR)
  - Must have a resolution of at least 720p.
  - Can contain live-action footage, slides, or still images.
  - Must be original. **CANNOT contain any copyrighted material.** If you use a photo, you must have explicit permission to use the photo.

### Performance Guidelines

1. All masquerade contestants must follow the guidance and instruction of all AX Masquerade Team.
2. All Masquerade contestants must comply with the Anime Expo Code of Conduct, LA City Ordinances, and comply with a PG rating.

3. Any presentations with stunts, extreme or shocking performances must be approved by the department lead and assistant lead before the event. Failure to do so may result in disqualification and/or expulsion.
4. The use of flash powder, fireworks, lasers, electrical flashes, or smoke machines are STRICTLY prohibited.
5. Any debris left on stage must be quickly cleaned by stagehands in less than 10 seconds. Interaction with the MC, judges, or the audience is prohibited while on stage.

## Costume Judging

**Craftsmanship judging is not required. but it is recommended.** Contestants are only judged on the skill level of their class. Contestants who opt out of Craftsmanship judging will only be eligible for the Best Performance Award.

Contestants will be given the chance to opt in or out of Craftsmanship Judging before Anime Expo 2025.

- Contestants will be judged on a scale of 1-10 in the following categories:
  - **Design Difficulty** – How complicated is this cosplay?
  - **Techniques & Problem Solving** – How did the contestant adapt to unexpected challenges?
  - **Execution** – How well did the contestant put together the costume/prop?
  - **Creativity** – Has a similar execution been done before?
  - **Continuity** – Is the quality the same throughout the cosplay?
- Contestants must arrive 10 minutes before their judging time and have with them all the elements of the costume. If a contestant is late and does not contact the AX Masquerade Team, a makeup judging session cannot be guaranteed.
- It is encouraged for contestants to be in full costume for the judging session, but it is not required. For contestants who do not wish to wear their costume to prejudging, please bring all costume components – props, shoes, hair, etc. Any components that do not appear for the costume judging cannot be judged.
- A Costume Portfolio or Build Book, detailing the progress of the costume(s) construction is mandatory for Craftsmanship judging.
  - For Anime Expo 2026, all build books will be digital and must be submitted by **June 30, 2025, at 11:59 PM**. The build book should include the highlights of each portion of your build and should not exceed 25 pages (not including the title/ending page). A template will be provided for use upon acceptance into the competition.
- In addition to the build book, you may also bring the following to your prejudging session:
  - Fabric swatches
- If a costume is commercially acquired, it is not eligible for Craftsmanship judging or Craftsmanship awards.
- For group entries, most of **each** costume (over 60%) must be constructed by at least one (1) member of the group to be eligible for Craftsmanship awards.
- To avoid biased voting, if a contestant and one or more of the judges have a personal relationship (friend, relative, boyfriend/girlfriend, or significant other), that judge will not be allowed to vote for that contest.

## Performance Judging

- Contestants will be judged on a scale of 1-10 in the following categories:
  - **Stage Presence** – Facial, characterization, feeling
  - **Tech** – Is the contestant’s video & audio well incorporated? Does it add to the performance?
  - **Creativity** – Did the performance have any unique or original ideas?
  - **Prop & Set** – Does the prop/set add to the performance?
  - **Continuity** – Does the performance flow? Can people easily understand it?
- Contestants must arrive according to their call time at the Peacock Theater Talent Entrance. Call time will be issued at a later time.
- If a contestant is late, they must contact the AX Masquerade Team as soon as possible in order for arrangements to be made. If a contestant is late, their Performance may be cancelled, and they will no longer be eligible to compete.

### Helpful Tips for Performances

- **Be concise.** Keep your performance concise and engaging. Don’t feel pressured to “fluff” your runtime.
- **Test, test, test!** Test your skit on someone unfamiliar with the source material. If they don’t “get it,” consider revising it to reach a wider audience.
- **Perform for the back row.** Make sure that regardless of where someone is in the audience, everyone can understand your performance. Exaggerate movements, avoid crowding, and use on screen visuals to add to the performance.
- **Structure matters.** Have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Don’t just end abruptly—plan your exit!

## Prizes

- **Best in Show:** \$5,000.00
- **Best Masters:** \$2,000.00
- **Best Intermediate:** \$2,000.00
- **Best Beginner:** \$1,000.00
- **Best Performance:** \$1,000.00
- **Best Craftsmanship:** \$1,000.00
- **Judges' Choice**