

Ask Diane “My Non-Competitive Students Have No Focus” September 23, 2009

Dear Diane,

I teach primarily competitive students, and really enjoy helping them prepare for competitions. Our lessons have structure and direction, and my students are motivated to work seriously on their dancing.

I am at a loss however, with my students who do not want to compete. They enjoy their lessons, but they seem totally unfocused. One day they want to do Rumba, the next day Tango, the next day Hustle. We can't seem to work on their dancing skills in any systematic fashion.

I've suggested performing in our studio showcase, but they aren't interested in that either. I'm worried that without a consistent goal to work towards, my students just want to be danced around.

I'm a good teacher, and I know I can help these students with their dancing, but I feel I'm losing focus too.

Please help.

Sincerely,

Jared in Chicago

Dear Jared,

Thank you for this excellent question. It would first be important to understand why your student does not want to participate in competitions and showcases. Is it because of the expense or because they would rather not perform in front of people?

There is another excellent option to suggest to your student. Student Medal tests give you and your students a structure to measure their success. Students in every discipline benefit from concrete goals to work towards. The difference here is that the student may find this testing system more in alignment with their personality type than the more public and “showy” competitions and showcases.

Student Medal Tests are offered by several national dance organizations, such as DVIDA®, USISTD, and others. In a Medal Test, an independent examiner from one of the national organizations comes to your studio and gives your students an independent, written evaluation of their dancing.

In DVIDA®, for example, Medal Tests are offered in all dances at all levels, from beginning Bronze through Gold Star. Students can prepare for a Medal Test in just one

dance or for as many as they like. It's a completely individualized process and the examiner's expectations match the student's individual level of dance development.

Preparing for these tests will help develop your students' dancing from head to toe. The examiner will provide detailed written feedback on many different elements including:

- Posture
- Footwork
- Rise and Fall
- Sway
- Hip Action
- Lead and Follow
- Musicality

Before the day of the Medal Test, you should have the Dance Director or another high level instructor evaluate your students' dancing and point out any areas that may need a bit of work before the examiner arrives. This way, your students' hard work will be guaranteed to pay off in a successful Medal Test and very helpful, concrete feedback from an objective observer.

I've just returned from Trinidad where I had the great pleasure of giving sixty-four separate student Medal Tests. I was amazed and inspired by how well-prepared each and every student was. Their dancing was graceful, musical, and joyful, because their technique and preparation were impeccable. They seemed thrilled to mark their achievement by having the opportunity to dance for and be acknowledged by an Examiner.

The student Medal Test system provides another avenue to develop your students and may give the focus and structure you've been looking for. The *process* of preparing for the tests will yield as great a result for your students as the actual Medal Test. The examination day is just the icing on the cake.

I respect your commitment to find the best ways to teach your students. If you decide to try the Student Medal Test System, I would be happy to assist at any phase of the process.

Warm Regards,

Diane

Diane Jarmolow welcomes your questions and comments. She has recently created a revolutionary sales training program for dance teachers at all levels, and is also available for consultation on a wide range of issues involving dance teacher training, BDTC-in-a-Box, studio management, and studio culture. You can visit her web site at www.teachballroomdancing.com, and can contact her at diane@teachballroomdancing.com.