YOUTH TALENT CONTEST
TERMS & RULES

The annual Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest is the largest amateur performing arts talent contest in the world. The contest's purpose is to discover, develop and encourage young amateur entertainers throughout the eight-state area served by the Mid-South Fair. Contestants can compete for over $20,000 in cash and prizes, plus over $5,000 in scholarships.

Please read the below Terms and Contest Rules carefully. If you have any questions about any part of the Youth Talent Contest, you may email Debbie Banan kdjudge@aol.com.

TERMS

Accompaniment: The Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest will accept USB thumb/jump drives. If you have recorded accompaniment with your act, you must use a single-track USB Thumb/Jump drive. This means the ONLY track allowed on the medium is your performance track. If your USB thumb/Jump drive has more than one track you will be subject to disqualification. **Any contestant using accompaniment track must provide a second copy (backup) at check in**.

Competing: Contestants may compete as soloists and separately as a member of a Small Group (2-3 members). Those contestants may only enter once as a soloist and once as a member of a small group. If a contestant is a member of a Large Group (4 or more members), there is no limit on the number of group acts they can compete with. No member of a Grand Final winning act may compete again in the same category.

Conduct: The Youth Talent Policy Committee will not tolerate offensive conduct by participants, teachers, parents, or associates. Such conduct can result in expulsion from the current and future editions of the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest.

Groups: Vocal, dance and variety groups are divided into small groups (2-3 performers) and large groups (4+ performers). No contestant under the age of nine (9) can compete with a group or as a soloist.

Judges: Judges are not allowed to discuss contestants and/or acts with anyone other than those on the Judges panel. Please do not approach judges for explanations regarding any decision. Anyone attempting to discuss an act with a judge before, during, or after a contest will be disqualified.

Personal Belongings: The Mid-South Fair is not responsible for equipment, costumes, etc., left at the Mid-South Fair before, during, or after the contest. Contestants are responsible for securing their personal belongings.

Professional Status: The Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest is an amateur competition. To protect the amateur focus, the Youth Talent Committee defines a professional entertainer as one who earns more than one-half their normal living expenses by performing in any of the categories offered in the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest. Also, anyone who is a union member or has signed a contract with a professional agent or manager is ineligible. The agent or manager in this case is one who is paid by salary or commission for services provided to the entertainer for securing employment in the entertainment field. Additionally, an entertainer who sings or otherwise performs on any record released for commercial distribution through normal retail outlets shall be considered a professional. This does not prohibit an entertainer from self-producing a record for sale or distribution to friends and associates as part of church group activities or a demo. Further, a professional status in one category would make the contest ineligible for all categories. For example, a professional dancer may not compete in the Youth Talent Contest as an amateur singer or musician. If an entertainer wants to renounce their professional standing, they may apply to the Youth Talent Contest for a declaration of their amateur standing. For example, if an entertainer disassociates from a managerial contract, they could petition the Youth Talent Contest for reinstatement as an amateur for Youth Talent Contest purposes. Any request for reinstatement is reviewed on an individual basis and the decision of the Youth Talent Contest Committee is considered final.

Protests:

- **Rule Violation:** Any protest concerning rule violations must be made prior to the announcement of the winners. Once the winners are announced, the decisions of the judges at the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contests are final. This includes all Preliminary, Semifinal, and Grand Final competitions. Studio teachers

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should be responsible for control of parents and/or contestants. Any violation of this rule may jeopardize the contestant's eligibility.

- **Professional Status:** If a contestant is determined to be a professional and wishes to protest for reinstatement as an amateur, they must do so within ten days of being notified of the professional status determination. The petition must be submitted to the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Office and will be reviewed by the Youth Talent Contest Committee.

Schedules: Competition schedules will not be mailed or emailed until the 3rd week of September. No scheduling information will be given out over the phone.

Scheduling Conflicts: Only extreme scheduling conflicts will be considered. Schedule requests will ONLY be accepted in writing through U.S. Mail to the Youth Talent Office at 2584 Hwy 51 South, Hernando, MS 38632, or through e-mail at kdjudge@aol.com.

Withdrawal: If your plans have changed and you don't plan to compete, please call or write to withdraw your act prior to the Monday the week the Mid-South Fair begins (please note the Fair always begins on a Thursday). There are no refunds of entry fees or tickets.

CONTEST RULES

1. Entry into the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest:
    - Senior Division:
        - Must be between the ages of 13-21 on the opening date of the Mid-South Fair (October 1, 2026.
        - Be invited as the first-place overall winner of a sanctioned preliminary contest
            - If the first-place winner of a preliminary contest is ineligible or has already received an invitation, it is the Fair's sole discretion which act will receive the official invitation
        - Be a finalist from the previous year's Grand Finals (assuming eligibility criteria is met)
        - By special invitation from a Mid-South Fair Representative after approval of the Youth Talent Committee (invitation to come from the Youth Talent Director)
    - Junior Division:
        - Must be between the ages of 9-12 on the opening date of the Mid-South Fair (October 1, 2026)
        - The Junior Division will be limited to the first 200 applicants.
2. No solo performer can compete outside of their age group. No member of a group can compete in a lower age category.
3. Act Description:
    - For the Senior Division, the act must remain the same as performed in the preliminary contest (which earned the invitation) or upon an accepted application.
    - For the Junior Division, the act must remain the same as submitted on the application.
4. Groups with contestants in multiple age groups (Senior and Junior) must register in the Senior Division. As an example, if a group has one 13-year-old member and two members that are 12-years-old, the group must compete in the Senior Division. No Senior Division groups may add anyone after receiving an invite without re-qualifying or obtaining approval from the Youth Talent Office.
5. A vocalist that accompanies themselves is considered a Variety Act. Variety Acts will divide the total score between the acts performed. For example, a variety act considered "song and dance" would be able to earn up to 20 points for the song and 20 point for the dance, for a max total of 40 points. Another example would be a "self-accompanied vocalist" where the vocal and instrument portions would each be considered for 20 of the max 40 points.
6. If an act appears on stage in a category different from their invitation or approved application, the act will be disqualified. It is the act's responsibility to confirm their entry category at check in.
7. Time Limits: Each act in the Senior Division is limited to four (4) minutes. Each act in the Junior Division is limited to three (3) minutes. ***Any act running over the time limit will be disqualified.***

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- An official timekeeper will be present at all contests. The act is timed from the first vocal utterance. For example, if the act in a vocal category says, "Hello everybody," before their music comes on, the clock will start. In the instrumental category, the first note starts the clock. In the dance category, the first movement starts the clock. Exit Tags are not timed but if you speak or sing or play… you will be timed.

8. Individual scores will be posted for one (1) hour after the results of each round are completed (Senior Division). A parent/teacher observer will be present for each contest to ensure the integrity of the results for which acts will advance to semifinal and final, as well as the assignment of the top 4 finishers. No scores will be mailed after the Mid-South Fair Youth Talent Contest concludes.
    - No individual Scores are posted or released for the Junior Division.
9. Acts using machetes, knives, and any other item determined to be a weapon will not be accepted.
10. Anything thrown off the stage at any time will be cause for immediate disqualification.
11. Contestants may not use fire, smoke, or any smoke effects on stage.
12. All props must be inanimate, with the exception of those used by a magician.
13. Disqualification guidelines for each contest type:
    - Vocalists cannot have a vocal utterance of any kind on an accompaniment track, such as:
        - An "oooooooo"
        - A whistle
        - Background singers
        - Someone saying, "1, 2, 3"
        - Synthesizers
    - Dancers cannot have any taps or tap effect sounds on any recording provided
    - Instrumentalists can ONLY be accompanied by live or taped piano
        - In a piano solo, no accompaniment is allowed
        - If using an electronic keyboard, all sounds must be created live on stage
        - No pre-programmed music or sound is allowed
    - Bands or Instrumental groups may have no accompaniment; all sounds must be created live on stage
14. Accompanists are permitted on stage but must not assume visual importance in the performance; they are not to be individually acknowledged or bow with the contestant(s)
15. All persons assuming visual importance in the act must meet all qualifications, including:
    - Age limit for the division
    - Listed on the application (Junior Division)
    - Have been invited or accepted for entry by application as a part of the act (Senior Division)
16. Members of an act may drop out without penalty, unless it changes the act from a group to a solo.
17. If a member of a group was not part of the preliminary contest that earned the invitation, the act must re-qualify or apply and be invited as a completely new act.
18. Judges are instructed to consider the appropriateness of material used in competition. The Youth Talent Committee recommends that all presentations be tasteful and appropriate for the contestant's age and for a family entertainment venue.
19. Contestants may only enter and exit from officially designated stage left and right; no act may exit or enter from the front (audience) or backstage.

AWARDS

Senior Division (Ages 13-21):

- Each act competing in the Grand Finals will receive $50.00 and a Finalist's trophy.
- The winners of the Grand Finals receive a trophy cup and the following cash awards:
    - Third Sweepstakes Winner $ 500.00
    - Second Sweepstakes Winner $ 750.00
    - First Sweepstakes Winner $1,500.00
    - Grand Award Winner $2,500.00
- The Grand Award winner will also return for the following year's Mid-South Fair as special entertainment at Youth Talent Contest Grand Finals.

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Junior Division (Ages 9-12):

- The winners of the Junior Division Contest receive the following cash awards:
  - Third Sweepstakes Winner $ 150.00
  - Second Sweepstakes Winner $ 250.00
  - First Sweepstakes Winner $ 500.00
  - Grand Award Winner $ 750.00
- The Junior Grand Award Winner will perform as special entertainment at the Senior Grand Finals and will return for the following year's Mid-South Fair as special entertainment at Youth Talent Contest Junior Grand Finals.