



OCB Guide for New Competitors

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A. Common Misconceptions About Competing

Many people shy away from competition because they think they have to be huge, or have to have years and years of weight training experience. These are common misconceptions that are due in part from supplement company ads and many of the more popular magazines primarily showing professional level athletes who aren't drug-free. Many people think these images are what it takes to be a physique competitor. These people are often surprised by the difference once they actually see a local drug-tested competition. A wide variety of physique types and conditioning levels can be seen at local drug-free shows. Some athletes compete after only a few months of weight training experience too. It doesn't take years of training to compete. Drug-free competition is more about conditioning (lowering body fat) to show more detail in the physique. When more detail shows in the muscles, a person appears more muscular. Natural bodybuilders look like regular people with their clothes on, but when the clothes come off... look out! They look much bigger, especially under the lighting conditions on stage.

Many figure and fitness competitors think that they need to be at a certain low body fat percentage before even beginning their contest prep. This is untrue. A competitor simply needs to allow enough time to lose the desired amount of weight. For some this is 8 weeks, for others it is 16 weeks. Another misconception with the fitness division is that a competitor must be a gymnast in order to do well in the routine round. This is not necessary. While gymnastics skills do enhance a routine as they display moves of both strength and flexibility in one, if a competitor masters several strength and flexibility moves, has a well-choreographed routine to well-mixed music and is poised and perfected, she can place very well in this round.

B. What does it take to Compete?

All it really takes to compete is the desire. You don't need a certain amount of experience, and you don't have to have a certain amount of mass. If you've never seen a drug-free contest, go check one out and see what the competitors truly look like, then decide if you think you're ready. Or check out one of the drug-free bodybuilding publications such as Fitness & Physique Magazine (www.FitnessandPhysique.com). This magazine features coverage of many drug-free contests. You can scope out the level of competition and decide if you think you're ready or not. Just be sure you're checking the coverage of local level shows and not coverage of a National show when you make your decision, and keep in mind that usually only the top competitors are the ones who get pictures published as part of the contest coverage. Oxygen Magazine is another great source for fitness and figure competitors.

To enter a contest, competitors typically must submit an entry form and there is usually an entry fee which helps cover the costs of producing the shows (facility rental, awards, etc.). Entry fees are usually around \$25-50. Many shows require competitors to pay a drug-testing fee also. This usually ranges from \$25-\$45 for polygraph testing or around \$10-20 each for urine testing. And an organization membership is usually required for all competitors too. By being member of an organization, competitors are covered under the organizations insurance policy. Memberships typically run around \$30-50 per year. So all in all, a competitor usually has to pay out around \$100 to compete in one show for an organization, and about \$60 for additional shows with the same organization during the same year (membership fee not necessary for subsequent shows).

C. Choosing a show – How?

There are different levels of shows to choose from. The level of competition generally increases with each of the following categories: Local, State or Regional contests, National contests, World contests and Pro contests. Plus there are several divisions within a show. There are master's categories for higher age groups, novice classes for people fairly new to competition, and sometimes even junior or teen classes for younger age groups.

Bulletin Boards can be a great way to ask other competitors their opinions about a certain organization, promoter, or show. Some bulletin boards for this can be found at www.LiftforLife.com, www.getbig.com, www.bodybuilding.com and www.NaturalPhysiqueForum.com. Word of mouth from others near you is also a good source for information about area shows.

For fitness and figure competitors who are deciding which division to compete in, it's best to research the organization's physique and routine guidelines and if possible, buy a video tape from the show or attend a show to see what the caliber of competition is like and to observe the format of the show. Some organizations prefer a smaller, sleeker look while others award muscularity and hardness near that of a bodybuilder. As well, some organizations require a series of poses similar to bodybuilding or entail extra rounds such as interviews, evening gowns, obstacle courses, or sportswear, while some consist only of quarter turns.

Differences in Meanings for Novice Classes

Novice can have different meanings among the various organizations. One federation may have more lenient rules of eligibility for their Novice class, and may allow crossovers from the Open. These shows could have similar competition in the Open and Novice divisions. Other organizations may limit the Novice class more and not allow crossovers from the Open division. Their shows will have truer novices in the Novice class, and there will be a considerable difference between the Novice and Open divisions. Do careful research before choosing a contest to compete in if these options are important to you.

Different Drug-Testing Procedures

If your intent is to enter a drug-free contest, be careful about the differences that may exist between shows that are promoted as drug-tested events. A particular show may claim to be drug free, but not perform any actual testing. Or a contest could be pitched as a drug-tested event but its criteria may be one year's time being drug-free. Duration organizations consider one to be drug-free can vary. Time drug-free can be 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, 7 years, or even lifetime. If these issues concern you, make sure you know the procedures before you enter so won't object to the competitors you could potentially face.

Some organizations use polygraph testing as their screening device for use of banned substances. Shows tested by polygraph usually test all competitors, but can select athletes randomly for testing at these events too. Other organizations may use urinalysis as their screening method. Shows that test by urinalysis usually only test class or division winners, or select individuals instead of everyone because urine testing is a little more expensive than polygraph testing. Some organizations use both methods at certain shows. Urinalysis only traces substances back to about 6 months max, usually much less time than that for many substances. Plus growth hormone or insulin use doesn't show up at all on these tests. Usually any kind of testing is a good enough deterrent to keep athletes using banned substances away from local, state or regional shows. With having to pay to enter, getting only a trophy as the reward, and not getting any major publicity or possible endorsements such as they would from a national or world event, there is very little appeal for one to enter a natural show not being natural. This becomes more of a problem with the higher scale events like pro qualifiers, World championships or pro shows.

D. Contest Dieting

Competing is basically about burning off body fat, retaining muscle, and displaying the physique to the competitor's best advantage. Most competitors seems to start anywhere from 8 to 16 weeks in advance to get ready for a show. It really depends on how much fat needs to be burned. For example, a person needing to shed 20 pounds of fat will need a longer time for dieting than a person who only needs to shed 10 pounds of fat.

Competition Body Fat Percentages

The fat that surrounds the spinal cord, heart, and vital organs is called essential fat and is necessary to sustain life. The lowest body fat percentage a person can have is their amount of essential fat. Essential fat is approximately 2-3% of total body weight for males, and seems to be range between 7-10% for females. The difference in levels between genders is due to reproductive and hormonal factors. It is not likely for a competitor to reach the lowest possible body fat percentages though. If competitors can get within a couple percent of the lowest possible levels, they will display unbelievable definition. Most amateur regional level competitors don't even get that low.

Fitness and figure girls may can come in at a wide variety of body fat percentages, largely depending on where and how their body holds fat, as well as the desired look of the competing organization, but generally speaking, body fat levels range from 9-15%, not nearly as low as female bodybuilders must go to show adequate definition.

How Long to Diet to Get Ready for a Show?

A common question people ask when starting out in physique competition is how long they need to diet to get ready for a show. Many gyms offer body fat testing. Calipers (skin fold measurements), bioelectrical impedance (painless electrical current through the body) and near infrared reactance (light absorption and reflection) are the most common methods for obtaining body fat estimates. With proper application and derivation, they can provide fairly accurate results that are useful for estimating time one would need to plan on dieting for to reach their desired contest conditioning. Here's how it works:

In this example, the competitor is a female weighing 152 lbs. She has set a goal to be at 11% body fat for her competition. Say her test yields 18.6% body fat. 18.6% of 152 lbs is: $0.186 \times 152 \text{ lbs} = 28.27 \text{ lbs}$, so she **currently has about 28.25 lbs of body fat** on her frame. A bodyweight of 152 lbs - 28.25 lbs = **123.75 lbs of lean bodyweight** (muscle, water, bones etc.). Using algebra, (who said that stuff would never get used in the real world?) to find to her goal of 11% body fat:

$123.75 \text{ lbs} / x = 100\% - 11\%$, or simply 0.89 , $123.75 = 0.89x$, $123.75 / 0.89 = x$, $139 = x$, so about 139 lbs would be about the target 11% body fat. As a check, weight of 139 - lean bodyweight of 123.75 = 15.25 lbs of fat, and $15.25 / 139 = 10.97\%$ or 11% rounded).

28.25 lbs of fat now - 15.25 lbs of target fat = 12.75 lbs to lose. Losing 1-2 lbs per week is a common rate of weight loss to shed body fat while maintaining muscle mass. Losing weight too quickly can come at the expense of losing muscle tissue. Figure on about 1.5 lbs lost per week for this example. It would take $12.75 \text{ lbs} / 1.5 \text{ lbs} = 8.5$ weeks of dieting to reach the target body fat level from this starting point. You can plug in your numbers and see how long you should allow for.

Note: When dieting, competitors should weight themselves first thing in the morning each time. Water weight can vary several lbs throughout the day. By recording weights at the same time of day, like first thing upon waking after about 8 hours of fasting insures more accurate weight readings when monitoring weight loss from one week to the next.

Once you decide to begin your dieting for a contest, it becomes more important to know your food intake. You pretty much have to be a calorie counter at this point, at least until you gain plenty of experience with dieting down. To determine the breakdown of foods, you can go to a local bookstore and pick up a nutrition or food guide that lists the amount of carbs, protein, fats, sugars, sodium, etc. in foods. Begin dieting by eliminating all the junk food, excess sugars and foods high in fat from your diet and piece together your meals using a source of lean protein, a source of complex carbohydrates, and some vegetables for fiber and vitamins/minerals. A good ratio to follow if not on a carb cycling type of diet when starting is around 60% carbs, 25% protein, and 15% fat. This may differ from individual to individual. Many people do fine with these ratios, others feel they must take in lower carbs when dieting for a contest. Your body type, metabolism and number of fat cells in your body (which is hereditary) can affect what works best for you. There is also speculation about blood type playing a role in what works best for an individual, but there doesn't seem to be scientific evidence backing that theory. You can check into other books about these topics if you wish to explore them more thoroughly.

You should continue eating frequent meals, but the portions will likely become a little smaller the closer to the contest you get. As an example, say your normal food intake averages 3,500 calories per day. When you start dieting, you should maintain that number but use a stricter (cleaner) diet. Counting calories serves as a gauge for where to go next. If after the first week you don't experience any weight loss, you should then cut your calories back 10-15%. After another week you can gauge your progress and take it from there. For example, if you lose 5 pounds in a week, you should add some calories back to your daily diet. Ideally you should try to lose 1-2 pounds per week. Much more than that would probably be at the expense of your muscle mass, not the fat you want to get rid of. Continue adjusting your calories (or exercise amounts) as needed in order to continue losing 1-2 pounds per week up until the week before your show.

E. Contest Training

You need to continue lifting weights to send the signal that your body must hold onto that muscle you've built. Keep lifting as you normally do. If you intentionally lift lighter weights, the muscles may adjust to the decreased stress put on them and be more likely to lose size, especially since you'll be at a calorie deficit. The goal in contest dieting is to lose fat and retain muscle. Definition comes from lowering overall body fat so there's less of it between the skin and muscle. You don't really want the muscle to change when dieting, you want it to be shown more clearly, and that happens as fat is burned and skin is closer to the muscle showing more lines (less cushioning masking lines, cushioning meaning fat). You can add some cardio to your exercise program to help with the burning of fat. Cardiovascular exercise burns additional calories, and continues burning fat long after the cardio session has been completed. As the weeks go by, you can increase the cardio session's length, if needed, to continue losing 1-2 pounds per week. Fitness and figure competitors (or women competitors in general) may need to do more cardio than a male bodybuilder due to slower metabolisms, in part from female genetics and in part from not carrying as much muscle mass as a male bodybuilder.

Just beware when dieting that you don't overdo it. If you do too much exercise without taking in enough fuel (food) your body can actually work against you. It can go into starvation mode and fight to hold onto fat instead of burning it for energy. You have to keep a slight negative caloric balance, not an excessive one. Symptoms of over dieting/exercising are your legs starting to feel heavy when you walk, energy becoming drastically low for longer than a few hours (like for days), strength while working out goes down drastically, and metabolism slowing down (less frequent bowel movements). If these things happen, you're not burning fat as efficiently as you could be, and trying to diet and train becomes harder!

F. Posing

There are some videos listed in the Resources/Links section on the theOCBwebsite.com website. They can be useful for learning posing techniques. There are a couple for bodybuilding, and one for figure too. You can also get copies of local shows in your area on video and study competitors in them to look for what presents well, and what can take away from presentation.

Learn the poses (photos of each mandatory pose are available on the rules page of theOCBwebsite.com), and practice them in a mirror. Try slight variations of the poses to see what makes your physique look its best. If you have a video camera, tape yourself going through the poses. If you don't use a mirror when doing this, you can get a good idea of how you would look on stage when you don't have a mirror to check your form. Watch your transitions from pose to pose and think about what you can do to present them fluidly. Posing takes a lot of practice to master, and a lot of practice to avoid shaking while posing on stage. Many competitors tremble when hitting poses on stage because they didn't practice enough and their bodies did not become used to it. It's never too early to begin practicing your poses and quarter turns. For a new competitor, it's best to start at least 2-3 months before the day of the show. Shaking takes away from one's presentation. One trick that can help with this is to make sure your jaw is relaxed if you start to shake. This relaxes the muscles in the neck and prevents shaking a lot of the time.

Most competitions have a 'prejudging' (group comparisons) in the morning followed by the finals later in the day. During prejudging you will go through quarter turns, and compulsory poses with the other members in your class. Quarter turns are judged for proportion and symmetry. You begin by facing forward in a relaxed position. Relaxed is far from the meaning though. On stage in the relaxed position you want to flex your muscles while still appearing to be standing at ease. The head judge then calls for a quarter turn. You display your physique at a side view, then from the rear, then the other side. After the quarter turns, you go through the compulsory poses along with the other competitors. Mandatory poses can be different depending on which federation you are competing in, but virtually all of them require the front double biceps, front lat spread, side chest, side triceps, rear double biceps, rear lat spread, hands over head abdominal, and a most muscular pose. That does it for the prejudging. The decisions are made at that time for each class with most organizations, but not announced until the evening. Generally only the overall winners are determined at the finals. Finals are basically an opportunity to show your creativity. You're usually permitted 60-90 seconds to pose to music of your selection. After all routines are performed, awards are given out. Then for the overall, each 1st place class winner comes back onstage and goes through the quarter turns and compulsory poses again. Judging is done at that time for the overall winner. After the poses are complete most organizations have about a minute of music while the competitors have a pose down. Judges sheets are tallied at that time and the winner is announced afterwards.

G. Final Week Before the Show

Carb Depletion/Loading

Some people carb deplete and then carb load the final week before a show. The theory is that once depleted, muscles suck in more glycogen directly afterwards and one can look slightly larger for the contest. Carb depletion usually consists of cutting your carb intake in about half and doing many high rep exercises for 3 days (usually Sun, Mon, Tue for a Sat show). At the end of the third day energy will likely be low, and muscles should look flat. Then one carb loads for 3 days taking in about twice the carbs as what their normal diet before the final week consisted of. Cardio or weights are usually not done during this time since it would interfere with glycogen loading. This process can be tough to master though. If you look great first thing in the morning, you may not want to fool with carb manipulation and risk messing your look up. Also, for fitness and figure competitors, it is not really necessary to manipulate carbs during the final week. As these competitors generally compete at a slightly higher body fat level, carb manipulation has little effect on how you look the day of the show. A fitness/figure girl may instead choose to carb deplete the final 2-3 days and not load until the morning of the show, to avoid holding water in the glutes.

Sodium Manipulation

Some people manipulate sodium levels right before a show to try to keep from retaining water under their skin on contest day and

looking soft. The underlying theory is, if you have less sodium, your body won't hold onto as much water and you will look harder and more defined. It's not quite that simple though as other electrolytes (like potassium) factor in. A common misconception with respect to sodium is that you have to eliminate it completely. This can actually cause water retention. If the body doesn't get the daily minimum required sodium (which is somewhere around 500mg), it will begin to produce aldosterone that in turn retains water in the body. Again, on this one... if you look good first thing in the mornings, you may not want to mess with things. If you do manipulate sodium, you should cut it in half, a gradual decrease, not a drastic one. For example, taking in 3000mg daily, then switching to 1500mg the day of and maybe the day before the show.

Water Intake

Thinking one must refrain from drinking water on contest day is another common misconception. Again, a drastic decrease can be harmful. Not taking in enough water can cause water retention, plus dehydration is dangerous. A gradual decrease is recommended. Like if you take in 2 gallons per day, cut back to one, or a half for contest day. Remember that muscles are made up using a large percentage of water. If they lose water, they will look smaller. People who take in too little water often have troubles looking full and vascular. The goal is to not hold water between the skin and muscle, not lose water from the muscles themselves.

Training Style

The final week you may elect to do no lifting at all. Your work is done. A few days rest will refresh you and bring you into the show fully charged. If you do lift in the final days, be a little careful not to overdo it. If you've reached extremely low body fat levels, there's higher risk of injury (little cushioning in the joints).

Last Meal

A typical class for prejudging takes about 10 minutes. You can get a rough estimate for when your class will go on by estimating through use of the schedule of events for the day. Try to schedule your last meal about 3 hours before you go on so your belly isn't bloated. Avoid certain foods that can cause bloating, like high fiber foods (vegetables), or other foods that can have an effect on bloating (pretzels, bagels, ice cream, chocolate).

Pumping Up

Pumping up should only take about 5-10 minutes. You don't need any longer than that. It's not a workout. You're just doing a couple of light sets for high reps to pump blood into your muscles and make them look fuller. If you have a weak body part, you can pump it to try and balance out your physique more. You can get pumped just from posing too.

H. Tanning

If you've never experimented getting a dark tan, you can easily be fooled when preparing for your first contest. As you become darker than you've ever been, you start to think you have a great tan, and that you're ready. Then you get up on stage only to realize you're too pale. What happened?

The stage lights are very bright. They can wash out definition and make you look much lighter once you get under them. Don't fall victim to this common oversight. Make sure you will still have a dark tan once you're under the lights.

You'll most likely need to add artificial color before the show. Even African Americans, whom many tend to think wouldn't need to tan, find they can benefit at a competition by having darker skin coloring; plus coloring evens out their tan. Tanning beds are not needed for that one-day you'll be on display, although many competitors do use them to get a base tan. You should shave your entire body at least a week before the show in case you break out from shaving in areas not accustomed to being shaved. To look really dark, use a skin dye like Pro Tan Competition Color or Jan Tana Show Tan the night before the contest and apply amply (about 4oz per coat). Be aware that this stuff can really dry out your skin, so it's wise to apply a moisturizer before you apply the skin dye product. Don't fool with a spray nozzle that some brands come with. They are messy and take much longer to apply the product. Pour the dye in a cup and dip the applicator in it. You will get a thicker coat, and cover yourself much faster. While applying the dye, you may wish to stand on a towel to catch any dye that drips to the floor. When you go to bed for the night, make sure you use old sheets where you sleep, as the dyes leave many stains. Rinse off the excess tanning agent in the morning. If you are light skinned, it would be good to apply another coat of dye in the morning on contest day. Then you can apply a coat bronzer (ProTan, Jan Tana, DreamTan) over top once the dye dries to make the color darker, and more even looking. (Bronzer is intended for use on contest day. It does not tend to leave one blotchy like the skin dyes can do, as long as it is rubbed in thoroughly and evenly). Bronzers darken the skin's appearance, but do not stain it. If you want to be even darker, you can apply a second coat of bronzer on top of the first. Bronzers also wash off afterwards. If you need to even out streaks from sweating after group comparisons, apply another coat of the bronzer prior to the finals. If you use a skin dye more than one day before your contest, don't apply it to your face or neck until the night before to avoid peeling skin in these more sensitive skin areas. It's not necessary to dye your hands, wrists, feet or ankles until the night before either. Doing so can make those areas more noticeably dark than the rest of your physique. Go easy around the elbows and knees when applying tanning agents or those areas will appear darker due to being more porous. If you choose to use oil over your tan, use professional posing oil, not baby oil as that makes one look too shiny and wet. Remember that posing oil is for providing a sheen under the lighting. You don't want to over apply it and appear too wet. A small amount is all that's needed. A warning about Dream Tan... wear black or very dark posing trunks, Dream Tan doesn't dry completely. Try not to put any clothes on until after going on stage as that can ruin the look (comes off on clothes). Apply small amounts and rub in. Using too much at once can cause the stuff to go on looking very messy. You can apply more Dream Tan before going on for finals, or at least add some Hot Stuff vasodilator to help bring the shine back out. Baby oil does help a lot when removing the color after a contest (after you've scrubbed with a lufa or washcloth). Be courteous in the contest venue or in other people's cars. And that goes to all tanning products users. It takes 15-45 minutes to apply Dream Tan.

I. Where To Find Supplies

Log on to theOCBwebsite.com and check out the Resource section to find links to many sites offering Books on Contest Dieting/Training, Posing suits, Choreography, Drug-Free Magazines, Tanning & Posing Oil Supplies, Shoes (Fitness/Figure), Custom Posing Music and more!