

**NOAC AIA DANCE CLOTHES COACHING OUTLINE  
CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL**

**DANCER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **CONTEST #** \_\_\_\_\_ **Lodge#** \_\_\_\_\_

**COACH:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THE PURPOSE OF THE NOAC AIA COACHING SESSION:**

Plains Powwow Culture is a ‘popular’ culture, evolving continuously in many areas; certainly in the areas of the music, the dance and the dance clothes. Dance competitions continue to be increasingly popular not just at the summer tribal gatherings, but at big annual dance competitions happening throughout the year. Hundreds of dancers compete for thousands of dollars in prize money. Powwow-style dancing is a passion for many people and the most competitive among them actively keep their eyes on the latest fashions and their ears open to the latest songs. Smart dancers are always looking for ways to improve their dance moves and their dance clothes. Even the best-dressed dancers know their dance clothes can always be ‘bumped up a notch’. While dance clothes are not ‘judged’ at these dance competitions, they do matter. Savvy dancers know they have to look their very best if they want to catch the judges’ eye and make a positive impression. And when you look good, you feel good and then you’re sure to dance your best.

In our many years of experience and involvement in dancing and powwows, we know that ‘powwowing’ is a family activity; rare are the dancers who go it alone. The construction of a set of dance clothes is far too complicated an endeavor to be accomplished by any one person. A set of dance clothes is a compilation of items made, received as gifts, purchased, and borrowed for the event. *It Takes a Family to Dress a Dancer*. From Tiny Tots to Golden Age, all dancers have help with their clothes. And guidance from experienced dancers is some of the best help you can get.

At the NOAC AIA Dance Clothes Coaching Session a dancer has the opportunity to discuss his dance clothes with a senior powwow dance enthusiast, tapping into years of experience in the areas of dance, dance clothes, craft and powwow culture. This outline is to be used as a guiding framework, with the understanding that ‘change happens’ and everyone needs to keep his eyes open to the latest trends - competitors and coaches alike.

It is the goal of all Arrowmen who have been selected as NOAC Dance Clothes Coaches to share their knowledge and experience with younger dancers (and their support teams) in the hope of inspiring yet another enthusiastic, better-dressed dancer.

*American Indian Activities Committee  
National Order of the Arrow Conference*

### **A note about DANCE CLOTHES:**

The most important thing about a set of modern Contemporary Traditional dance clothes is the overall look. Dance clothes are meant to be danced in, not to be judged in a still position. The components of your dance clothes should move well when you dance and work to enhance your dancing style. For this reason, materials, size, shape, and placement of the individual dance clothes components listed above must be in order. When specific materials are called for—such as beadwork—an adequate substitution of cloth, fabric applique, sequins, painted material can be used. However, proper colors, designs, and proportions must be in place for the article to get maximum points and for your dance clothes to have maximum visual impact.

This outline is not just a “scoring sheet”; it is a resource for you to constantly improve your dance clothes to be the best they can be. When you look at the individual scores of the various headings as well as the overall score, think of what you can do to improve each item, even if just by just a couple of points. Our goal as the NOAC Contemporary Traditional staff is to help you to elevate your dance clothes to a higher level. By continually improving your dance clothes, your presentation on the dance floor will improve as well.

### **A Note to DANCERS:**

This outline is designed to summarize what a male Contemporary Traditional dancer wears at a modern day powwow. It represents the research done by the use of photos and personal experiences at powwows.

It also relied on two written works for “Lakota” style dance clothes:

- (1) The Northern Traditional Dancer by C. Scott Evans, Crazy Crow Trading Post, 1990.  
Revised 1998.
- (2) The Contemporary ‘Traditional Style’ of the Lakota by Ronnie Theisz, February 13, 1974.

Beyond these two references we have relied on many other reference materials to cover the description of Contemporary Traditional dance clothes other than Lakota. Numerous books are now available with photos of Contemporary Traditional Dancers. Publications such as *Whispering Wind* magazine also provide excellent information.

Be aware that although a printed or recorded work may have been relevant at the time of its making, Contemporary Traditional is an ever-changing dance style and these works can sometimes become outdated within a short period of time. If possible, attend powwows and notice the subtle trends being added to Contemporary Traditional dance clothes of today. If you live in an area where it is difficult to attend powwows, you can use resources such as:

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), [www.gatheringofnations.com](http://www.gatheringofnations.com), [www.powwows.com](http://www.powwows.com)

to view photos and video footage of powwow dancers. Please be respectful of other's dance clothes. Model your dance clothes after contemporary dancers, but do not copy a specific set of clothes verbatim.

The concepts in this outline represent the norm with a broad distribution. If a Scout-dancer can document items that fall outside this range, he will receive the appropriate amount of points. It should be said, though, that documentation can be a difficult task and needs to be carefully done. Photos are an excellent first step, but one needs to exercise careful judgment when using photos because many designs and colors have family histories. The combination of photos, authoritative articles, and attending modern day powwows will serve the Scout-dancer well.

## COMTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL

### MAXIMUM SCORE: 110 Points

Scale (Items 1-9): 0 = Missing or Inappropriate Item; 1-3 = Acceptable; 4-6 = Good; 7-9 = Excellent; 10 = Superior

**Item 1: HEAD** Roach; Visor; Roach Feathers;  
Spreader, (10)

“Wapegnaka” (Bull’s Tail); Mandan-style Feather Headdress

Superior: Northern style porcupine/deer tail hair roach, well made and correctly worn. No set length, but fits the dancer’s body. Spreader of German silver, bone or rawhide, fully/partially beaded, with two sockets and two imitation eagle tail feathers properly attached. Lane-stitch beaded or quilled “Wapegnaka” (Bull’s Tail) to match the rest of the beadwork. May include scalp feathers, quilled wheels, etc. A roach pin is usually worn with a large cluster of feather/plumes attached to the outer end. Other possibilities: beaded headband with 1 or 3 beaded or quilled rosettes to coordinate with other beadwork; feather visors made of imitation eagle feathers; small round/mess bustle worn either in the tail of the roach or around the neck; beaded roach crown that matches the rest of the beadwork in design and style; Mandan style headdress. Acceptable: Northern-style hair roach of poor construction or fiber imitation; a roach excessive in length. Undecorated leather spreader; ribbon, or other decoration in lieu of “Bull’s Tail”. Poor quality or missing roach feather; poorly constructed feather visors; poorly constructed Mandan-style headdress (“Dog Soldier Headdress”); etc.

Inappropriate: a “feather” roach; animal skin headdress; missing items.

**Item 2: NECK** Choker (Bone or Beaded), Scarf & Slide; Beaded Necktie; Necklaces  
(10)\_\_\_\_\_

Superior: Properly constructed hair pipe, bone tube, dentalium choker with harness leather or bone spacers, or beaded choker that matches the rest of the beadwork in design and style. Appropriately sized metal backed mirror or disc conch shell in the center may be used. No penalties for plastic vs. bone. Beads may be any sort of glass or plastic bead that matches rest of dance clothes’ colors and design. Fabric scarf and a scarf slide may be of German silver or beaded to match rest of beadwork. Beaded neckties matching the rest of the beadwork. If fringe is added it needs to match all other fringe.

Acceptable: Poor construction or poorly matching/coordinating with the rest of dance clothes

Inappropriate: Scout neckerchiefs; missing items.

**Item 3: CHEST AREA** Shirt; Vest; Otter; Breastplate; Bandoliers; Cape (10)

Superior: Shirts are satin or cotton and can be a solid color with an elaborate fabric applique design down the sleeves and over the shoulder or a colored print with simple ribbon decoration; long-johns dyed in a bright color to match over all outfit. Fully or partially (front panels) beaded vests must be done with colors, designs, and beading technique which matches the rest of the dance clothes’ beadwork. Bone Breastplate with two or three sections of 4-inch pipes, or two sections of 4-inch pipes separated by a section of 1-2 inch pipes or appropriate beads. Harness leather spacers with appropriate bead embellishments decorated with beaded or quilled rosettes or pendants, ribbons, hawk bells, etc.

Bandoliers made of bones and beads (see Item 2 for bead standards), or of “junk” or deer toe/dew claw dangles. Loop style or bone and bead necklaces that match the rest of the dance clothes. Otter “breastplate” with metal-backed mirrors, quilled wheels, ribbons, and/or quilled or beaded rosettes or pendants that match the rest of the beadwork. Quilled Breastplate made with real quills - extra sweet! Fully or partially beaded cape that matches rest of beadwork set. Cape is fringed with leather or ribbon that matches the rest of dance clothes.

Acceptable: Lower quality, but properly made examples of all the things listed above; beadwork which doesn’t match the rest of the dance clothes.

Inappropriate: Bare chest; missing items.

**Item 4: ARMS** Cuffs; Armbands (10)

Superior: Fully beaded or quilled cuffs of colors, designs, and technique which match the rest of the dance clothes. Cuffs fringed with leather or ribbon fringe which matches all other fringe.

Armbands - fully beaded, German silver/brass, or caribou or deer lower leg (with toes) arm bands decorated with beadwork, quillwork, brass tacks or mirrors. Quilled armbands made with real quills that match or coordinate with rest of the dance clothes are a sweet touch.

Acceptable: Armbands are not mandatory, especially with elaborately decorated shirt sleeves; lower quality beadwork which is still correct for designs, colors, and technique, but incongruent with the rest of the clothes; low quality materials.

Inappropriate: Items completely out of the ‘norm’; missing items.

**Item 5: HANDS** - Wing or Northern Style Flat Fan; Dance Stick; Shield; etc. (10)

Superior: Appropriately sized wing or Northern style flat fan (Canada goose or turkey for instance). Dance hoop wrapped in otter fur with feather dangles, ribbon, or ermine. Dance stick, cane, mirror board, gunstock war club. Dance sticks are decorated with beadwork of proper colors, designs, and technique (gourd/peyote stitched or bead wrap) that matches rest of beadwork. Appropriately decorated rawhide shields. Properly constructed pipe bags which work well with the rest of the dance clothes.

Acceptable: Poor quality fan or poor quality construction on dance sticks, etc.

Inappropriate: Improper fans (small Straight Dance style fans); improperly constructed pipe bags; missing items; pipes; calumets; sabers; rifles.

**Item 6: MID-BODY** Aprons; Side Tabs; Belt; Sash; etc. (10)

Superior: Aprons are fully/partially beaded or partially quilled and match the rest of the beadwork. Beautiful fabrics decorated with fabric applique designs, ribbons, metal sequins, ribbon or leather fringe which works well with the rest of dance clothes. Fully beaded side tabs that match in design and color with leather or ribbon fringe that matches. Length of aprons and side tabs is personal preference, but should match each other. Belt can be fully/partially beaded, concho or tack belt. Assumption sashes of appropriate color (not as common among contemporary dancers). Beadwork matches rest of beadwork.

Acceptable: Fabric without decorations; beadwork that doesn't match the rest of the dance clothes.

Inappropriate: Undecorated aprons; finger woven Straight Dance sashes; missing items.

**Item 7: LEGS** Leggings; Knee Bands; Tights; Fur Anklets; Bells (10)

Superior: Leather or fabric leggings decorated with beadwork designs or painted or fabric applique designs which complement the set of clothes. Beaded knee bands that match the rest of the dance clothes - fringed with leather or ribbon which matches the rest of the dance clothes. Quilled knee bands are rare, but appropriate. Leather or ribbon fringe is attached and matches all other fringe. Solid color athletic socks are worn with or without stripes. Dyed long-johns to match top and overall outfit. Appropriate colored compression pants (tights - usually black) can be worn. Large brass or nickel plated bells (ca. 1" Dia-1 1/2" dia.) or sheep bells, or deer toes mounted on harness leather and worn in straps at ankles, leg bells extending from the waist to the ankle can be worn, as appropriate. Ankle fur can be dyed a color that matches the rest of dance clothes. Anklets are not mandatory if wearing leggings.

Acceptable: Undecorated leggings. Knee bands with no beadwork or doesn't match rest of beadwork. Good quality fake fur representing correct species.

Inappropriate: Knee high angora hides like that of a Fancy Dancer; missing items.

**Item 8: BUSTLE** (10)\_\_\_\_\_

Superior: Properly sized and constructed U-shaped bustle. Can be one or two rows. Decorated with fluffs, hackle tips, angora, spots and/or horsehair. It is made of imitation eagle feathers (hand painted, dyed, goose, hybrid turkey). Two upright spikes can be decorated with hawk bells, quilled strips, and/or fluffs. The bustle will include properly sized trailers of fabric that matches the rest of the dance clothes. Decorations of feathers, beadwork, fabric applique, ribbon, metal sequins etc. Centerpieces made of beaded/quilled rosettes, mirrors, feather clusters. Old-style mess bustles with modern colors can be worn (not as common among contemporary dancers).

Acceptable: Poor quality construction or materials.

Inappropriate: Hackle bustles, butterfly bustles.

**Item 9: FEET** Plains Hard-sole Moccasins, fully or partially beaded/quilled. (10)

Superior: Properly designed and constructed two-piece, hard-sole Northern Plains moccasins. Fully or partially beaded/quilled, with proper colors, designs, and techniques. Matches rest of the dance clothes.

Acceptable: Properly designed and constructed two-piece, hard-sole Northern Plains moccasins, undecorated. Or lower quality quill and beadwork.

Inappropriate: Barefoot; tennis shoes; sandals; water socks; etc.

**Item 10: OVERALL**

Scale: 1-5 Good start, room for improvement; 6-10 Solid basic dance clothes, lacking some items; 11-15 Excellent; 16-20 Superior

Does the set look complete? Do the dance clothes have the right  
“look”? (20)

Are they consistent the current styles?

**FINAL SCORE** (110)

**Ribbon Scale:**                      **White 1-30**    **Red 31-60**    **Blue 61-90**    **Gold 91-110**