



COSTUME CONUNDRUMS

...the things everyone else seems to know

Figure skating has many costume rules - some written, and some less formal. Here's a summary of the published costume rules (you can see the exact language USFS publishes at the end if you want to read it all.)

Singles Programs

- Costumes should be modest, dignified, and appropriate for athletics
- Should not be garish, theatrical, or give the effect of excessive nudity
- Women can wear pants!
- Please wear any required medical/adaptive equipment
- No props
- Make sure nothing falls off your costume

For showcase programs:

- The rules for singles costumes do not apply
- Costumes must be dignified, but may be theatrical
- Don't wear inflatable costumes, except for in the inflatable event or ensembles.

Maybe the most important information is on the next page - all the things an experienced coach can tell you from their years of competition and judges.



The Unofficial Things We've Learned Over The Years

No feathers. Just don't.

No feather boas, maribou trim, etc. It's too easy for them to fall off and stick to the ice.

Excessive nudity

Never opt for too much flesh toned fabric. Legend has it that the official guideline is that you should be at least 50% covered with non flesh colored fabric. One skater literally painted color onto the flesh fabric after a judge remarked on their too naked costume. This unwritten rule makes sense - in sport, do we (especially young skaters) really need to show 'nude' flesh?

Skirts on dresses

It seems to be best to choose a traditional skirt that goes all the way around in a circle instead of one that only goes part way around making a crescent.

White skating dresses

They blend into the ice, so unless you're in a show with spotlights, all-white dresses aren't usually your best choice.

Ons and offs

Always consider how difficult it is to take a costume on and off. Any dress with a complex set of hooks, zippers, buttons, locks, keys, and secret passwords can make life difficult. Imagine being at a competition or show with limited time to change, and think ahead in case you are in a locker room full of nervous competitors who don't have time to figure out the labyrinth of your fasteners.

One Costume Really Can Fit All

You really can wear one costume for many things if you would like to. Unless you are skating to "Yellow" by Coldplay, you will probably be just fine in any color of well-fitted costume. If you want to buy just one color of costume to last you until the end of time, hows about a shade of red? Think about it . . . it's good for the Christmas show, a tango, Carmen, Latin dances, hiding red Gatorade stains, love songs, red lipstick, Taylor Swift, and red never goes out of style.

Don't let your costume outshine your performance.

We agree, a \$10,000 custom dress dripping with Swarovski crystals is gorgeous, but do you want the dress to be the only thing people remember about your skating? Picking out dresses and costumes is part of the fun of competing for many skaters (and especially skater moms!) but judges are not scoring the bling - they want to see well executed skating. Don't let your dress over-promise on you.

Dress for the weather

If you are always cold when on the ice, that won't miraculously change in a competition or show setting, so maybe don't pick an open back spaghetti strap costume. When someone says "it's only 1:40 mins on the ice", that isn't really the case because you will be standing around, warming up, and waiting your turn to skate. Perhaps a long sleeve velvet number would be a more comfortable choice.

Sounds obvious but...

Dresses have a front and a back. Usually the front of the dress has more decoration. The skirt is often slightly longer in back. The panty portion of the dress is narrower in front and wider in back, just like a bikini bottom. We have seen (with our own eyes) kids with their dress on backwards because they were panicking for time getting ready.

What goes under it?

What type of undergarments will work under the dress? If you are most comfortable wearing a bra, don't pick an open back dress, or factor in the cost of a clear strapped bra (BodyWrappers has a great line, but they are not cheap!) Also, because skating dress bottoms are often cut narrower and higher than underwear, it may be worth considering a thong or dare we suggest it... even going 'commando'. Definitely an age-dependent decision, but it's super distracting when you can see a skater's underwear peeking out from under their dress.

Just sayin'.

Tights can easily be washed.

Give yourself time

Wear your new costume to practice at least once before your performance. Find out any challenges before it's 3 minutes to show time.

You don't need to spend more on a dress than your lessons!

Check ebay, facebook groups, and ask the other skaters at the rink. There's a thriving market for gently used skating dresses.

The official rules from the 2025-2026 USFS rulebook

6030 Clothing and Equipment – Singles

6031 The clothing of the competitors must be modest, dignified and appropriate for athletic competitions or tests, not garish or theatrical in design. Clothing may, however, reflect the character of the music chosen.

A. The skating clothing worn in actual competition may not bear any form of advertising. However, warm-up suits may bear the name of a sponsor when a skater is on the ice. The sponsor's name must not exceed 4.65 square inches (30 square centimeters).

B. Warm-up suits may bear the name of the manufacturer and up to six logos provided they are dignified, with a maximum of 30 square centimeters each, and do not refer to tobacco, alcohol, sports betting or other categories prohibited by U.S. Figure Skating or exclusively held by its official sponsors. Warm-up suits with logos that are in conflict with U.S. Figure Skating sponsors or partners may not be worn during televised events.

6032 Clothing must not give the effect of excessive nudity inappropriate for the discipline.

6033 For domestic competitions and tests, there are no restrictions on attire related to gender. If a skater is participating in an ISU sanctioned event, they must follow ISU rules for their respective discipline.

6034 For domestic competitions and tests, costume requirements are inclusive of necessary medical/adaptive equipment aids.

There are no restrictions on choosing to wear required equipment aids, however they should not be theatrically enhanced or be used as a prop. If a team is participating in an ISU sanctioned event, they must follow the ISU rules for their respective discipline.

6035 Accessories and props are not permitted.

6036 Any ornamentation attached to the clothing must be firmly fastened so as not to fall off while skating under normal competitive conditions.

2024-25 Showcase Guidelines (08-22-24)

I. COSTUMES:

Costuming and make-up for showcase skating programs should enhance the feeling created by the performance and reflect the meaning of the story, theme, or character portrayed on the ice.

The competitors' clothing must be dignified and appropriate for artistic competition. It may be theatrical in design and reflect the chosen music.

Costume rules for Singles/Pairs/Dance/Synchro/TOI programs do not apply to showcase skating.

Choreographic Artistry: Costuming: should be 1 color, so as not overpower the performance. Crystals/Deco may complement fabric with similar or a different color.

Wearable Inflatable costumes are only permitted in the Inflatable event. In the event a skater performs with a wearable inflatable costume in any event, besides the inflatables category, the skater/team will be disqualified by the event referee.

Inflatable costumes that impersonate humans (e.g., sumo wrestlers) are not permitted.

Programs [with inflatable costumes] are performed under full arena lighting (for safety reasons).

Please be mindful of how your choices may impact fellow members when considering costuming, music, and choreography. Some choices may be harmful and/or offensive to others if they appropriate or even mock a culture or faith, promote a stereotype, or attempt to shame any identity dimension.

A LITTLE EXTRA (UNOFFICIAL) INFO FOR YOU

If you are purchasing/making a dress or costume for a special event, try and check ahead whether the arena setting has good lighting. Spotlights, or even decent arena lighting makes a massive difference to what the judges and audience can see on your costume. That beautiful motif fabric you have found dotted with 2 inch giraffes (unicorns, sloths, clowns, kittens...) which is PERFECT to go with your music, will look like polka dots from a distance without amazing lighting systems.

In most arenas you need to go big and bold with fabric choices and decorations if you want to have impact on the judges/audience.