

# AES Student Recording Competition Rules and Policies

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## Introduction

The AES Student Recording Competition is a unique opportunity for student attendees of international AES Conventions to receive feedback and recognition for their audio production work. If you wish to participate, the faculty advisor for your student section must nominate your recording to represent your school in one of the competition's four categories. If you are a student member of AES who is not affiliated with a particular AES Student Chapter (because none exists at your school), you may enlist a professional member of AES to verify your work.

An individual student or production team may participate in multiple categories by submitting a different recording in each category. However, each AES student section may submit only one entry per competition category. If multiple students or student groups in a section wish to enter the same category, they must consult their faculty advisor. One suggestion for student sections is to hold preliminary contests to identify the best project in each category.

Students are expected to submit competition mixes that represent their best final mixing efforts without additional mastering. Judges frequently criticize student mixes for excessive peak limiting and inadequate dynamic range. Therefore, contestants should resist the temptation to maximize loudness to the detriment of tonal balance and musical dynamics.

Students who are not competing are strongly encouraged to attend the Recording Competition events at the AES Convention, where they can hear the highest quality projects created by other students, learn from the thoughtful comments of the judges, and share their opinions and suggestions with others in attendance. The goal of this program is to showcase high quality music and recorded sound in a healthy environment of constructive criticism. We hope you'll participate.

## Eligibility

To participate in the AES Recording Competition, you must:

1. be a current Student Member of the Audio Engineering Society;
2. engineer the nominated recording while you are a student affiliated with a college audio program
3. be selected by your AES faculty advisor as the sole representative for your student section in a competition category;
4. register for an ALL ACCESS BADGE for the Convention Technical Program;
5. submit your recording and documentation electronically according to the rules and prior to the deadline;
6. attend the convention in person.

It is the responsibility of each student to ensure eligibility and maintain it throughout the Recording Competition. If a project is engineered by a team of students, all team members must meet the eligibility criteria. Violation of these rules will result in disqualification. Late entries will not be accepted.

Once an entry is submitted to an AES Student Recording Competition, it is disqualified from future competitions.

## **Competition Categories**

### **Category 1- Traditional Acoustic Recording**

Category 1 is suitable for recordings of acoustic instruments, vocalists, and ensembles recorded live in natural acoustic settings such as performance halls, churches, theatres, soundstages, pavilions, and similar environments. The recording may take place with or without an audience present. Entries in this category will generally be recorded using combinations of individual microphones and microphone arrays so that the musical balance, perspective, and spatial orientation are largely a function of the ensemble, the acoustic space, and the recording technique. The final stereo or surround balance may be mixed and recorded live. Alternatively, tracks may be recorded to multitrack media and mixed in post- production. Editing is allowed, but overdubs are prohibited. This category may include classical, jazz, folk, or any other genre of music that is performed and recorded live in a suitable acoustic environment. Electronic instruments are allowed, provided that they are reproduced through acoustic means (e.g., amps and loudspeakers) and are recorded live using the microphone techniques described above. Since this category is defined by the live application of stereo and multichannel microphone techniques employed in traditional “classical” music recording, live performances of exclusively close-miked ensembles should be entered in either Category 2 or 3 according to their specific criteria.

1. - Emphasis on the craft of acoustic music recording on location
2. - All live acoustic or electroacoustic sources
3. - No overdubs
4. - Editing and mixing allowed
5. - All recording and mixing performed by the entrant(s)
6. - Stereo or surround delivery format

### **Category 2 – Traditional Studio Recording**

Category 2 is suitable for recordings that are created in a recording studio or similar facility using multitrack studio techniques and technology. Music of any genre is permitted, and both editing and overdubs are allowed. Electronic instruments such as electric guitar, electric bass, and keyboards may be recorded direct and/or by acoustic means. Conventional signal processing techniques (e.g., equalization, dynamics, reverberation, etc.) during recording and mixing are permitted. Since this category is defined by the creative and proficient use of microphones and studio recording techniques, MIDI sequences, sample replacements, and sample loops from pre-recorded sources are prohibited. In other words, all musical elements must be

performed by musicians and recorded by the contestants specifically for the project. Mixes based on highly processed and synthesized sources should be submitted in Category 3.

1. - Emphasis on the craft of multitrack studio recording and mixing
2. - All live acoustic or electroacoustic sources
3. - Editing and overdubs allowed but not required
4. - No sample loops or sample replacement from synthesized or prerecorded sources
5. - No MIDI sequences
6. - All recording and mixing performed by the entrant(s) -
7. - Stereo or surround delivery format

### **Category 3 – Modern Studio Recording**

Category 3 is intended for multitrack studio projects that do not meet the restrictions of Category 2. All options are allowed with respect to sound sources, recording techniques, creative production, editing, processing, and mixing. Music of any genre is permitted, including, but not limited to, pop, rock, dance, rap, hip-hop, electronica, and re-mixes. “Anything goes” in this category, provided that recordings do not violate applicable copyrights.

1. Emphasis on the full exploitation of the recording studio as a musical instrument
2. Any combination of real and virtual sources allowed
3. - Captured in a studio environment onto multitrack tape or DAW, fully programmed on a computer, or anything in between.
4. - All modern recording, signal processing, editing techniques are allowed
5. - MIDI sequences allowed
6. - Programming, sequencing and sampling, including sample loops and sample replacement/ enhancement, allowed
7. - All recording, production, and mixing performed by the entrant(s)
8. - Stereo or surround delivery format

### **Category 4 - Sound for Visual Media**

Category 4 is for any type of sound recording created to support a visual experience. The category is open to all visual media, including narrative and documentary video and film, advertising, video games, signature graphics, and image spots. Sonic elements such as dialogue, narration, sound design, and musical scores are permitted. These sources may be derived from production sound, sound effect libraries, synthesis, and original “wild-track” recordings made by the contestant. Audio content must be arranged specifically for use with the video. Therefore, music videos and live concert reels are not acceptable entries. Audio from these projects should be submitted to categories 1, 2, or 3.

1. - Emphasis on the craft of recording, editing and mixing sound to complement visual media
2. - Any combination of dialogue, music and sound design elements permitted
3. - Live concert recordings synchronized with video permitted
4. - All editing and mixing performed by the entrant(s)
5. - Stereo or surround delivery format

The Student Delegate Assembly reserves the right to disqualify entries that are submitted into the incorrect category or that otherwise violate the criteria listed above.

## **Entry Procedures, Formats and Documentation**

All contestants must submit appropriate electronic project documentation with their audio mixes. The specific documentation may vary for each project and must adequately describe the recording and mixing processes for the project. Students should accurately portray how the recording was created and mixed, using proper session documentation such as studio setup diagrams, microphone input lists, patch lists, mix notes, photographs, etc.

The documentation must also include complete credits for the project, including the musical work or song title, recording/mixing location, and full names of performers, composer/songwriter, publisher, technical personnel, and all others involved in recording, editing, mixing, and production. In fulfilling this requirement, entrants should work to omit clues to institutional affiliation to preserve the impartiality of the competition.

Documentation shall contain between two and six pages of text and graphical content. The target length is between 500 and 1000 words. Judges are advised not to read content that exceeds this length.

Sample project documents and templates are available from the AES Technical Committee on Studio Practices and Production, which collaborated with members of the Recording Academy's Producers and Engineers Wing to create the AES Technical Document "Recommendations for Delivery of Recorded Music Projects." All electronic documents must be in a universal computer format (e.g., pdf, jpg, rtf) and submitted in a zipped folder according to the submission guidelines below. Similar information is also available at: <http://www.grammy.org/recording-academy/producers-and-engineers/guidelines>

## **Submission Guidelines**

Each submitted recording should be uploaded as a single .zip file that includes all the appropriate audio files and documentation for that particular track. All stereo files must be in PCM .wav 24bit, 44.1kHz format and all surround files must be in PCM .wav 24bit, 48kHz.

Audio files for Category 4 must be in PCM .wav 24bit, 48kHz format. Surround channels will be treated at equal level including the sub channel. Videos must have ISO MPEG 4 (.mp4) or Quicktime (.mov) container format. Entrants should use MPEG-4 or H.264 codecs and keep the resolution reasonable, since videos only give an idea of the visual content and their quality is not judged during the competition. Videos shall not contain

any sound. Therefore, entrants should make sure that their submitted video and audio files are time- aligned.

Entries must comply with the following file naming convention: .zip files shall be named `membrnumber_category_*.*`, where "membrnumber" is the entrant's AES membership number and "category" is the category of entry as follows: traditionalacoustic, traditionalstudio, modernstudio, or soundforvisual. Individual surround files shall be named similarly, with channel designations included (L, C, R, Ls, Rs, LFE).

Example: A student entering the "Traditional Acoustic Recording" category with membership number 12345 would submit an archive named `12345_traditionalacoustic.zip` containing the following files: one audio file named `12345_traditionalacoustic.wav` if stereo, 6 individual audio files named `12345_traditionalacoustic_(L,R,Ls,Rs,C,LFE).wav` if surround, and a documentation file named `12345_traditionalacoustic.pdf`.

The audio files submitted electronically are distributed to the judges for critical evaluation. In addition, contestants are responsible for bringing hard copies of their recordings to the convention.

Finalists will be announced at the first Student Delegate Assembly meeting (SDA-1) on the first day of the convention.

Students whose entries are selected for the finals will present their verified hard copies to the SDA officers.

- 1 - Stereo physical copies shall be Redbook Compliant CD-Audio.
- 2 - Surround physical copies shall be DVD-V (Dolby Digital or DTS). DVD-A will not be accepted.
- 3 - Physical copies containing video shall be DVD-V (Video: PAL standard for European conventions, NTSC standard for American conventions; Sound: Dolby Digital or DTS). Discrete surround is not required for the hard copy (though note that the judges work from discrete tracks submitted electronically), as it is used only for convenient playback at the convention.

Note that because judges are not obligated to hear entries longer than 5 minutes, students may want to edit entries to that length. Students should not assume that judges will listen beyond the first five minutes of a submission or that playback at finals will extend beyond that length.

## **Judging Procedures and Criteria**

Judges will receive the entries approximately one month before the convention, allowing time for a thoughtful evaluation in listening environments of their choice. Evaluation criteria will vary by category.

Key criteria include:

Category 1—Accuracy and quality of tone; suitable balance of direct-to-ambient sound; dynamic range; musical dynamics; musical balance of internal parts; soundstage depth; soundstage width; source-localization and perspective.

Category 2/3—Quality of recorded tracks; quality and uniqueness of overall mix; tonal balance; tempo and timing; musical dynamics; dynamic range; relative track levels; musical balances; track panning; creative processing; soundstage and spatial qualities.

Category 4—Quality of soundtrack components and the overall mix; creativity; success in supporting and enhancing the narrative and/or emotional impact of the visual component.

Up to four submissions in each category may be judged to be award-winning. The names and school affiliations of the finalists will be announced at the first Student Delegate Assembly meeting (SDA-1).

Playback and critique of the finalists' recordings will take place during the convention before the judges and an audience of attendees. During the playback sessions, each finalist individual or group is allowed a maximum of ten minutes to describe his, her, or their production process and play a sample of the recording. Each team shall elect a spokesperson who will speak on behalf of the group. Finalists are encouraged to prepare several slides or graphics that can be displayed via computer projection to represent the recording setup and production process. Judges have the option to make comments and ask questions of the participants prior to making their final award decisions. Locations and times of the Recording Presentations will be published in the convention Technical Program.

## **Awards**

Judges may recognize outstanding recordings by conferring merit awards to the finalists in each category. Finalists will not be ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, but rather awarded Gold, Silver, Bronze, or Honorable Mention certificates of quality. Since it is possible to have more than one extraordinary project in each category, judges may award more than one Gold, Silver, Bronze, or Honorable Mention certificate. Thus, any combination of awards is permitted, as long as it does not exceed four awards per category. Furthermore, it is also possible that none of the entries in a given category rise to the level of Gold, Silver, Bronze, or Honorable Mention. Judges are not obligated to select finalists in every category.

Awards will be presented to the finalists at the last meeting of the Student Delegate Assembly (SDA-2) on the final day of the convention.

This award system is intended to make the Student Recording event less of a head-to-head contest and more of a merit-based, collegial competition that recognizes outstanding student recordings.

## **Award Criteria:**

1. Gold: The recording is judged to be artistically and technically extraordinary by professional standards and could be award-worthy in the marketplace as a commercial release.
2. Silver: The recording is judged to be artistically and technically excellent by professional standards and could be competitive in the marketplace as a commercial release.
3. Bronze: The recording is judged to be very good by professional standards and shows the potential for achievement if released.
4. Honorable Mention: The recording is judged to be good by professional standards and shows the work of a talented engineer.

“Awards are given to un-mastered student entries based on their ability to achieve truly professional levels of quality. Winning entries don’t sound like a student project. The student has performed so well that their project sounds like the work of an experienced, talented audio engineer. No excuses are made for any flaws; they are simply professional-sounding in every way. Judges hear a recording which, after a high quality mastering session (entries should be unmastered), would be fit for release.” — Alex Case, AES Education Chair Emeritus

## **Prizes**

Prizes in the form of audio hardware, software, accessories, apparel, and other merchandise may be presented to competition awardees upon or following the receipt of achievement certificates. The selection of these items will vary based on the generosity and intentions of competition sponsors.

Prize distribution shall occur at the discretion of the AES Education Committee, which reserves the right to assign prizes to individuals or their respective institutions based on the number and value of available items, the intentions of the donating sponsors, the number of competition awardees, the levels of recognition received, and the number of participants per entry.

Prize allocation is a supplemental tool intended to aid the Education Committee in congratulating students for exemplary work. It is secondary to the recognition of achievement bestowed by the AES. Students should not expect to receive prizes in addition to their honorary certificates, which represent an extraordinary accomplishment of which awardees should be extremely proud.

Please contact the Chair of the AES Education Committee John Krivit at [jdk@aes.org](mailto:jdk@aes.org) if you have additional questions or need further clarification.