
CONGRATS, YOU'RE A SHOWGIRL- NOW WHAT?!

What to expect when you're going to zone

Seriously though congrats...

Ladies, being selected as your local showgirl is a big deal and you should be proud!

This guide is meant to help you prepare for the next big hurdle that is a zone final! I know how scary going to a zone final not quite sure about what is going to happen can be! So, let me introduce myself and help you get ready to be your best.

My name is Isabel Hawken and I was the 2016 Rydal Showgirl and the Second Runner up at the Sydney Royal in 2017. I, probably much like you, had not much of an idea of what to expect at zone- and this was pretty scary! Since going to Sydney and then traveling around to a million shows, the one thing that struck me was how many girls asked me the same things about zone! So I decided to make a guide to help the girls from show societies that may not have a showgirl every year or from tiny shows in the middle of nowhere or girls who need to know all the info all the time. I have also found my passion of nurturing young women within our rural communities. I am a proud member of the CWA, a firm believer that girls can achieve anything they set their minds to and extremely proud of the young women who I have met and how they have shaped my life.

I won't lie to you, zone is a stressful day and I hope by reading this you can get a better idea of what to expect and how you can individually prepare so you feel in control, comfortable and ready to do your show and yourself proud.

This is not meant to act as a stand-alone guide, please utilise your show society, past showgirls, family and stalwarts of your community- they are often an untapped wealth of knowledge that will be more than happy to help you.

Perhaps my most important piece of information for you is to always be yourself and always make yourself proud. You will hear me bang on about this the whole way through but I want you all to know that you are all here for a reason and you are all individuals -the best thing about showgirl! Also, there is no such thing as the perfect showgirl and this should be celebrated! Anyway, enough about that- you want the goss...

WHAT IS SHOWGIRL ABOUT?

I know this probably sounds silly BUT your experience of showgirl will develop throughout your journey, so here is my experience of what showgirl is about.

Leadership- whilst you may not see yourselves as leaders within your community – you are! Some of you will have had multiple opportunities to be leaders within your community or at work or within the show and some of you are just starting out and may not have had opportunities yet but trust me you will! Once you are a showgirl you will have many opportunities to lead and to develop your style, it may not be easy to begin but it will get better!

Advocacy- no one at zone or at Sydney knows your community better than you, so advocate for your town! In your time as showgirl you may get to meet your mayor, state member or federal member or (insert important person). Most of the time they want to hear what you have to say and they will take this on board. If there is something that is a real concern to your community- tell them! Your town is great but every community can improve and this is the perfect role to get the ball rolling. Try to be gentle in your approach I know how emotional some issues can be- remember that they are there to help you advance your concerns and are a useful ally!

Mentorship- showgirls are sisters in this journey together. We are about supporting each other, celebrating one another and being proud of our achievements. I have been lucky enough to have amazing mentors throughout my time and I hope that I have mentored a few new gals along the way! My advice to you- be the showgirl you would want to mentor you. Also remember you are never too old to have a mentor in life- seek them out.

Friendship- you will never cease to be amazed about the total legends you will meet along the way! You will always have somewhere to stay wherever you are around the state and you will meet girls you never would have in your everyday life. Once a showgirl, always a showgirl and no one but a showgirl will really understand how excellently unique we are!

Service- naturally being a showgirl means you have been involved within your community or show society. Remember that service can mean lots of different things, whether this is volunteering with your local nursing home, working at the RSPCA, stewarding at the show or being in your local CWA branch. Being involved in your community is important to lead a fulfilled life and is incredibly rewarding. My advice to you is to find something you are passionate about and put your hand up!

Networking- you never know who you will meet and how either you or they will be able to help you! Always be yourself, honest and genuine.

HELP- STRESSING!! HOW DO I PREPARE?

Hopefully you will have a few months in your role before you have to go to zone, but if not don't stress! Here are my 7 tips:

- 1- Dubbo development weekend- if you are not already booked into this by your show, book yourself! They run in November and January and is a course designed to help you through your zone final and life! With tips on speech, colour matching, how to walk and how to introduce yourself, this is meant to make you comfortable in your own skin so you can be your best. This is also a great chance to meet other showgirls and make some connections before zone. See contact info section for details.
- 2- Book your accommodation for zone- speak to your coordinator about this. You may be lucky enough to have your accommodation paid for by your show society- this is awesome! If not, never fear, often there are lots of hotels/motels/cabins or even people with a spare room willing to lend a room if you are desperate. If you have to travel a fair distance, come the Friday night before. Do not travel on your zone judging day if you don't have to.
- 3- Talk to your show society- they will be able to give you an idea of how your show is doing, issues or challenges facing your show and what your show is doing really well. Feel free to celebrate what you do best! Remember you are representing your show society as well as your town.
- 4- Figure out your outfits- yes stockings are the key to success! Whilst it may not seem like you are fooling anyone with a 7 denier stocking, they are a tradition and you don't want to be the only one not wearing them. For your interview, a smart business dress will be expected. For example, I wore a black pencil skirt, navy top and black blazer with stockings and a black court shoe. Bring a small hand bag with a spare pair of stockings, hair brush, deodorant, band aids, pain killers, mints, touch up make up and sash just in case. You should have natural make up with neat hair and tidy nails. You want to look professional but be comfortable and true to your personality- this is a balance you will have to strike yourself. If you want to wear a beautiful floral dress, wear one! Just look neat and professional!

For the dinner you will be expected to wear evening dress- this means long ladies! You are allowed to get dressed up- you can have your hair done, a heavier make up style, high heels and bling. Remember you do have to walk upstairs onto a stage- consider your shoes! You can beg, borrow and steal your outfits. You will look beautiful whether the dress is Zimmerman or from Vinnies. The zones

are in summer so it can be hot or raining- prepare for all options. ALSO you will need to wear your sash for the whole dinner. Keep this in mind when you are choosing your dress style and colour. You don't have to wear stockings under a long dress!!

5- Public speak as often as possible- I know for most of us public speaking sucks but it is unfortunately a fact of life. Even the most introverted of us will have to do this at least once, at a wedding, a funeral, for work- you never know, so why not practice? Believe me it does get easier the more you do it. You will have shockers- I did when I had to do an ANZAC day address, I was speaking on a topic so personal that I literally cried the whole way through in front of the whole town! But this shows you are a human and do have feelings! Speak to yourself in the car, in front of the mirror, to your family and friends. Speak on topics you are passionate about, talk about yourself or even just read the newspaper aloud. It will all help and remember that everyone listening to you wants you to do well and is on your side.

6- Knowledge, knowledge and more knowledge- you can never prepare too much. Also, can I just say, this should be information that every young woman should be up to speed with.

Whilst politics at any level may be boring, it is important to understand both sides of a debate even if you aren't interested! Know your ministers for everything. Research the big issues in the news state, national and global.

Start with local issues- what are the big challenges your area is facing? Build from here- is this a state wide/ nationwide problem? What is being done about it? What do you think could be done about it?

What is happening in the agricultural world? Think local, state, national and global. Read The Land, listen to the Country Hour on ABC at 12noon, speak to your families, friends and anyone that will have a yarn! Is it dry? Is it wet? What are the cattle prices doing? What is the big deal about biosecurity? Utilise resources like your local LLS, NSW Farmers branch and even stock and station agents.

7- Another piece of advice that I have for you is tell your employer or place of study that you may need 2 weeks off if you progress to the Sydney Royal! In my workplace leave is at an all-time premium- we are talking an 18 month waiting list, so get organised. They will more than likely be happy to oblige- you are after all a community minded individual and they will be proud to have you as an employee because you bring so many skills to the job! So keep them in the loop to make it easy for you both.

INTERVIEWS

Get there early. I literally cannot stress this enough. GET THERE EARLY! Make sure you know where you are going, have ample time and there is someone there with you (if possible). I was lucky enough to have my showgirl coordinator and my fiancé and this was good for me.

The interviews will be ordered in distance from the home zone e.g. I was only 30ish minutes from Rydal in Oberon so I was one of the first interviewed- those further away were last. This may not be the way they schedule your zone but if it is, there is no changing the order and no point worrying about it. You will stay in this order for the day so at the dinner the onstage interviews will be the same. They will send you a running sheet for the day a month or so before your zone final.

The interview probably will be the same as your local show, a 20 minute chat about various topics with 3 judges. These judges are from a range of areas, some are high up in the ASC, some are past showgirls and some are journalists- it could be anyone involved in the show movement or agricultural sector. They will be kind to you- they want you to do well. To prepare I suggest you read the scoring sheet and do the above-mentioned homework!

The judging luncheon is fun- a great chance for you to meet the other girls and interact with the judges outside the feeling of the interview room. Enjoy the food, be yourself and don't force it. Showgirls are by far the most interesting people I have ever met and even better, they are all here to celebrate shows and young women in agriculture. You will be surprised by the amazing women in your region you never would have come across! It is a hard act to keep up a personality that isn't you- so be yourself. It is ok if you are naturally a quiet person or if you love to laugh. Everybody has a personality and don't be afraid to be true to yourself!

In-between

Between your interview and the dinner, you will have a few hours of free time. You can do whatever you want in this time! I'll be honest, I napped after lunch and then got ready later in the afternoon. This was what made me feel relaxed and recharged ready for the dinner. Most zone finals won't be in huge towns so there is a pretty high chance that the place you are staying will have other gals there too! Get ready together if you want to, I was lucky enough to have one of my bestest showgirl pals two doors down and we had a good debrief and natter whilst getting ready. This might not be your thing- so do whatever will work best to keep you chilled.

DINNER

Yay to the yay- you've made it to the fun part!

You know the drill- check your invitation for the time and location. Allow plenty of time, enough to change a tyre (you never know when you will need to) so you can get there to avoid unnecessary stress.

Now you can enjoy finding your table, see those that have come to support you and mingling with all the other people there! The dinner has a really nice vibe of people getting to celebrate their amazing girls and get to know a little about the other girls in the region.

My top tips to you are:

- Don't drink too much! Feel free to use a bit of Dutch courage but don't overdo it. You still need to walk onto a stage, public speak AND walk off again. Be wise but feel free to celebrate in moderation. Remember that you are a representative of your show society, community and yourself!
- Eat your dinner! You will be a starving nervous mess if you don't eat something! Also the food is totally yum! It can be a long night to not eat anything especially if the town does not have a certain fast food joint.
- Mingle! You never know who you will meet and you never know how you or they may be able to help you. This is networking opportunity as well as a showgirl event.
- Have fun- remember that showgirl is about a bigger picture. What colour sash you have at the end of the day does not determine how involved you can be or whether you can make a change within the show movement. Zones finals are meant to be fun, this is a time of year when everyone from the show sphere can get together and celebrate every amazing thing that shows are.

LET'S TALK ONSTAGE INTERVIEWS

You have to do it, so let's get you ready.

This is how they work- you get introduced, you walk onto stage, you answer a few questions, you walk off and a great weight lifts off your shoulders (maybe!).

Depending on the MC/judges/organising show society you may have an idea of the questions you will be asked and you may not. Don't panic this isn't something you can change, so no point worrying.

The judges don't want to see you flounder and the MC will guide your answers if you get stuck- you will be totally prepared so this won't be you!

BUT if you do get stuck, this is my advice to you.

Think of a time when someone has asked you something that has made you uncomfortable, this can be in a social setting, at work, uni or even a family member. I often get asked at work by patients loved ones if they are going to die. This is always uncomfortable and I always wonder if I say the right thing....

- How did you initially respond? Did you have an answer or were you so shocked you couldn't speak?
- Once you had said something were you happy with your answer or did you want to retract your comment?
- What did you think you could have said better?
- Has this changed the way you approach similar situations?

Hopefully onstage they don't ask you something that makes you feel uncomfortable but the point of doing this exercise is so you can reflect on something that has made you feel that way and apply it to approaching your on stage interview, which let's face it is an uncomfortable and stressful environment!

My top tips for an onstage interview answer are:

- 1- Listen to the question- sounds simple but can be easily forgotten.
- 2- Pause, take it in, then answer.
- 3- A good structure to remember is state your point, use an example/s, and summarise your point e.g. I feel that mint slices are a superior chocolate biscuit because they are versatile, they have a good chocolate to biscuit ratio and they are refreshing at the end of a meal. This is why I believe the mint slice is a superior biscuit.

- 4- Keep your answers short, sharp and punchy. Not only will people watching thank you for it, you yourself will not get lost- its win win.
- 5- Stand up straight and believe yourself- these are after all your opinions and while the questions they ask you may not be too dense, stay true to yourself and use conviction!
- 6- If you stumble, take a breath, stop and start again. Don't draw attention to it and don't let it shake you, we all do it even the Queen.
- 7- Dazzle them with a smile (relief?) as you leave the stage and thank the MC- it is over- yay!

AFTER ZONE

If you have been selected as a zone finalist congratulations! The Sydney Royal is an incredible experience and I will make another booklet to help you get ready!

For the majority of you, this is where your showgirl progression will end. HOWEVER- your contribution, involvement, show journey and life does not stop here!! You can seriously achieve anything you want to. You can shape your junior judging programme, run sections, join youth councils, judge showgirl- whatever your imagination and time will allow! The future of agricultural shows lies in our hands and we need to take up the challenge to future proof these and celebrate everything rural in NSW!

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All other showgirl documents and general advice found here
<https://www.agshowsnsw.org.au/competitions/showgirl-and-rural-achiever>