Iowa Thespians

Iowa Thespian Festival Backstage Challenge 2026

New in 2026:

- Each school can register up to **two teams** composed of up to 4 students.
- We also encourage students/schools that do not have a full team to sign up to be placed on a randomized team .
    - please note that we reserve the right to split up teams smaller than 4 to facilitate everyone getting to participate
- There will be an overall cap on registration of 120 students.
- The registration cost is just $5 per person

Overview

The Backstage Challenge consists of five events. These events represent basic skills that every theatre technician needs. These events will take place on Friday of Thespian Festival 2026 (see Festival program for specific time and location).

If a team is unable to finish all of the events during the allotted time, the team will not be eligible for Backstage Challenge team awards (though individuals may still receive recognition for excellence in a particular event). Some team members may have to leave for Thespys' or other events during this timeframe, so be strategic about completing Backstage Challenge events earlier in the allotted time if possible.

These rules are based on the Backstage Challenge rules at the International Thespian Festival. However, there have been several adjustments to improve the flow of the event, and due to time and location restrictions.

2026 Events:

1. Light Hang and Focus
2. Costume Quick Change
3. Knot Tying
4. Leg a Platform
5. Cable Roll-Up Relay

Clothing Requirements:

- **Shoes:** Closed-toed shoes are required to maintain a safe environment.
- **Attire:** No loose clothing should be worn that could become a safety hazard.

Good Sportsmanship and Safety:

All teams are required to show good sportsmanship by being respectful and supportive of other teams. Safe actions are required at all times; unsafe or disrespectful behavior can result in time penalties or disqualification.

Left Blank for Double Sided Printing

1. Light Hang and Focus

Format: 4-Person Relay

Maximum Time: 4 Minutes

Overview: Team members work sequentially in a relay to securely hang, power, position, and focus an ETC Source 4 ellipsoidal fixture onto a target shape marked on the wall.

Equipment & Materials Required (per station)

- Light stand / Pipe
- ETC Source 4 ellipsoidal with three-prong Edison plug or stage-pin connector
- Female stage-pin connector to male Edison plug adapter (as needed)
- Safety cable attached to yoke of ellipsoidal
- Gel frame with pre-cut gel
- Adjustable crescent wrench with tether
- Extension cords as needed
- Spike tape
- Table
- Stopwatch

Rules & Required Sequence

1. **Participant 1 (Hang & Secure):**
    - Put on gloves and pick up the tethered wrench.
    - Leave the start line on the judge's call.
    - Locate the fixture, hang it on the pipe, and hand-tighten the C-clamp.
    - Install the safety cable and wrench-tighten the C-clamp while holding the fixture.
    - Tag Participant 2.
2. **Participant 2 (Power & Base Position):**
    - Open the shutters.
    - Plug in the fixture.
    - Position the fixture (rotation and basic focus as necessary).
    - Lock the fixture by tightening the pan screw, yoke bolt, and rotation knob.
    - Tag Participant 3.
3. **Participant 3 (Focus & Shutter Cuts):**
    - Adjust for the sharpest possible focus (blue/rainbow edge).
    - Make shutter cuts to match the taped shape.
    - Tag Participant 4.
4. **Participant 4 (Gel & Finish):**
    - Check overall orientation and focus.
    - Drop in the gel frame and secure the gel safety clip.
    - Cross the finish line to stop time.

Rules & Safety Guidelines

- Participants must wear gloves on both hands at all times and use adjustable crescent wrenches. Speed wrenches and fingerless gloves are prohibited.
- Aprons may be worn but must not attach around the neck.
- Wrenches must be attached to an 18" minimum tie-line tether when in use and kept in a pocket when not in use. Items must never be tethered around the neck or shoulder.
- Items dropped from pockets or aprons count as dropped items.
- Do not carry gel frames in pockets or teeth. Gel frames may be placed on the ground, but must not be stepped on or kicked.
- The gel clip and drop-in iris slot must be on top of the fixture when focused.

Light Hang and Focus Penalties

Penalty Description	**Time Added**
Placing any item in mouth	+10 seconds
Dropping items or placing on the ground	+10 seconds
Gloves not worn beginning to completion	+10 seconds
Items tethered around neck	+10 seconds
Wrench not tethered	+10 seconds
Gel frame not installed properly or forgotten	+10 seconds
C-clamp opening not facing installer	+5 seconds
Instrument hung upside down	+15 seconds
Safety cable not used properly	+10 seconds
Any item not tightened	+10 seconds
Shutters not open prior to power	+5 seconds
Shutter cut inside or outside 2" tape lines	+5 seconds each
Failure to follow the sequence	+10 seconds
Focus is not sharp	+5 seconds
Blatant disregard for rules / Unsafe behavior	**Disqualification**

2. Costume Quick Change

Format: 4-Person Relay (3 Wardrobe Crew + 1 Actor)

Maximum Time: 5 Minutes

Overview: Three wardrobe crew members work sequentially in a relay to transition one actor out of a Scene 1 costume and into a Scene 2 costume according to proper quick-change protocols.

Equipment & Materials Required (per station)

- Two (2) costumes (designed to be one size fits all) including accessories
- Table for accessories
- Costume rack
- Hangers
- Tape (for marking table layout, quick-change box, and start box)
- Stopwatch

Rules & Required Sequence

1. **Prep Period (20 Seconds):** Time begins when Wardrobe Crew 1, 2, and 3 leave the start box to begin prepping accessories and costume layout. Standard conventions such as "puddling of costumes" or "reverse dressing" are allowed.
2. **Actor Release:** After 20 seconds, the Actor is released from the start box into the quick-change box wearing the Scene 1 outfit.
3. **Crew Member 1 (Stripping Outfit 1):** Assist the actor out of the Scene 1 top-half outfit (undoing fastenings, helping lift clothing over head/arms). Hand off garments to Crew Member 2.
4. **Crew Member 2 (Dressing Outfit 2 & Storing Outfit 1):** Assist the actor into the main garments of the Scene 2 outfit. Secure main fastenings (snaps, hooks, laces) while holding Scene 1 items.
5. **Crew Member 3 (Accessories & Completion):** Put on all Scene 2 hats, ties, and remaining accessories. Ensure all fastenings are fully done.
6. **Finish:** All three wardrobe crew members return to the start box carrying all Scene 1 costume pieces in hand to stop time. *(Note: Costumes do not need to be rehung on the rack to stop the clock, but the team must assist in hanging them after the event finishes).*

Rules & Safety Guidelines

- Participants must properly snap, hook, and lace all clothing items.
- The actor must be dressed in all appropriate accessories.
- Participants must remain polite, professional, and respectful to the actor at all times.
- Do not drop hangers, clothing, or accessories.
- The actor may only assist with unbuttoning or stepping out of items if explicitly requested by the wardrobe crew.

Costume Quick Change Penalties

Penalty Description	Time Added
Items not properly placed on actor	+5 seconds per item
Missing accessories or clothing pieces	+15 seconds each
Unnecessary roughness with the actor (pulling too hard)	+5 seconds
Dropping clothing items on ground	+5 seconds per item
Rude treatment to actor	+15 seconds
Blatant disregard for rules / Unsafe behavior	**Disqualification**

3. Knot Tying

Format: 4-Person Relay

Maximum Time: 2 Minutes

Overview: Four team members take turns running to the station to execute four specific knot-tying steps in sequence.

Equipment & Materials Required (per station)

- 2 medium weight ropes (approx. 4’ - 6’ in length)
- Pipe stand
- Bucket (required for bowline)
- Stopwatch

Rules & Required Sequence

1. **Participant 1 (Clove Hitch):** On the judge's call, leave the start line, tie a **Clove Hitch** on the pipe stand, and run back to tag Participant 2.
2. **Participant 2 (Half Hitch):** Run to the pipe stand, tie a **Half Hitch** (locking knot) onto the clove hitch, and run back to tag Participant 3.
3. **Participant 3 (Sheet Bend):** Run to the station with the second rope, tie it to the first line using a **Sheet Bend** (tailor's knot) ensuring both tails are on the same side, and run back to tag Participant 4.
4. **Participant 4 (Bowline & Signal):** Run to the station, tie a **Bowline** around/into the bucket ensuring the tail is on the inside of the loop, and raise hands to signal completion and stop time.

Rules & Safety Guidelines

- All knot ends must maintain a minimum tail length of 6 inches.
- Ropes must never be placed in the mouth.
- Knots must be pulled tight; loose knots incur time penalties.

Knot Tying Penalties

Penalty Description	Time Added
Placing rope in the mouth	+5 seconds
Failed knots or incorrectly tied knots	+2 seconds per knot
Not having a minimum of 6" tails on all knot ends	+2 seconds
Outside bowline (tail on outside of loop)	+2 seconds
Sheet bend tails on opposite sides	+2 seconds
Failure to follow the sequence	+5 seconds
Knots not pulled tightly (left loose)	+2 seconds
Blatant disregard for rules / Unsafe behavior	**Disqualification**

4. Leg a Platform

Format: 4-Person Relay (Two Pairs)

Maximum Time: 5 Minutes

Overview: Two pairs of team members execute a relay to un-leg one platform and leg a second platform, ensuring all safety, hardware sequence, and stability requirements are met.

Equipment & Materials Required (per station)

- 2 small identical platforms
- 6 identical 2x4 legs, pre-drilled for 3/8" bolts
- 3/8" Hex bolts (2 bolts per leg plus extras)
- Washers (1 washer per bolt plus extras)
- 3/8" Nuts (1 nut per bolt plus extras)
- 2 Ratchets with sockets for 3/8" nuts
- Table
- Stopwatch

Rules & Required Sequence

1. **Pair 1 (Flip & Strike Pair 1 Legs):**
    - Leave the start line.
    - Together flip the legged platform over safely.
    - Each person in Pair 1 removes ONE leg from the legged platform (2 legs removed total).
    - Pair 1 tags Pair 2.
2. **Pair 2 (Strike Pair 2 Legs & Start Legging):**
    - Each person in Pair 2 removes ONE leg from the legged platform (the remaining 2 legs).
    - Pair 2 then attaches 2 legs to the new platform.
    - Pair 2 tags Pair 1.
3. **Pair 1 (Finish Legging & Flip):**
    - Pair 1 attaches the final 2 legs to the new platform.
    - Together with Pair 2, safely flip the new platform onto its legs and set it precisely on its spike marks.
4. **Finish:** All 4 team members return to the finish line to stop time.
    - *(Assist judges in resetting hardware after time is recorded).*

Rules & Hardware Specifications

- **Hardware Assembly Sequence (Outside to Inside):** Bolt -> Wood Frame of Platform -> 2x4 Leg -> Washer-> Nut.
- Every team member must attach at least one leg.
- Tools or hardware must never be placed in the mouth.
- Tools should not be placed in pockets
- Platforms and tools must be handled with care

Leg a Platform Penalties

Penalty Description	Time Added
Loose Leg: Small Wiggle	+5 seconds
Loose Leg: Medium Wiggle	+10 seconds
Loose Leg: Very Loose Leg	+15 seconds
Placing any items in mouth	+10 seconds
Not all team members attached at least one leg	+20 seconds
Not set in spike marks correctly (off spike)	+10 seconds
Inaccurate hardware sequence	+10 seconds per sequence
Flipping the platform in an unsafe manner	+30 seconds
Throwing / Dropping Tools	+30 seconds
Blatant disregard for rules / Unsafe behavior	**Disqualification**

5. Cable Roll-Up Relay

Format: 4-Person Relay

Maximum Time: 5 Minutes

Overview: Four team members work through a continuous loop of six connected extension cords, disconnecting, coiling with over/under technique, securing, and storing each cable in a sequential relay.

Equipment & Materials Required (per station)

- 6 Extension Cords in a single connected loop: *(Connected loop sequence: 10' – 15' – 25' – 10' – 15' – 25')*
  - Two 10' Cords
  - Two 15' Cords
  - Two 25' Cords
- Tie-line attached to the female end of each cord
- Storage table with taped and labeled storage areas
- Stopwatch

Rules & Required Sequence

1. **Participant 1 (Cables 1 & 2):**
   - Leave the start box on the judge's signal.
   - Disconnect Cable 1 (10'), coil it properly using the over/under method, secure with tie-line, and place in designated table spot.
   - Proceed to Cable 2 (15'), disconnect, over/under coil, tie, store, and return to tag Participant 2.
2. **Participant 2 (Cable 3):**
   - Run to Cable 3 (25'), disconnect, over/under coil, secure with tie-line, store on table, and return to tag Participant 3.
3. **Participant 3 (Cable 4):**
   - Run to Cable 4 (10'), disconnect, over/under coil, secure with tie-line, store on table, and return to tag Participant 4.
4. **Participant 4 (Cables 5 & 6):**
   - Run to Cable 5 (15'), disconnect, coil, tie, and store. Proceed to Cable 6 (25'), disconnect, coil, tie, and store. Return to the starting box to stop time.

Rules & Technique Requirements

- **Over/Under Technique:**
  1. Hold one end in receiving hand; grab cable ~2 feet down.
  2. Make first loop normally by bringing hands together, rotating wrists counterclockwise.
  3. Grab next 2-foot section, rotating wrist clockwise to invert the loop under the bundle (first "flipped" loop).
  4. Alternate standard and inverted loops ("over, under, over, under") until completed.
- Do **not** roll cables over the arm.
- Scoring evaluates neatness, consistency of coil size, and placement in marked storage areas.

Cable Roll-Up Relay Penalties

Penalty Description	Time Added
Over/Under Technique not followed	+5 seconds per cable
Rolling Cable over arm	+15 seconds per instance
Messy and inconsistent size roll	+10 seconds per instance
Cables not secured properly	+5 seconds per instance
Failure to follow sequence	+5 seconds
Blatant disregard for rules / Unsafe behavior	**Disqualification**