



Skills Ontario Competition Competitor Preparation and Training Manual

This manual focuses on in-person and virtual scenarios.

Table of Contents

1. Purpose.....	3
2. Importance of Training.....	4
3. SECTION 1:	
a. Preparation - Medal Winning Mindset	5
b. Virtual Coaching and Preparing for a Remote Virtual Competition Format.....	5
4. SECTION 2:	
a. Competing - Mental Preparedness/What to Expect	9
b. Physical Preparedness/What You Need to Know About.....	11
c. The Unexpected	12
d. The Power of the Scope	13
e. Tips and Tricks Learned from Experience.....	15
5. SECTION 3:	
a. After the Contest / Follow up	17
b. Closing Remarks from the Skills Ontario Director of Competitions	17
6. Additional Resources.....	18

Purpose

A great deal of work goes into preparing a student for the Skills Ontario Competition and Qualifying Competition. It is an investment of time and energy on behalf of teachers, students, schools, colleges, and other institutes. Skills Ontario offers this document as a guide to help prepare students and teachers for what to expect leading up to and during the competition.

Competing is a commitment and we at Skills Ontario want to help ensure that all students have the opportunity to be their best during the competition! Information in the following guide has been compiled from multiple sources, including volunteers, staff, Provincial Technical Chairs, and more, in order to help students arrive prepared and ready to improve their chances of success!

Recommendations fall into two categories:

- 1) Mental/physiological
 - a. Crowds, noise, pressure, time clock, travelling, etc.
- 2) Contest preparation
 - a. General (not contest-specific) preparation such as practicing previous projects, knowledge using a tool or workwear not normally used by the student, familiarity with the scope and expectations.

The training manual is broken into three sections:

1. Preparation

2. Competing

3. Follow up

Importance of Training

The Skills Ontario Competition is the largest in Canada, drawing in 38,000+ visitors over two days when in-person at the Toronto Congress Centre, while also hosting 2400+ competitors. For many competitors, competition day is their first time at the Skills Ontario Competition. If they have visited as a student spectator, then they have a leg up on their competition. It is awe inspiring, but can also be overwhelming, nerve-racking, and in some cases, intimidating. There is a vast number of various activities, stations and booths in one of Ontario's largest venues, that is also filled with thousands of people. Students are often surprised and unprepared for the noise and crowds, especially if they have been practicing alone or with only a few others in the same room with them.

An analogy that the Competitions Department likes to use to demonstrate to competitors the difference between practicing in your classroom vs. competing at the provincial event is:

"It's like being a great singer, yet you've only sang alone or perhaps in front of only a few people, but you know you can make it. You've never sang in front of a big crowd, but you are auditioning to be on America's Got Talent, which has a huge crowd, live judges scoring you, and maybe even famous singers watching you! The Skills Ontario Competition often takes students by surprise in a very similar fashion! There are massive crowds, live judges scoring you, and potential employers watching."

Jennifer Green, Director of Competitions and Young Women's Initiatives

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS - Keep an eye out for Provincial Technical Chair quotes throughout the guide!

SECTION 1 – Preparation

Medal Winning Mindset

There are many advantages one competitor can gain by preparing well for the Skills Ontario Competition. Who better to ask than the Technical Chairs and Judges who have witnessed the struggles, hard work and achievements from so many students over the years? The experts at Skills Ontario have given us their input and experiences as to how we can help competitors better prepare and excel while competing at the Provincial contest. We hope you find this insight informative and will apply it to your upcoming training for the provincial Skills competition, whether in person or for 2021, the remote virtual format. This training guide is designed to be beneficial for both formats.

When preparing for the Skills Ontario provincial contest, do not just aim to win. Aim to be innovative, too. It is often the outside the box problem-solving and creativity that sets the winners apart. This is the medal winning mindset.

Virtual Coaching and Preparing for a Remote Virtual Competition Format

Skills Ontario is committed to delivering the closest level of success, opportunity, and excellence we traditionally offer at the Provincial Skills Ontario competition, while competing in a virtual format for #VSOC2021. We understand that the Skills Ontario Competition offers invaluable experience and pride to students in the skilled trades and technologies. We are here to support students and schools in ensuring this year will be like any other in offering these great opportunities to students across the province!

In the spring of 2020, Skills Ontario offered multiple Secondary level contests in a virtual format, while students were learning online from home. The outcome was inspirational. We learned a lot about running contests virtually and the preparation required by students to ensure success when competing virtually in a skilled trade or technology contest. The suggestions below are based on the experience from the Competitions Department, as well as on the input from the competitors and Technical Chairs who ran their contests.

Suggestions from Jeremy Braithwaite, Tech Chair for Mechanical CAD

Preparing your IT requirements for a remote virtual competition...

When preparing for a virtual competition, or in-person competition, it is always critical to review all of the provided information. Excellence lives in the details - thoroughly understanding the requirements and precisely delivering what has been asked is essential to your success.

Eliminate unexpected problems, especially related to technology. Technology is amazing; however, sometimes unanticipated things can occur at the most inconvenient times. It's recommended to have a spare or backup of devices/technology, for if the unexpected happens. An extra mouse, keyboard, laptop or camera can sometimes be of great value if the unexpected occurs. Also, consider having an alternate source of internet close by - a phone that can be tethered or temporary access to the neighbors wifi! You can never be too prepared.

Virtual training and a remote virtual style competition allows the physical barriers to be broken. We can connect trainers and competitors that travel distance would not normally allow. Technology connects us to an endless supply of knowledge and talent - it is right at our fingertips.

From a lean perspective, we can minimize waste in travel and time, allowing us to spend more time on value-added activities like training or competing.

Who doesn't want to compete from their own domain? Set the mood, play your favorite tunes, get your favorite snacks and go for the win of a gold medal - right from the comfort of a classroom and school! All competitors get the homecourt advantage!

Below is a list of guidelines that a trainer or student competitor can follow to improve their success when facilitating (in person or online) learning and coaching.

ONCE YOU DECIDE TO COMPETE AT THE SKILLS ONTARIO COMPETITION: PREPARE

- **Read and understand the scope guidelines.** Be sure you can answer these questions:
 - Will the contest take place at a specific date and time, or can you partake in the contest at any point during a particular window of time?
 - How much time will you have to complete the contest?
 - Can you conduct the contest at home, or must you participate in the contest in a specific location (e.g., a school lab or tech room)?
 - Are there any other important, "need to know" factors outlined in the scope?

- **Know the scope format.** Look back on previous scopes posted on the Skills Ontario website or the Nationals scope for your contest.
 - What is the key problem/project they are asking you to solve?
 - What types of challenges will you face?
 - What can you prepare for ahead of time?
- **Test yourself.** If the Technical Chair provides a practice question, take it! You may also find ways to practice your contest by looking back on previous scopes or talking to previous competitors.
- **Check your computer/camera.** Avoid last-minute problems! Whether you're using your own computer or one in a lab, verify that it has all the correct hardware and software well in advance of the contest. Also, make sure you'll be in a location with an adequate Internet location.
- **Know the software platform you will be competing in.** Whether its Google classroom, Webex, Teams, or any other platform, make sure you are comfortable with the virtual software you will be using to participate in for your contest. Practice using it with your coach/teacher or friend. Make sure you know how to adjust your volume, ask questions, and use your camera. This will be important during the contest as judges may ask you to zoom in or move your camera to examine your work.
- **Study the contest materials.** Even if the contest is "open book," it's still important to study and review just as if you were conducting your contest at the Toronto Congress Centre.
- **Plan your time.** As you test yourself, limit your time to that which will be allotted for the actual contest, and decide how long you will spend on each portion (for example, if the contest is six hours long, practice the scope requirements in sections so you'll know approximately how to budget your time on competition day).
- **Carve out a quiet practice spot with minimal distractions.** Turn off all notifications from your phone, your email, and elsewhere (or set them to silent). If you are practicing at home, shut off the TV and radio. Let your roommates or family know that you'll be practicing, so that they're less likely to interrupt you during that time. If your contest requires lab or hands-on work in a tech room, ask others to leave you in peace while you are practicing at least until you are ready for an audience.
- **Determine when your contest will take place.** You may have to conduct your contest at a specific time; however, if your contest will be available for several hours (or even a few days), choose a time that presents the least potential for distraction, interruption, and stress.
- **Gather all that you'll need to complete your contest.** If you can have materials ready and with you, be sure that they're set to go.

- **Take a deep breath.** Once you're logged in, take a moment to relax and get focused.
- **If you have questions related to your scope, reach out to the contact of your scope and email them to clarify your doubts.**
- **Ensure that you have all the tools/materials/equipment that are listed in the scope for your contest.**

Remote Virtual comes with its own set of benefits...

"If you asked me back in March 2020 about the virtual LEGO world, I wouldn't think the things we're doing now are possible.". The kids love the ability to design, build, create and collaborate in the virtual world. There are lots of real engineering things that can be done. I am learning new things each week and getting into software that I would never imagined using, let alone learning enough to teach with it."

Skills Ontario Technical Chair, LEGO Robotics

Section 2: Competing

Mental Preparedness/ What to Expect

The most obvious tool for success is fully reading, being familiar with, and understanding the contest scope and [Competition Information Guide](#). The most current editions of the contest scopes are posted to the links below. Print them off and read them over carefully.

[Secondary Scopes](#)

[Post-Secondary Scopes](#)

The scope outlines the expectations of students during the contest, what the project is or general description, what they need to bring with them to compete (ie tools), and a judging rubric. Any rubrics or points noted on for judging allows students to be aware of where they can earn points and be successful, or where to have a stronger focus on practicing.

The updated scopes are posted to the skillsontario.com website by the end of January each year, allowing ample time for students and teachers to be familiar with its content. The scope for the current contest year cannot be posted on the skillsontario.com website until the Skills Canada National Competition scope for that contest has been posted to skillscanada.com. Not all contests continue to nationals, however. If scopes for the current year are not yet posted, the scopes from the previous year are also posted on the skillsontario.com website that can be used as references until the current year's scope is posted.

This may sound like an obvious starting point, but our competition competitor post-event survey indicates that few students examine the scope fully or more than a month before the competition, or even refer to the scope at all. Some have noted that they are only looking at it less than a week before the competition or are relying on their teacher to tell them what is in it.

We cannot emphasize enough how important the scope is as a crucial point of training.

Aside from preparing and practicing for the skilled trade or technology part of the contest, it is highly recommended that students also prepare mentally for the actual event itself. As mentioned earlier, students are often astounded by the sights and sounds of the *in-person* Skills Ontario Competition. There are several often unforeseen elements that students could benefit from being prepared for before arriving:

- Prepare for large crowds and noise when competing. Some contest hearing protection is mandatory (such as in the carpentry contests), but we recommend hearing protection if the noise from the large crowds or even from the other contests would bother a competitor.

- If you are in a team contest, make sure you and your team members plan ahead and are all on the same page.
- Be aware that you may be photographed or filmed while competing by media on site, or photographers representing Skills Ontario and/or sponsors. Competitors in the TV Video Production Contest as part of their contest are to film other competitors/contests and must request permission before recording.
- Media, including traditional press and social media, may be posted about you. Be prepared for the possibility of being publicly recognized.
- You may receive a request for an interview by media (by your school, local newspaper, television station, and more). Be prepared on how to handle questions and respond professionally and promptly.
- Set your expectations and requirements of being away from home, especially if have never done the following:
 - Travel: Be prepared for bus rides or flights you need to take.
 - Accommodations: Be aware that you may have an overnight stay at a hotel and/or may be sharing a room with someone.
 - Meals: Note that all meals are likely from a hotel or restaurant. We also recommend you bring snacks for the Competition and be nut free – this will increase your mental awareness and energy, which is especially helpful if you are in a physically demanding contest.
- Be prepared for the one-on-one judging. Judges are always watching closely as you compete.
- Don't panic. Many students have arrived and turned around immediately after arriving to the contest site, while others have left in the middle of competing, due to stress. Make sure you stay calm and have the tools to handle the pressure:
 - Know how to calm yourself down if you start panicking that you will not finish on time or if you think you have made a mistake.
 - Be early and on time. Take Toronto traffic into account when planning your drive.
 - Know where to enter the Toronto Congress Centre from the bus drop off point or the visitor parking lot. This is noted on the [Skills Ontario Competition Floor Plan](#).
 - Research the floor plan to know where your contest site is and where the closest restrooms are. The Toronto Congress Centre is **very large** and students have gotten lost, which has led to some being late for their contest before. Being late can possibly result in mark deductions or disqualification (noted in your scope).

- Be aware that competing is mentally strenuous and its perfectly normal to be nervous.
- Understand that the competition can create anxiety – take the time to relax, feel prepared, and stay focused.
- Read all instructions thoroughly, manage your time, and be adaptable. If there is a change in instructions or something goes wrong, having the mindset to adapt and recuperate will make a vast difference in staying calm and moving forward.

Physical Preparedness/What You Need to Know

Thinking outside the box, preparing for multiple ideas and scenarios ahead of time, and having creative problem-solving skills when the pressure is on will make a big difference!

- Research creative and innovative approaches to projects.
- Be flexible to try new things and experiment with ideas and concepts without focusing on achieving the best score. This will allow you to relax and not feel the pressure if not thinking about the judging aspect of the contest.
- Watch Skills Ontario, Skills Canada and WorldSkills YouTube videos to get an idea of the competition and look at photos from past competitions on the [Skills Ontario Facebook page](#).
- Talk to previous competitors or coaches to better understand your contest.
- Check in if your coach can share past test projects from previous Skills Ontario Competitions they've been involved in.
- Review and discuss what success looks like to you.
- Coaches/teachers: ask students how they would tackle a past/different project. This approach helps competitors to understand the contest in a more comprehensive and less pressured way.
 - Analogy: You are listening to the radio and the host is asking a trivia question to a listener who called in. You feel confident and you know the answer, while the listener is stumbling or doesn't get it right and you're thinking: *This is easy!* There is no pressure when you have nothing on the line, but when it affects you directly, it's much harder to come up with an answer or say it quickly. The same goes with these projects!
- Wear clothing you feel comfortable in and have worn before (for example, do not wear brand new work boots), while following the safety and PPE guidelines of the contest scope.
- Bring equipment/materials (if applicable) you have worked with before and are comfortable using. For example, do not bring a brand new style of mixing whisk or

drill you haven't used before – you may not be prepared for how it performs or how you should handle it.

- Bring ear plugs if loud noise distracts you.
- Have you ever engaged in your skill or contest for 5-6 hours at a time under strenuous conditions? Know what your body and mind will feel like while competing over a long period of time. Don't be taken by surprise; plan on how to cope if physically tired near the last few hours of the contest.
- Take into consideration the physical conditions of the competition area. Pack different types/layers of clothes. It can be cool in the morning, but get quite warm by midday once the in-person venue fills with thousands of people. Read the scope carefully – it will provide details if you are in a building, a tent, or outside. This is noted for all levels of competition: provincials, nationals, and worlds.
- Eat a proper breakfast and get a good night's sleep. The competition is long and you will be very busy!
- As noted before, we recommend you bring snacks for the Competition and to be nut free – this will increase your mental awareness and energy, which is especially helpful if you are in a physically demanding contest.
- Lunch is provided for an in-person competition, but it is recommended to bring snacks and other food if you have restrictions or specific appetite.
- Remember to bring a water bottle and stay hydrated. Each contest site for an in-person competition is provided with water jugs to re-fill. No cups will be available.

The Unexpected

"I feel that students are most unprepared for the level of structure in place and the way the rules are followed exactly. Many think that they are guidelines and they can be bent when they come into play. They are surprised when the rules are held to the full extent to keep the competition fair."

Jeremy Braithwaite, Tech Chair, Mechanical CAD

Skills Ontario Tech Chairs shared their experiences of what students are often surprised by or underprepared for while competing:

- There is no talking allowed during most contests. If you are competing in a remote virtual format, this includes no talking to your teacher/supervisor.
- Coaches and parents cannot communicate in any way with competitors once the competition begins.
- The day is long and physically demanding.

- There are time constraints. Students often have the skills but struggle with time management as some contest projects/sections are timed.
- The degree of difficulty/level of excellence can be a surprise. Do your best to be prepared.
- Questions to the Tech Chairs and judges **are** allowed. **Ask them!**

Tech Chair recommendations for training include:

- Students are afraid to try new things. Innovative problem-solving can often lead to gold medal status. Be prepared to think outside the box!
- Working in groups can be tough on competition day, as students are under stress and may encounter difficulties communicating. Team competitors must have excellent communication skills – it helps to appoint a team leader and roles/responsibilities.
- If the instructions are available ahead of time, be very familiar with them.
- Practice under time constraints in a noisy area.
- Know the agenda and schedule in advance.
- Develop a contingency plan that prioritizes maximizing high marks – know your judging rubric if it is posted with the contest scope.

TIP FROM THE EXPERT...

“Training exercises, support from teachers and practice makes perfect! When I competed as a student, we had the local competition, then regional and then the provincial competition. Providing students with training material that simulates the competition environment is very valuable in preparing them for the provincial competition.”

The Power of the Scope

“I firmly believe that if students FULLY READ and FOLLOWED the scopes, they would place much higher in the rankings, without having to add a great deal to their skills. Our contest has a high number of competitors and it could have easily come down to who was able to execute the instructions flawlessly.”

Skills Ontario Technical Chair

The scope is designed to provide students and coaches with the information they will require prior to the competition. Scopes always include an agenda of the day’s event, safety and equipment requirements, judging criteria, project outlines and expectations. Often, they will include a full project description as well. If they do not, there are basic notes to practice from.

Knowledge is power. We strongly recommend that both students *and* teachers/coaches familiarize themselves with the scope well before the event and upon deciding to compete. We find in many cases, only the teacher reads the scope; the student(s) must as well.

The scope in itself is a training tool, keep it handy during practice and have it with you during the competition to reference.

Unfortunately, post-event competitor survey results have indicated that a significant percentage of students are not dedicating enough time to reading, practicing and following the scope in advance of the competition.

To encourage better preparation for the competition, we strongly recommend students and teachers/coaches familiarize themselves with the scope as soon as possible.

The following suggestions have been made by Tech Chairs to help students become comfortable with the scope prior to the competition:

- Hold preparation meetings to review the scopes with students (in-person or virtual).
- Make a quiz based on the scope.
- In team contests, pick one student to be the official scope expert.
- **Some contests have built in “easy points” to prove students are familiar with the scope**, such as file naming conventions or where to store files on the desktop. If students are familiar with the scope, this can be an easy extra mark.
- Skills Ontario and Tech Chairs are available for questions regarding the scope. Take advantage and seek help or clarification if you need it in advance.

“I sit with my students and we read the scope together once. Then when we are practicing, if they have questions, I ask them, what does the scope say?”

Tech Chair and former Coach

DURING THE (ONLINE REMOTE VIRTUAL) CONTEST: FOCUS

- **Log in early.** Logging in 15-20 minutes before the session starts will give you time to test your audio and reacquaint yourself with the platform tools. If you are competing with more than one person (a team), check that there isn't unnecessary feedback coming from the microphones.
- **Use a hands-free headset if possible**, so you can interact with and listen to judges while simultaneously working on your project (such as in the culinary or baking contests, if applicable).

- **Keep an eye on the clock.** You may want to set an alarm to notify you when you have limited time (e.g., 10 minutes) remaining in your contest.
- **Don't leave the contest page!** If you are permitted to search the web or check other websites for information, do not use the same tab – you may lose all your work. Instead, open a second browser tab or window (or choose a completely different browser), then conduct your search.
- **Technical problems? Don't panic.** But do contact your judges *immediately*, detailing the exact problem that occurred and any error messages you might have received. If you can take a screenshot, that is helpful as well.
- **Check, and check again before you submit.** Ensure that every answer is complete and appears as you intended. Review the accuracy of your answers or project, as well as your spelling and grammar.
- **Upload your completed project.** You should have received a link to upload and submit your project to Skills Ontario, if required in the scope. Each contest may have a specific time to upload completed projects (documents, photos, video, etc.) Ensure you submit your project during your allotted timeslot. Make sure to follow all instructions for submissions, especially file-naming conventions. Should you happen to have a problem, try once more. If you still have a problem submitting, email competitions@skillsontario.com *immediately* for assistance. This allows Skills Ontario to know that if your project is submitted late, we are already aware prior to the deadline that you were having technical difficulties.
- **Know your surroundings.** Familiarize yourself with the remote location you will be competing from (home/school/college/etc.) and ensure you have easy access to everything you would require during the competition.

Tips and Tricks Learned from Experience

Practice similar tasks well in advance of the competition, so you are not surprised. Contact information for the Technical Chair(s) and/or the Competitions Department is listed in every scope on the Table of Contents page.

Do practice exams online. Seek out additional training experiences.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Practice fixing mistakes.

Practice additional projects. Look to National (Skills Canada) Scopes or other provinces to gain more experience.

Practice with both an audience and a timer before the competition.

Tips for teachers and coaches

Teachers often accompany students to the in-person event. For the remote virtual event, a teacher/supervisor is mandatory for some contests (refer to [Competition Information Guide](#)). Allow lots of time before the contest begins to arrive or log into your computer and get situated. Often times a student may require accommodations for special requests or be too shy to ask important questions. Teachers are welcome to ask questions and help students before the contest begins. Make sure you allot yourself the additional time, if required.

Allow students to fail during training. Learning from mistakes is a great pathway to success, and they will learn what to avoid in the future, instead of learning on the spot.

Have students practice similar tasks well in advance of the competition, so both you and your student(s) are not surprised. Contact information for the Technical Chair(s) and/or the Competitions Department is listed in every scope on the Table of Contents page.

Whenever possible, have past competitors come back to train the current competitor(s). This benefits students immensely to learn what to expect and where things could go wrong/right, directly from someone who has already been through the experience. Some school boards hold after hours Skills Ontario Competition clubs to promote training for the event.

Use the opportunity to learn about what is expected and being judged by reaching out to the Technical Chairs, as this information could be a valuable training tool.

If Technical Chairs and/or judges are available after a contest has completed, request a few minutes of their time to discuss and ask questions. Please note that judges and Technical Chairs may still be quite busy completing final judging and taking down the contest site.

Teachers should be familiar with the scope and expectations (judging rubric) prior to beginning training.

Section 3: Follow up

AFTER THE CONTEST: REVIEW

- **Assess your own progress.**
 - How do *you* believe you did?
 - What questions did you find confusing?
 - Did you have to skip anything?
 - Return to your notes and readings and see if you can find the answers to the questions that challenged you.
- **Ask yourself how you can improve on the contest for next year.**
 - Did your study strategies work?
 - Did your plan for participating in the online contest prove successful?
 - Write down your observations and keep them in mind for the future. If you continue to the Skills Canada National Competition, your notes will likely be very helpful!

Closing comments from the experts

Jennifer Green, Director of Competitions at Skills Ontario and former medalist at the Skills Ontario and Skills Canada Competitions.

"This competition will enhance and change your life for the better! It is something you will carry with you the rest of your career, and even on your resume. I was an apprentice who competed for Industrial Millwright, and will be the first to say – it was a game changer.

I have seen first-time competitors, and competitors who come back year after year. What do they all have in common? A strong perseverance with the aim to train and succeed! Every little bit of effort gives you more knowledge and experience in that skilled trade or technology.

Being a part of the competition is a moving experience and can bring great opportunities. Seeing the look on a competitor's face when their name is called, hearing the crowd cheers and roars as they walk up to the podium – that is what happiness, achievement and goals are made of."

"Plan your work, work your plan"

Additional Resources

Training Resources – Skills Alberta

<https://skillsalberta.com/training-resources>

What it takes to train for World Skills – Tech Life Today -

<https://www.techlifetoday.ca/articles/2019/muhammad-afzal-worldskills-training>

Inspiring Skills Excellence - World Skills

https://worldskills.org/files/legacy_wsf/downloads/WorldSkills_eBooklet_Inspiring_Skills_Excellence.pdf

Train like an Olympian – World Skills UK

<https://www.worldskillsuk.org/champions/international-skills-competitions/training-like-an-olympian>

Siemens teams up with CME for Youth Skills Training Plan – CME

<https://www.canadianmanufacturing.com/manufacturing/siemens-teams-up-with-cme-for-youth-skills-training-plan-149211/>

Combating the Challenges of Training Engineers for World Skills during a Pandemic – World Skills UK

<https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/49619-combating-the-challenges-of-training-engineers-for-worldskills-during-a-pandemic>