

How to win “Strictly”

Marianka Swain offers some sage advice to this year’s crop of hopefuls

“Does it really matter who wins? It’s just a dance show,” commented a foolhardy acquaintance whose place on my Christmas card list remains in jeopardy. For those of us who inhabit this gloriously eccentric sequined world from September to December, marvelling at the highs and despairing (or howling in mirth) at the lows, that final outcome is the all-important climax to our – say it with me – journey.

I have scientifically (ahem) analysed the performance of past winners, from the undisputed champions (Natasha Kaplinsky, Jill Halfpenny, Mark Ramprakash) to the breakthrough talents (Alesha Dixon, Harry Judd, Kara Tointon) and surprising victors (Darren Gough, Tom Chambers, Chris Hollins), and can now reveal the sure-fire path to “Strictly” glory.

1 A fine showmance
Keep the *Dirty Dancing* dream alive and succumb to the charms of your Latin love god partner while “going method” during rumba week.

2 No ambition please, we’re British It’s a fine line



between an eager contestant and a fatally over-competitive one (see: Gabby Logan), so stick to the script: “I’m just trying my best and having fun.”

3 Undress to impress
Prove your white knight credentials by coming to your partner’s aid during a wardrobe malfunction – and make Bruce’s day with your live TV moment.

4 Bad mistakes, I’ve made a few Don’t alienate viewers with dazzling perfection. Throw in a shocking fall and mid-to-late-series memory lapse – just to prove you’re human.

5 One moment in time
Oh, but when it all comes together: the right song, the right costume, the right dance... “Strictly” magic. From perfect

scoring jives and salsas to cheeky Charleston and breakthrough quicksteps, you can’t emerge victorious without “That Dance”.

6 Make ‘em laugh You may be physically shattered and emotionally wrought, but make sure you fill your VTs with hilarious spontaneity! (Actual hilarity rather than staged atrocities, please.) Close the deal with a Muttley guffaw.

7 Obstacle course It is a truth universally acknowledged by reality TV producers that no contestant can succeed without overcoming clearly signposted obstacles. Try crippling shyness, overloaded schedule or excess of northern blokeishness.

8 The judges have their scores! We don’t always vote for the big scorers – hell, we often vote against them – so if high marks come your way, obey Rule 2 and cultivate your look of surprised delight.

9 This business we call show Series are won or lost on the showdance... and yes, we’re all thinking Dollgate. Stick with greatest hits or take a risk on one genius concept – as long as it’s *sans* puppets.

10 It takes two Most important, whether lust, tolerance or genuine affection, all winning celebs have unbeatable chemistry with their long-suffering professional. For maximum vote-grabbing, tease us with banter, stun us with drama and win our foolish hearts with a happy ever after. ●