

Rainbow Roll Fest Awards 2025

At Rainbow Roll Fest, we have two awards tracks for shows: audio and video. Most awards categories are given to one audio-based show and one video-based show, with a couple of awards geared only toward video and a few awards where one award is presented to all formats.

The show is a good fit for our **audio** track if:

- The show is based primarily around voice performance
- If hosted on a video-based platform like YouTube or Twitch, the show may have static or dynamic overlays as a complement to voice performance
- The show is available on at least one major podcast player

The show is a good fit for our **video** track if:

- The show is based primarily around video capture of performer's faces and/or bodies (including v-tubers)
- The show features actors filmed in-studio or captured remotely via online recording (Zoom, OBS, etc.)
- The show contains detailed animation sequences

Awards Information

Our rubrics operate off of a 1-5 scale of achievement rating system. From 1 to 5: 1 = below average, 2 = average, 3 = above average, 4 = noteworthy, 5 = outstanding

On many levels, the process of assigning awards is an inherently subjective one. What lands as a great performance or story for one person may not land as powerfully for another – that's just the nature of art. We acknowledge there are inherent limitations to any awards process (including the limitations inherent to screeners themselves), and that there are good faith differences of opinion about whether awards are a valuable metric of appreciating art.

We have adopted a process that we hope will help shape our awards into a fair and meaningful experience for everyone involved. At Rainbow Roll Fest, we iterate on our awards process every year, using what we've learned in previous years to help make our process better with each awards cycle. We use a rubric to help our judges have some sense of guidelines as they evaluate shows, and this year, we're making that rubric public for maximum transparency. We recognize that our rubric is not necessarily the rubric everyone would use, and we are always open to receiving feedback in our feedback form at the end of each year's Rainbow Roll Fest.

Our rubric is shaped by extensive consultations with many people in the field of Actual Play: academics, award winning creators, creators who have never won awards, former judges, and members of Rainbow Roll Network. Our rubric is not a final manifesto on THE way to make Actual Play or a manifesto on more technical dimensions of craft. It's much more about what we like and value, and about identifying the kinds of art we are most interested in rewarding. If your show doesn't totally align with our rubric, it doesn't mean it's a "bad" show, just that we may have different approaches to what we value in art.

We do not make our panel of judges public in order to prevent harassment, and because some of our judges may live in places where it's not safe to be publicly associated with LGBTQIA+ causes. We do have a commitment that our judging panel will be composed of majority BIPOC people and majority LGBTQIA+ people. Our judges are individuals who are active in the field of Actual Play as creators, performers, producers, thinkers, writers, and fans. **If you suspect you know the identity of a judge, DO NOT contact them about the judging process. Contacting a judge about the judging process will result in immediate dismissal of your show from Rainbow Roll Fest and a potential ban for your show in future years.**

Judges will assign each show scores between 1 and 5 for each dimension of a rubric. Shows that receive scores of 4 or higher in all dimensions of a category will be advanced to the final round of judging deliberation, where judges will determine winners. Awarded shows will receive brief feedback from judges about why their show was chosen to receive the award. (We regret that we are unable to offer feedback to all shows.)

In an effort to create conditions for a wider variety of shows and artists to be recognized, we have a policy that performers and shows are not eligible to win in a category two consecutive years in a row (but are eligible again in subsequent years). For example: if you won Outstanding GM in 2024, you are not eligible to win in that category in 2025, but will be eligible again in 2026. If your show won Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble Cast in 2024, it won't be eligible in that category for 2025, but will be in 2026, etc.

Every show that is selected for Rainbow Roll Fest is automatically entered into all the awards for its category, audio or video, with the exception of Outstanding Player Performance and Outstanding Original Music. Shows must enter each of those awards using our registration form. Shows may nominate up to two players per show for the Outstanding Original Player award (you can read about why [here under 'Why can I only nominate two players for Outstanding Player?'](#)).

Awards and Rubric

Outstanding Player Performance

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play performance. Award winners should demonstrate compelling character decisions (that is, the character needs to stand out as noteworthy due to choices the player makes) and exceptional skill as a performer.

Rubric - Audio

1. The player conveys a wide range of emotion through vocal performance. They demonstrate their ability to portray complex emotions.
2. They demonstrate a keen sense for pacing and emotional/story beats.
3. The player makes compelling character decisions. You have an understanding of who this character is on a fundamental level due to the

player's choices, and they stand out as noteworthy due to choices the player made.

4. The player interacts with the world of the story in ways that deepen and enliven the worldbuilding.

Rubric - Video

1. The player conveys a wide range of emotion through vocal and physical performance. They demonstrate their ability to portray complex emotions.
2. They demonstrate a keen sense for pacing and emotional/story beats.
3. The player makes compelling character decisions. You have an understanding of who this character is on a fundamental level due to the player's choices, and they stand out as noteworthy due to choices the player made.
4. The player compels interest in the character through their expressions and physical movement, integrating embodiment into their performance in a memorable way.
5. The player interacts with the world of the story in ways that deepen and enliven the worldbuilding.

Outstanding GM

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play GMing. Award winners should demonstrate a deep understanding of how to craft a compelling story and the ways that systems, players, and GMs interact in order to tell compelling stories. They should craft story, skill, and/or combat scenarios that enable players to shine, and should also demonstrate keen skill as a performer.

Rubric - Audio

1. They demonstrate a deep understanding of how to craft a compelling story and the ways that systems, players, and GMs interact in order to tell compelling stories.
2. They are an excellent worldbuilder: the world comes alive through their descriptions, plotting, and encouragement to players.
3. They convey a wide range of emotion through voice performance, demonstrating their ability to portray complex emotions.
4. They craft story, skill, and/or combat scenarios that enable players to shine.
5. They demonstrate a keen sense for pacing and emotional/story beats.
6. They embody striking NPCs that are memorable due to the GM's portrayal and choices.

Rubric - Video

1. They demonstrate a deep understanding of how to craft a compelling story and the ways that systems, players, and GMs interact in order to tell compelling stories.
2. They are an excellent worldbuilder: the world comes alive through their descriptions, plotting, and encouragement to players.
3. They convey a wide range of emotion through visual/physical performance, demonstrating their ability to portray complex emotions. They compel interest in NPCs, plot, and story through their expressions and movement.
4. They craft story, skill, and/or combat scenarios that enable players to shine.
5. They demonstrate a keen sense for pacing and emotional/story beats.
6. They embody striking NPCs that are memorable due to the GM's portrayal and choices.

Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble Cast

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play performance by an ensemble cast. In addition to each individual demonstrating noteworthy skill as performers, award winners should demonstrate a nuanced and thorough understanding of how to play off one another and how to pace scenes, using each other's talents as a foundation to create memorable character moments, cast decisions, and story beats.

Rubric - Audio

1. They demonstrate a nuanced and thorough understanding of how to play off one another, using each other's talents as a foundation to create memorable character moments, cast decisions, and story beats.
2. They convey a wide range of emotion through voice performance, demonstrating their ability to portray complex emotions.
3. They enable each other's strengths to shine through performance choices and interpersonal interactions.
4. They demonstrate a keen instinct for creating rewarding and satisfying stories.

Rubric - Video

1. They demonstrate a nuanced and thorough understanding of how to play off one another, using each other's talents as a foundation to create memorable character moments, cast decisions, and story beats.
2. Their costuming, makeup, and props convey a depth of commitment to theme and story.
3. They convey a wide range of emotion through visual performance, demonstrating their ability to portray complex emotions.
4. They enable each other's strengths to shine through performance choices and interpersonal interactions.
5. They demonstrate a keen instinct for creating rewarding and satisfying stories.

Outstanding Editing

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play editing. For this category, we are looking for shows that demonstrate exceptional editing which is indispensable to the flow, pace, and tenor of the story.

Rubric

1. The editing flows exceptionally well.
2. The audience is drawn deeper into the experience of the story due to the quality of the editing.
3. The editor exhibits a keen instinct for the ways that edits convey and contribute to pace, tone, and story.

Outstanding Sound Design

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play sound design. Award winners should demonstrate use of sound (sound effects, music, mixing) in a way that is indispensable to the story and aids in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Rubric

1. The editor/sound designer uses sound (sound effects, music, mixing) in a way that is indispensable to the story. The sound design is such a fundamental element of the production that you can't imagine the story being the same without it.
2. The sound design quality is consistent throughout the production and aids in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Outstanding Original Music (may not be awarded all years)

One award for all formats

Description provided to applicants:

This award recognizes achievement in the field of composition for actual play. Award winners should demonstrate use of exceptional original scores that supplement the play, pace, and editing of their show. The use of music should aid in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Rubric

1. The music provides indispensable contributions to the play, pace, and editing of the show.
2. The use of music aids in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Outstanding Visual Design

One award: Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play visual design. Award winners should demonstrate use of video effects (overlay, captions, images) in a way that is indispensable to the story and accessible to their audience (i.e., descriptions of overlay provided, visual descriptions of performers provided, captions are available) and should aid in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Rubric

1. The production designer uses video effects (overlay, captions, images) in a way that is indispensable to the story. The visual design is such a fundamental element of the production that you can't imagine the story being the same without it.
2. The visual design quality is consistent throughout the production.
3. The visual design is accessible to the audience (there are descriptions of the overlay, visual descriptions of performers are provided, captions are available).

Outstanding Costuming and Makeup (may not be awarded all years)

One Award: Video

This ensemble award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play costuming and makeup. Award winning casts should utilize costuming and makeup in a way that is memorable and relates to the story they are telling and the characters they are portraying. Costuming and makeup should be accessible to the audience (i.e., visual descriptions provided, elements of costumes and makeup can be distinguished on video) and should aid in creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Rubric

- The cast and GM wear costuming and makeup in a way that is memorable and ties in directly to the story.
- The costuming and makeup is as much a part of the story as the performances.
- The visual design is accessible to the audience (i.e., visual descriptions provided, elements of costumes and makeup can be distinguished on video).

Outstanding Use of System - D&D (may not be awarded all years)

One award for all formats

This award recognizes achievement in system use in actual play. Award winning shows should demonstrate gameplay that excels in illustrating the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of D&D. Encounters, combats, and downtimes should clearly illustrate the rules of the game in action.

Rubric

1. Gameplay demonstrates the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of D&D.
2. The encounters, combats, and downtimes clearly illustrate rules of the game in action.
3. The GM and players clearly explain game mechanics and moves.

Outstanding Use of System - Pathfinder (may not be awarded all years)

One award for all formats

This award recognizes achievement in system use in actual play. Award winning shows should demonstrate gameplay that excels in illustrating the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of Pathfinder. Encounters, combats, and downtimes should clearly illustrate the rules of the game in action.

Rubric

1. Gameplay demonstrates the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of Pathfinder.
2. The encounters, combats, and downtimes clearly illustrate rules of the game in action.
3. The GM and players clearly explain game mechanics and moves.

Outstanding Use of System - Indie (may not be awarded all years)

One award for all formats

This award recognizes achievement in system use in actual play. Award winning shows should demonstrate gameplay that excels in illustrating the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of an indie game system. Encounters, combats, and downtimes should clearly illustrate the rules of the game in action.

Rubric

1. Gameplay demonstrates the capabilities and unique characteristics of an edition of an indie game system.
2. The encounters, combats, and downtimes clearly illustrate rules of the game in action.
3. The GM and players clearly explain game mechanics and moves.

Creative Use of System (may not be awarded all years)

One award for all formats

Description provided to applicants:

This award recognizes achievement in system use in actual play. Award winning shows should feature gameplay that demonstrates an unconventional and creative use of a ruleset, with encounters, combats, and downtimes that clearly illustrate rules of the game in action while also expanding upon those rules.

Rubric

1. Gameplay demonstrates an unconventional and creative use of a ruleset.
2. The encounters, combats, and downtimes clearly illustrate rules of the game in action while also expanding upon those rules.
3. Any new or unconventional rules or mechanics are clearly explained.
4. As an audience member, you have the impression that this is a very creative, unexpected use of the system.

Outstanding Show

Two awards: Audio and Video

This award recognizes achievement in the field of actual play. For this category, we are looking for shows that expand, challenge, and elaborate on the art form of actual play. Award winning shows should offer unique perspectives, memorable performances, and top-notch stories.

Rubric - Audio

1. The show stands out for its uniqueness and memorable qualities. This is a show that sticks in your mind; you can't stop thinking about it.
2. The show pushes the field of actual play to evolve and grow.
3. The show makes striking and memorable use of sound design as an element of story.
4. The show has a unique perspective and communicates that perspective clearly and effectively.
5. The show boasts memorable performances and top-notch stories.

Rubric - Video

1. The show stands out for its uniqueness and memorable qualities. This is a show that sticks in your mind; you can't stop thinking about it.
2. The show pushes the field of actual play to evolve and grow.
3. The show makes striking and memorable use of visual elements such as costuming, makeup, and overlays.
4. The show has a unique perspective and communicates that perspective clearly and effectively.
5. The show boasts memorable performances and top-notch stories.

Outstanding Depiction of LGBTQIA+ Themes

One award for all formats

This award recognizes achievement in representing LGBTQIA+ themes in actual play. For this category, we are looking for shows that demonstrate thoughtful, nuanced portrayals of trans and/or queer identities and experiences. Award winning shows should have a distinct perspective on what it means to make trans and queer art in the form of actual play.

Rubric

1. The show features at least one portrayal of a queer and/or trans identity/ies and experience/s, and demonstrates thoughtful and nuanced portrayals of trans and queer identities.
2. The material is handled both sensitively and boldly.
3. If historically harmful or complicated tropes (bury your gays, etc.) are used, the show demonstrates consciousness of how and why it is using them.
4. The show has a distinct perspective on what it means to make trans and queer art in the form of actual play.