

Standard **Rules of Play**¹¹

US Air Guitar contests each consist of two rounds:

- Round 1 (freestyle): each competitor performs to a song of their choice, in an order chosen at random before the event
- Round 2 (compulsory): the 5 top competitors from round 1 perform surprise song, in ascending score order from Round 1
 - Each performance is played to 1 minute (60 sec.) of a song
 - The 60 seconds can start anywhere in the song
 - The instrument must be invisible & must be a guitar
 - Air roadies are allowed, but must leave the stage before the performance
 - Back-up bands (air or real) are not allowed

Judging Criteria

For each Regional, there is a jury of independent judges. The results of the jury cannot be protested. All performances are scored on a scale from 4.0 to 6.0, with 6.0 being the highest possible. Scores are given to one decimal point (e.g. 5.4, not 5.48). A single score is given to each air guitarist based on their overall performance in that round. The scores from BOTH ROUNDS are added to determine the contestants' final scores. This combined score determines the winner.

Traditionally, after the competition all competitors play a group rendition of "Rockin' in the Free World."

The score reflects the quality of the performance based on three key criteria:

- A. **Technical merit:** You don't have to know what notes you're playing, but the more your invisible fretwork corresponds to the music that's playing, the better the performance.

¹¹ <https://www.usairguitar.com/rules>

- B. **Stage presence:** Anyone can do it in the privacy of their bedroom. Few have what it takes to rock a crowd of hundreds or even thousands - all without an instrument.
- C. **Airness:** The last criteria is the most difficult to define yet often the most decisive of all. Airness is defined as the extent to which a performance transcends the imitation of a real guitar and becomes an art form in and of itself. According to ethnomusicologist Sydney Hutchinson, “**Airness** is really where you get to the heart of the competition, and this is a word they used in English, from 1996 onwards, from the very beginning, and they sort of wanted to use this word to express the ineffable quality of performance that we all know and can’t quite pinpoint - we *know* when we see a great performance, but we can’t always describe why that was a great performance. So US Air Guitar has tried to sort of define this more precisely. And they say that **airness** is what takes air guitar out of the realm of merely imitating an actual guitar and into being an art form of its own.”¹²

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Fun fact: Each character in "Airness" represents a pillar of air guitar:

Artistic Merit - Ed “SHREDDY EDDY” Leary
Originality - Gabe “GOLDEN THUNDER” Partridge
Feeling - Mark “FACEBENDER” Lender
Technical Ability - Astrid “CANNIBAL QUEEN” Anderson
Airness - Nina “THE NINA” O’neal
Charisma/stage presence - David “D VICIOUS” Cooper

¹² Ethnomusicology Today podcast: “Embodying Air Guitar with Sydney Hutchinson and Byrd McDaniel,” August 28, 2018. https://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=156353&id=754686