

# USIC 2026 Contest Rules

Please see the Walnut Valley Festival (“WVF”) rules at: [Contest Rules | Walnut Valley Festival](#).

The USIC 2026 rules are basically the same as the WVF rules as far as they can be reasonably applied to the USIC 2026 contest, with some differences, as noted below. Please follow the WVF rules as they pertain to your specific instrument category.

## **A few rules, based on the WVF rules, repeated here for emphasis:**

- All contestants are to prepare four numbers, two numbers for the first round and two for a second round in case of a tie.
- Maximum playing time: five minutes total for each round.
- Contestants must play instruments acoustically into a microphone. An instrument’s electrical capability cannot be used. You may retune your instrument between instrumental numbers using a portable electronic tuner. BE AWARE that time spent retuning your instrument on stage will be included as part of the recommended Maximum Total Playing time of 5 minutes per round.
- Contestants will not be allowed to take two instruments on stage.
- A medley of tunes is not acceptable.
- Speaking and/or singing is not allowed on stage.
- Judging criteria will be the same as the WVF “General Rules...” (see above link)
- Score cards will not be given out.

## **A few differences which are unique to the USIC 2026 contest:**

This year there are no restrictions based on age, past winnings, or membership in a band. All categories are “open”. Note: this policy may or may not continue in coming years.

All contestants will be playing “solo”. Accompanists are not allowed.

The rules for the “**Clawhammer Banjo**” category will be the same as the WVF “Bluegrass Banjo” rules, except the difference is in the *style of playing*. An observable difference is that Clawhammer style uses only the fingers and thumb – no picks. Bluegrass style uses picks.

The rules for the “**Upright Bass**” category are the same as the other instruments except any playing technique is allowed, including the use of a bow.

Please note that only the Flatpick Guitar, Fingerstyle Guitar, Bluegrass Banjo and Mandolin categories are accredited by WVF. The Clawhammer Banjo and Upright Bass categories are unique to the USIC contest.