



OBSERVATION AND COMMUNICATION

PART 1 - OBSERVATION TECHNIQUES

1.1 RECOGNITION OF CRITERIA

- A. Recognizing and comprehending what you are observing, responding clearly and effectively, and rewarding the accomplishment is a judge's job. The successful judge will see more than the obvious, will work to have a deeper understanding of the show and provide a concise response.
- B. Successful Execution judges are technically educated in dance techniques and movement expression and recognize the training, development and achievement of the performer. Successful Content judges begin with knowledge of choreographic skills and techniques, principles of visual design, and coordination of visual and musical elements. Successful Overall Effect judges recognize the pacing and planning of the show, respond to effects that are intellectual and aesthetic as well as the emotional.
- C. Mental Process
 - 1. Assessment is the act of considering, measuring, calculating the value of what you have viewed. It is the act of analysis, examination, scrutiny, breakdown, and appraisal. It requires a cognitive process of weighing many factors to determine its level of significance (or point value.)
 - 2. Assessment is an intellectual process. It is not a response or reaction; it is not an opinion or judgment. It is not a notion or feeling; it is not a point of view or personal preference.
 - 3. Evaluation is not personalized or random. It is an objective appraisal based on score sheet criteria.
 - 4. We evaluate the level achievement of specific ideas (sub-captions) under generalize rules (linear scale). The sheets **describe** the level of achievement; it is your training, experience, and mental process that align the visual with the written description.
- D. Judges must identify their own preferences and biases. Identify concepts you expect or want to see from a performance. And then, LEAVE IT BEHIND! This is not saying judges prefer certain styles or teams, it is saying that judges have an inclination to talk about how *they* would create the show.
 - 1. Too often, judges are unconsciously expecting to see elements based on their comfort zones, such as a generalized stereotype of what the activity looks like each year, or concepts they easily recognize and can relate to. This demonstrates that judges are not reading the intent of the program and helping it grow on its terms. Problems are created for programs trying to present new ideas but find judges are not open minded enough to go beyond their own experiences.

1.2 EXAMINATION

- A. There are many types of judging professions. The doctor evaluates the symptoms and diagnosis the illness. The teacher collates the test scores and determines the grading curve. The performance critic watches a show and writes a judgment for the paper. While each of these judges uses a different process of conclusion - the doctor analyzes, the teacher compares, the critic interprets - they all have an end result in common.



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They educate by prescribing antidotes, rewarding achievement and expressing enjoyment.

- B. In relation to the three captions that have been determined as criteria for evaluation - Execution, Content, and Overall Effect - there are also three different methods of observation associated with the evaluation, in general. Specific methods of observation have a direct correlation to the type of criteria/caption being measured and are tools to converting subjective perceptions into numerical scores with the use of the Linear Scale.

1. Comparison

- a. Comparison is starting with a basis of reference and then examining something else to meet that same basis. It is contrasting one person to another, one group to another. It is frequently used to examine alignment and intervals in formations. "Sampling" or focusing on random individual performers allows for comparing similarities and differences in posture, technique, initiation, etc. This process is most often used by the Execution judge but also by all judges when determining scores/ranks between teams.

2. Analysis

- a. Analysis is the consideration of the separate parts of an item and their relation to each other. In this activity, there are design elements common to all performance, such as choreography, form, and time. These components are isolated and analyzed for their relationship and suitability to each other. In that suitability there are standard principles of design which should be used during evaluation and should be free from personal bias. Analysis is also used in breaking down the components of Content and understanding the training within Technique.

3. Impression

- a. Impression is a strong effect produced on the intellect, feelings or conscience. It is a subjective response or immediate reaction. A judge using impression for evaluation should be aware of initial responses such as emotions, intrigue, enjoyment, etc. and should be able to identify the 'visual' element that provokes that response. While personal impression is the *subjectivity*, the displayed visual or audio element is the *objectivity* to provide reasoning to the evaluation.

1.3 ASSESSMENT

- A. Judges should use ALL of the above observation skills in the assessment process, which ever the caption. But Analysis must be a part of the mental process to maintain objectivity. An evaluation based solely on impression or comparison has no reasoning behind it. Reasoning is your first step towards accountability to the score sheets and the teams.
- B. Analysis is the mental process of breaking down the visual components and identifying the **Who – What – Why** that must be communicated in your comments. And identifying the Who – What – Why will tell you **how** to communicate those comments (in terms of Teacher – Counselor – Critic.)



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- C. Understanding all the observation skills will help each judge understand where they lean and hopefully provide more objectivity to the process. Analysis of the inner self will let each judge identify when they are being influenced by other captions such as:
 - 1. Unconsciously contrasting the current team's technical or precision level with another you have just seen, without identifying the influencing factors of style and design.
 - 2. Identifying vocabulary and composition without relating them to the theme, concept, or intent of the entire program.
 - 3. Being over- (or under) whelmed and unable to identify how your emotion was created.
- D. Analysis of the sheets will help the judge stay in caption. In-depth understanding of the criteria of a caption and its relationship to the other captions is imperative. Staying within the caption and not being influenced by the other elements in the performance should be a major concern for all judges."
- E. Judges are to identify the intent of each individual program and evaluate how well that show communicates that intent. Every show is put together differently. Judges are to distinguish those differences and support growth that may not be in the norm. Make sure that as a judge, you are not projecting what you think a program should contain. Evaluate only the elements the show is projecting based on the Linear Scale/Score Sheet.
 - 1. Understanding the intent of a performance requires judges to be bit **intuitive** about what the performers and designers want to achieve. It means getting involved (impression) with their process as well as observing (analysis) the outcome, being insightful. A judge's past experience as a judge, coach, or designer will be an important reference to determining intent, achievement level, scoring level, and how to communicate.
 - 2. Being able to step back and look at the bigger picture is important to identifying the overall strengths, weakness, processes, patterns, and visual issues. Stepping away from the performance is the opportunity for analysis of the overall (as opposed to the smaller elements) and do recap comments. This recap/'step-back' is not only beneficial to the team but also to the judge verbally identifying one team from another (comparison).

PART 2 - COMMUNICATION

2.1 RECORDED COMMENTARY

- A. The recorded performance critique is a means for the judge to provide a verbal explanation of the scores written on the sheets. It provides the teams and coaches with a dialog of information on how the judge views the show being presented.
- B. Judges should provide evaluations that are concise, comprehensive, objective, and show reasoning. While comments from judge to judge will not be the same, use of included guidelines will offer a reflection of consistent training from judge to judge, a comprehensive use of the score sheet, and a objective process to creating a verbal evaluation.
- C. Along with information about the visual program, the recording can reveal much about the personality, character and experience of the judge. A judge's credibility will be on



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the line if they have poor voice or speaking quality, lack grammar or sentence structure, fumble for correct terminology, or misunderstand the criteria. It is important that each new judge coming into the program already possess a certain degree of “verbal confidence” about the basic principles of public speaking and rehearse the skills needed to personify a professional and trained judge.

- D. Commentary should be a running dialog of positive and constructive observations, using qualitative terms to describe the achievement of the program.
- E. Towards the end of the performance, the judge should start summarizing the team’s strengths and weaknesses, and identify key issues that should be addressed by the team. This “recap” will help the judge conclude their assessment and clarify for the team their achievement.

2.2 DIGITAL RECORDING

- A. All performance judges will use the Olympus WS-100 64 MB Digital Voice Recorder with USB Interface.
- B. When using digital recorders, the judge should record the following introduction sequence at the beginning of the recording, to allow for early confirmation that the correct team and judge is being downloaded:
 - 1. Name of the TEAM being judged.
 - 2. Name of the JUDGE.
 - 3. CAPTION being judged.
 - 4. Name & date of the COMPETITION.
 - 5. A friendly but neutral greeting.
- C. The Olympus digital recorder creates a file each time it is turned on and off. To create only ONE file per team, judges **cannot use the** STOP button after they start recording. Judges will have to start recording at the beginning of a program, use the RECORD button again to pause OR just keep the recorder continuously running until the end of performance. Once the performance is done, hit STOP, so that a new file will be created for the next team.
- D. Downloading Digital Recordings
 - 1. Between rounds, each judge’s recorder will be downloaded, each team’s evaluations collected and either burned onto a CD or emailed to the Head Coach within a couple days.

2.3 AUDIO CASSETTE

- A. If cassette tape recorders are to be used, the clerk should run the tape forward past the leader tape before turning the recorder over to the judge. Before the team begins its performance, the judge should record an introduction at the beginning of the tape. The following are suggested:
 - 1. Name of the TEAM being judged.
 - 2. Name of the JUDGE.
 - 3. CAPTION being judged.
 - 4. Name & date of the COMPETITION.



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5. A friendly but neutral greeting.

- B. Judges should avoid a time lag on the tape between the opening comments and the actual judging comments. The pause button can be used to stop taping after the opening or by filling the time with a general comment on the team, yet making it clear that judging has not yet begun. Judges should keep the recorder continuously running once a team has begun its performance until the end of performance.

2.4 COMMENTS

A. Reward System

- 1. The scoring system used by the Judges' Affiliation is based on accomplishment. Judges should approach recognizing this accomplishment in terms of the depth of achievement and not on isolated single errors. Even in situations where a team is poorly trained and the show's composition is poorly constructed, the recorded observations should be delivered in terms of achievement. It is not within this system to search for weaknesses as a means to justify a score or placement.

- B. Most judges come out of activity having once been a performer and/or coach. Because of this background, judges can identify with performers, understand the creative process of instructors and enjoy watching the growth and development of both. It is with this experience and enthusiasm that the judge should motivate both students and instructors to work toward their best.

- C. Recorded criticisms should be constructive. Besides pointing out discrepancies and weaknesses, credit should be given for strengths and good points of the team and its show. Weaknesses should be identified as constructive criticism and supported with suggestions for improvement. Comments should be formed as way to improve as opposed to stating the weakness without way to improve. If a weakness is identified, a team generally welcomes suggestions made by a judge as to how that weakness may be corrected.

- D. Care should be taken to avoid wording comments in such a way they may embarrass any team member or advisor. A team enjoys a positive, excited judge. The judge's manner and tone of voice should be expressive and honest and should be presented in such a way that the delivery is not offensive. Judges should keep in mind that the recordings may be played for team members and/or parents, so emotions should be expressed in a positive, constructive manner.

- E. Judges should not take their eyes off the performing team and should record comments while the team in performing.

- F. Judges should be making comments about **who** they are watching, **what** they are seeing, **how** well it is being achieved, and **why** it is being achieved. Judges should not refer to themselves when giving verbal critique. Do not say, "I think the leaps are..." or "I would like to see..." It is all about the team and the performance, not about the judge.

- G. Comments should be consistent with the points given on the score sheet. For example, a judge should not continually use the word "excellent" on the recording, then, assign an average score. However, it is still possible for a judge to refer to a particular aspect



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or portion of the show as excellent while still assigning the team an overall average or below average score.

- H. Be explicit. Avoid excessive general comments. Keep up with the show as it is being performed; provide a running commentary throughout the show. Avoid "going off" on only one element of the show or aspect of the score sheet. Offer a balance of comments on all the sub-captions.
- I. All methods of evaluation - Comparison, Analysis, and Impression – should be used to communicate **why** (or why not) the performance is achieving its intent. This requires each judge to know their caption in depth and be able to explain the technical components of the performance that are contributing to the achievement. Each caption judge will use analysis to explain his or her responses. (No longer can an Effect judge say that they "enjoy the performance," or that the "music offers excitement" without explaining what elements are creating those effects.)
- J. Dance and design terminology should be used so comments can be specific and appropriate to the show.
- K. Recaps at the end of performances should be brief and focus on major strengths and weaknesses.

2.5 NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

- A. Effective communication is to know who you are talking to and speak in terms they will understand and appreciate. The judge may have to play many roles to connect with the variety of coaches and teams they meet.
 - 1. Teacher
 - a. The judging of young, novice teams requires a nurturing attitude of encouragement for minor successes, speaking in basic terms, presenting basic principles of achievement, and offering goals for their level. The judge can be seen as a mentor and contributor to the development of a team.
 - 2. Counselor
 - a. At the next level, there are teams which are not new to performance, have experienced some success and may be reluctant to accept suggestions or explore new directions. These teams may be at a point of just developing their identity and own opinions, finding a security in their methods. For the judge it becomes more difficult to talk to these teams on their own level and help them reach for further growth. They no longer need to hear about the basics but how to expand on what they are already trying to accomplish. The judge becomes the advisor, recognizing the developing identity and style and assisting in that direction.
 - 3. Critic
 - a. The mature teams come to the arena no longer needing the teacher or counselor. They look to the judge to be an educated viewer, to recognize their capabilities, and to understand their methods. These teams will have moments of brilliance setting new standards of creativity and achievement and require a dialogue equal in understanding to the complexities of their design.



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- b. At this point, the judge must challenge them, encouraging them to set even higher goals and give credit to their development. It may be most helpful to this team for the judge to just respond only to what is being presented and allow the team to interpret the comments. It isn't always necessary to find fault within the program if evaluating the program is beyond the judges' experience.

PART 3 - WORDS TO NUMBERS

- A. **"The first priority** for judges should be to analyze each performance and score accordingly. Judges should NOT place teams in an overall ranking and then attempt to score each caption to justify that ranking."
- B. Making verbal statements is another step of the cognitive process which is confirming the assessment. If possible, listen to what comments are being made. "Think" in the same terms of the Linear Scale.
- C. **KNOW YOUR SCORE SHEET LINEAR SCALE!** The Linear Scale is written with qualitative words defined by numbers to help you quantify your assessment. Your scores become YOUR VISUAL LINEAR SCALE of reference, for each event throughout the season. Your linear scale is your standard – know every point of it before walking into an event.
- D. Assess that like caption and sub-caption scores represent like performances. Use comparison between scores to confirm rankings of caption and sub-caption scores.
- E. Reference to Linear Scale Boxes to express performance quality and achievement is appropriate. Further divide those numbers into smaller groupings of available numbers to help narrow down the score. (Numbers Management.)
- F. Be able to define each line of the Linear Scale with a description of the exact visual criteria being demonstrated. (Example: Choreography score of 68: a variety of vocabulary and skills such as turns, extension, balance, leaps, and speed are seen, some compound – mostly singular. Lack of development of breath, weight change, phrasing, physical expression, use of entire body, staging, and complex ensemble responsibility. Spatial responsibilities are limited to front/back, often stagnant and individual.)
- G. "All judges must share a consistent, collective understanding and application of the DDCA Judges' Affiliation philosophy." Please be a representative of the JA's focus, direction, value system when making your decisions. Consistency in each judge, judge to judge, event to event, will give your scores more credibility.