

The Language of Adjudication

Adjudication: A Positive Experience for ALL

Gary Packwood, D.M.A.
Interim, Director of Choral Activities
Head, Music Education
University of Montevallo

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The Adjudicators Process

Characteristics of the Effective Adjudicator

The teacher who instantly can grasp what is needed and effectively communicate musical and technical concepts clearly to the performer may have what it takes to be an effective judge at a music festival.

Warning: don't be misled by the title, "adjudicator". An adjudicator is not one scouting for errors (as a policeman with his radar gun watching for speeding motorists). The adjudicator is an educator, but that does not mean that in some way you are superior to the director or performer. The adjudicator's role is to work with the instructor to help the performers reach their musical potential.

- Adjudicators must be committed to young people and the development of their musical potential. The student must come first!
- Adjudicators must have knowledge of the mechanics of vocal production.
- Adjudicators must possess an understanding of all styles and periods of choral and vocal literature.
- Adjudicators must be able to communicate clearly, honestly, tactfully, and professionally.
- Adjudicators must work without bias, personal feelings, or attitudes.
- Adjudicators must possess enthusiasm in any situation.

Students tend to believe that what is said or written by an adjudicator is definitive and that the adjudicator must be an authority on the subject (unless, of course, they know you!). The privilege of adjudicating is a sacred trust, if not an awesome responsibility.

The most successful adjudicators possess a strong empathy for others, truly understand their positions, and have the ability to communicate in a way that draws others to them. It will do little good to possess all the technical knowledge in the world if no one listens, or if the manner of speech turns the listener off. Much of the study of learning to adjudicate must be in the area of communication.

Communication skills and understanding people are the keys to success. These include body language, attitude, tone of voice, delivery of observations, and techniques that present impressions in a positive and non-threatening manner.

Good communications skills help produce proper taped commentary as well as written comments.

A FEW GENERAL REMINDERS

- Be confident in yourself as an adjudicator and as an educator. Be honest – your voice and manner tells all.
- Be enthusiastic. You must love participating in the adjudication process for people to believe in you and trust your judgments.
- Understand your listener. Always see things from the other person's point of view, as well as your own. Understand the pressures of performing at festival, and draw others to you by making them feel important.
- Be prepared and knowledgeable in the area in which you will adjudicate. Don't fake your way through it—review, if necessary, before every judging situation. If you're unprepared, you invite loss of confidence.
- Have a sense of humor. Take the responsibility of adjudication seriously but don't take yourself seriously. Laugh at yourself from time to time.
- Develop your speech skills. This requires commitment and time. Consider taking a class. The tone of your voice speaks more than words. Don't babble – be concise, clear, and succinct. Tone of voice reflects attitude and personality – work to develop a variety of voice inflections, volumes, and mannerisms to maintain interest.
- Don't hesitate. This can suggest uncertainty to the listener.
- Provide complete thoughts – the listener can't read your mind.
- Be consistent in your commentary. Be certain that your written comments reflect your oral commentary.
- Evaluate only the tangible elements of the performance with concrete statements. Avoid making judgments concerning performers' attitudes, commitment, or dedication.

CRITERIA REFERENCE ADJUDICATION

OVERVIEW AND APPLICATION

Criteria reference is a rubric that serves to standardize adjudication throughout a festival or competition. Used correctly, different adjudicators in various locations may apply the same, consistent standard to achieve a specific rating level. It is designed to provide more objectivity to the evaluation process, but is not intended to make the process less personal.

On the back side of the adjudicator's evaluation sheet there are three categories, each with five grade levels. It is important for the adjudicator to become more than familiar with the descriptions under each grade level – not only for the purpose of assigning the appropriate grade, but also for referring to these descriptions during commentary, whether taped or written.

This system provides accountability and consistency. Criteria reference guides the director and students to specific musical goals. Its intent is to reward vocal excellence, musical creativity, and performance preparation. At the same time it serves to educate beginners and encourages them to grow and achieve their fullest artistic potential.

Criteria reference adjudication requires that the appropriate grade, based upon the descriptions under each category, be applied to each category without bias. There is a "gray area" in which the adjudicator may consider other factors. The adjudicator must be satisfied that the final rating is the result of the three categorical ratings. If the final rating is not what the adjudicator intended, it may be necessary for him/her to revisit the categorical grades. However, any changes must be warranted and reflect oral or written commentary.

Adjudicators hear only what is presented at one specific moment. They cannot evaluate a choir or ensemble based on previous reputation, whether good or bad, nor upon personal preference. Ratings must reflect the degree of achievement of the criteria.

TAPED COMMENTARY AND GENERAL TECHNIQUES

GENERAL TECHNIQUES

- Adjudicators may be provided with a cassette tape recorder (usually portable) by the district chairman. Pre-test your recorder to make sure it is working properly, and so that you are familiar with its functions. If you adjudicate frequently, it would be a good idea to purchase your own recorder, so that you are comfortable with it. The adjudicator should choose the technique with which he/she is most comfortable. The best evaluation occurs when the adjudicator is relaxed, focused, and not pressured.
- Begin with a pleasant but functional greeting, that should include the event, your name, and that you are looking forward to hearing the performance.
- Clear, specific dialog is important. Avoid using vocabulary that is not clearly understood, and at the same time, use a wide range of terminology.
- Use the “Tripe C” approach: COMPLIMENT, provide CRITICISM, and conclude with a COURSE OF ACTION that will inspire the director and students to improve.
- Address the problem, not the singer.
- Quick decisions and responses are essential. There is no time to observe, mull over, contemplate, and make suggestions at the **next** rehearsal. Judgments and teaching must be done **now**, on the spot. A good judge instantly recognizes the primary target for improvement and makes meaningful comments.

- Be very specific in your observations of weaknesses and their causes. Do not get bogged down with a single issue. Offer clear suggestions and recommendations for improvement. This may best be done following the performance.
- Remember, no matter how weak a performance, the director and students have worked hard to achieve it! Even comments concerning weaknesses should be laced with empathy.
- Short, concise words of praise during the performance should be used at every opportunity.
- Adjudicators should avoid proving how high their standards are by assigning low ratings and giving negative comments. Adjudication is all about evaluating, teaching, motivating, and inspiring. Demeaning or rude comments are unacceptable.
- Maintain a low speaking volume, so as not to interfere with the performers or audience.
- Give care to your penmanship so that your written comments are legible. You might consider bringing your own mechanical pencil, since wooden pencils are difficult to keep sharpened.
- Within the weakest performance a skilled adjudicator can always find something positive to say. Thank the group for their performance.

Reference: The Adjudicator's Training Handbook of the Florida Vocal Association, Dale Choate and Mark Scott, 1999.