



SEARS ONTARIO DRAMA FESTIVAL

ADJUDICATION EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

EXPECTATIONS:

Adjudicators are hired based on their expertise as theatre professionals and/or drama/theatre educators. Their sensitivity to participants' feelings and their ability to both teach and communicate are paramount to the adjudication process.

A good adjudication would likely contain the following:

- Positive reinforcement to the company concerning what was done well.
- Coherent suggestions to help the company improve in areas where it could do better.
- Creative alternatives, where applicable, to choices made by the company.
- Balanced, detailed commentary between on-stage and off-stage participants.
- A dialogue between the adjudicator and participants.
- Sensitivity toward all participants and a comprehension of any limitations faced by the company.

Public Adjudication should not exceed 15 minutes at the end of the evening. This adjudication should approach each of the productions in order of appearance. The public adjudication should consist of a *positive* general assessment of each production and include the adjudicator's impressions with particular emphasis on significant points within each production. Finding thematic connections between the productions and contextualizing the backgrounds of scripts would help to sum up the evening. Comments on individual performances should be avoided unless they are of special interest. Any weaknesses perceived in the production can be referred to but coupled with positive reinforcement of the whole. Under no circumstances should productions be compared regarding the value of each.

Private Adjudication ideally could last 20 minutes for each production (depending upon available time) should the private adjudication be scheduled at the end of an evening's performances. In the case of following day adjudications this time frame might be expanded for each production (again time permitting). Each private adjudication should consist of a detailed assessment of the production centering on individuals' work. Leading comments should be employed to encourage dialogue between the adjudicator and participants. The adjudicator should encourage questions and ideas from participants on specific topics regarding the production. Though a more critical attitude is appropriate in private adjudications it should be tempered with constant positive reinforcement and coupled with creative and concrete suggestions for improvement. The adjudicator should avoid criticism of teacher-directors in the presence of their students.

GUIDELINES:

The most useful adjudications are those which delve into the details of production and performance. Though it's difficult to consider the many disciplines involved in a production, and to be expert in each, it's a good idea to attempt to visit every area of the performance. The following consists of suggestions regarding specific areas of production and performance that might be covered.

Choice of Script: The adjudicator should be familiar with the script, having read and researched it in advance of the performance. The script should be read without the adjudicator placing a particular interpretation upon it. Personal feelings regarding script or style should not enter into the adjudication unless the adjudicator feels the script may create unfortunate controversy. In that case it might be a good idea to contact the venue facilitator regarding doubts or queries far in advance of the scheduled performance. Barring that sort of situation, the adjudicator should consider the script for:

- What kinds of challenges the script offers a director, actors, designers and technicians.
- Whether the script is written by a student or teacher, or whether it is an extant script by an established playwright.
- The script's potential social or artistic impact.

Set Design:

- Is the set safe?
- Is the set practical, offering a variety of acting areas and clear entrances and exits?
- Does it reflect the intention of the script?
- Does it capture the mood and style of the production?
- Is it adaptable to a variety of venues?
- Is the set dressing detailed and intriguing? Does it convey necessary information?
- Does it *recede* once the actors enter, or is it distracting in any way?
- How might the set or set dressing be improved? (Color, line, focus, depth, practicalities, etc.)
- If there are set changes, do they occur seamlessly within the performance?
- Are there alternatives to the choices made?

Lighting:

- Does the lighting capture the mood and style of the play?
- Does it convey necessary information? (time, place, season, etc.)
- How well are the light pools used to create focus?
- How effective is the use of *specials*.
- Is the lighting executed correctly or is it distracting in any way?
- Are the cues well timed and executed? Consider the number of cues.
- Specifically, how could the lighting be improved?
- Are there alternatives to the choices made?

Sound:

- Is the choice of sound effects, mood music and additional effect music adequate?
- Are the levels correct and balanced with the actors' voices?
- Are the cues well timed and executed? Consider the number of cues.
- Does the soundscape fit the mood and style of the play?

Costumes:

- Do the costumes complement the set and lighting designs?
- Do they enhance the mood and style of the play?
- How much information do they provide regarding period, place & character?
- How much detail has been worked into the costumes?
- Do any costumes prove distracting in any way, constricting movement or splitting focus?
- If any, how are quick changes handled during the performance?

Properties:

- Do properties contribute to the total *stage picture*?
- Is use of hand props appropriate? Do they add information to the set?
- Are properties employed to enhance actors' performances?
- Do they get in the way of the actors or detract from the performances?
- Are there alternatives to the use of certain props?

Hair & Make Up:

- Is hair preparation and make up appropriate to the period, place and characters?
- Do they convey the style of the play?
- Is make up over done, or under done, considering the venue?
- Are there any special hair styles or make up required by the script?
- Is the construction of wigs, masks or make up notable in any way?
- Is hair or make up distracting at all?

Acting: There are so many elements to acting the guidelines here can be sub-divided.

Characterization:

- Does the actor appear to thoroughly comprehend his/her character?
- Does the actor appear to understand both *context* and *subtext*?
- Is the character interpreted clearly, and is that interpretation unusual or original in any way? Is there a *magnetism* apparent in the performance?
- What clear choices have been made in the development of characters?
- Is the character convincing and believable at all times?
- Does the actor remain in character when he/she is not the focus?
- Is the character clearly motivated in his/her actions?
- Is the character *over acted* in any way?
- How successfully has the actor physicalized and internalized the character he/she is portraying?
- Are there other choices regarding character that may not have been considered?

Vocal Work:

- Does the actor have clear and articulated speech?
- Is projection strong enough for everyone in the audience to hear distinctly?
- Is the emotional reality of the character revealed through breathing and phrasing?
- Does the actor employ an accent? Is it consistent and appropriate to time, place and character?
- Has the actor altered his/her voice to achieve stronger verisimilitude of character?
- Are the actor's rate and pace and inflection appropriate?
- Are there alternatives to the actor's choices?

Ensemble Work:

- Are all elements of the performances contributing to the overall success of the show?
- Do actors appear to *listen* to other characters and so respond appropriately?
- Is choral speech clear and harmonized well?
- Are the actors' performances *integrated* with the others on stage or do you find more *individual* performances?
- Is there a balance in the level of performance or do the leads dominate?
- How effortlessly do the actors appear to integrate their movement in blocking?

Direction: Once again, criticism of the director is a delicate area and must be coupled with sensitivity toward his/her position regarding the cast and crew. Consideration should be given to whether the play is student or teacher directed. Any critical comment should be offered in a positive vein and, if possible, in a private discussion with the director. Often a discussion of *choices* will deflect negativity and provide a useful dialogue with the director. Again, because of the complexities in directing, elements can be sub-divided.

Craftsmanship:

- Does the director comprehend the principles behind blocking, use of space, triangulation and visual focus?
- Does the blocking appear to arise from motivation within characters?
- What degree of success has the director achieved in creating an appropriate mood for the play through lighting, sound, movement and pace?
- How appropriate are the director's choices in costume, set dressing, properties, make up, etc.?
- How well does the director build the play to a climax and use anticlimax to pace the play?
- Do the actors appear to have been challenged to create nuanced performances?

Artistic Choices:

- How well has the director *read* the play and understood the intentions of the playwright?
- Has the director provided a unique or unusual interpretation of the play?
- How successful has the director been in bringing the entire company to a state of believable performance?
- How naturally do all aspects of the production blend together?
- Are there alternative choices to those the director has selected?

Dance & Choreography:

- Is there a clear purpose to the dance or choreographed movement in the play?
- Does the choreography reflect the mood and style of the production?
- Is the dancing well executed?
- Is the choreography original and innovative?
- How well does the choreographer employ the space?
- Is the choreographer a *student*?

Singing:

- Is there a clear purpose for singing in the production?
- Are the voices strong and clear?
- How well are the songs interpreted and executed?
- Are the harmonies accomplished and well executed?
- Is there balance between the voices and the orchestra or sound source?

Musical Direction:

- How effectively does the musical director interpret the score? Is it an intelligent and sensitive interpretation? Is it unusual or unique in any way?
- Has the musical director succeeded in transmitting his/her interpretation to the orchestra?
- Has the best possible performance been elicited from the orchestra?
- Does the orchestra properly accompany the singers?
- Is the music *student* written? Is the musical director a student?

Production Values: This segment is, of course, an overview of the production and performance. Was I impressed with the rendition of this play? Was I impressed with the effort? Did I think there were memorable moments? Did I get a sense that the production's stage manager ran a tight and seamless show? Was the audience caught up in the show and how did the audience react by curtain? There are so many factors to this part of adjudication that this segment is most likely to be the one that determines an adjudicator's decisions.

- Does the show start on time? Is it within the time frames for set up (10 minutes) and strike (5 minutes)? Is it within the performance time frames (15 – 50 minutes)?
- Given the often limited resources of groups, how effectively do the set designers, costume designers, lighting & sound designers, props people, and others contribute to the atmosphere of the production? Are they *students*?
- Are there any especially significant production values? (i.e. original music composition, special effects, masks, style, etc.)
- How successfully has the production maintained the audience's willing suspension of disbelief?
- How successfully has each actor discovered the inner truth of his/her character's emotional reality and reactions to the plot's convolutions?
- What was the emotional impact the play had upon *me* as a whole?

AWARDS:

Always difficult and sometimes controversial, this is the toughest part of adjudication. On the one hand it's wonderful to award deserving students but on the opposite side, so many others must be left out. Remember to always check the program to be sure the award is going to a *student* and that it is truly that student's work. Consider, if you have the time, explaining to the audience *why* you feel the student deserves this award in a few well chosen words.

It's a good idea, in keeping with the positive atmosphere of adjudication, that everyone goes home with some affirmation of their work regarding *Awards of Merit*. It's also often best, though at times there will be exceptions, to spread the *Awards of Excellence* beyond one or two productions.

But there shouldn't be any surprises. Consider how people would feel if a show had received no Awards of Excellence yet was chosen to advance to the next level of the Festival. And shows should not be ranked. It should be made clear to the audience that the awards for *Outstanding Production* are given in no order of value.

And most significantly, the selection of a production to advance should be based on the *quality of the production on the evening it was adjudicated*, not on whether it was student or teacher directed or if you believe it had great potential unrealized in the show you saw, or what you've heard about its performance on other evenings or whether you believe the script, style or genre to be superb or awful.

Adjudication should be objective, sensitive, and limited to the performance the adjudicator witnessed.