

2025 WGI Color Guard Steering Committee Report

Live Meeting — Dallas, Texas

This was the first live meeting since 2020. These live meetings are critical to move beyond only meeting short term needs into conversations considering long-term vision and practices. The Committee thanks all involved in making this meeting possible.

About this Document-

This report must live beyond the season it describes. This is a document of record that includes the context for conversations and decisions. You will notice that many items will be revisited in the future. No decision is considered permanent and the way and the why decisions are made will be key to these future conversations. This document is meant to reflect the context of the time, in order to project further development in the future.

There is a supplemental document, that will take a more surface perspective, with only the essential information on what decisions were made. This will be made available with this report and in the Instructor HUB.

Initially-

Ron spoke to the committee further concerning internal issues and understanding the role and boundaries of the committee.

Reorientation-Karl

- Boundaries of the committee
- Though it is personal experience and accomplishment that get us here, our advocacy must go beyond personal interests and branding.
- Essential informal format of meeting
- How decisions are made
- How information is released
- Shift in expectations, both internal and external, as we are now defined by our membership on the committee.

Items forwarded, for clarification, to the committee from the Board of Directors-

Proposal #3-

This proposal establishes guidelines for determining the number of rounds at any contest with a focus on creating smaller numbers of units in each round.

We were asked to define process for odd numbered rounds judged by separate panels at both Championships and Regional+ events.

The committee recommends, we follow the solution presented in the proposal...

- Any time rounds are judged by separate panels, we will create an even number of rounds to balance the contests. This will happen by rounding up to the next number of rounds in order to honor the intent of keeping rounds smaller.

We were then asked how units should progress through qualifying rounds in these scenarios.

The committee recommends, we honor the agreements presented during the A and Open Caucus...

- When progressing into the next round of competition over multi-paneled contests, the highest scores across all rounds will progress into the next qualifying round.

These policies will hold true for all Regionals and Championships where qualifying rounds for a given class, are judged by separate panels.

Proposal #22 –

This proposal considers tied units from Prelims progressing forward into Semi-Finals. The proposal requires that tied units from Prelims go on in the same performance position in separate rounds, instead of back-to-back in the same round. (The back-to-back policy caused imbalanced rounds at championships in 2025, especially in instances of 3-way ties.)

We were asked how the initial tie is broken and how to determine who goes on in an earlier vs. later round. It's important to know that all units are assigned, by computer, a random number for each contest. In the past, this was used to break ties in lieu of a coin flip.

The committee recommends ...

- Computer generated assignment of numbers for each contest, will remain in place for all classes.
- In a tied situation, the group with the lowest number goes on later. This is consistent with how order was determined in 2025's back-to-back situations.

Other Scheduling Considerations –

Concrete finish time for Regionals

We have grown into situations where it is common for Sunday Regional Finals to extend to and past 5:00PM. For 2026, WGI is creating a concrete finish time of 4:30PM.

We have a policy that requires percentages of units to move into Finals. (100% of Worlds, 75% of Opens, 50% of A groups). At larger Regionals, about 5, these percentages force Finals beyond the 4:30 target.

The committee was asked, how should percentages be adjusted in order meet the 4:30 target in these larger contests?

The committee recommends ...

- When possible, the original percentages should be honored.
- When needed, Dale and those that work on finalizing schedules will negotiate these percentages upon close of registration, once the number of groups in each class for Prelims is established.
- We currently have a policy where we do not cut just one group from one qualifying round to the next. Cutting numbers requires at least 2 groups that do not progress. The Steering Committee asks that this policy remain in place as we consider these scheduling adjustments.
- New wording...

“For two-day Regional+ events, the standard regional finalist formula (100% World, 75% Open, 50% A) will be utilized unless the total number of finalists exceeds 40 groups. If the total number of finalists exceeds 40 groups, WGI will adjust the formula.”

It's important to remember that each class has different interval times. Creating a fixed alternative guideline in percentages cannot be applied equally across each situation with consistent effectiveness. In this first year of the 4:30 target, we trust that scheduling will keep the spirit of the original percentages when possible and lower the number of units when essential, with all classes willing to diminish their percentages if required. This includes the World Classes.

Review of Judge Sheet changes from 2025 and needs to adjust for 2026-

World Class Descriptors of Class Standards (top of sheet)-

For 2026 we will adjust both World Class Sheets to:

“Advanced to Virtuosoic”

- This better reflects the realities of some of the eventual finalists into those classes.
 - We expect to revisit and adjust this descriptor as abilities in these classes grow.
- Groups will still be judged based on the proofs they offer. This is not a loophole into disproportionate reward.
- *Standard-setting* was eventually dropped, as a stated class standard, with the elimination of Box 6 (see below)
- We did not see that percentages in the A and Open Classes required adjustments to the 2025 descriptors.
 - A - *Intermediate*
 - Open - *Advanced*

Craftsmanship on all sheets-

For 2026 - No adjustment from 2025

- This was felt as a useful tool for judges and incentive for instructors towards better attention to detail and the elevation of shows and performances considering all captions.
- The next step is needed considering judge training items
- Craftsmanship is easiest seen in its absence. So how to recognize, “Crafted to what degree?” in both commentary and scoring, when units may not offer opportunities to comment or credit.

Safety and Compatibility-

For 2026 - No adjustment from 2025

Risk on all World Class sheets-

For 2026 - No adjustment from 2025

- The concept of “*World Class Risks*” needs continued discussion and supplemental judge training.
- The intention is to broaden the definition of risk without creating a loophole for the lack of effort or risks seen as unsuccessful or unworthy of world class acknowledgement.
- Includes subtlety, nuance, and being vulnerable in terms of exposure

...Sample of salient conversational points to aid in context and clarification:

Inherent risk exists in all skills. It is the point of development of the performers and designers that makes the risk more or less significant.

As an example, consider throwing a double:

The expectations of each class require us to acknowledge that the risk associated with throwing a double is different when comparing Regional A Class and World Class. The risk still exists but it is diminished by the assumed capabilities of World Class performers.

The World Class intent is in acknowledging that risk can be defined by the exceptional abilities of World Class performers

Exceptional performers with exceptional abilities are able to deliver a wide range of exceptional risks that are not necessarily available to the Open Class units. It is the exceptional aspect of the World Class that makes its risks worthy of the point of comparison.

Risk is cumulative and not an expectation of every count. Risk is simply another tool in the compositional, programmatic, choreographic, and performance kits.

What makes a risk World Class if, on the surface, it looks as though an Open Class or A Class performer could deliver it? Can we find the World Class aspect if it exists? The hope is, that training on the broader definition of risk will help with recognition and reward. If a World Class aspect does not exist, the component is still considered in the totality of each caption through aspects of vocabulary, variety, range ...etc, though it may not contribute to the comparative point concerning risk. ...The double still counts, but perhaps not as salient risk!

Completion of Skills –

For 2026 - No adjustment from 2025

- We keep this in place knowing the redundancy this has across each caption. The redundancy of safety is seen as worth it. This will be re-evaluated for 2027.
- This is intended to combat the most extreme cases where training and compatibility are ignored.
- We found that some judges use the word ‘danger’ in their commentary to address this. We want to encourage more of this. When you see it, say it!
 - As a follow-up, judges should alert the Lead Judge of their concerns. If merited, the Contest Administrator will contact the group before Finals. In turn, the Lead Judge will contact Curtis as part of their weekend report. Curtis will pass the concern on to Dale for follow-up with the unit.

Other Items related to scoring and or judging

Allow Judges to hold the first 2 rounds at Regionals and Championships

This allows judges to better reflect the performances by anchoring their numbers. This also allows for more accurate placements not only inside the 2 rounds but also in the next rounds of competition.

“Get it right” vs. “Get it right now”

This will require a small adjustment to the 90-minute guideline for issuing scores.

Raise the Open Class and World Class minimum qualifying score for Finals

For 2026 we will increase the qualifying score by 5 points.

- Better quality control towards finalists meeting the expectations of the World Class standard.
- This is a first step to shift our thinking regarding Regionals’ role as qualifier for Championships (see discussion point below)
- Looked at several Regionals, and this would not have eliminated groups that otherwise would not have been eliminated with the old formula

- We will re-assess for 2027 with a potential increase in mind.
- For 2026, Steering Committee members to offer one-time consultation as added service to units that are impacted by the new threshold and may be struggling

New Formula:

The Minimum qualifying score for the last regional weekend would be a 65.00, with scores diminished by 1.5 each weekend prior.

For 2026

- Week 1 - 56.00
- Week 2 - 57.50
- Week 3 – 59.00
- Week 4 – 60.50
- Week 5 – 62.00
- Week 6 - 63.50
- Week 7 – 65.00

Scholastic classes still maintain the rating system.

For 2026 - Eliminate Box 6 on World Class Sheets

This has been on the horizon for several years.

- Training for Box 6 “New Standards” has been limited without the ability to access historic and current videos
- We debated the effect of box 6 limiting the numeric range of Box 5 and perhaps causing lower scores in recent years in some cases
- The committee will continue to revisit this issue over the next years (starting in 2028) as resources change and units progress into new standards with and without a box 6 incentive and acknowledgement.
 - This may cause an eventual shift in the wording of Box 5 or a redevelopment of the idea of Box 6.

In 2026 we will shift descriptors and structure of Box 5 on all World Class sheets.

This is related to the recent concern that in some cases, scores at the top of World Class are low. This will be revisited for the 2028 Season.

We have a good history of guarding the threshold between Box 4 and Box 5 with great deliberation and care. This move will count on that being in place with continual reinforcement and focus on the entry into box 5.

- Because of the elimination of Box 6, the numeric range of Box 5 will be expanded from “90 to 98” to “90 to 100”
- Delineation of Box thirds in Box 5 will be eliminated.

- Descriptors typically defined by those thirds will be consolidated into, “Some to All”.
- This opening of box 5 creates an opportunity, once a group enters box 5, for the scoring priorities of profiling and spreading to be truly reflective of the units, from a comparative standpoint. This happens without a potential compromise created by squeezing groups into separate criteria defined inside box thirds. If merited, this should allow for a freedom for groups to move up in the numeric range assigned to the box.

Judge Items away from scoring

Judge ability to cover all points of comparison in commentary.

We have an issue with judges having to keep up with units in commentary. Commentary is strongly guided by what the unit is offering in the moment. At times it is a struggle to account for aspects of the caption that are not being covered by the unit. This can leave the unit with mostly positive comments without account for the vulnerabilities that appear when judges go through the points of comparison after the commentary is done.

We discussed the days of paper sheets, when judges would mark up their sheets with plusses and minuses indicating strengths and weaknesses at each point of comparison. This was some of the most valuable information to both young and experienced instructors. We have not developed a way, as effective, to deliver this type of information. Instructors have strongly stressed the need for this type of information to come back.

Curtis reflected on issues, seen in judge reviews, concerning Judges covering the full caption. He spoke to the frequency of this as an indicator of a pattern, creating a cause for concern. The old approach of paper notes created a real-time accountability for both the judge and the unit, that is missing in today’s paperless approach.

Though we would hope that this information would appear in commentary over time, it was the shorthand provided by this singular account of each bullet point that provided the quickest information to instructors of all ages. This was most effective when considering the youngest instructors, still developing their process and discovering the judging system.

For 2026 we encourage judges to:

- When possible, go down the sheets’ points of comparison as part of the wrap-up.
- Identify in this wrap-up commentary, the general strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Find a neutral way to express a point that is within the class standard but neither a strength nor weakness.
- It is not expected that the judge will share the nuanced deliberation that is normally part of the judges’ decision-making, between commentary and assigning the score.
- The intent is not to expose process, but to offer a quick full-caption synopsis of the group, beyond what is given during running commentary.

Focus of Performance Commentary vs. Critique Conversations

This point comes up based on confused expectations, on the part of Instructors, regarding what commentary is available to the judge in performance commentary vs. what conversations are available to both parties during critiques.

It's important to inform, acknowledge, and remind all parties:

- Performance commentary happens as units perform in scheduled order. This limits group-to-group comparative comments, because the total picture is unavailable to the judge until the last unit has performed. Any comparative points in this context would not be honest reflection, but simple speculation.
- **Performance commentary** should focus on the unit as **compared to the class standard**.
- **Critique conversations** are guided first by the instructor. The judge can/should include reflections on the unit as **compared to its competitors** in that show.
 - Typically starting at mid-season, points comparing the unit to the total field of Championships competitors can be discussed. ...Always with the qualifier that this is not the same weekend and groups do not progress at the same rate. ...This is not a promise ring!

JUDGE ITEMS FOR 2026

Topics for application into the 2026 season.

ALL Captions

- Constantly update awareness to prepare for more possibilities. We must react to the challenges presented by the explorations of the World Classes. Encouraging exploration must be accompanied by a willingness to look beyond how we expect that exploration to reveal itself. We cannot anticipate how others explore guided only by what we already know.
 - Our World Class judges must be intellectually on-the-move...not coasting.
- How do we stay current? Self-reflection first. Consider this as a statement on Roster profiles.
- Discuss how excellence is valued differently in the captions and what commentary is appropriate for each caption. Where are the lines that may be crossed in current commentary patterns.
- Re-explore distinctions between a tear-down and a build-up scoring system (We have a history of both that can be used as reference). Look at current commentary patterns and check to make sure the commentary reflects the current build-up/ achievement-based system.
 - A byproduct of this is the current issue of "Pointing out minutia while missing the major moment." This appears as a hiding place for those judges not comfortable during challenging moments in talking about WHAT before HOW. World Class

Instructors see this first as a problem in identification with an effect of creating a lack of trust in the judges' capacity to operate at a higher level.

Upstairs

- Be ready for the next big thing! – **Imagine that others imagine differently** without assuming either party is right or wrong
- When seeing a group presenting a sensibility that is out of the judges' comfort zone, Identify concrete indicators of quality before factoring personal propensity and personal aesthetic.

GE

- We are the arbiters of NEW and NEXT. Are we ready for our response when called upon?
 - “Do you like it because it’s good...or is it good because you like it?”
- Discuss Programmatic Risk in World Class
- How does choreography contribute to Effect differently than how it may contribute to Vocabulary in the analysis captions? Are we doing enough to reward this aspect when we are the only caption that can acknowledge these differences? Does our commentary reflect this? In our ignoring these differences, are we paving the way for trends of sameness as seen in the activities' collective efforts?

DA

- Design can still take a step to understand the full scope of the caption as it relates to the total production.
 - If all equipment efforts start with the body, then we also must connect that all effects actually start from the design.
 - This should require us to acknowledge how space and equipment and movement work together and are all touched by the eye of the designer as opposed to compartmentalized efforts of “drill” that are simply decorated by movement and equipment.
 - We are not just responsible for the plan of the house but also all that is in it...down to the throw pillows! (....and how these elements relate!)
 - GE’s language of, ‘The *total being greater than the sum of its parts*’, gives us a window into the indicators of good design. At what point does the show come together to transcend its collection of components? Do we see this in all units, in all classes? IF not, then when we DO see it, can we delineate, ‘*To what degree?*’ and then factor that into the judging system for reward?
- From an analysis standpoint, what aspects of Excellence takes the upstairs perspective to acknowledge fully?
 - The idea of perspective should help us see what DA must address when IA cannot.
- At Judge Summit, discuss the trend of blocking and its place as a total approach vs. as a component of a variety of approaches. Factor these conversations by class. Delineate when this may be a strength vs. limited Variety and lack of sophistication (See RA Criteria)

- Compare to what we once called a “presentational approach”
- In World Class, at what point does this feel like an easy out vs. advancement.

EQ

- Identify skills at a pace that keeps up with world class efforts (Instructors are no longer assuming this is in place)
 - This may be a byproduct of our “Say more with less” approach. Let’s find the balance
- Offer better proofs of the judge’s ability to keep up with, and account for, World Class efforts. (see commentary comment above)
- Assure that excellence comments are not a hiding place for lack of ability/effort to ID demands. We have to answer the question, “What’s the big Idea?” before mentioning minutia!
- Create better awareness of how and when skills are compounded in order to identify, more fully, the challenges placed on the performer.
- Remind ourselves of the technique of projecting ourselves into the physicality of the performer to understand better what the performer is asked to do and what they are experiencing.
- Make sure that commentary reflects the build-up achievement-based system.

MVT

- Understand the body’s role when it is the body that may offer the compounding element to compounded equipment skills
- Discuss how movement skills may be compounded independent of any equipment element.
- Thresholds for movement excellence shifting when an equipment element exists. ‘
- Are we dismissing movement elements when presented separate from those intertwined into the equipment writing. Is this resulting in a lack of exploration from a pure body perspective, and a sameness in choreographic choice?
- Besides programming, Movement is the easiest place for units to explore and invent. We cannot allow a reward system that creates a weighted acknowledgement to only certain techniques, approaches, and styles.
 - This requires us to update our awareness to remain current and be ready for anything!
 - This means being able to find the inherent value in all we see, (familiar or not)
 - Imagine what it takes to deliver what we are seeing, (familiar or not)
 - Factor into the comparative process. (familiar or not)

- We see less effort of exploration once equipment is factored into the movement contribution. This is not because of the possibility not existing. This is perhaps a lack of inventive effort from the content creators and perhaps propensity on our part that may be a result of our own conditioning over years. We must combat our own complacency as it makes us compliant to a trend of sameness. We must encourage the exploration when we see it, even if it doesn't rise to the level of reward. (...and be able to articulate why it may or may not)
- Movement style contribution as a supplemental element OR a multiplier of skills. At what point does this differ? Are we able to look at the total and delineate the difference. Explore current examples offered by units.

Discussions regarding population growth/Conversations about the future

At this year's CGAB, it was mentioned how many issues in 2025 were related to the growth in the number of participants. The expectation of continued growth and the challenges it may present became a large part of our conversation. Understanding this is key context for the points below.

For 2026. Power Regionals are replaced by a greater number of "Regional + Events". These Regional + Events will have many of the added-value aspects of a Power Regional but in more locations.

In the past, we have weighted regionals towards **performance opportunities** as opposed to being **qualifiers for championships**. Except for units 400 miles away from a regional, units are required to attend a WGI Regional to be seeded into championships. The Steering Committee has continued this point with delineating between groups on championship paths and those that are looking to explore opportunities by attending a Regional without the intent of attending WGI Championships,

Some conversations regarding this delineation (NONE of these items are implemented for 2026):

Delineating between Championship units and Regional only units at Regional Plus events.

Create a "Regional" subclass within each class, that would still compete as normal in regional settings BUT might be distinguished in terms of awards at the finish of the Regional contest, (separate from the Class winners). No actual scoring would be impacted by this concept, and Judges would not consider the delineations during their process.

- This would require that what is now Regional A be renamed, IE "Cadet"
- A Class would also contain a *Regional A Class* delineation
- Open Class would contain a *Regional Open Class* delineation
- World Class would contain a *Regional World Class* delineation

Initially

- We might recognize the top finishers at each Regional of each class as well as the top finishers in the “Regional” subclass of each of these classes, independent of their final finish in the total contest.
 - As an example - The highest placing Regional Open unit may be the 5th place finisher in the total contest, but, would be named the Regional Open Class Champion for that Regional contest. The highest placing finisher would still be named the Open Class Champion for that contest. Of course, it is possible that the highest placing unit may still be a Regional-only unit, giving them both titles.
- Regional-only units would not be included in Championship standings, as they are not seeded into Championship Prelims.

Eventually

- If an anticipated overpopulation of regionals creates a need for delineation, particularly at *Regional +* events, certain services may be directed towards Championship tracks only. This was the case at Power Regionals in the past.
 - It may be the certain other services be directed at Regional-only units.
- Given the projected growth, this concept of delineation may be used to create opportunities specific to both populations in the future.

Concept that certain Regionals be identified specifically as qualifiers for Championships.

How a Regional-Only concept may be applied to developing areas.

- This concept was discussed in how this may shift our process in current Regional settings and how this may help the eventual needs of future Regional templates as different populations are served differently.
- This may help us see a need to shifting standards and tolerances for non-Championship tracks in these specific shows.
- This is a way to imagine how to service smaller communities or help low population areas of the country that are in the developing stages of new circuits and color guard ally organizations.
- The easiest connection is the development of **international color guard communities** that are needing simplified versions of judging systems that can be implemented with local talent (instructors as potential judges). This provides a pathway into the WGI family for remote North American organizations as well as those developing communities around the world.
 - This would be optional depending on the development of the area based on needs, desires, and projected goals of the local population.

Minimum qualifying scores

For 2026 we will raise the minimum qualifying scores for Open and World Class by 5 points. compared to 2025 with the last week before championships being

- We are foreseeing situations in the future where we would continue this increase, perhaps even for the 2027 Season. (proposed 10 point increase from the 2025 standard)
- In future situations where we delineate between Championship tracks and Regional only units, these qualifying scores could shift specific to different regional templates and in developing areas (national and international).

Judge items to be discussed and potentially trialed for future implementation and application

Shift the expectations of commentary to find pathways to a better understanding of the total presented by the unit.

We had a strong debate on the value, from a judge perspective, of being able to watch without running commentary in order to take in the total of what we are seeing. This untethers the judge from running commentary. Running commentary, especially from the IA perspective, cannot keep up with the frequency offered in most World Class units. It is proposed that we see if limiting the need for speaking allows for better comprehension for the judge.

- We accept this sounds counterintuitive
- This is purely a proposed study from the judge perspective
 - We accept that this does not offer proofs or evidence that the judge can offer to the units in real time
- Try initially with summaries at midpoint and at wrap-up
- Try each caption to find differences in application possibilities

Judges looking at transcripts of their own work as a pathway to self-improvement (Much of this to be implemented in 2026 if needed)

- This was a joint conversation between Instructors and the Judge Admin team
- We discussed potential AI components to Judge self-evaluation and review process.
- We also discussed how instructors may use AI when looking at commentary

Steering Committee Monthly Calls –

Understand that the Committee will continue monthly calls through January.

Anticipated items typical for this time of year:

- SC Outreach
- Training items (Instructor and Judge)
- Items for WGI HUB
- Reclassifications and Reviews

We then have a Mid-Season call to assess the year so far. We also have a post-championships call, in May, to reflect on the Season and our own efforts. We also use this May call to prepare for the CGAB's Data gathering effort to be handed to the next Steering Committee for the 2027 Season.

Thank You

-Karl Lowe

WGI Education Coordinator/ Chair of Color Guard Steering Committee

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