

# **WGI Indoor Percussion Visual Summit Digest: Setting the Stage for 2026**

## **Introduction and Context**

Following the annual Advisory Board meeting in June 2025, the WGI Steering Committee initiated an offseason project to deeply explore the current state of visual adjudication in the indoor percussion activity. This effort, which included five follow-up committee discussions, culminated in a Visual Summit designed to gather broad, unfiltered feedback from the instructor and designer community.

This report summarizes the work conducted during the offseason, the key insights distilled by the Steering Committee, and the resulting three-point "Emphasis Plan" that will guide our adjudication training and focus for the upcoming 2026 season. This plan is designed to reflect the expressed wishes and priorities of the groups themselves, whom our judges then seek to serve.

## **1. The Offseason Work: Gathering Perspectives**

The Visual Summit process was divided into two main components to ensure maximum participation and depth of discussion:

### **Basecamp Discussion Forum**

We launched a dedicated Basecamp workspace for the Visual Summit and invited staff members from each Percussion Advisory Board (PAB) group. Five specific questions were posed to guide the discussion:

1. What makes the WGI Percussion visual captions unique and different from visual captions in other marching arts activities?
2. Where do visual judges' responsibilities intersect in the various marching arts activities?
3. Describe one thing that's currently working and one thing that's not working in the Visual Effect subcaption of the Effect-Visual caption.
4. Describe one thing that's currently working and one thing that's not working in the Visual caption (Composition, Performance Quality, or both).
5. What's one key thing Effect-Visual and Visual judges should be more mindful of when evaluating presentations?

### **Open Zoom Session**

Following the comment period in Basecamp, an open Zoom session was hosted for instructors and designers to further elaborate on their forum posts, discuss strengths and weaknesses in the Effect-Visual and Visual captions, and identify areas where additional adjudicator emphasis or training would be beneficial.

This two-step process ensured that a broad range of voices could contribute and allowed for deeper exploration of shared themes and differing philosophies.

## 2. Distillation and Focus

It is important to acknowledge that the input received was incredibly diverse. A strong, singular consensus on what is currently working or what needs attention did not naturally form from these conversations, highlighting the complexity of our activity and the varying artistic philosophies and priorities among our participating groups.

The community's feedback often pointed to competing priorities, divergent views on what should be emphasized, and an inherent tension between the desire for perfectly consistent assessment and the practical realities of live, real-time evaluation. It became clear that there is no singular, universally agreed-upon approach to "visual" across the activity, and a recognition that our judges come from varied visual backgrounds, including drill design, marching technique specialists, color guard, and movement/dance/choreography specialists. However, the one point of convergence was the shared understanding that our activity is special and unique, and that any successful, intentional approach to visual design should be able to be fairly evaluated and rewarded, while keeping our unique indoor percussion identity at the forefront.

The three points below represent the Steering Committee's effort to synthesize this feedback and the areas of general consensus into high-leverage areas that directly address this inherent variability and provide a unified focus for ongoing judge training and application.

## 3. The 2026 Emphasis Plan

The following three points will form the core of the adjudication training and application emphasis for the 2026 WGI Percussion season.

### 1. Embracing What Makes WGI Indoor Percussion Unique

**Goal:** Evaluate the unique demands and artistic opportunities of the indoor percussion activity.

We heard a strong desire from the community for judges to philosophically ensure that what makes WGI Indoor Percussion distinct and unique is at the forefront of every consideration. Common sentiments shared included the intimacy and proximity of the indoor venue, the indoor activity being the one place in the marching arts where percussionists are the cornerstone of the presentation, and the physicality involved in being a visual performer while simultaneously wearing and playing a percussion instrument.

- **Emphasis:** Judges will be encouraged to philosophically explore: 1) *What makes this activity unique compared to drum corps or marching band outlets?* 2) *Are the elements that make the indoor activity "special"—including limitations such as the manipulation of voices and bodies on the floor, and inherent limitations born out of navigating equipment and set pieces—being fully*

*recognized and valued during evaluation? 3) While many aspects can contribute to a dynamic visual performance, are the efforts and responsibilities of the percussionists proportionally considered during the decision-making process?*

## **2. Achieving a 50/50 Balance in Visual Commentary (Composition vs. Performance Quality)**

**Goal:** Ensure a balanced split in feedback and focus between the composition (the "what") and the performance quality (the "how") in the Visual commentary.

Feedback indicated that commentary has, in recent years, skewed decisively toward Composition (the "what"), often making the caption feel too "design heavy," without a reciprocal level of focus on Performance Quality (the "how"). The community desires an equitable distribution of attention.

- **Emphasis:** The objective for the Visual caption is to achieve a 50/50 balance in the commentary between the Composition and Performance Quality subcaptions, providing robust, deep, and equitable feedback across both sides of the sheet. This will help ensure that the full breadth and depth of the performers' skills are consistently evaluated and recognized at all points throughout the season.

## **3. Elevating the Evaluation of Primary Moments**

**Goal:** Implement a proportional prioritization for real-time evaluation, ensuring key artistic and technical moments receive the highest weight and emphasis in commentary.

Many instructors and designers felt that judges frequently use a disproportionate amount of commentary time dissecting the mechanics of *getting into* and *getting out of* large visual events, sometimes missing the event itself. While transitions remain important, they should not overshadow the impact, effect, and quality of the peak moment itself. This is particularly critical in Effect-Visual, where the moment is the effect, but also holds true in the Visual caption.

- **Emphasis:** Adjudicators in both Effect-Visual and Visual captions are reminded to weigh moments and transitions proportionally. The primary evaluative focus should be on the 'moments' themselves, dedicating the commentary priority to the design, impact, and achievement of those peaks. Commentary on transitional mechanics ('getting into' and 'getting out of') should take a secondary priority to the event itself.

## **Conclusion**

This Visual Summit was a productive, transparent mechanism for gathering broad community input. The Steering Committee diligently worked to synthesize this diverse feedback into three clear, actionable points that target the key areas of concern regarding evaluation consistency and priority. We look forward to implementing this Emphasis Plan across the 2026 season to ensure an improved evaluation experience for all groups.