

Team! I hope everyone is well, preparing for or traveling safely, and gearing up for the next week. Thanks for the time and energy on the calls all season, and all of the excited anticipation and enthusiasm on the text threads. Game on!!! I'd like to touch base on several fronts as we all do final prep for our responsibilities in Dayton. Before diving in, please follow the link below. For best results, I recommend full screen, and turn up to 11.

[Why We Judge](#)

Philosophy

At the core of our philosophy is the understanding that every contest is a new contest, free from the influence of prior perspectives, biases, or recaps. This is especially the case during World Championships when as many as a few weeks have passed since a group's last performance. It's been several weeks since the last regional, the last time some of these groups may have seen any of their class competitors. So much could have changed since that last regional weekend; their programming, the kids, our vantage point, the contest dynamic, etc. ASSUME NOTHING. You are the best in the world at evaluating this activity. Trust yourselves, as the system trusts you, to react and reward with an open mind.

As we say, we have the best seat in the house. The price for that seat is accountability and compassion. Period. I've never been around a group of people that more honestly believes that it is truly about the kids and staffs. Every performer we see this weekend has a story of sacrifice and commitment. To humbly match this, *you* are allowed to exhaust yourself by the end of your rounds. *You* are allowed to have an elevated heart rate. *You* are allowed to tap into that passion, that compassion, that emotion that focuses you when the red light is on. It's why you commit to this.

For the kids... Perhaps our best mantra

Commentary

Be ready to give 110% to the very first group, in the very first round that we see. There is no opportunity to "ramp up" in any round. Not only could your first group win the round, it might conversely be their only performance in Dayton. Both scenarios, and every one in between, deserve our utmost attention and care. Please also refrain from a lengthy intro if their show has already begun. All of the files are labeled and they'll know who you are, and where they are. Be observant and invested immediately.

While one of the biggest challenges this week will be making competitive decisions, our commentary must still reflect the performance of that day, for the duration of

the performance. Even as we are assessing, absorbing, and comparing, *verbalizing* our reactions will help them crystallize in our conscious and inform the thought process when arriving at a number.

Be very cautious of inadvertent yawns or other distracted commentary that could in any way suggest indifference. It is during WC that we as a roster are most scrutinized. We should not give groups any reason to question our attention, commitment, and investment in their efforts. Always consider our tone of voice, never being dismissive or condescending. Channel genuine enthusiasm and care. It makes a world of difference to the person listening.

If you get a chance to use the group's name during your commentary, it will resonate. The effect of a positive, caring recording (while still being accountable to competition and scoring) could be the seminal moment for a group that plays that recording to the kids and motivates them to take on the next performance. We have the privilege of contributing a verse to their WC experience...

"Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." -*Dale Carnegie*

Sometimes judges become effusive in praise, often appropriately so, as we look to celebrate all successes. After all, we approach the scoring process from a build-up mentality where we recognize and reward value and success. Sometimes faults can be obscured or overlooked within such an environment of positivity. Strive for enthusiastic, scoring-relevant commentary *through time*, being careful to not just save negative scoring justifications for the wrap up.

Be **Ardent**, but be accountable.

Numbers Management

We will see a lot of successful programs and performances in Dayton. It's the beauty of the tiered system that we can maximize rewards in three different paradigms. There's a lot of fantastic teaching, writing, and performing going on out there and the groups that advance to the next round are usually hitting on all cylinders. Have the courage to reward greatness in each of the three paradigms.

Everyone should be aware now of how each class round handles advancements. Take as copious notes as need be for you to most accurately compare groups from round to round. Use breaks and any bit of downtime between groups to reflect on those notes to keep as much of what you've seen and heard front of mind for comparison.

Competitively speaking, we will see the gamut of achievement. That said, the groups that commit to coming to Dayton are usually serious about finessing their programs to the highest competitive level. Many of these groups have already been earning "A"s for their efforts, and deservedly so. We all have plenty of numbers to assign numerous "A"s if the performances merit. There are plenty of numbers available north of 90 to still be able to Rate and Rank appropriately.

Work to profile the strengths and weaknesses of EACH sub-caption. Often this will reveal a competitive and ordinal difference in sub-captions, and that's ok! Music and Visual judges should profile the strengths and weaknesses of both Composition and Performance as independent contests. Effect-Music and Effect-Visual judges should likewise profile the strengths and weakness of a group's Overall Effectiveness, and Music or Visual Effectiveness, independently. Commentary should also reflect sampling and assessment of BOTH sub-captions, and not be just a reflection of one side or the other.

Please use the appropriate spread guidelines. Be careful not to distort the spreads. This seems to happen most often at the very top and very bottom of the classes. If all of the neighborhoods have been established with appropriate spreads in each, be careful to not overreact to the top number with a bloated spread just because. Likewise at the bottom end, be careful to not throw the bottom number away just to 'give yourself room'. If you were the only one who saw things that way, and everyone else had them at least within plausible spread guidelines, the ultimate placement may be distorted or skewed.

*All of this said, it can be a challenge to maintain spread guideline integrity in the euphoria of a great performance and rewarding the group with your highest number. As we assess all of those differences that separate competitors, work to be certain you are confident and comfortable with your spread decisions, and not just satisfied that you had a group in a sub-caption first place with a 100, because it was the number you had left. Just stacking 7 groups at .5s between 97 and 100 may not be the most accurate reflection of their differences, but again it perhaps could.

You also have the adjustment phase to correct or massage decisions.

As a team, we should have the same integrity in our decisions between group 23 and 22, group 13 and 12, and group 3 and 2. Often the toughest decisions are well away from upper echelon finalist range. Let's continue to max out and exhaust effort for those groups that competitively find themselves there.

Sometimes judges can be psychologically or reflexively bullied into rewarding a group based on prior success, the reputation of designers and instructors, or an interaction during the season. Judges are encouraged to confidently look past these influences, and apply scores independent of such burdens.

Day-to-day scoring has the potential to be somewhat volatile given a variety of factors. Navigating chronological bias is always a challenge in the Semifinals and

Finals rounds. Trust yourselves in the moment to make decisions reflective of *that* performance, *that* day, in your sub-captions. Naturally, this can be very challenging when performance order is dramatically incongruent with how scoring is playing out in your sub-captions. Regardless, we must maintain our caption and sub-caption discipline and integrity as the rounds evolve.

Be passionately **Bold**, but be responsible.

High Fives

As always, let's be their biggest fans while they're on the floor! We are accountable to a competitive system and should provide scoring-relevant commentary, but our enthusiasm for their efforts and choices will undoubtedly affect the tone of our voice and our care in assigning numbers.

Employ your peers on your panel for not only camaraderie but for motivation, empowerment, and heightened focus. That panel dynamic is perhaps one of the most cherished aspects of our experience in the activity, and one that can activate and elevate our effectiveness as adjudicators. Other than the sheer energy of the performances, few factors motivate and influence our focus as much as the fist bumps, head nods, and hugs that we share as we work for these groups. Channel these! We hold dear each of our backgrounds, our fortes, our life experiences. We're all equally accountable to the philosophy and the craft, but it's these personal dynamics that complement the panels.

When the red light is on, Be **You**, and be Exceptional.

Go time. Safe travels and so excited to see everyone!

Chris Hestin