

APF Judging Seminar 2024

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Introduction

The purpose of this seminar is to appreciate the role of a philatelic judge, to develop the competencies of jurors and improve the quality of judging at philatelic exhibitions, thereby ensuring accurate, fair, and consistent judging.

Philatelic judges must comply with the following requirements, and any others deemed necessary by the APF:

- Serve as a philatelic or literature judge at the state, national or international level as requested by the APF.
- Display appropriate behaviour while judging. Complete appropriate preliminary research. Arrive at exhibitions and jury meetings on time. Complete all assigned tasks, prepare exhibitor feedback forms, and conduct in front of frame feedback sessions as requested.
- Exhibit and achieve 70 points in all their qualified classes at a state, national, or international exhibition at least once every three years.

An inactive judge cannot stay current in the ever-changing world of exhibiting. Judges are encouraged to exhibit in as many different classes and formats as possible, to better understand, appreciate the challenges and be versatile as a national juror.

- Report to the APF International Officer on all judging and exhibiting activities.
- Attend exhibitions and judging seminars on a regular (or remedial) basis.
- Attend seminars and workshops as directed by the APF.
- Respect the confidential nature of jury deliberations and decisions.

Judges may request a temporary leave of absence from the APF judging roster for personal reasons for a period of up to one year. An accredited judge may resign their accreditation status at any time for any reason by notifying the secretary of the APF. Judges who retire may be accorded the honorary designation of “Emeritus Judge.”

Failure to exhibit once every three years or failure to attend an APF required seminar or workshop will result in suspension. A judge may be removed from the roll of accredited judges by the APF for misconduct while judging or incompetence as a judge. Reinstatement as an active judge will be at the discretion of the APF.

Continuing Self-Education

Judges are presumed to be highly knowledgeable philatelists. Exhibitors assume judges have at least some knowledge of all aspects of philatelic specialisation as well as a deep knowledge of their areas of expertise. Every judge should try to

maintain this high regard, not only by their actions in judging but also through self-education in philately.

Judges should read and study widely in all aspects of philately, particularly the fundamentals. They should subscribe to and read a wide range of publications, some of which should be beyond the scope of their field of interest. They should collect in several different philatelic classes to gain as much varied experience as possible. Judges are expected to attend many exhibitions to study the exhibits and attend meetings and seminars regardless of the subject presented.

Judges need to be fully conversant with the FIP's GREX, GREV, and Guidelines, as well as the APF's National and Experimental Classes rules and guidelines and always follow them.

Judges must continue to exhibit; improving their qualifying exhibit(s) that met the exhibiting requirement for accreditation and developing new exhibits in other classes. The object is not the winning of medals. Rather, it is to retain empathy for the person who is at receiving end of the feedback, to maintain a feel for the changes that are occurring in exhibiting standards, and to learn first-hand the problems that must be overcome by exhibitors whose efforts the judge will be called upon to evaluate.

Preparation Before an Exhibition

As soon as practical, preferably at least six weeks before the exhibition, the jury secretary should provide judges with copies of the title pages and synopses for competitive exhibits they are to judge. The team leader should issue a list by exhibit showing which judge is to lead the discussion during judging and feedback (both written and in front-of-frame). The judge needs to ensure they are especially well prepared for their allocated exhibits.

Judges must avoid conflicts of interest or any appearance thereof. They must not judge exhibits by family members, including domestic partners. Judges who have had any direct role in the acquisition of significant material for, or the preparation of, an exhibit should not judge these exhibits. If such a situation unknowingly arises, the juror must advise the jury chair of the conflict of interest and recuse themselves from any discussion or deliberations of the exhibit(s) in question, including medals and awards.

To fairly evaluate exhibits, judges must prepare in advance and study references to gain the knowledge necessary to make intelligent and informed assessments of the material presented. However, no judge is expected to be an expert on every given exhibit's subject. Most exhibits are the product of years of collecting, study, and research, so it is unreasonable to think that judges know any exhibit's subject to match that of the exhibitor.

The foundation for a judge's understanding of an exhibit is provided by the exhibitor's title page and synopsis. It is incumbent on the exhibitor, through the *Title Page*, to tell the judges what they must know about their exhibit, including aspects such as rarity and original research. The judge needs to have some understanding of the subject to evaluate its treatment, philatelic significance

and what sort of material will be shown. Every judge should arrive at the exhibition having already studied the title and synopsis pages and enough basic background information to appreciate both the material and the challenges.

Judges must adjudicate on both the material, the effectiveness and coverage of the subject (storyline). They do not need to be a subject matter expert to do an effective job. An honest effort should be made to use the information provided by the exhibitors and philatelic/historical references to learn as much as possible about the content of the exhibit.

Judging is a logical process and being able to competently evaluate treatment does not require in-depth expertise.

Make notes about the exhibit:

What is the purpose?

What is the scope?

What is the normal condition for the material in this subject?

How are the important/rare items going to be highlighted?

What would you expect to see in a high-level exhibit?

What references does the exhibitor refer to that you need to read?

What would you suggest for improving the introduction page(s)?

Conduct research using a personal or philatelic library and the internet.

Participation

Make sure to bring a laptop with MS Word since you must use it to write your exhibition feedback for the exhibitor.

Read over the jury timetable, note the critical timing of; roll calls, jury meetings, jury photograph, the results approvals and the in front-of-frames feedback timetable.

The first allegiance of a judge is to the jury and its tasks. A judge is expected to be on time for jury functions, stay until released by the jury chair and attend the social events to which the jury is invited. Judges must block out these times and inform family and friends that they will not be available. In general, this will be all day and most nights. Typically, Friday, from early in the afternoon, and all of Saturday and Sunday to judge and prepare for and attend the Judges Feedback Session and In Front of Frames Feedback Session. No judge should go to the dealers or any meetings until jury duty is completed and the jury chair releases the jury. Brief breaks for rest or refreshment are appropriate but be mindful of the timeline.

Where possible the judge should look at all the mounted exhibits before judging starts. This gives an idea of exhibits that may require extra time or perhaps the use of a consultant.

Judges should get to the first appointed meeting early. They should wear their name badge indicating status as a juror for the entire exhibition and dress appropriately.

As a judge you are expected to:

- Be a team player.
- Be an active participant in the process.
- A reasoned, independent decision-maker
- Award objective, balanced results
- Avoid unfairness.
- Give appropriate consideration of award levels.
- Give unqualified support of team/ jury consensus.
- Give positive, constructive feedback of substance for exhibitors.
- Take responsibility for completing the feedback forms.

Judges often work in teams of two or three to allow the application of a broader base of viewpoints, experience, and expertise in exhibit evaluation. Using points to evaluate and score exhibits, judges will arrive at a consensus score at the frames.

The jury chair and/or the team leaders should have discussed the approach to ensure consistency, particularly for “Treatment”, “Importance” and “Presentation.” For example, some judges may feel strongly that a top score in any category is rare, and another team of judges believes that a top score represents excellence without having to be perfect.

While working at the frames, judges should speak quietly and take care not to discuss details while others are within earshot. Be aware of people who may be on the other side of the frame rows. If a viewer approaches the exhibit being judged, politely ask that person to delay looking at this exhibit until it has been judged.

Be aware of your physical (back/leg pain) and mental state (irritable/angry) when judging. Impaired physical or mental state can make you judge harsher than usual.

Some judges try to force a medal level and work backwards to assign points to each criterion. Others just take 10 per cent off every criterion without giving much thought. Both have happened, and both are very wrong. There is a difference between double-checking the result and fixing the numbers.

Judges should review the final score and compare it with other exhibits to catch errors. It is recommended to compare exhibits with similar scores as an additional double-check on consistency and fairness.

After the end of formal judging, judges should spend additional time reviewing the exhibits they will be expected to speak to at the feedback session. This should be done whether the exhibitor is expected to attend or not, and regardless of the medal level. (One never knows when an exhibitor will write after the exhibition asking for feedback, and the judge should be prepared to respond). Given the speed with which normal judging must take place, this additional attention to one's assigned exhibits is critical to an appreciation of their strong points and the areas in which improvements are possible; and allows the judge to make specific comments keyed to the frame and the page number.

Common issues in Judging

Judges must not bring their prejudices into their judging. All accepted exhibits, including those that are professionally prepared, are entitled to serious consideration and careful judging even though there may be a prevailing bias toward them. For example, there are no rules that state that 19th-century exhibits are more “classical” or “important” than the 20th century, or rules that permit a bias toward certain countries or fields, or even material commonly regarded as “philatelic” when that is the accepted norm for the era and area. If the exhibitor is presenting a serious study, then the exhibit should certainly be taken seriously by the judges.

Judges should avoid displaying prejudice toward or against inexpensive material. Exhibits of inexpensive material may represent a significant challenge and should be given as much serious attention as any other exhibit. On the other hand, there should be no bias against rarities or rather costly material. The phrase “All you need is money” and similar comments are not useful. Such attitudes must be avoided by judges.

Judges should avoid downgrading an exhibit because they know little or nothing about the topic being exhibited. Judges may not refuse to judge an exhibit. If a judge feels that they are insufficiently familiar with what is being shown, advice should be sought from other members of the jury or an impartial expert or specialist; this is a permissible and well-accepted practice.

Judges should avoid a tendency to give too much weight to such things as the arrangement of material, the presence of a typographical error, or the length of the write-up, instead of the material. Material is the dominant factor and judging the write-up and decoration is not a substitute for judging the material. Questionable material should be given the benefit of the doubt unless it is established beyond doubt that there is a misrepresentation. The weight given to such a problem must be assigned according to how seriously it reflects upon the exhibitor's knowledge of the material.

Judges should know there is no “right” way to exhibit. Some exhibitors prefer to present the stamps separately from the postal history; other collectors remove the aerophilately from the body of the exhibit and present them separately. Such individuality is to be respected; it is an absolute right of every collector to exhibit in the manner that seems most logical to them. It is the responsibility of the judges to determine if the exhibit is arranged logically within its parameters.

Judges must not display prejudice against any method of writing-up of an exhibit. Handwritten, guide lettering, typewriting, computer printing, and even pencil lettering is equally acceptable if the work is done in good taste and is appropriate. In this connection, exhibits should not be downgraded because of an occasional erasure, typographical error, grammatical lapse, or any other such fickle reason, if the general effect is one of neatness.

Judges must not judge the owners, the previous owners, the circumstances of acquisition, or any rumours concerning the exhibit, but that their judging is limited solely to the exhibit in the frames. Awards are given for the exhibit, not the exhibitor. It is the responsibility of the exhibition committee to police its rules concerning the ownership of the exhibit or any other legal or moral matters, and these must be of no concern to the judges.

Judging should not be approached as an ego trip but as a responsibility; with the recognition of how much the judge does not know. Judges should try to seek out and empathise with the exhibitor's topic or subject and should refrain from imposing their standards. One of the charms of philately is the individual approach. All exhibitors are free to follow their ideas in exhibiting, and their efforts should be accorded full and serious weight. Comments on the effectiveness of the approach to the topic or subject are fine when accompanied by specific suggestions for improvement. Denigrating the entire effort should be avoided at all costs.

Jury Deliberations

After judging at the frames, the jury retires to the jury room to deliberate. The medal levels and special awards are determined by consensus at this time unless the jury has agreed to the medal levels and/or points at the frames.

The jury chair will ask the jury for their recommendations for a Grand Prix. If the judge feels that they cannot vote with good conscience because of a total lack of understanding of the material, the situation should be discussed with the jury chairman. A judge who has materially assisted in the preparation of an exhibit should note that fact when voting.

Apprentice judges do not vote in selecting the consensus award but their reasoning supporting a recommendation may have bearing on the ultimate level awarded. Likewise, apprentices do not have a vote in determining special awards but are encouraged to actively participate in the discussion and even nominate exhibits.

All deliberations are confidential and are not to be discussed with anyone except the jury members. The scores and medal level awards are confidential until they are posted, as are the special awards until announced at an awards function.

Written Feedback

Written feedback is provided for all Australian exhibitions. The purpose of the feedback is to assist the exhibitor in improving the exhibit, potentially resulting in a better medal level. This is entered on the feedback form using your computer. It will be printed and returned to the exhibitor with their exhibit. Jurors should retain a copy of their feedback form, so they have one for use at the frames with exhibitors.

Often your team leader will have assigned you specific exhibits on which you are to prepare the feedback. The expectation is that jurors will be fully prepared to discuss the merits and deficiencies of an exhibit based on a thorough review of

the exhibit against the judging criteria. The written feedback should include specific statements, both positive and negative, that would be useful to the exhibitor.

While no feedback form is prescribed for use during judging, numerous forms have been personally devised to record notes, comments, corrections, and suggestions on the exhibit, all directed to its improvement. Judges should note the specific frame and page number and record areas/material that are good and areas/material where the exhibitor should make a change.

During and after the judging there is often some waiting time. Judges should take this opportunity to go through all the team's exhibits and plan the feedback for their exhibitors. Exhibitors who would benefit from a one-up-club evaluation should be identified and highlighted on the feedback form.

Notes made during the judging process should be adequate as a basis for making constructive comments on the feedback form.

In-Front-of-Frames Feedback

Judges must make themselves available for discussions with exhibitors at the frames. This is a more private opportunity to provide more in-depth suggestions to the exhibitor and answer additional questions. Other exhibitors and/or judges may wish to join in the discussion if the exhibitor does not object. Make sure permission is granted, as some may see this as deterring their opportunity and desire for open discussion with a judge of choice.

Judges should always keep in mind two cardinal principles: that philately is a friendly hobby, and that exhibitions are its public face. It then follows that exhibitors are to be encouraged rather than discouraged. The interaction between judge and exhibitor should always be courteous, helpful, constructive, supportive and nonconfrontational. The sole reason for judging is to assist the exhibitors.

Judges should find and emphasise elements that would justify encouragement. This is not to say that higher awards should be freely given (gold medals still must be earned) but when lesser exhibits show effort, merit and the possibility of development, the judge should try to help the exhibitor on to the next step.

Novice exhibitors and those on their way up the ladder often need to think about how they have titled their exhibit and/or what the exhibit attempts (purpose); and whether that is something that can earn a gold medal as it is presently defined (scope). Judges should be extremely wary of saying "You can't get a gold with this exhibit," when what is meant is: "To get a gold, I believe you will need to add such and such type of material/limit the area shown to provide more depth, explicitly broaden the scope of the exhibit to include so and so."

Judges should make substantive comments highlighting both the strong points noted in reviewing the exhibit and the areas in which the exhibit can be improved. The latter can include points of the presentation, but feedback focused on those alone is inadequate. The judge who has comments to make that may be embarrassing to the exhibitor should make those comments one to one,

at the frames, but never in a public forum. Attempts at humour at the exhibitor's expense "just to lighten the atmosphere" must be avoided.

Judges should not direct exhibitors to specific dealers or offer to sell useful material to exhibitors. Exhibitors should never be told that specific items are essential and then pressured to acquire them. The judge should differentiate between their opinion and objective requirements. Their thoughts about ways in which the exhibit might be restructured to be more effective should never be presented as requirements in the same context as the need to remove or properly label an acknowledged fake.

In general:

- Start the feedback with a *congratulation*, if appropriate.

- Give a breakdown of the points if the exhibitor so wishes.

- Mention the best aspects of the exhibit.

- Advise how to improve the exhibit.

- Good advice is constructive with concrete suggestions for improvement.

- Do not talk about the exhibitor but focus on the exhibit.

- Be specific with your suggestions.

- Present issues in a positive way

 - Not: "You are missing a lot of items"

 - Rather: "The exhibit will be much stronger with the inclusion of covers with the intended usage of each value".

Handle an angry exhibitor in the feedback session by keeping calm. Keep to your plan, explain the points, acknowledge the good parts, and suggest ways to improve the exhibit.

A judge should be prepared to justify the jury consensus on all exhibits rather than his or her determinations. Judges must never indicate that they disagree with the award level.