



OFFICIAL TRAINING RESOURCE

General Adjudication Training Manual

Fair Judgment Across Every Kind of Competition

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEST. APPLY THE STANDARD. PROTECT THE RESULT.

A comprehensive, discipline-neutral textbook for adjudicators serving scored, ranked, recall, proficiency, battle, audience, and hybrid competitions.



GAME FOR ANYTHING.

About This Manual

Competition asks people to place work, skill, preparation, and identity before others for evaluation. That exchange creates an obligation. A result should never be treated as a casual reaction dressed up with numbers. It should emerge from a defined competition, a competent decision-maker, a fair process, and a record that can withstand reasonable scrutiny. This manual establishes the common adjudication foundation of the Open Competition Alliance: how to understand an unfamiliar contest, how to apply its published standards, how to exercise independent judgment, and how to protect the integrity and dignity of the people involved.

The material is intentionally discipline-neutral. It does not claim that the same qualities define excellence in ballroom dance, karaoke, poetry slam, yodeling, robotics, auctioneering, duck calling, debate, origami, creative building, or any other activity. It teaches the professional method that begins after a competition has defined what matters. Readers should pair this foundation with genuine discipline competence, event-specific rules, and any endorsement or appointment required for the assignment.

SCOPE OF TRAINING

Completion of general adjudication training demonstrates knowledge of adjudication process and professional standards. It does not, by itself, establish subject-matter expertise or authorize a person to judge every discipline.

How to Use the Manual

Read the chapters in sequence on a first pass. The early chapters establish vocabulary and authority; later chapters assume that foundation when addressing formats, rubrics, bias, score integrity, and difficult cases. Experienced officials may later use the manual as a reference. Applied examples are deliberately drawn from very different settings so that the reader learns to transfer principles without importing one discipline's values into another.

Learning Outcomes

- Explain the adjudicator's role and limits within a competition-official structure.
- Identify the object, standard, expression, aggregation method, and consequence of an adjudication task.
- Distinguish scored, ranked, recall, proficiency, battle, audience, and hybrid formats.
- Interpret rubrics, anchors, weights, penalties, and stage instructions accurately.
- Use comparative and criterion-referenced judgment appropriately while controlling avoidable bias and drift.
- Protect independence, disclose conflicts, preserve score integrity, and maintain professional and safeguarding boundaries.
- Distinguish reviewable procedural error from good-faith adjudicative judgment.

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CHAPTER 1

The Meaning and Responsibility of Adjudication

Subjective judgment can be disciplined, accountable, and fair without pretending to be mechanical.

Adjudication Is Structured Competitive Evaluation

Adjudication is the act of making a competition decision through an authorized framework. It begins with human perception and expert interpretation, but it does not end with personal reaction. The adjudicator observes what the competition has designated for evaluation, interprets that evidence through published standards, expresses a judgment in the required form, and submits it for combination under a known procedure. Every part of that sentence matters. Remove the defined object, the standard, the authorized expression, or the aggregation method, and the result becomes harder to distinguish from preference.

People sometimes speak as though a decision is either objective or arbitrary. Most judged competitions occupy the important territory between those poles. A singer's pitch accuracy may be measured more directly than emotional communication; a robot may either complete an assigned task or fail to do so, while elegance of design requires interpretation. The presence of judgment does not make a standard meaningless. It makes clarity, competence, observation, and good-faith application especially important.

An adjudicator is not asked to remove all individuality from judgment. Different qualified judges may notice different evidence, assign different significance within the permitted criteria, or reach different close decisions. A panel exists partly because legitimate perspectives vary. Professional legitimacy does not require identical marks. It requires that each mark answer the same published question through an independent and defensible process.

Taste, Critique, Coaching, and Adjudication

Taste asks, 'What do I like?' Critique asks, 'How does this work, and what might make it stronger?' Coaching asks, 'What should this person do next?' Adjudication asks, 'What decision does this performance or entry earn under this competition's rules?' These activities can draw on similar expertise, but they have different purposes and permissions. A judge who turns a ballot into a coaching session may overlook the required comparison. A judge who turns personal taste into the standard may penalize a competitor for succeeding in a style the judge would not personally choose.

The distinction becomes clearest when preference and performance separate. A classical-vocal specialist may dislike the timbre expected in a particular popular genre, yet recognize accurate phrasing, stylistic control, and effective communication within that genre. A ballroom adjudicator may prefer codified partner technique but be assigned to a social or vernacular form whose values are grounded elsewhere. Expertise is properly used to see and interpret relevant evidence. It is misused when it silently replaces the published competition with a different one.

The Human Stakes of a Score

Scores and placements are administrative data, but they are also public statements about people's work. Competitors may have invested years of training, substantial money, travel, cultural knowledge, or unusual vulnerability in appearing. Fairness does not promise that every competitor will agree with a result. It promises that the decision was made by people who understood their assignment, attended to the work, applied the stated standards, and resisted irrelevant influence.

Respect for competitors is therefore not separate from technical adjudication. Visible ridicule, careless attention, speculative comments about character, or casual discussion of confidential marks can damage the legitimacy of an otherwise correct calculation. The adjudicator's authority is temporary and purpose-bound. It exists to evaluate the assigned competition, not to claim broader superiority over the participants.

OCA PRINCIPLE

Judge the competition that was published, the entry that was presented, and the criteria you were assigned—not the contest you wish had been offered.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Describe why subjective is not the same as arbitrary.
- Separate personal taste from discipline-grounded evaluation.
- Explain why an adjudicator may disagree with colleagues without acting improperly.
- Recognize that demeanor, attention, and confidentiality are part of fair adjudication.

CHAPTER 2

Authority, Roles, and the Competition Ecosystem

Good decisions depend on knowing not only what to do, but who is authorized to do it.

Distinct Functions, Shared Integrity

A competition is a chain of authority rather than a room full of interchangeable helpers. The organizer establishes or adopts the event framework, publishes the rules, appoints officials, and retains the responsibilities assigned by policy. Adjudicators evaluate competitive merit. A head adjudicator or chair manages the panel's procedure and resolves authorized questions. Scorekeepers and scrutineers calculate from the marks submitted. Stage, floor, and technical officials manage the conditions under which competition occurs. Safeguarding personnel receive and manage concerns within their remit.

At a small event one person may hold more than one role, but the roles do not disappear. The person must be able to identify which authority is being exercised at each moment. When an adjudicator notices a suspected time violation, for example, the rules may direct the judge to report it to a technical official rather than subtract points. When the same person is also the head adjudicator, that person should still document the transition from observation to authorized ruling rather than conceal the penalty inside a quality score.

Role	Primary responsibility	Usually should not
Adjudicator	Evaluate assigned criteria and submit the required judgment.	Change published rules, tabulate the panel, or impose unassigned penalties.
Head adjudicator / chair	Brief the panel, answer procedural questions, manage authorized rulings and corrections.	Pressure independent judges toward a preferred winner.
Scorekeeper / scrutineer	Receive, validate, calculate, and report marks under the scoring system.	Replace submitted judgments with personal evaluations.
Organizer / competition director	Adopt rules, appoint officials, manage the event, and certify authority.	Privately direct judges toward a marketable result.

Role	Primary responsibility	Usually should not
Technical / rules official	Observe and enforce assigned objective requirements or violations.	Hide a formal penalty inside an aesthetic score.
Safeguarding lead	Receive concerns and activate protective procedures.	Treat a scoring dispute as a substitute for safeguarding response.

Before, During, and After the Assignment

Before judging, the adjudicator should obtain and read the current rules, criteria, scale, stage instructions, conflict policy, correction procedure, and any event-specific briefing. Preparation includes practical matters: knowing the report time, dress expectation, device policy, schedule, viewing position, accessibility needs, and method of ballot submission. A person who accepts an assignment without enough time or competence to prepare should notify the appointing authority rather than attempt to improvise expertise at the table.

During competition, attention must be continuous for the period assigned. The judge should use the official identification system, make marks within the permitted time, avoid discussion in an independent panel, and ask procedural questions through the designated channel. The duty is to the whole field. Checking a phone, socializing, preparing comments for one competitor while another performs, or visibly reacting to errors can produce both actual and perceived unfairness.

After submission, the adjudicator protects confidentiality, cooperates with legitimate clerical review, and avoids campaigning for the panel to reinterpret its decision. If feedback is authorized, it should be delivered through the event's process. Public commentary should never reveal confidential ballots, disparage competitors, or undermine an uncertified result. The assignment may end, but obligations concerning records, boundaries, and professional speech often continue.

Uncertainty Is a Signal to Clarify

A disciplined judge does not convert uncertainty into private rulemaking. If the ballot does not explain whether scores carry forward, if a required element appears absent but penalty authority is unclear, or if two published documents conflict, the question belongs with the head adjudicator or organizer before marks are finalized. Asking a procedural question is not weakness. It is an integrity practice.

The judge should, however, distinguish a genuine rules ambiguity from ordinary difficulty in exercising judgment. A criterion such as originality may require expert interpretation; the head adjudicator should not tell an independent panel what score to give. Clarification defines the question and the process. It does not supply the answer that belongs to the judge.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Identify who evaluates, who calculates, who enforces, and who manages.
- Remain within assigned authority even when several roles are held by one person.
- Prepare from the current official materials.
- Escalate procedural ambiguity without outsourcing adjudicative judgment.

CHAPTER 3

Understanding the Contest: The OCA Five Questions

Before asking who was best, determine what “best” is supposed to mean here.

A Universal Reading Framework

Unfamiliar competitions become manageable when the adjudicator asks five questions in order: What is being evaluated? Against what is it being evaluated? How is the judgment expressed? How are multiple judgments combined? What happens as a result? These questions do not dictate a scoring philosophy. They expose the philosophy and mechanics already chosen by the competition.

Consider a gingerbread-house contest that supplies four criteria and a ten-point scale. The first and third questions appear answered: the criteria identify the object of evaluation, and numbers express the judgment. Yet the judge may still not know whether entries are compared with one another or with anchored standards, whether the four scores are equally weighted, whether high and low panel scores are dropped, whether ties share placement, or whether the round qualifies entrants for a final. A ballot can look complete while the adjudication task remains underspecified.

The Five Questions

1. What is being evaluated? Identify the relevant performance, product, attempt, round, criteria, and required elements.
2. Against what is it being evaluated? Determine whether the reference is other competitors, a published standard, an opponent, a technical specification, or a threshold.
3. How is the judgment expressed? Identify the required output: recall, rank, numeric or category score, pass/not yet, majority vote, or winner selection.
4. How are judgments combined? Understand the sum, average, weight, majority, dropped-score, placement, or hybrid method used to form the result.
5. What happens next? Know whether the decision advances, qualifies, places, eliminates, awards a level, earns points, or produces feedback only.

What Is Being Evaluated?

The object of judgment may be broader or narrower than the visible performance. Technique, accuracy, difficulty, creativity, presentation, musicality, authenticity, compliance, overall effect, audience connection,

or successful completion can each be relevant. The rules should state which qualities matter and whether the judge evaluates the whole entry, a particular attempt, a best-of-series result, or only the current round. A battle may reward direct response; a proficiency examination may require every named competency; a technical build may combine measured completion with judged design.

Required elements deserve special attention. A requirement is not automatically a scored criterion. Some events direct judges to include fulfillment within a category; others assign a fixed penalty; still others reserve compliance decisions to a technical official. Secretly reducing 'presentation' because a required component was missing may feel sensible, but it creates double counting if the official system later applies the published deduction.

Against What?

Comparative evaluation asks which entries are stronger relative to the present field. Criterion-referenced evaluation asks whether an entry satisfies a standard that should remain stable across fields. Direct-opponent evaluation asks who won the current match. Technical evaluation may ask whether an attempt stayed within a specification. These reference points change the judge's mental task. In a strong final, every competitor may be excellent and still require a complete ranking. In a weak proficiency cohort, no candidate may meet the threshold even though one is clearly best in the room.

Many competitions mix reference points. A rubric may be scored against anchored descriptions and then converted to comparative placement. A preliminary may impose a minimum qualifying standard before a ranked final. Hybrid design is legitimate when the transition is explicit. The risk arises when judges drift between models without realizing it, raising a proficiency standard because the field is impressive or treating an ordinal final as though a fixed numerical threshold should determine first place.

Expression, Combination, and Consequence

The ballot is an instruction, not stationery. Six recalls on a twenty-entry preliminary ask the judge to identify six advancers; they do not ask for a private ranking of all twenty. A 1-to-5 category card asks for separate criterion decisions; it does not authorize the judge to begin from a desired overall total and reverse-engineer category numbers. A ranked final asks for an ordinal order; it does not mean that the distance between first and second equals the distance between fifth and sixth.

Judges should understand aggregation well enough to appreciate the effect of their marks, but they should not tabulate strategically. If audience voting is worth twenty-five percent, expert judges submit their honest expert scores rather than lowering a hometown favorite to offset predicted crowd support. If a system drops high and low scores, judges still use the full appropriate scale. Knowledge of combination protects correct ballot use; it does not authorize result engineering.

Finally, consequence shapes the needed precision. A non-advancement preliminary, a championship placement, a credentialing threshold, and a feedback-only exhibition do not carry identical stakes or tasks. The judge must know whether previous scores reset, whether every rank must be unique, whether a tie can stand, and whether the mark becomes part of a continuing registry.

PRACTICAL HABIT

Before every round, silently complete this sentence: ‘In this stage, I am evaluating ___ against ___, expressing my judgment as ___; the marks will be combined by ___ so that ___.’

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Use all five questions before judging an unfamiliar contest.
- Separate required elements from scored criteria and formal penalties.
- Identify whether the reference is comparative, criterion-based, opponent-based, or technical.
- Read the ballot as a precise instruction.

CHAPTER 4

Competition Formats and Stages

A format is not merely how results are displayed; it determines the judgment the official must make.

Scored Competitions

Scored systems translate evaluation into points. Some use a single overall score; others divide the performance into criteria and combine category marks. Scores can be summed, averaged, weighted, normalized, or adjusted by formal deductions and bonuses. Their strength is transparency about components. Their weakness is the temptation to treat any number as more precise than the underlying judgment supports.

A scale of 0 to 100 does not create one hundred meaningful distinctions by itself. If the rubric cannot explain why an 87 differs from an 88, decimals may perform certainty rather than provide it. Smaller anchored scales often produce more interpretable decisions. Larger scales can be appropriate in disciplines with established conventions or measurable components, but judges should understand the unit of judgment and avoid decorative precision.

Ranked and Placement Competitions

Ranked systems ask the judge to order entries. Rank is ordinal: first is preferred to second, but the ballot does not necessarily communicate the size of that preference. This makes ranking useful when the central question is comparative order and numerical distance would be artificial. It also requires judges to resolve close comparisons rather than hiding them inside equal scores when ties are not permitted.

The panel's final placement may differ from every individual ballot because the appointed aggregation method combines orders according to its rules. Specialized systems, including majority-based placement methods used in some dance settings, belong to the scorekeeper or scrutineer to calculate. The adjudicator's responsibility is an accurate, complete order. Disliking the aggregate result is not evidence that calculation should be ignored.

Recall and Selection Formats

Recall judging asks who should continue, often under a fixed limit. The judge may view a large field in heats and mark a specified number of competitors across the round. This is a selection task rather than a full

placement exercise. An adjudicator who spends scarce attention building an exact first-through-twentieth order may miss the actual decision at the cut line.

Heat structure introduces memory and contrast risks. A strong entry can look ordinary in an exceptional heat and exceptional in a weak heat. Judges should use consistent notes, identifiers, and criteria across the entire stage, reserving the final recalls until the field has been viewed when procedure allows. The event's rules—not a judge's preference—determine whether ties at the cut advance all, advance none, trigger selection, or use another method.

Proficiency and Standards-Based Formats

Proficiency adjudication compares performance with a defined standard. It may produce pass/fail, pass/not yet, meets/exceeds, or a tiered award. A sound system identifies required competencies, any minimum per criterion, the role of total score, and critical failures that prevent qualification regardless of aggregate strength.

The examiner must resist quotas that the rules do not create. If every candidate meets the standard, every candidate may pass. If only one does, passing others to make the day feel balanced corrupts the credential. Developmental feedback may be generous and encouraging while the decision remains faithful to the published threshold.

Head-to-Head and Battle Formats

Battles make direct comparison explicit. The relevant unit may be a round or the whole match; the output may be a winner vote, category vote, numeric card, or cumulative point total. Alternating order can create response opportunities and second-performer advantages, while simultaneous formats create different viewing demands. The rules should tell judges whether prior rounds carry forward, whether response or rebuttal is a criterion, and how a tied match proceeds.

A battle is especially vulnerable to reputation carryover. Seeding, crowd energy, and a competitor's historical status may create an expectation before the current exchange begins. The judge's duty is to decide the present match under the present rules. Public signaling can be part of the format, but theatrical presentation should never replace completion and secure submission of the official decision.

Audience and Hybrid Systems

Audience participation is legitimate when its purpose and weight are explicit. Methods include applause, paper ballots, tokens, selected audience panels, and authenticated digital voting. Each measures something slightly different and carries vulnerabilities related to acoustics, seating, hometown support, social following, duplicate votes, and differential access to promotion.

Hybrid systems can combine expert and audience perspectives, technical and artistic panels, judged scores and objective measurements, or different methods across stages. The design must define each body's authority and prevent accidental double weighting. If presentation appears on both a specialist panel and the general panel, for example, it may influence the total twice unless that effect was deliberate and disclosed. Judges should score their assigned portion honestly, not compensate for what they expect another body to do.

Stages Change the Question

A competition may move from eligibility screening to qualification, preliminary selection, elimination rounds, semifinal, final, consolation, or super-final. The same activity can demand different judgment at each stage. A recall preliminary may prioritize identification of viable advancers; a ranked final requires complete comparative order. A qualifying round may apply a threshold; the final may reset scores and reward the best performance of that moment.

Before every stage, confirm whether marks carry forward, whether the criteria or weights change, whether the panel changes, and what the ballot requires. Judges should never assume that because the competitors look familiar, the task is unchanged.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Distinguish points, ranks, recalls, thresholds, opponent decisions, audience votes, and hybrids.
- Avoid false precision in numeric systems.
- Keep proficiency standards stable across cohorts.
- Reset attention to the current battle or stage when the rules require it.

CHAPTER 5

Rubrics, Criteria, Weights, and Scales

A rubric is a public theory of what matters, translated into instructions a judge can use.

What Makes a Criterion Useful

A strong criterion is relevant to the competition's purpose, distinct from neighboring criteria, observable in the entry, interpretable by qualified judges, and scalable across the permitted range. Names alone are not definitions. 'Technical execution' must identify what counts as execution in the discipline; 'creativity' should clarify whether novelty, transformation, risk, problem-solving, or individual voice is being rewarded.

Weak rubrics often repeat a general impression through several labels: quality, excellence, wow factor, overall quality, and general effect. Because the categories are not distinct, the same favorable reaction is counted again and again. A stronger structure might distinguish execution, difficulty, creativity, presentation, and overall effect, with definitions explaining the boundaries. Overall effect can legitimately capture integration and impact, but it should not become permission to rescore every other category.

Anchors Make Scales Meaningful

A number has meaning only in relation to an anchor. On a ten-point scale, '7' may mean competent, strong, above average, or simply what a particular judge tends to give. Anchored descriptors establish shared interpretation: a developing performance may show partial control with recurring errors; a competent performance may meet the expected standard reliably; an exceptional performance may demonstrate sustained mastery, complexity, and integration.

Anchors should describe observable qualities rather than emotional enthusiasm. They do not eliminate judgment, and examples should not become rigid templates that punish legitimate variation. Their purpose is to keep judges speaking the same evaluative language. Two judges may still place an entry on opposite sides of an anchor; the disagreement is more useful because its basis can be examined.

Scale level	Illustrative anchor	Adjudicator focus
1 — Deficient	Essential requirements are absent or performance is not functional.	Identify concrete failures; do not use as a generic low mark.
2 — Developing	Partial achievement with substantial inconsistency or unresolved errors.	Distinguish emerging competence from mere attempt.

Scale level	Illustrative anchor	Adjudicator focus
3 — Competent	The published standard is met with generally reliable control.	Recognize success without requiring exceptional distinction.
4 — Strong	Sustained quality, clear command, and notable effectiveness.	Reward evidence beyond baseline competence.
5 — Exceptional	Rare, integrated, and authoritative achievement of the criterion.	Use when the anchor is actually met; do not reserve automatically.

Weighting Is a Statement of Values

Weights determine how much each criterion can influence the result. A forty-percent category is not merely printed more prominently than a twenty-percent category; it has twice the mathematical capacity to affect the total. Competitions may express weight through percentages, different maximum points, or multipliers. Judges need not perform all tabulation, but they must understand the scoring range assigned to each component.

Hidden reweighting occurs when a judge lets a favored criterion dominate beyond its published share. It can happen overtly—deciding technique should count seventy percent when the rubric says thirty—or indirectly, by allowing one impression to drive every category. The cure is to score criteria independently from the evidence. Begin with execution when scoring execution, not with the overall total you want the competitor to receive.

Not-applicable categories require a published rule. Removing a denominator, substituting an average, or awarding full points can each change relative outcomes. A judge should never invent the treatment at the table.

Scale Discipline

Judges commonly compress scores into a narrow safe band. Compression feels cautious, but it reduces the system's ability to distinguish meaningful performance differences and gives small errors disproportionate effect. Inflation creates the opposite problem, crowding almost everyone near the top. Both often arise when judges have not internalized the anchors or fear the social meaning of a low mark.

Saving room for later competitors creates an early-order penalty. If the first entry meets the definition of exceptional, it should receive the exceptional range. A later entry can also receive that range or exceed the first within it. The possibility of a future stronger performance is not evidence that the current performance was weaker than its anchor.

Scale drift also occurs as fatigue changes attention or as the field establishes a new emotional baseline. Judges should revisit the written anchors during breaks, maintain consistent note-taking, and distinguish an evolving understanding of the field from a silently moving standard.

Objective Checks Within Subjective Evaluation

Many judged competitions combine observable binary facts with qualitative evaluation. A required element was present or absent; a time limit was exceeded or not; a robot completed a task; a dancer maintained a specified hold for a required section. These checks can strengthen clarity, but only if authority and scoring treatment are explicit.

The judge should not assume that a measurable fact belongs inside every qualitative category. When the rules assign a five-point time penalty, lowering creativity as well may punish the same violation twice. When completion is itself part of technical execution, ignoring it because a separate official also recorded the fact may undercount it. The published system controls.

RUBRIC DISCIPLINE

Score each criterion for what it says. Apply each weight for what it means. Use the scale anchors that were published. Do not redesign the competition through your ballot.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Evaluate criteria for relevance, distinctness, observability, interpretability, and scalability.
- Use anchors to give numbers shared meaning.
- Treat weights as substantive.
- Avoid compression, inflation, saving room, and hidden reweighting.

CHAPTER 6

Making and Recording the Judgment

The ballot should preserve the result of careful observation, not substitute for it.

Observation Before Evaluation

Judging begins with disciplined attention. Experts often recognize patterns quickly, but speed can conceal assumptions. A useful sequence is to observe the relevant evidence, identify which criterion it bears on, compare it with the appropriate anchor or competitor, and then express the decision. The sequence need not be slow, but it should be mentally available. When challenged by a close call, the judge should be able to return to evidence rather than repeat a feeling.

Fast-moving formats require triage. A recall judge cannot write an essay for every entry; a battle judge may have seconds before signaling. Preparation makes speed possible. Knowing the identifiers, criteria, round structure, and ballot interface reduces administrative load so attention remains on performance.

Notes as Evidence and Memory Support

Working notes can stabilize memory across heats, long sessions, and close comparisons. Effective notes are brief, criterion-linked, and observational: 'timing unstable in final phrase,' 'all required components completed,' or 'novel response directly answered opponent.' Notes such as 'annoying,' 'lazy,' or 'not championship material' speculate about character or merely restate a conclusion. They provide little decision support and create needless harm if reviewed.

Working notes are not automatically official feedback, yet they should still be professional. Appeals, incident review, or data-access rules may expose them. The safest assumption is that any recorded comment might someday need to be explained. Judges should follow the event's retention and disposal rules rather than keeping private archives of ballots or competitor information.

Reading and Completing the Ballot

Before marking, identify the competitor code, stage, required fields, scale endpoints, whether ties are allowed, the number of recalls, and the submission method. Confirm whether deductions are entered separately and whether blank fields are permitted. Many score problems are not failures of judgment; they are failures to answer the form actually presented.

Completeness matters because missing data can change how software or a scorekeeper treats the ballot. A blank may be interpreted as zero, excluded from an average, or trigger an invalid ballot. If the intended

treatment is unclear, ask before submission. Do not use a blank as an informal protest against a category or competitor.

Independent Scoring Without Result Engineering

Judges may understand that a mark is likely to influence advancement, but they should not manipulate the ballot to produce a preferred aggregate. Strategic exaggeration—placing a favorite first by an artificially wide score or burying a rival because other judges may support them—turns the panel from a combination of honest judgments into a contest among judges.

The proper unit of responsibility is the ballot the judge is authorized to submit. Score the categories independently, rank the field honestly, choose the required recalls, and allow the published system to combine the panel. The aggregate may surprise everyone. That is not, by itself, a defect.

Submitting and Verifying

Submission should be timely and secure. On paper, the judge should confirm identifiers and signatures where required. In a digital system, the judge should review the summary before finalizing and immediately report a device failure or suspected mismatch. Screens should not be left visible to competitors or spectators, and credentials should not be shared.

Verification is not permission to reconsider taste after learning the standings. Legitimate checks ask whether the ballot accurately captured the decision made: Was the correct competitor selected? Was a category omitted? Did the interface register the intended value? Once the judge confirms that the record matches the judgment, the score proceeds under the event's finality rules.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Observe evidence and connect it to the assigned criterion.
- Keep concise, professional notes that support memory.
- Complete every required ballot field according to its instructions.
- Submit an honest ballot rather than engineering the panel result.

CHAPTER 7

Calibration, Consistency, and Panel Practice

Shared understanding strengthens independence; manufactured agreement destroys it.

What Calibration Is For

Calibration aligns interpretation of criteria, anchors, rules, and procedures before consequential judging. A panel may review definitions, score a sample, compare distributions, and discuss why a criterion produced a wide spread. The objective is not identical numbers. It is to discover whether judges are answering different questions, using different scale meanings, or missing the same event-specific instruction.

Useful calibration language remains connected to the framework: 'I treated completion as part of technical execution because the definition says...' or 'My eight reflects the strong anchor, while exceptional requires sustained control.' Improper coordination focuses on the desired outcome: 'Everyone needs to give this an 8.5,' 'We cannot let that team advance,' or 'Our scores look bad unless we agree.'

Independent and Deliberative Panels

In an independent panel, judges observe and submit without discussing scores or soliciting colleagues' reactions. Independence protects perspective diversity and reduces conformity. A head adjudicator may clarify procedure but should not reveal other marks or direct a consensus. Judges should avoid facial signaling, whispered comparisons, and score-shopping that accomplish indirectly what discussion rules prohibit.

A deliberative panel intentionally discusses evidence and may reach a collective decision. This model can be appropriate for credentialing boards, specialized technical reviews, or formats designed around reasoned consensus. It requires structure so status, seniority, or confidence does not silence minority observations. Members should record initial impressions when useful, invite evidence from all panelists, and distinguish a consensus reached through reasoning from acquiescence to pressure.

Neither model is inherently superior. The event must choose and disclose the model. The ethical failure is behaving deliberatively in an independent system or pretending an intended group decision is merely a collection of isolated ballots.

Consistency Across a Long Event

Consistency does not mean issuing the same score repeatedly. It means that the same quality of evidence receives comparable interpretation under the same standard. Long events threaten this through fatigue, hunger, noise, time pressure, emotional carryover, and shifting scale use. A spectacular entry may make the next competent entry feel worse than it is; a run of weak entries may make ordinary work feel exceptional.

Mitigation is operational as well as psychological. Panels need reasonable breaks, hydration, suitable sight lines, functioning equipment, and rotation when allowed. Judges should revisit anchors and stage instructions, use stable abbreviations, and report attention-compromising conditions. Heroic endurance is not a substitute for reliable evaluation.

If a judge detects drift, the response depends on timing and policy. During an unsubmitted practice exercise, recalibration may include rescoring. During live competition, a judge should not retroactively revise earlier marks without an authorized correction process. The head adjudicator can clarify anchors prospectively and document any formal action.

Legitimate Disagreement

Panels benefit from disagreement when it reflects different relevant observations. A technical specialist may notice execution details another judge misses; a presentation specialist may better perceive audience communication. The scoring design decides how those perspectives are represented. Wide disagreement is not automatically scandalous, but it is information. It may reveal ambiguous criteria, inadequate calibration, unsuitable appointments, poor sight lines, or simply a genuinely close and multidimensional entry.

Post-event review should examine patterns without punishing judges for independence. Chronic outlier behavior disconnected from notes or anchors deserves development; a single dissenting judgment may be the most careful ballot in the room. Review the process and evidence before equating majority with correctness.

CALIBRATION BOUNDARY

A panel should agree on what the rules and scale mean. It should not agree in advance on who deserves to win.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Use calibration to align meaning, not manufacture scores.
- Follow the assigned independent or deliberative panel model.
- Manage fatigue and contrast effects as operational risks.
- Treat score spread as information requiring interpretation.

CHAPTER 8

Bias, Taste, Expertise, and Discipline

Respect

Expertise should sharpen perception, not enlarge permission to judge irrelevant things.

Bias Is a Condition to Manage

Bias is not limited to conscious prejudice or corrupt intent. It includes ordinary cognitive shortcuts that direct attention and interpretation. Reputation bias makes a famous entrant's work seem stronger before it is evaluated. Halo and horn effects allow one striking strength or error to color unrelated categories. Primacy and recency favor the beginning or end of a sequence. Contrast makes an entry appear better or worse because of what immediately preceded it. Affinity, hometown, status, and expectation effects can operate even when the judge sincerely intends fairness.

Professionalism begins by rejecting the fantasy of total immunity. A judge who believes expertise has eliminated bias is less likely to notice it. Mitigation makes irrelevant information less available, returns attention to criteria, uses consistent notes, and slows decisions at predictable risk points. The goal is not moral self-accusation. It is better decision design.

Effect	Typical risk	Useful countermeasure
Reputation / status	Past success becomes evidence for the present score.	Judge the current entry; limit unnecessary biography and ranking information.
Halo / horn	One feature drives every category.	Score criteria independently and identify category-specific evidence.
Order / recency	Early or late entries receive systematic advantage.	Use anchors, stable notes, and full-field review where permitted.
Contrast	An entry is evaluated mainly against its immediate neighbor.	Return to the correct reference set or published standard.
Affinity / hometown	Similarity or community loyalty shapes evaluation.	Disclose relevant relationships; attend to observable criteria.

Effect	Typical risk	Useful countermeasure
Anchoring	A seed, expected score, or first number fixes the range.	Avoid irrelevant predictions and make an evidence-based first judgment.

Taste Versus Competence

A judge may dislike a genre and still evaluate it competently; a judge may enjoy a performance and still recognize that it fails the rubric. The key question is whether the official has enough discipline knowledge to interpret the published criteria on the activity's own terms. Personal restraint cannot replace missing competence. A judge who does not understand what counts as control, difficulty, authenticity, or risk in the discipline may be unable to see the relevant evidence.

Adjacent expertise is valuable but dangerous. Classical vocal training can help a karaoke judge hear pitch and breath control, yet become distortion if every style is rewarded for classical tone. Permanent engineering knowledge can illuminate structural reasoning in a temporary build, yet mislead if the contest intentionally values rapid assembly, recyclability, or artistic transformation. The judge must know which knowledge transfers and which assumptions do not.

Cultural and Community-Defined Standards

Some competitive practices belong to communities whose values have been historically misunderstood or extracted by outsiders. Respecting a discipline means more than learning terminology. It may require understanding tradition, innovation, social function, authorship, acceptable variation, and who has authority to define excellence. A generic rubric cannot repair a panel that lacks the cultural competence needed to interpret it.

Adjudicators should approach unfamiliar practices with disciplined humility. Ask for definitions and examples before the event, not during a competitor's performance. Avoid presenting one's own adjacent tradition as universal. If the assignment requires competence the judge does not possess, declining or requesting a more appropriate appointment protects both the competitor and the institution.

Practical Bias Controls

Before the event, disclose relationships, avoid unnecessary research into entrants, and learn the rubric rather than predictions. During the event, use identifiers consistently, separate criteria, record evidence in a stable form, and notice strong emotional reactions as cues to slow down. Across heats, return to anchors. In panels, resist score-shopping and do not treat confidence or seniority as proof.

After the event, review patterns where policy permits. A judge whose scores are consistently compressed, unusually aligned with hometown entries, or disconnected from category definitions may need recalibration or development. Statistical review can reveal patterns but cannot diagnose motive by itself. It should begin a fair inquiry, not replace one.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Recognize common cognitive effects without reducing bias to intentional misconduct.
- Use criterion-specific evidence to limit halo, horn, and contrast effects.
- Apply expertise within the discipline's published values.
- Decline assignments when subject-matter competence is insufficient.

CHAPTER 9

Specialized Decision Contexts

The general principles remain stable, but some formats place special pressure on attention and judgment.

Recall Cuts and Physical Heats

When competitors appear in separate physical heats, the judge must mentally reunite them into one stage. Heat quality, viewing angle, costume similarity, and identifier errors can distort recall decisions. A consistent notation system and a deliberate final review of the cut line are more useful than an elaborate ranking of the entire field. The judge must submit exactly the number of recalls required unless the rules authorize another action.

Ties at the cut are an event-design question. Systems may advance all tied competitors, advance none, request a selected resolution, or invoke a predefined secondary procedure. The judge should not invent a secret extra criterion after seeing who is tied.

Final Ranking

A final rank asks for a complete order even when the field is uniformly strong. The judge may use pairwise comparisons: Which of these two better satisfies the overall criteria, and why? Pairwise reasoning should support, not replace, a whole-field check for transitivity and accidental duplicates. If the system prohibits tied ranks, every place must be used once.

The scorekeeper's calculation may produce a winner whom an individual judge ranked lower. That result reflects the agreed method for combining panel preferences. A judge should raise only a genuine calculation or ballot-recording error, not demand that the system privilege one ballot after the outcome is known.

Audience Reaction and Crowd Effects

Crowd reaction can be evidence when audience connection is a criterion. Even then, loudness is not a pure measurement of connection: venue acoustics, group size, performer order, organized supporters, and cultural display rules affect response. The judge should interpret reaction through the criterion definition rather than simply awarding the loudest moment.

When audience reaction is not a criterion, it is environmental noise. Expert judges should neither follow it nor overcorrect against it. Deliberately lowering a popular entrant to prove independence is as improper as raising the entrant because the room approves.

Battle-Specific Judgment

Battle formats intensify momentum and narrative. A favored competitor may appear to 'own' the match after a dramatic opening, causing later rounds to receive less independent attention. Judges should know whether each round resets, whether a match can end early, and whether the third round in a best-of-three remains necessary after two wins. They should distinguish showmanship directed at the audience from an effective response to the opponent when the rubric separates those qualities.

Going second can provide information and a rebuttal opportunity; going first can establish material without response. A fair format may rotate order, account for response explicitly, or accept the asymmetry as part of the contest. Judges apply the chosen structure rather than silently compensating through unexplained points.

Feedback and Proficiency Examination

Feedback is an assigned product, not an automatic entitlement to redesign the competitor. Useful comments identify evidence, connect it to a criterion, and indicate a plausible direction: 'Pitch remained centered in sustained notes, but consonant releases repeatedly arrived after the accompaniment' is more useful than 'work on technique.' The comment should be proportionate to the judge's evidence and role.

In proficiency contexts, feedback should preserve the distinction between encouragement and qualification. 'Not yet' can be delivered respectfully and specifically without lowering the standard. For youth and vulnerable participants, feedback must also follow safeguarding rules concerning setting, communication, guardianship, and private contact.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Treat separate heats as one stage.
- Complete ranked finals without confusing an individual ballot with the aggregate.
- Use audience response only as the rules direct.
- Apply battle order and feedback procedures as published.

CHAPTER 10

Ethics, Conflicts, Conduct, and Safeguarding

Integrity is not only the absence of bribery; it is the disciplined management of authority and relationship.

Recognizing Conflicts of Interest

A conflict exists when a relationship, interest, obligation, or dispute could reasonably affect—or appear to affect—the adjudicator's independence. Common examples include family or romantic relationships, close friendship, current coaching, employment, financial interest, sponsorship, business partnership, ownership in an entry, active dispute, and direct competitive rivalry. The seriousness depends on timing, closeness, decision stakes, available alternatives, and the event's policy.

Small communities require realism. If every qualified duck-calling judge knows most competitors, universal recusal may make competition impossible. Familiarity is not the same as a hidden financial interest or current coaching relationship. The answer is not to conceal connections but to disclose them early so the authorized official can apply a consistent policy and document any approved exception.

Disclosure Comes Before Self-Justification

The first duty is disclosure, not private certainty that one can remain fair. The adjudicator should provide enough information for the head adjudicator or organizer to assess the relationship without broadcasting unnecessary personal details. The event then determines whether recusal, reassignment, panel adjustment, participant notice, or documented permission is appropriate.

A judge should not wait until a favored or disfavored competitor reaches the final. Late disclosure can make replacement impossible and place the entire result under suspicion. If an unexpected entrant appears, disclose immediately and avoid discussing the merits until direction is received.

Professional Conduct

Professional conduct includes punctuality, preparation, sobriety, attention, appropriate device use, controlled body language, and respectful speech. Judges should not ridicule errors, celebrate one competitor from the table, coach through gestures, lobby colleagues, or exploit access to seek business or

personal relationships. Where a format intentionally uses theatrical judges, performance can be part of the event, but the official must still complete the real adjudication accurately and avoid humiliating participants.

Confidentiality protects both deliberation and score integrity. Events may publish detailed ballots, but publication should occur through the authorized process. A judge should not leak scores, share screenshots, or post that the winner 'should never have won.' Public disagreement by an official can transform a legitimate close result into institutional distrust.

Safeguarding and Boundaries

Adjudicator status creates authority, visibility, and access. Those features can make competitors—especially minors and vulnerable adults—feel unable to refuse requests or challenge conduct. A credential never overrides safeguarding rules. Private hotel-room feedback, isolated transportation, unauthorized backstage access, sexualized communication, or direct-message relationships may create unacceptable risk even when described as mentorship.

Feedback should occur in approved settings and channels. Communications with minors should include required guardians or organizational accounts. Photography, changing areas, travel, lodging, and physical contact are governed by event and OCA safeguarding standards. If a competitor reports a concern, the judge should listen without conducting a private investigation, avoid promises of secrecy, preserve immediate safety, and report through the designated process.

Retaliation is a grave violation. A competitor must not receive lower scores, lost invitations, or reputational punishment for declining contact, disclosing a concern, filing a protest, or participating in an investigation. Judges should report pressure to retaliate as well as direct misconduct.

CONFLICT PRINCIPLE

Not every disclosed relationship requires recusal. Every material relationship deserves timely disclosure and consistent application of the event's policy.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Disclose material relationships before judging.
- Allow the authorized official to apply recusal policy.
- Maintain professional demeanor and confidentiality.
- Recognize that adjudicator authority creates safeguarding responsibilities and retaliation risks.

CHAPTER 11

Ties, Penalties, Corrections, Appeals, and Finality

Procedure is most important when the desired answer becomes visible.

Ties and Tiebreaks

A tie is not an emergency that suspends the rules. It is a foreseeable outcome that the competition should address in advance. Legitimate methods include a published priority criterion, majority preference, an additional performance, an original-panel revote, a designated head-adjudicator decision, a specialized calculation, dropped scores, or shared placement. Each changes incentives and authority; none should be chosen only after organizers see which competitors are tied.

Some ties should remain ties. Proficiency awards, shared placements, or point standings may not require artificial separation. Where the format requires one winner, the judge follows the predefined method even if another method would favor the competitor the judge personally preferred.

Penalties, Violations, and Disqualification

Quality evaluation and rules enforcement are related but distinct. A time violation may trigger an automatic deduction recorded by a technical official. A missing required element may belong inside a criterion, produce a fixed penalty, or lead to disqualification. Safety or conduct matters may be reserved to the organizer. Judges must know their assigned authority before acting.

Silent score reduction is especially damaging. If a costume violation calls for five points, reducing presentation by two obscures the rule, prevents consistent treatment, and may combine with the official deduction. The proper response is to record or report the violation through the published channel and score the remaining criteria as directed. Disqualification carries serious consequences and should never be improvised by an individual judge unless the rules expressly grant that authority.

Score Corrections and Audit Trails

A correction repairs the record of the judgment actually made. Examples include selecting the wrong competitor number, omitting a category, entering 2 instead of 8, or encountering a technical submission failure. Reconsideration changes the judgment after submission because the judge had second thoughts,

heard another opinion, or saw the leaderboard. The first may be authorized; the second ordinarily threatens finality.

Correction procedures should require prompt reporting, identification of the original and corrected value, a reason, authorization, timestamp, and retention of an audit trail. Digital systems should preserve rather than overwrite history. The head adjudicator should evaluate whether the request is clerical and whether correction remains possible under the rules. A judge should never ask a scorekeeper to quietly alter data.

Appeals and Protests

Appeals protect rules and procedure, not every disappointed preference. Reviewable issues commonly include mathematical error, wrong-competitor attribution, misapplied rules, incorrect penalties, eligibility decisions, undisclosed conflicts, and material technical malfunction. Event policy may define additional grounds and strict filing requirements.

Good-faith adjudicative judgment ordinarily stands. A competitor's belief that originality was undervalued may be sincere and worth respectful explanation, but it does not by itself prove a correctable error. Rejudging subjective merit after every disagreement would make results provisional until the most persistent person stopped objecting.

Finality should not become a shield for corruption, discrimination, safeguarding violations, or proof that the panel failed to apply the published framework. The distinction is between disagreement with an authorized judgment and evidence that the process producing it was not the promised process.

Communicating Difficult Decisions

Officials should state what was decided, under which rule, by whom, and what next step is available. They should avoid argumentative improvisation, speculation about judges' motives, or promises outside policy. When an error is confirmed, direct acknowledgment protects credibility better than defensive vagueness.

The competitor should receive enough information to use the process, but not confidential deliberations or personal data belonging to others. A calm explanation of jurisdiction—what can and cannot be reviewed—is part of procedural fairness even when the answer is no.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Use tiebreak rules adopted before the tie.
- Keep formal penalties separate from quality scores unless rules combine them.
- Distinguish clerical correction from post-result reconsideration.
- Separate reviewable process errors from good-faith judgment.

CHAPTER 12

Applied Practice and Continuing Competence

A credential marks a foundation; professional competence is demonstrated repeatedly in context.

Preparing for an Assignment

Competent judging begins before arrival. Read the current documents, confirm the stage and format, answer the Five Questions, study the rubric and anchors, disclose conflicts, and identify any discipline knowledge that needs clarification. Review the correction, protest, safeguarding, and emergency channels. If the event cannot answer a question material to fair judging, document the concern and seek resolution before accepting responsibility for the result.

Practical readiness also matters. Arrive with necessary identification, accessible note-taking tools, required attire, and an understanding of the schedule. Confirm sight lines and sound before competition. A technically elegant rubric cannot compensate for a judge who cannot see the work or hear the performance.

Learning Through Calibration and Review

Practice ballots allow adjudicators to expose assumptions without affecting competitors. A useful laboratory includes numeric rubrics, weighted categories, recall selection, ranked finals, proficiency thresholds, battle cards, audience hybrids, and penalty separation. Judges should score independently first, then compare reasoning with anchors and instructions.

Post-event review can examine completion errors, score distributions, correction frequency, outlier patterns, and feedback quality. The purpose is development and system improvement. Review should distinguish a judge who sees the field differently from one who repeatedly ignores the scale, misses required fields, or allows a relationship to shape decisions.

Scope of General Training

General adjudication training establishes a common professional method. It does not certify universal expertise in the things being judged. Appointment may also require demonstrated experience, nomination, discipline endorsement, observation, apprenticeship, continuing education, or event-specific recognition. A

person can understand fair process and still be unqualified to evaluate advanced ballroom technique, competitive auctioneering, robotics design, or an Indigenous performance tradition.

The distinction protects the meaning of credentials. It also supports growth. An official can build format competence, discipline knowledge, and leadership capacity in stages rather than claiming expertise all at once. Head adjudication, proficiency examination, battle judging, safeguarding leadership, and specialized discipline pathways may require separate preparation.

Continuing Competence

Rules, technology, and community standards change. Adjudicators should complete required renewal education, review major policy updates, practice with new scoring systems, and seek feedback on recurring weaknesses. A long record of service is valuable, but it is not a substitute for current competence.

Officials should also monitor their own capacity. Hearing, vision, attention, mobility, language access, stress, and fatigue can affect assignments without diminishing a person's worth. Appropriate accommodations, role selection, and honest limits protect performance. Stepping away from an unsuitable assignment is a professional decision, not a failure of commitment.

The OCA Adjudication Promise

Open Competition Alliance exists to make room for competitions with radically different ideas of excellence. The shared standard is not aesthetic sameness. It is a process worthy of trust: the contest is defined, the judge is qualified, the criteria are applied, the panel is independent within its model, conflicts are managed, scores are secure, and competitors are treated as people.

Fair play does not eliminate close calls, disagreement, surprise, or the wildness that makes competition compelling. It gives those things a legitimate structure. The professional adjudicator's contribution is quiet but decisive: understand the question, attend to the evidence, make the judgment honestly, and leave a record that says the competition meant what it claimed to mean.

Chapter Review

A professional adjudicator should leave this chapter able to apply the following ideas in practice, not merely recognize their vocabulary.

- Prepare from current rules and real event conditions.
- Use practice and review for ongoing development.
- Pair general standards with appropriate discipline competence.
- Treat fair process as the common foundation across radically different competitions.

CHAPTER A

Five-Question Adjudication Worksheet

A clear assignment can be stated in five answers.

Question	Working answer
1. What is being evaluated?	Entry, attempt, performance, round, criteria, required elements:
2. Against what?	Other competitors, an anchored standard, an opponent, specification, or threshold:
3. How is judgment expressed?	Recall, rank, score, category score, pass/not yet, vote, or winner:
4. How is it combined?	Sum, average, weights, majority, dropped scores, placement system, or hybrid:
5. What happens next?	Advance, qualify, place, win, earn a level or points, receive feedback:

If any answer is missing or contradictory, ask the designated official before judging begins. The worksheet is a preparation aid; the event's official rules remain authoritative.

CHAPTER B

Pre-Event and Round-Start Checklists

Reliable performance grows from repeatable preparation.

Before Accepting or Confirming the Assignment

- Confirm the discipline, level, format, dates, location, schedule, compensation, and expected duties.
- Assess whether your discipline competence and current capacity match the assignment.
- Request the current rules, criteria, scale, conflict policy, safeguarding policy, and correction/appeal process.
- Disclose material relationships or interests early.
- Identify accommodations or access needs.

Before the Event

- Read the official materials in full and answer the Five Questions.
- Study anchors, weights, required elements, penalties, and stage transitions.
- Complete calibration or sample scoring as assigned.
- Confirm reporting time, attire, credentialing, device, and ballot procedures.
- Know whom to contact for procedure, technical issues, conflicts, and safeguarding concerns.

Before Each Round

- Confirm the stage, competitor identification method, viewing order, and ballot type.
- Verify the number of recalls or whether complete unique ranks are required.
- Confirm whether scores reset or carry forward and whether criteria or weights changed.
- Check sight lines, sound, timing, and ballot function.
- Return attention to the published anchors and current task.

CHAPTER C

Ballot-Reading Guide

Every ballot answers a question; determine the question before making marks.

Ballot type	What the judge submits	Common error
Recall	A fixed or permitted selection of advancers.	Ranking the whole field or exceeding the recall limit.
Ranked final	A complete ordinal order, usually without duplicate ranks.	Using equal ranks or treating rank gaps as numeric distances.
Weighted rubric	Independent category marks within defined ranges.	Reverse-engineering categories from a desired total.
Proficiency	A threshold or level determination against standards.	Passing a quota or comparing candidates to one another.
Battle card	Round or match decision in the published form.	Carrying reputation or prior matches into the current decision.
Hybrid scorecard	Only the component assigned to the judge.	Compensating for predicted audience or other-panel results.

CHAPTER D

Conflict Disclosure and Feedback Guides

Clear language makes integrity easier to practice.

A Useful Conflict Disclosure

MODEL LANGUAGE

I am disclosing that Competitor 27 is a current student in a weekly class I teach. I have not discussed this event or their entry with them. Please apply the event's conflict policy and let me know whether I should be reassigned or recused.

A disclosure identifies the person or entry, the nature and current status of the relationship, and any fact needed to apply policy. It does not argue that the judge is definitely unbiased, demand recusal when policy does not require it, or broadcast private details to the whole field.

Criterion-Based Feedback Formula

Useful feedback often follows three moves: identify the observed evidence; connect it to the criterion or anchor; offer a proportionate direction when feedback is authorized. The order keeps comments grounded in the judged work.

Instead of	Use
“Awful. No stage presence.”	“Eye line remained downward through most of the performance, which limited audience connection under the presentation criterion.”
“You are not creative.”	“The solution completed the required task, but its design closely followed the provided example; the originality anchor calls for meaningful transformation.”
“Not championship material.”	“Timing and partnering were inconsistent in the final section, placing technical execution in the developing range for this level.”

Instead of	Use
"I just did not like it."	"The interpretation was stylistically coherent; however, dynamic contrast remained limited under the expression criterion."

CHAPTER E

Cross-Discipline Case Studies

Apply the framework to the contest in front of you.

Case 1: The Karaoke Final

Five finalists are scored for vocal control (30%), stylistic interpretation (25%), rhythm and phrasing (20%), stage communication (15%), and overall effect (10%). Audience voting is a separate 20% component of the combined result. One judge dislikes country music and expects the local favorite to dominate the audience vote.

ANALYSIS

The expert judge applies the published genre-sensitive criteria and does not compensate for the audience component. Personal genre preference is irrelevant; predicted audience behavior does not authorize strategic scoring. Category marks should be made independently before the weighted total is calculated.

Case 2: The Sand-Sculpture Build

Teams receive scores for structural execution, creativity, theme interpretation, and finish. A separate technical official applies a fixed deduction for work after the time signal. A judge sees one team continue for several seconds and lowers both execution and presentation before reporting the violation.

ANALYSIS

The judge should report the time issue through the authorized channel and avoid a hidden duplicate penalty. If the overtime caused observable defects relevant to a criterion, those defects may be judged, but the mere violation should not be punished again inside unrelated categories.

Case 3: The Dance Preliminary

Twenty-four couples appear in three heats. Each judge has eight recalls. The second heat is unusually strong, and the judge has already marked seven couples before the third heat begins.

ANALYSIS

The judge should treat the heats as one stage, use consistent notes, and avoid letting the strength of one heat exhaust the ballot prematurely. When procedure permits, provisional selections should be reviewed at the cut line after the whole field is seen.

Case 4: The Comedy Battle

A famous competitor faces a newcomer in a best-of-three battle. The newcomer wins the opening round clearly. The famous competitor receives louder crowd response in round two but makes little direct response to the opponent, which is an explicit criterion.

ANALYSIS

The judge decides each round under the published model, separates crowd volume from assigned criteria, and does not allow reputation to carry the famous competitor. If response is explicit, the absence matters within that criterion rather than as a generalized punishment.

Case 5: The Robotics Proficiency Test

Candidates must complete four essential tasks and earn at least 70% overall. Failure of the emergency-stop demonstration is designated a critical failure. The highest-scoring candidate earns 88% but fails that demonstration.

ANALYSIS

The candidate does not pass if the rules make the emergency-stop failure disqualifying for proficiency. Comparative superiority and a high aggregate do not override a critical requirement. Feedback should explain the specific standard without softening the credential threshold.

Case 6: The Unexpected Student

Minutes before a final, an adjudicator discovers that a current private student has entered under a stage name. The event has a conflict policy requiring disclosure and presumptive recusal for current one-to-one coaching relationships.

ANALYSIS

The judge should disclose immediately to the head adjudicator, avoid discussing the entrant's merits, and follow reassignment or recusal direction. The inconvenience of a late discovery does not justify concealment.

Case 7: The Score Correction

After submission, a judge reports that they entered 3 instead of 8 for Competitor 14. The request is made before results are announced. The digital record shows the surrounding note 'strong anchor—8' and the event permits documented clerical corrections.

ANALYSIS

This is strong evidence of a correctable data-entry error. The authorized official should preserve the original value, correction, reason, time, and approval. The correction repairs the record; it is not post-result reconsideration.

Case 8: The Originality Protest

A competitor files a protest stating that the panel undervalued originality. The rubric was applied, ballots are complete, and no conflict, calculation error, or rule deviation is alleged.

ANALYSIS

The complaint concerns good-faith adjudicative judgment and ordinarily does not support re-scoring. Officials should explain the scope of review respectfully and provide published feedback if available, while preserving the finality of the authorized panel decision.

CHAPTER F

Glossary

Shared language supports shared expectations.

Term	Meaning
Adjudication	Structured competitive evaluation performed under authorized rules and procedures.
Adjudicator	An official authorized to evaluate competitive merit or another assigned quality.
Aggregation	The method used to combine marks, votes, ranks, or components into a result.
Anchor	A description that gives a point or range on a scale observable meaning.
Appeal / protest	A formal request for review under the event's published grounds and procedure.
Calibration	Preparation that aligns interpretation of rules, criteria, and scales without forcing identical judgments.
Conflict of interest	A relationship or interest that could reasonably affect or appear to affect independence.
Criterion-referenced	Evaluation against a defined standard rather than primarily against other entrants.
Deliberative panel	A panel authorized to discuss evidence and reach a collective decision.
Disqualification	Removal from eligibility or result under authority granted by rules.
Finality	The point at which a decision stands except through an authorized review or correction process.
Hybrid format	A system combining different scoring bodies, methods, or reference models.
Independent panel	A panel in which each judge submits judgment without score discussion or

Term	Meaning
	coordination.
Norm-referenced	Evaluation primarily comparing entrants with one another.
Penalty	A defined consequence for a violation, separate from quality scoring unless rules say otherwise.
Proficiency	A threshold or level judgment against stated competencies.
Recall	A selection indicating which entrants should advance from a stage.
Rubric	A framework defining criteria, scales, weights, and often performance descriptors.
Scrutineer / scorekeeper	An official who validates, tabulates, and reports submitted marks under the scoring system.
Tiebreak	A predefined procedure for resolving an otherwise equal result.
Weight	The relative contribution of a criterion or scoring body to the combined result.



FAIR PLAY. WILD IDEAS.

Competition, Wide Open.