

*Guide for a Student Judge*  
By Aileen Garrison

This article presents a set of guidelines that may be of help to the student during the developmental stages of the AOS Judging Program. Nothing I propose is revolutionary; on the contrary, most of what you will read can be found in the current edition of the *AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*, either in bold print — or between the lines.

First and foremost, the student is a representative of the American Orchid Society and as such, he or she is bound by the rules and regulations of that governing body. The student must maintain a high standard of personal integrity at all times, and avoid any conduct that could be construed as unethical by an observer.

Secondly, the student must be committed to the judging system and its orderly evolution, and must work within the system, not try to change it.

**Knowledge and Abilities** A student should possess a thorough knowledge of the more commonly grown orchid species and hybrids, as well as a general knowledge of the lesser-known genera. Inherent to this is an overall knowledge of historical and current orchid literature. Be familiar with the reference material available to you — know where to look and what to look for. Organize this knowledge quickly, effectively and objectively, without being influenced by your own personal preferences; separate facts from opinions.

Be able to work harmoniously as a member of the judging team, yet be capable of making independent assessments. In other words, formulate your own opinion, but at the same time, be able to recognize the merit of the opinions of other judges. It is important to maintain your point of view; the key is to do so without becoming defensive or argumentative.

**Training and Development** During the time I have been in the judging program, I have served in many different capacities ... from clerk to chair of a judging center. Without exception, I have learned from each of these experiences and I would like to share some of them with you.

At an orchid show you may be asked to clerk, chair a ribbon judging team or just be a member of the judging team. Normally, as a student, you would expect to participate in the ribbon-judging process, but there are times your services as clerk will be required. This is particularly true at larger shows where there are a number of judges, many whom have traveled long distances to participate. You are still part of the judging process, and in all probability, even though you are serving as a clerk, you may be asked for your opinion. The important thing to remember here is voice your opinion *if* asked; under no circumstances volunteer your opinion if you are not asked.

As a member of the ribbon judging team, once all entries in a class are viewed, you will be asked for your nominations for first-, second- and third-place ribbons. Have your nominations ready, in order of preference; don't delay the process by having to return to the exhibits before you can make a decision. Remember, in ribbon judging, competition is limited to the entries in the show. You are looking for quality, true, but not to the degree required for an AOS award. However, don't reward a plant or flower just because it is the only one in its class. One of the purposes of staging an orchid show is to educate the public, and a blue ribbon says quality.

On the subject of ribbon judging, I would like to share with you what I call a "lesson learned." Many years ago at a show in Charlotte, North Carolina, I was part of a team assigned to ribbon-judge phalaenopsis. The team consisted of an accredited judge, a probationary judge and a student judge (myself), and all of us were from the Southern Region (now known as the Atlanta Judging Center). After viewing all of the entries in a particular class, I was asked by the chair for my three nominations. I responded, and then the chair asked the probationary judge to do likewise. Interestingly enough, we had selected the same three, but the order was different. The chair then asked me again; this time I changed my order of preference to agree with that of the probationary judge, adding as I did that, "I could go either way, it didn't matter." No sooner had the words left my mouth than I had my heels locked right there on the judging floor. The chair let me know, in no uncertain terms, that it did matter. "I asked you for *your* choices; as a judge you must be able to make

independent decisions and be prepared to defend those decisions, not defer or cop out.” I learned a valuable lesson that day, and I am very thankful that a member of our judging community cared enough to point out the error of my ways.

The student’s role in AOS judging differs greatly from that of ribbon judging. Here you are a student in the true sense of the word. The plant or flower under consideration has been nominated by one or more of the certified judges present. It is your responsibility to provide the judging team with all available facts. Previous awards, botanical descriptions and any other factual information that may assist the team are acceptable. Descriptions taken from a vendor’s brochure, however, are not acceptable since these merely represent opinions of the grower, hybridizer or seller. Neither are opinions of the student judge presenting the information acceptable. Here again, I learned a valuable lesson. During AOS judging at a show where I was a student, I was asked to research a particular plant that had been pulled from one of the exhibits. I was quite taken by the plant, although I knew little about the cross, and I was very surprised when records showed the cross had been recognized several times. As I presented the judging team with the results of my research, I added something to the effect that I, too, thought the plant deserving, but according to the records, this particular plant did not measure up to the standards that had already been set. I noticed a rather horrified expression on the faces of the judges but I proceeded undaunted until the chair confronted me, one on one, and explained why my remarks had been totally inappropriate. In essence, what I had done was prejudge the plant; my comments could have been construed as an attempt to influence the decision of the judges. As a student, my job was to collect the facts and present these facts to the team. I had not been asked for my opinion and I should not have volunteered it. Thankfully, the judging chair, again from my region, cared enough to point out my mistake.

What I have attempted to show in the above illustrations is that as a student, you are in the learning mode. The certified judges are your teachers and they are willing to share their knowledge and experience with you if you are willing to listen. Insight based on experience is something not found in a textbook. Grasp every opportunity that presents itself no matter what form it takes. Let constructive criticism be a challenge ... there is no need to make the same mistake twice.

**Summary** In closing I would like to leave you with some pointers:

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Insure that your personal integrity is above reproach	Make negative remarks that could cast uncertainties about you as a representative of the AOS
Learn the judging system and how it works	Attempt to change what you have only begun to understand
Make independent judgments	Try to second-guess the judges
Complete all assignments in a thorough and timely manner	Be late for any judging function
Listen to the voices of experience	Take criticism as a personal affront

Look forward to the day when you will join the ranks of the accredited judges. Then you will have the opportunity to share your knowledge and experiences with those new to the program. The best advice I can give is to take what you do seriously, but do not take yourself seriously — have fun and enjoy the journey.

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