

Training Student Judges in the Southern Region

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The Selection Procedure: The process of selecting student judges is carried out in conjunction with our semi-annual business meetings. Prospective students must apply in accordance with Section 4.2.1 of the seventh edition of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. Applicants who are clearly not qualified are urged to work on their credentials and apply at a later date. Those who seem to be qualified are asked to appear for a written exam, a test for color blindness, and an interview with a panel of accredited judges.

The written exam is designed to help us evaluate the background of each applicant, and there is no level at which one "passes" or "fails." The interview serves a similar purpose and, in addition, gives us an opportunity to be certain that each applicant is aware of the commitment of time and money that will be required if he or she joins the program. Our goal is to accept well-qualified people into the program, but only at a rate at which we can offer them thorough training.

Student training: Our students participate in the judging process to the greatest extent possible. At regional judgments, each student is required to select from the plant table those plants which he or she feels are most likely to be considered for awards. By comparing those selections with those of the certified judges, we can get an idea of the critical skills the students are developing. This exercise requires some caution in its application. Some students become quite astute at guessing which plants some judges are likely to select, and we must remain aware of the fact that, in some instances, a student may have more knowledge about a certain area of orchidology than anyone else in the room.

Each plant presented to a team of judges for possible point scoring is thoroughly researched, and, if time permits, the students perform that research. The students find previous awards, parentage, taxonomic references, color slides, and any other information which may be helpful. They then present the entire package to a team of judges for consideration. In addition to the facts, students are asked for their opinions. They are usually asked if they nominated the plant and why. If the plant is considered for an award, the student also scores it, and his or her score sheet is held for comparison with those the awards description and presents it to a team of judges for review and editing. If the plant is not awarded, the student is responsible for presenting a brief discussion of the teams' deliberations to the audience at the conclusion of judging.

At shows, the students participate as full voting members of ribbon judging teams. In addition, they are asked to prepare AOS Show Trophy score sheets for the three exhibits they consider to be the best in the show. The score sheets become a part of the students' files.

Besides participating in actual judging situations, students in the Southern Region have a steady diet of homework. I given them an assignment which calls for some research, a little reflection and synthesis, and a modest amount of writing nearly every month. There is also a standing assignment requiring each student to review each Awards Quarterly as it comes out, giving a few examples of good and poor descriptions and commenting on the articles which pertain to judging.

Each year, students prepare a talk of about 15 minutes' duration to be presented at a regional judging. Topics are left to the students' discretion, so long as they relate to some aspect of the judging process. Students also participate fully in our semi-annual judging seminars. They share the lecturing responsibilities as well as benefiting from talks given by more experienced judges.

There is no final exam. I am suspicious of exams, due in part to my lack of skill in preparing them. I am not sufficiently trained in testing to detect those persons who can memorize vast amounts of material while retaining (or learning) little. Similarly, I know that there are many people do not perform well on exams, regardless of their knowledge of the subject material. I am fortunate in having a group of judging colleagues who pay close attention to the progress of our students, and I feel comfortable in relying on their collective observations when we gather to discuss elevations in status. As our numbers grow, we may be forced to adopt a testing system. Meanwhile, we prefer a thorough discussion and a simple vote.

Once elevated in the status of probationary judge, a student experiences some pleasant changes. Probationary judges can select plants for awards consideration. Votes and point scores begin to count for the first time. Some drudgery remains, because the homework assignments are still due. But the annual oral presentation no longer is required. Students now do the endless research while the probationary judge sits as a member of a team. The mechanics of judging, however, are not new to the probationary judge. He or she has been going through all the motions for three years or more.