

The Drudgery of Judgery – Sweating the Details

By Ned Nash

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Among my varied duties here at the AOS is that of overseeing the awards registrar. In this capacity, I also assist in the proofreading of the *Awards Quarterly*. As a judge, it has long been a source of frustration to have what appear to be transpositions, exclusions or other faulty information, included in the *AQ* as part of the permanent record. I am sure that you are just as frustrated when you go to the *AQ* for reference, only to find some impossible dimension, or no dimensions, or no flower count, or some other shortcoming of information that prevents you from adequately evaluating the plant in question. It is probably only natural to assume these as errors on the part of the *AQ* editorial staff. Six months of reading summary sheets and proofreading two issues of the *AQ* have shown me that I was mistaken, for the most part, in this assumption. It is my observation that, by and large, both the awards registrar and the editor are more than diligent in their entering of data, pretty much exactly as it comes to them.

Presumably, before any award information reaches us, it has been read and approved by at least two experienced accredited judges: the team captain and the regional chairman. Photographic records, while less of a problem, are also passed on by at least one experienced judge – supposedly – before being submitted into the permanent record. While a good many of the regions use word processing to submit their summary sheets, some few do not. Some regions, apparently, do not even have access to a typewriter. Some regions' summary sheets have been read and proofed by the signatory person – chairman or otherwise; some clearly have not been proofread, at least with any care. It is difficult to understand how a group of dedicated volunteers, whose combined expertise on the subject of orchids far exceeds that available at any time in the past, can allow such sloppy work to be submitted by their peers into the permanent record of the Society; records that will profoundly influence future judging and will certainly reflect on the perceived quality of the information recorded therein. These records represent each and every one of us, and the quality in some cases is not, I believe, what most of us would want represent our contribution.

“Sloppy” is a pretty strong word. How else to describe, though, such faults as omission of flower or spike count; omission, misplacement or transposition of segment measurements (paphiopedilum petal length and width are most often transposed); or just plain poor penmanship? Can we not show some pride in our work? Can the team captain not proofread the description and measurements before signing? Can the regional chairman not double-check to assure that all information is present and legible? That spelling is correct? Use of, at the very least, block printing instead of cursive? The final result – information – is important, both to our generation of judges, and to future judges. Obviously flawed recording of information also throws the system integrity into question.

Many will say “Not me,” or “I didn't realize!” (Why not?) Never serve as a team captain? Don't use the summary sheet copies distributed for reference?), or “Not my problem.” I can assure you that we here do our best to properly record and store the data sent us as a

part of the Awards System, and I know that some few of you are worried that someone here will change the wording or intent of your carefully thought-out description. Changing what you have written is the least of our worries. We are much more concerned with being able to properly interpret your writing into the records. If these records are important – and I think they are – shouldn't we, the judging community, show a little pride in the actual results of our product? After all, it is pretty difficult to hold someone else – the staff – to standards that judges can't or won't maintain. Let's all be a little more caring about the final quality of the work we do as judges. It will make the system work better for all of us.

In closing, a few final suggestions for making awards summaries and their contents easiest to read and transcribe into the records:

- Type, or use block printing
- Double-check measurements to see that they are correctly entered. (Hint: Your logic and experience will often guide you here.)
- Team captain should read the scoresheet before signing off.
- Regional Chairman should read the summary sheets and double-check for accuracy before signing off.

These many seem like elementary steps, and they are certainly nothing revolutionary, but if they were religiously followed, the awards records would be even better than they already are. Remember, the staff is always ready and willing to assist you on these matters. You have but to ask.