

Judging Forum Exercises

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There is a wealth of knowledge out there if you are listening. How you recognize, assimilate and present this knowledge will, most of the time, determine how proficient a judge you can become. This process is continuous for students, probationary and accredited judges.

I will never forget when I was a student judge and on a team evaluating an *Ascocenda*. I thought the flowers were excellent. Judge Walt Off looked at the inflorescence and pointed out that he was not pleased with the arrangement of flowers. I first thought he was being too picky, but realized very quickly that he had a much better overview of evaluating the flowers than I. To this day, I always place the inflorescence as one of my first considerations in judging vandaceous orchids.

These questions should help you realize if you are listening:

1. If a judge asks you a question, and you do not know or provide an unsatisfactory answer, do you then research the subject and discuss your findings?
2. Can you identify each of your center's judge's specialties? Do you then discuss those specialties with each of them?
3. When you are ribbon judging and a judge take the time to complete an in-depth evaluation on an entry, do you pay attention or are you too busy trying to order the entries to make your own nominations? I recently was on a team with Rob Griesbach, PhD, at the National Capital Show. Griesbach has always been a wealth of knowledge – especially about *Phalaenopsis*. It was very worthwhile to spend a few minutes listening to his evaluations on modern breeding trends and novelties that are not always well known.
4. If a judge spends time working with you on a description, are you taking note of the judge's methodology and terminology or are you trying to get the description finished so you can go on to the next description?
5. Do you read the Awards Quarterly and choose descriptions that are written clearly? Do you try and describe some of your own flowering plants and adopt words and phrases and utilize many of those description techniques?
6. Do you listen to what a judge is saying and adopt terms and phrases that are accurate or descriptive as part of your vocabulary? I gave several presentations in the early 1980s on small-growing *Phalaenopsis* and used the term *biplanar* referring to *Phalaenopsis equestris*. I am pleased to have heard the term used by at least a dozen judges in their descriptions and presentations. I utilized the term *off-axis* in referring to a lack of symmetry. Many of the judges at the center has adopted the term and utilize it. The meaning is now commonly understood.
7. If you cannot remember, do you take notes? One of my previous students and now Chair of Mid-Atlantic, Chris Rehmann, would always walk around with a small notebook and constantly be making entries. It was impressive what he did not forget by using his mass of notes.

8. If you are criticized, do you take offense or do you turn the criticism into useful study and knowledge? I was a student judging at the Miami Show with team leader Phil Jesup. He corrected by pronunciation on at least 10 types of Pleurothallids. It was a bit embarrassing, but he did it with a smile. I do not think that I mispronounce those species to this day.
9. 9. Are you willing to make long-distance phone calls, or send e-mails, and communicate with judges in other centers or other experts to gain information about a subject?
10. If you disagree with a judge's evaluation, do you get upset and counter with your opinion or do you stop and bear in mind that the other judge may be evaluating qualities that you have not considered?
11. If you only have a cursory knowledge of an entry, can you admit that you have minimal information and ask other more knowledgeable judges to provide information that will help you score the flower more accurately? It is absolutely impossible for every judge to have expanded knowledge on all orchids. On lesser-known entries, judges should take advantage of the group knowledge (the encyclopedia of judges) of all of the judges in their center.
12. If a judge asks you to reconsider your nomination, can you change your opinion without feeling that you have been embarrassed? As a probationary judge, I was AOS judging *Miltoniopsis* with team-leader Ben Berliner. The other judges on the team were in the 82-84 point range on a yellow *Miltoniopsis*. I think my score was 77 or 78. In a very respectful manner, Berliner asked me to look at the flowers again and reconsider. When I did, I realized that I had underpointed based on too quick an observation and raised my score to 82. Did I feel foolish? Maybe a little. Was Berliner's purpose to embarrass me or get his way – absolutely not. He was interested in a fair score for a well-presented flower. The lesson was that I will never be so locked in to a score that I cannot consider another judge's observations and request.

In conclusion, there are infinite knowledge resources available to members of the AOS Judging system. Learning to recognize the resources and taking advantage of them is a primary goal. I claim that the best judges are the best listeners and they continue to listen and learn.