

Let's Untie the Other Hand

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If American Orchid Society judges have a common ambition, it is probably that of achieving the ability to give each flower an immediate, bottom-line score which will be right on the ultimate average of all judging scores for the orchid entry. Students try diligently to learn to do this. Old, mossback A.O.S. Judges realize it cannot be done. That is why most of us use the individual scoring elements on each point-scoring sheet: we need all the help we can get!

After studying the A.O.S. Orchid Judging score sheets carefully, it seems to me that we are handicapping ourselves unnecessarily by splitting in half most of the discretionary scoring points available to us. In effect, we are entering competition with one hand tied. The culprit is the alignment of points in the scales we use for orchid judging. Please note the term used in "alignment." Nothing in this discussion suggests any change in the distribution of points in the judging process. Rather, we seek to untie the other hand for all users of the A.O.S. Judging System while preserving that system in its present form.

To begin, let us examine the eight detailed Point Scales for A.O.S. Awards beginning with number 2, "Cattleyas" on page 19 of the A.O.S. Handbook on Judging and Exhibition (Sixth Edition), and ending with number 9, "Vandas" on page 23. These score sheets and their point scales have several features in common:

- a. Each scale has a total of 100 points each, with scoring increments apportioned in a manner appropriate to the genus evaluated.
- b. Each scale is divided into three parts: form, color and other characteristics. Form and color are further divided, with half the total points allocated to general features and half to specific items.
- c. Except for paphiopedilums, the point scales distribute points 30-30-40 among form, color and other characteristics, respectively. Paph distribution is 40-40-20 for essentially the same characteristics.

These eight Point Scales for A.O.S. Awards use ten different numbers to indicate maximum scoring values. These numbers appear parenthetically after each point-scoring element on the point scales. Certain characteristics of these numbers are tabulated below in TABLE 1. An examination of the tabulation will show the values used in A.O.S. Judging, number of times they occur on the eight scoring sheets and the number of whole points which may be deducted before the value of the element drops below the award zone on a percentage basis.

With TABLE I data at hand, let us look at the A.O.S. Judging problem. Numbers, especially small numbers, behave badly when we attempt to limit their use while at the same time employing them to compute a desired result. In A.O.S. Judging, we limit number use by restricting the award zone to values in the fourth quartile; i.e., values at or above 75 percent. Some notable things which happen to this particular set of numbers

may be found in the following relationships, which were extracted from data in TABLE 1:

TABLE I: Characteristics of values presently used on the eight point scales considered

Numerical Value	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	% Occurs in 8 Scales	% of Total Values	Group Percentages
20	95	90	85	80	75	3	3.4	3.4
15	93	87	80			14	15.7	15.7
10	90	80				30	33.7	
9	89	78				2	2.2	38.1
8	88	75				2	2.2	
7	86					4	4.5	
6	83					3	3.4	
5	80					28	31.5	42.7
4	75					1	1.1	
3	-					2	2.2	

TABLE II: Characteristics of values proposed for the same eight point scales

Numerical Value	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	# Occurs in 8 Scales	% of Total Values	Group Percentages
20	95	90	85	80	75	4	5.6	5.6
18	94	89	83	78		2	2.8	
16	94	88	81	75		2	2.8	5.6
14	93	86	79			4	5.6	
12	92	83	75			3	4.2	9.8
10	90	80				53	74.6	
8	88	75				1	1.4	76.0
5	80					2	2.8	2.8

- a. Five values (3 through 7) can lose no more than one point if they are to remain within the A.O.S. Award zone. One of these (3) must be scored “all or nothing,” so far as the award zone is concerned, for the first full point subtracted from this value leaves the remainder at 67% of the total value. True, an orchid judging entry need not be in the award zone for each increment in order to score points sufficient for an A.O.S. Award, but for each element scored below the award zone, an element of equal value must be scored above the award zone if the entry is to accumulate points at or above the 75% level. Before we shrug all this off as an inconsequential play upon numbers, note that the five numbers we are discussing are used 38 times on the eight score sheets under consideration on the eight score sheets under consideration and, in fact, constitute 42.7% of the total

- values assessed on the eight sheets we are examining. Suddenly, “inconsequential” is not so easily applied to these values.
- b. Moving up, we find the next three values (8, 9, and 10) can lose up to two points each within the award zone. These values appear 34 times on our scoring sheets and represent 38.1% of the assessed values. We have now covered 80.8% of the values used to assess virtually the full range of orchids subject to A.O.S. Merit Awards and are still down in the peanut gallery for number size with which to assess them.
 - c. A giant step takes us to the next value, 15. This value may lose 3 points before falling out of the A.O.S. Award zone. Score sheets use the value 15 a total of 14 times, or 15.7% of the total number of assessed values.
 - d. Finally, we arrive at 20. Up to five points can be deducted within the A.O.S. Award zone before a “twenty-pointer” falls below the lower award zone limit. That makes for easy judging, but 20 is used only 3 times on the sheets and constitutes only 3.4% of the total points.

Of course, one may expand the range of point scoring elements by using half points and other decimal equivalents. Frankly, however, some very funny point score totals begin to appear during the late hours of many a tedious A.O.S. Judging Session, even when whole numbers are used. Perhaps the system could not withstand both metric measurements and decimal scoring.

A better solution would seem to be deletion of the “general form” and “general color” assessments, with those point values being pro-rated to the specific values following those headings. While this would double the individual values and allow more “room” to judge, it would leave the total values for form and color unchanged. A.O.S. Awards under the “new” scoring would be fully compatible with awards granted under the present system.

When the proposed method is applied using the tabular method constructed for the present method (TABLE I), we find the new approach would utilize a total of eight point scoring values, tabulated in TABLE II to show the characteristics involved. It is significant that only one value (versus five in the TABLE I distribution) retains the “one point” problem, and this value (5) appears only twice on the sheets for a total participation of 2.8%. This may be contrasted with the 42.7% rate for one-pointers as shown in TABLE I. Two point values double in frequency of use from 38.1% to 76.0%, while those having 3 points or more within the award zone increase from 19.1% to 21.0%. An overall review of TABLE II versus TABLE I data will show a general movement of values toward the more flexible, larger numbers.

With more than 97% of the values involved possessing the flexibility of two or more points within the A.O.S. Award zone under the proposed system versus 58% in the present method, the proposed method appears to offer improved judging discretion with no increase in effort or cost. In addition, the integrity of the present system and all previous A.O.S. awards would be preserved. Perhaps one could wish for several redistributions within the award values, but this would have a significant impact upon

comparability of current with previous awards and would require very careful study before adoption. The approach we propose does not have compatibility implications.

And there, with considerable exposure of the neck, you have my proposal and rationale. Disagree if you will, support if you can, but please comment. If you will identify you're A.O.S. Judging status (and nothing else, if you prefer) in your remarks, we will tabulate them by student, probationary and accredited categories and offer them to the A.O.S. *Awards Quarterly*, in a follow-up comment.