



Southern California School Band & Orchestra Association

SCSBOA Professional Development Conference 2020

Festival Adjudication

“Understanding the SCSBOA Festival Sheet”

This session is designed to introduce several modifications to the Adjudication Form for 2020, to review what adjudicators are looking for in a festival performance and to understand/review the festival sheet.

Presenter: John Vorwald

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Front Page Modifications

- Starting this festival season, directors need to enter the length of each piece that will be performed.
- In addition, total length of all pieces must be indicated (maximum 18 minutes).
- Grade 4/5 ensembles may perform a third selection if the total program does not exceed 18 minutes.

Adjudication Form Modifications

- On last year’s festival sheet, there are two elements under “Sound”: Tone Quality and Blend/Balance. If there are major issues with Blend/Balance, it is conceivable that the letter grade for “Sound” could be lowered. Outstanding tone quality might not receive full credit in this scenario.
- Accurate balance is dependent upon an understanding of the traditional “pyramid” concept of balance. This concept produces sounds in which lower voices have a fundamental role in shaping all aspects of balance. Proper balance drastically affects intonation in an ensemble. Ideally, the assessment of “Sound” incorporates all three elements: tone quality, intonation and blend/balance.
- A number of years ago “Intonation” was removed from the component trio under “Sound” and a letter grade box for intonation was created. Since this rendered the “Sound” concept incomplete, it seems fitting to add a letter grade box for “Blend/Balance” and rename “Sound” to “Tone Quality”.
- The modified Adjudication Form has been approved by the Festival Adjudication Committee (FAC).
- The resulting modified festival sheet was previewed at a few events last year and received positive responses from the judges.
- This will also create 15 letter grades instead of 12, eliminating the rating dilemma if grades are even (assuming the group plays 3 selections).

Criteria References Updated

- The final modification includes relocating the criteria reference for Blend/Balance, so it lines up with the Adjudication Form.
- BLEND/BALANCE - The previous criteria for Excellent and Superior are slightly modified to allow less than perfection for the Superior rating. Below are revised criteria for Excellent and Superior.
- **EXCELLENT**
 - Blend and balance concepts are frequently understood and maintained, although roles in the musical dialogue are not always clearly defined. Tonal blend is mostly consistent, but sometimes adversely affected in upper range and dynamics.
- **SUPERIOR**
 - Highly developed concepts of Blend and Balance are demonstrated. Tonal blend is often uniform and consistent. Balance between and within sections is apparent most of the time. Inconsistencies may occur during the most difficult passages but are usually short in duration.

What are adjudicators looking/listening for in a festival performance?

- The SCSBOA festival adjudication sheet lists tone quality, intonation, blend/balance, fundamentals and musicianship as the elements of festival performance evaluation. Although the list is not purposely organized in order of importance, tone quality is recognized as one of the most important elements to be assessed. Most music education associations' judging sheets place tone quality near the top of the list of factors to consider. Good tone quality and good intonation are key ingredients of a fine performance. That is why tone quality and intonation are listed 1 and 2 on the SCSBOA festival sheet.
- Festival Adjudicators look for progress and understanding of each of the elements on the festival sheet and based on the criteria references assign grades (A to E) to each of these. **Note that adjudicators are required to consider the grade level of the ensemble when applying criteria references.** Pluses or minuses may be entered in the small blocks indicating "strength" (+) or "needs improvement" (-).
- The elements on the sheet and associated criteria references on page 4 provide a director with learning objectives that can help define program standards.
- Let's look at the terminology on the sheet and what judges are listening/looking for.

ADJUDICATORS LISTEN/LOOK FOR:

TO NE QUALITY

- **Woodwinds/Brass** – To what degree do the Woodwind or Brass players play with a characteristic sound that is sonorous, centered and mature and is achieved in all registers and at all dynamic levels? Is the tone focused, with appropriate breathing and/or embouchure skills?
- **Strings** – To what degree do the String players play with characteristic sound in all registers and at all dynamic levels? Is the tone resonant, with proper bowing technique to generate tone and proper interactions between bow, speed, weight and contact points?
- **Percussion** - To what degree do the Percussionists play with characteristic tone quality? Is tuning/tension and use of implements enhancing wind instruments tone quality?



INTONATION

- **Ensemble** – To what degree does the ensemble demonstrate consistent command of pitch center?
- **Melodic** – How accurate is melodic (interval) intonation?
- **Harmonic** – How accurate is harmonic (chordal) intonation?
- **Unison/Octaves** - To what degree are unisons/octaves played in tune?
- **Listening** – Do players exhibit pitch adjustments skills?

BLEND/BALANCE

- **Ensemble** – To what degree does the ensemble achieve proper blend/balance within and between sections?
- **Individual** – To what degree do individuals achieve proper blend/balance in the musical conversation?
- **Melodic** – How well does the ensemble achieve melodic balance?
- **Accompaniment** – To what degree do accompanying voices adhere to the traditional concept of balance?

FUNDAMENTALS

Rhythm/Precision

- **Pulse/Precision** – How accurate and precise is the subdivision of pulse?
- **Tempo (*control*)** – To what degree does the ensemble maintain rhythmic control of varied tempi throughout the performance?
- **Rhythmic Accuracy** – How accurate is the execution of rhythmic elements?

Articulations

- **Uniformity** – To what degree are players able to execute articulations uniformly?
- **Consistency** – To what degree are the application of articulations consistent in all sections?
- **Clarity** – To what degree are players able to articulate rapid passages or varied figures with clarity? Is the demand placed on players impeding clarity?

Technique

- **Attacks and Releases** – How well does the ensemble understand attacks and releases? Is there lack of timing or lack of visual contact with the conductor?
- **Note Accuracy** – To what degree do the performers execute note accuracy in both the melodic and harmonic content of the music?
- **Bowing** – To what degree do the performers control the bow through various articulations?
- **Facility** – Do the players exhibit adequate dexterity and flexibility to execute demanding passages?

MUSICIANSHIP

Interpretation

- **Style** – To what extent is the performance idiomatically accurate?
- **Nuances** – To what extent are artistic subtleties used to create a nuanced performance?
- **Tempi** – How stylistically accurate are tempos?

Phrasing

- **Uniformity** – To what extent is the phrasing natural and uniformly performed?
- **Shape** – To what extent is the phrasing meaningful and expressively shaped?

Dynamics

- **Range** – To what extent is a full range of dynamics used?
- **Contrast** – How well are performers able to achieve dynamic contrast? Are noticeable volume differences observed? Is one dynamic level used too often; not often enough?
- **Control** – Is control of dynamics exhibited at all volume levels?

How can the Festival Sheet help build your program standards?

(for more information about festival preparation, refer to Bill Hoehne's excellent article "Preparing Your Band for Festival")

As mentioned previously, the main categories we reviewed on the festival sheet (tone quality, intonation, blend/balance, fundamentals, musicianship) can be utilized to provide the director with specific learning objectives that can help elevate program standards. It requires consistent (often daily) exercise to develop the musical skills in each of the main categories.

Here are a few samples (need adjustment for appropriate grade level):

- *Develop a warm-up exercise that starts every rehearsal. Use many variations (long tones - nine-count tones (cresc./decresc.), intervals, breathing, etc.) to work on tone quality and attacks and releases.*
- *A focused and deliberate effort to improve intonation includes developing a daily tuning exercise that also addresses other elements on the sheet. Use half-step exercise for tuning and slur technique. Use a chord-building exercise for tuning and balance. Include singing intervals to develop aural skills.*
- *Use unison rhythm and melodic studies to enhance rhythmic precision and to develop phrasing concepts.*
- *To develop technique, use minor, major and modal scales at different speeds, with varying articulations and dynamics. Use "slow-to-fast" to learn literature and develop technique.*

A FEW FINAL ITEMS:

District vs Regional Judging Standards

- The guidelines/criteria for a Superior rating are not different at the Regional Festival. However, festival dynamics – many quality groups at the regional and perhaps use of our more experienced (demanding?) judges – may sometimes result in a higher standard compared to a district festival.

Judging Styles – here are a few hopefully fictional characters to portray various judging styles

- **Surprise Adjudicator** – the recording starts somewhere during the first selection and the judge starts commenting on the performance. Nowhere does this person indicate who he or she is, where the festival is taking place, nor the date of the festival.
- **Mr. Nice Guy** – certainly does not want to offend anyone, so this judge makes only positive comments. It's lovely that the groups looks nice, has great posture and seems to be paying attention to the director, but what does the group sound like?
- **Heavy Breather** – this judge has never heard him/herself on a voice recorder before and is unaware that words are lost to heavy breathing sounds. Often the voice recorder is too close to the mouth. Practice prior to assignment will remedy this.
- **The Problem Detector** – this is every director's favorite judge. Every single item that needs work is pointed out. Thanks, but how can the director fix it? That is why the group came to festival in the first place.
- **The SCSBOA Adjudicator** – starts on a positive note, complementing the group on something that the group did well, then picks several important areas that need improvement and provides ways to fix the problems, and then concludes with another positive statement that will make the director want to bring the group back to a festival next

That's it!

Have a great Festival Season!



"Sorry, you missed it."