

The Ten Commandments For Philatelic Judges

Reprinted from *The Philatelic Exhibitor*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Jan. 1993



by Samuel Ray Updated and Expanded to 15 Commandments by John M. Hotchner

In the 16 years since the late Sam Ray set down his landmark list of the behaviors of an effective judge (including apprentices), the field of exhibiting has grown and matured at a rapid rate, and the expectations of judges have grown with it. Further, as independence has been achieved by more and more countries, and the countries of the world continue to pour out new issues, it has become impossible for any one judge to meet the standard of earlier days: to be deeply knowledgeable in the philately of the entire world.

This makes the composition of the jury all the more important. Since the major areas of the world and types of collecting are split among the jury, there is additional and increasing pressure on each individual judge and apprentice to perform their tasks with excellence. This is given even more emphasis by the increasing degree to which the panel is reasonably expected to provide useful feedback to the exhibitors.

And so, while I hesitate to monkey with a legend, it is clear that Ray's 10 commandments has become a jumping-off point rather than the final word they were 16 years ago. It is in that spirit that the revision which follows is offered.

1. **Knowledge** - Judges are presumed to be highly knowledgeable philatelists. Exhibitors consider them to have at least a nodding acquaintance with all aspects of philatelic specialization as well as a profound knowledge of their several areas of expertise. Every judge should endeavor to merit this high regard not only by his/her actions in judging but through self-education in philately.

In preparing to become a judge one should read and study widely in every aspect of philately, and particularly in the fundamentals. One should subscribe to - and read - a wide range of weekly papers and society publications; and at least some of these should be beyond the scope of one's own fields of interest.

One should collect in a number of disparate fields and categories in order to

gain as much varied experience as possible. One should attend all possible exhibitions to study the collections on display, and should attend meetings and lectures regardless of the subject presented. Everything is grist for the mill. One's education should continue after becoming a judge -- this is actually the time to redouble one's efforts, for philatelic education is a never-ending process, and the scope of the hobby is ever increasing.

2. **Continue To Exhibit** - Judges should continue to exhibit; improving the exhibit(s) that met the exhibiting requirement for accreditation, and developing new exhibits in other exhibiting categories. The object is not the winning of medals. Rather it is to retain empathy for the person who sits on the other side of the critique table, to maintain a feel for the changes that are occurring in exhibiting standards, and to learn first hand the problems that must be overcome by exhibitors whose efforts the judge will be called upon to evaluate.

3. **Preparation for Judging** - Judges should be prepared to judge both the material in the exhibit and the effectiveness and coverage of the subject (story line) as presented philatelically. One need not be a subject matter expert to do an effective job but a good faith effort should be made before arriving to judge at an exhibition to use the information provided by the exhibitors in title pages and/or synopsis pages. They, or the exhibit title if that is all that is available, should be used as a jumping off point to consult philatelic/historical references so as to learn as much as possible about the content of the exhibits -- especially the unfamiliar areas -- to be judged.

4. **The Challenge Level** - Judges should look for and evaluate the challenge level that the exhibitor has set. Novice exhibitors and those on their way up the ladder often need to think about how they have titled their exhibit and/or what the exhibit actually

attempts; and whether that is something that can earn a gold medal as it is presently defined. Judges should be extremely wary of saying "You can't get a gold with this exhibit," when what is meant is: "To get a gold, I believe you will need to add such and such type of material/limit the area shown in order to provide more depth/explicitly broaden the scope of the exhibit to include so and so."

5. **Encouragement** - Judges should at all times keep in mind two cardinal principles: that philately is a friendly hobby, and that exhibitions are its public face. It then follows

that exhibitors are to be encouraged rather than discouraged. Judges should be friendly and helpful toward exhibitors and should refrain from a superior- than-thou attitude. In practice, judges should find and emphasize elements that would justify encouragement. This is not to say that higher awards should be freely given -- gold medals still have to be earned -- but when lesser exhibits show effort, merit and the possibility of development, the judge should seek to help the exhibitor on to the next step.

6. **Dominant Considerations** - Judges should avoid a tendency to give too much weight to such things as the arrangement of material, the presence of a typographical error, or the length of write-up, instead of the material. Judges should always remember that the material is the dominant factor, and that judging the write-up and decoration is not a substitute for judging the material.

Questionable material should be given the benefit of the doubt unless it is established beyond doubt that there is a misrepresentation. The weight given to such a problem must be assigned according to how seriously it reflects upon the exhibitor's knowledge of the material.

7. **Exhibit Preparation Methods** - Judges must not display a prejudice against any method of writing-up of a collection. Hand lettering, guide lettering, typewriting,

computer printing, and even pencil lettering are equally acceptable, as long as the work is done in good taste and is appropriate. In this connection, exhibits should not be downgraded because of an occasional erasure, typographical error, grammatical lapse, or any other such capricious reason, as long as the general effect is one of neatness.

8. **Logic of Presentation** - Judges should know there is no "right" way to collect or to present a collection. Some collectors prefer to collect and present the stamps and their problems separately from the postal history; other collectors remove aero-philately from the body of the collection and present it separately. Such individuality is to be respected; it is an absolute right of every collector to exhibit in the manner that seems most logical to him. It is the responsibility of the judges to determine if the exhibit is arranged logically within its own parameters.

9. **Focus of Judging** - Judges are strictly cautioned that they are not judging the owners, the previous owners, the circumstances of acquisition, or any rumors concerning the exhibit, but that their judging is limited solely to the material in the frame. Awards are given to the collection, not the collector. It is the responsibility of the local exhibition committee to police its own rules concerning the ownership of the collection or any other legal or moral matters, and these must be of no concern to the judges.

10. **Foster individuality** - Judging should not be approached as an ego trip but as a responsibility; with the humility born of recognition of how much the judge does **not** know. Judges should therefore make an effort to seek out and empathize with the exhibitor's topic or subject, and should refrain from imposing their own standards. One of the charms of philately is the individual approach, it should be remembered that all exhibitors are free to follow their own ideas in exhibiting, and their efforts should be accorded full and serious credence. Comments on the effectiveness of the approach to the topic or subject are fine, when accompanied by specific suggestions for improvement. Denigrating the entire effort should be avoided at all costs.

11. **Unbiased Judging** - Judges should avoid bringing their personal prejudices into their judging. All collections accepted by the exhibition committee, including those that are professionally prepared, are entitled to serious consideration and careful judging even though there may be a prevailing bias toward them. For example, there are no rules that state that nineteenth century collections are more "classical" or "important" than twentieth century, or rules that permit a bias toward certain countries or fields, or even material commonly regarded as "philatelic" when that is the accepted norm for the era and area. If the exhibitor is presenting a serious study, then the exhibit should certainly be taken seriously by the judges.

12. **Cost A Nonissue** - Judges should avoid displaying any prejudice toward or against inexpensive material. Exhibits of inexpensive material may represent a significant challenge and should be given as much serious attention as any other exhibit. On the other hand, there should be no bias against rarities or rather costly material. The phrase "All you need is money" and similar comments hardly indicate a judicial climate. Such attitudes must be carefully avoided by temperate judges.

13. **Judges Must Vote** - Judges should carefully avoid the temptation to downgrade an exhibit because they know little or nothing about the collection. Admitting ignorance is no sin. However, judges may not refuse to judge an exhibit. If a judge feels that he/she is insufficiently familiar with what is being shown in an exhibit, advice should be sought from other members of the panel or an impartial expert or specialist; this is a permissible and well accepted practice. If the judge feels that he/she can not vote in good conscience because of a total lack of understanding of the material, the situation should be discussed with the jury chairman. A judge who has materially assisted in the preparation of an exhibit should note that fact when voting.

14. **Preparing For the Critique** - After the end of formal judging, judges should spend additional time on their own reviewing exhibits they will be expected to speak to at the critique. This should be done whether the exhibitor is expected to attend or not, and regardless of the medal level. (One never knows when an exhibitor

will write after the exhibit asking for a critique, and the judge should be prepared to respond.) Given the speed with which normal judging must take place, this additional attention to one's assigned exhibits is critical to an appreciation of their strong points and the areas in which improvements are possible; and allows the judge to make specific comments keyed to frame and page number.

15. **In the Critique** - Judges should make substantive comments highlighting both the strong points noted in reviewing the exhibit, and the areas in which the exhibit can be improved. The latter can include points of presentation, but a critique focused on those alone is inadequate. The judge who has comments to make that may be embarrassing to the exhibitor should make those comments one to one, at the frames if possible, but not in the public forum of the critique. Attempts at humor at the exhibitor's expense "just to lighten the atmosphere" should be avoided.

Judges should be extremely careful about directing exhibitors to specific dealers or offering to sell useful material to exhibitors. Exhibitors should never be told that specific items are essential and then pressured to acquire them from a given source.

The judge should take pains to differentiate for the exhibitor his/her personal opinion and suggestions from objective requirements. The judge's thoughts about ways in which the exhibit might be restructured to be more effective should never be presented as requirements in the same context as the need to remove or properly label an acknowledged fake.

NOTE: The author wishes to thank Bill Bauer, Jo Bleakley, Bud Hennig, A. Don Jones, Peter McCann, Randy Neil, Steve Schumann, Bud Sellers, and Ann Triggler who reviewed and made suggestions to improve a preliminary draft of this presentation. JMH