
A PROPOSAL FOR THE CREATION OF UNIFORM JUDGING
PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS
IN INDIVIDUAL EVENTS COMPETITIONS:
AN ATTEMPT TO EMPOWER COMPETITORS,
COACHES/CRITICS AND THE FORENSICS ACTIVITY

DR. ROB TUCKER
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The judging of individual events has long been fraught with difficulty, with critics invoking their own idiosyncratic preferences and biases, instead of some form of consistent judging standard. Students have forfeited the advantage of having detailed information about a given judge's philosophy or criticism criteria. In 1984, forensics theorists produced a set of standards by which speeches could be constructed and subsequently evaluated. There exists little or no evidence that coaches/critics have actually adopted these standards, and so, as before, students are left without a guide. This paper examines the history of theory development concerning judging criteria and advances a proposal for a system of uniform judging philosophy statements to be used at national competitions. The proposal incorporates extant theory and relies on models traditionally used in modern academic debate. On the Judging Philosophy Form, each of the judging standards is outlined, with room for response provided. In addition, each standard is to be ranked in order of relative importance in accordance with the critic's own judging behavior. A sample judging philosophy statement form is included. The relative merits of the proposal are discussed in light of potential benefits for the student competitor, the coach/critic and the forensics activity as a whole.

The forensics community has long accepted the importance of establishing consistent judging criteria for contest events. It is axiomatic that such criteria, once constructed, should be made available to student competitors. In debate arenas, for example, there exists a long-held tradition of requiring extensive judging criteria (philosophy) statements of participating coaches/critics in most District and National competitions. Recently, the forensics community has generated judging standards for individual events, but has stopped short of creating a judging criteria (philosophy) statement. Such a statement would bridge theory and reality, providing multiple benefits to the student competitors, their coaches/critics and the activity as a whole. This paper will 1) outline the lack of application of present-day judging standards, 2) advance a simple proposal for a uniform judging criteria (philosophy) statement and 3)

discuss the merits of such a proposal. A sample form will be included.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the 1970's and early 1980's the competitive turf of individual events has demonstrated record proliferation. Both the National Forensics Association and the American Forensics Association have held national tournaments, while the number of state, league and regional competitions has expanded greatly. Concomitant with this unprecedented growth came a need for consistent judging criteria in contest events. As the forensics students deepened their sophistication in competing in individual events, coaches/critics needed a complete and thorough understanding of the consistent standards by which they judged the competitors. Yet, much of the standards remained idiosyncratic — whatever each judge thought them to be. "For years people within the competitive forensics community have struggled with an undetermined amount of judging criteria. Often these criteria are extremely variable and depend upon many of the judges' individual preferences. Because of this, it is often very difficult to tailor an event for competition. This situation leads to competition that can vary from state to state or district to district. Seeing that this causes a problem in judging as well as competing in an event, it is helpful to look at any consistent judging philosophies that may or may not exist" (Jukam, 1987, p. 1). Whatever standards that did exist were not "standardized," to use Murphy's (1984, p. 87) term, in the sense that they were not consistently or uniformly held by the forensics community or even by a majority of coaches/critics. "As individual events has expanded, however, so too have the problems and concerns surrounding the activity. Perhaps the most common and compelling plea conveyed by contestants and coaches alike concerns the need for consistent judging standards in all individual events" (Sellnow, 1987, p. 2).

In 1984, the Second National Conference on Forensics sought to remedy this now-apparent gap in the developing theory of individual events. "In an effort to bring some consistency to the judging standards for individual events, the participants at the Second National Conference on Forensics adopted sets of standards for evaluating public address and oral interpretation of literature events" (Sellnow, 1987, p. 2). The standards adopted by participants at the National Conference were designed to add clarity by making judging criteria more consistent. It was hoped, in this way, that decisions by coaches/critics in contest events would be more understandable to the competitors. "In setting forth Resolution 45 at the Second National Conference on Forensics (1984), participants argued that the proposed standards for evaluating public address events would permit a more coherent evaluation of the contestants and provide a frame of reference for criticism" (Hanson, 1988, p. 25).

Additionally, it was hoped that a clear articulation of consistent judging criteria should put the judge in a better position to evaluate contest events be-

fore them. The coach/critic could, equipped with consistent judging criteria, make a more systematic and thorough evaluation. Hanson (1988) cites Andrews (1983) who explains the value of such an informed critical process:

A critic is a specialist and must be able to communicate to others the results of his or her critical observation and inquiry. A critic combines knowledge with a systematic way of using that knowledge and constantly seeks his or her practice of criticism. In the most fundamental sense the critic is an educator. He or she confronts a message; his or her reaction to that message is not the same as the reaction of the casual or even the critical listener. The critic seeks to understand what is going on in order to interpret more fully the rhetorical dynamics involved in the production and reception of the message and to make certain judgments about the quality of the message (pp. 5-6).

The consistency of judging standards inherent in the National Conference recommendations provide a solid theoretical framework for decision-making in contest events. "With the set of evaluation criteria afforded critics by Resolution 45, the critic ought to be able to provide feedback on the dynamics involved in the production of the message, the quality of the message, as well as report on the observed impact of the speech materials on the audience" (Hanson, 1988, p. 26).

The difficult question remains, however, how do the consistent judging standards resulting from the Second National Conference on Forensics (Resolution 45) "match" the reality of actual judging criteria being employed by coaches/critics across the nation? Do coaches/critics really use these concepts or are they simply dismissed? If applied at all, are these standards consistently applied? Are judgments about competitive speeches still being made on an idiosyncratic basis? Does each judge view these concepts differently? Is there any hope for a set of consistent judging criteria which "matches" real-world practices of judgment-making?

The recommendations of the Second National Conference on Forensics (cited in Parson, 1984) represent a thoughtful answer to the above questions. However, this is only a partial answer. Resolution 45 is a starting point the theory which drives the practice of judgment-making in contest speech. We still lack a complete understanding of how these standards actually operate in the "real world" of forensics competitions. Some research has attempted to "match" the standards advocated in Resolution 45 with actual judges' behaviors. For example, at least two studies describe how consistent judging standards operate within After-Dinner Speaking. Drawing upon research by Swanson and Zeuschner (1983), Hanson (1988) shows that the practice of after-dinner speaking can "match" the judging standards articulated in Resolution 45. More to the point, Sellnow's (1987) content analysis of "real-world" orations "matched" the consistent judging standards of Resolution 45 against ac-

tual judgments of coaches/critics. Further, research on the reality of judging behavior vs. consistent judging standards has been accomplished in a number of contest events: Poetry (Largaespada, 1987), Impromptu and Extemporaneous Speaking (Harris, 1986; Roper, 1987), Rhetorical Criticism (Harris, 1987; Wright, 1988), Public Address Events (Jukam, 1987) and others.

What has yet to be demonstrated is how each coach/critic invokes each standard (i.e., judging philosophy). Hanson (1988) has called for the "fieldtesting" (p. 33) of judging standards, checking their validity in the "real-world" of forensics. Much research has yet to be done to complete the "match" between the theory promulgated by the Second National Conference on Forensics and the half-decade of practice we've experienced since 1984.

It should be clear that this paper does not take a position on the "rightness" of these various judging standards, only on their applicability in the "real world" of forensics. No attempt is made here to evaluate judging criteria as educational, pragmatic, etc. Instead, this effort focuses on the interplay between "judging standards" and "judges", assessing the strength and nature of the relationship between the two. What comprises a "good" contest speech may be measured by these standards in the abstract, but what "counts as" a good contest speech will only be measured by evaluating judging behavior in tournament practice or, at a minimum, by soliciting comments from coaches/critics about the nature of their own personalized rules for judging. Only in this latter way can a "match" between judging standards and judges be accomplished.

PROPOSAL

In an effort to "match" theory with practice, the proposal which follows should act as a bridge between what has been done and what needs to be done. In a fashion somewhat analogous to modern academic debate, I propose that judging criteria (philosophy) statements be required of coaches/critics participating in major/national individual event tournaments. These statements would be operationalized on the Judging Philosophy Form, with no substitutes accepted (as in debate). The Form would be flexible enough to handle different genres of contest events (e.g., Oral Interpretation on one side, Public Address on the reverse). Additionally, the Form would spell out each of the general standards put forward in Resolution 45, with space provided for unique explanations of a coach/critic's judging behavior (within the large rubric of the general standard). Furthermore, a place would be provided which would allow the coach/critic to rank the standards in order of importance to their own judging behavior (i.e., #6 delivery is more important than #4 organization). This communicates critical information to the interested competitor and provides a vast amount of information to the forensics community interested in "matching" theory with practice.

This proposal can be adopted incrementally, i.e., step-by-step, to assure its acceptance by the forensics activity. In the first year, I recommend using the Judging Philosophy Form for Public Address Events (possibly just Extemporaneous and Impromptu Speaking, as they are most susceptible to Speaker adjustment) only at major/national individual event tournaments. In latter years, if successful, its usage could be expanded to include more tournaments and Oral Interpretation Events.

JUSTIFICATION

The reasons to adopt this proposal are found within the benefits derived to the student competitor, to the coach/critic and to the forensics activity as a whole. Assuming that coaches/critics can be relied upon to actually judge the way they say they do, the advantages of having a uniform statement of a coach/critic's judging philosophy are both profound and pervasive.

FOR THE CONTEST SPEAKER

Well beyond the basic elements of speech construction and delivery, competitive speakers are motivated to learn and display advanced concepts of speech-making. A significant skill that contest speakers develop is the ability to make adjustments to the unique characteristics of judge and rhetorical situation. Toward development of this skill, judging philosophy statements can be an invaluable aid. They tell students about a particular judge's preferences, within large categories of judging criteria. They inform students about the relative strength of a given coach/critic's commitment to one aspect of contest speaking (organization) in relation to others (delivery). Consequently, judging philosophies indicate to students which elements of the speech-making enterprise to emphasize, and, in turn, how to adjust to the unique rhetorical dimensions of that judge and that round. Additionally, because the judging philosophies are "standardized" (i.e., on the same 'form'), meaningful comparisons can be made between coaches/critics, allowing for more sophisticated strategy-building in both single-critic and multi-critic rounds. Student competitors can decide to "go for" (commit themselves to) certain aspects of a judge's preference (i.e., a 'delivery' judge, a 'content' judge, etc.) with a great deal of confidence only by knowing a given coach/critic's judging philosophy in advance of the actual round of competition. Furthermore, a system of judging philosophy statements can help to remove the feeling of helplessness that besets many a student competitor, especially a novice. Faced with the idiosyncratic nature of judges preferences, it would seem that students who hope to be successful in contest speaking are "up a creek, without a paddle," at the whim of forces outside their control. Providing students with statements of coaches/critics' philosophies in advance at least gives them a paddle.

FOR THE COACH/CRITIC

Judging philosophy statements elicited by coaches/critics participating in, at a minimum, the national individual event tournaments would provide each

judge the opportunity to reflect upon the nature of their own preferences. Coaches/critics will be able to detail their own unique perspectives and viewpoints on such vital notions as organization, delivery, etc. This assumes that these coaches/critics will think out their own interpretation of the judging criteria offered on the Judging Philosophy Form and then complete the Form. As has been the tradition in modern academic debate for years, this single act of sitting down and committing one's ideas to paper forces the coach/critic to contemplate the positions taken and, in a rather sophisticated way, balance radical, extreme positions with rational, intelligent deliberation. What results is the thoughtful, careful expression of coaches/critics' preferences about fairly standard concepts relating to judging criteria in competitive forensics. Through this process, coaches/critics can only become clearer (not more confused) about the judging standards they invoke during tournament rounds, noting the irregularities of positions taken and seeking a more rational and consistent basis for criticism.

Additionally, upon adoption of the uniform judging philosophy system proposed here, the coach/critic will become more aware of his/her own rankings. The Judging Philosophy Form provides a space for coaches/critics to evaluate themselves, ranking their relative preference of each judging standard, with one (1) being 'most preferred.' Through this sort of self-analysis, coaches/critics can learn about their own actual judging behaviors in relation to the standards developed by the leading theorists in the field of forensics. The Judging Philosophy Form will contain a disclaimer that: 'while all standards are important, some are obviously more important than others.' The ranking of standards by coaches/critics does not mean that those criteria ranked #5 or #6 are unimportant, but rather, that those criteria ranked #2 or #1 are simply more important. It should be underscored that, as the theory developed at the Second National Conference on Forensics supports, all standards should be seen as important, however unequally, to success in contest speech-making.

FOR THE FORENSICS ACTIVITY

If uniform judging philosophy statements were made available to interested researchers within the forensics community, the impact would be truly beneficial. The sheer amount of data that would be generated would tremendously aid research efforts. As investigators seek to 'validate' each of the judging standards, i.e. to confirm that coaches/critics actually use these criteria in making their decisions, a system of judging philosophies of the type advocated here would provide the mechanism for empirical validation. Also, a content analysis of coach/critic's comments on the Form could provide the degree of "match" with the theory-driven standards. The type and amount of information provided from uniform judging philosophy statements would help to fill the gaps in modern research about the utility of judging standards. In addition, researchers would discover the nature of "real-world" judging behaviors, be more

confident to construct judging 'profiles' and to establish norms. Ultimately, these investigators might find themselves refining theory to, in some instances, catch up with practice.

Furthermore, a more thorough and complete understanding of a coach/critic's expectations (and criticism behavior) within the large criteria areas could only advance the interests of the forensics activity as a whole. Clarity and precision would be brought to the decision-making process; ballot commentary might improve and competitors would learn to relate to the specific philosophies of their judges. In the final analysis, the quality of speech competitions might be enhanced if the interface between student and coach/critic becomes a more coherent dialogue by meeting the coach/critic's expectations as articulated on the Judging Philosophy Form. The highest interest of the forensics activity to improve the quality of competitive speech would be fundamentally served by adopting uniform judging philosophy statements.

CONCLUSION

Considering the idiosyncratic nature of coach/critic judging criteria existing since the early 1970's and persisting today, a system needs to be developed which builds from the theory advanced by the Second National Conference on Forensics (specifically Resolution 45). Such a system would begin by stipulating the six (6) judging standards for Public Address Events and the five (5) judging standards for Oral Interpretation Events which are derived from Resolution 45. In turn, coaches/critics would be asked to 1) descriptively respond to each one of the standards and 2) rank each standard in relative importance according to their own view of proper criticism behavior. Once completed and put into a central national catalog, the student will have a better idea of how to adjust to any given coach/critic (the epitome of the art of rhetoric), how to meet the coach/critics' expectations, how to bridge theory and practice.

Such a system of uniform judging philosophy statements will empower competitors to make the "right" judgments about their own preparation and performance adjustments. Additionally, such a system will empower coaches/critics to better manage their own criticism behavior, minimizing radical preferences or irregular judging rationales. Furthermore, such a system of judging philosophies will empower the forensics activity to competently advance its own interests, to complete needed research and to improve the quality of speech competitions generally.

In 1984, the Second National Conference on Forensics laid the foundational theory for the judging of individual events. These theorists put forth standards that are typical of "good" contest speeches. However, little has been done to construct a bridge between the extant theory and the continuing practice. The proposal offered here is an attempt to build such a bridge.

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