

Evaluating and Refining

Our Critique and Awards Program

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Just what is the purpose of the Critique and Awards Program? Doubtless, it depends a great deal on who you are, what you do, where you do it, and what personal experiences you and your co-workers have had with the program over how many years.

The opening words in the *Critique and Awards Rulebook* spell out the purpose for all members in broad terms. Specially developed Guide Sheets for Class Chairmen and Judges are aimed toward coordination and consistency. Supporting materials and schedule deadlines for those conducting the program are refined and passed along.

After a five-year in-depth look, the program remains one of compromises between the ideal and the functional while considering the wide variety of often conflicting recommendations from our active and innovative membership. Feedback has dwindled. However, no one assumes that all of the rough spots have been smoothed out.

Changes will never cease if the program is to remain a vital part of AAACE that affects such a large portion of our membership. While the evaluation committee was functioning, suggestions and complaints were channeled and brought to the attention of the AAACE Board and those responsible for the program. Feedback obtained during the time of *Odyssey* and *Ideas for AAACE* was used. Comments were sought from those conducting the program, technical committees, those serving on the Board, as well as from member participants and from those indicating why they didn't participate. Scoring methods and procedures used by other organizations also were reviewed.

While trying to be explicit and thorough, program materials were refined to be economical. Space in the Rulebook and on the Class Forms was at a premium. Consistency within a medium was sought. Whenever possible the back side of Class Forms was the same for several classes enabling AAACE Headquarters to economize on printing plates.

Mailings were standardized in bulk through the State (Agency/Province) Representative to assure an equal entry opportunity where members represented more than one institution.

Many suggestions were put to the test during the evaluation. They were kept, revised, or dropped as a result of reactions. Diametrically opposed ideas were resolved by the AAACE Board. Suggestions that would add substantially to the budget for conducting the program had to be set aside.

Since cost is one of the factors, an entry fee was discussed by The Board. Sentiment for a fee has grown among members during the evaluation, but many are firmly against it. Who pays, and how, would pose a big problem for many potential entrants. An even greater challenge would be in coming up with enough money to assure that critiques could be obtained that would satisfy the expectations of those paying a fee.

Present supporting materials are intended to give judges a broader and more uniform background on our organization and the Critique and Awards Program.

Emphasis has been put on the professional improvement aspects of the critique. The scoring is weighted toward the content. Where possible the program seeks to tie with individual entrant needs and how the entry would accomplish the intended purpose for the audience. Within the time, space, and dollar limitations of conducting our program and considering the fact that we are dealing with busy human beings from their frame of reference, there always will be opportunity to report "they didn't treat me right."

Emphasis has shifted from State/Agency/Province entry to member entry to assure that dues paying members receive opportunity and encouragement to participate. At the same time, greater control is available over non-member participation. It is generally recognized that most class entries are not solo efforts, but the member or members with a name on the entry blank should have major inputs in the work.

Being evaluated at present is what might be done to eliminate the current State/Agency/Province policy that requires the "runoff" to meet the limit of three from USDA and one from each state or province. Like most other changes, some problems could be eliminated while others are created.

Classes were divided and some additions made prior to the split-run approach used in 1974 and 1975. Suggestions for eight more classes are being considered. The split run was a compromise that, while plagued by some of the anticipated problems, was generally well accepted. It resulted from the conflicting desire to have more classes (to cover the communications spectrum while avoiding some of the "apples vs carrots" and play

back equipment judging problems) while keeping down the size and complications of the C & A Program. Entry levels remained consistent: 311 with 34 Classes in 1973; 305 in 1974 and 325 in 1975 with 17 Classes each year.

Greater attention to professional improvement has been sought through added comments on Class Forms, improved summaries, greater sharing of the Summary Book and of winning entries at the meetings (national and regionals) and in other ways.

Having two or three judges reflecting different interests and competencies has seemed to enhance the critiques. Members of the intended audience have made outstanding judges in many cases. But no matter how carefully classes are divided by content, a judge from a specific audience may deal with many entries where lack of knowledge or personal bias will be a drawback.

Most vital in the program is to have those conducting it give of themselves. Most do, and they reap just rewards. Knowledge gained from applying oneself to the screening and judging job is professional improvement. Exposure to ideas being used effectively alerts AAACE members and judges to potentials for localizing.

Class Forms and other C & A materials and procedures have helped refine other communication judging programs. Major points for scoring have been adapted to training programs. Evaluated entries have provided the basis for training sessions.

The award part of the program remains a significant factor for many members and rarely is just an ego trip. Good and justified mileage has been made in informing superiors, faculty and staff, and sometimes the public of achievements made by AAACE members in the program. This is particularly true of an accumulation of consistently good results over time.

How many entries deserve a ribbon? Judges are urged to go by merit and not percentages. For the past three years, percentage of ribbons has been 69, 73, and 71 respectively. In each year, there were more red ribbons and fewer blue ribbons with white ranging in between.

Because the program is dealing with **your** creation—usually your PRIDE and JOY—you have an expectation when the entry is submitted. Problems with an entry being determined ineligible have dwindled. Also, judges are asked to evaluate all entries whether eligible or not. When your material is judged you may reluctantly accept a low score and no ribbon if combined with logic that will make you a better communicator. Disgust comes with a low score and no comment or weak and generalized reasons.

Many suggestions and complaints have to do with the participant or someone conducting the problem lacking knowledge or understanding of the existing procedures. Increased guidance to judges has helped, but each year there are exceptions.

The Critique and Awards Evaluation Committee started functioning in 1971 while conducting the program for the 1972 Arizona meeting, using feedback gathered by the AAACE Board prior to that time. Participating were: Norm Newcomer, New Mexico, Press; Dick Howard, Ohio, Radio-TV; Mel Brennan, Maryland, Visuals; Don Esslinger, Missouri, Publications; and Bob Fowler, Arizona C & A 1972 chairman. Glen Goss, then a Board member, served as evaluation chairman.

Committee members reflect the hope that adjustments according to feedback have been able to reduce realistically the weaknesses that caused some people to want to drop the program for a while or permanently. For all of the drawbacks, indications are that the program affects a large number of AAACE members and they want to see it continued. Involvement in taking a long, hard look at the program has been a rewarding, although at times frustrating, experience. It is hoped that the efforts are in the best interest of all members of AAACE. Certainly there are no delusions that the Critique and Awards Program is now totally satisfactory to any individual including those on the evaluation committee.

Meet ACE Authors

Glenn W. Goss, an AAACE member since 1952, is Director of Agricultural Communications at Penn State. He has been Acting Head and Publications Editor there, Agricultural Editor at the University of Rhode Island, and Press-Radio Editor at the University of Vermont. He has degrees from Syracuse (NY) University and the University of Vermont. A former AAACE Board member as Northeast Director, he has been involved in many AAACE activities and committee assignments. In this issue he summarizes the efforts of the Critique and Awards Evaluation Committee that started work in 1971.



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