MMBA Adjudication Philosophy Manual

The Show of the Day. The Education of Tomorrow.

A shared philosophy for MMBA adjudicators and educators

FINAL EDITION

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Section 1

Purpose of Adjudication

We judge the show of the day. We educate for tomorrow.

MMBA adjudication exists to recognize achievement, establish meaningful competitive relationships, and provide educators with useful information that can help students grow.

Competition matters. Numbers and placements matter. But the number is only one part of the responsibility. The adjudicator is also an educator, listener, observer, and representative of the association.

The Show of the Day

We evaluate the performance presented today - not reputation, previous scores, potential, or what we expect to happen later in the season. Each ensemble deserves a fresh adjudicator and an evaluation grounded in today's evidence.

The Education of Tomorrow

Although the score belongs to today, the educational value of our work should reach into the next rehearsal. Useful commentary identifies what is working, what is limiting achievement, and what deserves attention next.

The Guiding Question

What does this ensemble need from me today?

That question does not change the criteria. It changes the way we use our knowledge. Different ensembles can be evaluated through the same criteria while receiving different, developmentally appropriate educational conversations.

Section 2

The Competitive Season: WHAT, HOW, and WHEN

The criteria remain consistent. Our educational emphasis evolves.

A marching band production develops over time. Performers become better trained, responsibilities become more secure, and ideas become clearer. Adjudication should recognize that developmental journey without changing the criteria.

WHAT?

What are the performers being asked to do? Consider content, vocabulary, design, staging, coordination, expressive opportunity, appropriateness of challenge, and clarity of intent.

HOW?

How successfully are the performers accomplishing it? Consider training, accuracy, consistency, control, confidence, expression, communication, recovery, and achievement under demand.

WHEN?

Where are we in the season? WHEN helps determine which educational conversation is most useful at this point in the ensemble's development.

Season	Primary Emphasis	Educational Mindset
First Third	WHAT → HOW	Understand the possibilities
Second Third	WHAT ↔️ HOW	Develop the possibilities
Final Third	WHAT ← HOW	Reward the achievement of those possibilities

Early season does not excuse poor achievement, and late season does not ignore design. The shift is one of emphasis. In the final third, particularly for A Class, the conversation should increasingly refine and maximize rather than redesign.

Understand → Develop → Reward

Section 3

Possibilities vs. Perception

Am I evaluating what I am experiencing - or what I expected to experience?

Every adjudicator brings experience, taste, history, and artistic preferences to the field. Those are valuable resources, but they can also become filters that narrow what we are willing to recognize.

Be Open to Possibilities

- Challenge preconceived ideas about what marching band, art, visual pageantry, and effect can be.
- Seek to understand unfamiliar artistic language before dismissing it.
- Allow the performance to challenge your expectations.
- Recognize that innovation is not automatically excellence, but unfamiliarity is not automatically failure.

Preference is not criteria.

A mature adjudicator can say, 'This is not personally to my taste, but I understand what it is doing and recognize that it is being done well.'

Experience should give us more possibilities to consider, not fewer.

Section 4

A Class and Open Class

One philosophy. Different developmental expectations. One commitment to excellence.

A Class and Open Class are not different definitions of excellence. They are different developmental environments intended to serve performers with different levels of training, independence, responsibility, and readiness.

The criteria remain consistent. What changes is the level and depth of responsibility being demonstrated and the educational conversation most appropriate to the performers.

Classification Is Educational

Avoid asking whether a band is 'too good for A Class.' Instead ask which competitive environment will best support the continued development of the performers.

Challenge + Achievement + Growth

No single characteristic determines classification. Size, score, tempo, props, technology, or one difficult moment should never become a mechanical placement test. Look for the total pattern of responsibility and demonstrated readiness.

An A Class ensemble achieving an appropriately designed program at an exceptional level should be celebrated, not penalized for its success. Movement should represent an opportunity for continued development, never punishment for winning.

Section 5

The Value of a Tenth

A tenth is not merely arithmetic. It communicates a competitive relationship.

Before asking what number to give, determine what you observed, at what level it was achieved, and what relationship the performances created.

Who? → By how much? → Why?

One tenth and three tenths communicate the same fundamental ranking; what changes is the degree of separation. Let the performance create the spread.

Judge Subcaptions Independently

Do not work backward from the bottom line. One ensemble may demonstrate greater content while another demonstrates greater achievement. Allow each subcaption to speak independently, then let the mathematics reveal the result.

Neighborhoods

Competitive neighborhoods are created by today's performances, not reputation or previous scores. In MMBA, adjudicators hold all numbers until the completion of each class. At that time, review the class as a whole and make any necessary adjustments to individual subcaption scores before verifying and submitting the final scores to the tabulator. Use that opportunity to ensure the numbers accurately communicate the relationships created by the performances. The objective is to get it right - but the review process should be focused and efficient so the contest continues to move without unnecessary delay.

The number follows the evaluation.

Get it right.

Section 6

Effective Commentary

Observe → Analyze → Educate

The number tells the competitive story. Commentary explains the story. Evidence supports them both.

Observe

Describe what actually happened. Be specific. Describe before you prescribe.

Analyze

Explain why the observation matters and how it connects to criteria, responsibility, communication, or achievement.

Educate

Give the educator something useful for the next rehearsal. You do not always need to provide the solution; sometimes the greatest value is clearly identifying the problem that needs solving.

Prioritize

Do not attempt to say everything. If the staff could address only one thing before the next rehearsal, what should it be?

Recognize Achievement

Positive commentary is educational when it is specific. Tell educators what worked, why it worked, and what should be reinforced.

Challenge the performance. Respect the performer.

Sophistication means providing the appropriate conversation - not the most complicated one.

Section 7

Post-Contest Critique

We are not there to win the critique. We are there to help the students win the next rehearsal.

Critique is a short educational conversation, not a second recording and not a courtroom. With only three to four minutes per unit with each judge, focus is essential.

Come Prepared With Three

Priority	Question	Purpose
Recognize	What should continue?	Reinforce meaningful achievement
Prioritize	What most needs attention?	Identify the greatest limitation
Direct	What comes next?	Establish a clear educational objective

Listen to the director's complete question. Ask for clarification when intent is unclear. Redirect tactfully when the conversation moves away from what will most help the students.

The 30-Second Finish

When the Chief Judge calls '30 seconds,' stop expanding and start summarizing. The judge should return to the three priorities; the director should stop introducing new topics and begin clarifying.

When the director walks away, they should know the three.

Section 8

Professionalism, Customer Service, and Trust

Customer service does not mean giving directors what they want. It means giving educators what their students need.

MMBA competes for the trust of educators. Directors have choices about where their students perform. A quality experience must be educationally valuable and professionally delivered.

Customer service is not appeasement. It does not require changing a number, avoiding a difficult truth, or telling a director what they want to hear. It means being prepared, respectful, useful, approachable, and honest.

Build Trust

- Be positive and professional in every interaction.
- Listen seriously and explain decisions without becoming defensive.
- Respect volunteers, hosts, students, directors, staff, and colleagues.
- Protect confidentiality and avoid public discussion of competitive results or private concerns.
- Remember that every interaction contributes to the reputation of MMBA.

Serve the customer by serving the student.

From the car to the car.

Section 9

Professional Responsibility and Contest-Day Conduct

Work collaboratively. Judge independently.

Serving as an MMBA adjudicator carries responsibilities that begin before the first ensemble performs. Preparation is part of adjudication.

- Review current sheets, criteria, schedules, assignments, seasonal philosophy, and special instructions before arriving.
- Arrive early enough to understand logistics, check equipment, and prepare mentally.
- Support the panel professionally while owning your independent evaluation.
- Avoid predetermined relationships based on reputation, history, or previous scores.
- Protect panel independence by avoiding casual comments that may influence colleagues.
- Maintain focus throughout the day; never allow fatigue to become the students' evaluation.
- Reset after every ensemble. Every ensemble deserves a fresh adjudicator.
- Stay within your caption and be able to explain why an observation belongs there.
- Manage numbers throughout the contest and adjust when evidence requires it.
- Protect confidentiality before, during, and after awards.
- Avoid the parking-lot critique. Be friendly and approachable while maintaining professional boundaries.

When Something Goes Wrong

Live events create problems. Technology fails, weather changes, schedules shift, and people make mistakes. Professionalism does not require perfection; it requires responsibility. Solve the problem through the appropriate channels and avoid public blame.

Never allow your fatigue to become the students' evaluation.

From the car to the car.

Section 10

The Developing Adjudicator: Expanding Our Artistic Vocabulary

A judge should never consider themselves a finished product.

If our artistic vocabulary stops developing while the activity continues to evolve, experience can eventually become limitation. The professional adjudicator remains a student - not simply of marching band, but of the arts.

- Dance can expand understanding of movement, gesture, body, space, weight, and time.
- Theater can deepen understanding of staging, character, dramatic development, focus, and audience relationship.
- Film can teach pacing, framing, transition, juxtaposition, tension, and release.
- Visual art can expand understanding of color, texture, form, abstraction, and hierarchy.
- Architecture can challenge ideas about space, structure, scale, and environment.
- Literature can deepen narrative, metaphor, symbolism, ambiguity, and point of view.
- Jazz and improvisational arts can expand appreciation for interaction, risk, individual voice, structure, and freedom.

Study Outside Your Preference

Attend unfamiliar performances. Listen to unfamiliar music. Visit museums. Read challenging work. Ask why the artist made the choice, what is being communicated, and why you are reacting as you are.

Learn From One Another

Veterans should mentor without demanding imitation. Emerging judges should challenge ideas without dismissing experience. Both should listen, learn, and remain open to possibilities.

Never stop being a student.

The activity we judge tomorrow should not be limited by the artistic vocabulary we developed yesterday.

Section 11

Consistency Without Conformity

Shared criteria. Shared philosophy. Shared responsibility. Independent thought.

Directors should be able to move from one MMBA event to another with confidence that the criteria and philosophy remain consistent. But consistency does not require every adjudicator to see or hear a performance in exactly the same way.

Different Perspectives Are a Strength

A multi-judge panel exists partly because informed professionals bring different lenses. Agreement is not the goal. The questions are whether the criteria were applied appropriately, the evaluation is supported by evidence, the commentary supports the number, and the decision was made independently.

Outliers Deserve Curiosity

When one evaluation differs significantly, ask why before assuming it is wrong. Sometimes an outlier identifies a problem; sometimes it identifies a truth.

Accountability Still Matters

Professional independence is not permission for anything to go. Repeated unsupported evaluations, preference-driven decisions, weak caption understanding, or unprofessional conduct should be addressed through education and accountability.

Calibration

Training should help judges develop a shared language for explaining decisions, not produce identical decisions.

Calibration is conversation, not cloning.

Section 12

Bringing It All Together: The MMBA Adjudicator's Responsibility

We have been entrusted with someone else's students.

Directors, families, designers, instructors, and students invest enormous time in every performance. For a few minutes on a Saturday, that work is placed before us. It deserves our very best.

- Meet the ensemble where it is while applying consistent criteria.
- Judge what happens today; educate for what happens tomorrow.
- Remain open to possibilities and separate preference from criteria.
- Have the courage to make decisions and support them with evidence.
- Make education useful: observe, prioritize, recognize, question, and direct.
- Serve the customer by serving the student.
- Represent something larger than yourself.
- Continue becoming a better adjudicator.

We judge the show of the day. We educate for tomorrow.

Appendix A

A Class vs. Open Class Placement Guide

One philosophy - different developmental expectations.

This guide supports educational placement. It is a guide, not a formula. No single characteristic determines classification.

Consideration	A Class Emphasis	Open Class Emphasis
Vocabulary	Fundamental to intermediate	Intermediate to advanced
Responsibilities	Clear focus; developing layering	Frequent layered and simultaneous responsibilities
Staging	Readable, achievable, training-centered	Greater complexity, evolution, and independence
Endurance	Developing sustained achievement	Sustained achievement under increased demand
Recovery	Recovery skills continuing to develop	Quick, increasingly discreet recovery
Design	Clarity and performer development prioritized	Greater depth, variety, layering, and integration
Performer Role	Building consistency and confidence	Increasing independence, nuance, and ownership
Primary Question	Are performers successfully developing appropriate responsibilities?	Are performers successfully managing greater depth, independence, and sophistication?

What This Guide Is Not

Complex meters, props, ensemble size, technology, a high score, or one difficult responsibility do not automatically determine class. Classification requires examination of the whole ensemble and the relationship among responsibility, training, design, and achievement.

Which environment will best support the continued development of these performers?

Challenge + Achievement + Growth

Appendix B

WHAT / HOW / WHEN - The Season at a Glance

Understand → Develop → Reward

Season	Primary Emphasis	Adjudicator Focus	Educational Conversation
First Third	WHAT → HOW	Intent, appropriateness, emerging training	Explore • Ask • Understand • Identify
Second Third	WHAT ↔️ HOW	Balance opportunity with increasing performer responsibility	Develop • Connect • Challenge • Reinforce
Final Third	WHAT ← HOW	Achievement, refinement, communication, consistency	Refine • Clarify • Maximize • Reward

Early Season - Understand the possibilities.

Middle Season - Develop the possibilities.

Late Season - Reward the achievement of those possibilities.

WHAT and HOW remain part of the evaluation throughout the season. WHEN changes the educational emphasis, not the criteria.

We judge the show of the day. We educate for tomorrow.

Appendix C

The Value of a Tenth - Quick Reference

Who? → By how much? → Why?

Question	Adjudicator Responsibility
Who?	Establish the competitive relationship
By how much?	Determine the appropriate spread
Why?	Support the decision with performance evidence
Subcaptions?	Evaluate independently
Neighborhood?	Allow today's performances to establish it
Unexpected result?	Examine it before changing it
Unsure?	Return to criteria and evidence
Before verifying?	Make sure the numbers tell the story
Final responsibility?	Get it right

The number tells the competitive story.

The commentary explains the story.

The evidence supports them both.

Appendix D

Effective Commentary - Observe, Analyze, Educate

Make what you know useful to someone else.

Step	Question	Purpose
OBSERVE	What happened?	Evidence
ANALYZE	Why did it matter?	Understanding
EDUCATE	What can they do with it?	Direction

- Describe before you prescribe.
- Prioritize the issue with the greatest educational value.
- Recognize achievement specifically.
- Ask questions when intent is unclear.
- Identify communication problems without automatically designing solutions.
- Match the conversation to the ensemble and the season.
- Keep tone honest, respectful, and useful.

Challenge the performance. Respect the performer.

Appendix E

The Three-Item Critique

Three to four minutes. Three priorities. One purpose.

Item	Question	Purpose
1 - Recognize	What should continue?	Reinforce achievement
2 - Prioritize	What most needs attention?	Identify the greatest limitation
3 - Direct	What comes next?	Establish an educational objective

The 30-Second Cue

When the Chief Judge announces '30 seconds,' the purpose of the conversation changes.

Judge	Director	Chief Judge
Stop expanding. Start summarizing.	Stop introducing. Start clarifying.	Create the cue consistently and protect the clock.

“If I leave you with three things tonight…”

Discuss → 30-Second Cue → Summarize → Clarify → Switch

When the director walks away, they should know the three.

Appendix F

From the Car to the Car - Contest-Day Checklist

Professionalism should be simple enough to remember.

☐ Arrive prepared: sheets, schedule, assignment, philosophy, equipment.

☐ Be positive and professional with hosts, volunteers, students, directors, and colleagues.

☐ Work collaboratively; judge independently.

☐ Give every ensemble a fresh evaluation.

☐ Protect confidentiality and avoid casual competitive commentary.

☐ Stay within your caption and manage numbers responsibly.

☐ Recognize fatigue and reset before the next ensemble.

☐ Use critique for education, not debate.

☐ After awards, remain neutral and professional.

☐ Avoid the parking-lot critique.

☐ Leave the association stronger than you found it.

From the car to the car, you represent MMBA.

Appendix G

MMBA Philosophy at a Glance

The adjudication compass.

1. Meet the Ensemble Where It Is
What does this ensemble need from me today?

2. One Philosophy - Different Developmental Expectations
Challenge + Achievement + Growth

3. WHAT / HOW / WHEN
Understand → Develop → Reward

4. Remain Open to Possibilities
Preference is not criteria.

5. Let the Number Follow the Evaluation
Who? → By how much? → Why?

6. Observe → Analyze → Educate
Challenge the performance. Respect the performer.

7. Make Critique Count
Recognize → Prioritize → Direct

8. Serve the Customer by Serving the Student
Give educators what their students need.

9. Work Collaboratively - Judge Independently
Calibration is conversation, not cloning.

10. Expand Your Artistic Vocabulary
Never stop being a student.

11. Represent MMBA
From the car to the car.

The MMBA Adjudication Compass

- What am I experiencing?
- What are the performers being asked to do?
- How successfully are they doing it?
- Where are we in the season?
- Am I applying criteria or preference?
- What relationship did the performances create?

- Does my number communicate that relationship?
- Does my commentary explain it?
- What does this ensemble need from me today?
- Am I providing something useful for tomorrow?

Judge the show of the day. Educate for tomorrow.

Appendix H

The MMBA Adjudicator's Commitment

A mindset, not an oath.

I Commit to the Performance

I will judge the show of the day. I will evaluate what I see and hear today - not reputation, history, expectation, or last week's result. I will remain open to being surprised.

I Commit to the Criteria

I will apply the criteria consistently, evaluate WHAT is being asked and HOW successfully it is achieved, and remember WHEN we are in the developmental journey. The number will follow the evaluation.

I Commit to Possibilities

I will challenge assumptions, separate preference from criteria, and seek to understand unfamiliar artistic choices before dismissing them.

I Commit to Education

I will observe carefully, analyze thoughtfully, communicate clearly, recognize achievement, prioritize what matters, and provide something useful for tomorrow.

I Commit to the Performer

Students deserve my preparation, attention, enthusiasm, honesty, and respect. I will challenge the performance and respect the performer.

I Commit to the Educator

I will listen as seriously as I speak. I will explain without becoming defensive and remember that critique is an opportunity to help students win the next rehearsal.

I Commit to Service

I will never confuse customer service with customer appeasement. I will strive to provide educators with the information their students need.

I Commit to My Colleagues

I will work collaboratively while judging independently. I will respect different informed perspectives and participate in calibration as conversation, not cloning.

I Commit to Growth

I will never consider myself a finished adjudicator. I will continue developing my artistic vocabulary and remain a student.

I Commit to MMBA

I will be prepared, approachable, positive, independent, accountable, and professional. From the car to the car, I represent MMBA.

I will recognize achievement.

I will encourage growth.

I will remain open to possibilities.

I will serve educators.

I will respect performers.

I will support students.

I will never stop learning.

We judge the show of the day.

We educate for tomorrow.

That is my responsibility. That is my commitment. That is the MMBA philosophy.