

APS Seminar On Judging Traditional Philatelic Exhibits

Outline and Notes on Content by John M. Hotchner

(Note: This is presented as new information for some; refresher for others. Anyone else who presents APS judging seminars is invited to present theirs in this form for publication in TPE.)

Welcome To The APS Seminar On Judging Traditional Philatelic Exhibits
Please make certain that you sign the registration sheet so that those of you who are in the Accreditation Program get credit. Others who think they may one day like to try judging are also most welcome and should sign the sheet.

Introduce self and give brief statement of experience / qualifications.

This is the one seminar that is required for accreditation as a philatelic judge, but other seminars are given for postal history, thematics, special studies, first day cover collecting, judging youth exhibits, single frame exhibits, and others. They are often given at the APS Spring and Fall meetings if you don't see them elsewhere. I recommend you attend as many as you can since judges are expected to judge every competitive exhibit in the frames.

I have brought copies of the pamphlet "So You Want To Become An APS Accredited National Stamp Show Judge?", which all of you who want to pursue that should have and read carefully.

You should also have and read carefully the Fourth Edition of the APS' *Manual of Philatelic Judging*; which is available at the APS table on the show floor.

Because everything we are going to cover in today's seminar is in one or both of these publications, we will cover the highlights here, and then have time for questions. Because this is the only required Seminar, I will start by going over some of the fundamentals of judging that apply regardless of exhibit class.

There are three attributes expected of a Philatelic Judging

1. Integrity

Evaluating only the exhibit not the exhibitor, and showing no favoritism or undue harshness to exhibits in your own collecting area(s). This includes not taking it upon yourself to try to downgrade an exhibit for failure to correct faults seen in previous showings.

2. Expertise

In a wide range of philatelic areas and subjects. You may not start out your judging career with this, but you should strive to develop it through study, experimenting with exhibiting in areas beyond your primary one, and with attendance at other seminars. You will also be expected to learn 'good exhibiting practice'; the ways in which exhibits should flow, convey their information and highlight the material. Though these features are important, keep foremost in mind that it is the philatelic material that should carry the exhibit.

3. Care In Preparation For and in Performing the Judging

In review of the title page and appropriate reference material before the exhibition,
In review of the exhibit,
In Evaluating and keeping an open mind, and
In treatment of the exhibitor in critique, at the frames, and in subsequent correspondence (if any).

How To Become A Judge

Well covered in the references, but two relatively new changes:

1. Must have earned a Vermeil medal at a WSP (national) show to register as an Apprentice.
2. You will be expected to do your fourth apprenticeship on your own; not as part of a jury team, in order to test your independence and accuracy of judgment.

National - World Series of Philately Exhibits

There are now 34 participating shows which have gone through an apprenticeship process, and are accredited to have their Grand Award winner participate in the WSP at STAMPSHOW each year.

There are also Local and Regional shows; some quite professional. And you may be asked to judge at those levels. But these are the levels at which many exhibitors get started, and judging criteria should include a greater degree of encouragement for the exhibitor's effort. There should be a heavier emphasis on rewarding philatelic accomplishment, and meeting of a difficult challenge at the National level.

There are five levels of awards at National shows, plus a Certificate of Participation for those exhibits which are evaluated as not having fulfilled a significant challenge: Bronze, Silver-Bronze, Silver, Vermeil and Gold. Each exhibit is awarded the level of medal it has earned, with no limitations on the number of medals at any level.

What Are You Expected To Do As An Apprentice: The Judging Process

1. Study the Title and Synopsis (if available) pages sent by the show committee. Check references in your own library. If time permits, get additional material from the APRL.
2. Report promptly at the appointed place and time set by the Jury Chairman. You will be assigned to a team with one or more accredited judges. Often one will be named as the person who will work with you.
3. Walk through the exhibition. Get a feel for the show and what's up in the frames. Remember that exhibits are to be judged for medal levels against their own theoretical level of excellence; not each other. *All* exhibits accepted by the show committee must be judged.
4. Go with your team and examine the exhibits. Make notes on positive and negative attributes that you may later want to convey to the exhibitor. Decide on the medal level you will recommend and discuss that with your team if asked. Answer other questions that the accredited judges may pose. Ask about anything you don't understand.
5. Participate in the explained in detail shortly.
6. Participate in the critique - also explained in detail later.
7. Participate in all social events that the show committee invites you to.
8. You are in a position of authority. Show and receive respect by dressing appropriately. Being prompt for set timed events, and remember that shopping is for after the judging is done and you have been released by the jury chairman.

Evaluating Exhibits

There are several key factors:

1. *The challenge level*: How difficult a task has the exhibitor set? Done properly, is it worth a gold medal? Importance is not rated at the national level.
2. *Completion of the story*: With philatelic material (and it does not have to be the most expensive possible material)
3. *Difficulty of Acquisition*: Scarcity / Rarity... But it does not have to be old or valuable to be hard to find. How difficult would the exhibit be to replicate?
4. *Balance between elements shown*: Is there a good representation of more difficult material? Is there more of specific types of material than is really necessary to tell the story?

5. *Knowledge / Personal study / Research:* Research is not essential, but the exhibitor should have developed information that describes and identifies the material accurately, and explains its significance with a high degree of accuracy.

6. *Condition:* In the context of what is available for the material shown.

7. *Presentation:* Logical, easy to follow, effective highlighting of special material, and brief write-ups presenting essential information.

Jury Deliberations: The meeting at the end of exhibit review where the awards are decided.

1. Apprentices speak first, but votes do not count in reaching a consensus. Give medal level and brief few sentences as to why that level is your choice. If two apprentices, take turns speaking first.

2. Rest of the jury votes. Most often consensus is evident. If not, discussion until it is reached.

3. It is possible to reclassify exhibits within classes if the reclassification will result in a better medal level (e.g. Thematic to Special Study). Exception: Jury may not reclassify Display Class exhibits, or to Display Class without the approval of the exhibitor.

4. Once, medal levels are done, the specials are awarded. Apprentices will be asked to participate, but do not have a formal vote. Special prizes must be given in accordance with the rules set out by the sponsoring organization.

5. The jury chair will assign judges and Apprentices to speak to each exhibit at the Critique.

6. Once this has been done, Apprentices are excused with the instruction that all that has taken place in the Jury room and on the floor between judges is under seal. This is so that the jury members can be entirely free to speak their minds in evaluating the exhibits without fear of being quoted to friends later. Further, no one may announce by word or deed (or nudge and wink) the awards until the show committee puts the ribbons up; and the specials until after they have been announced at the banquet.

7. The jury chairman will then seek the opinions of the accredited judges about the performance of the Apprentice(s) as preparation for completing the required Evaluation form that goes to the APS Committee on Accreditation of National Exhibitions and Judges.

Before the Critique Study your exhibits in more detail and make notes on both the good points and areas for improvement that you want to convey to the exhibitors, or his/her representative.

The Critique

1. All jury members are expected to attend and participate.
2. The jury chairman will conduct the Critique, and it is up to him or her to maintain control of it. That includes allocating speaking time and correcting misstatements on the part of jury members.
3. When speaking to an exhibit, try to start off with a positive observation or two before getting to areas for improvement. Be specific. "The jury liked the exhibit" is not adequate.
4. If you have many negatives to discuss or if the situation gets awkward, precis your remarks and offer to meet the exhibitor at the frames to provide additional feedback. Under no circumstances should you embarrass the exhibitor in the Critique.
5. At the frames and in Critique, listen carefully to what the exhibitor says. It may modify or moderate your views.

After accreditation Your quest to become an excellent judge does not end with accreditation. You should constantly strive to sharpen your skills and broaden your knowledge. For example:

1. Practice judge when you are not on the jury. If you do not agree with the jury's decision, go to the Critique and find out why they reached their conclusion. In fact, go to every Critique you can to learn about the most productive ways to approach exhibitors.
2. Broaden your collecting interests; even if only for fun. Collect something in unfamiliar geographic areas and/or in different eras, or postal history when you have only done traditional before. This will give you an appreciation for the challenges of other exhibitors.
3. Continue to exhibit so that you don't forget what it is like to be on the other side of the table. Try new subject areas or disciplines.
4. Read widely in philatelic literature. Form your own philatelic library - go beyond your own collecting interests.

5. Study exhibits that have won high awards to become familiar with the material that exists and how it can be woven into a cohesive whole.
6. Attend lectures on unfamiliar areas, and take opportunities to study the collections of friends.
7. Judge. There is no exercise better than being on the front lines. It is up to judges and Apprentices to find their own assignments.

Notes on Judging Traditional Philately (Some of which will apply to other classes, as well)

1. Read the title page carefully. Is the title accurate? Does the page explain clearly what the scope, challenge and significance of the effort is?
2. Look at the exhibit as a whole - as an exhibit, not a collection; to see that it tells a story. Every piece in the exhibit should support the story.
3. The exhibit subject should be self contained. If the exhibitor is interested in high medals, she/he should not have defined out a portion of the story that is integral to the full story. Nor should the exhibitor add sections of easier material that don't contribute to the story for the sake of lengthening the exhibit.
4. The exhibit should have a logical flow. For Traditional exhibits - which is to say a single stamp, a series, the stamps of an era, or the stamps of several countries that have a close relationship in production, design, etc. the flow will normally be:
 - the development of the stamp (essays followed by proofs),
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 - the production of the stamp (VF/S copies of the basic issued stamps followed by production varieties (including plating, if appropriate), both those intended and those not intended), and then
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 - (often but not always) a representation of covers showing early or first day of use, and how the stamp(s) were intended to be used (including contemporary postal markings), as well as more unusual usages that show what is available to the dedicated searcher. Each section of the exhibit should be of equal depth and quality.
5. If a single stamp, the exhibit should go into exceptional depth. The larger the range of material being shown, the less depth may be expected, but this does not excuse the exhibitor from showing a good representation of the key items for the area. If the area shown is too large to be shown comprehensively in the number of

frames available, it is an accepted rule of thumb that the least difficult material can be left out in favor of better items that illustrate the story line.

6. There are aspects of Traditional exhibiting that can go unappreciated if the judge does not pay attention in preparation. For example, many first and even second issues of the world are extremely scarce in multiples and on cover.

The wise exhibitor will provide information to put those items (when present) in context. But the wise judge will know what to look for and why.

7. The material should be properly and briefly described. The exhibitor should provide objective and significant information about the material that will put it in context and help the judge to appreciate it. The exhibitor's own research conclusions should be highlighted if she/he has furthered the frontier of knowledge in the area shown.

8. It should be kept in mind that a well done Traditional exhibit is itself a challenge simply because of the number of quality items needed to fill a page, as compared to an exhibit that relies on one or two covers for each page. This is not to say that cover exhibits should be rated less generously; only that Traditional exhibits may represent an unappreciated challenge.