

## First Reads

By Shirlee Whitcomb

The most exciting judging experience, and without a doubt, the truest test of the judges recognition skills is the first read. Senses are sharper, there are no preconceived ideas about what the show will be, and the performance is at its freshest because repeated viewings have not yet diminished the elements of surprise or effect. We are usually excited to see a guard for the first time. For most WGI judges, almost every viewing at a Regional will be a first read.

A few things put a damper on this exciting part of our job. There are often concerns about scoring. Frequently there is performance anxiety about use of the right terminology. There is the knowledge that our own work (the tape) will be critiqued by a caption facilitator, and even that the instructor might perceive that weve missed half the show. Performance anxiety on the part of the judge is no small consideration in the first read scenario.

In our diligent efforts to bring the standards of adjudication to its highest level of accountability, we have provided a whole array of tools for the judge to consider in this process criteria reference -- placemats accountability tote sheets scoring mandates block scores, etc. You are busy taking notes and trying to be accountable at every possible level, and on top of that you are supposed to enjoy the shows and the kids.

Except for the criteria reference, all of the tools are training wheels intended to help you learn your caption so fully that it becomes engrained in your mind to a point where it automatically becomes the channel through which each show is judged. If you have truly learned all the material about your caption and the tenets of judging and the scoring process, then the need for these tools and the apprehensions should diminish significantly, serving only as occasional checks and balances to assure yourself you are on target.

The judge who knows the philosophy inside out, the judge who is secure in their communication style, the judge who is fully secure in the tenets of judging, and who knows what a number means, will be able to judge instinctively allowing their intuitive understanding of the caption to guide them through a truly enjoyable experience.

The best advice to offer those who have any trepidation at all about first reads is this: Dont hold back in the natural flow of your observations. Let the security of your knowledge support the observations you make. Be open, honest, and clear in your recognitions. Dont contrive your dialog or your responses. Let the guards know when you are impressed and let them know if some aspect of the show leaves you feeling concerned or unclear. Let your tone of voice convey that unspoken but vital aspect of your recognitions.

Fear of saying what you are thinking, or lack of confidence in your own responses can impair the credibility of the tape dialog and it can impact on the validity of the scoring process. Fear of assigning a score because it may not line up or because it isnt in the block range, or because the instructor will be angry, will absolutely impair the quality of the tape as well as the accuracy of the score.

The best judges are secure in their knowledge of the system and the caption, and confident in their ability to evaluate the programs through that focus. They are natural in their delivery because they know that the necessary information is inherently engrained in them. They judge intuitively. There is no fear of first reads. First reads are welcomed and exciting challenges.