

The Visual Performance Caption

All sheets are broken up into two parts, generally, the written book and the performance, which we call Composition and Excellence. In covering the Visual Performance caption, we'll look at both independently. But first, let's consider, from the judges' viewpoint, Composition.

1. The Judge (and Process of Adjudication)

When considering the composition in light of the Visual Captions (Visual Performance, Visual Ensemble, and General Effect), the following statements as regards judging must be given weight by the design team:

- The judge must be aware of the Qualities/Dimensionality of the composition. Therefore, design with dimensionalities and artistic qualities.
- The judge must recognize and reward the Cumulative Aspects of design. Therefore, design with quality and variety throughout the entirety of the program.
- The judge must recognize, analyze, VALUE, and compare each composition. Therefore, design with artistic merit.
- The judge must recognize the triad of Equipment, Movement, and Staging. Therefore, consider the triad (Equipment = guard equipment, props, instruments; Movement = marching, dance, role-play; Staging = geography, relationship, variety of form and negative space) in design.
- In assessing compositional quality, the judge measures the "whole," then measures the writing process within the whole. The judge adjudicates through time to experience the complete show.
- The judge should make commentary on the What (the Composition) and the How (it's Excellence through performance). The two are inseparable, and should be linked in commentary.
- Effect judges "react" to the composition and the performance and respond to pacing, impact, and the effect triad (aesthetic, adrenal, intellectual).
- Analysis judges deconstruct the components of the show and assess the logic, artistry, and orchestration of the composition, as well as the excellence of the performer.

There is an explicit understanding that the commentary will contain positive and negative comments for both the What and the How. Let's examine the writing process and its adjudication:

2. The Philosophy of Design

The mere existence of design elements will not ensure quality. It is the *skill* of composing, arranging and orchestrating that will denote quality. The judge should measure and credit the presence of design quality and their depth and artistry. Conversely, the fact that there are no mathematical problems does not ensure quality of composition. Logic is the beginning of art.

In the composition, *form* should be evident. It is the structural outline and the conceptualization of planned events that occur through time. The choices of what, when, where, how, and why must not only be logical, but artistic and purposeful (without irrelevance). The form should be connected to the soundtrack.

In measuring the composing process (and its resultant performance), the judge should recognize the quality of design within the parts. A program with deficiency in the triad (see above) will be at risk, even if composed well. Be aware of "presentational" compositions (events in a fixed position, dependent on flats for entrances and exits). Be aware of *motion* in the development and progression of design.

Elements of design should be recognized and valued: line, shape, symmetry (asymmetry), dimension, texture, density, direction, speed, plane, weight, contrast, space, flow, orientation and the relationships

between them. Note: these all read differently in different viewing environments (close, short vs. distant tall stadiums).

Horizontal composing is the development of events through time, from the beginning of the show to the end. Vertical composing reflects the design of each event in isolation. Both are inseparable from the other. The judge considers when, where, how, and why events occur, and how they are linked logically and artistically. Motion to connected events drives intent and is evidence of planning and forethought.

The judge should recognize the characteristics for both equipment and movement. These characteristics might be important to the music, the role, identity, recurring motifs, or used to create expressive dynamics. They lend depth and interest to the program. They are part of the planned process and reflect layering, dimensionality, and thought. Existence, placement, and choice of detailing become an aspect of quality within the composing process. Choices will be based on the audio and depth of program intent.

The judge should be aware of the importance of how motion through path and speed impacts design. In staging, this is Transition and Development. That is not to say that motion is absent from vertical events, merely that we recognize its use and value its composition between kinetic events differently. Transition moves the performers between presentational ideas. Development is the use of motion to create longer phrase events...transitions can be linked to create development. The distinction between transition and development is where we see the evolution from spatial arrangements to spatial composition. In short equipment or body moments, it is called phrasing.

Characteristic (a single design element)

Phrase (a moment of equipment or movement)

Vertical Event (a sequence of phrases, traditionally at an arrival point)

Transition (a planned moment of design, characterized by motion)

Development (linked moments of design, often through-composed or overlapping)

Horizontal Composition (the whole of the design through time)

Props become a consideration when they are on the field or manipulated by performers. They contribute to design through dimensionality, density, weight, space (texture), shape, and line.

Shapes and patterns on the field or props can, and will, impact path, space, dimensionality, and weight.

In composition, the number of performers within a design is not an issue; the imaginative and varied use of design components is always the priority. Size is immaterial to quality and artistry.

All bands, of all shapes and sizes, with all types of instrumentation, have an equal chance of success. What we as designers do with our materials determine both artistry and outcome. Often, judges without years of experience fail to recognize this dictum. Size is often rewarded, as in music, volume is often rewarded. We must continue to have a discussion within our activity to educate all parties to the fact that "varied and imaginative use" does not come with a size restriction.

The concepts of Emphasis, Hierarchy, and Intent should be recognized. They denote a planned priority and importance in design.

The following are Composition criteria on the Visual Performance sheets:

Quality of Orchestration:

Horizontal- The logical progression of design ideas to enhance the intent and unity of the audio/visual composition.

Vertical- The layering or combination of design choices to enhance the intent and unity of the audio/visual composition.

Staging: The proper placement of the elements to present the audio/visual.

Creativity/Variety: The uniqueness and freshness of the visual program.

Simultaneous Responsibility: The combination of the visual responsibilities layered upon the musical responsibilities required of the performers.

Visual Musicality: The visual representation and enhancement of all aspects of the musical program.

Unity of All Elements: The purposeful agreement among the elements of design.

Let's examine what actually gets judged when your students perform, the excellence of their performance.

3. The Philosophy of Performance

In Excellence, the judge compares multiple performers and recognizes the following:

Students should, through performance, display an understanding of accuracy, clarity, and control through simultaneous effort. Student should display an understanding of precision in unison, sequence, and solo. Random events (non-unison, geographically dissimilar composition) still require timing. Students should display an understanding of orientation, which is control of facing, direction, path and relationships. The students should display artistic/expressive skills, with regards to role, nuance, and detail, also, the ability to change space, time, weight, and flow.

Recognize and understand the Triad - (Equipment, Movement, and Staging). They are equal partners in design. They may be presented singly or in combination. The fusion of all three offers the best opportunities to create the most complex and challenging design options. The triad can be composed at many levels of complexity, and can challenge students in every class. The triad is not a guarantee for high credit. Its value is important for variety and interest in composition, and heightened opportunities in achievement. It adds depth and value to design and performance. The primary emphasis on the triad is to reinforce the development of skills in all three areas, and we reward designers for incorporating all three into their composition.

- **Equipment** considers the use and manipulation of all physical objects: flags rifles, sabers, other guard equipment, props (if manipulated), instruments, and uniform parts.
- **Movement** considers the vocabulary and performance of body motion to include: dance, marching, role-play, and character development.
- **Staging** considers the physical space and the creative use of space utilized by the design team. Variety and imaginative use of design elements are credited.

The following are Composition criteria on the Visual Performance sheets:

Precision: The degree of accuracy relative to the quality of the performance.

Uniformity of Style: The consistent manner of approach from the ensemble. All styles have an equal chance for success.

Individual Technique: The clear, distinct and uniform approach to the use of body and equipment from the individual and groups of performers.

Consistency: The constant application of a chosen style or role.

Clarity: The ability of the ensemble to maintain accuracy and control with respect to space, time, line, weight, flow, strength, and effort changes.

The following is a list of visual terms and their definitions:

4. Visual Vocabulary in Design

1. *Design* - Grouping/arrangement of the elements of a composition, including, plan, function, time, and unity.
2. *Composition* - Arrangement of forms, lines, values, and other pictorial elements.
3. *Line* - A set of markings that lead the viewer's eye through a work of art. Line is used to define shape, and its diffusion can increase or decrease performer connection, and therefor linear intent. Line can also be read through the guard's equipment and movement in all shapes and body positions.
4. *Shape* - An area defined by an enclosed line; in three dimensions they are sphere, cone, cylinder, and cube. In two dimensions, they are circle, triangle, rectangle, and square. At body level, they are pin (vertical), wall (flat), ball (round), and twist (curve). Equipment can trace these patterns in space.
5. *Balance* - A visually favorable distribution of weight through symmetry (formal balance through horizontal, vertical, diagonally, or radial) or asymmetry (informal balance).
6. *Dimension* - Designed relief from stark line and unison effort.
7. *Space* - In staging, an area used for the presentation of a design. Positive space contains elements of design; negative space is absent of elements of design.
8. *Mass* - The feel of weight, heaviness, or visual volume. This is usually achieved through thickness of line, value of form/shape, or intervallic compression.
9. *Weight* - The distribution of elements within a design. This element will impact of balance as well as on the emphasis within the design whole.
10. *Motion* - Combines design elements from static art to moving design and vocabulary. Motion forces the consideration of time, and reflects space, flow and path.
11. *Artistic Efforts* - Qualities that make an aesthetic contribution; role, effort changes, nuance, detail, and dynamic qualities.
12. *Orchestration* - The logical progression of ideas as well as the layering or combination of design options to enhance the intent and unity of a composition. It includes the visual enhancement of the audio and is reflected both horizontally and vertically.
13. *Emphasis* - Planned organization of design that establishes priority.
14. *Color* - It can influence the look of weight, dynamic intensity, emphasis, clarity, readability, and perceptions of depth.
15. *Unity* - The purposeful agreement among design elements. It implies congruity and visual connection. The aim of unity is to make the design coherent and readable.
16. *Dynamics* - Essential efforts in space, time, weight and flow. "Expression" refers to performer communication on the GE sheet. "Dynamics" refers to those efforts as design elements in Visual Ensemble. Gradations refer to "Dynamic Range."

5. A Planning Primer for Judges and Designers

As you plan your program, or judge the planning of a program, consider the following:

- Create *opportunities* for greater achievement through clarification and unification of postural, gestural and non-durational efforts. Exposure to these efforts should be orchestrated in an individual, segmental, and ensemble manner, and must be related to the soundtrack. It has become traditional to explore gestural efforts on the periphery of the kinesphere without thought to the level, orientation, gradation, or shape to each effort. Usually, these efforts are used to cover transitions, travel, or under-orchestration. They can be more, and should be more fully orchestrated.
- Consider how EMPHASIS, PRIORITY, PRIMACY and FOCUS are used to manipulate the audience's attention.
 - Emphasis through isolation (geographic distance).
 - Emphasis through stylistic differentiation.
 - Emphasis through differences in speed (quick to slow).
 - Emphasis through differences in orientation (facing).
 - Emphasis through differences in gradation of effort (appearing difficult/easy).
 - Emphasis through differences in weight (heavy to light).
 - Emphasis through differences in textural change (filled form to line, curve to straight, and outline to filled form...).
- Does your composition allow the students the opportunity to display the skills required of the program? A single high-achieving soloist will generate little credit on the judges' sheets. The degree to which all students display gradations in dynamic efforts through layered moments can impact both visual sub-captions. Consider exposing single effort/high achievement moments between layered triad events to develop clarity, excellence, and uniformity of training. Glorification of the "busy" or thickly-composed show is a trend today. Let's start rewarding clarity and artistry in writing, and involving larger groups to excellence, not "writing to hide."
- Compositional tools are typically utilized ineffectively as young staffs orchestrate to a weak soundtrack. Dynamic efforts viewed through the student's performance are not reflective of the audio. A soundtrack that has little or no textural change, dynamic range, or instrumental variety can put your program at risk through limited opportunities to relate visual orchestration to the soundtrack. Weight, space, time, flow, shape, and all levels of the triad (equipment, movement, and staging) should relate to the theme/soundtrack/concept in some way...or the designer is just writing in a vacuum. Composition, orchestration, and depth are relational to the audio.
- Appropriate segmentation usually isolates the guard (flags/rifles/sabers) in a presentational manner. However, consider the logic in path, speed, and orientation into vertical events that provide greater opportunities for *artistic* vocabulary, not just *logical* vocabulary, which is related to the soundtrack. Isolation provides emphasis; geographical segmentation provides textural change; consider adding depth and

dimensionality through level, layer, orientation, and nuance upon arrival and throughout the event. Gradations in shape, line, and texture should all lead to a logical end point of each event. Overlapping segmental events can also create depth if the audio can be constructed in a way to make it possible.

- Within the structure of each show is a chosen style. All styles have an equal opportunity for success, if applied with uniformity and conviction. Do not disregard styles with which you are unfamiliar or disparaging.