

## JUDGING TIPS FOR THE POSTER, ESSAY & PUBLIC SPEAKING CONTESTS

### Contest Rule Supplement

#### **Introduction:**

The following information is a compilation of advice from experts on how to coordinate judging for your District's poster, essay and public speaking contests. This supplement is to serve only as a guide. Please refer to the Contest Handbook for rules and official score sheets.

#### **Titles/Theme:**

See rules for Poster, Essay and Public Speaking contests.

#### **Judges:**

Select 3 or 5 individuals with backgrounds in soils, water and related natural resources such as conservation, agriculture, environmental science, English, art or speech. District Supervisors and staff, teachers, artists, journalists, librarians, artists, authors, media and advertising specialists, environmental scientists, Extension personnel, county commissioners, and Toastmaster members are good candidates. Above all, look for potential candidates who are familiar with soil and water resources and appreciate the learning skills and abilities of children.

Try to get a diversity of judges and avoid possible conflicts of interest with ties to students, school or community, etc. The contest rules make every provision for the contestant's anonymity; however this issue remains a concern, particularly in the public speaking contest.

Whether to use the same or different judges for each contest is up to the District. By selecting different individuals, you can capitalize on related skills and tailor the judging team to a specific contest, as well as avoid overuse of the same judges. When a District's volunteer pool is limited, using the same people for all contests may enhance judging consistency.

#### **Orientation:**

Prior to the event, judges should receive a copy of the rules and score sheets. During orientation, you should inform the judges of the overall contest objective - to introduce and make students aware of soil and water conservation in a positive manner. It's always helpful to cover the contest's background as well as the awards program and succeeding levels of competition. You should cover the contest rules in detail including all definitions (current title, copyright restrictions, scoring categories, essay versus report, etc.), scoring emphasis, point infractions, and score sheets. Finally, you may want to address specific areas of concern, show examples of winning entries, discuss predetermined procedures for selecting winners and addressing ties, and answer questions. A comprehensive orientation is your best insurance for a successful contest! It is recommended that Districts use the state score sheets for all entries. After the contest, score sheets can be returned to the contest coordinators and teachers for evaluation and critiquing purposes

#### **Preparation:**

Poster and essay entries should be numbered (post-it notes work great) with a corresponding number on the score sheet with all personal information concealed. Posters should be displayed at eye level. The room used for judging should be quiet with restricted access to avoid interruptions and to allow judges to discuss contest details openly and fairly.

Select a room suited for public speaking and with good acoustics for the public speaking contest. You should provide a podium. Microphones are optional. The contestants have the right to either use or not use a

microphone if one is provided. A monitor should be placed at the room entrance to restrict access during speeches. Appoint an official timekeeper and provide him/her with instructions, a stopwatch and recording sheets. Never utilize the timekeeper as a judge.

**Judging:**

It is recommended that judges first score each entry individually and then, as discussed in orientation, select the winner by the highest score or discuss their top three selections and reach a consensus on the winning contestants.

In the event of a tie, judges will make final selections through a discussion/consensus process.

**Closure:**

Good, informed judges are one of your most valuable resources in the poster, essay and public speaking contests. After completing the contest, ask your judges to evaluate the event. Their input will help you coordinate an even better event next year. Follow up with an acknowledgment for their service to your contest and your District or Area.

**BEST WISHES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONTEST**