

Adjudicators' Guide

Last revised in March 2020

OVERVIEW

Professional theatre artists and educators are invited to adjudicate for the National Theatre School Festival based on experience, expertise, training and commitment to creative learning. They are also chosen to reflect and respond to student interests and lived experiences. This means hiring artist-educators with a wide range of artistic specializations AND that adjudicators at large should demographically mirror the students of Ontario in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation and (dis)ability.

The central role of the adjudicator is to provide useful critical feedback, in a thoughtful, caring way. Adjudicators should provide feedback that helps participants to grow as artists and people, through enriched understandings of their own collaborative work.

All adjudicators will be asked to participate in an online meeting to further a shared vocabulary and ethos.

BEST PRACTICE IN PUBLIC & PRIVATE ADJUDICATION AT ALL LEVELS SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Positive reinforcement to the company about the strengths of the work, alongside critical feedback that helps the artists to grow.
- Clear suggestions and observations about how the company might make the work stronger: sometimes this can be offered by providing the company with *questions to consider* and answer for themselves about what they are working on, other times *concrete* proposals or creative alternatives to choices are most useful. Adjudication should include both.
- Specific, detailed commentary about both on-stage and off-stage elements: where possible, adjudicators should use specific examples and observations about as many participant roles as are applicable (design/ directing/ performance/ writing/ music/ choreography... and how those elements work together)

- Sensitivity toward all participants and a comprehension of any challenges or limitations faced by the company or its members
- An admission of subjectivity: it is important that students know that while adjudicators have been selected for their expertise and have insight to offer, each adjudicator will have her/his/their own tastes and points of view. The participant's job is to listen to the adjudicator, consider the feedback and determine for themselves what is most valuable. Adjudicators should find their own way of expressing this at both public and private adjudications.
- An awareness about a diversity of experience and ability: students who participate in the festival have a diversity of experiences, identities and abilities. Adjudicators should be mindful of their own assumptions about the students they are working with and work against those assumptions in adjudication processes. Part of this is being cognizant of the words chosen to talk about the members of a company. For example, if you are speaking to an individual student you can start by asking their name, which will allow you to use that person's name rather than making an assumption about a gender pronoun. Another thing to be mindful of in this regard is considering what gender pronouns you use to describe a particular role in the theatre (i.e directors are not only 'he', stage managers are not only 'she' — This may seem evident but it is still a problem to overcome!) Adjudicators should also be aware that student participants in the festival have a range of abilities and should not expect all students to participate in private adjudication in the same way.

It might feel daunting to address themes or experiences you encounter that you don't yourself understand or do not have your own personal experience with. A good approach in these instances is to ask questions. You can always say: *What were you hoping to do in this moment? Or what was your intention with this choice?* You can also come to a new understanding through the process of an adjudication and amend a previous statement or proposal. Adjudication is an opportunity to model learning and adapting to new knowledge. With all points above, try to remain open and ready to learn yourself.

WHAT ADJUDICATORS WILL RECEIVE FROM EACH COMPANY IN ADVANCE:

Companies working from a previously published or original script will submit a copy of the script for their adjudicator(s). Some productions are more movement/ score / improvisation based: in these cases companies may send text for their pieces, with accompanying notes, as they deem appropriate. In all cases, companies should submit for the adjudicator(s) an artistic statement (of 250 words or less) that includes a student response to the following questions:

Why are you working on the play/ subject matter/ material you have chosen? (Why this piece here and now?— if you are discussing this question with students you can focus on why THEY need to work on it here and now)

What has been the most challenging part of your process so far?

What are you most excited by in this work that you are making together?

These questions should be discussed and answered as a company. The group's thoughts on these matters may be summarized by the director, the writer, another member of the creative team, or composed collectively. Companies are asked to indicate the author(s) of their artistic statements. Teachers are expected to guide and participate in the process of generating artistic statements, but should not be the lead or sole author. Adjudicators can use the artistic statements as a launch point for providing feedback in adjudication.

Companies should revise artistic statements after moving on from districts to regionals or from regionals to provincials. You may inquire about this to ensure students continue to reflect on their work as it evolves.

Materials may be sent either via the District Rep/ Regional Coordinator, or directly to the Adjudicator— the specific channels of communication vary district-to-district or region-to-region. Ask your District Rep or Regional Coordinator how and when to expect these items electronically. Companies are asked to submit materials in a timely fashion to respect adjudicator preparation time.

ON PUBLIC ADJUDICATION:

Public adjudication happens at the conclusion of a program of festival shows and should not exceed 15 minutes total at the end of the day/evening. It should consist of a positive general assessment of each production and include the adjudicator's strongest impressions of the whole. Constructive criticism can be provided, but coupled with positive reinforcement. The place for a deeper critical discussion is in the private adjudication where there can be a more layered conversation. Making an observation about exceptional student work during public adjudication is welcome. However it is not appropriate to speak critically about an individual student in public. The primary goal of public adjudication is not to single out any member of the team, but rather to focus on how the elements work together. Under no circumstances should an adjudicator rank productions or make comparative overall value judgements between them.

The adjudicator should, in general, approach each of the productions in order of appearance although an adjudicator might weave some feedback together in order to draw connections for the audience. The adjudicator may start and conclude by finding formal or thematic

connections among the productions to help close the evening for participants and audience. Contextualizing the script, devised or collectively created material may also be a way to enrich the audience's experience of the program of work. You may, for example, share some information about the playwright's practice or about a genre of theatre related to the festival work.

ON PRIVATE ADJUDICATION:

Private adjudications ideally last 20-30 minutes for each production. They are sometimes scheduled immediately following the public adjudication and other times scheduled the following day (some districts may have other procedures as well). Private adjudication should be a conversation inside of which *concrete, specific feedback* is offered. Hearing student talk and articulation of ideas can also help adjudicators decide how to distribute awards. The adjudicator should *provide detailed assessment* of the production, focussing on both individuals' work as well as the work of ensembles and production teams, while asking and encouraging specific, productive questions of and from the company to encourage engaged dialogue. A good question for adjudicators to conclude with is "Did I miss anything?" so that students may raise any matters that are important to them that have not already been covered. That said, because time for adjudications is limited, adjudicators should not begin broadly with "What questions do you have for me?" It is the adjudicator's job to both focus the discussion and make space for student talk/ areas of need/ interests.

Though a more critical attitude is appropriate in private adjudications, it should be tempered with positive reinforcement and coupled with *creative and concrete* suggestions for improvement. The adjudicator may also provide positive observations and constructive feedback to teacher-directors in a collegial way within the framework of providing support to students together. Teachers and adjudicators both should encourage students to think both openly and analytically about feedback.

Some local festivals offer private adjudication to each group/ company individually and other districts do all private adjudications together, as one large group. There are pros and cons to each approach: individual private adjudications give the adjudicator the opportunity to speak confidentially and dig deeper with each group rather than spending time/ diplomacy making sure all groups feel equally valued in each other's presence. Students may also be more inclined to speak frankly about their process with less fear of exposure amidst other groups. One group at a time private adjudications can make the adjudication more like a "rehearsal hall" moment than an exhibition or lecture. At most regional festivals, as well as at provincials, the private adjudications are also done individually so this also allows the kids to get familiar with that process. From another point of view, it can be valuable to do private adjudications collectively, as that approach can provide the opportunity for each group to learn from the adjudications of their peers from other schools. Sometimes, collective adjudication is also just what works best for a particular festival schedule. Ultimately, at the district level, each

adjudicator should decide how they can be most effective, in consultation with the host school/ district rep. Different adjudicators will have different approaches. Host schools may also have strong feelings about individual/ vs collective.

Note: Some students may not be able to stay for private adjudications that happen following performances due to family restrictions or geographic distance. The following are recommendations to help ensure that ALL company members are able to benefit from private adjudication:

1. Teachers make an audio recording of the private adjudication to then be shared with the whole group back at school. These recordings are for company use only and to be deleted after use. Confidentiality of these recordings is the responsibility of the teacher-advisor.
2. A teacher advisor may arrange a subsequent Skype or Google Hangout etc. meeting with the adjudicator and students, subject to the discretion / availability of the adjudicator and company. This should *not* replace the more crucial in-person adjudication but rather offer an additional opportunity to students with barriers.

TIME KEEPING:

Please pay attention to the time you have. Different districts, regions and the Provincial Showcase all have varying amounts of time available for private adjudication. Be aware of how much time you have with the students so that you don't run out of time to give them your concrete, detailed feedback about their hard work. One approach you can take is to ask the company's stage manager to keep time for you! For example, you can ask that person to give you a 10 and 5 minute warning. Adjudicators must strive to offer equal amounts of time to each school/ company.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN ADJUDICATING:

Choice of script/ material

Adjudicators should be familiar with the scripts, having researched their origins in advance of the performances. Companies should also have provided adjudicators with an artistic statement that indicates why they have chosen a particular script or subject matter here and now. This should allow the adjudicator to see where students and teachers are coming from and incorporate that prior knowledge into the adjudication.

It may be relevant or helpful to further unpack the choice of particular performance material in a private adjudication but the adjudication should not be about the adjudicator's personal

feelings or tastes about a particular script or style. The adjudicator's role is to help students do the best job possible with what *they* are working on and, in doing so, possibly help them develop a greater awareness of what they are working on.

That said, questions you might help students to consider are:

- Whom is this play for?
- Whom might this play harm? How do you know?
- Has this story been told before? Does it need to be told again?
- Who is represented in this play? Who is not represented?
- How does who is represented align with the social identities (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, (dis)ability, citizenship, etc.) of the students in your cast? In your school? In the audience at NTS Drama Festival performances? In the town/city/province/world you live in?
- Who wrote or created the play? Have plays by people with the same social identities been produced often?

When raising these questions, it is important to keep in mind that some students will be familiar with these conversations and for others it will be entirely new. Gentleness, generosity, expectations, and advocacy should be your guides. Some students may be experiencing harm from the very script/ production you are discussing, some may have been feeling alienated by the absence of these discussions while others may not really understand why you are asking these questions at all. This is about cultivating an understanding that asking these questions and having the conversations that follow is doing important work in the world. It is also about artistic development: these are real and important conversations being had in the professional theatre community and helping students to enter these conversations about the work they are making with each other is essential.

If the material or script is original / student written / collectively created, the adjudicator can provide dramaturgical feedback alongside other responses to the company's work, depending on her/his/their expertise. Other questions an adjudicator should consider are:

- What kinds of challenges does the script/ content offer a director, actor, designer or technician? How did the team address these challenges?
- What is the potential social or artistic impact of the script or performance material?
- How did the company serve the material they chose to work on?

PRODUCTION & PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER:

Sound/ Music/ Original Composition

- How do the sound/musical elements serve the piece and interpretation of the piece?
- How did the choices of live or recorded music contribute to the overall production?
- Are the sound levels balanced with the actors' voices?
- Are the cues well timed and executed? (Consider the number of cues and if/ how they are serving the production.)
- Does the soundscape/ aural world serve the mood/ style/ world of the production?
- If there is live singing:
 - Are the voices strong and clear?
 - How well are the songs interpreted and executed?
 - Are any harmonies accomplished and well executed?
 - Is there an effective balance between the voices and any other live music or sound sources?
- If there is a live instrumentation/ orchestra/ band:
 - How well are the songs/ is the score interpreted and executed?
 - How do the players play together?
 - Is there an effective balance between the orchestra/ band and any other live music or sound sources?
- Is there any original student composition or musical direction?
- Are there missing sound elements that could better serve the production (that are realistic to produce)?
- Are there existing sound elements that feel superfluous or detract from the piece

Scenic Design/ Properties

- How do the scenic elements and props serve the piece and interpretation of the piece?
- Is the set safe for the performers?
- How do the set and props 'collaborate' with the actors and other design elements?
- How do the properties help the performers do what they need to do?
- Do the properties get in the way of the actors or detract from the performances?
- How does the set help or hinder the action on stage?
- Is the set adaptable to a variety of venues?
- How do the scenic elements enhance the storytelling?
- Do the scenic elements communicate a world to the audience?
- Do the elements feel like they belong to the created world?
- Is an intention or concept communicated through the scenic design?
- If there are set changes, do they occur smoothly and intentionally within the performance?
- Are there missing scenic elements or props that could better serve the production (that would be realistic to produce)?
- Are there existing scenic elements that feel superfluous or detract from the piece?

- Are there alternative choices to existing props/ scenic elements worth exploring?

*Lighting

- Does the lighting help to communicate time and place?
- Are you aware of the lighting on its own or is it implemented in conversation with the other elements and overall storytelling?
- How well does the lighting focus audience attention?
- How effective is the use of specials?
- Are the cues well timed and executed? (Consider the number of cues and if/ how they are serving the production.)
- Specifically, how could the lighting be improved? Are there alternative choices worth exploring?

**Please consider that some schools have very little access to lighting equipment and expertise. Adjudicators should make sure that what they are valuing is not simply access to technical resources but rather innovative offers with available means.*

NOTE: The same criteria used to consider all of the above design elements can also be used to evaluate video projection, puppets and other production design elements that overlap with the above areas.

Costumes/ Hair & Make Up

- Do the costumes contribute to our understanding of the characters or performers?
- How do the costumes contribute to our understanding of time and place (period or contemporary)?
- How do the costumes work with the other design elements?
- How much detail/ care has been worked into the costumes?
- Do any costumes prove distracting in any way, constricting movement or taking us out of the story/ world of the piece? Do we notice the costumes in ways that don't serve the piece?
- If applicable, how are costume changes handled during the performance?
- Are hair and make up significant elements of the production? If so:
 - Do hair preparation and make up help us to better understand characters, time and place
 - Is make up over done, or under done, considering the context?
 - Is the construction of wigs, masks or make up notable in any way?
 - Is hair or make up distracting at all?
 - Are there any special hair styles or make up that could better serve the piece?

Acting/ Performance

- Were actors being *interested* or *interesting*? Were they fully present, listening and responding to their fellow performers or were they attempting to ‘be seen’ or be the ‘best’ on stage?
- Do the actors remain focussed when not at the ‘centre’ of the action?
- Do actors appear to thoroughly comprehend their characters or roles?
- Do actors appear to understand and be contributing to a shared vision for the piece?
- Are there elements of originality to an actor’s interpretation? Is there a magnetism or specific quality apparent in the performance?
- What clear choices have been made in the development of characters?
- Is the character or performer convincing and compelling?
- How successfully have the actors physicalized and internalized the characters they are portraying or the roles they are performing?
- What else did you notice about actors’ physicality?
- Do the actors have clear, articulated speech and adequate projection?
- Were the actors’ vocal/speech choices appropriate to the characters’/ time/ place/ to world of the piece?
- How were the actors’ approaches to pacing?
- If there is dance or choreographed movement in the piece:
 - How well is it executed by the performers?
 - How do the performers move together/ how does the dancer move in relationship to the other actors.
 - How does the expression in the dance advance the storytelling or define the world of the piece?

*** Many of these actor areas will of course say something about the director’s (and choreographer’s where applicable) contribution to the work as well.*

Direction

A good adjudicator should frame feedback so as to encourage both student and teacher directors to model reception to both productive constructive criticism and positive reinforcement. If time permits, a private discussion with a director might be useful, both to determine how best to give the actors notes/ feedback and to offer constructive criticism that won’t undermine the director’s leadership of the team. But as time may very well not permit for one-on-one conversations, adjudicators should be mindful to place respect and care at the core of adjudication. The goal is to help the director do her/ his/ their job even better, so it is important to acknowledge the director as a leader within the team who also has things to learn and ways to grow.

Elements to evaluate:

- How well has the director understood the play/ material/ subjects of exploration?
- How has the director collaborated with designers to guide how the elements work in relationship to each other in order to create the world of the play or piece?
- How well has the director guided the audience to enter the world of the play/piece and understand the rules within it or suspend disbelief?
- Have the director's choices communicated time/ place?
- Do the actors move in space with purpose and in relationship to each other or do they move for the sake of moving?
- Are the transitions tight or flowing and as well-considered as the other 'action' of the piece?
- Do the actors seem to understand their roles as well as a collective purpose?
- Has the director guided or provided a unique or unusual interpretation of the play or collectively generated material?
- What are some alternative choices a director may want to consider?

*** Many of these directing areas could apply to choreographers as well.*

Notes on Ensembles

Recognition of an ensemble should be one of the festival's highest honours. There is a danger of the festival community perceiving the acknowledgement of an ensemble as lesser than other accolades or feedback targeted at certain people or elements. For this reason, it is especially important to be specific with feedback for ensembles. How does the ensemble work together? How do members of the ensemble support each other inside the performance? How do you perceive the relationship between the whole and the parts? An evaluation of an ensemble may acknowledge the work of a company of actors, a director, or both.

Things to assess about overall production

- How effectively do members of the creative and production teams work with limited resources?
- Are resources effectively employed to serve the play/ piece/ story? Was the most effort exerted in the most important places?
- Does there appear to have been a coherent vision for the piece that all the creators understand/ share?
- Are there any especially significant production values? (such as original music composition, projection design, masks, movement, use of space etc.)
- What was the experience of the piece like as a whole? What emotional impact did it have? How did it provoke thoughts or feelings?

IMPORTANT:

Adjudicators should use specific examples and observations about as many elements as are applicable: scenic design/ lighting/ sound/ directing/ performance/ new writing/ music/ choreography... and, most importantly, how those elements work together. That said, no production should be penalized for more or less or the absence of any of these elements. For example: one company may choose, for artistic reasons, to use a bare stage and employ no set pieces at all, while another company may create a set that is a crucial element to the point of feeling like another character in the piece! There is no point system and there are no 'marks' to gain or lose in this way. The adjudicators feedback is qualitative not quantitative.

AWARDS

It is a valued and important tradition of the Festival that students are recognized and receive awards for their achievements. Assigning awards can be the toughest part of adjudication. Good luck! The following information may be daunting for first time adjudicators! Please communicate with your local festival representative (likely the person who asked you to adjudicate) to ensure you understand what awards you are expected to give.

In keeping with the positive atmosphere of adjudication and the festival, each participating company should leave with at least one award for some aspect of their production or member of their ensemble/ team. Certain aspects of awards may vary district to district and region to region, so adjudicators should seek guidance from local festival coordinators about strategies for acknowledging each company's work and a distribution of awards that are both generous to all participants and an honest reflection of the adjudicator's evaluation of what is presented. Your district/ regional coordinator or NTS Festival rep will communicate the specific awards to be allocated in each specific adjudication context.

Remember to always check the program to be sure that awards are going to students (not teachers or advisors) and that they are truly acknowledging student work. Adjudicators should explain to the audience why they feel the student(s) deserve the awards they are given, in a few well-chosen words.

Please Note: There are local particularities and traditions in each district and region and adjudicators should connect with the local rep/ coordinator to go over the awards process before the festival.

Announcing Awards

Award Categories:

1. Awards of Merit
2. Awards of Excellence
3. Stage Manager's Award (most but not all districts have these awards)
4. Adjudicator's Awards (discretionary)
5. Outstanding Productions (move on to the next level — districts to regionals, regionals to provincials)
6. Productions of Promise *** (see below)

When announcing awards within each category, adjudicators should convey the information in the following order:

1. Brief description/ title of the award
2. Name of the school
3. Title of the show
4. Name(s) of recipient(s)

The reason for this order is because awards produce a lot of cheering! If the names are said last, it is more likely that the people in the auditorium will actually hear the names!

Shows should not be ranked. It should be made clear to the audience that awards for Outstanding Production at the district and regional levels are given in no order of value. For this reason, it can help to present awards in the order in which the productions appeared.

*** If a district or region desires, they may give an adjudicator the choice of selecting a Production of Promise. This is a new optional element at district and regional festivals. A Production of Promise is a show that is not given an Outstanding Production Award but rather is asked to advance to the next level because the adjudicator sees real potential for the production to become a stronger work through the opportunity to develop it further and perform it again. This award is also designed to provide a chance for a school group to grow through the experience of seeing the work of other students and schools who have advanced to the next level. For this reason, it is recommended that this award be giving to a production from a school that has not had the opportunity to advance to the next level in recent festival years.

Awards Breakdown

In the District and Regional Festivals there are two different categories: Awards of Merit and Awards of Excellence — in addition to the OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS (which are awarded to schools moving on the next level).

The precise number of Awards to be given is determined by the overall number of shows.

District Awards

- o OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS, Awards of Merit and Awards of Excellence
 - 19 – 24 shows =
4 OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS (plus 16 – 21 Awards of Excellence; 19 -24 Awards of Merit)
 - 12 – 18 shows =
3 OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS (plus 9 – 15 Awards of Excellence; 12 – 18 Awards of Merit)
 - 7 – 11 shows =
2 OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS (plus 5 – 9 Awards of Excellence; 7 - 11 Awards of Merit)
 - 6 or less shows =
1 OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION (plus 2 – 5 Awards of Excellence; 3 - 6 Awards of Merit)
- o + 1 Stage Management Award in eligible districts. All districts that hold the festival in one host venue will present a Stage Management Award, awarded by the Festival Stage Manager in conversation with Festival Crew and adjudicator. Some districts who hold the festival in multiple venues may not have a Festival Stage Manager consistently in attendance who is then able to evaluate Stage Managers. Every effort should be made by districts to recognize the work of SMs.
- o + Adjudicator Discretionary Awards: These awards have been created to acknowledge exceptional student achievements in Playwriting and/or Directing or Ensemble work. These are not mandatory but up to two of these awards may or may not be given, in addition to the standard awards, for extraordinary work at the discretion of the adjudicator.
- o + Other local Awards as applicable, possibly including a Production of Promise

Regional Awards

- 2 Outstanding Production Awards
- 1 Stage Management Award
(Awarded by the Festival Stage Manager in conversation with Festival Crew and adjudicator as appropriate)
- 1 Adjudicator's Award
- Awards of Excellence = Number of entries minus 2
- Awards of Merit = Number of entries
- + Local Awards as applicable, possibly including a Production of Promise

There are distinct awards given at the Ontario Showcase as follows:

Provincial Awards

- 6 Mira Awards for Excellence
- 12 Outstanding Achievement Awards
- 1 Outstanding Achievement Award for Stage Management
(Awarded by the Festival Stage Manager in conversation with Festival Crew and adjudicator as appropriate)
- 1-2 Bennie Awards for Excellence in Technical Theatre
(Awarded by the Festival Technical Director, in consultation with the Adjudicator)
- + Any other Provincial Awards, Bursaries and Scholarships

Awards Formula

The formula to determine the total number of Awards of Merit is to take the number of plays in and to match that with the total number of Awards of Merit. For example, if there are 12 productions altogether, there will be 12 Awards of Merit. If there are 5 productions, there will be 5 Awards of Merit.

To determine the number of Awards of Excellence subtract the total number of Outstanding Productions from the total number of productions that have been performed in the District or Regional Festival. For example, if there are 15 productions in total, subtract 3 (the number of Outstanding Productions) for a total of 12 Awards of Excellence. If there are only five shows, subtract 1 for a total of four Awards of Excellence.

(Number of Shows) - (Number of Outstanding Productions) = Number of Awards of Excellence

Examples of Awards

The 'titles' or 'categories' for awards are the purview of the adjudicator. Here are some *examples...*

General

- Acting/ Performance
- Artistic Team (playwright, director, choreographer and/or musical director)
- Choreography
- Collective or Devised Creation
- Costumes
- Design Team (set, light, sound, costume, props and/or hair and makeup)
- Digital Media
- Directing
- Ensemble Performance (see notes above on awarding ensembles)
- Hair and Makeup
- Lighting and/or Projection (Design and/or Operation)
- Movement and/or Dance
- Original Music/ Composition/ Performance
- Physical Theatre
- Playwriting
- Properties

- Production (i.e. seamless integration of Direction, Performance and Technical elements)
- Puppetry and/or Mask
- Scenic Painting
- Set Design
- Sound (Design and/or Operation)
- Stage Combat
- Technical Team (builders, running crew and/or SM)
- Vocal Work (i.e. choral speaking, singing, etc.)

Specific

- Comic Genius
- Exploration of theatrical form and content
- Creating worlds with human landscape
- Interplay of lights and music
- Original artistic research
- Original concept
- Performing yourself
- Playwright and director collaboration
- Specificity of character
- Theatre magic

Note: In terms of selecting Outstanding Productions that will move on to Regionals or Provincials, adjudicators should have one 'runner-up' selection in case a company is unable to move on due to logistic constraints. Adjudicators should keep these back-up selections to themselves and only share these selections if they become necessary.