

# HOW DEBATER'S SHOULD JUDGE INTERP!

by Michael Streeter

I use the pervasive, albeit, inaccurate term "Speech" to describe what I do. I am a Speech Coach, I coach the Speech Team and we go to Speech Tournaments. "Speech and Debate" is just as inaccurate for an interpretation is no more a speech than a debate is. When I use the term "Forensics" with anyone my age or older (outside of our cloistered little world) they think of the TV show *Quincy* with Jack Klugman. Anyone younger than I am will respond with..."huh?" Using speech is much more effective in recruiting a fourteen-year-old freshman than forensics will ever be. It is sufficient to say speech and those that don't see the efficacy of using a short, inaccurate term to facilitate understanding hasn't debated or seen a debate in the last few years.

That said, "Speech Tournaments" are frequently in need of judges. When I attend speech tournaments, often I hear groans and protestations when someone with little or no debate experience is asked to judge a debate. They fear speed/spread and avoid debate like the plague. The inverse is also true, though the protestations are much subtler. The debater given an interp ballot will whisper, "I never know how to judge these things, I just go with my gut feeling." If said to a fellow debater, the response is usually a shrug of the shoulders. If said to

an interper, the response is a knowing smile of assent. The interper knows that going with one's "gut feeling" is probably the best way to adjudicate an interp. What the interper fails to see is that going with one's gut feeling run contrary to everything in which a debater believes. This response is also of no value to the debater because it gives no clue as to how to write a ballot (the most important aspect of judging in this author's view). Gut feelings supply the rankings only. Ballots require more.

Debaters aptly supply quality critiques of delivery (though seldom will you see the comments "too fast" or "slow down"). Beyond delivery comments, debaters are often lost. Here are some tips that may help a debater to judge interpretation using language debaters can relate to:

**Topicality** - Is the selection appropriate to the event? Prose in Prose, Poetry in Poetry, funny stuff in Humorous, etc.

**Need/Solvency** - Does the selection meet a need in the audience? Intellectual stimulation, insight into life, emotional fulfillment, etc.

**Advantages** - How does the audience benefit from having experienced the interpretation? Was the experience worth the time of the audience? Was there something new to be learned?

**Ethos, Pathos & Logos** - (When I use these terms with my interpers, they often think I'm referring to *The Three Musketeers*). While the focus may be on the pathos, ethos and logos are not to be neglected. After you have watched an interp; ask yourself, "Were the characters made believable?" (Ethos) "Was the introduction adequately related to the piece?" "Was the piece communicated in a way that made sense?" "Could I follow it?" (Logos)

**Flow** - Is there an emotional arc or through line within the character(s) that carries through the piece?

**Turn** - Did the competitor misinterpret the piece. Are they taking it in the wrong direction?

**Tag Team** - In Duo, are the performances balanced or is one competitor carrying all of the weight of the piece?

**Clash** - In Duo, are the competitors listening to each other or are they each giving individual performances? Is there a dramatic build to a climax?

I'm sure others will generate many additions to this (half tongue in cheek) list. These tips may help the debater find her/his way to writing a quality ballot that will be of use to the competitor.

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