



2025 HANDBOOK

Adjudication Guide



American Association of Community Theatre
AACTFest 2025 Handbook

Welcome to AACTFest 2025.

The *AACTFest Handbook* facilitates participation in AACT's festival program to celebrate theatrical creativity across the nation.

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This handbook will be in effect until the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook* is published.

Copies of the *AACTFest 2025 Handbook* are available from the AACT office for a nominal fee or can be downloaded free from the AACT website at aact.org/handbook.

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Adjudication Guide

Adjudicators for festivals in the AACTFest cycle must be individuals with extensive theatrical knowledge, experience, and understanding, and must be approved by the AACT VP for Festivals. Adjudicators view each festival production and share their observations with the entering companies and the audience. Comments should be confined to those within the AACT Adjudication Guidelines (below).

Plays are to be adjudicated based on the overall production, with acting and directing as the major elements. All types of productions (comedy, drama, original works, musicals, revues, avant-garde, “controversial,” etc.) are acceptable entries to the festival and must be considered on a similar basis, as each company has a free choice of material (a one-act, a cutting, a selected act, etc.). The best production is the one most fully realized in relationship to acting, directing, and a consistent design concept, keeping in mind the criteria listed below. Design and technical competence is to be given consideration as to their effectiveness as an integral part of the total production experience.

Adjudicators may not question the choice of material, except as to its appropriateness for the company, and comment only on how it was realized.

AACT Adjudication Guidelines

Among the criteria to be considered are:

- Is the acting believable and technically skillful with effective timing?
- Are the characters well interpreted?
- Does the company display ensemble work?
- Is the material appropriate for the company?
- Is the concept appropriate for the material and realized by the company?
- Has the structure of the production been controlled?
- Are the movements and stage pictures effective?
- Is the production well paced?
- Do the technical elements support the overall production?
- How effective was the total impact?

Focus is to be placed on positive solutions to problems the companies have with production issues by suggesting alternative possibilities. Productions may advance to other festivals; these companies should be able to benefit by incorporating the adjudicators’ comments. Caution: the adjudicator should not redirect the show.

Any question of rule violation must be addressed by the Festival Commissioner, whose decision shall be final. Adjudicators must focus attention on the performances, not possible rule violations.

Adjudicator Selection

State Adjudicators are selected by the state festival committee or chair and must be approved by the AACT VP for Festivals. All festivals are encouraged to use three adjudicators; states may use fewer if necessary. It is strongly recommended at least one adjudicator be from out of state. An adjudicator associated with a company entering the festival may not be utilized.

Regional Adjudicators are selected by the regional festival committee or chair. Regional festivals must use three adjudicators. It is strongly recommended at least one adjudicator be from another region. A person connected with a state festival entry proceeding to the regional festival may not adjudicate that regional festival. An adjudicator may not adjudicate both a state festival and its regional festival.

Festival Chairs should provide the adjudicators with:

- A contract detailing conditions of service
- An honorarium
- Transportation and housing
- Per diem, meal cost reimbursement or direct purchase of meals

Adjudication Process

Prior to the festival, adjudicators must read the plays to be presented. **Adjudicators must attend a meeting prior** to the first performance session with the Festival Commissioner to review the adjudication process. Each adjudicator must sit in the same seat for the festival entry performances to provide a consistent vantage point. The AACT commissioner will work with the adjudicators to choose these seats and then block off surrounding seats.

Panel Adjudication

Festivals may use panel format adjudication when using more than one adjudicator; this selection is made independently by each festival. The duration of each panel adjudication will be 15 to 30 minutes; each panel member must have a separate microphone. The decision to use panel adjudication must be made on a timely basis and published with other festival details. The Festival Commissioner needs to be notified. Adjudicators should be comfortable and familiar with the panel process, which may adhere to the following suggested format:

- An adjudicator is designated to act as the moderator for the adjudication session. The adjudicators rotate being the moderator for the sessions.
- The panel adjudication should begin with each adjudicator briefly summarizing his or her overall impression, with equal time allotted for each adjudicator.
- Following the summaries, the adjudicators will participate in open discussion with the designated moderator serving as facilitator.

Regardless of the adjudication format (panel or individual), adjudicators' personal likes and dislikes as to authors and material are not to play any part in the adjudication process. A person who cannot overcome an aversion to certain authors or plays during the festival must not adjudicate.

Companies may record the adjudicators' comments about their own performance. Adjudications are

open to all festival attendees; no private sessions may be held until after the awards are announced. The adjudicators may discuss the festival productions among themselves, but not with anyone else present until after the awards are announced except during balloting. Adjudicators should allow time in their schedules, following the awards presentation, to meet one-on-one with the directors of advancing companies to provide additional feedback.

Adjudicators will be evaluated on their performance. Completed evaluation forms are kept by the AACT office and made available to the adjudicators minus the names of the evaluators.

Individual Adjudication

Following performances, each adjudicator will have at least five (5) minutes to respond, based on the AACT Adjudication Guidelines. (The Festival Chair may set a longer response time.) The adjudicators will rotate in order as to who goes first. The adjudicators must be provided with a microphone. Adjudicators should address comments to the entire house as well as the cast and crew of the performance just completed. Adjudicators may hear preceding adjudications as well as succeeding ones, if they wish. Adjudicators are required to use a microphone and must be lighted.

Balloting Process

The balloting process shall be conducted by the Festival Commissioner immediately following the final adjudication. This room will be closed to all except for the AACT Commissioner and adjudicators. If they are not associated with any of the AACT eligible companies, the Festival Chair is also invited to observe.

The first order of business is the determination of specific festival awards without discussion of ranking. Adjudicators should have a list of any awards that will be given other than rank placement prior to any performances.

Adjudicators will discuss these awards in order to arrive at consensus. Following the determination of these awards, balloting takes place, with the adjudicators ranking each production in order of preference with the most fully realized performance being “1,” the next “2,” etc., on the Adjudicator’s Ballot form.

In festivals sending one production forward, if unanimous agreement is established on the first ballot for the “1,” “2,” and “3” positions, the balloting process is complete.

Festivals sending two productions forward must continue the ranking process through all entered shows through the “6” position.

If there is not unanimous agreement, discussion may take place before the next ballot. Following discussion, a second ballot is taken, and if unanimous agreement is not reached, discussion will again ensue, followed by a third ballot. Following the third ballot, if a unanimous decision is not reached, a split decision shall be allowed, with a majority of the adjudicators in agreement on each position.

If two adjudicators are utilized at the festival and no agreement can be reached, the Festival Commissioner shall break the deadlock by voting after the third ballot. If any company is not eligible to proceed for any reason, the tally sheet should be altered to indicate the company's ineligibility to proceed.

When possible, the adjudicators should attend the Festival Award ceremony. Following the ceremony, the adjudicators should meet with the advancing company(s) to give more in-depth feedback to assist them as they move forward.

At the National level, the adjudicators will nominate four productions for Outstanding Production and select one of the four as the winner. No other production rankings will be given besides the sole winner and the nominees for Outstanding Production.

