



2027 HANDBOOK

Adjudication Guide



American Association of Community Theatre

AACTFest 2027 Handbook

Welcome to AACTFest 2027

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 2029 Handbook* is published.

Copies of the *AACTFest 2027 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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AACTFest 2027 Handbook
Adjudication Guide

Adjudicators for festivals in the AACTFest cycle must possess extensive theatrical knowledge, experience, and understanding, and must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals of the American Association of Community Theatre.

Adjudicators will:

- View each festival production
- Provide responses immediately following each performance
- Address both the participating company and the audience

All comments must align with the **AACT Adjudication Guidelines.

Adjudication Philosophy

- Productions are evaluated based on the **overall realization of the production**, with primary emphasis on:
 - Acting
 - Directing
- All production types (comedy, drama, musicals, original works, avant-garde, etc.) must be evaluated equitably.
- Adjudicators:
 - May not criticize the **choice of material**, except regarding its appropriateness for the company
 - Must focus on **how effectively the material is realized**
- Design and technical elements are evaluated based on how effectively they support the total production.
- Feedback should:
 - Emphasize **constructive solutions**
 - Offer **alternative approaches**
 - Avoid “redirecting” or re-directing the production
- Adjudicators must focus solely on performances and **must not address rule violations**.
 - All rule-related matters are handled exclusively by the Festival Commissioner.

AACT Adjudication Guidelines

Adjudicators should consider the following:

- Is the acting believable and technically skillful, with effective timing?
- Are the characters well interpreted?
- Does the company demonstrate strong ensemble work?

- Is the material appropriate for the company?
- Is the concept appropriate and effectively realized?
- Is the production well structured and controlled?
Are movement and stage pictures effective?
- Is the production well paced?
- Do technical elements support the production?
- What is the overall impact of the production?

Adjudicator Selection

State Festivals

- Selected by the state festival committee or chair
- Must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals
- Use of **three adjudicators is encouraged**, though fewer may be used if necessary
- At least one adjudicator from outside the state is strongly recommended
- Individuals associated with participating companies may **not** serve as adjudicators

Regional Festivals

- Selected by the regional festival committee or chair
- **Three adjudicators are required**
- At least one adjudicator from outside the region is strongly recommended
- Restrictions:
 - No adjudicator may evaluate a festival in which their affiliated company is competing
 - No adjudicator may serve at both the state and regional level within the same cycle

Adjudicator Support

Festival Chairs should provide adjudicators with:

- A contract outlining terms of service
- An honorarium
- Transportation and lodging
- Per diem, meal reimbursement, or provided meals

Adjudication Process

- Adjudicators must:
 - Read all scripts prior to the festival
 - Attend a pre-festival meeting with the Festival Commissioner
- Each adjudicator must:
 - Sit in the same assigned seat for all performances
 - Use a consistent vantage point
- Seating will be coordinated and reserved by the Festival Commissioner.

Panel Adjudication

- Festivals may choose a **panel adjudication format** when using multiple adjudicators.
- Sessions should last **15–30 minutes**.
- Each adjudicator must have an individual microphone.

Suggested Format

1. One adjudicator serves as moderator (rotating role)
 2. Each adjudicator provides a brief summary of impressions
 3. Open discussion follows, facilitated by the moderator
- The decision to use panel adjudication must be:
 - Announced in advance
 - Communicated to the Festival Commissioner
 - Personal preferences must not influence adjudication.
 - Individuals unable to evaluate material objectively should not serve.

Adjudication Access and Conduct

- Adjudications are **open to all festival attendees**
- Companies may record feedback on their own performances
- No private adjudication sessions may occur prior to awards
- Adjudicators:
 - May discuss productions among themselves
 - May not discuss productions with others until after awards are announced
- Following awards, adjudicators should be available to:
 - Meet with advancing companies
 - Provide additional feedback
- Adjudicators will be evaluated, and results will be maintained by the AACT office (anonymized).

Individual Adjudication

- Each adjudicator will have a minimum of **five (5) minutes** to respond following each performance (*The Festival Chair may extend this time.*)
- Adjudicators:
 - Rotate speaking order
 - Must use a microphone and be properly lit
 - Address both the audience and the company

Balloting Process

- Conducted by the Festival Commissioner immediately following final adjudications
- Session is closed to all except:
 - Festival Commissioner
 - Adjudicators
 - Festival Chair (if not affiliated with any competing company)

Awards Determination

- Awards (other than rankings) are determined first
- Adjudicators should have award criteria established prior to the festival

Ranking Process

- Productions are ranked in order of preference:
 - “1” = most fully realised production
 - Subsequent rankings follow in order

Single Advancement Festivals

- Rankings: **1st through 3rd**
- Unanimous agreement on first ballot concludes the process

Two Advancement Festivals

- Rankings: **1st through 6th** (or all entries if fewer)

Balloting Procedure

- Up to **three ballots** may be conducted:
 - Initial ballot
 - Discussion
 - Second ballot
 - Additional discussion
 - Third ballot
- If unanimity is not reached after three ballots:
 - A **majority decision** is accepted
- If only two adjudicators are present and no agreement is reached:
 - The Festival Commissioner will **cast the deciding vote**
- Ineligible productions must be clearly marked on the final tally.

Post-Balloting

- Adjudicators should attend the awards ceremony when possible
- Afterward, they should meet with advancing companies for additional guidance

National Festival Adjudication

- Adjudicators will:
 - Select **four (4) productions** as nominees for Outstanding Production
 - Choose **one (1) winner**
- No additional rankings will be announced beyond:
 - The winner
 - The nominees