

# **AHA/BJCP Sanctioned Competition Program Judge Procedures Manual**

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## **Introduction**

The American Homebrewers Association (AHA) and the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) have been involved in sanctioning and running thousands of homebrew competitions. The information in this manual is based on many years of experience with homebrew competitions.

The intent of this manual is to clarify the roles of staff, judges and stewards in order to accomplish three primary goals for homebrew competitions:

1. To give the entrants valuable feedback on the quality of their brew as perceived by the judges in order to enhance the quality of homebrewing.
2. To provide training for aspiring beer judges.
3. To maintain valid standards of judging.

## **Staff, Judge and Steward Definitions**

### **Competition Organizer**

The competition organizer is the person who has overall responsibility for the competition. Many of the organizer's duties occur in preparation for the event, including registration with the AHA/BJCP Sanctioned Competition Program, any advertising, acquisition of prizes or ribbons, assuring that all necessities for the competition are secured (e.g., cups, scoresheets, pencils), delegation of duties to staff assistants, running the event itself, and the timely distribution of the scoresheets and any prizes or ribbons to the entrants. The competition organizer is also responsible for filing the competition organizer report in a timely manner so that all those that contributed their efforts to the competition receive their due credit.

### **Judge Director**

The judge director manages all judging operations for the competition. The judge director recruits judges, assigns judges to categories, and handles all other judging issues. If possible, the judge director should ensure that there is at least one BJCP-ranked judge assigned to every flight, and that at least one of these judges is experienced enough to serve as head judge. In some cases the competition organizer is also the judge director, but for large competitions it is best to split the two jobs. Once the competition is underway, the judge director may be able to judge if he has no knowledge of the association between entries and entrants.

### **Head Judge**

Each competition flight should have one judge designated as the head judge for that group of judges. The head judge's responsibilities include reviewing all scores and paperwork for accuracy. The head judge should review the style guidelines for the categories being judged and go over the scoring guidelines with the other judges. The head judge should take the lead in discussions to form a consensus on scores. The head judge should try to tutor novice or lower-

ranked judges as time permits. Once judging is complete, the head judge is responsible for ensuring that scoresheets, cover sheets, and flight summary sheets are filled out and turned in to the judge director or competition organizer as directed by the competition management.

## **Judge**

A judge is any participating person whose scores count when evaluating competition entries. BJCP judges are participants in the Beer Judge Certification Program who have taken the BJCP exam. It is recommended that novice judges be paired with BJCP judges.

## **Novice Judge**

A novice judge is someone relatively inexperienced at judging beer in competition, but who has been approved to evaluate entries by the competition organizer. Novice judges are not members of the BJCP. Participating in a homebrew competition with experienced judges is an excellent educational opportunity for aspiring judges.

## **Steward**

The job of a steward is to help the judges. While the head judge is the person responsible for all activities for the judging flight, the steward assists as needed. Whenever possible, one steward should be assigned to each flight. Most flights have between two and four judges assigned; three is considered optimal. Stewards ensure that the judges have all of the judging materials they need including judging forms, pencils, cups, bottle openers, water, and bread or crackers. Stewards often bring the competition entries to the judges in the order specified by the head judge. Stewards should NOT open the competition entries unless specifically directed by the head judge. During the judging, stewards double-check all of the competition forms, including the cover sheets, to be sure they have been properly completed and that the math has been done correctly. Stewards may calculate the final assigned score if the head judge directs the steward to use a simple average score (i.e., arithmetic mean). Judging is an intensive process, and the stewards play a key role in making sure all goes smoothly. Serving as a steward is an excellent means of learning about beer evaluation and is usually the first step in becoming a beer judge.

## **Guidelines for Conduct**

Judges, stewards and other volunteers must maintain uniform standards.

### **Participant Conduct, Responsibilities, and Expectations**

Judges, stewards and staff should all realize that when they volunteer to help in a competition that they are making a commitment to the Organizer, who then relies on them to help make the competition a success. BJCP Members and all other volunteers should make every effort to fulfill their commitments. If for some reason a volunteer cannot attend as planned, it is the volunteer's responsibility to notify the Organizer as soon as possible. Volunteers that neglect their duties (particularly if they fail to notify an Organizer in advance that they cannot attend) should not be surprised if they are not invited back to participate in future competitions.

Competition judges and volunteers should behave in a civil and forthright manner. Follow these guidelines to make competition judging fair and fun for everyone involved:

- Be prompt to all sessions.
- Do not become intoxicated during any portion of a judging session or event while serving as a judge.

- Do not use tobacco, perfume, cologne or aftershave in the judging room.
- Speak in a hushed conversational tone to avoid distracting others.

### **Judges**

- Do not judge in a category you have entered.
- Review the style guidelines for the category you are judging before you begin.
- Discuss the general characteristics of an entry, but do not attempt to influence opinions of other judges. Be patient, tactful, and respectful of others. The head judge may approve continued discussions if appropriate.
- Seek guidance from the judge director if you notice another judge practicing any questionable behavior.
- Be objective in judging to style guidelines, even if this is not a style that you personally enjoy.
- Strive to maintain anonymity of entries.

### **Novice Judges**

- Novice judges may evaluate entries only as authorized by the judge director.
- Follow all other guidelines for judges.

### **Stewards**

- Assist organizers and judges as needed.
- Make sure all required materials are present at the assigned judging table.
- Ensure that everything required for judging, including openers, cups, pencils, scoresheets, ice, dump buckets, water, and crackers/bread is at the assigned table prior to the scheduled start for the judging.
- Bring beer for the given flight to the judging table. Double-check to be sure all of the entries assigned to the given flight are in your box. Arrange the bottles in the sequential order specified by the judges.
- Remember that some beers will contain sediment—treat them gently.
- Maintain proper serving temperatures during judging. 50° F is a good temperature for ales. Lagers may be served colder. Use ice as needed to maintain proper serving temperature.
- Replenish bread, water, cups, forms, etc. as needed.
- Empty dump buckets as needed or at the request of the judges.
- Fill in the cover sheet and flight scoresheet at the discretion of the head judge. Check scoresheets, cover sheets, and flight sheets to be sure they have been fully and accurately completed. Point out potential errors to judges and request they correct them. Staple the cover sheets to the scoresheets.
- Do not empty opened bottles or discard bottle caps until authorized by the judges. Some entries may need additional evaluation at the end of the flight.
- The judges may permit stewards to sample the entries along with them; however, stewards must refrain from attempting to influence the judging.

## Preparing for Judging

Before you can evaluate a brew, prepare yourself. Try to be well rested, mentally fresh and eager for the evaluation session. Be aware that some medications may impair your ability to perceive certain stimuli. If you are taking medication that could negatively influence your ability to judge, please inform the judge director that you are unable to judge.

Avoid eating very spicy or greasy foods; applying cologne, perfume or aftershave; or using lipstick or lip balms several hours before you begin a judging session. All of these substances can markedly alter your perception of beer characteristics.

Brush your teeth, gums, and tongue before judging. Try to avoid strongly flavored toothpastes, which can alter your perception of beer flavors (you can substitute water and baking soda for toothpaste). Do not use mouthwash or antiseptic rinse before judging.

Be sure not to underrate the less aggressive beer styles while evaluating them. Commercial products used for calibration beers are intended to help judges narrow their scoring to within an acceptable range prior to commencing with the judging. Calibration beers are not intended to serve as a standard against which entries should be judged; rather, entries should be judged based on the standards set by the style guidelines.

## Mechanics of Judging

### Judge Director

- Allow 2 ½ hours for each session. Experienced judges can evaluate 12 entries in two hours—approximately 10 minutes per entry.
- Try to limit flights to 12 or fewer entries. Judging more than 12 entries per flight can lead to palate fatigue.
- Arrange flights so judges evaluate more delicately flavored, lower alcohol, and lighter-bodied beers first and the more assertively flavored, higher gravity and fuller-bodied beers last.
- Select the most qualified and/or experienced judge in each flight to be the head judge. This person is in charge of assigning the consensus score to each entry.
- Prior to the start of judging, the Judge Director should lead a “judge instruction” session, covering the rules and judging procedures for the competition.

### Judges

- The head judge should review the BJCP Style Guidelines for all aspects of the styles being judged. Judges should discuss and reach consensus on the guidelines before commencing judging. Judge only according to the style guidelines, regardless of any personal knowledge or opinion of the styles being judged.
- Protect entries from light and agitation. Help ensure proper serving temperatures are maintained. If entries are presented too cold, ask the steward to bring several entries to the judging table to allow them adequate time to come to an appropriate serving temperature.
- Confirm that the entry numbers on the caps and labels match.
- Write legibly. Be sure to write your name and judging info at the top of each scoresheet.

- Use clear, concise, and meaningful language when filling out the scoresheet. Your comments should help the entrant improve upon his or her brewing.
- Inspect bottles prior to opening for fill level, evidence of possible infection (e.g., ring around the neck), or bottle conditioning. Make note of anything unusual. Bottle inspection does not affect scoring. Do not make assumptions about the beer based solely on bottle inspection.
- Provide the steward with the pull order for entries to be judged. It is acceptable to change the order in which the entries are judged from that provided by the competition management; entries do not have to be evaluated in the sequence specified on the flight sheet.
- Wait until all judges are ready before opening the first entry. Completely judge the entry before moving on to the next. Try to reserve some of the entry in the bottle in case the entry needs to be re-evaluated when determining the top entries in the flight. Recap the bottle, if possible.
- When possible, share some of the entry with your steward and let the steward hear the discussion between judges; a steward may become a judge at some point and can learn from the experience.
- Pour in a manner that gives each entry its optimum appearance, keeping in mind some entries may be under- or over-carbonated.
- Sniff the beer immediately after pouring to ensure proper evaluation of volatile aromatics. If you need to re-evaluate aroma after your initial evaluation, swirl the entry in the cup to release volatiles.
- Evaluate the appearance immediately after evaluating aroma. Make note of head, head retention, color, and clarity.
- Taste the entry after your initial evaluation of aroma and appearance. Attempt to isolate as many flavor components as you are able, making note of each of them and their appropriateness to style.
- After noting your initial impression of aroma, appearance, and flavor, re-evaluate the entry and note any changes or additions to your initial comments.
- Fill out the overall impression section of the scoresheet, noting major issues affecting the total score and providing feedback to the brewer.
- Once all of the judges at the table have finished filling out their scoresheets, they should discuss the entry and their scoring. Keep in mind that some people are more sensitive to certain flavor and aroma compounds (such as diacetyl or DMS) than others. Scores should be within seven points, and preferably within five or fewer points. Adjust scoring as necessary, and write the final assigned score on the cover sheet and flight sheet. Final assigned scores are not necessarily an average of the individual scores.
- Use water and French-style bread or unsalted crackers between entries to cleanse the palate.
- Remove any offensive-smelling entries (for example, ones that are strongly skunked or badly infected) from the judging table to avoid influencing judging of the remaining entries.
- Judge comments should be fair and constructive. Snide or rude comments on scoresheets are absolutely unacceptable. Keep in mind that a “bad” entry could be an unfortunate contamination or inconsistency limited to a single bottle. In a multi-bottle competition, you can call for a second bottle if you wish to test the “bad bottle” theory. Your

comments should be extensive and aimed at helping the entrant to improve upon his or her brewing.

- It is important to be quick as well as thorough and complete when writing your scoresheets. On average it should take about ten minutes to judge each entry, including completely filling out the scoresheets and coming to consensus.
- Judge each entry as presented. If clarification is needed about the entry (for example, it doesn't appear to be entered in the correct category, or the flight pull sheet doesn't provide necessary information such as special ingredients or base beer style), don't hesitate to have the competition organizer check the entry form. It's never appropriate for the judges to see the entry forms, but the organizer can check them for the judges. Sometimes entries may become mixed, or necessary details may not have been provided to the judges.
- Do not judge any entry according to a style other than the style it has been assigned. Scores and comments must reflect appropriateness to the style entered.
- While judges should be aware of the time constraints in competitions and work quickly, it is not appropriate to write only comments and an overall score on the scoresheets, leaving scores for the subsections blank. It is an even worse error to only write a few comments, even if all subsection scores are assigned.
- If a beer is a "gusher" or has an unpleasant aroma upon opening, a judge should not just assign a courtesy score of 13 without tasting and commenting on the characteristics of the beer. If the judges genuinely believe that the beer may be dangerous or hazardous to their health, they may state this belief and provide as much feedback as they can to the entrant, leaving the scores blank. Before taking this measure, call for a second bottle to see if the problem is isolated.
- Comments on the condition of the bottle should be provided to the entrant as feedback in case there are any questions about entry mixup or whether indications of bottle conditioning or infection are observed. The serving temperature of the beer may be provided to the entrant if you feel it is a relevant criterion in regards to your enjoyment of the beer. Do not penalize an entrant for a beer served at the wrong temperature; rather, work with the competition staff to see that the beers are properly presented.
- In each section of the scoresheet, you should comment on all relevant characteristics of the entry, not just the most prominent features you detect.
- You should always fill out the "style grid" on the scoresheet as a good check against your scores.
- Judges should work with the bottle that has been provided to them. They should attempt to conserve the beverage for taste-offs at the end of the flight or for mini-best of show. However, it is acceptable to request a second bottle to give an entry a fair change at an accurate judging if a beer is a "gusher" or tastes infected; it is better for the beer to receive an accurate evaluation and possibly win a place in the flight than to preserve a bottle for a best-of-show round in which they have no chance of participating.
- Judges should not consult with other judges outside the table unless the judges at the table cannot reach a consensus score, and then only if they all agree to the consultation. If this is the case, be sure to ask anyone consulted if they have an entry in that category since that may provide undue influence on the outcome.
- It is the responsibility of the head judge to work with the other judges in the flight to assign a consensus score to each entry.

- Judge each entry to the best of your ability with the information provided. Entry labels and pull sheets often lack information (e.g., specialty ingredients or base style) necessary for judging because the entrant did not include the proper information, the entry form was illegible, or the entry data was mishandled. Judge the entry as best you can.
- Judges may not disqualify any entry. Questionable entries should be referred to the judge director or competition organizer for a final decision.
- Entrants may contact the judges, the competition organizer, their BJCP Regional Representative or the BJCP Competition Director if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of their scoresheets. Judges are encouraged to provide a contact email or other address information on their scoresheets.

### **Scoresheet Comments**

As a judge, the product of your work is the scoresheet that is returned to the entrant. Entrants trust you to provide a legible, accurate, and thorough evaluation of their entries. They have paid entry fees and possibly shipping costs to submit their entries. Keep in mind that your comments will not only affect the entrants' impressions of you, but also of the competition and the competition organizers. Fill out scoresheets as you would have other judges fill out scoresheets for your own homebrew.

Judges' comments must include:

- A complete evaluation of the sensory aspects of the entry and how those aspects relate to the Style Guidelines.
- Comments that are constructive and reflect knowledge of the brewing, fermentation, bottling, and handling processes.
- Information on how to improve the entry as warranted.
- Constructive feedback and encouragement for the entrant in all cases.

Judges' comments must NOT include:

- Assumptions about the brewing process or ingredients without qualifying statements such as "If you used..." or "Did you...?"
- Derogatory, rude, and/or snide comments.

## Supplies for Competition Judging

- Judge registration forms
- Scoresheets, cover sheets, and flight sheets. Make at least three copies of the scoresheet per entry received. The exact number depends on how many judges are assigned to judge each flight, but extra copies are always a good idea. You will need one cover sheet per entry. Make one copy of the flight sheet per flight, keeping in mind that some categories may require more than one flight. Make extra copies of all competition forms.
- BJCP Style Guidelines. Make one or more copies per table. You may choose to only print the portion of the guidelines for the styles assigned to each table. Keep in mind that some categories (Fruit Beer, Spice/Herb/Vegetable Beer, Smoke-Flavored and Wood-Aged Beer, Specialty Beer) will require the entire guidelines for judging.
- Pencils
- Staplers and Staples
- Clear hard plastic cups or “beer-clean” glassware. Plan on at least four cups per entry. Judging cups are often used for water, so you may want to have water glasses on hand.
- Bottle openers (one per flight) and at least one corkscrew.
- Pitchers for water (one per table).
- French-style bread or unsalted crackers. You will need a bread knife if using bread, and plates or baskets to hold the bread or crackers.
- Dump buckets for excess beer and “gushers.”
- Ice for chilling entries as necessary.
- Table signs denoting categories being judged at each table.
- Plastic trash bags (sturdy enough to hold wet trash and ice without leaking).
- Tables – generally one per category being judged in the largest judging session.
- Paper towels, rags, or sponges for cleaning up spills.