

AGS Judging Criteria: Craftsmanship & Difficulty/Level of Effort



The AGS Certified Judges are trained to evaluate all of the pieces in the assigned category of a division. They will first look at the overall category, such as carving or pyrography. They do this to get “the big picture” before delving into the close-up evaluation of each individual piece.

As discussed in the Winter 2022 issue the first section of the judges form is a critique of the Overall Appearance. Now we want to delve into the next two sections, the first of which is a critique of Craftsmanship,

imperfections, they want to see how well they were incorporated into the art. Does the mottling obscure some of the design or not? Did the rough, gnawed area become a “feature” within the art piece? Did the repair to the crack become part of the design or was it a lame attempt to disguise the crack?

Attention to detail is also applied to the technique. We want to see holes that are “finished.” By that we mean they are sanded smooth and the color (or left natural) makes sense. Sometimes the holes should be painted or colored to match the interior or exterior of the gourd...but there are times when leaving

them natural is the better choice, such as if the weaving material is natural too. On the other hand, if the holes are left natural and everything else, including the weaving or stitching material, are a dark color, we’d probably see the white holes as a glaring

contrast that detracts from the art.

When there is weaving or coiling, the evenness of the stitching and uniformity of the tension is what we look for as evidence of attention to detail. With pyrography we like to see sharp, clean burn lines that are uniform in depth instead of frequent hot spots or burn lines with paint in them.

Similarly, we hope we don’t see glue, fingerprints or lint on the surface of any gourd. One of the most common problems seen are runs in the varnish, and one that is not so easy to repair and thus prevention is critical.

To conclude our review of Craftsmanship, the judges will be looking at how well the gourd sits or hangs and if it has a finished appearance. The final presentation of the gourd might be improved or detracted by the stand or base it sits on, the way it hangs from the cord that was included. Does it give a finished look or not? It’s all in the details!

Craftsmanship:

Evaluate based on:

- Attention to detail
- Uniform quality of work
- Overall impact not marred by obvious flaws
- Gourd sits flat or hangs evenly
- Finished look

When class is multimedia, all techniques applied are to be evaluated for quality of craftsmanship

- Inside of opened gourds is clean & neat
- Holes are smooth and, if visible, painted/dyed to match the interior or exterior
- Stitching or weaving is even and uniform
- Color and finish are smooth and uniform, without runs, fingerprints, or glue showing
- Burn lines are sharp and uniform and paint is not in the burn lines

which goes hand-in-glove with the degree of difficulty and level of effort that was used to create the entry. I’ll bet if you’re an artist you’re wondering, should I take it safe and not risk a more complex design and risk a lower score because I haven’t perfected the more complex technique. On the other hand, you be thinking you might get more points for that highly complex technique. Let’s see what the Judging “experts” say about Craftsmanship and Difficulty.

Craftsmanship. This begins with the preparation and use of the gourd itself. Was it prepped in the best way possible? The attention to detail includes the cleanliness of the exterior. Does the stem have a little dirt in the cervices? How does the blossom end look? These areas are often overlooked and yet they are as important as the attention to art work itself.

Some gourds have natural imperfections than can either add to or detract from the gourd art piece. When judges are looking at these

Difficulty/Level of Effort. Within every technique or category are an array of designs that apply escalating degrees of difficulty. Don't be fooled and think that there is only one level of difficulty in the Novice division. Every entry category and division can include complex and intricate designs.

Be aware that while big pieces may impress you, don't discount small ones. The effort involved is more than the time it took to do the work. A smaller entry may also take a long time to create; it could have been more difficult to work on. Are you looking at how well it was done? It's the quality of effort that resulted in a better entry that should be rewarded. Be aware of rewarding the "perception" of more time was involved with larger entries *at the risk of* downplaying excellence of other entries.

Every design and technique can be taken up a notch and when done well, the level of effort will be recognized accordingly. It goes without saying, that how well the techniques are applied will be reflected in the score given. Practice, practice, practice is our advice so that your entry reflects both the degree of difficulty and the accomplishment of the technique.

<p>Difficulty/level of effort:</p> <p>Evaluate based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of techniques as applied • Design complex or intricate • Skill in multiple areas • Amount of effort required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all techniques applied with same level of effort, intricacy and complexity?
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How this relates to judges. We've described what Craftsmanship and Level of Effort/Difficulty represent. You know what to look for and how to evaluate the pieces in the category and the category as a whole. There's one more aspect we'd like to draw attention to and that's Impartiality. At many shows the judges are peers of the entrants and possibly entrants themselves. It's also likely that judges are going to recognize, or be able to guess, who the artist is in many cases. What every judge needs to be able to do is ensure that they are impartial because bias can either favor or disadvantage that person whose entry is recognized.

Judge training classes include skits that are mocks of real situations. Unfortunately, these situations actually happen from time to time. Read this dialog and then think about how, if you were on this judging team, you should respond:

Judge 1: "These are all good, but this one here is obviously Mary's and she's already gotten two blue

ribbons. I know Mary's is good, but so is this other one and I think we should give it the blue ribbon."

Judge 2: "Not only that, but Mary really should be in the Advanced division."

You're Judge 3. What should you say?

Option 1. "Hmmm. I hear what you're saying, but aren't we supposed to be judging the gourd and not our opinions about the presumed artist?"

Option 2. "If you both feel that way, I guess I'll go along, but how would you feel if they did that to one of your gourds?"

Let's be honest with ourselves and by extension, entrants and visitors. Despite your feelings that you'd like to award a certain ribbon to a different entrant, do the right thing and judge the entries on their merits and not your feelings. Perceptions of bias are common and while it isn't always the explanation for what ribbon was awarded to which gourd, there are times when that's the most likely explanation. Even the visitors to the show may question the results.

When the entrants question the results, it is the head judge who is approached and is put in a position to determine if the judges decision was fair and accurate. The head judge can ask a different team of judges to rejudge the category, and if the results are different, duplicate ribbons may be awarded.

AGS recommends the competition area be staffed with an AGS certified judge so that if a visitor has a question about the awarding of ribbons, he or she can explain the judging criteria, and how they were applied to the category in question. It might be a good idea to create a poster with an enlarged copy of the Judging Form that is on an easel in the Competition Area.

In conclusion, as judges we are human; we have different backgrounds and experience/expertise which may result in different scores for Craftsmanship and Level of Effort/Difficulty. That's normal. But when the scores are influenced by feelings that's not good. We hope you will hold each other accountable when it comes to discussing the entries and awarding scores based only on criteria. 🧐