

How To Get The Most Out Of Critique

By Christine Clayton

With the re-introduction of critiques at both the local and the national level, I wanted to take this opportunity to remind you how to get the most out of your critiques.

Listen to Your Tapes and Take Notes

I cannot stress the importance of this enough. I know how hard it is to sit and listen to your efforts being critiqued on tape but you have to do it. Take one piece of paper per tape and draw a line down the middle. Label one column "Pros" and one "Cons". Then take short notes on each thing the judge praises and criticizes. The things you should ask questions on are anything in the "Con" column that doesn't line up with something you already know you have to fix.

For example, you made a decision to leave the unison rifle "5" in for another week rather than take it down. The comment on the equipment tape during that moment is, "I'm concerned the rifles don't have enough support in the upper half to consistently achieve that rifle skill" You knew that was a possibility; it confirms something you've been working on so you don't necessarily need to ask a question about it.

Another example, you just changed the beginning of the ending flag feature to make it more of a surprise; hopefully adding an effect in that area. When you listen to your Effect tape, there is no reaction at all from the judge (in GE, no mention of your "exciting" part is a Con) I would make a note to ask that judge about the lack of comment in that section...be prepared to be specific.

Listen to the Judges

It is easy to spend your time deciding what to ask next. When you ask the judge a question, listen to the answer and take notes. You may not agree with what they are saying which is why I suggest you.....

Disagree Diplomatically

You may disagree vehemently with the judge. The best response is a professional response. For example, this is your 4th show and for the first time you are hearing that your ending is not working. After asking for clarification from the Ensemble judge as to why the transition is not working for them, and taking notes as to their response, you can certainly say something like, "I have not had that input from other judges, I appreciate your thoughts." Don't waste your critique time arguing...it isn't going to change your numbers. Speaking of numbers....

Don't Talk Numbers First

Here is a secret....judges stress about their numbers as much as you stress about your opening dance statement. When you start a critique by picking apart numbers you will

immediately put the judge on the defensive and the critique will begin its downward spiral. Talk about your questions on tape commentary first. Then, if appropriate, discuss questions you have on your numbers as they relate to the box placement and the tape commentary, NOT as they relate to your competitors.

Take the Tapes and Information Back to Your Guard

Let your kids listen to their tapes. It helps them understand how the system works and lets them know that someone besides you notices when their toes aren't pointed. One way I have personally approached this is to play the tape and when the judge says a word I know the kids don't understand I'll press pause and ask if anyone knows what the judge just said. As your kids get more savvy you can have them raise their hand when they have a question. Often you'll find they ask the same things of you that you asked the judges in critique. You'll have the answers because you listened and took notes.

In closing, I just ask that you remember this wouldn't be a competitive activity if there wasn't someone sitting in the stands evaluating the outcome of the contest; those people wouldn't have anything to look at if it wasn't for your hard work as an instructor; you wouldn't have anyone to teach if the kids weren't there wanting to learn. We are all parts of the circle that is our fabulous activity. Use critique as an opportunity to make that circle as close knit as possible.