Evaluating Excellence
A Guide for IABC Award Evaluators

This guide applies to:
Division 4: Communication Skills

Introduction

The communication skills division includes marketing and communication projects or deliverables that showcase technical skills such as editing, writing, design and multimedia production. Entries in this division are generally tactical in nature and are often part of a larger campaign. The entrant may be in the foundation career level where they are not involved in strategic communications planning.

Work worthy of an IABC award should contribute to the success of the organization. Thus, it must be strategic. Yet the Skills Division does not evaluate strategic planning ability. This division does not use a Work Plan. The simple entry form for this division allows the entrant to provide information on the purpose of the work along with the audience, measurable objectives, key messages and resources. It does limit the entrant on how much information can be provided by using a character count.

The entry form for the Skills Division entry consists of six questions.
1. Describe the Organization
2. Why was this project undertaken?
3. Who was the audience(s) for this project? What do you know about the audience?
4. List up to three key measurable objectives for the project. How well did the project meet the objectives?
5. List up to three key messages for the project?
6. Describe the resources (budget, time, others) available for the project and how effectively they were managed?

Scoring Scale

The scoring of the Skills Division entry is completed using a rubric. Rubrics are widely used in education to provide an objective and consistent means to score complex tasks. Rubric, in the education, means "a standard of performance for a defined population." IABC believes the use of rubrics will improve the consistency of evaluations across all evaluators and reduce the amount of time it takes to evaluate an entry.

The criteria set for scoring is based upon IABC standards of excellence. The three equally-weighted key performance criteria for Skills Division entries are:

1. Alignment: to purpose, audience, measurable objectives and key messages
2. Creativity, resourcefulness or level of innovation
3. Professional execution within the category

Performance dimensions within these criteria are assigned to a point on the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence.

Disqualification

IABC prefers not to disqualify entries. The final decision to disqualify an entry belongs to the Awards Director for chapter and regional programs and to the Gold Quill Award Chair. Discuss entries that you believe should be disqualified with the appropriate individual.

Entries may be disqualified if
- the work plan exceeds four pages
- it violates the IABC Code of Ethics
- it is obvious the entrant did not play a role in the project

Entries entered in the wrong category may be reassigned to another category by the IABC staff evaluator coordinator for chapter and regional programs or by the Gold Quill Awards Chair. Discuss any entries you feel are in the wrong category with the appropriate individual.

Delivering Feedback

Your feedback to the entrant serves as a valuable professional development opportunity. Feedback is required for each section of the score sheet. Use the performance criteria areas on the scoring rubrics as reference points for providing feedback. Feedback specific to the entry project or program will help the entrant improve their communication skills. Use your experience and expertise to provide constructive advice.

Examples of constructive feedback:
- The tactic itself is solid, and seems to be executed professionally. What is lacking is the audience research and thinking that went into the decision to take this creative approach.
- Here is a missed opportunity to have some outstanding metrics for your objectives that would clearly define the success of your project.
- The plan seemed to address critical issues, but left much to inference and providing insights into your inferences would have made for a better plan.
- Entrant showed a good understanding of what was needed and how to get there. However, you could take it to the next level. For example, your objectives could be much more specific in their measurability. You focus on outputs rather than outcomes: you show how editorial directly supports the direction for the publication. You fall short on the opportunity to measure the impact of those outcomes. Did employee engagement scores increase, in part, because of better communication? Are associates better retailers, in part, because of better communication? Did the average revenue per employee rise as a result, in part, of the articles?

Meet the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence

7	**Outstanding:** an extraordinary or insightful approach or result
6	**Significantly better than average:** Demonstrates an innovative, strategic approach, takes all elements into account and delivers significant results
5	**Better than average:** Demonstrates a strategic approach and aligns the communication solution with the business need to deliver meaningful results
4	**Average:** Competent approach or results, professionally sound and appropriate
3	**Somewhat less than satisfactory:** Several key elements that are critical to the strategy or execution are mission, incorrect or underrepresented
2	**An inadequate approach or result:** A significant number of critical elements are missing
1	**Poor:** Work that is wrong or inappropriate

Scoring an Entry

While work worthy of an IABC Award must be strategic, the evaluation of a Skills Division entry should include only the work or project being submitted, not the entire communications program nor the strategic planning capability.

The Skills Division entry has severe limitations on the amount of information that can be provided. As an evaluator, consider the information provided. Try to be objective in scoring the work sample against the information on the entry form. Do not make assumptions.

The entrant should have provided enough information for an evaluator to determine that the work is aligned to a purpose, audience(s) and key messages. The entry must also have measurable objectives enabling the evaluator to understand the target set for success of the piece.

Ideally, objectives should be outcome-based. While output-based objectives may score well since the entry may be part of a larger campaign. Evaluators should understand how the piece contributed to the campaign success or delivered on its purpose. It is not necessary that the evaluator understand how the entry contributed to the overall business need.

As an evaluator when giving a score, select the box on the rubric that best represents the entry. Start at the "4" level which is professionally competent work. The dimensions of each score level build on each other: to score a "5" an entry must demonstrate the dimensions from the "4" score and to score a "6" the entry must demonstrate the dimensions from both the "4" and "5" scores. Some entries may not score equally on each dimension. As an evaluator determine the best fit. Half points are allowed.

Evaluators score entries based on the criteria and the information within the entry. It may be than the approach would not be the one the evaluator would use. When selecting a score, evaluators should justify why something is sub-standard, or why it is excellent.

Six steps for Evaluating Skills Division Entries

1. Review the Call for Entries to understand the entry requirement and categories.
2. Review "The Midas Touch" Guide to preparing an IABC Award entry to understand the entrant guidelines.
3. Read the entry form.
4. Review the work sample.
5. Using the score sheet, evaluate the work sample against the information provided on the entry form.
6. Provide constructive feedback to help the entrant improve their work. You may provide feedback that would help the entrant with their strategic planning capability, yet do not allow that to influence the score you give.

The Score Sheet

The first question on the entry form, "Describe the Organization," doesn't have a spot on the score sheet. This information provides a context to assess the entry. IABC understands that communication for business-to-business is different from business-to-consumer; not-for-profit is different than for profit; industrial often times has less pizazz than high-tech; different cultures have varying preferences; and smaller companies do things differently than larger ones. In scoring the entry, give consideration to these factors.

IABC sets the award scoring criteria based on the IABC Standards of Excellence. Performance dimensions within the criteria are assigned to a point on the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence. The criteria and performance dimensions align to the domains, tasks and knowledge used in the Global Communication Certification program.

Score an entry by selecting the box on the rubric most closely representing the performance for each of the areas on the score sheet. If the entry meets the performance dimension in multiple boxes use the score that represents either the majority of the dimensions met or the mid-point. Half points may be given.

A score of "4" is professionally sound and appropriate work for a communicator. To achieve a score of "5," the work must truly stand above average. To achieve a score of "6," the work must be innovative and achieve significant business results. To achieve a score of "7," the work must be extraordinary, something that resets the bar for the highest level of communication. The performance dimensions on the rubrics represent this IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence.

Scores to achieve awards are:

	Award of Merit	Award of Excellence
International Gold Quill award	5.25	5.75
Regional award	5.12	5.25
Chapter award	5.0	5.12

Section One: Alignment

In this section of the score sheet, evaluators score the strategic alignment of the piece of work. Alignment is expected to a purpose, audience, objectives and key messages. The entry may cover only one element of a campaign. The evaluator sees and evaluates only a section of the full project. For this reason, we ask the entrant to explain the purpose of the piece of work. The purpose should solve a problem, fill a need, or help to leverage an opportunity. The more information an entrant provides on the purpose, the easier it is for the evaluator to score the alignment of the work to the purpose. As an evaluator score the entry based on the information provided.

One-third of the weight of the evaluation is based on this section.

Section 1: How well does the work sample itself demonstrate alignment?

A.   How well does the work sample align to the purpose as described on the entry form?
In this question we evaluate:
- *How appropriate is the selected communication tool for the purpose?*
- *How well do the elements of the sample align to the purpose?*
- *How likely is the sample to deliver on the stated purpose?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• A unique method to meet purpose. • Clear and intriguing alignment to purpose • Compelling, urgent call to action.	• An excellent method to meet purpose. • All major elements align to purpose. • Clearly persuasive information or call to action.	• An effective method to meet purpose. • Multiple elements of the sample align to purpose. • Sample likely to cause recipient to take action to meet the purpose. • Sample aligns to research.	• An appropriate method to meet purpose. • Key elements align to stated purpose. • Information included for recipient to take desired action, increase understanding or awareness. • It is clear how entry supports higher level campaign, if appropriate.	• Somewhat inappropriate method to meet purpose. • Key elements not aligned to purpose. • Information inappropriate for recipient to take an action that could deliver on purpose.	• Clearly in-appropriate method to meet purpose. • Significant number of elements do not align to purpose. • Information not included so recipient can take action, increase understanding or awareness. • Sample is part of a campaign yet how the piece supports campaign is not clear.	• Description of purpose not included in entry form. • None of the elements align to purpose.

Section 1: How well does the work sample itself demonstrate alignment?

B. How appropriate is the work sample for the audience as described on the entry form?
In this question we evaluate:
- *Were the choices made driven by the audience(s) characteristics?*
- *Was the channel and work appropriate for the audience(s) to receive the message?*
- *Was the audience able to understand the message?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Clear and compelling to the audience.	• Intriguing to audience based on characteristics. • Insightful approach to targeting relevant characteristics	• Well targeted to audience. • Highly likely to capture audience attention. • Choices made driven by audience characteristics. • Sample aligns to audience research.	• Appropriate for the audience. • Likely to capture audience attention. • Meets audience needs.	• Not clearly aligned to audience. • Elements very inappropriate to audience. • Choices made inappropriate to audience.	• Audience(s) listed with no characteristics provided. • Approach or tone is insulting to audience	• Audience(s) not included on entry form.

Section 1: How well does the work sample itself demonstrate alignment?

C. How well were the stated measurable objectives met?

In this question we evaluate:

- *How well did the entry meet up to three key measurable output- or outcome-based objectives?*
- *Were the objectives relevant to the purpose?*
- *How well was the project measured and evaluated?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Evaluation includes quantifiable and anecdotal support. • Evaluation leads to future improvement. • Outcome-based objectives exceeded.	• Intriguing to audience based on characteristics. • Insightful approach to targeting relevant characteristics • Results significantly exceeded. • Quantifiable data supports results. • Outcome-based met.	• Results exceed stated measurable objectives. • Objectives relevant to business need. • Outcome-based objectives explained.	• Three output-based objectives met or reasonable explanation why not met. • Objectives are relevant to the purpose. • Appropriate measurement methodology. • Entry includes preset targets in the form of objectives.	• Objectives not measurable. • Objectives not met without explanation. • Only anecdotal results provided. • Results provided are not related to stated objectives. • Targets are set too low without explanation as to why.	• No information provided on results. • Stated objectives are not aligned with the purpose or category entered.	• Objectives not provided on entry form.

Section 1: How well does the work sample itself demonstrate alignment?

D. How well does the work sample incorporate the key messages stated on the entry form?

In this question we evaluate:
- *How appropriate are the key messages to the audience?*
- *How were the key messages integrated into the sample(s)?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Key messages delivered in novel or innovative ways. • Key messages delivered in way that influences thoughts and behaviors.	• Key messages delivered in interesting way that will engage the intellect and/or emotion of audience.	• Key messages integral to the sample.	• Key messages appropriate to purpose and audience. • Key messages are evident in sample.	• Key messages not aligned to purpose or audience.	• Key messages inappropriate for audience, purpose and communication medium.	• Key messages not included in entry form

Section Two: Creativity, Resourcefulness, Innovation

In this section, you are looking at the work sample to determine its level of creativity or innovation as compared to work within the category, geography and industry. Comparisons to other work within an industry is important since work can be considered extremely creative in one industry where in another industry it would be only of average creativity. In addition, limited resources cannot produce the same level of work that could be accomplished with a large amount of resources. These factors should be taken into consideration when scoring.

The entry may show strength in one of these areas or in all of them. As an evaluator seek to reward the entry in any or all of these areas. For an entry with a low budget, the resourcefulness may be the strongest element. An entry might show incredible creativity directly related to the audience or issue. An entry could apply a technique not common to the type of project.

While a budget number would be ideal, the entry does not require an actual budget figure. Yet, a description of the resources must be provided. Within "The Midas Touch," entrants were told that we understand giving specific budget figures isn't always possible given confidentiality. If the budget figures cannot be given, we accept a description of resources. The guide suggests using a percentage of an annual budget or a comparison to another piece of work as substitutes for an absolute monetary amount.

When scoring each question, consider the geography, industry and category.

Section 2: Given the resources and information described in the entry, how creative, resourceful or innovative was the work sample?

In this question we evaluate:
- *How this work compares to other work within the category, geography or industry?*
- *How creative or innovative is the work considering the category, geography or industry?*
- *How effectively are resources used?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• An example that increases professional standards of creativity, innovation or resource. • An unheard of effective approach to the purpose.	• Unique, effective approach to purpose. • All elements creativity or innovation with direct links to audience or issue. • Meaningful results achieved with scarce resources	• Better than average for the category. • Elements of work show creativity or innovation. • Entrant effectively used scarce resources.	• Work comparable to other work within industry or geography. • The approach is appropriate for the resources described.	• Work is obviously less than average. • Resources were not used effectively.	• A dated approach to the purpose. • Excess spending not likely to achieve purpose.	• No resources described within entry.

Section Three: Professional Execution

Well-designed and executed communication work helps to build professional reputation and credibility. Without carefully crafted vehicles, even the best strategy may fail to deliver messages that connect with the audience. Paying attention to industry standards and keeping up with leading edge thinking, processes and production demonstrates commitment to effective communication.

People are overwhelmed by the amount of information available so a message must grab their attention. Great creative work answers the question "What's in it for me?" or "Why should I care?" in a way that connects emotionally with the audience member. Whether a project is a multi-media advertising campaign or a government relations strategy creative thinking, imagination and innovative approaches will cut through today's information overload to command and retain audience attention.

As an evaluator, compare the work sample to your knowledge of the state of communication and the body of work within the category, industry, geography and culture. Look for work that is likely to generate interest and attract attention within the given geography or industry. Seek out high-quality writing, design and production within the budget and resource considerations.

Watch for clear, consistent, error-free writing; high-quality photography; adherence to design principles; and well-produced video. If the entry is an audit or a proposal, look for clear writing, an easy to follow structure, charts, graphs, illustrations and appropriate research methodology. Consider if this entry would survive the competition given the kind of communication normally directed to the audiences described?

The categories within the Skills Division are quite diverse. In scoring the professional execution of an entry it is necessary that you apply the criteria to the category using your knowledge of communications.

Section 3: How well does the work sample meet the standards of professional execution for the category?						
A. Overall, how likely is the work sample to engage the audience, connect emotionally or elicit a desired response? *In this question we evaluate:* • *How does the sample engage the audience?* • *How does the sample connect emotionally with the audience?* • *How does the level of execution of the sample impact its ability to deliver on the stated purpose?*						
7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Engages audience in unique, novel way directly related to purpose	• Brilliant idea to engage audience	• Superior means to engage audience • Likely to connect emotionally with audience	• Offers means to engage audience	• Speaks down to audience • Offers little to entice audience to engage with the material.	• Nothing to engage or connect with audience included	• Insulting to audience

Section 3: How well does the work sample meet the standards of professional execution for the category?

B. **How does the level of execution of the sample impact its ability to deliver on the stated purpose? How well does the work sample demonstrate effectiveness, functionality, organization, consistency, readability or appropriateness? (Apply the appropriate criteria to category.)**

In this question we evaluate:
- *How well organized are the elements of the work?*
- *How consistent is the work from the beginning to end? (theme, writing style, look and feel, etc.)*
- *How well does the work flow?*
- *How readable, viewable or enjoyable is the experience for the recipient?*
- *How appropriate is the format of the work?*
- *How appropriate are the choices made for the medium selected?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Exceptionally organized. • Unique or novel approach to medium.	• Significant use of organization or implementation resulting in significant results.	• Organized or formatted in way that urges recipients to continue • Takes advantage of the medium	• Effectively organized or planned • Consistent throughout • Appropriate flow if single piece • Readability appropriate • Appropriate use of medium	• Seemingly unorganized • Inconsistent style • Disruptive flow • Readability inappropriate for audience	• No organization • Major inconsistencies • Flow interrupted in way that recipients will depart • Not appropriate for medium selected	• Wrong medium • Multiple shifts in consistency

Section 3: How well does the work sample meet the standards of professional execution for the category?

C. How strong are the elements of the work sample and how it comes together considering the category? Depending on the category this could include items such as look/feel, theme, use of color, design, layout, composition, imagery, graphics, production value, language, writing style…

In this question we evaluate:
- *How well does the sample execute for the category, given the resources available?*
- *How well written is the sample(s)?*
- *How effectively are images used in the sample(s)?*
- *Is the work produced in an ethical manner?*

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
• Likely to leave a lasting impression. • Enhances the professional standards of execution.	• Clever, strategic work appropriate for audience. • Communicates key messages in powerful, emotional way. • Work is leading edge for medium and channels selected.	• High quality writing. • Superior production values. • Strong images convey key messages. • If standard approach, is well executed.	• Production values appropriate to media and resources available. • Reflects standards of ethics and good taste. • Sample matches description in entry. • Clear, consistent use of language, visuals and other elements supporting brand and purpose.	• Production values poor given resources. • Amateur work. • Inconsistent use of images and language. • Overused approach. • Approach clearly won't deliver on purpose.	• Typos, spelling errors evident. • Work insults audience.	• Work is unethical or uses materials without permission.

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