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THE AWARD: A RECIPE FOR BUTTON COMPETITION by Barbara Barrans

An award is a formula for a tray of buttons just as a recipe is for food.

Reading/writing/executing an award is exactly like following a recipe. If you are trying to duplicate the original, you follow it exactly, with no alterations. If someone has written their award or recipe for buttons, you must follow it to the letter. When you write your own award, then you may choose the type of buttons you want to be included.

All awards are structured in the same manner outlined in the official NBS classification. The classification is actually a series of segregation or “sorting” processes which we use in order to identify a particular type of button. Buttons have many attributes, including age, usage, size, material, construction, and face design. We create groups according to our desired focus. Each award delineates that focus. Let’s dissect an award in order to understand its various components, and the principles involved.

Division:

We start with the huge pool of all buttons ever made. The first “sort” we apply is made according to age and/or usage. Div I includes antique buttons only (manufactured prior to 1918), no modern (manufactured post 1918). Div III, the modern/vintage category is the reverse. and If we want to include buttons without regard to age, we use Div IX. Div II allows is restricted to uniform type buttons only. There are also divisions for Junior members only, Education displays, and Related (non-button) Specialties. At any rate, once we choose our division, we have narrowed the possibilities for our award. For the most part, the divisions are mutually exclusive. Inappropriate choice of division is one of the common errors made in writing awards. If a button type exists in one division only, the award should be written in that division, not in Div. IX which is “age not to be considered.” Any award for Synthetic polymers is properly written in Div III, not Div IX. Likewise, an award for waistcoats Victorian celluloid should be written in Div I. Div IX should be used only when both modern and antique buttons are available in the designated class.

Classification number (Section-Class):

We still divide buttons into major categories or sections. Prior to this year, section and class were listed as separate items. The old class number has evolved into a new “classification number” which includes the section along with the class. The two components are separated by a dash. So for black glass, the class for *Back types assorted* is 6-2. The “6” refers to Section 6, Black glass. The “2” is the class number for Back types assorted in that section. The section number always appears first, followed by a dash, and then the class (or sub-class) desired. The class (or classes) designated further limits the choice of buttons to be used in the award. You always begin with the ***smallest grouping or class that includes everything*** you want represented and then modify it through the language of the award.

Broadest Representation:

This leads us to a key principle regarding the class(es) chosen for the award. Always remember that the goal is to have the ***broadest possible representation*** of the class listed. Ideally every possible example falling under that category should be included. This may mean using mundane types as well as atypical examples. At National last year, an award was written for painted old black glass. Everyone included common examples with paint only. Some used luster and paint in combination. Only a few entrants thought to include tile types that had been decorated with paint over the tile. This is the kind of thinking that gets points and wins ribbons. Think broadly when choosing the buttons for an award, but be sure to stay within the parameters of that award.

Assortments (the Zero Classes):

The new classification is structured so that if the first class of the section is zero (0), it always calls for a complete assortment for that section. This “zero” class includes all classes/and subclasses listed within that section. For example, Section 9 is Horn, and class 9-0 is for horn assorted; this includes all

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of the listed horn classes. Plant life is Section 19; class 19-0 includes all assorted plant life. Awards written in zero classes call for all major classes and subclasses to be included.

Assorted Materials:

An award written for “assorted materials” is written “Class 1-0 through 15-5” and includes each of the material sections in order to represent all materials. So an award under assorted materials specialized to birds will be written as follows: Class 1-0 through 15-5, specialized to birds. If an award is written in the design/pictorial sections, it is assumed that assorted materials are called for unless otherwise specified.

Size (& Number):

Size and number of buttons is never open to interpretation; it is stated in each award. Probably more measles occur due to wrong size or number than any other single mistake. Measure and count at the beginning of your tray assembly. Then measure and count again when you have finalized your tray. Too often, last minute changes create costly errors. NBS encourages sponsors to use the official size/numbers set by the Society. Awards should stray from these standards only when absolutely necessary. “25 Any size” is not appropriate when a tray can be easily done in “Various”. The “Any size” category should be used with a count of 20, as that is the lowest official number designated by NBS. It should be reserved only for awards that are very difficult to execute in the standard sizes. An example would be “20 Any size mosaic inlays”.

Language of the Award:

At this point, we have come to the final fine-tuning of the award. To be successful, all buttons on a competition tray must not only fulfill the numerical aspect of the award (Sec/class), but also the verbal requirements. It is critical to indicate exactly what you desire, no more, no less, in order to achieve the desired aim. As mentioned before, always begin with **the smallest class that includes everything** you want represented, and then pare it down through the language of the award. This sets the final parameters. The key words here are “specialized to”. It usually involves exclusion, which may be for a portion of the chosen class, or for a particular type of button. Say our desired award is for “elephants with their trunks raised”. We start with the class for **Elephants**, class 17-5.5. It would not be appropriate to use the class for **Mammals**, because although elephants are mammals, **Elephants** has its own listed class. Class 17-5.5 includes all elephants. To limit it to elephants with raised trunks only, we need to state “elephants specialized to raised trunks”. To further limit it, we might add: “No more than 3 studios”. Now the award is just as we want it, and all potential entrants should understand what we have envisioned.

Specialized to:

This is the magic phrase used to limit an existing numbered class. It is quite flexible and may be used to link 2 attributes you want included simultaneously. Sometimes it does not matter which direction you make the link. Say our award is for “clear glass buttons with gold luster”. The award may be written successfully in two ways. We may write it under Class 7-2 (clear colorless glass) **specialized to** gold luster. Or we may do it this way: Class 7-5.2.1 (gold luster decorative finish) specialized to clear colorless glass. The award is virtually the same in both cases.

Focus:

One final important principle to keep in mind when writing your awards has to do with **focus**. I have found it interesting that many of my button friends seem to fall into one of two categories. There are the “materials” button people and the “pictorial/design” folk. This illustrates the concept of focus when writing an award. An award for animal life specialized to black glass is not the same award as one for black glass specialized to animal life. In the first award, the focus is on the animal life. The buttons for this award should try to represent as many of the animal life classes as possible. The only material prerequisite is that the buttons be made of black glass. The award for black glass assorted, specialized to animal life is another thing entirely. This award is looking for the broadest coverage of black glass types, such as construction, mechanical makeup, molded surface designs, DF, OME, etc.

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as long as they depict some form of animal life. The judges should weigh the criteria to reflect this focus.

Multiple Classes:

Many awards are written to include more than one class number. This is easily done by tying the desired classes together with a “+” sign. Make sure you use the entire classification number which is now hyphenated. It is probably wise to list them in numerical order. An example for glass swirlbacks would read: Class 6-2.4 + Class 7-1.4. This award includes black, as well as, clear and colored glass swirlbacks.

Balance:

Awards with multiple classes raise the issue of balance. Whenever you list more than one class, you might want to consider balance between the classes. In the above example, you might say: “Try for balance between classes”. Or you could state “Balance not required.” Just remember, whatever is not stated is left up to chance, which is not a good thing. Minor fine tuning can change the award.

Labeling:

I believe in labeling. Certain types of awards require labeling, even if not mentioned in the language of the award itself. The assortment (zero) classes for **Black glass**, and **Clear and Colored glass** must be labeled and mounted in numerical order. The same is true for the section titled **Other Pictorials**, as well as all 3 of the **Summaries**. Even if not required by an award, labeling guides the judges in the thought processes of the entrant. It also helps the entrant to be aware of what they have and what they are lacking. And lastly, it is an educational tool for any viewers perusing the finished hung trays.

Concept of Interpretation:

One final point needs to be made about the language used in awards, a place where ambiguity or confusion can be introduced. Not every rule is written, and judges may (and will) interpret the awards from their own viewpoint. Strive to remove any ambiguity for the judges to act upon. Think of your award as “judging instructions”. It is often helpful to actually put the tray together, even if only on paper, in order to see if the award can be done, and if it seems to be what you want. Focus and clarity are the keys to writing successful awards.