The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:

Sample Ballot Comments

Following are some sample extracts from ballots less experienced judges filled out. Looking at their strengths and weaknesses can help you do a better job.

From Lincoln-Douglas Ballots:

Sample 1: "I didn't think the affirmative understood his case very well. I had several problems with his philosophical analysis."

Sample 2: "The first reason I voted against the affirmative was that she did not answer two major negative attacks."

Sample 1 is a bad ballot because the judge is debating the debater. That is not the judge's job. The judge must work very hard to keep his or her personal beliefs and personal reactions from affecting the decision. What matters is if the negative made attacks and who won the battle over the attacks.

Sample 2 is good. It not only identifies who won but gives objective reasons why the judge voted the way she did; reasons that have nothing to do with the moral beliefs or politics of the judge.

From a Duo Interpretation Ballot:

Sample 1: "You did a good job but Tennessee Williams plays always seem too depressing to me." [team was ranked fourth]

Sample 2: "You did a good job of separating your characters but your faces and voices never captured the emotions that are in the words and scene." [team was ranked fourth]

Sample 1: What the judge thinks of the literature should not be a factor unless it is a comment on the quality of the literature. (Great and bad plays can both be depressing.) It is not fair to the contestants to have their rank affected by your pre-existing emotions.

Sample 2: this is a good comment. It gives a constructive compliment, and the criticisms are factors within the control of the participants.

From an Extemporaneous Ballot:

Sample 1: "Your humor seems canned, but I was really impressed by the number of sources you cited and your analysis on Asian economics." [student ranked first]

Sample 2: "You seemed to know what you were doing." [student ranked first]

Sample 1: Good useful comments. A specific weakness is noted plus two objective reasons why the judge ranked the student as he did.

Sample 2: A useless ballot comment. It explains nothing. What did the speaker do that made it seem that he knew what he was doing? How was he better than other contestants?

From an Oratory ballot:

Sample 1: "I really liked this speech. You were fluent, enthusiastic and the speech seemed full of energy." [student was ranked fourth]

Sample 2: "You didn't fill all your time. There were more than two minutes left. I also ranked you lower because your topic doesn't seem that challenging. Everyone already believes that friendship is a good and important thing . . ." [student was ranked third]

Sample 1: A horrible ballot. All the comments are positive yet the student is ranked fourth. Why? How is this student supposed to get better if she is not told where she was weak? And this type of good comments, bad rank ballot is doubly discouraging because it reduces students' trust in judging and the contest ethic.

Sample 2: Good because it gives specific causes that match the student's ranking. And these are factors the student can work on to get better.