

HOUSTONFEST: GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO JUDGES FOR 2022

First of all, **thank you** so much for giving your time to help with our contest! Without you, Houstonfest could not take place. The contest organizers, teachers, and students are very grateful to you for your time and effort.

Students placing in the top five in any event will advance to the online Texas State German Contest on February 26 to compete against the winners of our sister contests, Sprachfest in the Austin/San Antonio area and Winterfest in the Dallas area. We hope that many of you will also serve as judges for that contest.

Decision to Go Online Again

When we had to make a decision in early January about keeping contest in person, which was the original plan, or taking it online for a second straight year, we felt that it was too risky to plan for an in-person event: it might have to be canceled at the last minute if the omicron variant continued to surge, if school districts suddenly decided to forbid student travel (which some were starting to do in January), or if large numbers of teachers, students, and judges were sick or quarantined on the day of contest. The pivot to digital takes time, so we felt it wiser to make the call early and avoid a situation where we might have to go digital at the last minute or indeed have to cancel completely. Outranking all other considerations was the fact that school-district policy made it impossible to hold an in-person event at our usual Houston venue.

However, since students are generally in school (and not isolated at home doing online learning as many were in 2021), it seemed reasonable to add back the group events that we didn't do last year (for instance: skits, folk dance, and musical ensembles). Concerned about maintaining the security of our written tests and preventing cheating in an online environment, we have again called off the written tests. Our "menu" this year includes four types of events:

- **artistic events** in which the students will document their artwork in pictures (also toss in Research Paper here),
- **speaking and performance events** in which the students will **submit recordings** of their performances,
- **speaking events** which will be **conducted live via Zoom** on the day of contest and recorded for later judging (also toss in Timed Writing in which the students will write for 15 minutes on contest day while being supervised on Zoom and then submit a picture of what they wrote),
- and a highly-modified version of our quiz game **Pass auf!** using a self-grading online quiz platform called "Kahoot!"

Procedures for Online Judging

For simplicity, **an entry this year consists of one PDF document** (except for the speaking events recorded via Zoom on February 5, Timed Writing, and possibly Digital Logo Design). See more about these PDFs below.

For each event that you are judging, you will receive an email with a **link to a Google folder** some time during the day of Saturday, February 5 (most likely late morning or early afternoon). In the Google folder you will find:

- a **spreadsheet for recording your scores and comments** electronically ("! Judge Sheet - EventName")
- the **critique sheet** for the event ("0 Critique Sheet - EventName"),
- this **General Instructions** document ("1 General Instructions to Judges for 2022"),
- and the **PDFs containing the students' entries** (exceptions: for Digital Logo there will be a collection of PDFs, gifs, and jpgs; for Timed Writing there will be a collection of pictures of the students' writing samples; and for the events recorded via Zoom on Saturday morning there will be one or more video files and a collection of pictures of the students – more on that later).

You have until 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, February 8 (Central Time) to do your judging. You do not need to consult with the other judge(s) of the event unless there are ties in the top 10, in which case you should email or call each other and decide how to break the ties. All ties must be broken by the judges. If you don't notice the ties, we'll catch them as we tally the results on Wednesday, February 9, and contact you. Results will be announced on February 11 or 12.

Now let's consider the critique sheets, judging spreadsheets, and PDFs/videos separately:

Critique Sheets

We will provide you an electronic copy of the critique sheet that we normally use at in-person contest. There will be a copy in the Google folder and a copy in the second tab of the judging spreadsheet. If you like to work on paper, you may wish to print multiple copies of the critique sheet and make notes on them as you evaluate each entry, or just print one copy to refer to throughout. Others will probably find it unnecessary to print the critique sheet, preferring to refer to it on the computer screen. Whatever works for you! In any case, you will NOT submit any actual critique sheets, either electronically or in hard copy, to the contest organizers.

Judging Spreadsheets

The judging spreadsheets are Google “Sheets” that open in your internet browser. While it is possible to download the spreadsheet and work in a locally-saved version of it, please don’t. Just work in the online Google environment. The spreadsheet saves every change you make automatically, so there’s no need to “save” it. The organizers can also access it through the shared Google folder, so there’s no need to email it to us. When you’re finished, simply close the window. If you don’t finish in one sitting, you can come back to it later and pick up where you left off.

The spreadsheet will have the names and schools of the contestants already populated and a row (labeled with your name) for each judge to enter scores and comments for that contestant. There will be three rows for three judges to score each entry, but in some events, there may be only two judges. In that case, leave the rows for “Judge 3” blank.

There will be columns for you to enter your scores for each of the judging criteria listed on the critique sheet. Refer to the critique sheets themselves for a more detailed description of each criterion. In most events there are 5 criteria for judging, each scored between 0 and 20 points. A few events have 4, 6, or 7 criteria, with some criteria worth 5, 10, 15, 25, or 30 points. The spreadsheets are set to reject any scores outside the correct range, so it will “catch” you if, for instance, you try to enter 28 for a criterion that’s worth only 20 points. In almost all events, the maximum score for an entry from any one judge is 100. The spreadsheet will add up your scores on all the criteria automatically and calculate the combined score from the two or three judges (so you don’t have to do any math!). Note: For Einzeltanz, everything is a bit different.

Please do not attempt to type in the totals columns; by doing so, you could overwrite the formula that adds up the scores. Those columns should be “protected” so that you won’t be able to type in them, but if that system fails and you accidentally type in a total column, press Control + Z to undo it. That will restore the formula.

At the far right of the spreadsheet is a column to enter **comments**. Please do make a few comments for each entry; the comments will be shared with the teachers and students, and they really do take the comments to heart. The space is small, but you can type as much as you want and you’ll be able to see everything you’ve typed until you press enter. The cell will not expand in size, though, so after pressing enter you’ll see only the first few words. However, your entire comment is still there; if you want to read back over your comments, double-click in each comment box to see the whole thing (and edit/add to it if you want). One benefit of this is that judges won’t see each other’s entire comments (at least not without some effort) and won’t be influenced by the other judges’ opinions.

As always, but especially in these trying times, we ask that you **be merciful and kind in your scoring and comments**. **Try to keep your total score for each entry at 70 or above**. In your comments, STAY POSITIVE and CONSTRUCTIVE. “Work on x, y, and z,” not “Your x, y, and z were bad.” These students are putting in extra time and effort to participate in this contest. We don’t want to discourage them in any way but rather build them up and encourage them to keep learning German! See some sample comments on the last page of these instructions.

Judging Spreadsheets: Deductions

Rather than *disqualify* an entry for any reason (time-limit violation, forgotten lines, etc.), deduct what you deem to be a fitting number of points from an appropriate criterion, for instance, from “Selection and Preparation.”

For the specific types of violations listed below, there is a **standard 10-point deduction** off the **cumulative score** (not off each judge’s individual score). In events where a standard deduction is possible, there is a column in the judging spreadsheet where you can check if there should be a 10-point deduction, but if you check it, at least one judge should make a comment about why the points were deducted. The Google Sheet will take the 10-point deduction just once off the grand total regardless of whether one, two, or three judges check the deduction.

- **failure to provide the script, music/lyrics, dance notes, or poetry/prose selection** as required in the rules
- **clear evidence that a video consists of several bits edited together rather than one continuous take** as required in the special rules for this year (only in the Video Show category itself is any video editing allowed)
- **failure to include receipts for materials used to create an artwork** as required in the rules (but not ALL art events require receipts; see the critique sheet for your specific event to know whether receipts are required)
- **failure to include at least the contestant’s name and school** in the PDF (applies ONLY to art events)

Even though it is possible for most entries to “merit” two different deductions, **the most we will take is one deduction per entry**. The first judge who notices one of these violations can check the deduction column in the spreadsheet, and if any judges who come along later disagree that there should be a deduction, all the judges should consult briefly by email to come to a consensus.

Evaluating Student Submissions: PDFs and Video Recordings

Art Events (Club Album, Crafts, Digital Logo, Doll Costume, Gingerbread House, Needlework, Original Models, Photo Essay, Photography, Poster, Research Paper, Shirt): Open the PDF for each entry and evaluate what you find. There are two ways to access the PDFs: 1) In the judging spreadsheet, there will be links to the PDFs to the right of each student's name and school. Clicking once on the link will pull up a small window and clicking once inside that window will open the PDF; OR 2) you can open each PDF from the Google folder that was shared with you. The links inside the judging spreadsheet are probably more convenient. The PDF should contain identifying information (student name(s) and school), any **receipts** that are required (but not all art events require receipts), any required **documentation** or **background information** on the entry (only applies to a few events), and above all, **multiple pictures of the entry**. We've left it up to the students to decide how many pictures to include, but we encouraged them to take pictures showing the whole item, close-ups showing various details, pictures from various sides and angles, pictures including the backdrop or diorama in those events where one is required, and pictures showing the stages of their creative process. For Digital Logo, the uploaded file will consist only of the logo itself, and in Research Paper, the PDF will consist of the paper itself.

Pre-Recorded Events (Chorus, Classical Ensemble, Contemporary Music, Duet Acting, Einzeltanz, Folk Dance, Oral Presentation, Poetry, Polka Band, Prose, Puppet Show, Skit, Video Show, Vocal Solo): Open the PDF for each entry. There are two ways to access the PDFs: 1) In the judging spreadsheet, there will be links to the PDFs to the right of each student's name and school. Clicking once on the link will pull up a small window and clicking once inside that window will open the PDF; OR 2) you can open each PDF from the Google folder that was shared with you. The links inside the judging spreadsheet are probably more convenient. In the PDF you should find identifying information (student name(s) and school) and the **script, poem, prose piece, dance notes, or lyrics/sheet music of the musical selection** that the contestants are performing (so that you can read along as you watch their recording). Most importantly, you should find a **YouTube or Vimeo hyperlink** to the video of the performance. Click on that link to view and evaluate the performance. Having the students provide a link is much more efficient than having them upload the actual video files, which are often many, many megabytes in size. This system has the advantage over live judging that you can pause and rewatch the videos if you want to. As mentioned above under "Deductions," our rule is that all these recordings should be done in a single take (except for Video Show, where we welcome editing). When making their videos, the students can do as many takes as they want until they get one that they like, but they can't edit bits and pieces of different takes together. They have to settle on one continuous take to upload. If you see clear evidence that they have edited various pieces together into one video, check the 10-point deduction column and note it in the comments.

Events Done via Zoom on Contest Day (Directed Dialogue, Extemporaneous Speaking, Pair Discussion, Sight Reading): For these events, look in the Google folder that was shared with you to find one or more video files. (There will be no links to the video(s) in the judging spreadsheet itself.) We asked the proctors who conducted the live sessions to record the Zoom meetings in such a way that only one video file would result, but it could be that they ended up with several. The recording(s) will contain the speaking samples of multiple students; there won't be a separate video for each student. Watch the recording(s) and evaluate the performances. Each student should state their name and school at the beginning of their clip, but if they forget to do this or if you can't understand what they say, we have a back-up plan: in the Google folder, you will also find pictures of the students, which in most cases you won't use at all, but if there's an unidentifiable student in the video, you can browse through the pictures and match a picture and name to the "mystery" student – this system did actually help solve multiple mysteries last year.

Timed Writing: This event will also be done via Zoom on contest day, but it has its own quirks, so it gets its very own section. The students will have 15 minutes to respond in writing to a prompt while being supervised on Zoom. At the end of the 15 minutes, they will take a picture of what they wrote and upload it. The pictures may come in various file formats; we're not specifying a particular format to them. There are two ways to access the writing samples: 1) In the judging spreadsheet, there will be links to each student's sample to the right of the student's name and school. Clicking once on the link will pull up a small window and clicking once inside that window will open the picture; OR 2) you can open each file from the Google folder that was shared with you (and the student's name should appear in the file name in case they didn't write their name on their paper). The links inside the judging spreadsheet are probably more convenient. Read and evaluate each writing sample (and we wish you all the luck in the world reading the kids' handwriting!).

Sample Constructive Comments

Way to go!

Keep up the good work!

Good job!

You are on the right track. Try to _____ better.

I can tell you worked really hard!

Great progress!

Great effort!

I can tell you spent a lot of time preparing this.

You are on the top of your game!

I appreciate all of the effort you put into this event.

Very detailed, good job.

Flawless execution.

Good attention to detail.

Stupendous!

Very impressive!

Wonderful way to represent your school.

Good, but work on _____.

Excellent!

Perhaps more _____.

Adequately executed.

Excellent, don't change a thing.

Super!

Well done! I look forward to seeing your work again next year!

I can tell you have a lot of passion for this project.

Sounds good, but ask your teacher to help you with _____.