



QUIZMASTER'S HANDBOOK

BY JIM CICHESE
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BQF QuizMaster’s Handbook

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Introduction

If you are reading this booklet, it is likely because you are already a Table Official in a BQF Bible Quiz program. Thanks for your work! I know that God will bless a servant's spirit and reward your hard work.

Hebrews 6:10 tells us that "God is not unjust, He will not forget your work and the love you have shown HIM as you have helped His people and continue to help them (NIV). Remember above all else that even when quizzers get frustrated or angry, and even when you make an honest mistake, you are serving God, not an individual. Your reward (and your thanks) rests with Him. Keep up the good work.

This booklet is designed to accomplish one of two purposes:

1. To give you a basic idea of how to be an effective Quizmaster so you will "give it a shot" for the first time OR
2. To give you some things to think about that will help you improve if you are already a Quizmaster.

The first thing you will find about serving as a quizmaster is that no one can tell you exactly what makes a good quizmaster! If you took a survey of the top five quizmasters at nationals (that is, if you could figure out who they are!), what you would discover is that even they don't know for sure all that makes a good quizmaster. In almost every area, from reading to judging to managing the clock to various personal techniques, quizmasters have significant discretion, and must make choices that will affect the outcome of every quiz, and sometimes the outcome of every question within a quiz. Occasionally, you will hear someone say "Whatever method works best for you (the quizmaster), that is what you should do..." **That is a mistake!**

Quizmaster decisions or techniques should never be based on what makes things easier for the quizmaster, but rather should be based on what provides the most level playing field for all three teams in the quiz, so that the best team can win consistently!

With that said, if I haven't completely scared you off, I will try to do three things with this booklet:

1. I want to explain the basics of the job of quizmastering, in case you are new to the job.
2. I want to spell out some of the basic things that most people agree make a quizmaster "good" or "bad."
3. I want to open up some of the "controversial" issues that differ from one quizmaster to the next, so that you can make intelligent decisions about what kind of quizmaster you want to become.

The Job of the Quizmaster

If you asked the average quizzier, "What is a quizmaster?" most would probably reply, "The person who reads the questions." But you will soon discover that there is a lot more to being a quizmaster than just reading questions. If you cannot multitask, you probably should not be a quizmaster. In a typical Nationals level quiz, here are some of the tasks a typical quizmaster might have to accomplish:

1. Make sure the correct teams are in the quiz site, check the lights, and secure the room (get the door closed and the audience quiet).
2. Manage the clock by saying "time in" (or "time out") when appropriate.
3. Begin to read a question.
4. While reading, you must do all the following: Watch quizzers to make sure all jumps are legal, watch the lights so you stop the instant one comes on, and read the question without hesitating or stuttering.
5. If no one jumps, you must recognize when 3 seconds has elapsed, and move on to the next question.
6. If quizzers jump, call on the first person up: You must make sure the jump was legal, that the correct person begins to answer, and that they begin to answer within 5 seconds of the

time you call on them. If you have not finished reading the question, you must also instruct the quizzer to “finish the question.”

7. Judge the correctness of the answer: Did they say words not in the verse, did they give the *correct* question, and did they give the *entire* question and *complete* answer?
8. Award the points or error.
9. Receive any legitimate substitutions, time outs or challenges. If challenged, judge the appropriateness of the challenge and rule accordingly. If none of those apply, move quickly to the next question.
10. Proceed to read the next question, and continue as above until time expires.
11. During all of this time, you must be aware of potential distractions within the room; eliminate those distractions when you can, minimize them when possible or be prepared to “throw out” a question for a distracted quizzer if it seems appropriate.
12. If you have a rookie scorekeeper or timekeeper, you should also be peripherally aware of whether they are doing their job correctly.

That is about all there is to it.

Characteristics of a good quizmaster

In Bible Quizzing, it should go without saying that the most important qualities are honesty, fairness and integrity. But after that, there are a few more qualities that separate good quizmasters from bad ones. Here is a partial list:

1. **Consistency:** Quizzers can adjust to most of a quizmaster’s quirks given time. But the one thing that can’t be accounted for is randomness. If you read at random speeds, stop reading at unpredictable times or make rulings that seem opposite of the

rulings you just made on the previous question, quizzers will get frustrated quickly.

2. **Voice:** We chide quizzers when we can't hear their answers, but often a quizmaster is trying to read quickly, or just getting tired, and words begin to slur. Any quizmaster without a strong voice should probably retire, because there are no perfectly silent quiz sites. Crowd noise, air conditioners, and even passing jet planes can make the QM hard to hear; you must speak loudly and clearly.
3. **Ears:** Some quizzers are so quiet that you can't be sure they are even speaking; others talk so fast that you need a recorder to slow their voices down so you can understand them. While we can warn quizzers who are extremely difficult to understand, the fact remains that a good set of ears is critical for a QM. I greatly respect the fact that my father, when he realized his ears were getting questionable, retired from being a QM so that he would not cheat quizzers out of points they deserved just because he couldn't hear them.
4. **Good judgment/understanding of the rules:** The ability to know and interpret the rules well enough to make the correct call almost all the time. No one is perfect, and we learn from our mistakes, but mistakes hurt quizzers who have invested a whole year of studying to compete. Know the rules well enough to make the right call. No one has the rules memorized, but a good quizmaster will review the rules regularly (at least once every year), and will watch the BQF committee notes to keep tabs on changes to the rules.
5. **Decisiveness:** A close partner to making the *right* call is the need to make a *quick* call. If you are not sure what to do on a close call, listen to your other table officials, consider any challenges that have been made, but then decide! You are no more likely to get it right if you take ten minutes to decide than if you take one minute to decide, but taking ten minutes disrupts the flow of the quiz, makes the tournament late, and frustrates quizzers, audience members and coaches. In addition,

the longer it takes to make a call, the more you convey to the quizzers that you are not really sure you are right. That only encourages them to challenge the call when you finally make it. Make your best call quickly, then make it stick and move forward.

6. **Excitement:** While it doesn't usually affect the outcome of a single quiz, an excited quizmaster offers many advantages over a monotone or boring QM: You keep the quizzers engaged, you keep the audience interested, and you make quizzing more exciting and appealing for others who may be considering joining up. Be excited!

Some specific “How-To’s”

How do I read questions?

To help the quizzer, every question should be preceded by the word “question.” Whether or not you need to say “time in,” every question should follow the format, “Question, according to (book), chapter, verse number ...” The word “book” is in parentheses because an unofficial convention says that when there is only one book in the assigned material for the year (i.e. Matthew, Luke, John or Acts), you should not say the book name before each question.

- The word “question” preceding every question may seem unnecessary, but is quite important to the quizzers. First, it notifies them that you are actually reading questions, not just giving explanations or rulings or warnings to be quiet. Second, it gives the quizzers a consistent timing point, so that they can learn to time their jump to get up as early as possible while still getting all the information they need to correctly answer the question (Usually the first word of the question).

Some other factors in reading questions:

1. Never try to **trap** or catch quizzers. It is not the job of the quizmaster to punish early jumpers. If they jump too early, they

will get no words, and will usually get an error. That is sufficient. Be careful not to intentionally put pauses or hesitations into your reference, between reference and question, or between words of the question. Just read quickly, clearly and naturally.

- a. One way we trap quizzers is to anticipate that someone will jump, and so expect to stop reading at a certain point. Because of the anticipation, the QM stops reading sooner than he/she otherwise would have. You can recognize this tendency in yourself if you feel yourself almost stop reading, then you realize no one has jumped yet, so you have to sort of “stumble” forward in your reading. This can indicate that, at other times, when someone did jump, you may have stopped especially early because you expected them to jump, and thus you cheated them out of a syllable they may have otherwise gotten.
2. Never try **NOT** to trap or catch quizzers. The opposite of #1 is the QM who is so intent on getting to the first word of the question that he/she reads that word regardless of when quizzers have actually jumped. Be careful to resist the natural desire to help quizzers by giving them more words than their early jump merited. Remember that helping one quizzer who jumped too early is actually punishing the other 14 who timed their jumps correctly.
 - a. The easiest way to recognize this tendency in yourself comes when we quiz at Nationals on multiple books. When a QM reads the name of the book, quizzers usually commit themselves to jump after they hear the first syllable of the name of the book (i.e. the “Rev” in Revelation is distinctive; if you know the whole book, you mentally start your jump when you hear that syllable). If you put three good Nationals teams in a quiz with several books like that, you can be sure that on any given question, at least ten quizzers will probably jump. Since every one of them is trying to gain an advantage,

they will all push to jump as early as possible. They will continue pushing earlier and earlier until someone gets caught with no words. Experience suggests that in a quiz like that, with ten people jumping, someone will mistime their jump and get caught early on at least half of the questions (sometimes many more than half - watch a championship quiz at nationals). So, if you QM a quiz that has three teams like that, and you only catch 1 out of 10 with no words, you are probably trying too hard to give away the first word of the question.

3. Be careful not to treat quotes differently. Some quizmasters have a reputation, such that if you get caught with no words the question is always a quote, because that is the only kind of question where they catch people. Other quizmasters have a reputation that when you get caught with no words the question is never a quote.
 - a. The first (always a quote) is a relic that harkens to the days when only certain verses were potential quotes and everyone guessed “quote” if they got caught on those references, so it was no big deal to get caught with no words on a quote reference. Quizmasters didn’t mind giving no words on quote questions, because the quizzers were probably going to guess quote anyway and thus get the 20 points.
 - b. The second (never a quote) is a modern tendency. Due to the current rules, you never know which verse is a quote. Therefore, quizzers almost never guess “quote” unless they hear the first inkling of a syllable of the word “quote” from the quizmaster. Quizmasters, knowing a verse is a quote, also know that if they don’t get out some part of the word “quote,” the quizzer will get an error nearly every time. Therefore, some QMs try especially hard to get to the first word of the question when the first word is “quote.”

- c. The only way to recognize either of these tendencies is to observe how often you catch a quizzer with no words on a quote – it should be roughly the same percentage as you catch them with no words on all other questions. Quizzers have no time to decide whether a verse is a quote when they begin their jump, so they time their jump the same regardless of whether the question is a quote. If there is a *consistent* difference in percentages, it *always* indicates that the QM is doing something different when the question is a quote.
4. In the event that the book you are quizzing on has a chapter 20, all questions from that chapter should be read, “Question, according to (book) twenty, verse ____.” This is done to help quizzers distinguish between 20:2 and chapter 22, etc.

How do I judge correctness of the answers?

The basic guiding principle for judging the correctness of the answers is that when a quizzer jumps before the end of the question, it is the responsibility of the quizzer to provide the correct question and the correct answer as their *first* question and answer. Therefore, a basic guideline looks something like this:

1. Did the quizzer provide information or words (other than helping verbs) that are not present in the specific verse in question? If so, an error is automatic, and should be given immediately when you recognize it. Do not stop the quizzer mid-answer to look it up. If you have it on the page or screen, look it up as he/she talks. Otherwise, write it down and look it up later. When you are sure it is an error, stop the quizzer and give the error. Generally, I do not add time back to the clock just because it took me a while to recognize that the answer was, in fact, an error. Quizmasters are not required to recognize errors instantly.
2. Did the quizzer provide me with a first question that is a substantively different question and answer than I have on my

screen? If so, an error is automatic. NOTE: “Combo” questions, different interrogatives, and deliberately confusing questions offered by quizzers are all “controversial” and will be dealt with in another section of this manual.

3. Did the quizzer provide me the entire correct question and complete answer, with all relevant information (usually this means all the information not in parentheses on your computer screen). If so, twenty points is awarded as soon as all the information has been given. If not, wait until their time expires, then award an error. While waiting, consider the following:
 - a. Did the quizzer give me a complete question, only missing a few important words? If so, the quizzer may “quote through the verse” to supply the missing words, without having to repeat the entire question and answer to put the missing words in the right place.
 - b. If a quizzer did not give a complete question, quoting through the entire verse is not sufficient to earn 20 points. A quizzer must rephrase the entire question, as a complete question and answer, adding any necessary words.
4. Bear in mind, for most quizzers, they actually will arrive at the answer first (that is the way the human brain works best, normally), and then backtrack to the question. If they do this out loud, that is perfectly OK. Quizzers may provide the answer first and then go back and form the question. They don’t have to repeat the answer a second time to get points, as long as the QM can discern that this is what they were doing.
5. In the case of a “quote” question:
 - a. If the word “quote” has been read, the quizzer must recite the verse, letter perfect. Some grace can be given on difficult-to-pronounce words, and a quizzer may back up and restart at any point in the verse, but must quote with no mistakes at all.
 - b. If the word “quote” has not been read, the quizzer should be instructed to “finish the question.” In that

case, the quizzer MUST say the word “quote” before beginning to ask a question or quote the verse. If the quizzer says anything other than the reference without saying the word “quote,” an error is given.

6. Beware of the tendency to “gather popularity” as a Quizmaster. We all like to be popular, but Quizmasters who make the tough calls will eventually always become unpopular with someone.

Two opposing tendencies are equally bad in a QM:

- a. The tendency to “show them who’s boss” may strike if you see an aggressive team, or one that challenges often. Authoritarian QMs may tend to respond this way just to “put quizzers in their place.” You may gain favor with others in the quiz, but it may be at the expense of being just and fair.
 - b. The tendency to “let it go, since they obviously knew their stuff” may cause you to award undeserved points to a team with a good attitude. This may make you popular, but doesn’t hold quizzers to the high standard that a national competition requires.
7. If you get it wrong...
 - a. Don’t hesitate, if after the quiz you realize you made a mistake, to go and apologize. They may or may not be ready to forgive you, but it is a virtue for you to be willing to admit your mistakes.

A few “What if’s...”

1. What if I couldn’t make out a clear question or answer – it just sounded like they were quoting the verse?
 - a. Once time has expired, award an error. Do NOT ask the quizzer, “What was your question?” This unfairly gives a quizzer an extra ten or fifteen seconds to do what they were supposed to do in the first 20 seconds – give you a clear question and answer.
2. What if they gave a different interrogative, but it sounded like the same question?

- a. Quizzers must provide the correct interrogative, or an acceptable substitute. Example: The “world” can be a *who* or a *what*. The Holy Spirit, however, is a person, and can no more be a “what” than you could. I would be insulted if someone asked “What is the Quizmaster today? Jim.” Other cases are harder to judge, and eventually come down to the discretion of the quizmaster. Remember that grammar is not the point of quizzing, but bad grammar sometimes indicates a poor understanding of the text, which is part of the point of quizzing.
 - b. Who/Whom is one particularly tough issue with regard to interrogatives. There is a grammatical difference, but current convention says that quizzers should not be required to understand that difference (especially since many Quizmasters don’t understand that difference). Therefore, who and whom can be mutually substituted by the quizzer, however, if the question set misuses who or whom, you may have a valid reason to reject and throw out the question.
3. What if time runs out while the quizzer is answering?
 - a. Your timekeeper should say “Time” the instant the quizzer’s 20 seconds is up. If the quizzer is still saying necessary words at the instant the timekeeper utters the “T” in “Time,” then the quizzer did not complete the answer in twenty seconds, and an error is awarded.
 4. What if time runs out on the half while I am reading the question?
 - a. Usually, timekeepers are coached to allow the buzzer to sound if the clock expires anywhere near the time when you are reading the reference. What you must judge is this: **Did I/Would I have** gotten the reference out **in its entirety** before the buzzer sounded? If so, the question is valid, so continue reading, and whichever quizzer wins the jump should be allowed to answer. If not, the

question is thrown out *even if a quizzer jumped before the buzzer actually sounded*, and the quiz is over.

- b. If a timekeeper does not allow the buzzer to sound when time expires (usually because they are trying not to distract the quizzers), this becomes an impossible judgment. In that case the QM and the TK must work together to “guess” whether the question was valid or not. Better to let the buzzer sound, and let the QM decide whether the entire reference was read.
- c. Once you have passed the reference, and a given question is clearly valid, it is permitted for the timekeeper to prevent the buzzer from sounding mid-question or mid-answer, as that can be a major distraction for a quizzer.

How do I handle a challenge?

Humility is as valuable in a Quizmaster as it is in any believer in Christ. Know that you can and do make mistakes, and be prepared to listen when a quizzer suggests you may have made one. You *must* listen to any valid challenge (see the rule book to become familiar with who can challenge what), but you are not required to agree. However, it should be automatic to check with other table officials when ruling on a challenge. Once you have checked, and listened to opposing captains’ rebuttals if presented, make a decision. There is no rule that allows anyone to challenge a ruling on a challenge, so once your decision is made, the discussion should be over, and the quiz should move on, but be careful to listen to all parties involved before making your ruling.

How do I rule on a challenge?

Challenges can usually be divided into five categories, and the ruling depends on which category you are facing:

1. The procedural challenge: This is the challenge that says, “You stuttered when you read the reference,” or “A time bomb went off in the next room and distracted the quizzer.” There are a million variations, and no good rule covers them all. Basically

you must decide, “Might that have affected this quizzer/correct answer/error?” Then you make the best judgment you can make, and move on.

2. The “Bad Question” challenge: This is the challenge that says, “That is a bad question, it should be thrown out, because no quizzer would normally make that question.” Here are some points to help you judge those challenges:
 - a. If the quizzer scored 20 points despite the bad question, let the points stand.
 - b. If the question contains errors, typos or words not in the verse text (helping verbs are OK), and those typos may have caused the quizzer to get an error, throw it out and restore time to the clock.
 - c. If the question is a bad sentence, lacks a verb, or in some other way is constructed so that you judge that a normal quizzer could not be realistically expected to form that question, throw it out.
 - d. Any time a question is thrown out, time should be restored to the clock, and an effort should be made to report that question to the quiz question committee so they can consider and fix it if appropriate.
3. The hearing challenge: This is the challenge that says, “But they did give you that question,” or, “But they did say that word, you just didn’t hear them.” These are tricky, but my rule is this: If I am absolutely certain of what I did or didn’t hear, I stand by my decision. If not, I go to the other two officials for advice. If even one of them heard the disputed word or phrase, I assume the word/phrase was spoken. If not, I rule as best I can, based on what I heard.
 - a. Some QMs will ask the quizzer what they said. This is a mistake. Even the sharpest quizzers under pressure of answering will sometimes unintentionally utter a word they didn’t even know they said. Their minds are so consumed with answering they will later argue that they never said that word even if you show them

videotape. Other times, quizzers will say a word “in their heads,” and think they have said it aloud even if they never did.

- b. Some QMs will go to opposing captains and coaches to ask what was heard/said. I do not approve of this tactic. It is dangerous for many reasons, but at the end of the day, the rules clearly imply that the quizzer must provide the question/answer so that the quizmaster can hear it. Words spoken “under your breath” may be heard by nearby coaches or captains, but would not be heard by the quizmaster. This opens the door to a quizzer “manipulating the system” by speaking words very quietly if they aren’t sure what the verse actually says. Then, if the QM gives an error because of the missing words, the quizzer will appeal to other coaches and captains who probably don’t have the correct question in front of them, and weren’t really listening carefully anyway. Therefore, it is my opinion that *only words that are actually heard by the table officials* should count toward the question and answer.
 - c. A side note: This is a good place to emphasize the critical role that timekeepers and scorekeepers play in judging questions. No timekeeper or scorekeeper should ever be bored. If you are not busy, then help the QM watch and listen to the question and answer. You may only get asked once or twice a quiz, but it will probably be a critical decision, and the QM and the quizzer both deserve better than to have you say “I wasn’t paying attention.”
4. The judgment challenge: This is the challenge where the quizzer says, “Your judgment is incorrect, what they said *is/is not* the same as what you have on your page.” These are the hardest challenges to listen to, because they can imply more than just a mistake, they imply some sort of “flaw” in the quizmaster. Quizzers should be careful when phrasing these challenges,

since it is easy to be disrespectful to a quizmaster with this kind of challenge.

- a. Ruling on a judgment challenge is handled no differently than any other challenge. You listen to your table officials, and make the best decision you can. Familiarity with the rules, with the English language, and with the process of question-forming can help, but in the end it is called a “judgment” for a reason.
 - b. The buck stops with the quizmaster. In this case, as a quizmaster, you should have greater experience and you need to have more familiarity with the rules. These facts should put you in a position to readily overrule your other two officials, even when they argue strongly, if you are confident you are correct. You are the senior official, and the final arbiter of what is correct and what is not.
 - c. Be aware that very often the quizzer is guessing what question is on your page, but not always. Sometimes a quizzer knows there is only one question in that verse, or some such. But generally, do not allow them to “fish” for information that will help them challenge more effectively. You are not required to answer a challenger who wants to know “What question do you have on your screen?”
5. The integrity challenge: I would hope that in a Bible quiz, no one would ever intentionally accuse a Quizmaster of cheating, but sometimes, in frustration, as a quizzer realizes that their challenge is falling on deaf ears, they can say things that imply favoritism or cheating by the QM. If that happens, a challenging quizzer or coach should be warned as they approach that line, and if they continue on and keep challenging on that basis, a technical foul should be awarded as per the rules.

Two notes about challenges:

1. Sometimes, a QM can make the mistake of thinking that if someone challenges a question or ruling, the fairest thing to do is to “throw the question out.” Other than bad questions (number 2 above), this is usually the **least** fair thing you can do. It is, in effect, an admission that you have “lost the bubble,” and no longer have any idea what is the right thing to do. The problem is that if the quizzier deserves the points, you are punishing that quizzier and team for your inability to rule correctly. If the quizzier deserves an error, you are punishing the other two teams by not awarding the error that was deserved. In addition, there will only be a limited number of questions from that chapter/book, so simply replacing that question with the next one in line creates a shortage of questions and a disadvantage for the people who memorized that chapter/book. Therefore, the rule of thumb should be like NFL instant replay: In the absence of irrefutable proof of a mistake, the “ruling on the field” should stand. Don’t reverse your initial call unless you are certain it was the wrong call.
2. Sometimes, a QM can make a call, realize it was the wrong call, but wait for someone to challenge before reversing themselves. That is horrible! If you make a wrong call, don’t wait for the challenge to fix it – just correct it and get the call right. A QM who responds to a challenge with; “Yeah, I thought so too, but I was waiting to see if someone would challenge it” has defied the rules of common sense. If you knew it was wrong, why did someone have to tell you by challenging it? If you didn’t know it was wrong, why pretend you did? In addition, in an effort to show good sportsmanship, some teams have chosen not to challenge quizmaster calls in certain situations, so if you have this attitude, you are denying them a chance at what you know to be a fair and just call. You do not have to wait for a challenge from a quizzier or coach to reverse your own mistakes immediately after you have made them. Once you have gone on

to the next question, though, it is too late to correct your mistake, except by going to them later and apologizing – which is completely appropriate.

How do I manage the clock?

A common misconception is that a “good” quizmaster reads a lot of questions, but a “bad” quizmaster only reads a few. That *may* be true, but is by no means a hard and fast rule. The key is to determine why you are getting in a lot or a few questions.

Some quizmaster mistakes with regard to the clock:

1. QM assumes that reading fast gets in more questions: Actually, in an average nationals quiz, on any given question, the quizmaster’s reading time *always* amounts to about 2 seconds per question, but the quizzers answering time can vary from 3 seconds to their full 20/30 seconds. It is a pretty good rule of thumb that the slowest-reading quizmaster can only burn about an extra ½ second on a question, but a slow-answering quizzers can burn an extra 10 – 15 seconds. Therefore, the quizzers have 20 – 30 times as much control over how many questions are asked as the quizmaster does.
2. QM assumes that more questions is better than fewer questions: It is true that a high-scoring quiz is more fun and everyone feels better about scoring more points, but understand that if you as the quizmaster dictate that pace, you are helping to decide who should win the quiz. In basketball, a “run and gun offense” team will usually win a game where a lot of points are scored, but a “half-court offense” team depends on good defense and hopes for a lower final score. In quizzing, a team may deliberately strategize to try to get fewer questions, because that increases their chances of winning the quiz. To push for more questions is to decide in advance that you don’t think they should win! In reality, it should fall to the quizzers as much as possible to determine how many questions are asked and answered.

3. Starting the next question before the quizzer fully sits down: Often, in a struggle to get in more questions, the QM “steps” on the quizzer who just answered, by starting the next question before they have fully reset themselves. Even after a quizzer sits down, it takes a second or so to get the pad fully situated so the quizzer is ready to jump on the next question. Some quizzers get so frustrated by this that they just concede and don’t even jump on the next question, because they can’t get the pad reset in the time the QM is allowing them. This unfairly penalizes them for answering the previous question. Of course, if a quizzer is taking five seconds to reset, you should call time out and warn them not to waste clock time.
4. Failing to stop the clock: When a quizzer has given all the information you need, you should either award the 20 points or stop the clock if you need to think. Quizzing is “running time” while the quizzers are jumping, answering and returning to their seats, but no time should ever run off the clock just for a QM to think, to look up a verse, to consider a decision, or even to flip to a new page of questions.
5. Stopping the clock too often: The opposite of number 4 is the quizmaster who stops the clock between every question. “Running time” assumes a small amount of time for a quizzer to return to his/her seat, and even time for the audience to clap. Clocks should not be stopped for those things, unless a significant amount of time is being wasted.
6. Failing to keep the tournament on schedule: Even quizmasters who manage the clock well during the quiz can sometimes be the ones whose site always seems to fall behind everyone else, and throws off the tournament schedule. Focus on three things to avoid being that QM:
 - a. Start the quiz **aggressively** and **promptly**; more time is wasted between quizzes than during quizzes by far.
 - b. Make decisions quickly and keep moving. An indecisive quizmaster, or one who has to look up every rule and every decision will always lag behind.

- c. Be ready to move to paper if necessary. Computers are wonderful, but when they fail, they can fail catastrophically. If your question computer or the scoring computer are frozen or not working, don't just sit and wait, prepare a paper score sheet or find paper questions just in case the computers don't come back up in a reasonable time. The only good reason for being way behind schedule is a double or triple overtime quiz, and even in that case, you can keep moving by not wasting time between periods of the quiz. OK, we also had the lights go out in one hotel – it may be difficult to read questions in the dark!

How much do I try to help quizzers?

One of the most frustrating things for a coach is a QM who insists on coaching his team for him. Resist the urge to tell quizzers to “slow down your jump” or to “wait for words.” Don't try to give situational strategy or any other coaching advice you might want to give. That is the coach's job. And, believe it or not, there are circumstances where a coach will tell quizzers to jump early on purpose, and possibly even to willingly accept a few errors.

Some things you can do that genuinely help quizzers.

- At the local level, especially early in the year, I tend to stop the clock and explain most errors, and even some “close call” correct answers. This helps quizzers get a feel for what they are doing wrong, and how to get it right next time. Obviously, this is not a good policy at Nationals, and even locally you must be sensitive to just how much you are throwing off the day's schedule.
- At the national level, remember that you are not required to do or say anything more than “20 points” or “I'm sorry, that's an error.” However, if I can help quizzers during the one second they need to return to their seats, I usually do that. Short phrases like “wrong question,” or “50/50,” or “you left out the

word _____,” can be offered without burning clock time, and will help quizzers be better in the future. One thing to consider – when a team becomes known for challenging often, or for challenging on a flimsy basis, it is entirely appropriate to stop offering them such information, because they will usually use it only to base another challenge on it.

Some possible controversies

“Combo” questions

A combo question is a situation in which a quizzer, in an attempt to increase their odds of guessing the correct question, combines two or more questions and answers creatively while responding. This puts the quizmaster in the position of determining which question was given first, and gives the team captain great latitude in arguing that the correct question was, in fact, given, so points should be awarded.

Controlling policy: At the time of this writing, it is the policy of the question committee (people who write the Nationals questions) to intentionally pre-combine any two questions that have the same exact answer. Thus, the question set will already combine most questions that are legal as combination questions. That doesn’t stop quizzers from trying to create a few more...

Example: **2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)** ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

The Issue: Three distinct “What” questions clearly exist; What have I fought?, What have I finished?, What have I kept? A quizzer jumping early may have only the word “what” to work with, and must therefore guess which of the three questions is correct. This gives the quizzer a one in three chance of getting 20 points.

- The Lenient Quizmaster: At one National tournament, a quizzer, trying to be creative, gave the following question: “What have I fought, finished, kept? Answer: The good fight, the race, the

faith.” A lenient quizmaster awarded 20 points, not understanding that he had just been conned by a really clever quizzer.

- The Moderate Quizmaster: A more moderate approach would be for the QM to examine which of the three questions you actually have on the screen. Suppose your question was “What have I fought?” A moderate to lenient QM might award the points, since the correct question was given first, even though two other questions were added on for good measure. This QM would then award the error if the question on the screen was “What have I finished?” OR “What have I kept?” since those questions were given second and third. The great challenge here is that sometimes the quizzer’s questions and answers are so convoluted it can be impossible to tell which question was given first, second or third.
- The Tough Quizmaster: By strict interpretation of the rules, a quizzer’s first question **and answer** must be correct. Therefore, a QM is not out of bounds by ruling an error, regardless of what question was on the screen, since even if the quizzer gave the *correct* question first, he or she followed it by two *incorrect* questions **before** giving the correct answer.

Example: **Matthew 7:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

The Issue: Two distinct “What” questions exist; “What bears good fruit? every healthy tree” and “What bears bad fruit? the diseased tree.” A clever quizzer might try to combo the questions by saying “What bears? Answer: Every healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.”

- The Lenient Quizmaster: Twenty points is awarded, because the quizzer just put part of the question in the answer and then added a second question for good measure.
- The Moderate Quizmaster: Twenty points is awarded **only** if the question on the screen was “What bears good fruit?” because

that was the question the quizzer stated first (you know this because the answer given first answered that question, not the other one). ALTERNATELY: The Moderate QM can wait, assuming that what looks (sounds) like an *answer* was really just the quizzer “quoting through the verse” (when he/she said ‘Every healthy tree bears good fruit but a diseased tree bears bad fruit,’ that was a direct quote from the verse, so the quizzer may not have been answering the question, just thinking aloud). This forces the quizzer to decide between the two questions and complete only one of the two questions. Then, if the correct question is chosen, points are awarded. If the quizzer never chooses between the two questions, or guesses the wrong question when they do choose, an error is awarded.

- The Tough Quizmaster: The error is awarded automatically, again because the quizzer never gave a complete, correct question and answer until they first gave information from a second question. A sub-issue is assumed here: By definition, a question should be a complete sentence. Since the phrase “What bears?” is not a complete sentence, it can be argued that it should never be accepted by itself as a valid question, even if the rest of the sentence is given as part of the answer. Therefore, the quizzer did not complete the question, but gave two different answers, from two different questions, thus creating an error.

The “Mobile Question Mark”

The MQM is a question in which the quizzer pauses at several obvious spots, trying to convince the QM to fill in the question mark on whichever pause happens to be the correct one.

Example: **Matthew 5:27 (ESV)** ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

The Issue: Four “What” questions can be formed from this verse:

1. What you have heard?
2. What was it?
3. What was said?
- 4.

What shall you not commit? A clever quizzer, knowing he/she has a 1 in 4 chance to get points, might use creative pauses, hoping the QM will supply the question mark at the correct spot and award points. It might sound like this:

What, you have heard (pause) that it was (pause) said (pause)? – At this point, they are hoping that if the question was “What you have heard?” The QM will supply the question mark at the first pause and award points. If the question was “What was it?” the QM will supply the question mark at the second pause and award points. If the question was either of the last two the QM will simply wait, and the quizzer can then add the answer “You shall not commit (pause) adultery.” A clever quizzer would pause after the word “commit” hoping to also get credit for the question “What shall you not commit?”

- The Lenient Quizmaster: Twenty points is awarded, no matter which question is on the page, because the correct sequence of pauses will sound like the question on your page, with the quizzer simply adding the rest of the verse as “extra information.”
- The Moderate Quizmaster: Usually assumes that the first pause was the question mark, and awards points or an error, depending on whether that was the question on the screen. This QM may also ask “What was your question?” but as stated earlier, that is unfair because it gives the quizzer extra time to figure out what the question and answer should be.
- The Tough Quizmaster: Assumes the quizzer was simply quoting the verse and waits for a clear and distinct single question and answer. If none is given, an error is awarded.

Which Quizmaster has the “right” approach?

Quizzers, of course, will often prefer the lenient quizmaster, because quizzers score more points that way, with fewer errors. Naturally, what they really want is that *they* would draw all the “lenient” quizmasters, and their *competition* would draw all the “tough” quizmasters. Regardless of what quizzers prefer, especially at nationals, we need to hold all quizzers to a very high standard. While this is not a grammar competition, we should expect good enough English so that the question and answer given would make sense to an English-speaking 6th grader. If we want to crown one quizzer and one team as the “best of the best” at the end of the tournament, then smaller, less significant things like grammar and word perfect knowledge of the verse become the only real distinctions between good and great quizzers. They are valid distinctions, because they measure three things, 1. Who knows the most material, 2. Who knows it best, and 3. Who understands it best.

But at the end of the day, every quizmaster will arrive at their own level of comfort. I do not presume to tell you in this manual that one approach is correct, and the rest are bad (although of course, whatever I do is what you should do as well 😊!). But, as with most things, consistency is critical. If you are lenient in one judgment, and then strict in the next, quizzers will feel cheated. If you are consistently strict or consistently lenient, quizzers will adjust quickly. Bear in mind, though, that even being consistent gives a slight advantage to quizzers who know you well, and puts strangers at a disadvantage, until they have had time to learn your quirks.

Some things to watch for in yourself

Quizmasters can “give away” the question, or give the quizzer an unfair edge in guessing what the question is, if the QM’s technique is bad. Here are a few things to watch out for:

1. You should have the timekeeper help you follow on “Quote” questions, but you should not turn the screen or allow the timekeeper to “lean in” until after the quizzer has said “quote.” Otherwise that turn or lean will tip the quizzer off that this is a quote question.
2. If, on a regular question, the quizzer begins to quote through the whole verse, be careful not to “follow along with your finger” only when they are in the critical part of the verse. Either follow along for the whole verse, or not at all, because otherwise, you can tip the quizzer off to what part of the verse the question came from.
3. Ask another coach, official or quizzer if you have “tells” that give away when a quizzer has hit upon the correct information. Some QM’s relax, some sit back, others mark something off on the page (when using paper) and still others look up at the quizzer at a critical moment. You would do this without thinking about it, so you will only know about it if you ask a quizzer you can trust. And sometimes, they might not even know...
4. As stated before, watch for patterns in how often you catch people with no words. Some catch quizzers only on quotes, some never on quotes. Some catch quizzers only on the first question after a timeout, some always give the first word on the question after a timeout. One thing you can be sure: If you have a pattern, quizzers will figure it out and take advantage of it.

5. Some QM's tend to nod their heads while a quizzer is headed in the right direction, or giving correct information. This can function like a "hot or cold" search we used to do as kids; you nod when the quizzer is getting "hot" and stop nodding as they get "colder" until the quizzer finds their way to the correct question and answer. Don't do that.

Very often, quizzers pick up on these things subconsciously – sometimes they can't even tell you how they knew what the correct question was, they just read your body language and guessed right. But some quizzers are so sharp they can process the question, quote the verse, and read the quizmaster's body language all at the same time.

A final word

Alright, if you aren't scared off yet, you have a chance to be a good quizmaster. Remember this; we know you are human, nobody does everything perfectly. Strive for consistency, aim for a level playing field, and be constantly on the lookout for ways to improve. That is what makes a good quizmaster. Thanks again for your commitment and service to Christ, may God bless you richly.