

2025 AAF-ND American Advertising Awards

# Judges' Tips for Submitting Physical Entries in a Digital Format

Due to this year's competition being judged online exclusively, we asked our judges....

**“What can entrants do to make their physical work look just as good in a digital format as it would have looked in person?”**

While we can't share WHO our judges are until after judging has wrapped, we CAN share their pro-tips on how to bring your physical entries to life on a computer screen.

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## Tip #1 Get Hands On With Your Work

“Seeing is believing... and sometimes... winning! I recommend that entrants get their hands on a physical copy of their work and capture photos or videos that showcase the experience their work provides. Whether it's showing off a cool fold, capturing the glimmer of foil effects, or getting in close to emphasize paper texture, there are lots of ways they can help the judges get a better idea of the work.”

“Since we can't get our actual hands on the work, capture your hands on it. Our mirror neurons will take it from there and help us feel like we're actually experiencing the piece firsthand.”

## Tip #2 Take Advantage of Briefs!

“Since your competition is allowing write-ups and video submissions, people should really take advantage of this. It's a great opportunity to talk a bit more about their work. Good advertising is all about problem-solving, whether that challenge is raising awareness for a major issue or helping a product make it from the shelf to a buyer's shopping cart, we want to hear how you tackled the issue and why your solution is the best one out there.”

### Tip #3 Mock ups. Mock ups. MOCK UPS.

“This is a competition where mocking (up) is encouraged. As advertisers, we know presentation is half the battle. Since we won’t be able to physically hold entries, it can be super helpful to include a simple mock up. But don’t go overboard! I’ve seen some really strong submissions get into trouble when they go wild on the mock up and take the focus completely away from the actual work.”

“Make sure to mock up your work. When you use a mockup it should be easy for us as judges to identify what it is that we’re judging. Avoid super busy backgrounds or confusing scenes that feature multiple items that we aren’t judging.”

“Don’t just upload a PDF or jpg of the print file. Mock up how it looks in the situation (in situ) as well. If it’s a full page print ad, show it in a stock magazine. If it’s a billboard, put it on a stock billboard. The context of it is helpful.”

### Tip #4 Show Off Your Work Using Video

“If you’re able to make a video even of a printed / static entry, that can help to bring it to life. Think of the video as a simple “tour” of the piece.”

“I’m always surprised by the lack of videos to accompany entries in past shows that I have judged. If you have the option to upload a video, do it! If you’re wanting the judges to really feel like they’re experiencing what they’re judging, capture some movement and details using video. It can be super short, super simple... but take advantage of a quick video.”

### Tip #5 Ask a Peer to Review Your Work Before You Submit

“Test out your entry on different screens, send outside of your agency to QA, etc. This can ensure fonts are embedded, images are clear, etc.”

“Ask a trusted colleague or fellow AAF member if they’ll give you an honest opinion of your work before you submit it. They may have ideas you didn’t even consider. Like ‘Hey - instead of taking a picture of it on a black background, what if the background was blue?’ Just remember! The work itself can’t be altered just for the competition. It needs to be a piece of creative that was actually used in real life using someone’s real dollar.”