

National Model Railroad Association

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Achievement Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Periodically, I plan to share some of the questions, and answers I get from members about the AP program. Someone once told me to do what the requirements asked and not to read anymore into them. If it says "demonstrate" then give evidence of having done it. If it says "document" then make a record of what you did. If it says "make a list" then make a list. Keep it simple, but meet the requirements.

If you have questions about the AP program contact me by email (fjkoch@hotmail.com) or send your questions to Frank J. Koch, NMRA AP Assistant Manager, 4769 Silverwood Drive, Batavia, OH 45103.

General Question

"What is the status of my SOQ?"

Answer: I frequently get member questions on the status of various submissions. I can answer the questions when the submissions are in my hands, but not when the Division or Region AP managers still have them. I generally tell folks to expect a two - three month interval for the SOQ to work its way from the Division level to the Region level to the National level where it is approved; then to the calligrapher for printing, and then back to the Region, then the Division, and then to you. Some of the Region AP Managers process and mail completed SOQs to me as they receive them and others send a packet to me during the last half of each month. I tend to process everything I have during the first full weekend (or so) of each month and send it electronically the same day I finish compiling the report. The report is reviewed for first time recipients, the certificates are printed and signed, and then mailed them back to the Region AP managers.

SOQ Content Question

"Why is the expiration date required on the SOQ?" and "Where do I get copies of the SOQs?" and "Are the SOQs on the web site up to date?"

Answer: Several years ago, the requirements and forms were adjusted to include the membership expiration date when submitting SOQs to ensure memberships were current. I believe all the current forms include a space for it. If the forms you are using do not have a space, then please note the expiration date on the SOQ or enclose a copy of your current membership card. This also applies to the requirements and judging forms -- I still occasionally see the old judging forms that are very outdated and not acceptable when used for current judging. Recording membership numbers and expiration dates saves time and work during the approval process. Copies of SOQs are available from the NMRA web site, from your Division or Region AP managers, or from me if all else fails.

Prototype Model Question

"How should I interpret the requirements for Prototype Models?"

Answer: Let me be real simple, the actual requirements spell out exactly what is expected. Prototype Models really boils down to two sets of documented photographs, videos, or similar evidence -- one of the prototype scene and one of the model scene that has earned a Merit Award. The casual observer or judge should readily conclude that the two sets of photographs are of the same scene. There have been two submissions in the past year that required a bit more than casual study to tell apart - they were that excellent! I use a simple three step review process -- what is the scene the modeler purports to be modeling and what is the documentation for that scene, what are the models and scenery that duplicate the prototype, and how well was it accomplished. You've heard anecdotal stories of photographs or slides of models being incorrectly (by the Clerk) put in the prototype category because they were that realistic.

The models have always been excellent and of high individual quality, but Prototype Models has the specific added requirement that a *specific documented prototype scene is faithfully reproduced with the model*. Review requirement B: "You must prepare two sets of photographs (or VHS video tapes), one of the prototype and one of the model, and a written description that clearly describes the intended setting of the model railroad." The notes go on to say: "You must demonstrate that you have modeled from a specific prototype, by submitting plans and/or photographs. If at all possible try and take pictures of your model that are from the same angle as pictures you have of the prototype. That way you can have side by side pictures showing how well you have created the scene you are modeling."

Judging Conformity Question

"I notice that the SOQ and requirements say that you can earn points for drawing your own plans. What does this mean and how many points can be earned?"

Answer: The points would come as part of the "conformity" category judging (0-25 points) and is part of the documentation that establishes the "prototype" for the model and the adherence to the prototype - be it actual prototype or mixed prototype or fictional. Doing the drawings yourself rather than using available plans for the same prototype earns no extra points - but your own drawings may be the only documentation available.

If there is no documentation provided, the judges are under no obligation to make assessments as to prototypical practices, although most will provide some points. However, the number of points is limited if no or limited documentation is provided. Whether they be commercial drawings or your own drawings or sketches, the points should be the same for the same model for equal documentation and the degree to which the model matches described prototype.

As an example, I have one photo of two sides of a company store that I plan to model. I'll make elevation drawings and sketches showing key architectural elements (windows, corbels, trim treatment) to scale and then use them as my construction plans. I've got multiple interior photos of similar stores, but no floor plans, so I'll pull the key elements from the photos and generate a floor plan that is logical and representative. I've established the actual exterior prototype via the photos and

established the dimensions and details via the drawings. The judges can assess how well I've duplicated the prototype and award points accordingly. I could do the same thing with published plans if they existed. In the example, there are no published plans, so my photos and drawings must provide the degree of documentation.

Review the judging guidelines section on the NMRA web site for additional explanation. This is true across all the judged categories. As for the model's role in this - how well does it match the documentation that was established? Now, you be the judge in two real life extreme examples I've encountered over the years. (1) The photos are for an outside braced wooden boxcar and the model is a welded steel boxcar. (2) The depot is photographed (historical and current) from all sides and field sketches are supplemented by railroad construction plans. The small depot is built from scale stripwood that was cut from documented actual boards recovered from the depot (this last point is more scratch building, but could be a tie breaker in a very close contest). See the difference? Thought you might!

Author & Prototype Railroad Articles Question

"Can an article about the prototype railroad be used to satisfy the requirements for Author? I've been told that the only articles allowed are those that are about model railroading."

Answer: The answer is "probably yes, and rarely no." If the modeler can glean modeling information from the article/photographs/maps, then there can be credit for original work on the prototype. At the other extreme, if the article is a biography about railroad personalities, then the answer might be no. Or, if the publication consists of reprinting railroad archives, there is no credit (remember - original work by the author). I pulled an economic analysis on railroads from an old industry journal (for kicks), and it was tough, but I used it to develop a credible story outline for a model railroad - equipment types, industries served, general condition, etc.

The requirements actually address this directly: *"Prepare and submit material on any of the following subjects: Model Railroading; Prototype Railroading, applicable to Modeling; NMRA Administration."*

There are three equally acceptable types of material - all valid submissions. The key for me is that there does need to be a more direct link to modeling - more so than my earlier mentioned economic treatise. I look at the books put out by the historical societies. I believe that many would qualify, as the application to modeling is apparent. Importantly, it does not have to say "...and the application to modeling is...". One of my favorite local examples is the book "Railroad with Three Gauges" by David McNeil, a historian who wrote about the railroads of SW Ohio. Every detail of every siding and industry and topographical element was covered from a historian's view. Mr. McNeil is not a modeler or a railfan, but he is a rail buff historian. I've learned local facts that were unknown to long-time locals, even some who grew up not knowing their houses were right on long-ago branches. There are modeling inferences on virtually every page. If in doubt, ask an AP manager for their perspective. You may just be surprised at the answer.

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