

2026 Award number 11

The question presented:

The Blue Book on page 55 notes that atmospheric features (rain, snow, wind, clouds, lightning, rainbows, etc.) are not a part of Cl. 20-3 but should be used in Cl. 20-24, Unlisted. Some sources other than the Blue Book have claimed that the aurora borealis qualifies for Cl. 20-3. However, the aurora borealis is an atmospheric phenomenon that is transient, just as lightning is, so wouldn't the aurora borealis fit in the "unlisted" Cl. 20-24 rather than Cl. 20-3 (Astronomical)?

Team Answer:

Everyone should note we use the blue book as our first reference. Common sense comes into play and many references are helpful. In the end it comes down to the specific award and how it is worded. The option to push the envelope is always there. We encourage the judges to use BOD (benefit of doubt) when gray areas are in play, and to deduct points for "poor choices" or give extra points for "excellent choices." We realize there are conflicting opinions in various sources, in this case given the aurora borealis is considered an atmospheric phenomenon we believe it belongs in the unlisted section. We would **not** expect to see it in an award written to 20-3.