

# How to Play and Judge at the Same Time

The Magic Tournament Rules (page 6) allows judges to play in certain types of Regular REL events they are judging. This is particularly common at Friday Night Magic events and pre-releases - the kind of local events where the judge is likely to be part of the local Magic community as well as acting as an official.

Judging while playing is a great way of interacting with players and having fun in events where judge calls and issues are likely to be few and far between. However, there is the potential for complications to arise if there's a conflict - or perceived conflict - between your role as a player and a judge.

## Should I be playing?

The MTR allows you to play in the events you're judging, but the first question you should be asking is: should I?

There are a few things you might need to consider before playing an event you're judging:

- How many calls are you expecting? The size of the event and the number of other judges on hand will influence this.
- Do you have other responsibilities? Are you also acting as Scorekeeper, dealing with pairings, and so on?
- What's the tone of the event? Is it more competitive? Do you know the players?

The larger and more complicated the event gets, the less likely you are to be able to play while still managing the event. While your 8 person FNM will be fine, your 50 player pre-release will likely require at least one dedicated judge who isn't participating in the event.

## Playing Your Matches

Each round, when you sit down with your opponent, explain that you're judging this evening and might be called away. They'll likely already know this, especially if you're playing in your local community, but newer players in particular might have questions about judges. It's important to tell them that, if you're called away, you'll be giving an appropriate time extension.

You should be polite, approachable, and a generous opponent - Regular REL tournaments are more casual and are an opportunity for education, and as a tournament official, you should embody that. This is not to say you should be deliberately losing games or making mistakes, but consider reminding your opponent of their triggers and/or allowing them to take back actions, particularly if they're a new player.

## Taking a Call

Sometimes you're going to get called away by another table, which will, unavoidably, be disruptive to your game in progress. Clarify with your opponent what the current game state is (for example: "we're in your main phase, with that creature on the stack"), and remind your opponent that a time extension will be given if necessary.

After you take the call, thank your opponent for their patience and re-clarify the state of the game, and give any required time extension, then get back into it. Most players will be understanding.

If you're in a position where you have to take a lengthy call - a long investigation or to deal with some disruptive behaviour - you might want to consider conceding your match in progress. This is a very uncommon occurrence, and it'll feel bad for you as a player, but is likely the best approach *for the tournament*.

## Problems at your own table

If you have a problem at your own table, navigating your role as judge and as player becomes much more difficult. It is important to not only maintain your impartiality, but the *appearance* of impartiality - players perceiving you as neutral is vital for their experience and for the integrity of the tournament.

The best way of dealing with a call at your own table is to not deal with it. If there is another judge on hand, call them. Explain politely to your opponent that you're calling a judge not to punish them but to help rectify the situation. Interacting with judges is often intimidating for players at the best of times, which means interacting with *two*, one of whom is their current opponent, requires treading lightly.

If you're unable to call another judge, navigating the situation becomes more complicated. Often a player will (reasonably) be averse to asking questions that reveal cards in their hand or their strategy to their opponent, or perhaps they might be sceptical of rules questions or rulings you give that are seemingly in your favour.

The first issue can be addressed if you have a player in your local community who you trust to give accurate answers to rules questions. You can tell your opponent to ask their question that reveals important information to that player rather than to you.

The second issue is addressable through being very clear with your reasoning and offering to provide appropriate excerpts from policy and rules documents. Taking a minute to show your opponent the gatherer page for a card, or a portion of the Judging at Regular document, can help smooth over any concerns.

Be polite, clear, and patient when dealing with any issues. It's even more important than normal to make it clear that your ruling is not done on a whim and that you have policy and rule backing for your decisions. If your opponent has made bad gameplay actions based on their misunderstanding of the rules, consider offering to rewind the game if it's plausible in the current situation.

## Conclusion

The vast majority of judges will judge Regular REL events in which they play at some point - it is the most common place for a judge to start, after all. The vast majority of the time you'll have a great evening with very few issues, play some fun games, and contribute to the play and tournament experience of the players there. On the off-chance you do have issues, remember your responsibility to the tournament and to the community is more important than your in-match success.