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Beyond the Total Score: Limits to Compensation Between Dish Criteria

A proposal by Ahmad Issam Maadarani for reading a performance profile before reducing it to a number

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Two dishes may receive similar totals despite radically different strengths and weaknesses. This article distinguishes criteria the task permits to compensate for one another from requirements excellence elsewhere cannot replace. It offers no universal weights or ready-made thresholds: it examines scores under declared rules while keeping the performance profile visible alongside the total.

1. Totals contain a hidden decision

Adding flavour, texture and presentation scores accepts that excellence in one criterion can offset weakness in another by a specified amount. This may suit a task concerned with overall experience and fail a task requiring a particular skill. The total cannot be understood without its compensation policy. A weight is not justified merely because it is

familiar or produces an attractive table; it must relate to what the assessment promises to reward.

2. The performance profile as an explanatory unit

Describe the dish through a profile identifying each criterion, performance description, score where rules provide one, and relationship to the brief. A high score alone does not locate success, and a low one does not identify what to repair. The profile separates overall experiential quality from achievement of a particular technical requirement. When a scale is merely ordinal, addition does not turn it into a physical measure of quality. The total is then a conventional index governed by rules, and should be identified as such.

3. Three relationships between criteria

The first is permitted compensation within the task, such as accepting limited variation between presentation styles achieving the required experience. The second is a declared minimum requirement, met only by achieving a specified performance description. The third is a descriptive criterion informing feedback without determining rank. Do not move criteria between these types after seeing results, or turn every aspect into an exclusion condition: too many conditions can obscure the task or penalise different styles. Safety procedures remain outside inference from taste alone.

4. A hypothetical calculation exposing policy

Suppose a task uses a conventional zero-to-ten scale with declared weights: flavour 50%, presentation 30% and texture 20%. Dish A receives 9, 9 and 4, yielding an index of 8.0; B receives 8, 8 and 7, yielding 7.8. Addition alone ranks A first. If the task had already declared texture level 5 a necessary condition, A's total cannot satisfy that condition. These numbers illustrate rather than report tasting, and level 5 is not recommended for every dish. Neither ranking is proved universally better: each answers a different task.

5. Sensitivity: can the ranking bear its explanation?

When designing assessment, examine what happens to training-example rankings under alternative weights reasonably relevant to the task. This examines rule design; it does not permit changing actual results after announcement. Frequent reversals following small

changes indicate sensitivity to the chosen policy, not defective dishes. Examine reasons for weights, boundaries and scale descriptions before adoption. During competition, apply the published rule consistently and record limitations for a later revision.

6. A condition that does not become personal preference

A minimum condition requires a description of what must occur, how it is observed and the consequence of failure. “Excellent texture” is insufficient; “the component remains cohesive while the required bite is taken” is more understandable in a suitable task. Test descriptions against varied training cases and resolve ambiguity beforehand. Where rules permit re-examination, standardise its procedure. Conditions must not exclude unfamiliar dishes or introduce requirements absent from the brief.

7. A reviewable result report

Include the overall index where applicable, criterion profile, status of necessary conditions and rule resolving rank. Feedback follows the weakness's location, not merely the lower total. For example: “Flavour and presentation are high on this scale, but the specified cohesion requirement was unmet.” This preserves the dish's strengths while explaining the result. Close outcomes follow declared tie-breaking procedures without inventing precision exceeding the observations.

8. Conclusion: a number has no independent meaning

The proposal does not remove scores; it reveals decisions they compress. Totals work when compensation policy is understood and suited to the task. They mislead when concealing failure against a declared requirement or claiming absolute measurement. Showing the profile alongside the number clarifies the result and asks a foundational question: what may compensate, what must be achieved in its own right, and why?

9. A concise working sheet

Field	Review question	What to record
Scale	What do its numbers mean?	State when the total is a rule-governed conventional index.

Field	Review question	What to record
Profile	Where are strengths and weaknesses?	Show each criterion description beside its score.
Compensation	What may offset what?	Define policy before seeing results.
Condition	What must be achieved independently?	Describe observable performance and consequences of failure.
Sensitivity	Do alternative weights change case rankings?	Examine during design, without later changing competition rules.
Report	How was the result resolved?	Show total, profile, conditions and decision rule.

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