



Which referee skills do you like the most or the least?

Pre-Amble

Previous wpgrefs.com surveys have explored maltreatment, reasons why officials quit, the effect of Section 11, and why refs keep reffing. Wpgrefs' surveys have never asked officials to rank their enjoyment of different referee skills. Therefore, this survey sought to discover what skills officials enjoy.

Methods: The Survey

The survey was posted on wpgrefs.com between September 2024 and August 2025. It was advertised using social media and email blasts to the wpgrefs.com email list during the 2024-2025 season. The demographic items on the survey included location, experience, gender and age questions.

The skills surveyed were developed based on the skills covered in *How to referee hockey: it is not just about the rule book* (thehockeyrefbook.com). Survey participants were asked to rate different referee skills using a scale of very unenjoyable, unenjoyable, neutral, enjoyable, and very enjoyable.

Results

There were 48 respondents with the following characteristics:

- Experience: 7 respondents with 0-1 years of experience, 23 with 1-3 years, 7 with 4-6 years, 10 with 7+ years and 1 respondent selected "prefer not to disclose."
- Age: 13 respondents were 12-14 years old, 16 of 15-17 years, 3 of 18-23 years, 0 of 24 to 29 years, 1 of 30 to 35 years, 4 of 36 to 41 years, 8 of 42 to 47 years, 0 of 48 to 53 years and 3 of 54+ years old. None of the respondents selected "prefer not to disclose."
- Gender: 43 respondents identified as "male." 5 respondents identified as "female." None of the respondents identified as "other." None of the respondents selected "prefer not to disclose."
- Place of residence: 43 respondents lived in Winnipeg, 1 lived outside Winnipeg but in Manitoba, 3 lived outside of Manitoba but in Canada, 1 lived in the USA, 0 lived outside of the USA or outside of Canada. None of the respondents selected "prefer not to disclose."
- Role¹: 20 respondents identified as officials in the Two-Official System, 32 as a referee in the Three-Official System, 5 as a linesperson in the Three-Official System, 10 as an off-ice official, 5 as an officiating mentor, 3 as an officiating administrator and 3 as "other." Regarding "other," all 3 respondents identified themselves as either a liner or referee in the Four-Official System.

There were 32 skill items rated between very unenjoyable and very enjoyable. For each time that a respondent rated an item as:

¹ Respondents were permitted to select an unlimited number of roles for this survey item.

- “very unenjoyable,” that item was given a score of -2,
- “unenjoyable,” that item was given a score of -1,
- “neutral,” that item was given a score of 0,
- “enjoyable,” that item was given a score of 1,
- “very enjoyable,” that item was given a score of 2.

For example, consider an item that was rated 6 times as “very unenjoyable,” 21 times as “unenjoyable,” 16 times as “neutral,” 2 times as “enjoyable,” and 3 times as “very enjoyable”. That item’s Total Score would be equal to $(6 \times -2) + (21 \times -1) + (16 \times 0) + (2 \times 1) + (3 \times 2) = -25$.

Here is the table of tallies for each of the 32 survey items with the total score calculated as noted above for the example of -25.

Item	# of times item was rated as:					Total Score
	Very Unenjoyable	Unenjoyable	Neutral	Enjoyable	Very Enjoyable	
Being in the dressing room with other officials	0	0	14	17	17	51
Working with other officials to manage the game	0	0	3	25	20	65
Being part of the game	0	0	2	12	34	80
End zone positioning	1	0	4	26	17	58
Blue line positioning	0	2	12	21	13	45
Moving up and down the ice with the play	1	0	1	24	22	66
Dealing with altercations	1	5	19	11	12	28
Breaking up fights	1	5	18	15	9	26
Calling off-sides	0	2	12	22	12	44
Calling a goal	1	0	2	23	22	65
Stopping play for goalie covering the puck	0	2	18	16	12	38
Calling icings	2	3	13	19	11	34
Stopping play for puck out of play or unplayable	0	6	18	11	13	31

Item	# of times item was rated as:					Total Score
	Very Unenjoyable	Unenjoyable	Neutral	Enjoyable	Very Enjoyable	
Dealing with injuries	6	21	16	2	3	-25
Doing the line change procedure	1	3	23	10	11	27
Supervising the benches during the line change	1	2	21	14	10	30
Preparing the next face-off	1	0	13	22	12	44
Dropping the puck	1	0	8	16	23	60
Managing hotspots at stoppages	1	1	13	15	18	48
Creating presence at stoppages	1	0	8	22	17	54
Being aware of everything simultaneously at all times	1	2	11	18	16	46
Giving positive feedback to players for good play	1	0	7	18	22	60
Giving constructive feedback to players for bad play	1	2	17	17	11	35
Talking to coaches	1	9	17	10	11	21
Talking to captains	1	1	17	15	14	40
Ejecting coaches	12	15	18	0	3	-33
Calling penalties	0	5	21	13	9	26
Having responsibility for the safety and fairness of the game	0	1	8	24	15	53
Managing my calendar	2	3	15	17	11	32
Receiving feedback from mentors	1	0	8	16	23	60

Item	# of times item was rated as:					Total Score
	Very Unenjoyable	Unenjoyable	Neutral	Enjoyable	Very Enjoyable	
Giving feedback to other officials	1	2	21	14	10	30
The act of skating	1	2	21	14	10	30
Being in the dressing room with other officials	0	0	14	17	17	51
Working with other officials to manage the game	0	0	3	25	20	65
Being part of the game	0	0	2	12	34	80
End zone positioning	1	0	4	26	17	58

The above data was then ranked from highest Total Score to lowest. This ranking means that the skills higher on the list are considered more enjoyable than the items lower on the list.

Here is the order of skills from highest Total Score to lowest with Total Score in brackets:

1-Being part of the game (Total Score = 80)	9-Creating presence at stoppages (54)	17-Talking to captains (40)	23-The act of skating (30)
2-Moving up and down the ice with the play (66)	10-Having responsibility for the safety and fairness of the game (53)	18-Stopping play for goalie covering the puck (38)	26-Dealing with altercations (28)
3-Working with other officials to manage the game (65)	11-Being in the dressing room with other officials (51)	19-Giving constructive feedback to players for bad play (35)	27-Doing the line change procedure (27)
3-Calling a goal (65)	12-Managing hotspots at stoppages (48)	20-Calling icings (34)	28-Breaking up fights (26)
5-Dropping the puck (60)	13-Being aware of everything simultaneously at all times (46)	21-Managing my calendar (32)	28-Calling penalties (26)
5-Giving positive feedback to players for good play (60)	14-Blue line positioning (45)	22-Stopping play for puck out of play or unplayable (31)	30-Talking to coaches (21)
5-Receiving feedback from mentors (60)	15-Calling off-sides (44)	23-Supervising the benches during the line change (30)	31-Dealing with injuries (-25)
8-End zone positioning (58)	15-Preparing the next face-off (44)	23-Giving feedback to other officials (30)	32-Ejecting coaches (-33)

Discussion

Here are some observations about the ranking of the different skills:

- Within the top 8 skills, 2 are linked to moving with the play (“End zone positioning” and “Moving up and down the ice”). However, “the act of skating” does not appear until #23 that skating, itself, is not the same as moving with the play.
- Also, “Blue line positioning” appears at #14 showing that it is significantly less enjoyable than “End zone positioning.” This could be explained by a much larger portion of the sample identifying as a “referee in the Three-Official System” (32/48) than the portion who identified as a “liner in the Three-Official System” (5/48).
- It is not surprising to see “calling a goal” in the top 3. Goals are the most exciting part of the game and officials appear to enjoy calling them.
- “Dropping the puck” is also within the top 8. However, “Preparing the face-off” does not appear until #15 suggesting that the act of dropping the puck itself is enjoyable but the technical skill of preparing the face-off is less enjoyable.
- It is also interesting that positive interactions with others appears in the top 8 (“Working with other officials” and “giving positive feedback to players”). This contrasts with “giving constructive feedback to players” which appears at #19 suggesting that positive interactions are more enjoyable than interactions interpreted as not positive.
- This previous point about positive interactions also correlates with 6 of 8 items found in the bottom 8 of the rankings. Specifically, “Dealing with altercations”, “Breaking up fights,” “Calling penalties,” “Talking to coaches,” “Dealing with injuries,” and “Ejecting coaches” all skew towards being negative interactions and appear in the bottom eight.
- It is also noteworthy that “Talking to captains” scores in the mid-range at #17 with a score of 40 while “Talking to coaches” scores third from the bottom with a score of 21.
- The high position of “receiving feedback from mentors” suggests that officials have a desire to learn. Yet “Giving feedback to other officials” is ranked at #23. This suggests less desire to teach than learn. This may be the product of this sample having a larger proportion of younger officials. Perhaps, younger officials want to learn but do not feel they can teach yet.
- “Being in the dressing room with other officials” is #11 rather than closer to the top. This suggests that the camaraderie experienced by many officials is not universal or that younger officials do not experience that dressing room camaraderie earlier in their career.

Finally, it is important to note that this survey was limited by its high proportion of officials with fewer years of experience. This sample also has a limited number of respondents who identify as liners. It is possible that a sample of more experienced officials (or a larger sample of liners) will experience the enjoyableness of specific skills differently than the current sample.

Appendix: Unedited Miscellaneous Comments

These responses were made to this question: “Any other comments about the topic of ‘things you enjoy about officiating hockey’?”

- Refeing helps a ton in boosting confidence and is a great way to stay connected with the game of hockey when I'm not playing. I feel a sense of pride when I step on the ice as an official which I enjoy.
- More the less enjoying aspects of the game. Parents and coaches have made thing difficult this year - I have found they were very disrespectful to officials of ANY age and this can have a lasting effect on younger/inexperienced officials. Players are throwing around verbal insults - some resulting in MISC, GM, GrM - to each other and directly to officials
- I have found this year very frustrating to get scheduled for games. I sign up most weekends and have gotten about 1/3 of the games I received last year. I have not been able to develop my skills a much as I have wanted to and am considering quitting due to a lack of availability for me to officiate.
- I referee because it's good exercise, I enjoy building relationships with the players and coaches and other officials. I do it because I love hockey and want to make sure the game is fun, fair, and safe so everyone enjoys it, but mostly so the kids continue to play year after year and want to get involved to give their children the same fun experience when they are adults.
- Regarding the final question- I would add as long as my basic expenses were covered. I just love the smell of the ice and back in the game sense I no longer play hockey. I just love it!!
- Everything about it makes me enjoy hockey, I gotta work on stress management as a referee, especially with heated coaches, but other then that I find officiating life fulfilling, I know there are nit picky details that I can work on. But I don't mind that, I'm learning, I'm developing my skills & knowledge, I was gone for more then a season, but being back on the ice has improved my mental health drastically, it feels like I'm apart of something again, which I am.
- A great opportunity to be involved in the hockey community without playing
- Enjoy the training as it better prepares for next level
- Gets you involved in a way that doesn't have to be playing hockey, still feel the sense of community
- I enjoy reffing hockey very much. I enjoy the exercise and all aspects of being a ref.
- So far I have been loving reffing
- I love the perspective and appreciation for the game that it's given me. I'm 46, so I grew up with an "old school" mentality that all refs were idiots. Turns out, that I was the idiot. Refeing has completely changed my outlook on the game and has increased my enjoyment of EVERY game I'm at as either a spectator, official, or participant.
- Meeting new people
- The comradery between other refs.
- One of the least enjoyable parts to a hockey game for me, is when a fellow official doesn't know the rules, and it affects the game negatively. This can be the misapplication of a rule, or straight up making something up that is not in the rules.
- I ref because its a job and its nicely available. It's not like I have a passion for reffing it's just something I do and I'm alright with that.
- staying active, being challenged physically and mentally.
- I enjoy the exercise while reffing and giving back to the community. I always wanted to Ref hockey and enjoy it very much.
- Refeing helps a ton in boosting confidence and is a great way to stay connected with the game of hockey when I'm not playing. I feel a sense of pride when I step on the ice as an official which I enjoy.
- More the less enjoying aspects of the game. Parents and coaches have made thing difficult this year - I have found they were very disrespectful to officials of ANY age and this can have a lasting effect on younger/inexperienced officials. Players are throwing around verbal insults - some resulting in MISC, GM, GrM - to each other and directly to officials

