



Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2021

## JOE FUGATE PROPOSES A WAY TO TRACK YOUR OPERATING CREW SENIORITY ...



**OVER THE YEARS ON MY SISKIYOU LINE 1**, I explored a few “rules enhancements” to spice up an op session. One such system I considered I called my Seniority Rules system.

I reasoned that real railroaders build up seniority on the job so why not add something like that to my layout op sessions? And maybe that would add an incentive for folks to attend more op sessions and to be more aggressive in seeking op session tasks.

I never actually implemented this system, but I present it here as a proposal for others to refine and experiment with.

This system defines the role of each participant in a Siskiyou Line operating session. Seniority points get assigned or deducted based on completed assignments and rule violations. Keep in mind we’re doing this all in fun!

1. Just having ops crew members standing around doesn’t make for the most fun operating session. On my Siskiyou Line 1 layout shown here, I considered ways to “up the ante” during an operating session to encourage the crew to be more aggressive in pursuing op session tasks. Crew seniority tracking is one system I considered.

### SENIORITY POINTS

I outlined five seniority point levels for job assignments:

- 000-099 — Green / Trainee
- 100-199 — Switchman / Rookie engineer
- 200-299 — Seasoned engineer
- 300-399 — Conductor
- 400 or more — Foreman / Mentor

These point ranges define your “experience level” and “job rating” for the purposes of what layout assignments you can take on. You gain points by successfully completing various operating session tasks successfully. If you make mistakes, you can still get points, but they may be reduced by demerit points.

### JOB ASSIGNMENTS

Job assignments can be chosen based on seniority level points accumulated. Operators can take any job they have the seniority points to hold.

Crew members with a higher seniority have the first choice of an assignment when competing for the same assignment.

- 000-099 — Yard switchman (assist the Yardmaster).
- 100-199 — Engineer on through trains or in yard, crew on local trains.
- 200-299 — Conductor on through trains, engineer on local trains.
- 300-399 — Engineer/conductor on all trains, helper engineer.
- 400 or more Yardmaster, dispatcher, crew caller, or choice of assignment. Can also “qualify” Green crew members for a through train crew assignment.



2. I designed my Seniority rules to help crew members engage more and to remind everyone that not being attentive on a real railroad can lead to serious consequences. Hopefully this would add a bit more realism to the assignments, yet remain fun.

Note someone with the Foreman level (400+) can “temporarily promote” a crew member for any assignment up to 100 points above their level if the session is short-handed.

However, any demerits the “temporarily promoted” crew member gets will be doubled. So pay attention, real trains can be dangerous if you don’t stay attentive!

Alternatively, through trains can have just an engineer/conductor (300-399), with the extra crew position left unfilled if no one is available.

Local trains must always have two crew members or the train is annulled this session.

### HOW TO GET SENIORITY POINTS

Seniority points get awarded for the successful completion of these job assignments:

- +100 — Complete first green crew assignment successfully.
- +75 — Complete “temporary promotion” crew assignment successfully.
- +50 — Each yard assignment completed successfully.
- +50 — Each through train assignment completed successfully.
- +50 — Each local train assignment completed successfully.





3. Had I implemented my Seniority Rules, it would have been interesting to see if it would have added an incentive for guest operators to come back and earn more seniority points. There's nothing like some "gamification" to add to the challenge if your layout ops sessions seem to be getting too routine!

### DEMERITS

Here's where things started to get dicey. The main reason I never implemented my seniority points system is because I was concerned guest operators would be put off by the possibility of getting demerits.

It's hard enough to get folks to attend an op session, but to be called on the carpet for a boo-boo could be very off-putting. If I could make it clear demerits are all in fun, then it might work.

I recently realized I could have made it so only those with 100 or above in seniority points get demerits – in other words, green crew / trainees are expected to make mistakes!

Demerits get deducted for inattentive behavior and rules violations. The person or persons serving the named role(s) in brackets get the demerits.

Remember this is all in fun and intended to just remind us real railroading can be a risky business if you're not careful!

Demerits for various violations include:

- 10 — Delay another train by more than 30 fast minutes (5 actual minutes) [conductor]
- 10 — Negligent derailment [crew] or entering turnout with points thrown against you [engineer]
- 10 — Speed violation [engineer]
- 50 — Failure to heed dispatcher or yardmaster orders [engineer or conductor]
- 50 — Major derailment due to negligence (not due to equipment/track failure) [conductor, engineer, crew]
- 100 — Major accident that in real life would likely result in a "fatality" (judgment of the injured party) [conductor, engineer, crew]

### ADDITIONAL NOTES

A yard switchman assists the yardmaster by throwing turnouts.

Conductor (300+) gets choice of assignment: Can be engineer/conductor or crew/conductor.

Through trains with Engineer (200-299) ordinarily must also have a crew/conductor (300-399).

Green crew members (0-99) on through trains can only act as brakeman for the train and throw turnouts, they cannot be an engineer unless the train is also staffed by a Foreman level member (400+).

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4. At the end of the day, I believe an op session must first be about having a good time. If the seniority system can be set up such that it's all in good fun, then that's what really matters.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

As I mentioned, I never actually implemented this seniority system, however, I may explore using it on Siskiyou Line 2 with the proviso that green / trainee crew members don't get demerits unless they first agree that it's okay and all in fun. If you'd like to try it out or use this as a starting point for your own seniority system, please do so.

Tell us about how it goes!

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