

Learning Through 4-H Judging

“TO MAKE THE BEST BETTER” is the 4-H motto. How do we know what is best? How can we learn to make something better unless we learn standards and develop the ability to make wise decisions? Every experience that helps us make wise decisions enriches our life. Good judgment is based on proper information and ability to make wise decisions.

To present a broad scope of judging, we will answer five big questions in the following sections.

What is Judging?

Judging is making a decision and telling why it was made. Seldom a day goes by that you do not have decisions to make. When you buy groceries you must constantly choose between brands while considering quality, size, end use, and cost. How carefully we select the apples from a grocery shelf! Also consider the many decisions involved in the selection of an automobile! In 4-H, judging is essentially a matter of comparing two or more items. If 4-H members know what factors make up an ideal birdhouse, dress, or loaf of bread, they are more able to recognize top quality products, to know good standards, and to make wise decisions based on facts.

Why Have Judging in 4-H?

Judging is a valuable teaching technique for the 4-H leader. It provides another way for leaders to present project information to the 4-H members. Judging can be used by leaders to stimulate interest in a subject or as an incentive to motivate better work.

Judging teaches 4-H members to:

- Observe carefully
- Recognize good products, articles, animals
- Improve their own work
- Make wise selections
- Make their own decisions
- Express themselves clearly
- Appreciate opinions of others

When and How Does Judging Training Start?

Judging training can start as soon as project meetings begin. Successful judging depends on knowledge of the product or animal to be judged. With this in mind, it is easy to see that the basis for judging starts when the leader begins teaching members about the products they are making or growing. Judging training needs to come at the beginning of the projects so members may use this knowledge in selecting materials or animals for their projects. It would be a continuous learning process used often during the year.

Before 4-Hers can learn to evaluate or judge their products, they must know something about standards and quality. Members are ready to compare when they become familiar with the characteristics of a product, know the terms that describe it, and have some idea of what a good product really is.

Let's use circles as an example. Before deciding whether one is better than another, we need to know what a good circle is. This we learn by studying just one good circle. Now everyone won't agree exactly on just what a good circle looks like. Some might like brightly colored ones; others might like them very small. But all can agree on a basic characteristic, such as a perfectly round shape. At this point a person can use a scorecard to select the best looking circle.

Scorecards or score sheets are available in most of the 4-H project materials so members can study the characteristics of a good product. Other ways 4-Hers can study standards and quality are:

- **Read project materials.** Study and discuss facts in your project bulletins. List the important qualities mentioned.
- **Study pictures.** Use pictures from magazines to help members select desirable qualities. In some projects, like dairy cattle, you can get pictures made especially to teach judging.
- **Discuss sample products.** Have members bring samples of a predetermined item made or grown to a club meeting. Have them compare their items to the characteristics of a good product. Discuss ways they might improve their items next time.
- **Attend exhibit days.** 4-Hers may have an opportunity to watch a judge make his or her placings on exhibit day or at the fair. Encourage members to listen to the comments so they can understand how exhibit placings are made.
- **Take tours and trips.** Visit farms, stores, and processing plants. Ask the people in charge what they consider when judging their products.

How Do We Teach Judging Skills?

- **Study the Judging Criteria.** Before attempting to judge a product, study the scorecard that applies. Scorecards have been developed for many 4-H projects. If a scorecard does not exist, discuss major characteristics and the importance of each. It is not necessary to memorize the scorecard. Rather it is important to know which characteristics to compare and which are the most significant.
- **Judge One Article.** Use the information found on the score sheet and apply it to a product. Evaluating a single item or animal early in the project would be time well spent before setting up a full class.
- **Judge a Class of Four Items.** Remember judging is a comparative process. One product is compared to another under a given situation and the member must decide which is better of the two and tell why. When a decision is reached with the two, compare the top with the other two products. The next step would be to compare the two remaining products for second and third place.

By adding one additional product we have a “standard class” of four products. The process as outlined is continued to choose the best of the four products, which is second, third, and fourth. With four in a class, the decision making process is a little more complicated. Let’s consider ways of judging a class of four.

- **Analyze the entire class from a distance.** Look for something that stands out — an easy top or bottom or maybe the class divides itself clearly into a top and bottom pair. This helps narrow the class and gives a mental picture that will help as reasons are given.
- **Examine the class at close range.** Your placing may be confirmed or changed by closer examination. Handle the products, if this is permitted, to help discover finer points of quality.
- **Make a final decision.**
- **Take notes to prepare for oral reasoning.**

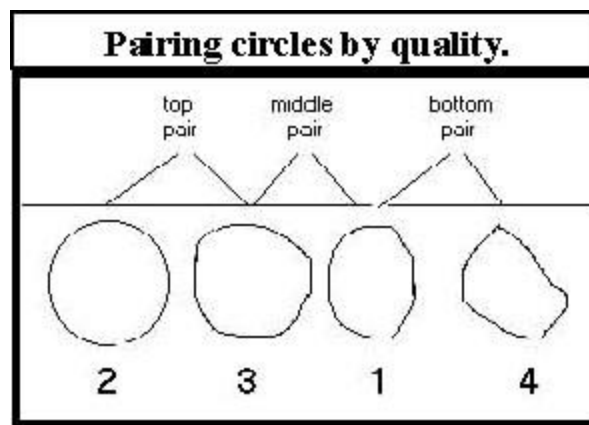
Giving Reasons

Giving reasons (why a class was placed a certain way) is probably more important than the actual placing. Giving reasons separates the lucky guessers from the good judges. Reasons can be oral, written, or both. Members probably learn more by giving reasons orally. If there is a limiting factor (such as time), written reasons may be given.

Giving reasons helps members to:

- Organize their thoughts
- Learn to express themselves in a logical, convincing manner
- Speak effectively
- Develop a system for analyzing a situation
- Think more clearly on their feet
- Improve their voices
- Develop their memories

Judging is comparing. When giving reasons, divide the class into three sets of pairs for comparison. For example, if the placing for the circles class is 2-3-1-4, the pairing would look like the figure.



How To Give Oral Reasons

Oral reasons are a way of telling someone why and how a class was placed. They include comparing the good points and the faults of a product. Beginning judges often may use a few notes, but more experienced members will want to talk from a mental image to logically and accurately defend the placing.

Taking Notes. It is impossible for anyone to remember all the details of a class; therefore, it is important to have members practice taking notes. Notes will help members recall the visual image of the product or animal. A class of four divides itself into three pairs--a top pair, a middle pair, and a bottom pair. Members should use a note-taking system that is simplest for them.

Members need to look for big things first, then judge the whole product and not just a particular part, keeping the scorecard in mind. Notes should be brief. Remind members to use them only during rehearsal time while they wait to give reasons.

The ability to effectively express oneself is an important quality. How well thoughts are organized largely influences how well the thoughts are understood by the listener. A system of presenting reasons that is logical, clear, and easy to follow should be used.

Since the class divides itself into a top, middle, and a bottom pair, the same basic procedure should be used to present each pair.

Style and Form... Have members introduce the class — “I placed this class of circles 2-3-1-4”.

Top Pair

- **General statement**—have members start with the most important general points for placing this pair. For example, “In the top pair I placed 2 over 3 because it is a more perfect circle.”
- **Compare**—have members continue to bring in details that will aid in their comparisons. For example, “Circle 2 was more uniform than Circle 3. Circle 2 was more free of irregular lines.”
- **Grants**—If the second place is superior in some respects, indicate the most important first. For example, “I will grant that 3 has a more uniform color.”

Middle Pair

- **General statement**— “In my middle pair, I placed 3 over 1 because 3 is more rounded than 1.”
- **Compare**— “Circle 3 is more uniformly shaped.”
- **Grants**— “I will grant that 1 has smoother lines than 3, but I criticize the oval shape of number 1.”

Bottom Pair

- **General statement**— “I placed 1 over 4 because it has smoother curves and more nearly approaches a circle than 4.” I placed 4 last and at the bottom of the class because it has sharp corners, uneven lines, and approaches a diamond shape rather than a circle. Therefore, I placed this class of circles 2-3-1-4.
- **Delivery.** Members should remember to speak clearly and convincingly when giving reasons. Avoid meaningless words such as “better”, “I like”, “that”, “it”, “for being”, “kind of”, and other words or phrases that add little to the reasoning. Use precise descriptions in telling the judge why one item is better than another. A summary or conclusion is usually not necessary. If members need one to let the judge know they are finished, they may simply state the placing. “Therefore, I place this class 2-3-1-4.” The form for giving reasons can be easily acquired by practicing in the project meeting and at home.
 - **When presenting reasons** to a judge, members should look at the judge at all times, talk at a rate of speed that is easily understood, and adjust their voice volume to the room or setting. A set of oral reasons in a judging contest should not exceed two minutes in length.
- **Remind Members** to arrive at all judging events with pencils, paper for note taking and a clipboard or notebook to write on. If they have questions about a class, ask the adult in charge.

Points to Consider When Judging Reasons

The following are points to be considered by the persons hearing oral reasons or reading written reasons. The percentage and breakdown are approximations and are intended to be used as guideposts.

Presentation (20%)

Oral: Clear, distinct voice, use of good English poise and confidence, eye contact with judge, posture, grooming (hair combed or brushed and neatly dressed).

Written: Legible, good English, correct spelling.

Knowledge of Subject (40%)

Recognized important differences, saw major strengths and weaknesses (the ability to determine the differences between pairs.)

Use of Appropriate Terms (25%)

Correct names and parts of idea or animals, proper comparative adjectives (differences between pairs.)

Organization of Reasons (15%)

Introduction (important statements first, small points at the end), logical order (comparison of class or pairs), conclusion. Except as it is reflected by a lack of knowledge about the subject, the reasons should not be marked down for having been based on an incorrect placing. Reasons should be considered on their own merit as independently of the placing score as possible.

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