



4-H Project Judging

4-H exhibit requirements and judging score sheets for Colorado State Fair can be found at <https://co4h.colostate.edu/program-areas/state-fair-information/>. These are also used by counties for their fairs across the state.

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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

What is 4-H Judging?

Participation in county and state fairs is an opportunity and privilege for 4-H members that helps them develop a sense of identity. Creating, sharing, exhibiting, and judging of projects helps members discover who they are and can inspire them in who they can become. In choosing to participate, they are asking for a competent adult to give their opinion regarding the quality of their participation in order to learn from judging feedback. Judging at fairs is a continuation of evaluation throughout the 4-H experience that may be done by:

1. members – as they complete each step and each article;
2. leaders – as they assist their members;
3. agents – working with leaders and members;
4. qualified judges – at contest days or fairs.

As a judge, you are a teacher, example, inspiration, as well as a developer of young people. Members, their parents, leaders, and the general public are more alert and attentive during evaluation than at any other time. What you do and say may be more important than what everyone else has said and done during the year. You have an important responsibility as a 4-H project judge!

Basic Judging Points

Regardless of who does the judging, there are some basic points to keep in mind to create a positive atmosphere for members:

1. The development of young people is the first consideration in 4-H.
 - a. Exhibits and activities are a means to an end – not an end in themselves. Nor do they illustrate all the learning that takes place.
 - b. No exhibit is so poorly done that it is not worthy of an encouraging comment.
 - c. Few exhibits are so well done that they cannot be improved.
2. Judging is done according to quality standards.
 - a. It is not a matter of personal taste or whim. Avoid personal preferences.
 - b. The standards are known by the 4-H members, leaders, parents, agents and judges.
 - c. The standards are based on learning experiences or skills learned in the project.
3. Judges are...
 - a. Evaluators who consider each exhibit in relation to the standards of quality for that exhibit. They evaluate on the basis of the results presented and not on the method used.
 - b. Coaches and mentors who use opportunities available to help exhibitors improve competence. This may include discussions with exhibitors or written comments on score cards. They judge the exhibit and the child's performance, not the child.



Judging Purpose and Philosophy

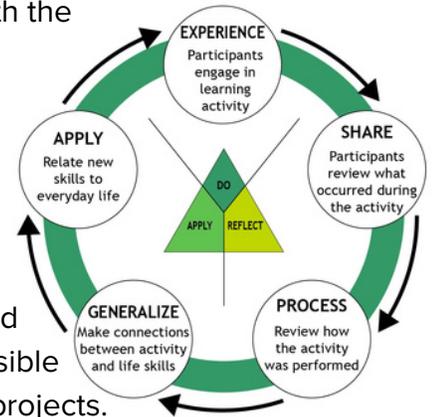
There are two major purposes for judging:

1. To evaluate the quality of a project or exhibit.
2. To contribute to the learning experience of the exhibitor.

Evaluating the project involves an objective appraisal of the exhibit. By using project specific score sheets, the exhibits can be evaluated in a uniform way according to certain standards. Contributing to the exhibitor's learning experience is equally important. This is achieved by personal contact with the judges or meaningful comments on the score sheets. Interview judging gives the member a chance to discuss the project or exhibit with the judge, ask questions about the evaluation and learn ways in which improvement can be made. Judging is helpful in the Reflect and Apply steps in the 4-H Experiential Learning Model shown here.

The following philosophy may be helpful in evaluating items:

« The person is the most important element in judging. The exhibit is a meaningful production of that individual. The reason items are evaluated is to help individuals learn all they can about what they have done, possible ways to improve, and to contribute to future learning experiences and projects.



« Don't depend on "rules." Sound reasoning is often a better guide. If there is a question about a technique used, consult the individual being judged or the instructions to determine why that specific method was selected.

« Evaluate actual results, rather than what might have been done. For example, in judging an article, evaluate the general skills utilized and the quality of work rather than saying the exhibit should have been completed by using another method.

« In your comments, explain the rationale for your standards and the value (weight) you are placing on various aspects of project display. Explain why some parts of the display are more important than other parts/aspects. Praise them for taking the risk to show their work!

« Specific comments for improvement should be given. Instead of saying, "This is not the right way," give suggestions such as, "A better way would be to..." or "You might want to try another method to see if it would work better."

« Answers to the following questions may help in making sound decisions quickly and easily:

- What is the general effect or appearance?
- What is the overall quality of workmanship?
- Are the techniques used suitable for the project?
- Where is improvement needed?
- Is there an appropriate degree of difficulty shown for the year of experience indicated?

Role of Agents/Superintendents

The superintendent or agent who is in charge of making arrangements with the judge should provide the following:

When contracting judges and prior to the actual day of judging the agent/superintendent should give specific information in regards to:

- Date(s) of judging
- Hours involved, including time expected to arrive for orientation
- Place where judging will take place
- Compensation for mileage, meals, honorarium or other expenses
- Specific project areas and classes to be judged
- Whether an individual is the sole judge for a project area or if there are other judges that will need to be consulted for final award designations
- Any special project requirements that the county may require
- Copies of the fair premium book or the project requirements from the state syllabus
- Information as to placing requirements such as how champions, etc., should be selected
- Availability of project manuals or other guidelines for the judge to preview to become better acquainted with specific project requirements

On the day of judging the agent or superintendent is responsible for:

- Providing a schedule of judging so the judge knows the amount of time allowed for each interview and when there are breaks in the schedule for lunch, use of the restroom, judges' consultation, etc.
- Making sure each judge knows who the superintendent or other helpers are and what their responsibilities are in assisting the judge
- Having exhibits ready (out of wrappers, boxes, etc.) so they are ready for the judge to look at
- Providing adequate seating and table space for the judge to visit with the 4-H members and also look at the exhibit in the best possible situation
- Having helpers to keep record of placings, to write comments on evaluation sheets, and attach ribbons to exhibits or present to exhibitor
- Checking in with the judge periodically to see if they have any questions or other needs
- Having vouchers or expense forms prepared for judges to complete



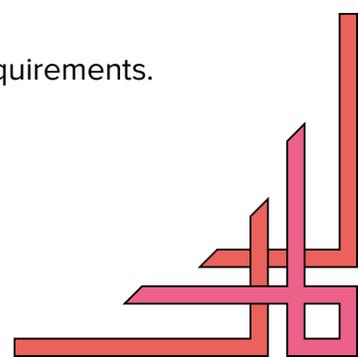
Expectations of Judges

BEFORE JUDGING

- Attend any scheduled judge's trainings when possible.
- Respond promptly to all invitations to judge and verify them by email.
- Be sure you have a complete understanding of fees, expenses, time, location, and number of classes you will be judging.
- Be familiar with the standards and requirements for the projects and exhibits or contests you will be judging. Thoroughly review the requirements before judging, so they are fresh in your mind.
- Understand the capabilities and personal likes of the age level that you will be judging.
- Keep up-to-date. Changes may have been made in project requirements each year.

DURING JUDGING

- Be well-groomed, rested, and maintain a good appearance.
- Be prompt. Report to the agent or superintendent upon arrival.
- Do not be a clock watcher. Be willing to judge later than you originally expected. Unavoidable delays may occur.
- Do not let delays or other scheduling problems affect your attitude.
- Have a sense of humor, but remember this is a serious event for the person who is being judged.
- Be tactful, welcoming, and concerned about the exhibitor and their feelings. Offer constructive criticism, keeping the educational value for the member foremost in mind.
- Keep from showing personal likes or dislikes, be consistent in your judging, and give members the benefit of the doubt.
- Make decisions quickly and firmly, but give the most attention to those at the bottom of the class who might need your help the most.
- Give "reasons" (basic points) for the decisions you make and the placings you give, not "opinions." A clear explanation and factual statements are expected.
- Personalize remarks about the exhibit. Since members will compare what the judge told them, don't say the same thing to all members.
- Don't be afraid to consult the agent or superintendents to clarify exhibit requirements. No one person can have all the answers all the time.



DURING JUDGING CONTINUED

- Read the member's record book first, especially the story. Sometimes the story has information that may affect your decision. Look at the member's exhibit. Also notice the member's age as this should be a consideration when judging. The average time spent looking over the books should be about five minutes.
- When you are ready, interview the child concerning his/her project. Please do not tell the child of your placing decision. You may look at the project more in depth when the child is not present.
- Judge's are asked to make written comments on the comment sheets. Begin with a positive or constructive comment. You may want to change your comment sheet if you change your placing. The Judges Assistant can write comments for you or you can write comments for you or you can write your own. Do not check everything outstanding if you give a red ribbon.
- Judges may ask for clarification of rules, copies of manuals, etc., but should not ask for advice from Judges Assistant or runners. If you need judging help, confer with Superintendent or Extension Agent.
- Records may be in pencil, pen or typed. Do not be influenced by too many pictures or padding of records.
- In choosing the unit champion and reserve champion, consider the blues. The top exhibit in each unit represents that county at the state fair. All awards are based on merit. There are not automatic awards.
- Before you leave, fill out a judges evaluation and a judges voucher.
- Check with your Judge Assistant to make sure everything is finished. Please do not discuss exhibits with assistants.
- The interview is not to be graded or reflect on the project awards because interview judging is not required and is provided as a learning experience for the exhibitor. Projects can be judged without an interview with the member.

AFTER JUDGING

- Leave a list of suggestions for improvement for the judging process with the superintendent or agent.
- Make a summary of what you observed in exhibits during the judging process, such as problem areas that you repeatedly observed. This information can then be passed on to leaders who work in the project areas.
- Do not take stories from from one county fair to another.
- Ask for feedback and determine how you might improve in the future.



Types of Judging

Interview: This is when the judge and the exhibitor are alone for a one-on-one discussion of the exhibit.

Open: This is when the judge can have an open critique before a group about the exhibit. The exhibitor may or may not be present. More than one person benefits from the discussion in this instance.

Closed: This is when the building is closed and only officials are allowed in the area until the judging is completed.



Score Sheets and Comments

« While judging, judges and clerks record any beneficial comments for the exhibitor. The written critique gives valuable information to the exhibitor about the qualities desired and standards used for judging.

« You will find many variations in counties across Colorado in procedures for judging. Rules and regulations should be checked with Extension agents and committees handling the judging.

« Do not assume you know what counties require and what you should do. ASK and BE SURE! This may promote happiness for all concerned.

Danish Ribbon System

There is no magic formula for the number of blue, red or white ribbons to be given. Quality measured against product standards and fulfillment of exhibit requirements determine the rankings. A summary of the standards for each ribbon is:

BLUE: Meets or exceeds product standards and meets exhibit requirements; overall, the work is of high quality.

RED: Meets minimum product standards and exhibit requirements; overall, the work is of average quality.

WHITE: Serious or considerable deficiencies in meeting product standards and/or exhibit requirements.



American Ribbon System

This is a rank-order system in which exhibits are placed 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. There may also be special categories such as top of class, best of show, parade of champion, etc.

While the American system uses product standards and fulfillment of exhibit requirements, it also uses the idea of competition among exhibitors to establish the rankings. Check with each county prior to judging to clarify their interpretation of this system, as well as all placings you will be required to make. Remember that ribboning systems will vary from county to county!



Suggested Interview Procedures

ASK QUESTIONS: The questions you ask should test the understanding of the “whys” as well as the “hows.” By asking questions and encouraging active participation in the interview discussion, you will gain a better understanding of the exhibitors and their skills and levels of ability. Offer the person an opportunity for some “self evaluation” by asking them about their strengths, weaknesses, and areas in which they had difficulty.

ACCENT THE POSITIVE: Find something nice to say. By complimenting something favorably that stands out at first glance, you add to the informational atmosphere you are trying to set, as well as making it easier to point out ways of improving the project or item. Praise should be sincere and in line with the achievement.

PUT THE EXHIBITOR AT EASE: Take time to talk with the people and not at them. A two-way conversation will add to the exhibitor’s learning experience. Ask a little about the person and the things they like to do; perhaps ask, “What new things did you learn?”

Try to choose pleasant surroundings that are free from noise and interruptions. Help the person feel at ease by greeting them warmly and conversing in a friendly manner.

Find out how the individual feels about the exhibit. In what way does the person feel the exhibit has been successful or unsuccessful. What did you like least about the item? Where did you get your help? Remember to be a good listener and be interested in why the exhibitor did what they did. You may even learn something new. Allow time for the exhibitor to ask questions. They may have some excellent ideas of their own for improving on the work they have done.

Suggested Interview Procedures

Continued...

EVALUATE EACH ITEM AND EXHIBITOR AS AN INDIVIDUAL. You are not comparing this individual and their effort against the others you will evaluate. You are evaluating each as an individual and their skills and abilities by what is shown. Try not to allow your personal preferences or tastes to influence your evaluation. Naturally, you will be using your own knowledge to evaluate, but because you do not like a certain color or item does not mean that it may not be attractive to some individuals. Guard against accepting everything as being successful. Consider individual capabilities when deciding on the results of a project.

BE CONSISTENT IN YOUR EVALUATION OF TECHNIQUE(S). Explain why certain techniques are or are not appropriate for various items, media, etc. Don't consider only one technique or method as being acceptable.

BEGIN AND END THE EVALUATION WITH A POSITIVE APPROACH. Find something about the exhibit that is successful and compliment the person. Help the person to discover what could be done to improve the exhibit. Try to inspire future work.

HELP THE PERSON TO ANALYZE HIS OR HER WORK. Help the member to analyze his/her own work and plan so that each successive venture will be more successful than the last. Try not to be as concerned with small details as you are with the exhibit as a whole in relation to each individual.

REMEMBER: Learning occurs when an individual knows, understands, and recognizes their strengths and weaknesses in what is being evaluated. Help the exhibitor to feel pride and accomplishment in their work. Indicating that something was done poorly will not help as much as taking the time to make a few suggestions as to how and why something can be corrected. A clerk may do this for you. The development and growth of the person is a result of working with the project and is more important than the methods used or the results achieved. Try not to be concerned as much with small details as you are with the project as a whole in relation to each individual member.



Questions for Interview Judging

The following questions may include some that the judge would use in an evaluation session with a 4-H member.

1. How much experience did you have before you started this project?
2. What did you like most about the project?
3. What did you like least about the project?
4. What did you do for the first time in this project?
5. Who helped you decide what your project would be?
6. Where did you get help?
7. What new things did you learn?
8. How will you use what you have learned?
9. What would you like to learn next?
10. Would you do anything differently?
11. How do you feel your project could be improved?
12. Did your project turn out as you planned? If not, how did it differ?
13. Did you have any trouble with your project?
14. What do you plan to do with your project after this exhibit?



Summary

Judging is a significant part of many 4-H experiences. It is intended to be a positive part of learning for the 4-H member. Judging a 4-H exhibit or display brings attention to only part of the total 4-H learning process and opportunity. It is important to focus on the total 4-H program by helping participants recognize the many facets of the program. Youth and adults gain through the many accomplishments and achievements that occur throughout the total 4-H program and year. Thank you for investing your time in the growth of 4-H youth!