



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

COLORADO 4-H HORSE JUDGING CONTEST

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Rules and Regulations for 4-H Horse Judging Contests

Contestants and Eligibility

1. Teams may be selected by any procedure which a county or area deems appropriate. It is recommended that selection procedures, in writing, be made available to all interested parties and participants.
2. At the Colorado State 4-H Conferences State Senior Horse Judging Contest, contestants must have past their 14th birthday and be no older than 18 as of midnight December 31 of the previous calendar year.
3. Contestants must be enrolled in 4-H in the county or area they represent or combined in accordance with state 4-H policy prior to April 15 of the current year.
4. At the Colorado State 4-H Conferences Horse Judging Contest 4-H members may compete as individuals from counties that do not have full (3-4 members) judging teams and are eligible for individual awards only. Individuals must be properly entered in the contest.
5. Contestants in 4-H competitive events (in state or national) must not have participated in official post-secondary (university, college, junior college or technical school) competitive events, of a similar nature in the same subject matter area to be eligible for participation in 4-H/National 4-H competitive events. Neither can that individual be a member of a post-secondary team undergoing training in preparation for a post-secondary event of the same nature. For example, a contestant who has competed in an official collegiate horse judging contest, either on or off campus, is ineligible to compete in a similar National 4-H horse judging contest. Similarly, they cannot be enrolled in a corresponding class i.e. Horse Judging or Evaluation class.
6. Alternates will be eligible to judge for individual awards.
7. Teams and individual members of that team, who have competed at the National 4-H Contest (National Western Roundup and Horse Classic), as the official Colorado 4-H representative entry will be allowed to compete as members of teams or as individuals at the state contest and be eligible for prizes/awards however the team members/individuals which



represented Colorado at the National Western Roundup and Horse Classic are considered to be ineligible to represent Colorado again at the National 4-H Contest (National Western Roundup and Horse Classic). Should a team with members who have represented Colorado at the National 4-H Contest win state again or place high enough that the opportunity is passed to them, those members may not participate on the team entered in the National 4-H Contest. Members of the team that have not used their eligibility to compete at the National 4-H Contest may compete providing the team entered meets the substitution for national contest policy requirements (see State 4-H Policy Document). In the event the team cannot meet the substitution requirements the opportunity to represent Colorado shall be passed on to the next team that meets the above outlined criteria. Further, teams or individuals who win a state competition in more than one contest area may continue to compete in the contest area(s) in which they did not represent Colorado at the 4-H National Contest. At County Contests it is at the host county's discretion as to how eligibility is handled. The State Champion Team from the State 4-H Contest is expected and encouraged to represent Colorado 4-H at one of the National 4-H Contests (Eastern or Western or both) providing they meet that contest's eligibility requirements). Western Nationals takes place in January of the following year, in Denver (Western Roundup) but it is not required. Colorado 4-H members may compete at Eastern National Horse contests in Louisville KY but are subject to that contest's eligibility rules and qualifications. If the State Champion does not choose to compete at the Western National 4-H Contest, the opportunity will be offered to the second-place team. If the second-place team declines to represent Colorado at the National 4-H Contest, it will then be offered to the third-place team. If the third-place team declines, it will not be offered to any other teams and Colorado will not be represented in that contest. Should the second or third place team choose to accept and go on to represent Colorado State at the National 4-H Contest, the previously outlined ineligibility rules will apply to that team/individuals representing Colorado at the National 4-H Contest for that specific activity.

Method of Conduct

1. A team may have three (3) or four (4) members; when four (4) are entered, the three (3) highest overall scores will be used for the team totals.
2. Contestants shall wear no clothing, accessories or other marks of identification which may reveal his or her identity or the county or club represented while giving oral reasons. Hats are prohibited in the judging arena and in the reason's rooms.
3. While the contest is in progress, there shall be no conferring between the contestants or between contestants and anyone else, except as directed by the contest superintendents or their representatives. The use of cell phones or other mobile electronic devices is prohibited during any part of the contest.
4. Contestants are responsible for their own writing instruments and notepads for the purpose of taking notes for reasons classes. There will be no prohibition against contestants using pre-printed score sheets and rule books during the contest. However, reasons should be given without notes. The use of notes while giving reasons will be penalized.



5. Two (2) to six (6) halter classes will be judged. The following breeds may be represented in the halter classes: American Saddlebred, Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred (Hunters), Appaloosa, Arabian, Paint, Morgan, Tennessee Walkers, Draft Breeds and/or Miniatures and so forth. Contestants will give oral reasons on one or two halter classes. All halter classes will be judged as sound of limb, eye, wind, mouth and reproductive organs.
6. Four (4) to eight (8) performance classes will be judged. The performance classes will be chosen from Western Pleasure, English Pleasure, Hunter Under Saddle, Hunt Seat Equitation, Saddle Seat Equitation, Pleasure Driving, Western Riding, Reining, Western Horsemanship, Show Hack, Hunter Hack, Trail, Showmanship, Ranch Riding and Working Western Rail or other Ranch Horse Division classes. Oral reasons will be required on one (1) to three (3) performance classes. Officials may excuse any horse from a class if they deem it to be lame. In this event, the excused horse should be placed last on the contestant's card. The remainder of the class will continue to be judged once the lame horse has exited the arena.
7. In order to prepare our members for future contests outside the state of Colorado as well as collegiate judging, classes will be judged or scored in accordance to the appropriate/applicable current rule book i.e. AQHA, USEF or NRHA. AQHA Rule Book will be the default rule book for all Stock Breed Classes except for Reining.
8. The horses and attendants will be designated by numbers 1-2-3-4, as viewed from the rear.
9. Horses will not be handled by the contestants. The opportunity for close inspection will no longer be provided in halter classes. All horses in halter classes will still be observed at a walk and trot.
10. Fifteen (15) minutes will be allowed for the contestants to judge halter classes.
11. The number of reasons to be given is at the discretion of the contest management. Typically, seniors give 2-4 sets, while juniors give 1-3 sets at the various county contests. At the State 4-H Horse Judging Contest, seniors will give four (4) sets of reasons and juniors will give three (3).
12. Two (2) minutes will be allowed contestants to give oral reasons to the judge. They may or may not be timed, at the contest superintendent's discretion. If it is decided that reasons are to be timed, it must be announced prior to the contest and a timer provided for each reason's taker. When reasons are timed, penalties for going over time should follow the penalty scale outlined in the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association Handbook. Contestants are not permitted to use notes while giving reasons; placing cards may or may not be available to them, upon entering the reasons room, at the contest superintendent's discretion.



13. All tack and attire will be considered legal, providing it is used properly according to the current applicable Rule Book.

Contest Superintendents

1. It shall be the duty of the contest superintendent(s) to see that all applicable rules and regulations are observed.
2. The superintendent may have a committee to assist them.
3. The superintendent will take no part in scoring the contestants.
4. The superintendent shall have charge of all records and shall have all placing cards scored, tabulated, and totaled. Reasons scores shall be tabulated appropriately. It is recommended that the superintendent keep all placing cards, records, and results for a minimum of one year, following the contest, so that they may be referred to, if necessary. At the state contest results should be kept on file for at least 6 years, so that contestant eligibility can be checked accurately.
5. After the contest officials have submitted placing cards, they (the officials) will recommend cuts for each class on the official placing. The superintendent can accept the recommended cuts or under certain circumstance request the officials to consider adjusting them.
6. A written copy of the contest results, including official placing and cuts shall be provided to all coaches either immediately following the contest or within 5 business days and shall be held by management for one year after the contest for possible review.

Support Staff

Assistants, including announcer, group leaders, timer, gatemen, tabulators, and so forth, shall be directly responsible to the superintendent.

Judges/Officials

1. Classes will be placed in accordance with the rules of the current AQHA, NRHA, US Equestrian Federation rulebook or respective breed association rules, as applicable.
2. Each official shall place the classes independently of each other from the same vantage points as the contestants, while the contestants are viewing the same classes. The judges shall enter their own placings on their own placing card, indicate their suggested cuts and then file that card with the superintendent for final review and approval. Referee judges(s) may be used at the discretion of the superintendent(s). **Officials shall mark their cards independently, place the classes and turn in their individual placing card before conferring with other officials.**
3. **All reasons takers are expected to watch the class for which they are taking reasons.**



Determination of Ratings

1. Fifty (50) points shall constitute a perfect mark on placing, and fifty (50) points shall constitute a perfect mark on reasons.
2. Zero scores will be assigned in the following instances:
 - A. unmarked card
 - B. double marked card
 - C. unidentified card
 - D. failure to turn in a card
3. Priority order for breaking ties:
 - A. If tied for a division award in Halter or Performance, the contestants or team having the highest reason score in that division will be listed first. If tied for a division award in reasons, the contestant or team having the lowest overall placing score will be listed first.
 - B. If tied for individual or team overall award, the contestant or team having the highest overall reasons score shall be listed first.
 - C. If still tied for either (a) or (b) above, the contestant or team having the lowest score in placing reason classes shall be listed first.
 - D. If still tied, the contestant or team with the highest overall placing score will be listed first.
 - E. If still tied, the contestant or team with the highest single class reasons score will be listed first.
 - F. If contestants are still tied after the above, the oldest contestant or team shall be listed first.
 - G. Coin Flip will be the final means of breaking a team for champion or Reserve champion teams and/or high or reserve high individual.

Default Protocol for Teams to Compete in National Contests: Pending State Update in 2026. Currently QH Congress is the only national contest outside of national 4-H contests with limits on number of teams allowed from organizations.

Competing in National Contests

Winning teams participating in a national contest must include at least two of the original qualifying team members. For substitute participants check state policy for qualifications.

The State Champion Team from the state 4-H contest is expected (but not required) to represent Colorado 4-H at a National 4-H Contest (either Eastern or Western or both) of the following year, in Denver (Western Roundup). Colorado 4-H members **MAY** attend the Eastern National Horse contests in Louisville, KY but are subject to that contests eligibility rules. The high team may select two other national contests such as contests held by various breed associations. Please contact the contest organizers for further details and entry limitations. This team must designate the two contests they have chosen by July 1st of the year they win the state contest. The coach of the winning team is responsible to notify the State 4-H Office,



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the coach of the second-place team, the state 4-H Equine Extension Specialist and the State 4-H Contest Superintendent of their contest choices by **July 1st**.

The Reserve State Championship team from the state 4-H contest may represent Colorado 4-H at two National contests, after the State Champions have made their selection. The coach of the second-place team is responsible to notify the State 4-H Office, the coach of the third-place team, the state 4-H Equine Extension Specialist and the State 4-H Contest Superintendent of their contest choices by **July 10th**.

The third high team from the state contest may represent Colorado 4-H at one National contest after being notified of the intentions of the state champions and Reserve Champions. is responsible to notify the State 4-H Office, the coach of the third-place team, the state 4-H Equine Extension Specialist and the State 4-H Contest Superintendent of their contest choices by **July 15**.

4-H team coaches are welcome to take their teams to any National contest where there is no limit imposed by the contest on the entry of 4-H teams by each state. In any contest where the entries of 4-H teams are limited, the above protocol regarding eligibility must be followed. Only when a contest has not been selected by the first three placing senior teams at the state contest, may unranked or combo teams that did not submit intent to combine notices per state policy be entered to represent counties or the state as the Colorado 4-H Teams.

When considering out-of-state travel with junior 4-H members please check with your County Extension Agent on county and state policies.

Only the members of the team representing Colorado at the National 4-H Contest at Western Roundup can be affected by eligibility restrictions please see section on “contestants and eligibility” for clarification.

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