

## 4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

# Sharpen Your Judgment

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“To Make the Best Better” is the 4-H motto. How do we know what is best? How can we learn to make it better unless we learn standards and develop the ability to make sound decisions? Each experience that helps us make wise decisions enriches our lives. Good judgment is based on proper information and ability to make wise decisions.

To present a broad scope of judging, we will answer four big questions:

### What Is Judging?

Judging is making a decision and telling why you made it. 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 and cost in making a purchase. How carefully we select the apples from a grocery counter! 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 and deciding which is better and why.

The key to successful judging is having knowledge about the items to be judged. If 4-H members know what factors make up an ideal birdhouse, dress or loaf of bread, then they are more able to recognize a top-quality product.

### Why Have Judging in 4-H?

Judging is a valuable teaching technique for the 4-H leader. It provides leaders another way 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.

#### Value to 4-H Members

1. Teaches members to appreciate high standards.
2. Teaches members to observe closely.
3. Teaches members to develop their reasoning ability.
4. Teaches members to make sound and systematic decisions.
5. Teaches members to improve their own work.
6. Teaches members to develop the ability to concisely express thoughts.

### When 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



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basis for judging starts when the leader begins teaching members about the product 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 project.

## How Do We Teach Judging Skills?

Judging activities are teaching tools that can be used at 4-H meetings. For the younger member or for those inexperienced in evaluation, you might want to use the Voting Game or the Group Leader Method.

### Voting Game

The voting game is a good way to begin judging quality. Two samples of an item, labeled 1 and 2, are placed on a table. The leader reads each characteristic to be considered and members vote for either 1 or 2. When each characteristic has been voted on, the scores are tallied and the results announced.

### Group Leader Method

Judging in a group is another good way to learn. By working in a group, 4-H'ers gain confidence in their opinions. The group chooses a leader, but everyone works together. The group members discuss one article or a class of articles informally. The group decides how the article should be rated and discusses reasons for the choice. Members learn from each other, sharing in the success when the rating is correct and in the responsibility when it is wrong. The group leader makes notes and reports group decisions and reasons, emphasizing the important points and correcting any errors.

## Individual Judging

When members have become more skilled in judging, have them try it on their own. Steps they would take include:

1. **Study the scorecard or standards** – Before attempting to judge a product, study the scorecard that applies. If a scorecard does not exist, discuss major characteristics and the importance of each.

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.

Ways 4-H'ers can study standards and quality are:

- *Study scorecards or score sheets.*
  - *Read project materials* – Study and discuss facts in project books. List the important qualities mentioned.
  - *Study pictures* – Use pictures from magazines to help members select desirable qualities. In some projects, like poultry, 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.
  - *Attend exhibits or fairs* – 4-H'ers may have an opportunity to watch a judge make his or her placings on exhibit days or at the fair. Encourage members to listen to the comments so they can understand how placings are made.
  - *Make tours and trips* – Visit farms, stores and processing plants. Ask the people in charge what they consider when judging their products.
2. **Judge one article** – Use the information learned while studying the standards or 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.
  3. **Judge a class of four items** – Let's consider ways of judging a class of four:
    - *Observe* – Get an overall feeling of the class. Look for something that stands out – an easy top or bottom placing, or a class that divides itself clearly into a top and bottom pair. This helps narrow the class and gives a mental picture that will help when reasons are given.
    - *Examine and compare* – Check each item individually. Placing may be confirmed or changed on closer examination. Handle the products, if permitted, to help discover finer points or quality.
    - *Decide* – Make a final decision on placing of the items.
    - *Tell why* – Take notes to prepare for those classes that require reasons.



## Giving Reasons

Even if a 4-H'er places a class correctly, they won't learn much unless they know why they placed the products as they did and can easily explain their choices or give reasons. Being able to give reasons is perhaps the most important part of the judging process. Reasons may be given orally or may be written.

### How to Give Oral Reasons

Oral reasons are what we call telling someone why and how you placed a class, by 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.

1. **Taking notes** – It is impossible for anyone to remember all the details of a class; therefore, members should make a practice of taking notes. Notes will help 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. Encourage 4-H'ers to use a note-taking system that is simplest for them.

Look for big things first. Judge the whole product and not just a particular part – keep the score-card in mind. Notes should be brief. Use them as reminders of things to mention, and use them only during rehearsal time while waiting to give reasons.

The ability to effectively express one's self is an important quality. How well you organize your thoughts will largely influence how well you are understood by the listener. Use a system of presenting reasons that is logical, clear and easy to follow. Since the class divides itself into a top, middle and bottom pair, the same basic procedure should be used to present each pair.

2. **Style and Form** — These steps will help your 4-H'ers give reasons:

- a. **Opening Statement** – Give the name of class and order of placing. For example: "I placed this class of sweaters – 4123." Any extra comments may then be inserted such as, "I thought this was an obvious two-pair class."
- b. **Explanation** – This is most important.

*Top Pair* – General statement. Start with the most important general points for placing this pair. Tell why the top article was placed first and compare it with the one placed second.

*Grants* – If the second place is superior in some respects, indicate the most important first.

*Middle Pair* – Follow the same procedure as for top pair.

*Bottom Pair* – Follow same procedure.

- c. **Closing Statement** – Repeat the name of the class and order of placing. For example: "For these reasons, I placed this class of sweaters 4123."

Figure 2 shows a reasons worksheet you may want to use with 4-H'ers until they become familiar with the basic form for giving a set of reasons.

### Delivery

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 and phrases which add little to your reasoning. Use precise descriptions in telling the judge why one item is better than another.

When presenting reasons to a judge, look at the judge at all times, standing straight and still. Talk at a rate of speed which is easily understood. Don't talk too loud, adjust voice volume to the room or setting. A set of oral reasons in a judging contest should not exceed two minutes in length.

## Figure 2. Reasons Worksheet

CLASS NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PLACING \_\_\_\_\_

### I. OPENING STATEMENT

I placed this class of \_\_\_\_\_ (class name) \_\_\_\_\_: (\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_)  
(\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_). (Insert any extra comments about the class in general, such as, "I thought this  
was an obvious two-pair class.")

### II. EXPLANATION

#### Top Pair

In my top pair, I placed (\_\_\_\_) over (\_\_\_\_). (Tell why) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I grant that (\_\_\_\_) was \_\_\_\_\_ than (\_\_\_\_). However,  
I criticize (\_\_\_\_) and place it second because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

#### Middle Pair

In my middle pair, I placed (\_\_\_\_) over (\_\_\_\_). (Avoid saying circle, steer or skirt –  
just use numbers.) (Tell why) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I grant (\_\_\_\_) over (\_\_\_\_) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.  
However, I criticize (\_\_\_\_) and place it third because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

#### Bottom Pair

In my bottom pair, I placed (\_\_\_\_) over (\_\_\_\_) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I grant (\_\_\_\_) over (\_\_\_\_) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.  
But I criticize (\_\_\_\_) and place it last for these reasons: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### III. CLOSING STATEMENT

For these reasons, I placed this class of \_\_\_\_\_  
(\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_).

## 4-H Competition Sportsman's Motto

*"Keep your head when you win and your heart when you lose."*

Sometimes leaders and members may dislike the way a judging activity is handled or a judge's decision. It is important to try to be fair and reasonable. Keep in mind judging is not like scientific testing:



- Even experts sometimes disagree.
- Standards change as research helps us get improved practices and products.

4-H members should:

- Play fair.
- Respect others' rights to their opinions.
- Keep an open mind.
- Be willing to try again.

JUDGING is selecting by comparing.

JUDGING is a daily experience.

JUDGING is a way of learning.

JUDGING is a way of teaching.

JUDGING CAN BE FUN AND CHALLENGING.

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