

GIVING REASONS

While a major emphasis in a 4-H and FFA horse judging program is placed on students learning to evaluate horses objectively, equal importance is placed on students learning to discuss and defend judgments rendered in the process of placing a class of horses. The combined process of placing horses, then defending those placing, teaches students to be totally objective, honest and fair in their approach to evaluating horses. Further, this process of giving reasons discourages student judges from rendering opinions which may be based on personal likes and dislikes, and encourages them to make defensible judgments in regard to current standards in the horse industry.

Another major purpose for giving reasons in judging contests is that it offers an opportunity for students to learn how to think, organize thoughts and speak about those thoughts in a refereed environment. Students who master those skills find them useful in many ways for the rest of their lives. Many leaders in agriculture, business and industry had judging team experience, and they frequently point to the reasons process as significant in developing leadership abilities.

Giving reasons should be a positive, pleasant learning experience for students. Students should be encouraged, not discouraged, when giving reasons and they should gain confidence in themselves through practice. Performance in the reasons room by students who are prepared should be evaluated from a positive view, rather than a negative view, giving every advantage possible to students who do a good job. Reasons judges should never use a negative, penalizing “fault out” system for scoring reasons. Reasons judges should be positive. Their actions toward students and their scoring method should reflect a positive approach.

Before most students, and even experienced judges, are able to give an effective set of reasons, it is necessary for them to spend considerable time learning the anatomy of the horse and proper terminology. Then they must gain experience. In order to give a competent set of reasons, it is necessary to train the mind to absorb and retain a mental image of the good and bad characteristics of a horse. The judge must develop a vocabulary based on current industry terminology that will enable him/her to state these points accurately, concisely and effectively.

In learning to give a good set of reasons, a judge develops the following skills:

1. The ability to make a decision after weighing all points of consideration.
2. The ability to present and defend a decision.
3. The ability to stand and speak with confidence to a group of people or an individual.

Rules and reminders for giving a set of reasons in a judging contest:

1. Learn to *visualize* the animals. Do *not* read your notes in the reasons room. If the contestant attempts to memorize his/her reasons, they will take a chance of forgetting what they want to say and freeze mid-reasons.
2. Talk in a *slightly* louder than ordinary voice. Be confident and enthusiastic, but do not shout. When contestants shout in a reasons room, they can appear overbearing and become un-conversational.
3. Stand approximately six to eight feet in front of the reasons-taker.
4. Always start your reasons by giving the class name and your placing, followed by the reasons why you placed the class.
5. Be sure to *compare* each animal to the one you placed below. Simply stating that a horse was a “good looper” will not accurately describe the qualities of the horse. There are many definitions of what a good looper is and thus could lead to a differing opinion. See #6 and #7 for a more in-depth description.
6. Use *comparative* terminology. Note: Most of the terms used are adjectives ending in “er,” like heavier, taller, wider, deeper, etc., or the word “more” prior to a descriptive term. The only time superlative terms may be used is when describing the first- or last-place animal. (Superlative terms end in “est,” like tightest, longest, shortest, etc.)
7. *NEVER* use indefinite terms, such as better, good, nice, best, etc., which explain nothing about the class, and do not compare one horse to another.
8. Proper *organization* is important. Follow the format set out later in this guide, and discuss each animal in a logical and systematic manner.
9. *Don't memorize* your reasons. Always think about the class and picture the animals in your mind.
10. Do *not* learn one set of reasons and apply it to each class. No two animals are alike, and each class differs greatly.
11. Big, fancy words are not important. Use *well-known* and *straightforward terminology* that is easily understood by the untrained horseman and accepted in the equine industry.
12. The *truth* about a class is the most important factor in giving reasons. Be accurate and do not make up points that were not true just to make your reasons longer.
13. There is *no substitute for accuracy*. (Reasons are scored approximately 75 percent on truth and accuracy and only 25 percent on organization and delivery.)

14. A set of reasons does not need to be long. A minute and a half should be sufficient if you are organized. *Two minutes are the maximum time limit* without penalty.

15. Always be prepared to answer questions concerning the class. If you can readily visualize the class in your mind, answering questions will be easy.

16. Train yourself to give a good set of reasons. To be able to give reasons takes practice. However, learning a format and flow makes it much easier. Here are some suggestions to improve your reasons:

- a. *Practice* giving reasons to other people.
- b. *Practice* writing reasons just as though you were speaking them.
- c. *Practice* giving reasons in front of a mirror.
- d. *Practice* your reasons using a video camera or a tape recorder to hear yourself.

17. *Look people in the eye* when you talk to them. This conveys confidence and conviction in what you are saying and is a more conversational method of communicating.

18. *Stand up straight*. Do not slouch, move around, or “speak” with your hands. Keep your hands in front of you or behind your back. You are making a presentation to an official and should give them proper respect.

Reasons should be accurate and specific, and proper terminology should be used to describe the individual horses. A good set of reasons should describe a class in such a way that someone listening to the reasons that have never seen the class can visualize the animals and “see” them in their mind.

The organization of reasons, or the “flow,” should unfold in a definite order. Although the organization should follow a definite pattern, each person giving reasons will develop an individual approach that is convenient to their way of speaking. A set of reasons should be comparative in nature, using a minimum of descriptive terms.

In addition, terminology within a set of reasons should vary and not appear monotonous due to a repetition of terms and expressions. Presentation, or delivery, is an important part of giving reasons. Oral reasons should be spoken in a pleasant and pleasing voice. They should be given in a convincing, confident manner with the utmost conviction, but they should never be shouted or given in an offensive manner. A good set of reasons should leave the official with a favorable impression of the reasons-giver. Remember, the maximum time for presenting a set of reasons is two minutes, so it is important to be concise and discuss only the factors that influenced your placing.

ORGANIZING AND TAKING NOTES

In competitive horse judging, students are often required to give reasons for their decisions several hours after they have placed a class. Therefore, it is necessary for students to take an adequate amount of notes on a class as they judge it.

Also, it can be helpful to circle large differences in animals, therefore highlighting and bringing them to attention. In the blanks next to each of the numbers, write the identification points (IDs) of each horse. These can be color, markings, blemishes or any distinguishing characteristics that help the students remember and describe each individual horse. Each person will probably develop his/her own method of taking notes, but the important thing is to get the essential facts into your set of notes. Many judges develop a type of shorthand, using abbreviations while taking notes, which save them time.

After taking notes, write your order of placement at the top of the page. You should make certain that this agrees with the placings you write on the card that will be turned in to contest officials. Also, make sure the proper class name and number are placed on the appropriate card and respective note page before turning the card in.

When preparing to give a set of oral reasons, use the notes previously taken on the class to prepare an ordered, concise set of reasons. The easiest way to set up a notepad to give a set of reasons is to take a page and write both the name of the class and your placing at the top of the page (Figure 1). Then, divide the rest of the page into a “tic-tac-toe” board or three columns and three rows. Each of the rows represents a “pair” of animals. In placing a class of the standard four horses, there will be three pairs. For example, if a class is placed 2-1-4-3, 2 and 1 are the top (initial) pair, 1 and 4 are the middle (intermediate) pair, and 4 and 3 are the bottom (concluding) pair.

At the top of the first column, write positive comparisons. In the positive comparisons box of each pair, write the number of the higher-placed horse over the number of the lower-placed horse. Next, write the IDs of each animal next to the numbers. You will need two blanks for IDs in your top pair, but only one blank for the lower-placed animal in the middle and bottom pairs. In the commendation boxes for each pair, write the reasons why the horse that was placed above in the pair excelled over the horse placed lower in the pair. At the top of the second column, write “Grants.” In these spaces go the characteristics that the lower-placed animal excelled over the higher-placed animal in the pair. This grid system allows the reasons-giver to organize his/her thoughts in a logical manner that easily translates into a set of reasons.

When an actual set of reasons is given, it should follow the exact flow described above. The critical points or criteria upon which you judged the class and the class name should be stated first, followed by the placing. Then, the student should describe the top pair, starting with the identification points, followed by the commendations of the first-placed horse, next by the grants of the second-placed horse, and finally by the faults of the second-placed horse. Next, the middle pair should be given in the same manner, followed by the bottom pair. Within the comparisons, grants and faults of each pair, there should again be a systematic order or flow.

By using this grid system for organizing a set of reasons, it is easier for the student to format the important facts in a logical manner without jumping from one animal to another throughout a set of reasons. It is easiest to describe in-hand or halter classes in the following manner: Each horse should be discussed front to rear, top to bottom, with movement being the last thing discussed.

By organizing each horse's description this way, the reasons-giver is "painting a picture" of each individual horse for the official. Furthermore, it is a consistent, logical format that is easy to remember and follow for both the reasons-giver and reasons-listener. Likewise, in a performance class without a pattern, each animal should be discussed in the following manner: First, describe how the horse carries itself, otherwise known as its frame, including the headset, followed by its quality of movement, rate of speed, consistency, transitions from different gaits, and finally, how it backs.

In a pattern class, each horse should be discussed in the order of the maneuvers of the pattern from start to finish. Again, as the maximum time for a set of reasons is two minutes, it is imperative to stress the important facts within a class and not get bogged down with details that did not affect the placing. Ideally, a set of reasons should be completed in 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 minutes.

Class Name :		Placing:	
Opening Statement:			
$\frac{1}{2}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color of horse and other identification that will help you remember the horse • Compare 1 over 2 	$\frac{2}{1}$ Grant of 2 over 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember, there may not always be a grant for a particular pair
$\frac{2}{3}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color of horse and other identification that will help you remember the horse • Why 2 beats 3 	$\frac{3}{2}$ Grant 3 over 2	
$\frac{3}{4}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color of horse and other identification that will help you remember the horse • Why 3 beats 4 	$\frac{4}{3}$ Grant of 4 over 3	

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD REASONS

1. **Organization:** Styles of reasons will vary with individual personalities and coaching methods, but all reasons should be well-organized and systematic. Within that framework, judges should score well-organized reasons similarly, with no preference given to individual style. The basic approach is the comparison of animals in three pairs: the top pair, the middle pair and the bottom pair. Other additions will be included and are perfectly acceptable as long as the basic organization is followed. However, reasons should not consist of a simple description of each animal. The focus should be on why one animal in a pair was placed over the other animal in that pair.
2. **Relevancy:** Reasons should reflect the actual differences in the pair and consist primarily of those points of comparison that were significant in the placing of the pair. Use of comparative or descriptive reasons that are irrelevant or unimportant in the placing of the pair are discouraged and should be scored lower. Judges should be alert to the so-called “canned” or pre-prepared reasons that may sound good, but, in fact, do not fit the particular points.
3. **Accuracy:** Truth is the primary consideration in scoring reasons. Students should be credited for accurate statements regardless of how the horses may be placed. Redundancy in terminology describing similar points of discussion between separate pairs of horses should be avoided. Errors of omission are to be considered when the student leaves out something important, but inaccurate statements are considered the major fault in a set of reasons. A complete and accurate set of reasons should receive a high score, even when placings differ from official placings. Official judges are cautioned to listen carefully for accuracy and should not penalize the reasons score simply because the student’s placing is different from the official placing. It is entirely possible for a student to receive a high reasons score with a low placing score.
4. **Terminology:** Some emphasis should be placed on use of terms commonly used to discuss horses or performances. Terminology will vary among students, but it should reflect terminology commonly used among horsemen. Major emphasis should be placed on comparative rather than descriptive terminology. However, descriptive terminology can be used to a limited extent in the opening statements and to describe faults.
5. **Presentation:** Oral reasons should be presented in a poised, confident, convincing manner, but they should never convey arrogance. Loud, boisterous, arrogant delivery is not desirable and should be penalized. Likewise, shy, timid, unconvincing presentations should not receive the highest scores. Reasons should be presented in a relaxed, conversational manner. The presentation should not contain lengthy pauses

and must be delivered within two minutes. Speaking manner will vary, but all students should use correct English. Oral reasons should be grammatically correct with proper pronunciation and enunciation of words and syllables. While good presentation is important, reasons judges are cautioned that this is not a contest of oratory at the expense of accuracy, relevancy, organization and terminology used in discussing a particular class of horses.

GRADING AND SCORING REASONS

Reasons scores are to be reflective of organization, relevancy, accuracy, terminology and presentation of reasons, regardless of the student’s placing of the class. A bad placing must not automatically result in a low reasons score. If students see the differences in the horses and reflect those differences accurately in their reasons, they must not be penalized on the reason’s score because their emphasis for placing the horses was different than that of the official judges. Reading reasons from notes should be strongly discouraged at judging contests. It is recommended to inform students that they will receive a zero score if they read their reasons verbatim. This is designed to encourage students to practice and give reasons without notes, as it will make the process of learning to give reasons more expedient.

Reasons should be graded then scored as per the following outline:

REASONS PERFORMANCE	GRADE	SCORE RANGE
Good to Excellent	A	46-50
Above Average to Good	B	41-45
Average	C	36-40
Below Average	D	31-35
Poor	E	30 and below

A contestant who is reasonably well prepared and gets through a complete set of reasons should never receive a score less than 25.

Reasons judges should mark the contestant’s reasons score on the individual cards provided for each participant. The cards will have only the contestant’s number for identification, and care must be taken to ensure contestants and cards are in the proper order and agree when the score is recorded. It is also advised to keep a master sheet of scores for contestants in case a card is lost or score questioned.

ETIQUETTE IN THE REASONS ROOM: Official Judges

Reasons judges must be continually aware that their actions and mannerisms can be stimulation or distracting to the student presenting reasons. Judges should be polite and encouraging to the student and should never present a harsh, critical attitude. Judges must be

aware that any personal action can have either positive or negative influences on the students as they prepare for the next set of reasons or future contests. Emphasis should be on a positive attitude, not on excess criticism.

There is no need for judges to attempt to educate contestants individually during the reasons session. Teaching is the responsibility of the coaches. Judges should focus their attention on the accuracy and quality of reasons performances, irrespective of the class placing. Remember, contestants have already been awarded points for their class placings. Also, reasons judges should never tell contestants the correct placing of a class.

It is particularly important that judges avoid any mannerisms which may be distracting to students. Eating, drinking, smoking, chewing, etc. must be avoided while students are presenting reasons. Also, judges must not stand, move around, use excessive eye and head movements, yawn, etc. while students are presenting reasons. Judges must be aware the student who is presenting reasons is trying very hard to concentrate on the class of horses, and mannerisms or actions of the reason judge must not cause a break in their concentration.

ETIQUETTE IN THE REASONS ROOM: Students

Before entering the reasons room, the student should be focused and ready to deliver their reasons. The student should not be chewing gum and may **not** use any sort of written notes. Should a contestant use notes at any time during the set of reasons, he or she should not expect to make higher than a score of 25 for the set.

One should place their feet shoulder width apart, keeping their feet and hands stationary with their eyes fixed at the judge's forehead or eyes. Students may begin their reasons upon the judge's acknowledgement. There is no reason to say anything to the reasons taker other than "hello." Avoid statements such as: "Are you ready" and "Can I go ahead and begin." The reasons taker will be ready for you to begin, or they will let you know otherwise.

REASONS FORMAT

The opening statement of a student's reasons should include the class name, the placing, and the most obvious, unarguable good or bad statement about the class. Reasons are comparative between each pair. Each pair should cover two or three main points.

Simply format your reasons by comparing your top, middle and bottom pairs. Each pair should include a grant. For example, you placed horse 1 over 2 and discussed why throughout your top pair. Before moving to your middle pair, however, you should grant something that 2 did or had better than 1. Include these grants in all your pairs.

Close your reasons explaining why you placed the final horse last. Finally, restate the class name and your placings.

The next few pages will break down each portion of a set of reasons and give you good and poor examples of each.

OPENING STATEMENT

Making an accurate and unique opening statement is extremely desirable because it makes a good first impression on the reasons judge. However if one should give a poor opening statement or lie, it makes it hard to gain respect from the official and receive a high score. That is why being honest is the most important part of the opening statement, as well as any other part of reasons. With more experience, opening statements can become more creative and flashy. An opening statement should have the placing of the class followed by an overall explanation of the class as well as a sentence leading into the top pair. Every class is different so having different opening statements is good. The opening statement should be short and to the point as well as accurate.

Good Examples:

- Sir/Ma'am, I placed the Aged Geldings 1, 2, 3 and 4, finding an obvious winner in 1, who best combined quality, balance and muscling to the highest degree.
- Sir/Ma'am, I placed the reining 1, 2, 3 and 4 and clearly used 1 over 2, as 1 was the most athletic individual of the class, staying the lowest in the spins and showing the most speed variation in its circles.

Bad Examples:

- Sir/Ma'am, I placed the Aged Geldings 1, 2, 3, and 4, finding this to be a two-pair class.
- Sir/Ma'am, I placed the Aged Mares 1, 2, 3, and 4. Four is the heaviest muscled horse in the class and is nicely balanced.

Good Example:

In my middle pair, balance alone placed 2 over 3. Two divided into thirds the most proportionally in relation to a shorter back with a longer reaching underline, whereas 3 was long in the back and short over the croup. Just as impressively, 2 was a higher quality individual that was more refined in the muzzle with cleaner throat latch, compared to 3, who was common about the head. Plus, 2 was more structurally correct, standing on a straighter column of bone, allowing 2 to step out with a less deviated stride.

Note the use of “balanced placed 2 over 3.” You should avoid “I preferred” or “I believe.” Here, you buzz word “balance” places the pair for you.

Bad Example:

- In the bottom pair, I prefer 3 over 4. Three is a eye-appealing horse who is heavy muscled and well-muscled. Four is heavy muscled but is the least desirable to look at on the profile.

GRANTS:

Grants give the reasons giver a chance to give credit to horses that are placed under another horse. There are three grants given through the course of a set of reasons. Once after the first pair, again after the second pair, and finally a grant will be given for the last place animal. Grants may be very obvious or very slight, depending on how close the pair was. Generally, your grants should be short and to the point. The main goal like always is to be honest and accurate; this shows the reason-taker that you saw the class correctly, which will help you score higher on your reasons.

Good Example:

- There’s no doubt that 2 is a higher quality individual, especially about the head and throat latch. Unfortunately.....

Note in these examples that there is a grant followed by “unfortunately” or “however.” This means that you are going to grant the horse and then fault it and say why it is still placed where you placed it. This is called the grant-fault method. You can just grant a horse and move to the next pair if you wish by stating, “and it is this advantage that places 2 over 3 in the middle pair.”

Good Example:

- Clearly 2 is the more athletic; moving, driving with power and impulsion out of the hind quarters, however.....

Bad Example:

- Two is well-balanced, but lacks.....

Terms to use when granting:

- I realize
- I concede
- I recognize
- I appreciate
- I respect

- I am aware
- It was obvious
- It was apparent
- Clearly
- Obviously
- There is no doubt

CRITICISMS:

After you have granted a horse you then critique it and explain why it placed where it did. Criticizing is a lot like granting back to a horse. You should only say a few things and make sure that you're honest. If there is obvious problem with the horse, then let the reason-taker know that it was easy for you to see that problem. But always be careful to not be too critical or say too many negative things about a horse so you do not offend anyone. If a horse is that bad, just give a generalized statement; there is no need to list every problem with it when everyone else can see the same things.

Good Example:

- However, 3 was the poorest quality individual being the most common about the head and deepest in the neck. Still, it is 3 over 4 in the bottom pair.....
- In reality, 3 was the worst-balanced horse in the class, being long in the back and short in the croup. Nevertheless, it is 3's muscle that still places 3 over 4 in the bottom.....

Bad Example:

- Three was somewhat light-muscled and was slightly lower quality than 4.

Bad Example:

- Three was the lightest muscled horse, who was also poor balanced and had the worst structure, as well as lacking shape and expression to its muscle shape, and was toed in.

Be sure to allow the class to tell you how to talk it. For example, some teams simply use one method to transition through pairs for each pair that they talk. You should allow the class to help you decide how to transition through pairs. By using this approach, then you will be able to talk a unique set of reasons.

To transition between pairs, a student should use smooth transitions that help the judge follow the reasons from pair to pair without confusion. The best transition terms do not always come from a list or a book; some of the best terms can be learned from your fellow students.

The following table will provide you with terminology to assist in transitioning through pairs.

Opening for Pairs	Continuing Terms for Pairs	Grants	Criticism	Closing
Beginning Opening Moving to Continuing with Coming to Concerning the In analyzing In discussing Closing with Culminating with Concluding with	Further Furthermore In addition Additionally Moreover Beyond this Coupled by Complimented by Also	Granted I grant I realize None the less I appreciate that Undoubtedly I recognize that I did recognize I concede I contrast Conversely I acknowledge However I readily admit	I criticize I fault However Nevertheless Unfortunately	Thus Therefore In closing Culminating with Reaching a final placing

BUZZWORDS:

Buzzwords are used to capitalize on an important point. This is a technique that is not used by many people, so it allows you to set yourself apart from the competition. Buzzwords should be used on the most important or obvious fact that needs to be brought to the reason-taker’s attention first. The use of buzzwords helps to prioritize your reason with the most important to the least important.

Examples:

- Muscle alone placed 1 over 2.....
- Quality of movement clearly placed 3 over 4.....
- Balance and quality easily sorted 2 over 3.....
- Stops coupled with spins placed 2 over 1.....

TRANSITIONS:

Transitions are simply a way of moving smoothly from one section of the reasons to another. This is done as simply as possible while still maintaining a smooth transition. Transitions are good way to bring out creativity. The reasons-giver can use unique and original terms that will set them apart from the competition.

- Directing your attention
- In addition
- I admire
- I understand
- Surprisingly
- But in reality
- But after this
- Without a doubt
- On the other hand
- However
- Plus
- Besides this
- Furthermore
- Although
- Even so
- There was a definite advantage

Many of these will also work as grants.

CLOSING STATEMENT:

A closing statement should be brief and to the point. After you have stated why you place the last horse, you will provide a closing statement that helps provide a finished presentation to your reasons. There are many different ways and styles. A popular one used by the students is: “Therefore, the Aged Mares are placed 1, 2, 3, and 4.” This allows you to restate your placing and still be short and to the point.

Good Example:

Three is the least functionally correct and acquired the most penalty points, thus placing at the bottom of the class. Therefore, the Reining is placed 1, 2, 4 and 3.

EXAMPLE REASONS

Aged Mares

Sir/Ma'am, I placed the aged mares 1, 2, 3 and 4, finding a commanding winner in 1, who best combined quality, balance and structural correctness.

One obviously exhibits a higher quality head and neck, being more refined about the muzzle with more chiseled features. One is tighter about the throat latch and has a thinner neck, whereas 2 is coarse about the throat and ties in deep at the base of the neck. Just as impressively, 1 divides into third more equally, while being shorter and stronger in the back with a longer, more forward-reaching underline. As a bonus, 1 stands on the straightest column of bone.

I admire the fact that 2 is a more massive individual who is deeper barreled. And it's this power that places 2 over 3 in my intermediate pair. Two spreads the most muscle width from end to end, being more prominently V-ed in the pectoral region. Two is the biggest out of its hip and dispenses more true muscle shape over the croup. Plus, 2 wrapped the most bulge and expression around the forearms and gaskins.

There's no question that 3 is more feminine. But, to go along with 3's femininity, 3 is also the lightest muscled and narrowest gauged horse of the class. Despite this, quality still places 3 over 4 in my concluding duo.

Three is smaller about the muzzle and exposes less distance from eye to muzzle, while being cleaner through the throat latch. Furthermore, 3 is a longer profiling, more modern-appearing horse, having a more sloping shoulder, forward-reaching underline and a longer, leveler hip; compared to 4, who was the steepest in the hip.

Undeniably, 4 is heavier muscled, but after this, 4 is the lowest-quality, worst-balanced individual of the class.

And therefore, the Aged Mares are placed 1, 2, 3 and 4.

TIPS FOR PRACTICING REASONS

The best way to get good at giving reasons is just to give them over and over and over. Say your reasons out loud with your eyes focused on a stationary object or person; you can even practice in front of the mirror. Complete your reasons every time you give them. Don't stop and start over just because you got lost or stumbled on your words. If you do get lost, simply take a deep breath and continue; do not make the judge aware of your mistake.

Sources: Dr. Bob Mowrey, Dr. David Dennistion, Dr. Kris Wilson and Dr. Jim Heird

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