



Understanding 4-H Judging

Children join 4-H to have fun and make new friends. One reason why 4-H is so successful is because children choose to do whatever interests them. As participation increases, 4-H'ers learn more, begin to assess progress for themselves, and look to others for evaluation of their work. The judging process in 4-H is like real life. 4-H'ers set goals, work to achieve them, and reap rewards for their efforts.

Having one's accomplishments evaluated can be motivating and educational for 4-H'ers. When judges critique their work or performance, it serves as a guide to further improvement. The judging process is probably more valuable than the award or recognition. To plan, practice, and present a finished product is to "learn by doing." To graciously accept constructive criticism of one's work is a real life experience. 4-H'ers learn quickly that judging results reflect a personal opinion and that evaluation will vary among judges.

Refer to *Recognizing Your 4-H Members' Achievements* to determine how to maintain a balance of activities to recognize and motivate your 4-H'ers.

Types of Evaluation

- *Project judging.* The judge evaluates the finished products against a set of standards without the member present. The focus is the quality of the project itself and not the learning process. Comments are provided to the participant in writing, usually on a score sheet.
- *Performance judging.* The judge evaluates how a 4-H'er accomplishes a task or goal in progress. The judge looks for skills being used, as well as evaluating the end result. This type of event enables the 4-H'er and the judge to see how the performance directly effects the end product. Comments are often provided verbally and also in writing on a score sheet.
- *Interview.* The judge interviews the participant as he/she evaluates the product against a set of standards. The purpose of this judging is to determine what the 4-H'er learned in completing the project. Comments are provided verbally and also in writing on a score sheet.

Danish Judging in 4-H

In 4-H most judging involves the Danish system of judging. In this system, the judges do not judge one person's work by comparing it to another's. The evaluation is made against a standard. A judge looks to see whether requirements are met. Often a score sheet is used, available from the county 4-H office.

If the work meets high standards, it receives an excellent rating and blue ribbon (score of 90 to 100). A red ribbon signifies very good work (score of 80-89). Yellow ribbons are given for work of good quality that will benefit from further improvements (score of 70-79). A white ribbon signifies work meets standards well enough to be shown, but is only fair quality (score below 70).

One advantage of this system is that everyone whose work fulfills minimum qualification can receive a ribbon. If all entries are judged to be excellent, all receive blue ribbons. The purpose of using the Danish judging system is to give every 4-H member the recognition deserved for the work that was done. It also helps young people recognize the need to improve their skills and to "make the best better."



Peer Competition

While Danish judging focuses on set standards, other judging compares the work of one 4-H'er to another. This is peer competition. This type of judging may be used to select the "best" projects within a class. An example of this would be awarding a "Best in Show" rosette to the photo with the highest score in a photo judging contest. In some projects, such as horse shows, participants are ranked against one another and given placings, such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd place, etc.

This is What We Believe

- 4-H youth are more important than 4-H projects.
- Learning HOW to do a project is more important than the project itself.
- "Learning by doing" through a useful work project is fundamental in any sound educational program and characteristic of the 4-H program.
- There is more than one good way to do most things.
- Our job is to teach 4-H'ers how to think not what to think.
- A balanced program of work and play, geared to the individual's needs, encourages positive youth development.
- Competition is a natural human trait and should be recognized as such in 4-H work, but it is only one of five ways 4-H youth can be recognized for their accomplishments.
- Every 4-H member needs to be noticed, to feel important, to experience success and to be praised.

Who are the Judges? How are They Selected?

Judges have a special interest in young people and may have knowledge in a particular subject matter area, as a hobby or career. They are selected by staff and volunteers for their knowledge and interest in youth. Most are volunteers, with some exceptions, such as in the horse project area where professional judges are secured.

What Rules do Judges Follow?

Judges must know the rules and criteria agreed upon by the 4-H participants, the 4-H leaders, and the 4-H staff. Each judge should be given information about the judging activity including scoring sheets. In addition, judges should be aware of and understand the philosophy behind the 4-H program and the purpose of evaluating 4-H'ers' projects and performances. An orientation for judges presented by staff helps to ensure a fair judging experience for everyone.



When You are the Judge

- Know and understand the 4-H philosophy.
- Judge the 4-H member's effort as well as the finished product. This is important because young people are not yet experts in a particular skill.
- Know the 4-H judging standards or criteria and follow them carefully. Do not allow personal biases to influence your comments or decisions.
- Be consistent in your judgment.
- Judge each entry on its own merit.
- Acknowledge the parts that were done well before making suggestions for improvement. Be positive, and look for the strengths first!
- Written or verbal statements should be constructive and not harsh. Critique is necessary feedback for further learning, but harshness serves only to discourage the individual. Give concrete suggestions for improvement.
- Sign your name or initials to the score sheet. If you feel uncomfortable signing your name to the score sheet, review your comments and scores; they may be too harsh.
- Focus your feedback on the learning and accomplishments of the youth rather than the award. Your comments should promote positive youth development and not hurt the individual's self-esteem.
- Treat the 4-H member as an individual. Be sure to consider age and experience when evaluating.
- Use this event to stimulate growth and to motivate children to learn more.

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Did You Know...

The USDA maintains a list of juried 4-H curriculum which meets high standards and is recommended for use throughout the country.

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.