

SHOWING ETIQUETTE: GETTING ALONG WITH JUDGES

“Participation in fair activities is an opportunity and a privilege for 4-H members. If they choose to participate, they’re asking for a competent adult to give his or her opinion regarding the quality of their participation. Having asked for this opinion, they should learn from it.”

- from the 4-H Judges’ Guide (4-H 040J)

Showing an animal is a terrific way for kids to learn more about their project. While shows are meant to be fun experiences, they can turn into stressful ones if we are not careful. When conflicts arise among adults, the 4-H member may feel caught in the middle and not sure whom to believe.

One place that conflict can arise is between leaders and the judge. As a leader, it is hard to see a member that has worked hard receive a placing that you feel is too low. It is also frustrating when you have prepared your members for one style of showing and the judge asks for something unexpected. However, part of becoming a successful showman is learning how to deal with unanticipated situations. Criticizing the judge or show management will not help children learn this.

A judge is someone who should be respected. Judging is not as easy as it looks! A judge must not only know a lot about the area they are judging – they also go through many hours of special training to learn how to award scores and rank entries. On the day of the show, the judge may stand for hours, in any kind of weather, with few breaks. If you disagree with a judge, give them the benefit of the doubt. They wouldn’t be there if they didn’t care about the kids. Also remember that the judge is at the show to work. Socializing with the judge during a show is highly inappropriate. It is distracting to them and could compromise their objectivity.

The show management should always be treated fairly. Volunteers spend many hours putting their shows together. They try very hard to foresee all problems, but some things are beyond their control. Go to the superintendent if you have a problem and be patient. It may not be possible to make a change right away. The next time you are at a show that is experiencing problems, try offering to help rather than criticizing the show.

Judging Policies

Here are some excerpts from the Clackamas Count Fair Exhibitor Handbook that outline judging policies and the responsibilities of the superintendents:

- Each animal or product shall be exhibited to the entire satisfaction of the judges. No persons will be permitted in the immediate judging area while the judging is being done except the judges and the necessary attendants.
- No person shall be allowed, under any circumstances, to interfere with the judge or judges during their adjudications, or with the fair’s staff, or to offer any criticism of the judge or his decisions in such as way as to insult or cause embarrassment to the judge or other exhibitors. Violators of this rule shall be excluded immediately from the judging ring or area and from the competition, and be subject to additional penalties, including forfeit of awards, as the management shall consider proper. All officials or judges are required, and exhibitors are requested, to report any violation of this rule to the fair management.
- No person shall act as a judge in any division in which he or a member of his immediate family is an exhibitor.
- The judge shall award first, second, third place, etc., according to merit, and if without merit the judge shall at his discretion make no award, but shall give explanation of why no award was made. This rule applies whether there are one or more entries in the section.
- The judge’s decision shall be final and no appeal will be considered except in case of protest to the Fair Board (see Rule 9).
- The judge shall disqualify or transfer to the correct section or lot (at his discretion) any animal or exhibit which is not a true representative of the class or section in which it is entered. The judge

may disqualify any exhibit not of show quality. The judge may disqualify any animal that is not sufficiently gentle to be shown with safety.

- Each Superintendent, under the direction of the management, shall have full charge of the department to which he may be assigned, and exhibitors must follow his direction relating to placing of exhibits, showing, etc. Each superintendent, under consent of management, may at his discretion exclude any exhibit he deems inappropriate because of quality, content, condition, or otherwise unworthy.
- The superintendent will direct the calling of classes for showing, in accordance with printed schedule as far as practicable.

From the 4-H Division Rules:

- INTERVIEW JUDGING is an opportunity for the judge to talk to the exhibitor on a one-to-one basis. THIS IS FOR THE MEMBER AND NOT THE PARENTS. Parents and leaders should not be in the area where interview judging is taking place. The best education will take place when the child feels free to talk about their project without other adults hovering. Parents and leaders may consult with the judge after the judging has been completed if appropriate and if time permits. Members who are unable to participate in interview judging may have their static exhibits brought to the fairgrounds by leaders, parents, or friends. The exhibits will be judged after all interviewing has been completed. Written comments will be given. Check the schedule of events for interview judging times.
- The merit system of awards will be used for all competitive classes. Exhibits or contestants will be placed in one of the four groups, depending on the quality of the exhibits or performance of the contestant. The four groups will be blue (excellent to superior), red (good to excellent), white (acceptable but needs improvement) and participation (Adventures and exhibits for display only).
- Premiums will be awarded according to the blue, red, or white ribbon received without regard to the class entered, except for all market animal classes where ribbons will be awarded but no premiums will be paid.
- Champion ribbons will be awarded at the judge's discretion.
- The decisions of the judges are final.

What if I really want to ask the judge a question?

Shows are a learning experience. While the judge is under no obligation to answer questions, a request from a 4-H member to speak to the judge can usually be accommodated. Here are some guidelines for speaking with judges.

- No questions should be asked until the show is over, unless the judge offers to answer questions before the class is dismissed.
- ALL requests to speak to the judge MUST be made to the Superintendent. The Superintendent is encouraged to be present during any discussions with the judge.
- 4-H members are the only ones allowed to address the judge. It is not appropriate for leaders and parents to question the judge instead. The judge and member may, but are not required to, allow other adults to be present.
- Always be respectful.
- Never question a judge's placing. It is appropriate to ask "what can I do better next time" but NOT "why did you place me that way."

Keep these things in mind:

- Remember that you are setting an example for the kids with every comment you make. Think carefully what you want to be teaching them.
- During the show (including breaks), it is not appropriate to talk to the judge about any aspect of the show or judging. This includes both fraternizing and questioning!
- The member is what is important, not the exhibit. Which will make your child feel better: complaining about the judge or telling them they did a good job?
- Judging is a hard job. Remember that the judge is there because they are devoted to the kids.