

Learning to Give Reasons (a step by step approach)

Reasons are frustrating to most beginners because coaches will often expect too much – too soon. The usual first reasons session finds the youth in front of the coach, trying to respond to the threatening question “why did you do it?” without any foundation or outline to help organize. In this and following newsletters, let me outline a 3 step process for teaching reasons that eliminates some of the fear of reasons giving a “one step at a time” approach will give your kids a foundation to help organize and communicate their thoughts. Organization and progressive learning is critical, so take it slow. You will avoid the fear of giving oral reasons by 1) helping the kids organize their thoughts, and 2) by **limiting** the amount of information they try to include in their reasons. If you teach reasons one step at a time, you’ll find reasons will become fun.

The Main 6 Terms

The whole purpose of giving reasons is to explain why one animal is preferred over another. If you narrow down all the reasons why one animal would be selected over another (doesn’t matter which species) then you have the six basic reasons why one animal would be preferred. These are:

- A. **is more (or less) muscular** (all muscle areas of body and muscle shape)
- B. **is trimmer (or fatter)** (all fat indicators. Trimness can be preferred or can be a detriment)
- C. **is larger (or smaller) framed** (all “measure” of the skeleton, including length of loin & rump, height, bone length, etc.)
- D. **has more (or less) capacity** (everything to do with rib dimension, depth, etc.)
- E. **is more structurally correct** (feet & legs, shoulder topline, and travel)
- F. **has better performance records** (anything that can be written down as a number: weight, height, etc.)

Notice that these are independent of each other. When someone selects an animal, it’s almost always attributed to one or more of these major reasons. Notice that for several major reasons, both “more” and “less” is indicated. That’s because either “more” or “less” of some trait can be an advantage depending on the purpose that selected animal will be used for. Have kids begin their reasons by using **one** of these six terms – and expect nothing more until they are quite good at giving a set with just these six terms.

First Workouts

In your first few workouts, you might consider having your youth learn how to give oral reasons before they ever see a class of livestock. This works well because students learn **what to talk about** before they have to (this develops confidence). Students learn **what to select on** before they have to (this avoids frustration). This also allows you to make better use of winter month or nighttime workouts.

In organizing activities for your first few workouts, consider the following procedures:

1. Arrange for a room (church, extension office, etc.) that will hold the number of kids you expect. Have a chalkboard, posterboard, or overheads available. Have the kids bring paper, pencil and a friend.
2. Plan to work for about 1 hour. Plan to begin work on time and move quickly through the material. As you know, a kid's attention drops quickly if things don't keep rolling (it's called "take big bites of the cookie and pick up the crumbs later"). In other words, don't worry about details.
3. Goal of workout: Each member will give a set of reasons before they leave.
4. Ask the kids why they think a steer or hog might place over another and have them write their thoughts down. Have them work in pairs. Then have them read their list out loud.

You'll be able to group them on the board according to one of the six main reasons why one animal beats another (see previous topic in this letter). Don't worry about things like breed character, femininity, wool traits, etc. They are not that important for now, so we'll deal with them later...(these are the crumbs).

Here's an example of how the board might look.

Reason	<u>More Muscle</u>	<u>More Frame</u>	<u>More Trimness</u>
Possible kids' comments	“muscles” “bigger” “bulging” “heavy”	“bigger” “taller” “longer”	“skinnier” “less fat” “in shape”

5. Summarize their work by defining the six main categories. Make sure they know that:
 - a) they are the real reasons why one animal beats another.
 - b) That one animal is considered better than another because it has more (or less) of one or more of each of these traits.
 - c) That these are independent of each other. (Example: just because a steer has more muscling doesn't necessarily mean it has more capacity or better performance records). You might suggest that to place a class, all they have to do is decide which animal has advantages in the most categories and he wins, second-most gets second, etc.
6. Make sure they have memorized the six phrases. They should recite them to their partner from memory.

Once again:

- “is more muscular”
- “is trimmer”
- “is larger framed”
- “is more structurally correct”
- “has better performance records”

7. Discuss why people give reasons. (to explain to someone else why you preferred one animal over another, or to explain why one animal is better than another). Let them come out with the answer, not you, if possible.
8. Have each student write down some reasons why one animal (doesn't matter what specie) would be selected over another. Using only the six major reasons defined about – allow them only to use those exact terms. Some examples might look like:
 - a) “I would place 1 (ewes) over 2 because she is more muscular and is larger framed.”
 - b) “I placed 2 (barrow) over 3 because 2 is trimmer, has more capacity, and is more structurally correct than 3.”
 - c) I place 3 (heifer) over 4 because 3 has better performance records. 3 also is larger framed and is less muscular than 4.”
9. A set of reasons are usually given about a class (usually 4 head) of livestock. This involves giving your comparisons of animals in each pair

1st over 2nd
 2nd over 3rd
 3rd over 4th.

Have the kids write down 1 or 2 reasons for each pair in a class of 4 head. Let them work together in pairs. They can make up reasons about any class they want.
10. Each kid should then read out loud (to the group or to their partner) the “set” of reasons they have just composed. Emphasize they are only to use the six terms they just memorized. (Remember, they are doing all of this before they actually judge livestock). You may want to write an introduction on the board to get them started as they read out loud. An example: “I placed this class _____ (fill in) _____ 2-1-3-4”. An example might read like this:

“I placed this class of ewes 1-2-3-4”. In my top pair I placed 1 over 2 because she was **more muscular** and was **trimmer**. In my middle pair, I placed 2 over 3 because 2 was **more structurally correct** and had **more capacity**”. In my bottom pair I placed 3 over 4 because 3 had **better performance records**”.

This in itself is an excellent set of reasons (if accurate) and actually would do very well at most contests in Iowa. You'll be surprised how well they sound in the first workout.

11. As an assignment, they should be prepared to gibe a set (fictitious) at the next workout (use only the six terms). If you have time, this would be a good point to hand out some parts diagrams, discuss the parts or have them be prepared for a quiz over the main parts.

Slides can be useful at this workout if they help you show a more muscular animal, a trimmer animal etc. But I would not expect them to place animals yet. Have them make up animals in their minds – they will remember more.

In a future letter, I'll discuss taking them to Step II of learning to give reasons. The key though is to DO NOT progress further until everything discussed in step one is mastered by your kids. Practice these skills first, learn them, and then move on. This build a solid foundation for future learning.

Performance Records

In later letters, we will talk about specific examples of using performance records when judging livestock. But for now, here's some not entirely accurate, but very workable definitions of some basic performance records that you can use with your kids. I suggest you give these definitions to your kids early in the season so you can work with them in their reasons (even if they have to make them up in their reasons just for practice).

Ratio – A ratio simply compares one animal with another on a “percent” basis. A 100 ratio is given to an average animal. Usually a bigger number means “more weight”. For example, a ewe with a 120-day weight ratio of “110” is 10 percent heavier than average and she is 15% heavier than a ewe that has a ratio of “95”. A ratio is **not** a genetic measure. It is a trait just like muscle thickness, height, or a weight measure”.

Breeding Value – This is where we look at an estimate of the **genetic makeup** of an animal for a trait. Remember – breeding values must be used to compare the genetic makeup of one animal versus another. They are different than ratios because they are calculated consisting of all kinds of information including now relatives, perform, etc. These breeding values usually look and work just like ratios – but they are genetic comparisons not just performance comparisons.

Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) – These are the most kinds of information available on livestock. They also are genetic estimate – but better than breeding values because they tell you what kind of genetics that animal will pass on to the offspring. These are usually reported in units of pounds of weight or inches of height, etc. (remember that a baby gets ½ from the sire and the ½ from the dam). For example, if a heifer has a yearling weight EPD of +6.0 then you would expect her to pass an average of 6 genetic pounds of yearling weight on to her offspring.

To see if your kids have the idea, here is a sample set of data on a set of 3 heifers. See if they can answer the questions.

Yearling Heifers

	<u>Actual Weaning Wt.</u>	<u>Weaning Wt. Ratio</u>	<u>Weaning Wt. EPD</u>
1	520 lb.	107	+1.0 lb.
2	470 lb.	100	-2.0 lb.
3	470 lb.	100	+3.0 lb.

Questions

1. Which heifer was the heaviest when she was removed from her mother?
Ans. 1
2. What was the average weaning weight of the group these heifers were raised with?
Ans. 470 lb. (because a ratio of 100 is average)
3. Which heifer will produce calves that weight the most genetically at weaning?
Ans. 3

4. True or False. Heifer number 2 should produce calves that should average three pounds more at weaning than calves produced by number 1.
Ans. False (-2-1=-3 or 3 pounds less weight genetically).
1. True or False. The genetic makeup heifer number 3 is six pounds heavier than an average heifer.
Ans. True (because the breeding value is equal to 2 times the EPD).

Why Do I Do This to Myself?

In order to keep us motivated, it helps to take time now and then and look at why we do this crazy activity. Sure, the competition is exciting (once we finally get there). But why do we put up with upset parents, lethargic teenagers and hours of listening to the same set of reasons? What a young person gains most from a good judging program is sometimes not what you think. But what they do gain from your efforts (and theirs) should make you feel good about what you are doing that comes from judging for them.

1. Feeling of success that comes from judging improves self esteem - (especially in kids who aren't getting this self esteem from high school athletics).
2. There is no better way to develop confidence in a young person's ability to make decisions (and how many times a day do you rely on your ability to compare the facts and make a decision).
3. Judging influences kids toward productive careers. College surveys have shown that a high percentage of people who were in good judging programs now have careers that are higher paying, more challenging and demand more responsibility.
4. Reasons are the most important experience of a judging program. If nothing else, the ability to form thoughts and speak in front of others (and to defend one's decisions) is a life skill that once gained will benefit a young person their entire life. There is no better way to gain these skills.

Learning to Give Oral Reasons

Review

Remember the six main comparisons we've discussed in the last letter you received? They are the main reasons one animal would place over another.

To review, these six main comparisons are:

1. more (or less) muscling
2. more (or less) condition
3. more capacity
4. more structural correctness
5. more (or less) skeletal size
6. better performance records

Using just these six terms accurately, a youth can give a good set of reasons. For example, here's a set on some breeding ewes.

I placed this class of ewes 1234.

I placed 1 over 2 because:

1 had more muscling.

1 had more skeletal size.

I placed 2 over 3 because:

2 had less condition.

2 had better performance records.

I placed 3 over 4 because:

3 was more structurally correct.

3 had more capacity.

3 had more muscling.

I placed 4 last because:

4 lacked muscling.

4 lacked capacity.

(ending statement like this is optional, but not needed).

Remember that these six main terms are valid for beef, sheep or swine classes. They work well for breeding and market classes as well.

And now, step 2...

Now, if your group handles this pretty well, and is ready for an added challenge to improve their reasons, then move them on to this next level of proficiency.

The next step in learning to give oral reasons involves adding some detail each time you state a major comparison. The major comparison tells why one animal was placed over the other. The supporting details explain why you know the main comparison to be true. Here's some examples of each.

Main Comparison

Example Supporting Details

more muscling thick quartered

*wider loin
heavier muscled stifle*

less condition

*trimmer over the rib
trimmer middle and flank
firmer handling*

more skeletal size

*taller at the shoulder
longer bodied
greater length of cannon*

more capacity

*bolder spring of rib
wider chested
longer ribbed*

more structural correctness

*straighter topped
smother shouldered
long strided*

better performance records

*greater 120 day weight
higher weaning weight EPD
less days to 230 pounds*

Using the same example set of breeding ewes, notice how just one specific has been added to give support to each main comparison.

I placed this class of ewes 1234.

I placed 1 over 2 because:

*1 had more muscling as she was thicker through the leg.
1 also had more skeletal size as she was longer bodied.*

I placed 2 over 3 because:

*2 had less condition as she was trimmer middled.
2 also had better performance records as she was heavier at 120 days of age.*

I placed 3 over 4 because:

*3 had more capacity as she was bolder sprung in her rib.
3 also had more structural correctness as she had stronger pasterns.
3 also had more muscling as she was wider down her top.*

I placed 4 last because:

*4 lacked muscle as she stood narrow based.
4 also lacked capacity as she was shallow bodied.*

As your kids read this set out loud, you might notice that it sounds pretty good (and **organized**). The organization and simplicity helps kids remember what they want to say about the class. And this then will build **confidence** in their speaking ability. If this set were accurate for the class, it would undoubtedly score very high no matter if the set were delivered at a local, state or national contest.

As a suggestion, you may first wish to sit down with your kids and have them brainstorm their own few specific terms. Don't require them to learn too many at one time (they will seek variety at their own pace). It's alright (in fact desirable) to repeat terms in a set as long as they are accurate. Also, make sure that their specific terms really do correspond to the main comparison that they are discussing. Many kids will want to make statements like:

"2 had more muscling as she was bolder spring and taller at the shoulder"

"3 had more trimness as he was longer bodied, straighter lined and squarer from hooks to pins"

Notice that with these kinds of statement, the specifics do not correspond with the main comparison.

Some additional things you can do with your kids to help them master the idea are follows:

- 1) Make a big list of specific terms and have kids group them under the main comparison that they belong.
- 2) Give them a sample set of reasons (orally or on paper) and have them circle the main comparisons and underline the specifics that go with each.
- 3) Have one youth start a set by stating a major comparison, then have his or her "partner" finish the comparison with appropriate details.
- 4) Have your kids sit in a circle. Pick a major category and see how far around the circle they can go with each person naming a specific term that relates to that main comparison.
- 5) Have your kids write a set in outline form.

From time to time (as postage permits) I will send a term sheet that gives you some additional terms to work with. However, I believe you'll have the best luck by kids making up their own lists (as a "team effort") and you help by just subtly throwing out a new term now and then. This time, I'll include a beef sheet.

Finally, believe it or not, there is more (grants, faults, variety, delivery and all that jazz) and they will be discussed in a future letter. But what we have discussed in these two letters will allow your kids to give some excellent sets.

Sheep Performance Records

Currently, very little performance information is available for evaluating sheep other than adjusted records and ratios. Someday, the National Sheep Improvement Program will take hold and provide us EPD's for sheep like we discussed last time with cattle. For now, we usually

must work with date of birth, type of birth and rearing statistics, and weight at either 60, 90 or 120 days of age (we use 120 day weight in the state contest).

Birth Type – This is our best indication of the ability of a ewe to produce multiple births (birth type) by simply telling us if she herself were born a twin or triplet. This performance trait isn't very accurate (only about 15% heritable which is considered low), but it is the best measure we have at the moment.

Rearing Status – This record indicates how the ewe was raised. For example, a ewe may have been born a twin but because she was graded to another ewe, or if one of her "litter mates" died, she may have been raised as a single. This allowed her to receive extra milk and care from her dam, and so she likely has grown faster than another ewe raised a twin or triplet. Obviously, her extra growth is not determined by her own genetics.

60, 90 or 120 Day Weight – These weights are our measure of growth in a sheep. Heavier weights go with faster growing sheep (but also go with larger mature weight sheep). 60 or 90 day weights are usually considered "weaning weights" and are largely influence by how well the ewe's mother milked (heavier milking ewes wean off heavier weight lambs). 120 day weights are more of an indication of the sheep's own genetic potential to grow. You can't fairly compare two sheep for these values if they were not raised about the same time and in the same group.

To see if your kids have the idea, here is a sample set of data on 3 ewes. See if they can answer the questions that follow.

Crossbred Ewes

No.	Birth Date	Birth Type/Reared*	60-day Wt.	120-day WT.
1	Jan. 15	Tw/Tw	55	90
2	Jan. 15	Tr/S	61	80
3	Feb. 1	S/S	60	102

*TR = triplet Tw = twin S = single

1. Which lamb had the slowest rate of gain after weaning? (Ans. 2)
2. Which lamb would you select if you desired a greater twinning rate in your flock? (Ans. 2)
3. Which ewe likely received less milk from her dam? (Ans. 1)
4. Which ewe will likely have the largest mature weight? (Ans. 3)
5. Which ewe will likely grow to the largest mature weight? (Ans. 3)