



Goals...Projects...Exhibits...Evaluation...

How do the pieces fit together?

The skill of goal setting and working to achieve a goal is something 4-H strives to teach and practice in all parts of the educational program. How can adults help 4-Hers understand how project goals relate to exhibits goals, how exhibits are judged, and how these pieces fit together? **Parents and volunteers** help 4-H-ers learn how to set goals and help them find ways to demonstrate their learning through an exhibit. **Judges** help 4-Hers think about which standards apply to their exhibits based on their goals and then discuss how well the 4-H member met those standards.

Goals

Helping 4-Hers Set Goals

Think of the process as similar to planning a vacation. Where you want to go is the goal. Using your favorite search engine, you will find there are many routes to get there. The route chosen is the action plan. After returning home, others will probably ask, “How did it go?” That is like the judging experience. How that question gets answered will depend not only on the goal but also the standards you used – was the vacation supposed to be fun? Educational? Involve family bonding time? Relaxing? Active? Each of us may have different standards that define what a “good” vacation experience is like.

A goal helps a member decide what she wants to do and learn in a 4-H project. A goal is also like having a road map. It helps the member decide how to get to where she wants to go.

There are several different types of goals. In 4-H, we encourage youth to set learning goals. They are simple and have three parts:

1. the action or “I want to learn”
2. the result, or the what, and
3. the timetable.

For example, for the goal “I want to learn to take group photos before graduation”, *I want to learn* is the action portion of the goal. What a 4-Her intends to do is the result –*to take group photos*. The

timetable is when the goal will be completed – *before graduation*.

A goal should also pass the “control test”. Does the 4-Her have control over what he or she wants to do? Does the action statement of the 4-Her’s goal refer to what he or she wants to learn? A 4-Her has control over a goal such as “I will learn to program a robot.” However, if the action mentioned in the goal is what someone else will do, it does not pass the control test. The goal statement “I will have the champion robotics team at the Iowa State Fair” does not pass the control test because the judges provide the action that decides which team will be champion.

There are resources available to help members learn how to set goals. The **4-H Goal Writing Worksheet (VI-2025A)** teaches young people what goals are and how to set them.

The Setting Goals worksheet (VI-2023B) is a good tool to use to help members understand that many exhibit goals may come from one project area.

The project [Hot Sheets](#) all have learning ideas under the section “Here’s what you can do all year”. They give guidance to what is appropriate for most youth to learn about at different ages related to the project.

Many project areas have [Tip Sheets](#) that share what specific criteria and standards should be met by exhibits in that project area. Links to both at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/page/project-helpers>

Judging

Helping a 4-Her prepare for the judging process begins with reviewing the member’s exhibit goals. These goals form the basis for the evaluation process. A 4-Her can demonstrate learning by the ability to explain, to apply information, and by the product itself. The judge will use the appropriate standards that relate to the member’s goals and exhibit as the basis to evaluate the demonstrated learning.

Criteria

In evaluating exhibits three major criteria are considered. The criteria are the set of categories that are used in the evaluation of an exhibit. The criteria are:

1. Learning involved
Decision making process used, how problems were solved, new skills developed, how gathered information was used, etc.
2. Workmanship and techniques
 - A. If the exhibit is an actual product: construction suitable for intended use, directions/guidelines followed appropriately, suitability of materials, an appropriate finish, etc.
 - B. If the exhibit is sharing an idea: accurate information, complete, organized, original, creative, practical, clearly communicated, etc.
3. General appearance and design
Neat and attractive

Standards

If the word standard is looked up in the dictionary, at least nine different definitions appear. In this discussion of the Iowa 4-H fair judging experience, a standard is a measure of quality, or generally accepted principles or techniques. It is most often applied to the workmanship and technique criteria.

The judge uses standards that are appropriate based on the 4-H member's exhibit goals. Remember, the judge is not judging the goals but judging the **progress** toward the goals. This judging philosophy emphasizes the growth and learning process that occurs as the 4-Her creates the exhibit and is involved in the exhibit experience. The judge will start with the 4-H member's goal then select the standards that are appropriate.

4-H believes that the member needs to be an active partner in the evaluation process. Part of the skill building process is that 4-H members will learn about standards and how they relate to their exhibit goals. As 4-H members become more experienced and knowledgeable in their project work they will set higher standards for their own work.

Standards for many project areas are available on the [Exhibit Tip Sheet](#).

More about Standards – How they fit in the learning process

Most standards are developed over time, experience and even research. They have solid justifications but may not be applied to ALL situations. Other

standards, however, are essential. Consider, for example, standards for food preservation that are necessary for food safety reasons or correct wiring procedures for electrical safety. These are standards that are consistent with the fundamental structure and safety of the subject matter.

When standards are used in 4-H judging, appropriate questions to ask might be:

1. Why is this standard used?
2. Who set this standard?
3. Where did this standard come from?
4. What will the use of this standard do to or for the exhibit?

Asking these questions will help determine whether or not the standard is essential.

Some standards are set by society through an agency of government for the protection of all (an example would be standards necessary to pass a test for a driver's license), some by professional or trade associations for entrance into the group, some by a particular type of employer, or some by a leader of a 4-H club. Some standards may be set by the 4-Her. Answering the three questions may help to avoid those standards that are arbitrary and a possible hindrance in the learning process.

Let's look at an example. A 4-H member purchases a quilt at a garage sale that is finished except for the binding. The member's exhibit goal was: I want to learn how to place a binding around this quilt by the county fair. Which of the following standards would the judge apply to this exhibit?

- a. Quilt blocks all squared with angles matching perfectly.
- b. Colors used are appealing and reflect good design choices.
- c. Fabric textures, weight, and content are appropriate for use.
- d. Binding was applied neatly, with even stitches, corners mitered, and all raw edges hidden.
- e. All of the above.

While all of the above standards could indeed be applied to a quilt exhibit, the member's goal was to learn about binding a quilt. Letter "D" is the standard that should be applied. None of the other standards would apply to this quilt exhibit. However, if pins were left all over the quilt – then an essential safety standard would apply. While a judge might discuss other quilting standards with the member to further the member's learning, the ribbon placing should be placed on standard "D" above.

Let's look at another example. The member's goal is to learn how to preserve a clear jelly by July 15. The member chooses to exhibit jars of jelly to demonstrate his learning. Which of the following standards should the judge apply?

- a. Amount of headspace as indicated by USDA materials.
- b. Jelly appears clear.
- c. Proper food processing time for the product according to USDA.
- d. USDA approved techniques for preparing jars for preservation.
- e. All of the above.

In this case, item letter "e" would be the correct answer. While items "a", "c", and "d" do not relate directly to the member's goal, they are still used because they are essential standards – in this case, a food safety issue.

Judges Provide Feedback

As the exhibit is being evaluated against the appropriate standards, the judge provides feedback to the 4-Her. The judge's feedback indicates how closely the exhibit comes to the appropriate standards. Categories may be excellent, good, fair, poor, okay, needs improvement, etc. The judge also needs to consider the age and experience of the exhibitor, if known. An older more experienced 4-Her would be expected to meet more of the standards than a younger, less experienced 4-Her who has a similar exhibit.

4-H is open to all youth. Some youth may need extra guidance or encouragement from judges to help them communicate the goals they have set and the learning they've accomplished whether because of developmental needs, language barriers, or cultural differences. Judges will adjust standards and criteria to reflect the ability of the youth.

Because the evaluation of exhibits is a part of a member's learning experience, if a member's exhibit is selected for state fair, he or she should have the opportunity to improve the exhibit before it is exhibited at a higher level. This opportunity supports the 4-Her in trying to reach or more nearly accomplish her or his goal, thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

What is Conference Judging?

Conference judging is when a judge and 4-H member meet and discuss one on one the 4-Hers exhibit. As part of the conference judging process, 4-Hers are asked to come prepared to answer the following questions:

1. What did you plan to learn or do? (What was your exhibit goal(s)?)
2. What steps did you take to learn or do this? Explain what you did so it is easily understood. The judge wants to know and understand the steps you used to make your exhibit.
3. What were the most important things you learned?

As a result of the judging experience, expect a 4-Her to:

- Feel good about the experience
- Gain knowledge about the exhibit and herself/himself
- Be empowered to do self-evaluation and set new goals
- Receive recognition

To achieve these outcomes during the exhibit evaluation experience, judges will build rapport, gather information, encourage self-evaluation and reflection, provide feedback, and guide the 4-Her in planning for the future.

Build Rapport

In any conference judging setting, judges will first build rapport by using the 4-Her's name, maintaining eye contact, and sitting in close proximity to the 4-Her.

For example,

Judge: Hi Don, I'm Sharon, and I'm going to visit with you about your exhibit and what you learned.

Gather Information

The judge will read review information (written, video, audio, or other) provided by the 4-H member. Next, a judge will gather as much information as possible by asking open-ended questions such as: What were your goals? How did you go about working toward your goals? What were the most important things you learned as you worked toward your goals? The judge will listen carefully to what the 4-Her says, and let the answers help determine the next questions. This is called "tracking." It demonstrates that the judge is listening and interested in the 4-Her and gives value to what the 4-Her chooses to share. The judge will ask questions that will help the 4-Her share more knowledge.

Judges consider the age and experience level as they ask questions. Judges know that when working with young or beginning members, "what" and "where" questions help them express their knowledge and source of information.

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Encourage Self Evaluation and Reflection

Self-evaluation and reflection help youth develop skills in measuring their own progress. This is a learned skill, and some youth will need more direct guidance than others in the process. As youth measure their own progress, they can take on more responsibility for their own learning. By actively involving the 4-Hers in the evaluation process in a way that allows them to identify problems and generate solutions, they are more likely to understand the problem and try solutions. Self-evaluation can increase the youth’s decision-making skills and encourage new ways to learn.

Here are some tips on how to encourage self-evaluation.

- Allow 4-Hers to talk about the criteria and their self-imposed standards.
- Encourage 4-Hers to show examples of work they are proud of and work they would like to change.
- Allow 4-Hers to reflect on not only what they learned about the exhibit, but also what they learned about themselves as they completed the exhibit.
- Use questions to guide the 4-Hers through this process.

Provide Specific Feedback

Eventually a judge reaches the point where he or she needs to make specific comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the exhibit. Feedback is often classified as negative or positive. Another way of viewing it is to classify it as supportive or constructive. Supportive feedback reinforces ongoing behavior. Constructive feedback indicates a change is appropriate. By thinking of feedback in this way, all feedback can be useful. As we think about young people, the purpose of all feedback should be to assist them in maintaining or enhancing their present levels of effectiveness or appropriate behavior.

When providing feedback, a judge will:

1. Be attentive. Orient his or her body toward the 4-Her and look at him or her.
2. Initiate the interaction pleasantly. Start out with praise, empathy, or pleasant comments.
3. Specifically describe what the judge wishes to discuss. Give the feedback in specific terms without being judgmental, personal, or emotional.
4. Give rationales. Unless the reasons are obvious, tell the 4-Her why the method/choice is important to merit the judge’s feedback.
5. Be open to ideas or suggestions from the 4-Her, offer constructive alternatives as needed.
6. Ask the member if he/she understands or has questions.
7. Thank the 4-Her for listening.
8. Supply written feedback if requested.

Example:

Judge: I think you have done a nice job of assembling the first aid equipment you need, and you’ve paid attention to details. It is always good to think about ways to improve an already good idea.

Judge: Now, just in case someone else might need to find the first aid kit, I think it would be helpful if you would label it somehow on the outside. What do you think, Katie?

4-Her: Yeah, I guess that might be better. My little sister could find it easier if she was supposed to go get it.

Judge: How do you think you would label it?

4-Her: I could write on it with a wide felt tip pen or maybe use paint and draw a picture of a first aid symbol.

Judge: Those are both good ideas. You will need to think about what will hold up the best, considering where it will be used.

Look to the Future

Conference judging may be an opportunity for judges to ask youth to look to the future and set new goals that may or may not be used in 4-H project work. The focus for the future should be action (e.g., where else the 4-Her might use this information or skill, what new information or skill the person might want to learn or develop, or where the 4-Her might gain a new skill or information).

Older members may be more capable of thinking of an application for the future because they deal in more abstract terms. Judges working with younger members may need to be more concrete. An effective judge encourages 4-Hers to reflect on what they have done with their exhibits and how they would like to change them.

An effective judge helps an exhibitor self-evaluate by asking questions that will help the 4-Her describe how he or she feels about the product. Here are some examples.

Judge: Has the kit helped you find the first aid supplies easier?

Judge: Besides containing all the needed supplies, how else did you evaluate your kit?

Judge: It appears you gave a lot of thought to what you wanted in the first aid kit. How happy are you with it now that you've used it?

As a result of this self-evaluation process, members can begin to set new, more challenging goals for the following year.

All adults, parents, leaders, and judges, play important roles in ensuring that conference

judging is a significant growth experience for youth.

The contact with a judge may last only a few minutes, but it's an opportunity to make a real difference to a 4-Her. A sharp tone or overly critical statement that puts personal preferences above objective standards can stay with a 4-H member for a very, very long time and can discourage them from ever exhibiting in that project area again. It can even cause them to drop out of 4-H.

Likewise, how volunteers and parents deal with negative experiences also impacts how the member views and will remember the experience. When a caring adult helps a member to realize that the conference judging experience is one person's viewpoint on one day and encourages a member to keep that in perspective, it too will help that individual for a lifetime. While judges are trained and should be respected and use commonly agreed upon standards, it is possible that different judges will think through things differently. Using all feedback, both positive and constructive, to make the best better is a cornerstone of 4-H! Let's all work together to achieve that goal!

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