

JUDGING 4-H COUNTY FAIR HORSE SHOWS

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS THE PURPOSE

HORSES ARE THE COMMON INTEREST

SAFETY: Safety in the ring is #1 priority at all times.

Be responsible for the ring

- Volunteer workers: The level of experience and knowledge of the volunteer staff assisting with the horse show will vary greatly from county to county.
- (Ring stewards, gate persons, announcers, etc.) Making appropriate adjustments in accordance with their abilities to ensure the safety of the youth in the ring remains the top priority for the day.
- Facility compatibility: Assess ring accommodations and if needed, make adjustments to ensure the safety of the riders. (EX: workable trail pattern or Western Riding pattern for the size of the arena.)
- Additional fair distractions & activities:
 - Additional county fair activities such as carnival rides, antique tractors, horns, etc. may provide added challenges for the youth in handling their horses. In conjunction with the show committee, discuss any concerns and potential adjustments needed to provide a safer environment.
 - Be prepared to make appropriate safety adjustments such as: splitting classes, bringing a horse/rider to the center of the arena, pausing a class for a distraction to pass, allowing jackets to be removed due to heat, etc.

ETHICS

Your intentions may be honorable, but how your actions are perceived by other may be completely different.

- Do not interact with youth or parents prior to or during the show. Wait until the show is done to avoid perceived potential bias or favoritism.
- Be careful when interacting with kids in the ring. NO TOUCHING while in the ring, especially if a second party is not present. Emotions are high; reactions are not predictable; what you are doing may be misunderstood by the youth or a parent/coach observing from outside the ring.

CONDUCT

Show committees

- The level of experience varies greatly from show to show and county to county in regards to expectations of the judge, contracts, flow of show, etc.

Knowledge of horses and rules

- Good judging is based on a basic understanding of what to select for the class being judged. This requires a mental image of the ideal for the class. In addition to having complete and up-to-date information, judges need keen powers of observation and comparison, and must be able to make accurate decisions within a reasonable length of time. A 4-H judge is obligated to use the rules in 4-H bulletin 2013 511-C A 4-H Guide for Light Horse Shows in Iowa and the rules of the show in the judging of all classes. Judges are expected to have a thorough knowledge of these state 4-H rules.

Breed variations

- Be fair and consistent in your judging; have an appropriate level of expectation of riding/handling abilities of the youth. Not all youth are "Olympic hopefuls" or "National winners".
- 4-H youth show a wide variety of breeds of horses. Be fair to all breeds being shown by the youth. They all deserve an equal amount of attention as their opportunity to show to the best of their ability.
- In preparation: ask prior to the show about the potential for seeing non-standard breeds. Familiarize yourself with the breed standards and rules. Bring a copy of breed rules with you to use as a resource. Some show committees may not provide or have access to a copy.
- When calling for gaits; clarify with announcer/ring steward 'jog or appropriate gait'.
- **Disqualifications: The purpose of fair is to reward the youth for their efforts vs. eliminating them from competition. EX: Be careful to NOT disqualify a youth for 'inappropriate' tack, if it could be questionable.

Speaking expectations (Giving Oral Reasons)

- In the 4-H show the judge is often asked to comment briefly on the classes over a PA system. These reasons are helpful to the exhibitors, parents and leaders. They inform them of what they are doing right, and what can be improved. It is important that these reasons be accurate and brief. Judges oral reasons should emphasize the important points, and contain good terms. The delivery should be sincere, and the enunciation clear. Correct grammar should be used. The organization of the reason should be easy for the listener to follow. That being said, it is not a clinic. It is important to keep the show moving.
- Focus on the positive: Provide or explain a few qualities you were focusing on when selecting the top riders/handlers for relevant types of classes. (Or handling expectations related to specific grade levels, etc.) Mention a small adjustment or two that could be made by the riders/handlers to practice and improve upon for further shows. This can be very educational for them.
- Do NOT make a comparison between the individual youth.
- Know your speaking abilities: Less is more: Don't say too much and get yourself in trouble.
- In one on one conversations with youth, be sure they understand you clearly to avoid the "telephone game." You may even ask younger youth to share "how are you going to share what I've just said with your Mom or Dad?"

Controversy outside of ring: Yes, this is a possibility!

- Harassment issues should be handled by the fair board, not the judge.
- Don't get into an argument with parents. Respond with a phrase you are comfortable with "I'm sorry we disagree, but my opinion is..." and move on.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE JUDGING JOB

- **Accept judging jobs/shows appropriate for your abilities.**
 - Some considerations to account for in regards to your level of experience and abilities.
- **Total number of classes for the day.**
 - Number of youth per class and the potential for split classes.
 - Are you comfortable with split classes? How do you plan to handle them?
- **Time constraints for the show.**
 - Are there time restrictions to be followed? Can you judge effectively at a pace to complete the classes within giving time limit? i.e.: before a scheduled break or arena is needed for another event.
- **Gate call time limit.** Some youth may be showing other animals at the same time. Consult with the show committee to determine a fair way to handle time conflicts.

PATTERN CLASSES

- **Who makes up the patterns for the show?**
 - This varies from county to county. About 50% of the counties will ask you to provide patterns. Check with the show committee when confirming details about taking the job.
 - To post or not to post (the pattern) more than one hour ahead of the show? Again, this varies from county to county
- **Options**
 - Announce a simple pattern to youth while in the ring. To ensure fairness, you must be able to announce it loud enough for all to hear. This method usually rewards the youth who can work on their own vs. one who has memorized the pattern and practiced.
 - Posted pattern: must be completed and posted one hour prior to the show. There may be questions about pattern interpretation. This method typically rewards the youth (parent/trainer pair) who have prepared and practiced effectively.
 - Pattern or rail work first?
 - Run pattern portion of class first: Gives all youth a chance to show what they can do with their horse and is a learning opportunity for upcoming years.
 - Rail work first: This will shorten total class time, but doesn't allow all youth to show. If time is tight and you can get a fair look; the youth can perform a simple pattern on the rail as a group. (Stop, back, 90 degree turn, etc.)
 - Pivot vs. turn: designate clearly & create a pattern that encompasses all breeds. quarter method for other breeds - draft horse pattern
 - Give youth the opportunity to ask questions about the pattern ahead time. Be sure that all participants hear both the question and your answer.

Danish Judging System

The general concept of the Danish judging system is to reward youth against a set of standards rather than against other participants.

- You do NOT have to award blues if their abilities do not merit a blue ribbon. Award blue ribbons in qualifying class appropriately. Keep 'safety!' in mind. Thus, if the youth does not demonstrate sufficient handling skills, awarding a red ribbon is acceptable and may be more appropriate than a blue ribbon.
- Pros and cons of Danish judging.
 - Pro: You don't have to select one winner and individually place all youth.
 - Pro: The "I'm the winner" element has been eliminated.
 - Con: You have to evaluate all riders/handlers to the end of the class.
- Handling split classes when judging Danish can be challenging
- Options:
 - Select appropriate number of youth to come back from the first & second cuts. Bring back and rerun top selections. This method works well but will add time to the day.
 - Larger classes can be divided the day of the show if needed to provide a safer class.
 - Smaller fairs may combine classes and have more riders per class.

Rules of Horse Show Judging

- If you really don't enjoy judging, don't judge.
- If you are a judge, you are always a judge, not just when you are in the ring.
- Know the rules and what is expected of you for that show.
- Know the ideal for the breeds and the classes you are to judge.
- Respect all breeds that you judge.
- Be professional and business like.
- Don't talk too much.
- Great judges are honest, especially to themselves.
- Influence from a great judge will be constructive, with the horse and rider who does the most correct in that class being placed at the top.
- All participants in the ring have paid to be there and deserve to be evaluated.

As a judge, you are to give your opinion and evaluation as to whom you assessed to be the best horse and/or rider in comparison to the others in the class for that particular class on that particular day. You are not there to decide right from wrong, nor can you be influenced by past performances or future potential. You are there to evaluate the positive aspects of each and select the horse/rider with the greater amount of positive attributes for that moment in time.

Judging Guidelines

Judging Protocol

- Good judging is based on a basic understanding of what to select for the class being judged. This requires a mental image of the ideal for the class. In addition to having complete and up-to-date information, judges need keen powers of observation and comparison and must be able to make an accurate decision within a reasonable length of time.
- Those judging open and 4-H horse shows are a guiding influence on the show participants they work with, and as always be careful to set a good example. This is important both in and out of the show ring. To be an effective teacher, a judge must have the understanding and respect of the show participants. A horse show judge has a special influence on those they work with the day of the show. Honesty and sincerity are extremely important.
- Judges need to avoid putting themselves in certain situations that might prove uncomfortable to themselves, exhibitors, or show officials. Judges should be well rested and mentally ready for judging. Judges should refrain as much as possible from conversation with exhibitors. Judges should not judge entries of relatives, people they have recently sold horses to, trained for, or given lessons to within 3 months. Judges should be enthusiastic about their job. Exhibitors can soon tell whether a judge enjoys judging or not. The most successful judges have a sincere interest in helping the participants.
- **General Keys to Success: Knowledge of breed standards/rules. Self Confidence. Fair and equal treatment to all.**

Judging Attire

- Neat, orderly, professional. Hat to shade eyes, protect from rain and sun and lend professional appear. Clothing that could possibly scare horses on a windy day would not be recommended. Sensible shoes for walking in deep and sometimes messy footing, boots are strongly recommended. Be prepared for inclement weather. Layering works well in all types of weather. Raincoat, gloves, boot covers and an extra set of clothes are good to have on hand. If you plan on changing before your drive home, don't change at the show grounds but rather at a nearby gas station or fast food establishment.

Helpful Hints

- Preparation for the Show
 - Review rules for classes to be judged.

- Know where and to whom you are to report on Show Day.
- Arrive early (at least 30 minutes before show time or 60 minutes if you are bringing patterns with you), promptness is very important.
- Upon Arrival to Show Grounds
 - Check in with Committee.
 - Assess the showground's, set up, organization, rest rooms, exercise and show pen. It will give you a better understanding of layout. No speakers in the practice pen, restrooms are far away, exhibitors have to park far away, etc.
 - Meet with your ring master, gate person and announcer to go over the ring policy, gate calls, and class routines. This will help eliminate possible misunderstandings and help to expedite the show.
 - Post your showmanship, jumping, trail patterns. Horsemanship and Equitation patterns are optional unless specified in the show rules. Review any patterns provided by the show committee.
 - Inspect any courses prior to the class to make sure they meet the show rule regulations and to eliminate any dangerous situations.
- Staying out of Trouble
 - Know the rules.
 - Professional Conduct – be courteous.
 - No alcohol.
 - No inappropriate language.
 - Exhibit confidence and be in charge.
 - Avoid casual visits with Exhibitors.
 - Be (appear) totally objective.
 - Where to stand during short delays (away from exhibitors or spectators).
- To help keep the show moving
 - Encourage the In-Gate person to have the horses in the next class check in.
 - Ask the announcer to make a call for the next class as the previous class enters.
 - As you line up your class in the middle of the ring for placings, allow the next class to enter at a walk on the rail.
 - Excuse any riders that need tack changes before the placings are announced.
 - The two (2) gate system works better: One for in and one for out. This will help alleviate congestion and makes for a safer environment.
 - Enforce the 2-minute tack change or hold on the gate.
 - Know the class order of precedence/judging criteria.
 - Know the gaits to call.
 - Know acceptable equipment.
- Handling Difficult Parents or Exhibitors – Do not change your mind.
 - Do not change your placings. After you have pinned your class, it is final.
 - Exhibitors are paying for your opinion, some will agree and some will not.
 - When dealing directly with a dissatisfied person, be courteous, but firm.
 - Avoid arguing or laboring through excuses. Keep it short and to the point.
 - Avoid negative criticisms or comparisons.
 - Be kind to small children. They are often afraid of you. Consider it a good day if you get them to smile. Your goal is to offer them a good experience so that they want to come back again.

Protective Attire and Safety

- Protective headgear or vests should never be discriminated against in any style of riding.
- SEI approved helmets, with harness fastened must be worn when mounted or driving on show grounds.
- Sleeve to cover the arm.
- Long pants (exception for driving).
- Any act of discourtesy to judge or show officials by an exhibitor or any other attendant will be grounds for disqualification and forfeiture of fees.
- Cruelty or abuse of horse will not be tolerated.