

HOW TO SHINE ON JUDGING DAY

When judging day arrives, report to the junior fair secretary *30 minutes* before your scheduled judging time. Seek out the county Extension staff or junior fair department superintendent. Check out the judging site. Let the superintendent know if you have any concerns about the layout. Be reasonable in your requests for any changes because judging day is hectic. Staff and volunteers want to be helpful, but they can't drop everything to get what you want.

The superintendent is your best friend when you judge. The superintendent's job is to make your work as efficient as possible. Here's what the superintendent does for you:

- Secures able volunteer help, including a recording clerk, someone to get exhibits ready for judging, someone to attach ribbons, and someone to hang the exhibits.
- Establish an orderly and efficient system for checking in exhibits.
- Prepare the lots for judging.
- See that placings are accurately recorded.
- Secure your signature on exhibit sheets and submit the records to the proper authority.
- See that the exhibits are displayed as attractively as possible.
- Make the exhibits as educational as possible for fairgoers after your judging is completed.

Start the judging on time. If you're judging Danish System, the superintendent or assistant will give you your first lot and you're off! Judges have developed various methods for judging lots. They usually separate the entries by "first impression" quality into groups of "good" (lowest quality), "better" (mid-range quality) and "best" (outstanding quality) exhibits. (Hint: Always use the terms "good," "better" and "best" when talking about exhibits at a county fair or similar judging experience. Never call exhibits "poor," "weak" or "bad." Consider all exhibits at a county fair at least "good.") For example, you may always set the good exhibits on your right, the better exhibits in the center and the best exhibits on your left. It doesn't matter where you set them, just so you have a system that works for you. (Hint: Keep your hands clean. You're handling someone's precious work, so handle the exhibits like they are your own. If you refresh yourself with something to drink or eat while you judge, keep the food and drink away from the exhibits! Always set drinks and eats on a separate table or at your feet. Wipe your hands after you handle any food.)

Next, examine each of your subgroups to support or reject your first impressions. At this point you will probably shift some exhibits to different groups. When you're sure that you have them in the right groups, you still have to make final placings (blues, reds, whites, pinks) as dictated by the Danish System. For example, let's say there are 20 exhibits in the lot. By looking at the Danish System list, you see that you can award not more than five blues. If there are 43 in the lot, you can award not more than 10 blues. Judges usually mark their placings on the entry tags: 1 for blue, 2 for red, etc. Write clearly so the recorder doesn't misread your number and record the wrong placing.

If you don't have an audience for your Danish judging, you give your placings to the assistant and move on to the next lot. If you have an audience, you'll want to do more at this point, i.e., take advantage of this opportunity to teach. Summarize and explain some of your decisions out loud. Try arranging the exhibits receiving blues in rank order so that you can tell participants and observers which are "my top blues" in this lot and why. Spend some time pointing out some strengths of these top blue exhibits. Always comment when an exhibit is especially well presented (neat, clean, well designed, secure mounting), noting, "It's always a pleasure to look at exhibits that are well presented." Hopefully, there will be time to answer questions from the audience.

If you're judging face to face, you'll receive your first eager young exhibitor and you'll start your interviews. Review your interview questions before you judge. Take your list of questions with you so that you can refer to them periodically.

Some counties will ask you to fill out a score card or comment sheet to share with the exhibitor. This slows down judging, but the benefits to the exhibitor of having written comments are worth the extra time. Help from an efficient assistant or secretary will speed up the process. Superintendents or assistants can write as you dictate. In Danish judging your comments must be pared down to a few words that can be written on the back of the entry tag, or on a separate comment card. These few choice words are the only means you have to reach the exhibitor and make the process as educational as possible.

After you have been judging for a half hour or so, you may want to suggest some minor adjustments in the flow of exhibits or youth. Talk to the superintendent. If any problems arise, be calm and professional. Remind yourself that county fairs are complex and things can go wrong. It helps to insert some humor from time to time to break any tension.

How many exhibits can you expect to judge? Again this varies from county to county. Counties with smaller 4-H enrollments may have only 100 entries or exhibits in a project area. If each exhibitor brings two entries, that means you'll be interviewing about 50 kids. Counties with large enrollments can have hundreds of entries divided among 100-200 youth. Not all the entries will appear. You can expect about 75% of the entries will actually show up for judging. That's still a lot of work.

If the number of exhibitors is too large for one judge to handle in 8-10 hours of judging, the county has probably hired another judge or two to judge with you. Before you start judging with another judge, spend some time getting acquainted. Compare your judging criteria, standards and philosophies. If your judging styles are very different, try to strike a compromise for the day, so that your judging "team" is consistent and fair in its placings. Make sure you have worked out a plan for dividing up the work, selecting merit awards and taking breaks.

Work hard. Do your best. Be gracious when people compliment or question your decisions. If someone is upset, listen attentively, then say, "I see your point, but that's how I saw it today based on my criteria." If someone does become belligerent (it very seldom happens), the superintendent should be called on to help out. Sometimes exhibitors, leaders or parents can take county fairs too seriously. Remind them to keep placings, ribbons and premiums in perspective.

Don't feel you have to apologize for the choices of blues, reds, whites and pinks that you make. Your decisions are final. If you have solid criteria and standards that you have employed consistently throughout the day that you can cite to back up your decisions, then exhibitors, observers and county staff should be satisfied.

When the day is done, you'll need to complete and sign the judge's sheet. The recording secretary will tell you if there are any questions about placings. If changes need to be made on the judge's sheet, the secretary will draw a line through any improperly recorded numbers and enter the proper placing. You'll need to initial all of these changes before you

leave. You'll also need to sign an affidavit listing the departments and classes that you judged.

Before you leave the judging area, thank the superintendent, recording secretary and any assistants for their help. Give feedback to the superintendent about the day. What could the fair do differently next time to make your job as judge easier or better, or to make it better for exhibitors? What changes would you suggest to the county fair premium list? Offer to make written comments and suggestions if the county fair would like them.

Usually you will then be directed by the superintendent to go to the junior fair secretary's office to sign a form verifying what you judged and for how long. Be prepared to give your travel mileage to the fairgrounds and your judge's card. Sometimes you'll get paid then for your judging. Other times your check will be mailed to you. How much will you get paid? Like everything else, that varies from county to county. You can expect to get paid between \$75 and \$125, depending upon how many hours you worked and how far you had to drive. Some counties pay in one lump sum for a half or full day of judging; others pay for mileage up to a certain amount. The pay is not great. There's an effort now to increase the amounts paid for judging, so perhaps these totals will grow.

If your judging day was a success, you can count on being asked back for a second or third year. Counties like to rotate judges every two or three years to expose exhibitors to new ideas and judging styles.

When you're driving home and alone with your thoughts, do a mental critique of your judging effort. When you get a chance, complete the "Judge Self-Evaluation Form." Ask the county to assess your judging, too. Then, based on your feedback, make adjustments in your future judging efforts. Finally, send the county a thank you note and offer your services again next year.

That's it. You're done. Relax and be proud of the contribution you have made to the development of youth. Congratulations. Good job!