

FACE-TO-FACE JUDGING QUESTIONS

Face-to-face evaluation has six distinct phases. There are a number of questions that you can ask in each phase. You'll have about 5 minutes with each exhibitor, depending upon how busy you are and how many exhibitors are waiting in line. You certainly won't have time to ask them all, but try to ask at least a sampling of questions from each phase.

Phase 1: Get Acquainted – When each exhibitor sits at your table, you should smile, say “Hi,” introduce yourself and shake hands. As you start to skim the exhibitor's exhibits placed in front of you, ask a series of get-acquainted questions:

- What's your name?
- What grade are you in?
- What got you interested in photography?
- How many years have you taken the photo project?
- How long have you been in this level?
- How many years have you had your photos judged at the county fair?

Take the time to make eye contact during this get-acquainted time. Listen carefully to all the comments. Show exhibitors that you're really interested by your expressions and gestures. (It gets hard toward the end of the day, but try to treat every exhibitor the same . . . like you're my only exhibitor today and you have my total attention.) When you find out an exhibitor's first name, use it throughout the judging. If you forget the name or you're not sure you heard it correctly, look at the entry tag.

Phase 2: Share – The second phase is simply a chance for the youth to share information about the exhibits that they brought for judging.

- Tell me about your photos.
- Where did you take the photos?
- How did you . . . ?
- When did you . . . ?
- What type of camera did you use? Is it your own camera?
- What was the weather like? The light?

- Do you have someone at home or a project leader in your club to give you advice on your project? Have you had any project meetings or field trips? (Hint: Try to avoid questions like, “Did someone *help* you with this exhibit?” It's an awkward question under the circumstances because the youth might think you're implying that it's not his or her work, which is required by county fair rules.)

Also, as part of this sharing phase, make a comment or two about what you're finding in the photos, such as, “I can see you really like dogs (or cats or barns). Your interest shows in your exhibits.” “You must have had a good time taking these photos.” “This photo makes me smile.” Your positive comments will help the youth relax before the next phase where you start to critically analyze his or her photos.

Phase 3: Process – Answers to the sharing questions will naturally lead you into the third or “Process” phase of judging. This is when you want the youth to analyze what they did, to reflect on what's important. Here are some examples of the types of process questions that you can ask. There is never enough time to ask all of them, of course. By listening carefully, you will find that the answer to one question will give you clues to your next question.

- Which is your *favorite* photo? Why?
- Which is your *best* photo, do you think? Why?
- Which of your photos is the one I think is your best? Why?
- If you could change anything in any of your photos, what would it be? Why?
- What was the *most* important thing that you learned taking your photos this year?
- What was your biggest challenge in taking these photos? (This could be the weather, an antsy subject, lack of time, etc.)

Answers to these questions will help you see how well the youth knows the basic rules of composition. The answers will guide your comments and suggestions for the rest of your face-to-face judging time together.

Phase 4: Generalize – This is a time for you to summarize what you see in the photos and what was learned. Focus on the best things you see in the exhibits and some ways to improve the things that need work. In all your comments, be specific.

Also be sensitive when giving comments about techniques that need improvement. A good rule of thumb is to use the “sandwich” approach to critiquing: say something positive, then say what needs improvement, then say something positive again.

Of course, this is also the phase in which you give your placings. Try to summarize the main reasons for your placings before moving on to phase five.

- I really liked . . . because . . .
- I thought this photo was really effective because . . .
- I thought you made a good decision when . . .
- I wasn't quite sure about . . . Could you explain . . .?
- That's coming along nicely. What if you tried this? What would happen?
- I would like to see you try this the next time you make your exhibit. What do you think would happen?
- Have you ever tried . . .? What would happen? You might try . . . because . . .
- Have you thought about . . .? You might experiment with . . .
- Keep working on . . . See if you can . . .
- You've just about mastered . . . One more time and you'll have it!

Phase 5: Apply – This is the time when you want youth to reflect on what they learned *today* and how to apply it in the future, to connect the learning to other situations. Some samples:

- What are you planning to photograph next?
- What else would you like to try or learn in this project?
- Your skills are coming along nicely. How might you use your photo skills to help your 4-H club? (or family, school, community)
- How could you help someone else learn these same photo skills?

Phase 6: Wrap up – End on a positive note. A smile, a call for final questions, a thank you and a word of encouragement to enter again next year usually work. They leave the exhibitor feeling good about the judging experience. They also leave you feeling ready to meet and greet the next exhibitor in line.

Group Conference Judging

When you're talking to a *group* of exhibitors at one time, you might want to stick to commenting on exhibits that receive a blue or top red.

Normally there isn't enough time to comment about everyone's work and the exhibitors can learn most by looking at the best exhibits in the lot. Hopefully there will be one or two in the lot that you can use to demonstrate some good exhibit rules and techniques to follow. You might say: “I found this to be the best of this lot based on (then give your reasons). There were several others that were strong, too, such as this one (then give your reasons).”

You can also make some comments about the overall quality of the lot. For example: “I thought the lot as a whole was strong in the area of . . . There were many interesting photos to look at. Good work.” Or: “An area that many of you could work on is . . . That's one of the hardest things to learn for any photographer.”