

COMMON YOUTH CHARACTERISTICS

The key to a successful judging experience is the understanding of youth and their developmental characteristics. While each young person is unique, youth tend to grow and develop in predictable stages. Youth in the early grades tend to be alike, just like kids in high school tend to be alike. Following is a set of characteristics for youth in four stages: Grades K-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8 and Grades 9-12. The characteristics of these youth change as they mature. Your judging strategies should change along with the youth. The grid below gives you some valuable judging tips for each developmental stage. Feel free to add your own ideas.

Grades K-2

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Judging Tips</i>
Thinking is in here and now (“concrete” thinkers).	Give youth specific advice in clear, concrete terms.
Attention spans are about 20-30 minutes.	Keep your judging comments concise, especially if youth have been waiting in line for awhile.
Begin to develop friendships, usually with youth of the same sex.	If the youth is with a friend, invite the friend to listen during your judging. Remind youth that working on 4-H projects is a great way to meet people with similar interests.
Want to be liked and please adults.	Let youth know that they have done a good job on this exhibit.
Learn best when physically active.	Suggest learning activities or projects where youth can use physical energy.
Have a special attachment to older youth.	Encourage exhibitors to choose older youth to be their helpers.
Are easily motivated.	Encourage exhibitors to keep trying. Tell youth you are looking forward to seeing their exhibits again next year.
Competitive activities are less appropriate.	Suggest some cooperative activities for more learning in this project area.
Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult.	Help youth stay grounded, to expect small achievements. Encourage them to plan exhibits that are realistic and doable.

Grades 3-5

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Judging Tips</i>
Learn best when physically active.	Suggest learning activities or projects where youth can use physical energy.
Have a special attachment to older youth.	Encourage exhibitors to choose older youth to be their helpers.
Are easily motivated.	Encourage youth to keep trying. Tell youth you are looking forward to seeing their exhibits again next year.
Reading becomes an individual experience.	Suggest additional resources that they can read to improve their exhibits or projects.
Attention span is about 45 minutes.	Keep your judging comments concise, especially if youth have been waiting in line for awhile. Suggest some learning activities that will take 30-45 minutes to complete.
Acceptance by peer group is important.	If the youth is with a friend, invite the friend to listen during your judging. Remind youth that working on 4-H projects is a great way to meet people with similar interests.
Interests expand from home, to neighborhood, to community.	Suggest learning activities that will involve friends and neighbors, and that will involve them in community service.
Enjoy both cooperation and competition.	Suggest learning activities where youth can work together and some where they can compete.
Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group.	Suggest learning activities where youth can work alone or where they can get individual attention.
Feelings of competence enhance self-concept.	Suggest learning activities where youth can succeed and receive individual recognition.
Show loyalty to members of their own sex and antagonism toward those of the opposite sex.	Suggest learning activities where youth can choose their own partners.

Grades 6-8

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Judging Tips</i>
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating their own work.	Suggest learning activities where youth have responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing and evaluating.
Can plan their own social and recreational activity.	Suggest learning activities where youth can work and play together.
Can discuss current events, international affairs and social issues with some help.	Ask questions that require an awareness of current events and issues to answer.
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines.	Ask questions that encourage making decisions, e.g., How will you . . .? When will you . . .?
Gain skills in social relations with peers and adults.	Suggest learning activities where youth can foster social interaction with peers and adults.
Peer pressure mounts, first from the same sex, then from the opposite sex.	Remind youth to be true to their own plans and goals as they work on these projects. Suggest learning activities where youth can get individual attention and recognition.
Can be quite self-conscious.	Be low key and respectful when youth sit for judging. Give them time to become comfortable with you. Avoid embarrassing questions or comments.
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults.	Suggest learning activities where youth can interact with older youth and adults.
Choices are often unrealistic.	Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives and help them weigh options before making decisions.

Grades 9-12

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Judging Tips</i>
Personal philosophy begins to emerge.	Do less talking. Let the youth describe their work in more detail. Complement their creative, individual thoughts and philosophies.
Enjoy discussing the world situations as well as personal activities.	Encourage discussion of events and feelings.
Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level.	Suggest learning activities where youth will be put into real-life, problem-solving situations. Challenge their ideas, encourage oral reasons.
Strong desire for status in their peer groups.	Suggest learning activities where youth are encouraged and supported by peers.
High interest in social activity.	Suggest learning activities where youth can foster social interaction with peers and adults. Encourage youth to plan and carry out their own social activities.
Need freedom from parental control to make decisions.	Help youth realize that their decisions have consequences. Discourage parents from asking questions if they sit with the exhibitor during judging. Speak to the exhibitor, not the parent.
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.	Encourage and help youth see their positive worth. Complement their efforts.

Source: 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System; adapted by Wayne Brabender, Wisconsin 4-H Photo Specialist.