

PHILOSOPHY OF 4-H JUDGING

A. The Place of Judging or Evaluation in the 4-H Program

"To Make The Best Better" is our well known 4-H motto. The implication is that we need to know what our best is before we can make it better. It asks us how well we're doing now; and it tells us how and where we can improve. To make "the Best Better" there must be some form of evaluation, or judging, that allows us to discover where we are and how well we're doing.

In the process of this evaluation we must always keep in mind that the best we are striving to "make better" is young people - helping them to achieve the best in themselves - people who really feel and know they are special and who feel they are capable and lovable. In 4-H people are our product! We use projects and records to help young people develop skills, gain knowledge and build confidence, but it is always the PERSON with whom we are most concerned.

B. Judging Defined

In 4-H, a Judge evaluates, that is, appraises or determines the merit of an exhibit, demonstration or record in light of recognized standards, then goes a step further in making decisions and making placings. When conference judging is used, the exhibitor plays the role of a judge (noun) and is involved in the action (judging, a verb).

C. Exhibit or Contest Judging

Exhibiting in 4-H is an educational tool; it is another opportunity to learn. An exhibit can be used as a vehicle for members to learn a new skill.

If judging is to be an educational experience, one of the most important concepts we need to understand is the concept of a standard. To judge is to judge according to the standard, not to the personal whim of the person doing the judging.

What then is a standard? A standard can be defined as:

1. Something established for use as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring or judging capacity, quantity, content and/or value.
2. Something used by general agreement to determine whether or not an item is as it should be.

If we think about these definitions in relation to 4-H projects we can describe the standard for a loaf of bread - golden brown color, smooth even texture, uniform shape, crack parallel on both sides, etc., or, we could list the standard for a meat type hog, or a Guernsey dairy calf - characteristics that we all agree should be there for a "standard" product.

D. How Standards Are Determined

Standards can be determined in four ways, that is, there are four kinds of standards:

1. Quality standards - measuring the degree of perfection. Example: a cake that is fluffy and moist, or tomatoes that are firm and free of disease (these standards are specified on the exhibit check sheet.)
2. Quantity standards - the amount or number of something. Example: six cookies, three articles of clothing that can stand alone; the number of inches of back fat.

3. Performance standards - these are standards we set for ourselves. How much do you plan to do? With a performance standard, there is always a minimum and a maximum standard on a continuum. For example, if a young person is responsible for cleaning his/her room, he/she may set a lot, medium or high standard.
4. Achievement standards - objective measures of something we have done. Example: playing a concert without an error, or making an "A" grade, or winning a blue ribbon. (These are all objective, tangible measures that we have achieved.)

E. Standards Are Influenced by Many Things

Advertising, friends, traditions all affect our standards. Standards vary widely and will depend greatly on the person, their resources and the people they associate with. Where a used car may be "good enough" for some people, only a new car will do for others. The same holds true for a variety of other items where the individual has his/her own standard.

F. Standards Are Learned

Standards are learned and in 4-H, teaching standards should be an integral part of our project work.

As one of the basic tenets of 4-H, teaching standards continues to be the thrust of the 4-H project. Since the early 1900's 4-H has been helping communities and rural areas accept up-to-date methods in agriculture and homemaking, thereby, raising the standards and the hopes of all those involved.

G. Standards Can Differ

The standards we hold up for ourselves don't always apply to others.

Quantity and Quality standards may stay the same, but performance and achievement standards will vary considerably depending on the age of the individual. A nine year old cannot be expected to perform on the same level as a sixteen year old. However, that doesn't mean we must lower our standard for quality. As an example, the standard for muffins remains the same regardless of who bakes them, yet nobody expects a beginner to achieve the same results or performance level as an experienced cook.

We expect members to be able to verbalize their reasons for holding certain standards.

This is what conference judging is all about. The basis of judging contest is to learn to verbalize our standards and evaluate our own performance or the quality of a class. Learning to articulate our feelings and ideas is a big step forward in life skills.

H. Helping The 4-H Member

What does this mean to you as a 4-H judge? How will you prepare your members so the judging of their demonstration, exhibit or fashion revue will be a positive, educational experience? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Work at creating a caring atmosphere where every 4-H club member feels special, wanted, capable and loved. Building a sense of self-worth helps kids feel good about themselves and their special talents.

2. Help your 4-H member understand the standards used in evaluation. Do this by helping them learn the information in the project materials that the standard is being based on.
3. Use check sheets to review standards and teach members what to look for.
4. Prepare for conference judging. Again practice, go prepared with terms, expectations, and standards for the exhibit.
5. Encourage record completion.
6. Inform members of the "rules of the game." In other words, be certain the members understand things like eligibility, exhibit requirements, and your expectations.

Preparation and practice is the only means of helping members attain their goal. And as we strive "To Make the Best Better" let us do so in a way that every member we work with feels special -walk beside them when preparing them for the judging experience rather than merely pointing the way.

Positive Attitude

Our job as adults is to show the child that we are proud of their hard work, and of their mastery of skill. Rather than their being a winner. If we do this we are more likely to have an emotionally healthy, successful child who is enjoying competition and who plays fairly.

Evaluating and Recognizing Youth Using the Danish System

What is the overall objective of the Danish System?

The Danish System is a method of evaluating entries (projects or exhibitors) in a class into groups according to standards developed for that class. The defined groups are designed to recognize youth for their achievement relative to set standards.

Why is the Danish System used in the 4-H program?

The Danish System distributes awards among those participating, thus providing recognition for the maximum number of participants. It is understood that recognition is a basic need of all people (young and not-so-young) and public recognition can help to fulfill this basic need.

The Danish System recognizes the existence of minor differences between two or more entries. This system allows for those minor differences and attempts to provide opportunity for the maximum number of youth to be recognized.

How does the Danish System work?

An evaluation is made of each entry in a class. The class can then be subdivided into groups (the groups will be outlined below). Consideration can be given to the age of the exhibitor if the class is evaluated for showmanship.

A "modified group" method may be utilized when the individual entries within each group are further ranked in relation to their relative standing within each group.

Description of Groups

Purple (Superior)

A purple is awarded to those entries that far exceed the average standard or meet the standards established for that particular class. This award indicates a near perfect exhibit and is awarded after receiving a blue.

Blue (Excellent)

A blue is awarded to those entries that exceeds the average standard or meet the standards established for that particular class. This award indicates a certain degree of excellence that exceeds the average expectation and may be given to a large number of participants.

Red (Good)

A red is awarded to those entries that meet the average standard or are slightly below the average standard established for that respective class. The general level of accomplishment meets expectations, but is less than excellent. Shortcomings are found in certain aspects to cause this ranking.

White (Fair)

A white is awarded to those entries that do not meet average standard or meets the established standards for whose in that particular class. The level of accomplishment is less than expected. A ranking of white is deserved due to the severe shortcomings from the good standard.

Considerations when using the Danish System

1. Items should be judged based on the outlined standards for the class. The standards must be applied equally to all. Entries are not judged against each other.
2. The judge should not assume that an exhibitor is inexperienced due to age or mistakes that may occur.
3. The exhibitor should not be judged when the class is for the evaluation of the project animal.
4. The judge should not assist exhibitors with the project prior to the exhibition or fair.

Problems may arise if:

1. Exhibitors are not fairly evaluated against the standards.
2. Application of standards is too rigid or too lax.
3. Purple, blue, red, and white classifications are awarded based on a pre-determined formula for the number or percentage of each classification.
4. Age and ability are not taken into consideration when a class is evaluated.
5. Participants receive recognition they do not deserve.

Summary

The Danish System is one procedure to recognize and reward young people for their efforts and projects. This system is designed to try to maintain a proper balance of competition and recognition. However, as with any method of evaluation and recognition, if the operational procedures are not understood, then the system can be abused.