Judging Horses 101

By Amanda Kumiko Kent and Cindy A. Kinder

☆ Animal Selection   ☆ Note Taking

☆ Terms & Transitions   ☆ Oral Reasons Format
Horse Selection

Unlike livestock, which are judged for production purposes, horses are looked at in terms of their athletic performance ability.

To develop a strong foundation for horse judging skills remember your A, B, C's: Action, Balance, Conformation

Just like different human athletes, equine athletes need different body types to be the best at different tasks.

Example:
A sprinter (Quarter Horse) compared to a long distance runner (Thoroughbred)
Or a ballerina (Arabian) vs. a football player (Clydesdale)

A. Action - Structure and Travel
The way an animal moves or its action is determined by its skeletal structure. Correct structure is essential to prevent the development of unsoundness or lameness in a horse, which may result in poor performance or the inability to perform. You can observe structure in: the angle of the shoulder, length of back in comparison to underline, level croup, pastern angle and leg set.

Correct leg set equals durability. If a horse stands straight, it will probably travel straight. If it stands crooked, it will travel crooked. Crooked movement wastes energy, can affect agility, and predisposes the horse to unsoundness.

*Try it yourself: keep toes pointed in 'pigeon toed' and walk four paces- How did that affect your movement? Now try pointing your toes out or standing with legs wide apart.

1. Narrow, slightly knock-kneed
2. Base wide, toed-out
3. Straight legs, slightly toed-out
B. Balance
Balance is uniformity in the appearance of muscle. This will vary slightly according to breed characteristics.
Visualize three equal circles on the horse’s body: one starting at the point of the shoulder and extending to the heartgirth, one just behind the heartgirth to the flank, and the last one at the flank to the point of the buttocks.

C. Conformation
Conformation includes all aspects of the horse’s body: muscling and balance, structural smoothness, body proportions, overall appearance and ideal characteristics for sex and breed. Breed characteristics may include specific requirements of color and markings.

Faulty or poor conformation would include an unsoundness or potential unsoundness or deviation from the ideal.

Why might these breeds have been developed?
Presenting oral reasons is the most valuable experience you will encounter in judging. No matter what career you choose, to communicate effectively is a must to be successful. Success starts with note taking.

In contests, several classes are judged in a short time, and oral reasons are given later; therefore it is necessary to take notes on what you see about the animals or performance in each class. Study the notes before giving oral reasons to a judge. A good set of notes should help you remember the class in your mind. A 6”x9” steno notebook is suggested for use in taking notes.

Only take notes on classes that have been assigned as a reasons class. Once animals are evaluated and placed notes are to be taken.

The format for notes is broken down into three sections:
1. Top Pair (of animals)
2. Middle Pair (of animals)
3. Bottom Pair (of animals)

Each section can then be further broken down into three pieces:
- Grant – is to list one good quality of the lower placed animal in a pair
- Criticize – is to list the bad qualities, one or two things, of the higher placed animal in the pair.
- Compare – is to list two or three good qualities of the higher placed animal in the pair.

Below is what a blank note page should look like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Name ____________________</th>
<th>Class Placing ____________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____ Number and identification</td>
<td>Grant (Good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Number and identification</td>
<td>Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Number and identification</td>
<td>Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Number and identification</td>
<td>Grant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes should be readable and brief; this will prevent you from memorizing your notes. You should be able to remember the animals, not your notes.
Below is what should be listed in your note page.

**Top Pair** – yellow highlighted sections are to be said for the top pair.
**Middle Pair** – grey highlighted sections are to be said for the middle pair.
**Bottom Pair** – blue highlighted sections are to be said for the bottom pair.

# of Animal | Grant (Good) | Criticize (Bad) | Compare (Good)

Opening statement | Say any bad qualities of the 1st place animal. (optional) | Say why 1st place animal beats 2nd place animal by stating the good qualities of 1st place animal.

Say the good qualities of the 2nd place animal over the 1st place animal. | List why the 2nd place animal does not win the class. (bad qualities) | Say why 2nd place animal beats 3rd place animal by stating only the good qualities of the 2nd place animal.

Say the good qualities of the 3rd place animal over the 2nd place animal. | Say why the 3rd place animal is 3rd. (bad qualities) | List why 3rd place animal beats 4th place animal by stating only the good qualities of the 3rd place animal.

Say the good qualities of the 4th place animal over the 3rd place animal. | Say why the 4th place animal is last. |

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**Tips for Effective Reasons Note taking and Reasons.**

1. Don’t start taking your notes until you have placed the class and written down your placing.

2. Try to be general in the terms that you use to describe the animal in each box, but write as much as possible to describe the animal. You will have time to be descriptive with the terms that you use when you prepare to deliver your oral reasons.

3. Don’t forget to write down an ID point and sex, if needed, for each animal.

4. Be sure to use the correct sex of the animal in classes that are of mixed sex and use your ID points when describing the animals.

5. Use the time during non reasons classes to look back at your notes and prepare your reasons or complete your notes.
Example set of notes

Class: Aged Quarter Horse Mares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Animal</th>
<th>Grant (Good)</th>
<th>Criticize (Bad)</th>
<th>Compare (Good)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Sorrel, left rear sock</td>
<td>Straight legs, evenly balanced, clean throat latch</td>
<td>(No obvious criticism)</td>
<td>Nicest balanced, Soundest Moving, More Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sorrel, star, stripe, snip</td>
<td>Most like class winner from a muscle standpoint</td>
<td>Coarse and straight shouldered, short choppy stride</td>
<td>Wider Chested, prominent withers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bay, toed-in on right front</td>
<td>More Attractive, Well muscled rear quarters</td>
<td>Shallowest Bodied, Narrowest Chested</td>
<td>Higher Quality, Longer, cleaner necked, more parallel in her lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Roan</td>
<td>Wide set, clear eyes, well muscled gaskins</td>
<td>Lowest quality, poorest balance, Over reaches</td>
<td>Lowest quality, poorest balance, Over reaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Splints on frontend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using these notes, here is an example set of reasons.

The words that are highlighted in green are transition phrases that are to be used in every set of reasons. These transition phrases help you move from box to box in your notes.

I placed the class of Aged Quarter Horse Mares: 4, 1, 3, 2. I started with the high quality, highly fit attractive mare. When compared to 1, the sorrel mare with the left rear sock is more evenly balanced, more feminine and has a sound structure. She is longer strided at the trot and lope. 1 is the most like the class winner from a standpoint of muscling. But the sorrel with the star, stripe, and snip is coarse and straight in the shoulder giving her a short, choppier stride. So she’s second.

In the middle pair of mares I placed 1 over 3. The sorrel mare with the star and stripe had a wider chest and more prominent withers. She travels straight and true. Both mares were steep in the shoulder but the bay was toed-in on the right front causing her to roll at the shoulder when traveling. She’s third.

Quality places 3 over 2 in the bottom pair. She has a longer cleaner neck, parallel in her lines and more balanced when compared to the roan. 2 had the lowest quality and poor overall balance as well as a potential unsoundness, splints. She also overreached as she traveled, so left her last.
# Terms and Transitions

## General Appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More balanced</td>
<td>Poorly Balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoother</td>
<td>Rough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Refined</td>
<td>Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More athletic</td>
<td>Bunchy-muscled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More broodmare potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties in more correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Head & Neck

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner cut about the head</td>
<td>Coarse-headed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharper, chisled features about the head</td>
<td>Long, mule ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider set between the eyes</td>
<td>Pig-eyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A head that tapers to a finer muzzle</td>
<td>Parrot-mouthed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner through the neck and throat latch</td>
<td>Ewe-necked, Swan-necked, cresty necked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck sets higher on to shoulder</td>
<td>Neck does not blend smoothly to the shoulder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Shoulder & Chest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More sloping shoulder</td>
<td>Steep shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More powerfully muscled shoulder</td>
<td>Light muscled shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider chest</td>
<td>Narrow chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper chest</td>
<td>Too wide in chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More prominent V</td>
<td>No V muscling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Ribs, Heart-Girth, Topline, Underline, Middle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deeper heart-girth</td>
<td>Lacks depth of barrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More spring of forerib</td>
<td>Slab sided, straight sided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter topline in relation to longer underline</td>
<td>Long back, sway back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoother underline</td>
<td>Short underline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More prominent withers</td>
<td>Thick over the withers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer croup</td>
<td>Steep croup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper flanked</td>
<td>Wasp-waisted, tucked-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Rear Quarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wider through the stifle</td>
<td>Light-muscled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavier muscled quarter</td>
<td>Apple-rumped, goose rumped,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer more athletic muscling through rear quarter</td>
<td>Not tied in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoother and cleaner over the hips viewed from the rear</td>
<td>Rough over the hip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feet and Legs

**Good**
- Set squarer on feet and legs
- Wider in front
- Higher quality of bone
- Cleaner/flatter bone
- Larger, rounder foot

**Bad**
- Stands too close in front/behind, stands too wide in front/behind
- Pinched between front legs, knock knee; sickle hock, straight hock
- Camped under, camped out; calf-kneed, buck kneed, knee sprung
- Bog spavin, thorough pin
- Base-narrow
- Lacks substance of bone, coarse bone
- Splints, ringbone, sidebone capped elbow, wind puffs
- Toe crack, seedy toe, club foot

Action

**Good**
- Moves out freer and easier
- Moves truer behind
- Shows more flexion in knees and hocks
- Longer, farther reaching stride
- Lighter on the forehand

**Bad**
- Choppy stride
- Paddles in front/behind
- Lame
- Forges
- Heavy on the forehand

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Unsoundness vs. Blemish

**Unsoundness:** Affects or has the potential to affect the performance and usability of the horse. (Example; Ringbone, pigeon-toed, founder, hoof cracks)

**Blemish:** Affects the appearance, but not the performance of the horse. (Example; Scars)

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Connective Terms

**Grants**
- I realize
- I admit
- I agree
- I saw

**Transitional Terms**
- Plus
- Besides
- Also

**Action Words**
- Exhibited
- Displayed
- Showed
- Presented

**Opening Pairs**
- Coming to the bottom pair
- Moving to
- In closing I preferred to
- In the top pair
Your Notes and Thoughts
4-H Livestock & Horse Judging

Teaching Youth Life Skills

✓ Leadership
✓ Teamwork
✓ Self-motivation
✓ Marketable skills
✓ Critical thinking
✓ Problem solving
✓ Decision making
✓ Communication
✓ Self Esteem
✓ Character
✓ Self responsibility