



University of Idaho
Extension

Judging Horses 101

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Photo by Donna Gillespie

★ 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.**

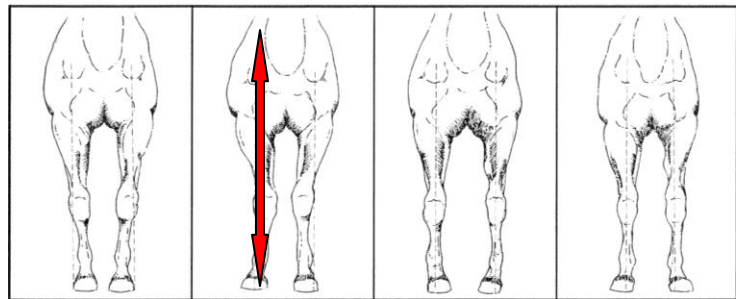
Example:

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.

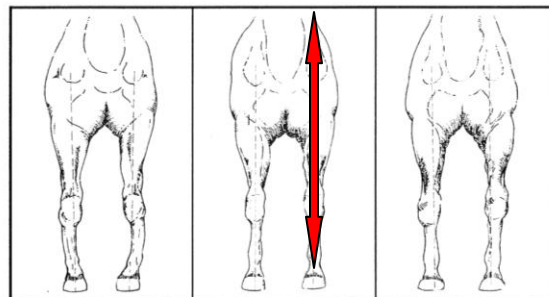


Base Narrow
(stands too close)

Knock Kneed
(hock kneel and splay forward, forefeet toes out/hocks in)

Pigeon Toed
(forefeet toes in/toes out)

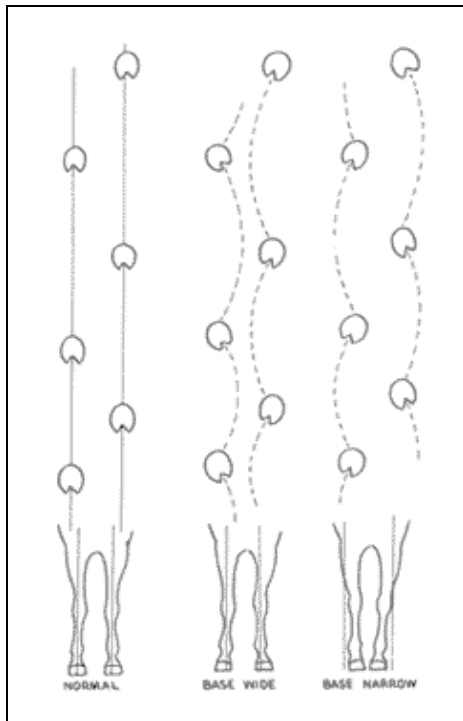
Narrow Chested, Toes Out



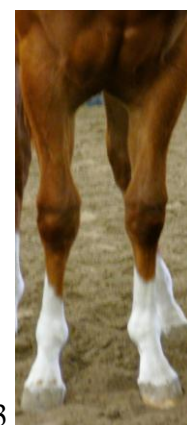
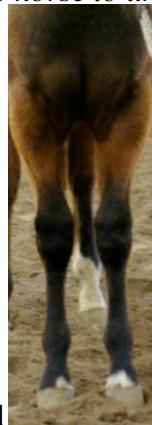
Bench Kneed

Ideal Position
(correct conformation)

Bow Legged
(with offset cannonals)



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.*



1. Narrow, slightly knock-kneed

2. Base wide, toed-out

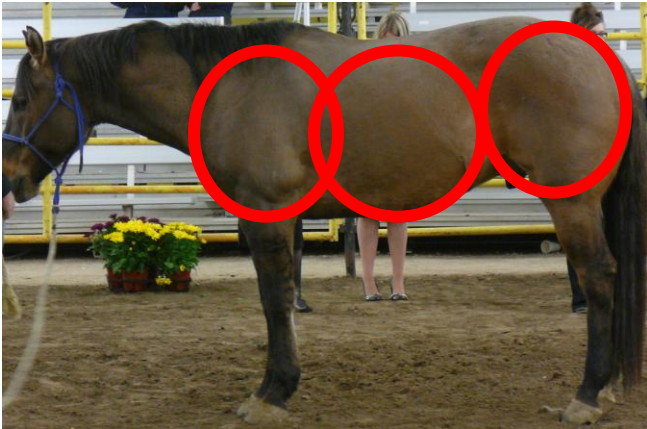
3. Straight legs, slightly toed-out

*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.

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.

Breed Characteristics

What may be 'ideal' conformation for one breed's purpose may serve no need or may hinder another breed's performance.



Photo from American Quarter Horse Association



Photo from Arabian Horse Association



Photo from Friesian Horse Association



Photo from the American Saddlebred Horse Assoc.



Why might these breeds have been developed?

☆ Note Taking ☆

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.

Class Name _____ Class Placing _____

_____	Number and identification	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
_____	Number and Identification	Grant	Criticize	Compare
_____	Number and Identification	Grant	Criticize	Compare
_____	Number and Identification	Grant	Criticize	XX

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 why 1st place animal wins the class.	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.	

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

Placing: 4-1-3-2

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

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, choppy 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 I left her last.

Terms and Transitions

General Appearance

Good

More balanced
Smoother
More Refined
More athletic
More broodmare potential
Ties in more correctly

Bad

Poorly Balanced
Rough
Plain
Bunchy-muscled

Head & Neck

Good

Cleaner cut about the head
Sharper, chisled features about the head
Wider set between the eyes
A head that tapers to a finer muzzle
Cleaner through the neck and throatlatch
Neck sets higher on to shoulder

Bad

Coarse-headed
Long, mule ears
Pig-eyed
Parrot-mouthed
Ewe-necked, Swan-necked, cresty necked
Neck does not blend smoothly to the shoulder

Shoulder & Chest

Good

More sloping shoulder
More powerfully muscled shoulder
Wider chest
Deeper chest
More prominent V

Bad

Steep shoulder
Light muscled shoulder
Narrow chest
Too wide in chest
No V muscling

Ribs, Heart-Girth, Topline, Underline, Middle

Good

Deeper heart-girth
More spring of forerib
Shorter topline in relation to longer underline
Smoother underline
More prominent withers
Longer croup
Deeper flanked

Bad

Lacks depth of barrel
Slab sided, straight sided
Long back, sway back
Short underline
Thick over the withers
Steep croup
Wasp-waisted, tucked-up

Rear Quarter

Good

Wider through the stifle
Heavier muscled quarter
Longer more athletic muscling through rear quarter
Smoother and cleaner over the hips viewed from the rear

Bad

Light-muscled
Apple-rumped, goose rumped,
Not tied in
Rough over the hip

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

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)*

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

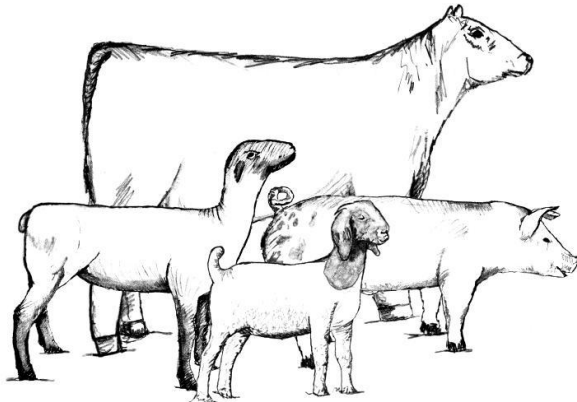
Moving to

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