



Judging 4-H Projects



The 4-H program is designed to empower young people to become independent. Young people participate with members of their family and community to create experiences that build self-confidence, develop inquiring minds, encourage interpersonal cooperation, develop concern for the community, and teach decision-making through real-life participation. *The 4-H project is part of that real-life participation.*

Participation in a “project” allows youth to have necessary developmental experiences. Children in grades K-12 also need to develop a sense of identity. They are not only faced with the task of discovering who they are but with discovering who they can become. The creating, sharing, exhibiting, and judging of these projects is therefore one of the most meaningful parts of 4-H. Projects can provide many of the experiences needed by children and adolescents to develop in positive and healthy ways.

The successful 4-H judge creates a positive and exciting atmosphere for members as they watch their projects being evaluated.

However, if the 4-H judge makes inappropriate insensitive or demeaning comments, the judging experience can be harmful to the 4-H member’s positive development, even if these comments

are technically correct. Thus, the judge’s role, the leader’s role, the parent’s role, and the member’s understanding of judging philosophy is essential.

The exhibit/project display is not an end in itself, nor does it illustrate all the learning that takes place in a 4-H project. It displays a portion of what the child is capable of doing, and it shows what the 4-H member has accomplished and created. While this is important as part of a youth’s development, the total development of the 4-H member is more important than the completion of the project/display.

Message to the Judges

Judges can contribute significantly to the positive growth and development of 4-H members through the exhibit and judging process. The judge serves as a representative of the 4-H program and of the outside world. The judge is the link between the 4-H member, and a standard of performance.

The information above and the 12 points that follow will help judges appropriately complete their role in the 4-H program and uphold the purpose and value of 4-H and 4-H project work.

1. Interact with the child whenever possible, and discuss your observations and your judging philosophy. Discuss the standards you are using, the rationale for your standards, and how the standard you are using relates to real-life participation. Explain the value (weight) you are placing on various aspects of project display. Explain why some parts of the display are more important than other parts/aspects.
2. Youth development is the primary purpose of project work.
3. Note achievement and success of the child's investment no matter how small. Praise the 4-H member for completing the project and taking the risk to show you their work.
4. Judge the exhibit and the child's behavior/performance—not the child.
5. Be familiar with the total 4-H project goals, purposes, objectives, activities, and materials.
6. Visit with the local Extension staff and/or volunteer responsible for your project area prior to judging. Understand and be familiar with any guidelines, awards, etc., specific to the county.
7. Use consistent scoring standards regarding the exhibit, and compare the exhibit to the general standards for judging. Avoid personal preferences. Use standards that are meaningful in reference to a typical home, farm, or work setting.
8. Evaluate the efforts of the 4-H member by emphasizing stronger points/abilities demonstrated by the 4-H member. Also offer constructive comments related to weaker points/abilities. Be sure to suggest ways the 4-H member can improve future exhibits. Help the 4-H member to realize their opportunity to grow through project participation.
9. Judge the exhibit as an illustration of a 4-H member's achievements toward project goals and objectives. Based on county and/or state rules, a judge may want to discuss with a 4-H member their understanding of the project goals, objectives, activities, and exhibit development.
10. Recognize the developmental level of the different ages of children. Comment on the achievements and successes of the child, taking into account the developmental ability of a younger person at a certain age.

11. Judging essentials:
 - a) a standard score card,
 - b) positive, constructive, and relevant written comments,
 - c) whenever possible, use conference (or open) judging: discuss the exhibit with the 4-H member.
12. Four important words in judging philosophy:
 - a) FAIR,
 - b) FIRM
 - c) FRIENDLY
 - d) CONSISTENT

Message to the 4-H Leader and Parent

4-H is intended to be a positive learning experience. It is through 4-H that young people and adults can grow and develop into productive and contributing members of our communities. It is through relationships and dialog with adults and older youth that 4-H members have the best opportunity to understand the value of 4-H and the role of 4-H projects and related judging activities. Adults help young people interpret the judging experience in relevant and meaningful ways. Evaluation of work should be positive experience, designed to help the 4-H member improve and grow.

Interpretation and dialog help 4-H members realize that the 4-H exhibit is not an end in itself and that it does not represent all that the 4-H member learned. The 4-H project exhibit is one part of the 4-H and part of the total learning experience. The exhibit is only one measure of success and achievement. Adults can help the young person experience self-recognition, self-satisfaction, and a feeling of success by learning competing in the project.

The following suggestions help in discussing 4-H projects and the process of judging with young people.

1. Help young people understand the purpose of judging?
 - a) by evaluating a sample of the 4-H member's work,
 - b) by helping the member see progress they have made,
 - c) by helping the member improve their skills.
2. Help a 4-H member set realistic goals based on age available resources, and time.
3. Share your thinking and hopes, but be careful not to impose adult goals on 4-H members. A person's goals should be their own.
4. Help the 4-H member recognize good work. Point out work that you believe is good; explain why you think so.
5. Provide constructive criticism/feedback based on experience, standards, and guidelines—appropriate to the subject of the project and the age of the member.

6. Be familiar with the guidelines or criteria of the 4-H project at both the county and the state level.
 7. Be a coach and mentor. Help the younger person recognize their accomplishments. Encourage 4-H members to do the work themselves to the best of their ability.
 8. Recognize that there is more than one way to complete a 4-H project. Creativity is a valuable personal ability; encourage creativity in completing 4-H projects within the project boundaries.
 9. Help the 4-H member realize that the judge's comments are designed to help improve the exhibit and should not be taken personally. These comments should be based on standard even though people view things differently.
 10. In competitive events, avoid over-emphasis of the winner. Help the 4-H member accept the results of the competition and realize that everyone is winner through their own accomplishments and efforts.
3. Abilities are often developed with age and the experiences that have contributed to a member's growth.
 4. Realize that people occasionally make mistakes and are entitled to your positive respect.
 5. Demonstrate good sportsmanship. Show positive appreciation and regard for the achievements of those whose projects placed higher than yours. Be proud of your accomplishments and your achievements.
 6. Judging is hard work, maybe harder than completing the project. It is only because the judges believe in youth, 4-H members, and the 4-H opportunity that they agree to judge hundreds of projects and provide comments that are meant to help you, the 4-H member, have a positive chance to grow through the 4-H program. Understand that they are making an invest in you. Appreciate their effort.

Message to the 4-H Member

As a 4-H member you are a special and unique individual. Each 4-H member is responsible for their own actions and attitudes. Each 4-H member can learn from the judging experience. It is intended to give guidance for personal growth and to provide opportunities for improving one's skills and abilities. It is up to the 4-H member to learn from the judging experience: a parent, leader, or judge cannot earn for the 4-H member. A judging experience should help a 4-H member learn to evaluate their own work.

An exhibit does not measure or illustrate all that a 4-H member achieved, but is an example of what has been accomplished. Keep in mind the following points.

1. Accept constructive feedback; learn from it. Model to others the value of gathering information that can be used to improve skills and abilities.
2. A judge's comments are meant to be helpful even though the judge was given the responsibility to critique the exhibits.

Summary

Judging is a significant part of many 4-H experiences. It is intended to be a positive part of learning for the 4-H member and other. It reinforces learning when applied positively, but if it becomes a search for demerits, judging can be destructive of self-esteem, causing loss of interest in the program and in 4-H. It can inhibit creativity and learning. The attitude we have toward judging is critical to the value of judging as a positive part of the 4-H program. When evaluating the process of judging, the most important criteria for its use is the growth and development of the 4-H member and the new skills, understanding and abilities that they have gained.

Judging a 4-H exhibit or display brings attention to only part of the total 4-H learning process and opportunity. It is important to focus on the total 4-H program by helping the 4-H participants recognize the many facets of the program. Youth and adults gain through the many accomplishments and achievements that occur throughout the total 4-H program and year.



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