



# Indiana 4-H Dog Showmanship Guide



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## Introduction

This guide has been designed to help establish consistent regulations and procedures for 4-H dog shows held throughout Indiana. This information is for 4-H members, volunteers, and judges on both the state and county level.

## Objectives for the 4-H Participant

- Develop leadership, initiative, and responsibility
- Develop self-confidence and patience
- Learn show procedures, rules, and etiquette as a dog handler
- Develop high standards of sportsmanship when dealing with judges, competitors, and the public
- Learn about the positive experience of dog ownership and of presenting the dog in the show ring
- Learn how to win and how to lose gracefully

## Showmanship Philosophy

Showmanship is concerned with how well the dog is shown by the handler. The dog's conformation or its being purebred is of no importance. The emphasis is on the handler's presentation of the dog standing still and in motion. The handler must convey knowledge and understanding of the dog's breed or the breed chosen as that which the dog most resembles. The handler should present the dog according to the chosen single breed standard.

The handler and dog appear to be part of a team. They work well together, move fluidly, and give an overall picture of being one unit. If a dog moves out of place or makes an error, a good handler is aware of this. The handler quickly and efficiently adjusts for the fault and resumes his/her presentation of the dog.

## Showmanship Classes

**Junior:** This class is for any 4-H exhibitor who is in the third, fourth, or fifth grade on January 1 of the current year. Once an exhibitor is the Junior Showmanship winner at the state fair, he/she is only eligible to compete in Intermediate or Senior Showmanship in future years.

**Intermediate:** This class is for any 4-H member in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade on January 1 of the current year or for showmanship winners in the previous class. Once an exhibitor is the Intermediate Showmanship winner at the state fair, he/she must compete in Senior Showmanship in future years.

**Senior:** This class is for any 4-H member in the ninth grade or above on January 1 of the current year or for showmanship winners in the previous class.

# Guidelines and Procedures for Showmanship

## Appearance of the Handler

The handler should appear neat and well groomed. The entire picture of the dog and handler should be one of symmetry and be appealing to the judge.

Girls must wear dresses, skirts, or culottes of knee length or longer, or dress pants. Tops must maintain an appropriate neckline and not show any skin at the lower edge. Boys must wear dress pants or slacks, and dress shirts. Jacket and tie are optional. Recommended shoes include tennis shoes or soft-soled shoes. Clothing color should complement the dog but not necessarily match the dog.

Blue jeans are not considered appropriate attire for any handler. Handlers must not wear western boots, high heels, sandals, or other unsafe footwear. Inappropriate attire includes hat, gloves, clothing with commercial advertising, or jewelry that might disturb other competitors or dogs. Sunglasses, indoors or outdoors, are not considered appropriate. Clothing should not distract, limit, or hinder the judge's view of the team. Handlers are to use good judgment concerning any makeup or accessories and in styling hair away from their face.

## Attitude of the Handler

The handler must be a good sport in the ring and outside the ring. He/she must exhibit a positive attitude toward other exhibitors as well as the judge. Courtesy to the judge and the other handlers is important.

Handlers must be alert and attentive to what is going on in the ring as well as to their dog and its behavior. Smoothness and continual control of the dog is mandatory.

Handlers should listen to the judge's directions. If a handler is unable to hear what the judge says for directions, he/she should ask the judge to please repeat what was said.

Handlers should not stare at the judge with an exaggerated smile. Staring at the judge makes most judges uneasy, and the exhibitor gains no advantage. Handlers need to be aware of the judge's presence at all times and should occasionally make brief eye contact with the judge. It is important for a handler to convey that he/she is enjoying showing his/her dog. Smiling is good, but it should not be overbearing or have the appearance of insincerity.

Double handling is not allowed. There should be no help from outside the ring to coach a handler or distract a dog.

## Appearance of the Dog

The dog should be well groomed with clean, mat-free hair, toenails cut to the proper length, teeth cleaned, and void of fleas and ticks. Its eyes should be clear, and its coat free of tear stains. Its ears should be clean with no excess earwax or dirt. Whiskers and hair on the legs, feet, and ears can be trimmed if it is appropriate. Not all dog breeds should be trimmed and void of whiskers. Dogs should be groomed before the competition without the use of dyes, talc powder, or other cosmetics. Dogs should not wear scarves or have painted nails. Bows or bands should be worn only by appropriate breeds.

## Show Ring Procedures

Armbands should be worn on the left arm with the number visible to the judge.

Score sheets and entry forms for mixed breeds should indicate a single breed preference for judging and exhibiting. For example, "Shetland Sheepdog/Chow Chow mix" is not acceptable, as each of these dogs is shown very differently. "Shetland Sheepdog X" would indicate that the dog is a mixed breed being shown as a Shetland Sheepdog. The judge will expect the dog to be shown according to that single breed standard.

Before judging begins, the procedure for entering the ring should be made known. The procedure used is entirely at the judge's discretion; he/she may call handlers in as a group or individually. Judging will begin when the handler and dog enter the ring.

The handler should set up (stack) the dog quietly and quickly, ideally leaving three to four feet between them and the dog and handler directly in front of them. Do not crowd. The judge needs room to walk between dogs if he/she prefers.

To stack a dog, it is best to set up the dog's front end first. The handler should lift a front foot if necessary by grasping the leg at the elbow. Position the rear legs by grasping the stifle or hock to place the feet. Should matting be provided, the dog should be stacked near the inside edge of the mat. Allow room for the judge to walk between the dog and the ring fence. Keep moving forward and restacking the dog as the dogs in front are individually gaited and moved to the end of the line.

When a class is very large, the judge may divide it and tell some handlers to relax their dogs. Relaxing does not mean not paying attention. While relaxing, it is not necessary to stack your dog or keep it alert at all times. Be alert for the judge to call your group back again.

Bait (treats) and/or toys are allowed, and when used properly, capture and hold the dog's attention. These should be used without distracting other exhibitors or the judge. Talking to the dog is permissible providing discretion is used.

For breeds normally examined on the table at conformation shows, the handler should follow the judge's instructions about when to table the dog. Unless indicated otherwise, the handler should place the dog on the table while the preceding dog is being gaited. Stack the dog facing the judge, with the front feet approximately one inch away from the edge of table.

During the individual exam, the judge will normally ask the exhibitor to "show the bite" (teeth). To show the bite, gently pull up the lips to reveal the bite of the dog with the mouth closed, keeping the leash out of the way. Premolars may be shown by raising the flews on each side of the dog's mouth. If the breed standard indicates the necessity to count teeth, the mouth should be opened wide enough to do so. If required, the mouth should be opened to display the color of the gums or tongue.

As the judge begins to examine the dog's front, the handler should move out of the way. The handler needs to adjust his/her position as needed during the exam, while keeping control of the dog. Should a judge disturb the coat or misplace a foot, the handler should reposition the coat or foot.

## Gaiting

Gaiting means to move the dog in the pattern requested by the judge. Movement should be smooth, in a straight line, and at the correct speed according to the dog's size and breed standard. The acceptable gait is a controlled trot. Remember, the speed for the "pattern" may be different than for the "go around." Handlers should make every effort to keep their dogs between themselves and the judge. It is permissible for a handler to momentarily block the judge's view of the dog when making turns in gaiting patterns. If matting is provided, keep the dog centered on it while gaiting.

Handlers should have the proper lead and lead placement when moving their dogs. Adjust the lead to the right length by gathering the excess lead in the hand closest to the dog so that no part of the lead is dangling while gaiting. Handlers and dogs should move in unison with each other and look like a well-trained team. Allow the dog to move freely and naturally. At the beginning of the individual gaiting pattern, a courtesy turn is optional. A properly executed courtesy turn will allow the handler to align with the judge and the path to be taken. This small turn in front of the judge is also called honoring the judge.

Handlers should maintain good posture when moving their dog. Handlers should constantly be aware of their dogs, the route, and the judge's position in the ring. It is not necessary to look at the judge and smile all the time. Occasional quick glances and a smile at the judge will indicate that the handler is being attentive.

## Gaiting Patterns and Diagrams

Patterns are a systematic way of moving the dog around the ring. The most common patterns are: the Go Around, the Triangle and Reverse Triangle, the L, the T, the Diagonal, the Down and Back Alone, and the Down and

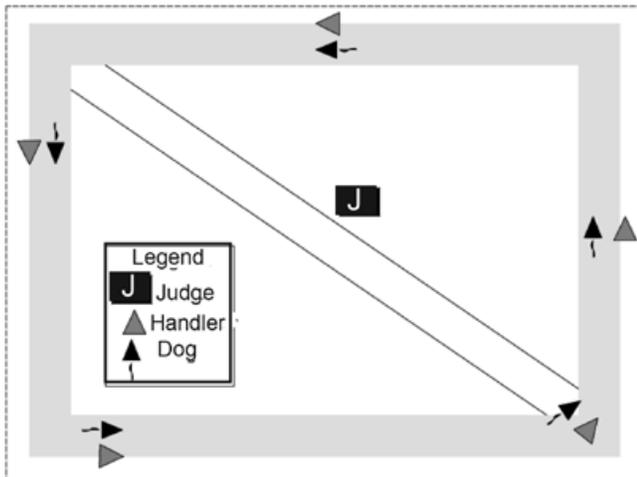
Back with Another Handler. The judge will instruct exhibitors about the pattern that he/ she wants completed. The individual pattern is to be consistent within the class. The pattern is at the discretion of the judge, but it is recommended that initially the Triangle and the Down and Back Alone be used for the Junior Showmanship class. More difficult patterns may be used if the competition warrants.

**THE GO AROUND:** The handler moves the dog around the ring, usually in a counterclockwise direction. Allow the dog to gait freely, with no jerking of the dog's neck by the handler. When moving the dog in an "all go around," the handler should make certain to leave plenty of room between his/her dog and the dog ahead. It is permissible to pass a dog that has stopped moving, but space should be left in the line for this dog when the gaiting is completed. Dogs should return to the original order as when entering the ring.

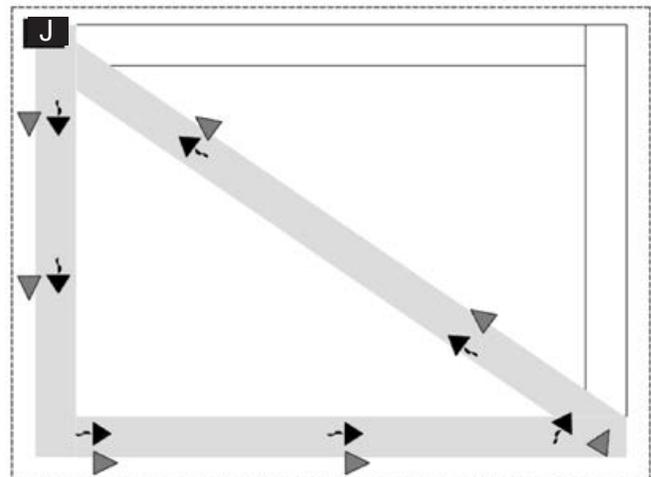
The handler should attempt to keep the dog moving at a suitable speed. If the dog in front is moving slowly and it is difficult to gait at the correct speed, the handler should hold back and make space. Then, when it is the handler's turn to gait in front of the judge, there will be enough room to move.

**THE TRIANGLE:** The handler and dog move to the first corner, turning toward the second corner. The second corner may be turned or the handler may want to make a small smooth circle (see *Optional Triangle diagram*) and proceed directly back to the judge on the diagonal. The purpose of the circle is to allow control of the speed and alignment of the dog on the diagonal. Either method should be executed with fluid motion.

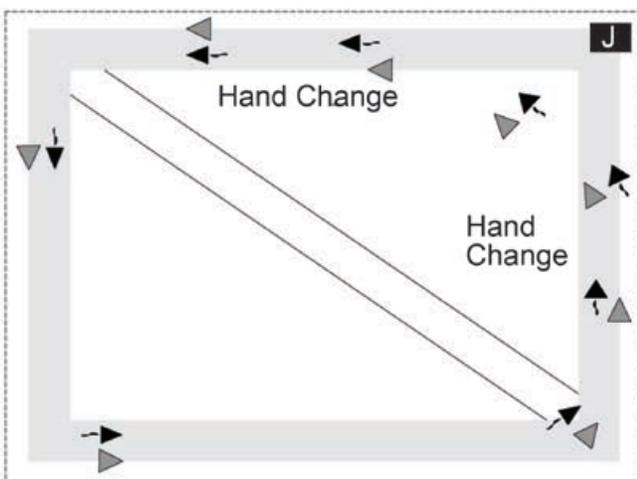
**THE REVERSE TRIANGLE:** The same as a triangle but reversed.



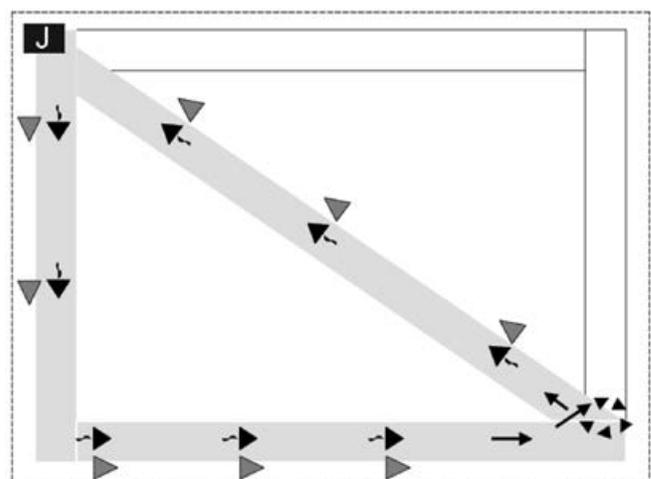
The Go Around



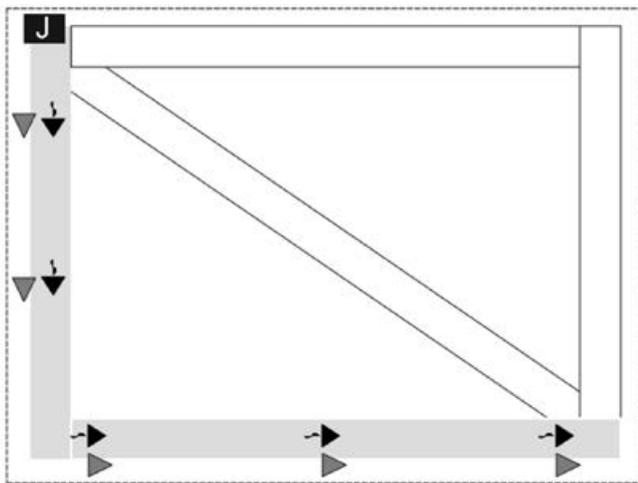
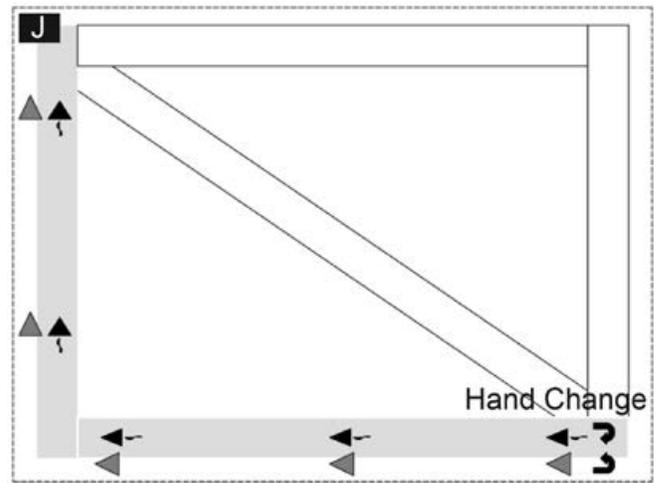
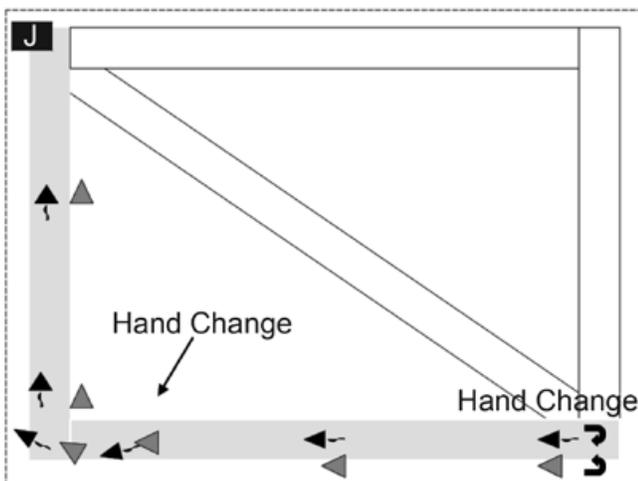
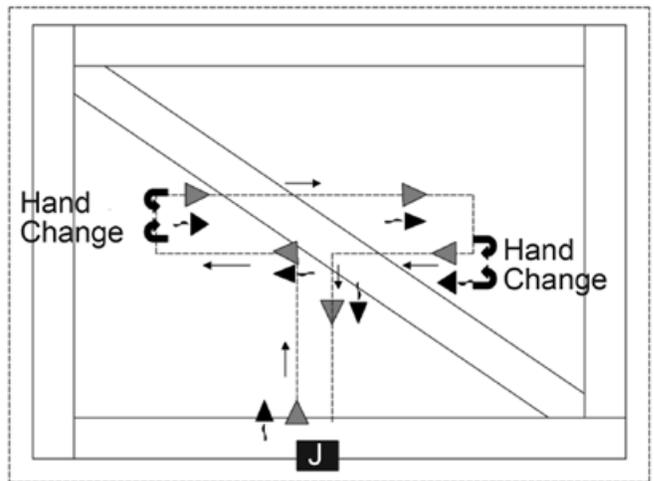
The Triangle



The Go Around: Judge in Corner



The Optional Triangle

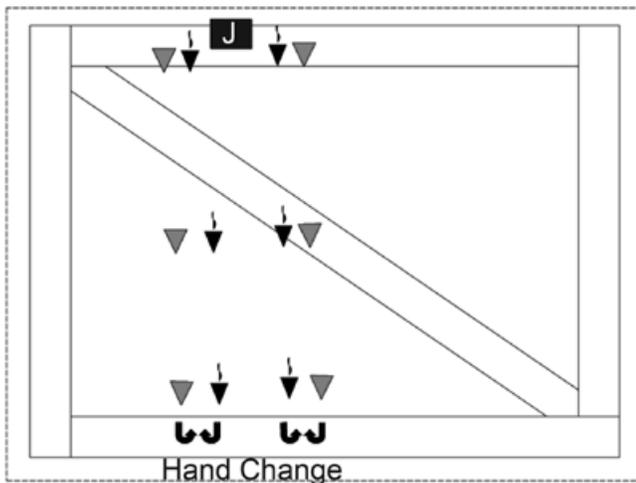
*The L: Going**The Optional L: Returning**The L: Returning**The T*

**THE L:** The handler moves the dog to the first corner, then turns and proceeds to the second corner. Just before reaching the second corner, he/she switches hands on the lead by grasping the lead with the right hand while releasing the left hand. When reaching the second corner, the handler turns to the left toward the dog and will automatically have the dog on his/her right side when returning to the first corner.

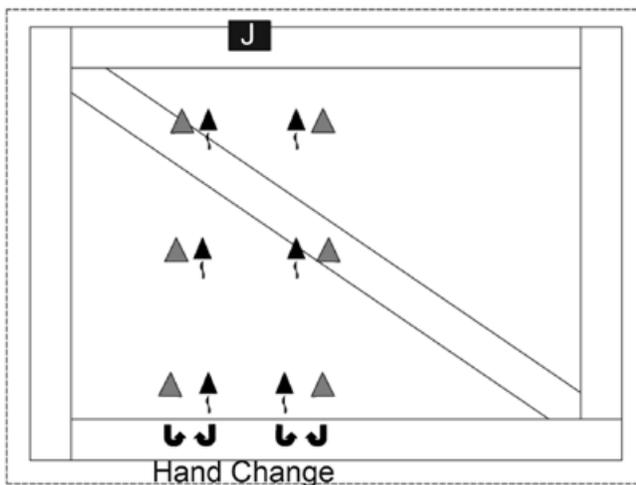
When returning to the first corner, the handler may allow the dog to pass in front as he/she changes hands on the lead, allowing the left hand to grasp the lead. The handler may choose not to change hands and return to the judge with the dog on the right side (see *Optional L: Returning diagram*). When returning to the first corner, if the judge is not at the end of the L, the handler must choose the side that will allow the dog to be kept between the handler and the judge.

**THE T:** A T pattern may utilize all or part of a ring. Starting in the middle at a position chosen by the judge, the handler moves the dog across the ring. When reaching the end, turn left and go to the corner. Before reaching the corner, the handler switches hands as in the L pattern. After turning into the dog, the handler moves the dog to the opposite corner. Before reaching that corner, the handler switches hands again, keeping the dog on the left, and proceeding back to the middle. In the middle, the handler makes a small smooth circle or turns left, keeping the dog on the left when appropriate while returning to the judge.

**THE DIAGONAL:** The handler moves the dog down the diagonal to the opposite corner. At the corner, the handler turns smoothly and heads back to the start, keeping the dog between the handler and the judge.



*Down and Back with Another Handler: Going*



*Down and Back with Another Handler: Returning*

**THE DOWN AND BACK ALONE:** The handler moves the dog straight across to the opposite side of the ring. When reaching the far side, he/she turns smoothly and proceeds back to the starting position. The handler should keep the dog between the handler and the judge.

**DOWN AND BACK WITH ANOTHER HANDLER:**

Two handlers place their dogs between them. Once they are ready, both proceed across to the opposite side of the ring, keeping the dogs in the middle about 2 to 3 feet apart. When reaching the opposite side of the ring, the handlers reverse hands and bring the dogs back to the judge, keeping the dogs in the middle. If one of the dogs is faster, that handler should wait for the slower dog before returning to the judge. The handlers should stop a few feet from the judge and pose and show their dogs.

**STAND AFTER GAIT:** At the end of the individual gaiting pattern, when the handler gets within a few feet from the judge, the handler should bait and present the dog. The dog should be presented in a natural stance without holding the head or tail. The handler should check to make sure the dog is stacked properly, first in the front, then in the rear. If a leg is out of position, the handler should reposition that leg. The handler should move smoothly and quickly, and present the dog to the judge to show proper expression. The ideal free stack, accomplished by adjusting the dog's position using only the leash, bait, or voice commands, should be given preference.

### Lining Up and Facing the Judge

Sometimes the judge will have handlers stack the dogs in a group and face the judge as he/she stands in the center of the ring. If the judge passes in front of a dog, the handler needs to make sure that the dog remains stacked as the handler moves to the other side of the dog. The handler needs to make certain that he/she does not block the judge's view of the dog. If the judge comes back, the handler should do the same thing in reverse. The handler should never step over the dog, for that may cause the dog to move.

### Handling Suggestions

A handler needs time and practice to learn to show his/her dog to its best advantage. The handler should practice frequently in a variety of locations so both the dog and handler are comfortable in the show ring with other dogs and handlers. Stacking and gaiting are distinctive to each breed. The handler's responsibility is to learn how his/her breed should be shown in a conformation ring.

Overweight or underweight dogs may not make the best impression on a judge, so a handler should adjust the dog's food intake and exercise over a period of time to help the dog achieve a desirable weight.

Unnecessary handler movements detract from the dog and the picture that the handler is trying to project to the judge.

The handler should know where the judge is at all times and be certain not to block the judge's

view of the dog. Be alert, since the judge may use hand motions instead of a voice request.

A handler should always maintain good sportsmanship in and out of the ring. A handler should not try to block out another dog from the judge's view.

Handlers should always give adequate space between themselves and the dog in front of them. Fellow handlers should allow each other plenty of space to show their dogs without feeling crowded.

Conversation in the ring should be limited only to the judge, and it should be minimal. Chitchat with other exhibitors or spectators should not take place while exhibiting.

## Guidelines for Judges

The actual show routine of judging will vary according to the judge, the number of handlers, the size of the ring, ring conditions, weather, and time of day. However, judges should strive to evaluate competitors in an appropriate and consistent manner. The judge may want to take into consideration the age of the dog when evaluating the condition of the teeth and the movement of an older dog.

It is very important to use only those procedures and patterns of gaiting commonly used in regular dog show classes. If the judge chooses to use two handlers in a Down and Back pattern, the judge must specify to the handlers if they should gait the dogs together, at the slower dog's gait, or at each dog's proper gait. The judge should be aware of the different breeds he/she will see in the ring and the particular ways in which these breeds are normally handled.

The examination table should only be used for breeds that are normally shown on a table. Although the procedure for completing the examination should resemble that of breed judging, examination of the dogs may be done rapidly because the conformation of the dog is of no concern.

Judges in each level should be consistent in the initial examination, use the same gaiting pattern and procedural requests, and allow each handler the same amount of time. The Triangle and the Down and Back gaiting

patterns are recommended to be used initially for the Junior Showmanship class.

A judge should not confuse the ability of a handler to take directions with the handler's ability to handle his/her dog. Some freedom of expression and expertise should be allowed. To have all exhibitors handle in an identical manner defeats the basic premise of showmanship.

Judges should limit their conversation with the handlers during competition to that which is absolutely necessary. Questions may be used only as a method for breaking ties in a run-off.

Judges should examine and evaluate the handler in four basic areas:

- proper breed presentation and gait
- skill in presenting the dog
- execution of ring procedure
- appearance and conduct of both dog and handler

The general rule in evaluating a handler's capabilities is *economy of motion*. Handlers who use exaggerated motions and gestures in any phase of their presentation of the dog should be faulted. Dogs should be presented in a quiet and efficient manner. The handler should be able to keep the dog's attention without dramatic or unnatural movements.

Judges are judging the handler, but time should be spent looking at the dog to gain insight as to how well it is being handled.

- Is the dog responsive to the handler? Do they work as a team?
- Does the dog appear posed or interested at all times?
- Is the dog under control?
- Is the dog moved correctly to the best of its ability?
- Are the dog's main faults being minimized?
- Do both the dog and handler appear relaxed?
- Is the dog presented with minimum effort?

The judge shall evaluate the ability of the handler to follow directions, use space wisely, and execute the requested gaiting patterns.

Handlers should appear ring-wise, be alert to the judging progression, and be prepared for changes in the routine.

The judge should be aware of the appearance of both the handler and the dog. The handler should be suitably dressed for the occasion, wearing clothing that will not hinder or detract from the presentation of the dog. The dog should be groomed and trimmed in the manner associated with the breed. Excessive grooming of the dog in the ring to gain the judge's attention is inappropriate and should be faulted accordingly.

The judge shall evaluate the general conduct of the handler in the ring. The handler should appear prepared, confident, businesslike, and attentive. Handlers should be courteous to both the judge and their fellow exhibitors. Handlers are expected to handle their dogs without distracting the dogs of other competitors. A handler who crowds or disturbs other dogs should be faulted.

Judges should make themselves available after the competition to answer any questions the handlers may have. The judge sets the standard of behavior and must maintain a professional appearance, etiquette, and attitude at all times. Judges should be helpful to each handler who asks a question. They should be friendly but deliberate when talking to handlers, parents, or teachers. Judges should not be afraid to admit that they do not know the answer to something or don't remember something. Truthfulness is an important character trait to model to children.

When showmanship run-offs are deemed necessary to determine placing order, handlers should be scored on set-up and gaiting. If a tie still exists, questions formed from the 4-H curriculum guides, glossary of terms, and state fair terms and conditions may be asked. Questions about obedience and agility should not be asked.

## Guidelines for Volunteers

Teaching the next generation of dog handlers is an awesome responsibility. Volunteers are to be commended for accepting this responsibility and setting the standard.

Showmanship classes are judged on the ability of the handler to handle his or her dog. Whether the dog is purebred is of no importance, because conformation of the dog is not judged. Handlers will be asked to demonstrate:

- moving the dog with the rest of the class,
- presenting the dog in the standing position proper to its breed,
- the use of an examining table for those breeds normally judged on the table, and
- moving the dog individually in a regular pattern.

The appearance and attitude of the handler is evaluated, and so is the grooming and condition of the dog.

It is important that handlers in each county consistently learn the rules of showmanship. Teaching according to these adopted standards will give consistency among the counties. The handlers will develop more consistent habits, and they will enjoy the show ring experience without confusion.

Handlers are expected to know basic ring procedure and all the patterns adopted. It is the leader's responsibility to instruct based on these standards and not change the patterns. Consistency of instruction is important to enable a handler to participate in county, out-of-county, and state showmanship competitions under a variety of judges. The handlers can adjust to anything if they know what to expect. A handler who moves from one county to another should be equipped to continue learning with his/her new group.

Volunteers should familiarize themselves and their members with the score sheet and the current rules and regulations of the Indiana State Fair Dog Show.

## Resources

*Indiana State Fair 4-H Handbook/ Premium List*

4-H-390-W, Dog Record Sheet (includes glossary of terms), Purdue Extension

4-H curriculum guides (available from the Extension office in your county):

Dog 1, *Wiggles 'n' Wags*, BU-8166

Dog 2, *Canine Connection*, BU-8167

Dog 3, *Leading the Pack*, BU-8168

Purdue 4-H Dog Web Site,  
[www.four-h.purdue.edu/dog](http://www.four-h.purdue.edu/dog)

AKC – American Kennel Club, [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)

UKC – United Kennel Club, 100 E. Kilgore Rd.,  
Kalamazoo, MI 49002, [www.ukcdogs.com](http://www.ukcdogs.com)

ARBA – American Rare Breed Association,  
9921 Frank Tippet Road, Cheltenham, MD  
20623, [www.arba.org](http://www.arba.org)

*AKC Complete Dog Book* by the American  
Kennel Club, 20th edition (2006)

*Dog Training Projects for Young People* by  
Joel M. McMains

Local dog clubs

National (Parent) breed clubs

Kennel Club USA, [www.kennelclubusa.com](http://www.kennelclubusa.com)

Tables & Ramp Breeds, American Kennel Club,  
[images.akc.org/pdf/judges/table\\_breeds.pdf](http://images.akc.org/pdf/judges/table_breeds.pdf)

Information on training and showing is available on the Internet. Attending dog shows or watching televised events can provide information about the correct equipment and method of exhibiting different breeds. Please remember that the guidelines listed here may be different from those used in other states but will take precedence in the Indiana 4-H Dog Program.

## Score Sheet and Comment Sheet

The following resources are available online:

- Dog Showmanship Score Sheet (4-H-650-W)
- Showmanship Comment Sheet (used at the Indiana State Fair 4-H dog show)

Go to the Indiana 4-H home page at [www.four-h.purdue.edu](http://www.four-h.purdue.edu) and choose "Projects." Select "Dog" from the project list, and look under "Score Cards."