

University of Missouri Livestock Judging Techniques

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Livestock judging consists of carefully analyzing animals and measuring them against a standard that is commonly accepted as being ideal. Livestock judging also has been defined as a study of the relationship between an animal's form and function.

There are numerous benefits to gain from competing on a livestock evaluation team. In the course of training and competition you are given the opportunity to interact with future leaders of the livestock industry. You develop a keen sense of judgment and confidence to make a decision that you defend in a set of oral reasons. Most prominent livestock people who are masters of judgment and selection have been affected by their involvement with livestock judging.

Participation in livestock judging builds your character and makes you a more complete person.

"Judging instills the confidence in those people who may be timid and humbles those who tend to be conceited." -- Harlan Ritchie

Steps to successful livestock judging

Techniques for livestock judging can be broken into four steps:

- **Information:** You must develop a mental image of the ideal for the species, breed and sex involved.
- **Observation:** Successful livestock judging requires a sharp eye and a keen mind. As a livestock judge you must learn to develop a greater perception for the animals that are being judged. Furthermore, these observations must be accurate and complete in every way.
- **Comparison:** A successful judge must make comparisons of each animal against each of the other animals in the class. Judges must be able to weigh the good and bad characteristics of each animal and make their decisions based upon their findings. The animal that will eventually be selected to top the class will be the one with the "most of the best."
- **Decision:** The final, and perhaps most difficult, step involves ranking, or placing, the animals in the class. Many people have the necessary information and the ability to observe and compare but they may lack the skill and courage required to make the right decision. Judges' decision must be accurate and logical, and they must stand by them.

Tips for competitive livestock judging

- Do not waste valuable time. Begin judging as soon as the class is in the ring.

- See the animals exactly as they are, not as you would like to see them. Every class is different. Do not "read" anything into the class! Do not play hunches! Do not try to out-guess the official judges. Place the livestock exactly as you have been taught.
- Break each class down into sections: Top pair, easy bottom, close middle, etc.
- When the contest starts, do your own work. Depend entirely upon your own judgment. Pay attention to the class and not to anyone else. When the contest is over, discuss the classes with your instructor and the officials.
- Try to have a tentative placing before too much time has elapsed. Otherwise you may find yourself out of time with no decision made.
- When evaluating a class, your first impression is usually your most unbiased and most accurate if it is the result of careful analysis.
- For general observation of a class, maintain a minimum distance of 25 feet. This will allow you a full unobstructed view of the class. If other students move in too close, just ask your group leader to please move everybody back.
- When finishing a placing on a class, make sure to mark your card. Double check to make sure the placing on your notes matches the one on the card you turn in.
- If there is a break in the contest do not let the time go to waste. Make use of this by looking over your notes from previous classes.
- Nearly all students go into a slump at some time during their judging careers. When this happens, do not get discouraged with yourself or upset with your instructor. Just keep your wits, maintain a positive attitude and work hard -- you will pull out of it.

Benefits of giving reasons

There are two parts to the format when judging livestock: Placing the livestock and giving oral reasons on your placing. The second part can be the most difficult because you have to convince an official, who has already reached a decision, that your placing is logical whether the official agrees or not. This can be difficult and stressful, so what do you get in return from learning proper reason-giving?

- You learn how to become organized; you get your thoughts in line with what you have on paper.
- You learn to recall a situation clearly in your mind that happened several hours ago or longer.
- You learn to express yourself in a convincing manner.
- You become able to clearly enunciate words.
- You learn to defend your decisions. This not only benefits you in judging livestock, it is also an asset for everyday life.
- You learn how to sell yourself and your ideas.

Evaluating a set of reasons

There are several schools of thought concerning oral reasons. The style you choose to express yourself is of little importance. The truly important factors involved in giving an effective set of oral reasons include:

- Accuracy of statements.
- Completeness of all the important points.
- Ability to bring out the important points between pairs of animals.
- Complete vocabulary of livestock terminology.
- Term variation.
- Correct grammar.
- A sincere, emphatic and precise presentation.
- An appropriate voice level, which depends on the size of the room.
- Clear enunciation.
- Voice inflection.
- A logical order to your reasons.
- Proper presence, e.g., eye contact, correct posture, no distracting mannerisms.
- Use of animal identification, e.g., red barrow.
- Do not overuse industry terms, e.g., "more useful to the cattle industry."
- Use carcass terms in market classes.
- Ability to communicate from a visual image of the animals.

Preparing notes for a contest

Unless you are gifted with an unusual memory, good note taking is a must on reason classes. A stenographer spiral notebook (6 by 8 inch) is a good size to use. Remember that notes are used to help you visualize the animals in the class. Use your notes to refresh your memory of the animals. Avoid memorizing your notes; you should give reasons from a mental image of the animals rather than memorizing the notes.

Helpful hints on note taking

- Before the contest, take your note pad and divide a page into the sections.
- When you approach a class, stand far enough away from the animals for a general look.
- Write down the big things that appear to you first: Size, thickness, volume, etc.
- Write down IDs of the animals -- if not color, then shape.
- Write down a tentative placing.
- Start with your first pair and write down the assets for the top animal. Then write the grants for the animal you placed second. Proceed to your middle and bottom pairs.
- Do not spend the entire class time writing. If you do, you will memorize your notes and be unable to recall the animals in the class when you get ready to give your reasons.
- Your notes should be brief. Develop a method of shorthand to quicken the note-taking process. Above all, make sure your notes are readable.
- Do not waste time. If you finish a class early, relax, look at the animals and try to remember them. This will enable you to more easily visualize the class for reasons.

Proper etiquette of oral reasons

Once you have developed a proper reason style, it is important to present them properly to the official. When you walk into the reasons room, the way you present yourself may be almost as important as what you have to tell the official. This is why proper etiquette is of utmost importance when delivering a set of reasons. Important things to keep in mind when you get ready to give a set of reasons include:

- Be prompt. When it is your turn to give a set of reasons, do not keep the official waiting. If you find yourself being rushed, just ask the official to extend your time. He or she may or may not.
- Always leave notes outside the reason room.
- Enter the reason room with an air of confidence but not cockiness.
- Some officials will offer you your card. If so, take the card, thank the official, place the card behind your back and continue your reasons. Do not depend on this card as not all officials will offer it to you.
- Do not stand too close to the official; 6 to 9 feet is about right depending on your size and your voice strength.
- Stand with your feet spread to about the width of your shoulders. Keep both hands behind your back.
- Stand erect. Avoid leaning over too far.
- Look the official squarely in the eye, or at least give that impression. Above all, do not let your eyes wander.
- Talk in a strong voice, slightly louder than a conversational voice, but do not shout.
- Speak with the utmost conviction and sincerity.
- Do not let yourself talk too rapidly as the official may not catch everything you say.
- Vary your delivery -- make your main points impressive and emphatic.
- You may gesture slightly with your head; any other body gestures are too distracting to the listener.
- Avoid mixing numbers.
- Never exceed two minutes on a set of reasons. This is a rule for most collegiate judging contests.

Reason format

The ability to give effective reasons is an important quality for a good livestock judge. Many factors influence the effectiveness of your reasons. However, unless reasons are presented in a manner that is pleasant to hear and clear and easy to follow, the value of accuracy is largely lost because much that is said does not "get through" to the listener.

By following the traditional format used at the University of Missouri, you can organize your reasons to cover all the points that were found in the class as well as keep the reasons short enough to remain in the two-minute time limit.

In the following format, we discuss the placing of crossbred market steers. As you can see, each pair is broken into three subsets:

- General statements
- Reinforcements
- Grants.

This format allows you to talk about the pairs in a logical order, which makes giving the reasons easier as well as making listening to them easier.

Introduce class

"I placed this class of crossbred market steers 1-2-3-4."

Top pair

- **General statement**
The most important factors for placing the pair this way. (Example: "In my top pair of red steers, I placed 1 over 2 because 1 is a thicker-made, larger-framed steer.")
- **Reinforcements**
Go into more detail to back up the general statement. (Example: "1 is wider through his chest floor, wrapped more muscle around his forearm, is thicker down his top. He showed more skeletal height at the apex of his shoulder. 1 would appear to hang a carcass with more retail product than 2.")
- **Grants**
Grant the biggest assets first. (Example: "I will grant that 2 is a trimmer steer and should display a carcass with a superior Yield grade.")

Middle pair

- **General statement**
"In a logical middle pair, I placed 2 over 3 as 2 ties together a more desirable combination of muscling and trimness than 3."
- **Reinforcements**
"2 appears to push less condition through his shoulder pocket and has less visible fat through his flank and cod areas. 2 also shows more natural muscle volume down his top and through his quarter than 3."
- **Grants**
"I will concede that 3 is more structurally correct than 2 as he has a more functional set to his rear legs."

Bottom pair

- **General statement**
"In my bottom pair and a close decision, I used 3 over 4 as he appears to be more able to reach the Choice grade."
- **Reinforcements**
"3 has more visible fat cover down his top and over his ribs than 4. 3 also shows more natural

thickness through all portions of his body and would appear to hang a more merchandisable carcass than 4."

- **Grants**

"I will grant 4 is a trimmer designed steer, but 4 is the narrowest, lightest-muscled steer in the class. 4 has the least amount of packer appeal and therefore merits no higher placing in this class today."

Conclusions

When you are finishing with your last animal, be sure to finish strong with a closing statement so the official will know that you are through.

Reason styles

There are three basic styles of reasons used at the University of Missouri:

Style 1

The more traditional style just discussed gives admissions last within a pair. This style has been used to allow our students to become more comfortable with giving reasons.

Example:

"I placed this class of Hampshire Boars 1-2-3-4. In my top pair, I used 1 over 2 as he is a heavier weight, higher performing, more mobile boar. 1 exhibits more natural width through his chest, down his top and through his ham than 2. I will concede that 2 is a trimmer boar as evidenced by less fat deposited through his shoulder pocket, down his top and through his ham seam. 2 also stands squarer on his front legs."

Style 2

The second style used is an alteration of the traditional format. In this style, you present the criticisms of the top animal at the beginning of the first pair. We suggest this style for the more polished reason giver since it deals with different types of transitions that may be unfamiliar to the inexperienced individual.

Example:

Introduce class

"I aligned this class of heavy structured Hampshire Boars 1-2-3."

Top pair

- **General statement**

"Even though 1 is a splay-fronted boar, he easily excels 2 as he is a heavier weight, higher performing, more mobile boar."

- **Reinforcements**

"1 exhibits more natural width through his chest, down his top and through his ham than 2."

- **Grants**
"I will grant that 2 is a trimmer boar as evidenced by less fat through his shoulder pocket and through his ham seam."

Style 3

The third style is a combination of the previous two. It incorporates the criticisms of the animal in the opening sentences but leads off with a positive statement.

Example:

Introduce class

"I liked the Suffolk Breeding Ewes 1-2-3-4."

Top pair

- **General statement**
"I started this class with 1 as she exhibits the most superior combination of structural correctness and extension in the class. If I could complete the class winner, I would like to see her higher volumed, showing more depth and spring of rib."
- **Reinforcements**
"Still, I used her over 2 in my top decision as 1 is a more nicely balanced, straighter-lined and a more eye appealing ewe that is leveler down her top and straighter and squarer on her rear legs. Furthermore, 1 is the most extreme about her growth indicators as she exhibits the greatest length of head, neck and cannon and the most potential growth and outcome in this class."
- **Grants**
"I will certainly admit that 2 is the thickest-made, widest-based ewe in the class. She, too, is bolder sprung through her rib and exhibits more internal volume than 1. Yet, I preferred her in second as she is heavy fronted, coarse-shouldered and short-necked."

Middle pair

- **General statement**
"Coming to the middle pair, it's still 2 over 3 as there is simply more ewe in 2."
- **Reinforcements**
"2 is a larger framed ewe that is longer-bodied and taller made. Also, she appears pounds heavier being wider-based and thicker made than 3. In addition, 2 is a more capacious ewe that is deeper and bolder sprung and exhibits more width down her top and more dimension to her rack."
- **Grants**
"I will grant that 3 shows more Suffolk breed character, being blacker about her points with a longer, more bell-shaped, ear. But I placed her third today as she is tight-ribbed, shallow made and fine-boned."

Bottom pair

- **General statement**
"In closing, I still liked 3 over 4 as 3 is a more stylish appearing and angular ewe being more feminine about her head and especially smoother in her shoulder."
- **Reinforcements**
"In addition, she projects more extension than 4 as she is especially longer about her head and neck. 3 also stands on more length of cannon and is a later maturing ewe than 4."
- **Grants**
"I recognize that the blue tagged ewe is thicker-made and higher-volumed as she stands wider-based than 3. But that doesn't compensate for the fact that 4 is the smallest-framed, shortest-bodied and most conventionally designed. She, too, is a heavy-fronted, coarse-shouldered ewe that stands on the least length of cannon, and exhibits the earliest maturity pattern in this class."

With the second and third reason styles, do not let repetition slip into your format. They will be quite effective if used properly.

Words and phrases to avoid

- Better -- this word is too weak; it explains nothing.
- Animal or individual: say what the animal is (barrow, gilt, heifer, etc.).
- Lacks or lacking -- non-descriptive; instead of saying a gilt "is lacking width," say "she is narrow."
- Beware of words ending with "ing." These words tend to be weak: placing, criticizing, faulting. Instead, say "I placed, I fault, I criticized," etc.
- Number -- don't say "number 1 is;" instead say "1 is."
- Avoid excessive use of "he" or "she". Be more specific; use an ID; e.g., "the black heifer."
- Do not use the phrases "for being" or "kind of." Example: "I placed 3 last for being light muscled;" instead say "I placed 3 last because he is light muscled."
- Do not use "it;" every animal has a gender.
- Do not use the word "that;" e.g., "that rump," "that top," instead say "squarer-rumped" or "leveler-topped."

Young cattle producers will be faced with selection decisions that affect their profitability. They should use all information available, including performance data. Evaluation through performance records and visual appraisal better prepares students for realistic selection decisions. A cattle producer using performance information is like any successful business owner who uses the most accurate inputs possible to make economically sound decisions. Judging decisions are always controversial. The goal is to make a sound, defensible decision based on fact and to learn from the judging exercise how to improve cattle production through selection.

G2952, reviewed February 1995

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