



INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR JUDGES

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Serving as a 4-H judge is both an honor and a privilege! You have been identified as having valuable expertise in a subject area and an exceptional ability to interact well with youth. Judging is the culminating component of a youth's Junior Fair project. It is important that you realize the significance of your judging responsibilities, and that you prepare yourself to do the best job possible!

The 4-H Educational Experience: Evaluation and Recognition

Evaluation is an important step to help members know how they stand based on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that they can build their strengths and improve their weaknesses. Recognition is a basic human need. Ohio 4-H members are recognized for many kinds of achievements, including the following:

- participation in educational experiences
- individual progress toward goals
- achievement of standards of excellence
- results from peer competition

Interview judging in 4-H is important! It is the educational process by which evaluation and recognition can be accomplished. As a 4-H judge, you are in a position to:

- recognize members for having the courage to participate in an interview
- evaluate and recognize how well each member met the standards set for his or her project
- evaluate and recognize how each member compares to others taking the same project

As a judge, you are able to evaluate and recognize members based only on what they share with you on judging day. Progress over time is best evaluated and recognized by the 4-H advisors and others who work with the members throughout the year, and who know the members' backgrounds and resources. A judge's brief interview cannot provide the appropriate feedback to reflect a member's cumulative progress.

As a judge, you will want to conduct interviews that are positive, educational experiences for members. The following tips are intended to help you be successful.



Ross County 4-H member after a great judging experience!

Before Judging Day

Find out from the judging organizer how the event is conducted, what is expected of you, which resources are provided, what are the directions to the event location, etc. Familiarize yourself with county rules, regulations, selections, and placing criteria. Every county does this differently.

Judging Day

Dress comfortably, but professionally. Both your clothing and grooming should reflect the fact that you are a knowledgeable, up-to-date person who is highly qualified to be a 4-H judge. Arrive early to get settled. Ideally, judging is arranged so interviews can be conducted as privately as possible. Parents, advisors, other 4-H members, and the general public typically are not allowed in the judging area. If possible, sit beside the member during the interview. This usually makes the member less nervous than does sitting across the table. It also helps the member talk with you more openly.

Criteria for Judging

1. Project Standards Compliance

Each project has an established set of standards that are to be followed when evaluating projects for achievement awards (i.e., grade ribbons). Grade awards are typically given at the end of the interview. The following evidence should guide your evaluation:

- the member's knowledge and accomplishments (based on his or her individual project plan)
- the member's skill in applying his or her project knowledge (based on the project exhibit, demonstration, or both)
- the member's attitudes and understanding gained from involvement in the project as planned

2. Comparing Exhibitors

After evaluating each project for standards compliance, you will need to consider how the member has demonstrated his or her learning through a visual exhibit; the member's involvement above and beyond his or her project guidelines; and the member's evidence of mastery in the terms of knowledge, skill, understanding, and greater application. Additional recognition that may be available to members through this process includes an outstanding ribbon, a project trophy, or a state fair participation ribbon. This assessment should be completed after completing all the judging in a specific project area, likely toward the end of the day.

Interviewing Steps

Find out from the event organizer the number of members to be judged, the total time allotted, and the approximate time to spend with each youth. Be sure that each interview is approximately the same length. To accomplish this, you'll have to gently draw out the shy, silent types and tactfully shut off the domineering talkers. Do not, under any circumstances, allow one member to speak for 15 minutes if another member has only spoken for 5 minutes! You may want to use a timer to make sure everyone gets the same amount of time.

Use some sort of system to rank, score, and keep track of members as you interview. If possible, take notes to help you remember each youth (e.g., what he or she was wearing, or some other unique characteristic that will help you remember him or her later).

Step 1: Opening Questions

Open the interview with easy questions to set members at ease and to help them feel good about and take pride in their accomplishments. Have a friendly, smiling, open, helpful attitude with every individual. Good openers include:

- What is your name?
- Have you been a 4-H member very long?
- Tell me about your project.
- What did you do or like best in your project?
- Why did you choose this project?

Step 2: Assessing and Teaching

Follow with more detailed project questions related to the member's exhibit as well as specific aspects of the member's project plan. Try to grasp the scope of the member's involvement in his or her project, and offer some constructive teaching points. It may also be helpful to have a few standard questions from the project book to ask all participants. This provides a frame of reference when comparing members for additional recognition.

Step 3: Summary Comments and Recognition

Come back to the positive aspects of the project before closing the interview, and let the member know that he or she has many reasons to be proud. Be sure to explain how the member met the project standards, and don't forget to mention areas for improvement. As you close, summarize the positive aspects of the interview and include some helpful suggestions. Then, hand the member a grade ribbon and offer congratulations for his or her work and interview performance.

After the Interviews Are Completed

1. Select your project winners, accounting for their mastery of project knowledge and skills against project standards. Also consider their significant accomplishments in leadership and citizenship.

Make sure you have valid reasons to support your assignment of outstanding ribbons, trophy winners, and state fair participants. For example, a member who planned and completed 4 of 7 activities extremely well may receive a higher grade than someone who completed 7 of 7 poorly.

2. Check and double-check your selections to make sure the right person is named for each selection.

3. Judges may be asked either to announce winners and make some general comments, or to simply give selections to one of the officials. If you are asked to make comments, try to promote understanding by the audience. Comments about general strengths and weaknesses you observed, the criteria you used in making your decision, and so forth are helpful. There is no need to publically justify your selection of one exhibitor compared to another.

4. Share with the event organizer your ideas for improving the event and enhancing project experiences. Ideally, you could submit suggestions in writing soon after the event.

Reminder: Have fun! We hope you walk away excited about the energy, knowledge, and potential that are bundled up in the projects and the youth that you judge. We thank you for sharing your time and talents to benefit 4-H youth!

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