

Poultry Showmanship – Chickens

Showmanship is a competition where you are judged on your knowledge, presentation and handling of poultry. A judge will ask questions about poultry in general, as well as questions about your project bird, and evaluate how you handle and present your bird.

For showmanship you need to learn about poultry, select the right bird, have a bird that is used to being handled, dress properly, have a positive attitude, and know the steps in showing your bird. Keeping showmanship records will provide information needed to continually improve.

Each poultry exhibition, whether open poultry shows or county or state fair shows, will have exhibition rules. You must follow the rules, and dress codes if applicable, to be permitted to show or successful in showing. Be prepared prior to your class and be on time.

Learning about Poultry

You must study to gain the knowledge to be successful in showmanship competition. Many questions asked come from the American Poultry Association (APA) American Standard of Perfection and the American Bantam Association (ABA) Bantam Standard. Questions may also come from this Poultry Resource Handbook and other sources. Since you do not know what the judge is going to ask, it is difficult to know what to study. Start by learning the basics. Know the class, breed, variety, sex and age of the bird you are showing. Know the external anatomy of the species of poultry you are showing, including the parts of the wing and feathers. Use correct terminology. All birds are judged against the standard for their breed. Learn what the standard is for the breed you are showing and be prepared to tell the judge any faults your bird might have, as well as how you could improve your bird's appearance. The older you are, the more you will be expected to know, regardless of whether or not it is your first year in showmanship. Sample questions for all age groups are available on the APA-ABA Youth Poultry Club website.

In addition to studying, you must learn how to properly handle and present the type of bird you are showing. Attend a poultry show where there are youth showmanship classes and watch the young people show their birds. Watch how they handle their birds and interact with the judge. Talk to some of the youth after they are done showing if you have questions. If you have the opportunity, talk with a showmanship judge after he or she is completely finished judging. Study, practice, and observe showmanship classes to help you be successful in showmanship.

Selecting the Right Bird

Selecting the right showmanship bird is an important part of showmanship. This shows the judge you know how to choose a bird that best represents the standard for that breed and variety. Select a bird in top condition to show the judge you know what a healthy and conditioned bird looks like.

Choose a breed and variety that interest you. Select a bird old enough to have its adult feathering. If at all possible do not use a bird in a molt, with broken feathers, or with definite disqualifications.



The bird needs to be the right size and temperament to easily handle. Younger and smaller children may want to show bantam birds, as they will fit in their hands better than will large fowl. Work with two or three birds in case one goes into a molt, breaks feathers, or has other problems that makes it unacceptable for showmanship.

Personal Appearance

It is important to dress properly when showing poultry. A well-groomed appearance can make a good impression on the judge.

Wear neat and clean clothing. Dark pants help hide any dirt or droppings. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts, tucked in, give a pleasing appearance to a judge.

Many judges like to see youth wearing show (lab) coats. Wearing a white (or other color) show coat adorned with any pins or patches you have won in poultry events, and/or from membership in poultry associations, displays to the judge your interest in poultry and recognition of knowledge gained. Wear a collared shirt underneath the show coat. Show coats also keep your clothes clean. County fairs may have showmanship dress codes, so make sure you check with your county Extension staff or fair board prior to the show.

Do not wear short-sleeved shirts and jewelry, as judges may consider them unsafe to you as well as your bird. Also, do not wear ball caps or hats, sandals, flip flops, or other open-toed shoes.

Your hands and fingernails should be clean. Tie long hair back away from your face so it does not interfere with showing your bird. Do not chew gum. Do not bring a cell phone into a showmanship class.

Decide what is unique about you that will catch and keep a judge's attention to help him/her remember you, without distracting from your overall appearance and showing your bird.

Positive Attitude

Have a pleasant and positive attitude when showing your bird. Always pay attention to where the judge is. Listen intently to any instructions the judge gives. Watch how he or she is interacting with the other exhibitors. Show respect for the judge and be polite throughout judging. When the judge approaches you to begin judging, shake the judge's hand, and say "Good morning" or "Good afternoon." You may also say "Yes sir/ma'am" or "No sir/ma'am." Tell the judge "Thank you" when you are done being judged and shake his/her hand again.

When asked a question, answer with confidence. If you do not know an answer simply tell the judge you do not know but will find out before being judged the next time. Speak loud enough for the judge to hear, and talk clearly. Look at the judge when talking. The judge has about 4-5 minutes to determine what you know. Do not waste time by talking too much and not letting the judge ask the questions needed to determine your knowledge.

Never talk to other competitors during judging. Your attention should be on the judge and your bird until the class is over and the judge turns in his/her results. Be courteous to other exhibitors if asked to pass the bird to the person beside you or when taking other directions from the judge.

Once the class has been judged and awards presented, exhibit good sportsmanship by being gracious in winning as well as in defeat. Congratulate the person who won, and those who placed above you. If you won, thank those who congratulated you. The judge may be watching and remember the type of sportsmanship you displayed the next time he or she is your judge.

Showmanship Records (After Judging)

After your showmanship class, write down the questions asked, and whether you knew the answer or not. Also record the judge's name and anything you can remember about the judge, so you will know his or her likes or dislikes if you have the same judge at another show. Keep a notebook with pages like the one below and record everything you can remember. This will help you be better prepared for future showmanship classes.

Form fields:

- Show: _____ Date: _____
- Bird shown: _____
- Judge's name: _____
- Placing: _____
- Question Asked:

- Notes:

Helpful Hints

A judge may ask you questions about the patches and pins you are wearing on your lab coat, so know what they represent.

Judges may do things to see if you are paying attention, or to see how long it takes for you to correct a situation. For example, a judge might put a pinch of bedding on the back of your bird, expecting you to quietly and quickly brush it off.

A judge might hand your bird to you sideways. You should ask him to please turn the bird so you can receive it in a forward position.

A judge might ask how old is your chicken, knowing you are showing a duck. The judge is waiting for you to politely say, "My duck is ____ years old."

Record, in your showmanship records, any kind of actions a judge might use to test your knowledge and skills.

Bird's Appearance

Your bird's appearance also demonstrates your knowledge. All external parts of your bird should be clean. There should be no broken feathers, and the bird should not be molting. The comb should be intact, with no frozen points or torn blades. The ear lobes and wattles should be intact and free of scars and blemishes. Feather-legged birds should have clean, intact leg and toe feathers. The upper beak may need trimmed, as well as the birds nails. File any rough edges. Refer to the Bathing and Grooming for Show section to learn how to clean your bird for showmanship.

Training for Showmanship

Coop training, posing, and handling are three essentials to teach your bird before entering a showmanship class. Train your bird so it is at ease when being held, handled, and passed to another person. It needs to know how to act when taken in and out of a coop or moved in and out of the show area, and how to pose to look like its breed pictured in the Standards.

Coop Training

Once you select your showmanship birds, move them to a coop the size used for your species/breed 4-5 weeks before the show. Handle your showmanship birds daily. Build a trust and bond with these birds. Teach them to eat out of your hand. Show them a treat, such as small pieces of bread or soft dog treats, and entice them to walk to the coop door. Do not give them the treat until they walk to the door. They will catch on very quickly! However, if you have a bird that is not interested in treats, remove its regular food, but make sure it still has water. Feed it by hand twice a day until it walks to you when you open the coop door. Once it is coming to you for its food, return the food dish and hand feed once a day using a treat. The goal is to get your bird to come to the coop door when you or the judge opens the door. It will relate opening the door to getting a treat. You cannot actually give your bird a treat during a showmanship class.

Training to Pose

A judge may ask you to pose your bird either in the show coop or outside of the coop on a small pad. It is very important for a bird to learn to pose while in the coop so the judge has a perfect side view. First look at your bird's picture in the Standard of Perfection or Bantam Standard and memorize the profile of that picture. You will want your bird to stand the same way as the pictured bird, with the same head posture, tail angle, and wing position.

Practice posing your bird both inside a coop and on a small rug on a table. Begin by holding your bird with its legs between your fingers and breast resting in your palm. When the bird is quiet, lower it until

its feet touch the rug. While holding the breast, use your free hand to move the head, tail, and wings into the position you have memorized. Some birds respond to being lightly stroked under the beak. Slowly remove your hand that is still holding the bird. You want the bird to stand for about 10 seconds once you remove both hands. If your bird moves, start over. Never put your hand on the bird's back as this will cause it to set or squat. Practice with your bird several times a day for about 10 minutes at a time. If you don't see improvement each time, and your bird is not cooperating, start over with another bird.

Birds, such as Modern Game bantams, are posed using a hand or a judge's stick, which is a telescoping pointer. Memorize how this bird should look when posed, and then use a treat to move it into the proper position. The judging stick is used to pose the bird in the same way as you would with your hand. To get a Modern Game used to the judging stick, gradually introduce the stick by leaving it rest against the inside of the show coop until it no longer bothers the bird. Some birds may be initially frightened or agitated. Attach a treat to the end to help the bird accept the stick. Remove the treat permanently once the bird is used to the judging stick. Be prepared to pose your Modern Game using either the hand method or a judging stick.

Handling and Presenting your Bird to the Judge

When you are called to your showmanship class, you may be assigned a coop or instructed to select a coop for your bird.

Step 1. Use the holding position, also called the home position.

Hold your bird in the following manner when carrying it to the coop: Place one hand under the bird's breast with your fingers between its legs, using your palm and thumb to balance the bird's weight. The bird's head will face your elbow, its legs will hang down between your fingers, and its breast or keel will rest in your palm. Place your other hand on the bird's back or at your side. Hold the bird at your side near your waistline. Never hold birds upside down by their legs or hold them by their wings.

Step 2. Approach the coop.

Moving in a slow, calm manner, approach the coop carrying your bird in the proper position.

Step 3. Place the bird in the coop.

Standing directly in front of the coop, hold your bird in the Home Position, and open the door using your free hand. Put your free hand back on the bird's back, and put the bird in head first. Keep one hand over the bird's wings to keep them close to its body. (Always put the bird in head first, the direction in which the feathers lay, so the feathers aren't damaged, and if the bird opens its wings, they are not damaged.)

Step 4. Position the bird.

Smooth your bird's feathers. Turn your bird sideways and pose it the way it should look according to the APA Standard of Perfection or the Bantam Standard.

Step 5. Close the coop.

Close the coop door. Place your hands to your side and turn to face the judge.

Step 6. Greet the judge.

When the judge approaches, shake his/her hand and say "Good morning/afternoon, Sir or Ma'am." S/he may ask some general questions before asking you to remove your bird from the coop.

Step 7. Remove bird from coop.

When asked to remove your bird, stand directly in front of the coop door and open it. This is where training and teaching your bird proper manners is important. Your bird should not try to escape when you open the door. Ideally, it should walk toward you when you open the coop door. To remove your bird, put your hand behind the bird to move it to the front of the coop if it doesn't walk toward you. Place one hand on the bird's back to secure its wings, and slide your other hand underneath it to secure its legs. Remove it from the cage once you have total control, and hold it in the home position.

Step 8. Continue to hold the bird.

Hold the bird in the same manner you removed it from its coop. The bird's weight will be on your palm and thumb, and your hand on the bird's back will help it feel secure.

Step 9. Take back the bird.

If the judge asks for your bird, pass it with its head toward the judge. A judge might return the bird to you side first or tail first. If this is the case, the judge is seeing if you know how the bird should properly be passed. Do not take the bird from the judge. You may ask the judge to please turn the bird around with its head toward you, or simply stand there and not accept the bird. The judge will then pass the bird to you the correct way.

To take the bird from the judge, slip one hand under the bird's breast (keel), and place your other hand on its back, with its head facing your elbow. Look at the judge to let him/her know you have control of the bird. Then place your bird in the proper holding position.

Step 10. Return the bird to the coop.

After the interview, the judge will either ask or expect you to return your bird to the coop. Open the door and put your bird in head first. Smooth the feathers, pose your bird properly and then close the coop door. Turn to the judge, and when you are certain he or she is finished, politely say "thank you" and shake the judge's hand. Stay in front of the coop until you are dismissed. Pay attention to your bird and the judge. Do not talk to other exhibitors.

Sources: *Showmanship*, Patty Picard

Poultry Showmanship-A Manual for the Organizer and the Judge, APA

Tim Bowles, Lucasville, Ohio