



# Understanding 4-H Judging

*Compiled by: Candi Bothum, 4-H Program Coordinator - Deschutes County*

*Edited by: David J. White & Tina Hohman*

## The Danish or Group Method of Judging

The group method of judging was developed to evaluate exhibits and meet the needs of the 4-H Youth Development Program. It is used almost exclusively in the Deschutes County 4-H Program and it is the accepted method in use throughout the 4-H Youth Development Program in the United States. This group method is often referred to as the ADanish System,@ or AModified Danish System@ of judging.

### Defining the Group Method

The Group Method is a process of evaluating exhibits and performances in a particular class or contest according to the standards developed for that class or contest. The entries, exhibits, or contestants are evaluated and arranged into groups for recognition of their achievement based upon how close the exhibit meets the established standard.

After evaluation of each item in the class, the entire class is divided, in up to five groups, according to its own merit. All exhibits, in this approach, are judged in comparison with a standard as opposed to comparing the exhibits to each other. The standard for each exhibit is established by the characteristics of the "ideal" outcome in each category. If the performance of 4-H members is being evaluated, due consideration of their age and/or development and experience is also considered.

### The Five Divisions:

**Blue or Excellent:** A blue grouping is given to those entries or performances that most nearly meet the standard(s) (the ideal) established for the particular class or level of performance. Excellent does not indicate perfection, but rather is a grouping indicating a high degree of achievement of the elements of the standard(s) for that specific exhibit or contest.

**Red or Good:** The red grouping indicates those exhibits or performances that rank good in relation to the standard(s) or expected achievement of the class or contest. Either the general level of the accomplishment is less than excellent or enough specific shortcomings are found to cause the placing to drop from excellent to good.

**White or Fair:** The white grouping contains those exhibits or performances which, upon evaluation, are found lacking and rate only average or below an acceptable rating for the

standard(s) established.

**Participant Ribbon:** The participant grouping may be awarded to an exhibit or exhibitor not meeting all the established criteria such as leaving out a required description on a photo. It may also be awarded to a performance that clearly is not satisfactory, based on the standard(s). Often this performance does not meet the standard due to no fault of the exhibitor, but rather the standard may not allow for certain physical and/or mental capacities. Rather than changing the standard, a participant ribbon may be awarded.

**No Award or No Ribbon:** No recognition is given if exhibits or performances, for one reason or another, fail to produce that level of achievement which can be reasonably expected in relation to the specific class or performance. This may happen in the case of, but is not limited to, a disqualification due to unsportsmanlike conduct, a lack of integrity, or abuse of an animal or person.

### Modifying the System

The difference between the Danish and Modified Danish system is the degree of specificity in the number of exhibits distributed between the award groups. Typically, in the Danish System, exhibits are assigned an award based on a numerical score for blue, red, and white ribbons. The blue ribbon score range is 85-100, red ribbon is 70-84, white ribbon is 69 and below. When the Modified Danish System is employed, individual entries, or performances within each group, are further ranked in relation to their relative standing within each group keeping strict adherence to the blue, red, and white ribbon standard used by the judge. For example, first blue, second blue and so on.

In some cases, the range specific ribbon colors may change based on the requirements of a specific event. For example, dog obedience suggests their ranges be 185-200 blue, 184-170, red and 169 or below a white. Dressage may be another event where ranges are modified; in this case 58% and above is a blue.

### The Judge

It is also important to recognize the human aspect of the system. As with any “judging,” it is that person’s opinion on that day. The judge’s interpretation of the standard may be different than yours, s/he may prioritize differently, and s/he sees things differently than you do; whether your eye is trained or untrained. As an organization, 4-H does its best to train participants to know and understand the standard(s) and equally important, it must also train its judges, so they know and understand the standard(s).

If too much emphasis is placed on the recognition or ribbon color, disappointment can be expected (4-Her, leader, parent, and organization). If the focus is on the learning, the exhibit, the experience, the skills, and the effort, then each 4-Her can achieve success.

Do not confuse this with a desire to accept mediocrity. 4-H must keep the standard(s) high and it

must teach our youth to strive to meet that standard, to the best of their ability. This effort must be balanced with integrity and an understanding that all judges will not be the same. If youth can put this in perspective, they will have achieved a life skill important as youth and as adults.

### **Group Method and 4-H Philosophy**

The group method provides recognition for the maximum number of 4-H members. Recognition is a basic need of all young people (and adults, too) and that public recognition for achievement helps fulfill this basic need.

The Group Method or Danish System of evaluation recognizes the existence and relatively minor differences between two or more entries or performances of any two individuals or groups of individuals. The method promotes the educational objectives of 4-H and furthers the motto *AMake the Best Better@* by providing incentive for the maximum number of youth.

The group method attempts to distribute awards (ribbons, and public recognition) among the majority of those participating.

### **When Using the Group Method, Pay Close Attention**

- Exhibits shall be judged against outlined 4-H project standards and applied equally to all participants, not against other exhibits/exhibitors.
- The exhibitor shall be judged, only in showmanship or other performance classes, Fashion Revue, demonstrations, public presentations, etc.
- The judge shall not determine what members should make, grow, etc., or enter in the fair. This is a program decision!
- The judge shall not assume that a member has experience because of age; or that they are inexperienced due to an error.
- When selecting champions, the exhibit must be of blue ribbon quality and be the first and second best blue ribbon exhibits in the class.

## **Types of Evaluation**

### **Interview Judging**

This is where the 4-H'er brings his/her item and the judge interviews the member and evaluates the item against a set of standards. The purpose is to hear from the 4-H'er, what s/he learned and the challenges s/he may have overcome. Each will receive constructive comments in return and may or may not find out his/her placing before leaving. This type of evaluation provides a life skill opportunity; s/he will undoubtedly need interview skills no matter his/her future.

When participating in interview judging, 4-H'ers should dress appropriately – as they might dress for a job interview with consideration for their project area. They should look the judge in the eye, speak clearly, and be prepared for questions about their exhibits. No gum, candy or other

things should be in their mouths.

Interview judging is typically scheduled. Members should be on time or slightly early. If they can not attend interviews, their items may still be judged, but they will not be eligible for special awards, ie: champion or reserve champion awards. They must also realize, things may take longer depending on the judge.

In Deschutes County, interview judging is utilized for all home economic and expressive arts areas, record books, wool & fiber, herpetology, natural resources, some production classes and various special awards.

### **Project Judging**

This type of judging places emphasis on evaluating the finished animal or product against a standard and not on the member or the process. The focus is on the quality of the project. Constructive comments may be provided in writing, usually on a score-sheet, if the member is not present or may be verbal if the member is present.

This type of judging is typically used, in Deschutes County, for conformation or market classes, occasionally for wool or fiber.

If the member is present, for example when showing a market lamb, s/he should dress according to his/her project area criteria. Showmanship attire is not required, but the member should be neat and clean with hard-soled or closed toed shoes (depends on the project area). Club shirts are acceptable; T-shirts with advertising for something other than a club name are prohibited. Members should not chew gum, candy or have other items in their mouths.

### **Performance Judging**

Performance judging places emphasis on how the member is accomplishing the task or goal as it is in process. The judge still compares his/her performance to a standard and not to another member in the class. For example: beef members showing in showmanship, horse members in equitation, or llama members in obstacle course. Upon completion, members shall receive constructive comments, sometimes verbally as in livestock showmanship or sometimes in writing, usually on a score sheet, as in most horse performance classes. Occasionally, members will receive both types of comments.

During performance judging, members should be clean and neat and dressed appropriately for their project area.

In Deschutes County, performance judging is typical for all horse, skills contests, llama and dog areas as well as all showmanship classes.

## **When We Do Not Use the Danish Merit Method of Judging**

Occasionally, there are times when the Danish Merit or Group Method are not used. In Deschutes County, this happens at shows outside of fair. During the 4-H Leaders Show or the Juniper Jackpot, members may be placed in order from best to worst, often only the top six performances will be placed. This also happens at the Juniper Jackpot livestock show. With this system, members are still judged and scored based on the standard, but those scores are used to place performances in order of quality.

This same system is used at fair during return classes. If a member receives a “blue and return” for their animal or performance, this means s/he has been asked to come back and show a second round against others his/her age for Champion or Reserve Champion awards. In these cases, performances/exhibits are judged against each other to determine the best. However, the standard must still be upheld, if champion class performances do not continue to meet a blue ribbon standard, no Champion or Reserve will be awarded. In the case of animals or exhibits, they have already met the standard, or they would not be in the class.

This system then repeats itself in the case of Grand Champion classes. Champion and Reserve Champion exhibitors often are asked to return to compete against their contemporaries. This time a Grand Champion and Reserve Grand Champion may be awarded. This competition between age groups is unique; typically, the philosophy is to not have various age groups compete against each other and therefore is not encouraged. However, in certain cases tradition has over-ridden philosophy and in Deschutes County, a few Grand Champion opportunities still exist. This occurs in most showmanship areas and in the horse project in equitation.

## **The Judges and How They are Selected**

In Deschutes County, judges are selected in a variety of ways. Often, members and adults in a project area have knowledge of a quality judge in their area. Often, judges names are researched on the OSU 4-H website where a list of trained and/or experienced judges (depending on the project area) is maintained. If Deschutes County has not had a judge before and does not have a good recommendation, judges are contacted and asked for references or other 4-H agents are asked to share their knowledge of a specific judge.

In the case of shared judges, the organizations are consulted and asked for suggestions. This happens with livestock at fair, where FFA and open class occasionally share judges.

Judges, who are sought, know and understand the standard in their area of expertise and can articulate and interact well with youth while sharing their reasons for placing a class. They must maintain appropriate ethical behavior, dress and treatment of youth, animals and projects.

Once a judge is hired and begins judging, his/her decisions are final. The appeal process for a bad judge selection is to not have them back.

## **Judges, Standards, and the Rules**

Judges are expected to know and understand the standard for their area of expertise. They are also expected to know the rules in areas of performance, including local rules. Local information must be shared with judges, so they can be informed and follow the rules. All rules and standards are based on the 4-H project materials available to 4-H'ers in Deschutes County. Judges are asked to leave their personal biases at home, yet judges come with their own priorities and personal preferences. Quality judges set these aside and base their decision on the standard(s) and the performances or exhibits.

## **If a Judge Doesn't Follow the Standards**

If a judge is hired that you believe does not follow the standards (either of the project area or the standard of behavior), it's your job to contact the superintendent and let him/her know your thoughts. The judge's decision will not change. However, the exhibitors opinions do matter when it is time to rehire. If the judge is treating youth inappropriately, 4-H staff will discuss what is acceptable. If s/he is not matching what you believe is the standard, the recourse is to not hire them back – talking with them in the middle of the show would create inequities for those who have not yet exhibited.

In the case of horse judges, there are evaluation forms created specifically for your comments. However, in all areas, take your thoughts, good or bad, to your superintendent or Extension or FFA staff member. They will gather information and help make future judge choices based on the input they receive.

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