



Conference Judging: Helping 4-H Members Evaluate Their Work

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Evaluation Learning

The learning experience is greatly enhanced by the opportunity for 4-H members to evaluate their work. A good project leader will provide evaluation experiences in project meetings. Self-evaluation is also recommended for county 4-H achievement days, fairs, or whenever members submit their project work for judging and evaluation.

Evaluation is a natural process. Parents evaluate whenever they respond in a positive or negative way to something a child does. Leaders evaluate whenever they inspect the progress of children and help them improve their work. Conference judging is a form of evaluation that involves the 4-H member in the judging of their project item or exhibit.

Conference Judging

The term conference judging in 4-H refers to the opportunity for the 4-H member and judge to review together the item or presentation to be evaluated. The member and judge discuss the strong and weak points and how the exhibit might be improved. This procedure gives the member a greater sense of personal involvement.

Project work becomes more educational when the member has a part in the evaluation process. Constructive feedback helps the member gain additional knowledge and skills. The same process is just as effective when judging demonstrations, public speaking, fashion review, or personal appearance contests.

Preparing 4-H Members

4-H members should be prepared to take a part in evaluating their project items. Club and project leaders should explain the conference evaluation style of judging to members. Emphasis should be placed on the member's part and what they will be expected to do. Conference judging helps the member feel at ease and in a more receptive frame of mind. Conference evaluation is often easier for the judge. The member gains a greater benefit from the experience. Conference evaluation eliminates the question of why an item received a certain ribbon, therefore, making the evaluation of project work more educational.

The following are steps to conduct a conference evaluation. Good organization enhances the conference judging experience for both members and volunteers who are judges.

Step 1 – The 4-H member takes the exhibit to the judge.

Members should be responsible for taking their project work to the judge. A schedule with specific times for members to discuss their exhibits with the judges will help eliminate a long wait and any accompanying negative anticipation.

Step 2 – The member and the judge sit down together to discuss the article.

Arrange for a suitable place where the judge and member can talk freely, comfortably, and without interference from others.

Step 3 – Establish rapport with the member.

The judge should take the lead by establishing a pleasant atmosphere. Friendliness and sincerity needs to be conveyed by the judge to the member. The relationship should be one of a helpful friend rather than an authority figure. Find something positive to say at the outset or ask the member to relate his or her experience concerning the project item.

Step 4 – Discuss and evaluate the article.

The judge and member will share in the evaluation by discussing the strong and weak points of the item or exhibit. A scorecard may be helpful for the judge to use as a guide. A scorecard is optional. Members should be asked their opinion of various aspects of the project as well as questions about what the member has learned, the skills that have been enhanced and how these can be applied to other life skills. Remember the experiential learning model of do, reflect and apply. By asking specific questions, the judge can give observations, suggestions, or point out anything the member has missed.

Step 5 – The ribbon placing.

When the judge feels most of the main points have been covered, the ribbon placement can be announced to the 4-H member. For instance, the judge might say, "Taking all the points that we have discussed into consideration, I believe that your exhibit today is deserving of a red ribbon placing."

Step 6 – The judge suggests ideas for improvement.

The judge reviews any suggestions for improvement with the member. The evaluation should end on a note of encouragement. Remember, the "sandwich" method of feedback. Start with a positive, provide feedback, and end on a positive note.

Characteristics of Youth Development

Adults who have some knowledge of the basic needs of youth and the developmental characteristics at different age levels will be better equipped when working with 4-H members. Table 1 illustrates the abilities and behavior patterns at the various age levels. These characteristics should be considered carefully in relationship to the project items made by the 4-H members and for the conference evaluation of those items.

The 4-H Purpose

The purpose of 4-H is to provide opportunities for the growth and development of the member accomplished through a program of purposeful project activities and recreation.

A 4-H member is primarily interested in the work of a particular project. The emphasis for leaders is on the growth of the individual rather than simply the products made for the project. Through 4-H work, members can be helped to develop:

- healthy attitudes toward work and plans for a future.
- appreciation for knowledge and the ability and willingness to share that knowledge.
- their full potential; mental, physical, spiritual and moral.
- skills to assume community responsibility and leadership.
- appreciation and understanding of the personal work of others.
- acceptance of new ideas and experiences.
- creative use of leisure time.
- understand the political, social and economic forces at work in our society and our responsibilities.

Projects Point the Way

Projects are the useful tasks that challenge youth and the process through which growth occurs. Good project work provides members with knowledge and skills contributing to self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. Members need opportunities and incentive to improve their work. Helping a member evaluate their project work provides incentive and points the way to personal growth. A project is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

The goal in 4-H is youth development. Conference judging, properly conducted, helps to build "Blue Ribbon" members.

Table 1: Understanding and working with youth - What are they like?

	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
Interest Span	Varied and many time quite short	Lengthens with experience	Almost adult if self-motivated
Motor Skills	High interest and poor coordination	Interested in skills for specific use – may tackle difficult jobs	Highly skilled
Mental Growth	Peak of interest and limited experience	Increased depth and scope	Continued increase related to experience – can see relationships
Ability to Plan	Limited ability because of limited experience and judgment	Can plan better than execute	Have need and ability to plan
Relation to Age Mates	Boys to boys and girls to girls	Interested in the opposite sex; interest in group acceptance	High interest in groups, but also in couples
Relation to Adults	Accept leadership easily	Need and want guidance but reject domination	Want leadership on adult level