

Judging: A 4-H Teaching Technique

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Decision making skills and the ability to logically and clearly express one's self are prized attributes in many careers today. One 4-H teaching technique — judging — can help members develop these skills.

Judging is making a decision and telling why you made it. Judging also teaches members to appreciate standards, to observe closely and to develop their reasoning ability.

Successful judging depends on:

- knowledge of the product;
- understanding the standards or criteria for the product;
- ability to compare products to the standards (giving reasons.)

Where to start

Early in the project, you will probably discuss the standards for the product you are making. What is the most important thing to look for in the product? For cookies, it would be taste, followed by texture, shape and crust. For photographs, composition, lighting, technical quality, and display are important.

Scorecards that identify these standards for some projects are available from your local University Outreach and Extension center.



Comparing the product to the standard

Once you understand the standard, it is possible to compare a product to the standard. Is the photograph a good one? How could it be improved?

Then it is possible to compare a pair of products and decide which is better and tell why. For example: Cookie A tastes better and has a better shape than cookie B.

In 4-H, judging contests are based on classes of four products. Products are designated by letters: A, B, C and D; or numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4. 4-H'ers are asked to compare the item to the standard and to explain orally the reasons for their selections.

Here's class of breakfasts.

Situation: Sue wants to eat a nutritious breakfast. Which would be the best selection? Second? Third? Last?

Nutritious breakfast (10 to 13 years of age)

- A. Danish pastry roll, butter, soft drink
- B. Cheese pizza, orange juice, milk
- C. Cereal, toast (2 slices) butter, jelly, milk
- D. Stack of 3 pancakes, butter, syrup, sausage, milk

Members decide how to rank breakfasts from top to bottom and explain why.

Remember, judging is a comparative process. Analyze the entire class from a distance. Look for something which stands out — an easy top or bottom. Or maybe the class divides itself clearly into a top pair and bottom pair.

This helps narrow the class and gives a mental picture that will help as reasons for class placement are given.

Next, examine the class at close range. The members placing may be confirmed or changed by close observation.

Now members are ready to rank the class from top to bottom, formulate their reasons and take notes about their placement. Notes are used only to practice oral reasons.

The nutritious breakfast class placement is: B, D, C, A.

Reasons: Here's an example of reasons that might be given orally for the breakfast class:

B is placed first because it is the most nutritious and contains food from three foods groups — one serving milk and one serving orange juice (a good source of Vitamin C and A).

D is placed second because it is not as nutritious as B, even though it also contains foods from three food groups. D contains more sugar and is higher in fat.

C is placed third because it contains food from only 2 food groups — one serving of milk and three servings bread and cereal.

A is placed last because this breakfast contains only 1 food group — one serving bread. It is also highest in sugar. For these reasons, the placing is B, D, C, A.

When members prepare oral reasons for a judging class they should:

- be brief,
- organize their presentation logically,
- recall visual images,
- keep the scorecard in mind,
- look for the big things first,
- look for pairs.

In presenting oral reasons members should be encouraged to:

- speak clearly and convincingly,
- use precise descriptions,
- look the judge in the eye when talking,
- stand straight and tall,
- use the correct volume,
- state their conclusions.

Age guidelines

As a project leader working with 4-H members you will want to remember the following guidelines:

Ages 8 to 11

- ✓ plan simple choices,
- ✓ offer choices that are related to what they know,
- ✓ give positive feedback,
- ✓ review the judging card used by members for reporting their placement. What is class, project, etc?

Ages 12 to 14

- ✓ increase the complexity of choices,
- ✓ encourage contests,
- ✓ provide positive feedback,
- ✓ review the judging card used by members for reporting their placement.

Ages 15 to 18

- ✓ encourage them to improve their skills in oral reasons,
- ✓ encourage participation in regional and state events, if available,

- ✓ encourage members to explore careers with judging skills in mind.

Setting up a judging event

To set up a judging class for a project group, you may want to obtain judging cards from your local University Outreach and Extension center. It is good to have pencils and paper for note taking, and calculators on hand for totaling scores.

A chart for scoring placing scores is also available from your local University Outreach and Extension center. Ask for instructions on using it, if it is new to you. You will want to ask a volunteer to serve as the official judge. You might ask that person or someone else to serve as reasons judge for the class. It is a good idea to set a time limit on reasons presentations, make a rule of no talking, and explain time limits for placing a class.

For more information, refer to additional MU Extension guides in this series:

LG 744, *4-H Demonstrations*

LG 782, *Ages and Stages of 4-H Youth Development*

LG 783, *Learning by Doing*

LG 784, *4-H Project Leader*

