Be a Good Judge!

- **Before you accept a show**
  - Do not judge a show if you may have a conflict of interest.
    - **Examples:**
      - You have worked one-on-one with someone in the contest in the last three months.
      - You have sold a horse to an individual in the contest within the last three months.
  - Know your limitations; do not accept shows that are too large or too diverse.

- **Before the Show**
  - Have good communication with show management.
    - **Be sure to confirm:**
      - Show location (address)
      - Start time
      - Class list (show bill)
    - Have a contact number and email for the show manager in case an emergency arises.
      - If an emergency occurs, assist show management in finding a replacement judge.
    - Do not assume things will be provided; ask what equipment is available to make appropriate patterns (trail obstacle number of poles, jump numbers, etc.).
    - Know the expectations each show has of its judger (they are not always the same).
      - Are you providing patterns or are they?
      - Are you expected to provide reasons to the audience on a mic after classes?
      - Will they provide lunch, water, etc.?
      - Is the show in an indoor arena or an outdoor arena?
      - Is there a contract?
      - How much will they pay?
      - Will they or are they providing lodging? If so, who is booking it?
  - Be prepared and organized.
    - Have patterns labeled and organized, and make sure you have a copy for show management as well as for yourself.
      - Patterns should be posted **one hour prior** to the show.
        - Patterns can be emailed ahead of time.
    - Make appropriate patterns for each age division.
      - Pick patterns in which cones are set the same to decrease the amount of time you get up to change the pattern.
        - A [horseshowpatterns.com](http://horseshowpatterns.com) subscription may be helpful.
      - Do not make patterns that set exhibitors up to fail.
    - Have score sheets ready for pattern classes.
      - Score sheets can be found on our [ND 4-H Horse Events](http://www.ndsu.ndsu.edu) page or at [www.aqha.com](http://www.aqha.com) or [www.apha.com](http://www.apha.com).
      - Although not required, posting score sheets helps our riders learn. Please consider posting all of your score sheets after every class as an educational tool.
    - Know the rules.
      - Always have a rulebook with you in case of questions.
Quiz yourself on penalties prior to the show to refresh your memory.
Understand the expectations (faults/penalties) in each class.
Know what is legal and illegal in each class.
  o If an exhibitor is using illegal tack, take a minute to explain that so the individual can correct the problem before the next class.
  o Advise exhibitors to read our North Dakota 4-H Horse Shows Bit Rule Examples and Explanations (publication GBH093).
Follow scoring systems set forth in the rulebook.
  o Scoring systems help standardize judging.
  o Competitors know what they are being penalized for and can understand placings.
  o Scoring systems help justify placings when asked questions later in the day.
  o We highly recommend that you post your score sheet for exhibitors.
  ▪ Mark the date.
    o Put the show/contest on your calendar right away so you do not schedule over it.
    o Put the contact name, number and email for the show manager in your calendar.

At The Show
  o Be a good judge.
    ▪ Dress appropriately.
      ▪ Judges should wear long-sleeved shirts, khakis (or something similar) and a cowboy hat.
      ▪ Blazers are optional. You want to look like the judge, not an exhibitor.
      ▪ Clothing should be ironed, boots polished, and a hat should be clean and shaped.
      ▪ Lead by example: No one ever should have a question as to who is the judge!
    ▪ Arrive on the grounds promptly and on time (no more than an hour ahead of the start time).
    ▪ Proceed immediately to show management. Do not stop in the barns to talk with exhibitors.
    ▪ What to bring:
      ▪ Carry a rulebook with you at all times.
      ▪ Carry a notepad, clipboard or binder with you.
      ▪ Score sheets can be found on our NDSU 4-H Horse Events website.
      ▪ Carry extra pens/pencils.
      ▪ Bring ChapStick and/or sunscreen (even for your hands).
      ▪ Have a judges evaluation form.
      ▪ Have gait call or penalty cheat sheets.
      ▪ Have a ladder sheet for larger classes.
      ▪ Bring extra clothing and rain gear (even extra boots) just in case.
      ▪ Bring a whistle in case you need to excuse someone during a jumping/trail class.
      ▪ Bring two extra stopwatches if possible for timed events.
      ▪ Bring a marker to set on the ground to mark your spot for showmanship to ensure consistency.
    ▪ Know the procedure for each class.
      ▪ Set a routine for each class and consistently follow that routine.
      ▪ Write down the name of your volunteers for gait, announcer and, if you have one, ring steward. Make sure you discuss class procedures with them.
        ▪ Example:
          ▪ Have a horse waiting at the showmanship cone when the next horse gets here in the pattern.
• Be in the pen before the class is called. Position yourself where you feel comfortable to observe the class.
• Set your tie breakers before each class to minimize unforeseen bias.
  ▪ Pay attention to the class; watch everyone.
  • Do not chitchat with the ring steward during a class.
  • Be clean and organized in your note keeping to answer questions later in the day.
  • Watch horses as they enter the pen.
  • Pick a spot to sit where you can see the entire pattern (and horse’s foot placement if judging trail).
  ▪ Copy exhibitor numbers correctly.
  ▪ Be impartial, no matter who is showing. Treat each contestant with respect and dignity.
  ▪ Be consistent in what you are looking for in each class according to the rulebook.
  • Bring your same attention and respect to the rider at 7 a.m. as you would at 7 p.m.!
  ▪ Remember, safety should be your No. 1 priority. If a horse is unsafe, pulling it to the middle or asking the rider to leave is better than endangering the whole class.
  ▪ Always double-check your placings.
  • If you use a ring steward as a scribe, always double-check the scores; remember, you are responsible for making sure the placings are correct. Talk to show management to see if they are going to double-check scores; that can save you time.
  ▪ Award the ribbon the exhibitor deserves that day.
  • Remember, you are judging exhibitors against a standard, not against each other.
  • Some classes may not have blue ribbon performances. If no one deserves a blue that day, do not award one.
    • Do not give in to the pressures of an angry parent; be cordial, extend grace and point the parent to the rulebook.
    • The aim is to help our youth grow and learn in their horsemanship skills.
  • Remember, a blue ribbon is an above-average, near perfect performance with very few mistakes; red is a good to average performance consisting of some mistakes and other bobbles; and a white ribbon is a below-average performance (see Danish system guideline sheet).
  • If an exhibitor receives a white ribbon for a fault that can be changed before the next class to improve the ribbon placing, take time to point it out.
    • Examples: forgot their number, is using illegal tack, completed the pattern on the wrong side of the cone, etc.
  ▪ Work to minimize complaints while still following the rules set for each class.
    • Make sure you always have someone with you when an exhibitor/parent approaches you for any reason.
    • Ideally, follow the show manager’s grievance policy. If the manager does not have one, you can follow the ND 4-H Policy (Page 5).
    • Have the exhibitor talk to you and not the parent.
    • Refrain from answering questions during the course of the horse show.
  ▪ Be easy to work with; flexibility is key when judging.
  ▪ Be willing to answer questions and ready to explain your decisions.
    • This is where keeping good notes comes in handy!
  ▪ Check with show management to determine breaks and when you will break for lunch, dragging the arena or arena setup.
  ▪ Remember that exhibitors put a lot of time and effort into preparing and transporting their horses to show to you.
• Example: In a walk trot class, walk and trot them more than two second per gait. They paid, prepared and spent the money to get to the show and deserve time to show.
  ▪ Remember that you are serving as a role model for all youth participating in 4-H horse shows.
  ▪ Remember that a horse show is not a clinic and the two are different.
    • Your job is to place each class.
    • Quick “sandwich” (plus/minus/plus) feedback is appropriate.
      o Example: Everyone did a fantastic job today in the showmanship class! Collectively, work on rolling shoulders back to shine that poise and confidence and practice being nice and smooth in your transitions. I loved all of the beautiful smiles out there. Great work!
  ▪ Do not be intimidated; you are the expert.
    • You decide, as the judge, as to how you place a class, so stand by your decisions.
  ▪ Leave the horse show grounds after the show. Do not fraternize with exhibitors or spectators.
  ▪ Be polite and cordial at all times, extending grace even when it is difficult.
  ▪ Strive to be positive.
    • Add up the “good” – what horse do you want to take home?
    • Do not hunt for penalties or something to go wrong.
    • Be the exhibitors’ biggest cheerleader!
    • Your job as a judge is to know the rules and judge the class fairly and accordingly; let the faults and penalties come to you.
  ▪ Always work to practice, grow and become a better judge. The more horses you see, the better you will get.
    • Watch
      o The Judges Perspective – A free series by the American Quarter Horse Association consisting of judges walking you through winning runs of various classes
      o The Game Plan – A free series by the American Paint Horse Association that covers classes evaluating the horse and the run
    • Purchase videos.
    • Attend an educational seminar.
      o AQHA
      o Arabian Horse Judges & Exhibitors School – December, Scottsdale, Ariz.
      o HSJ Seminar – October, Loveland, Colo.
    • Virtual education
      o Watch the virtual shows online and score some runs.
        o HorseIQ
        o AQHA University
        o Horse Show Judges University
        o HorseShowJudges.com