

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 judge (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 hideshowpatterns.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](#) page or at www.aqha.com or 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.
 - If an exhibitor is using illegal tack, take a minute to explain that so the individual can correct the problem **before** the next class.
 - 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.
 - Scoring systems help standardize judging.
 - Competitors know what they are being penalized for and can understand placings.
 - Scoring systems help justify placings when asked questions later in the day.
 - We highly recommend that you post your score sheet for exhibitors.
- Mark the date.
 - Put the show/contest on your calendar right away so you do not schedule over it.
 - Put the contact name, number and email for the show manager in your calendar.
- **At The Show**
 - 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.
 - 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
 - The Judges Perspective – A **free** series by the American Quarter Horse Association consisting of judges walking you through winning runs of various classes
 - 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.
 - AQHA
 - Color Breed Council – January, Tulsa, Okla.
 - Arabian Horse Judges & Exhibitors School – December, Scottsdale, Ariz.
 - HSJ Seminar – October, Loveland, Colo.
 - Virtual education
 - Watch the virtual shows online and score some runs.
 - [HorseIQ](#)
 - [AQHA University](#)
 - [Horse Show Judges University](#)
 - [HorseShowJudges.com](#)