

# Interviewing Tips For 4-H Judges

*Serving as a 4-H judge is both an honor and a responsibility! It's a recognition of your expertise in a subject area and abilities in working with young people. At the same time, it's important to realize the significance of your responsibilities and to be ready to do the best job possible!*

## Evaluation and Recognition: An Important Part of the 4-H Educational Experience

Evaluation is important to help members know where they stand in knowledge, skills, and attitudes so they can build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Recognition is a basic human need.

4-H'ers are recognized for many kinds of achievements including:

- ▼ participation in educational experiences;
- ▼ individual progress towards goals;
- ▼ achievement of standards of excellence;
- ▼ results from peer competition.

Interview judging in 4-H is important! It's the educational process by which evaluation and recognition can be accomplished. As a 4-H judge, you will:

- ▼ recognize members for participating in the interview;
- ▼ evaluate and recognize how well each one met the standards set for their project and;
- ▼ evaluate and recognize how members compare to others taking the same project.



As a judge you will only be able to evaluate and recognize members as they are on judging day. You will not be able to evaluate their progress. Do not allow yourself to be put in the position of trying to decide who learned the most, who worked the hardest, or other aspects of members' progress. Evaluation and recognition of such progress can best be done by 4-H advisors and others who work with the youth throughout the year and who know their background and resources. It cannot be done by a 4-H judge during an interview at the conclusion of a project!

As a judge, you will want to conduct interviews that will be positive and educational experiences for members. The following tips will help you accomplish this.

### Before Judging Day

Find out from the event organizer how things will be conducted, what will be expected of you, what resources will be provided, directions to the event location, and so forth.

Become familiar with county rules, regulations, selections and placing criteria. Not all counties are the same!



# Judging Day

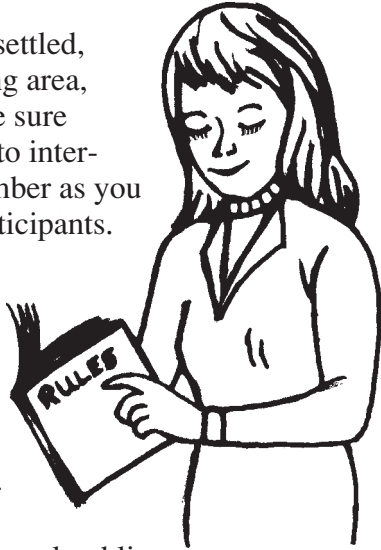
Dress comfortably but professionally. Both your clothing and your grooming should reflect the fact that you are a knowledgeable, up-to-date person who's highly qualified to be a 4-H judge!

Arrive early to get settled, arrange your judging area, and otherwise make sure you're as prepared to interview your first member as you will be for later participants.

Make sure the judging is arranged so interviews can be conducted as privately as possible. Parents, advisors, other 4-H'ers, siblings, and the general public should not be allowed in the judging area. If possible, sit beside the member during the interview. This usually makes the member less nervous than does sitting across a table and helps him or her talk with you more openly.

Depending on what categories you're judging, you might consider having available a supply of the following:

- ▼ pencil, paper, and clipboard or notebook
- ▼ tissues (Nervous 4-H'ers sometimes cry!)
- ▼ a pitcher of water and paper cups (You'll get thirsty talking with 30 4-H'ers on a hot July afternoon!)



- ▼ paper towels (Some projects such as small animals, foods, fishing and others can get messy.)
- ▼ demonstration items related to the project (For example, clothing judges sometimes bring a needle and thread to show different hand stitches; rope judges sometimes bring rope to have members demonstrate knots, etc.)
- ▼ a timer (Make sure each member gets equal time.)

## Criteria For Judging

### 1. Comparing against standards

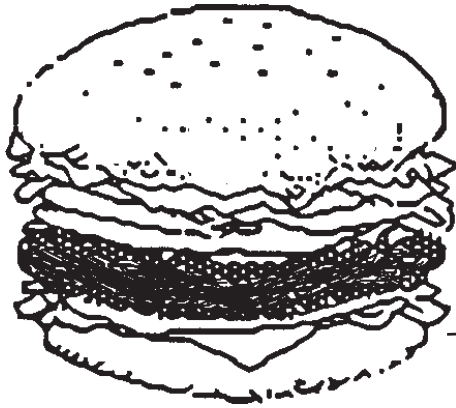
The following evidence allows you to assign individual achievement awards, such as grade ribbons, based upon the standards set for the project. Grade ribbons are typically awarded at the end of the interview.

- ✓ Member's knowledge *and* accomplishments (based upon individual project plan)
- ✓ Skill in applying project knowledge (based upon project exhibit and/or demonstration)
- ✓ Attitudes and understanding gained from involvement in project as planned

### 2. Comparing against others

The exhibit, project manual, or other visuals members bring are also there to help you identify outstanding project performers for additional recognition. Such as outstanding ribbon, project trophy, or state fair participation. This also includes taking into consideration the scope of the member's involvement based on his or her project plan as well as evidence of project mastery in terms of knowledge, skill and understanding. Typically, this assessment is done at the end of the day.





During the interview, use the “teaching sandwich” outline.

Step 1: Opening questions.

Step 2: Assessing and teaching.

Step 3: Summary comments and recognition.

## Interviewing Steps

Find out from the event organizer the number of youths to be judged and the total time allotted as well as the approximate time to spend with each person. Be sure that each interview is approximately the same length. You’ll have to gently draw out the shy, silent types and tactfully shut off the domineering talkers to accomplish this. Under no circumstances allow one member to go on for 15 minutes if another member has only taken 5 minutes! You may want to use a timer to make sure everyone gets the same amount of time.

Use some sort of system to rank, score, and keep track of members as you interview. This will help you when making your final decisions.

### *The Teaching Sandwich*

#### **Step 1: Opening Questions**

Open the interview with easy questions to set members at ease and to help them feel good about and take pride in their accomplishments. Have a friendly, smiling, open, helpful attitude with every individual. Helpful openers include:

- ▼ What is your name?
- ▼ Have you been a 4-H member very long?
- ▼ Tell me about the interest areas you explored in your project? [Project interest areas are identified in the planning section of the project manual; part of the manual’s Member Project Guide.]
- ▼ What did you do or like best in your project?
- ▼ Why did you choose this project?

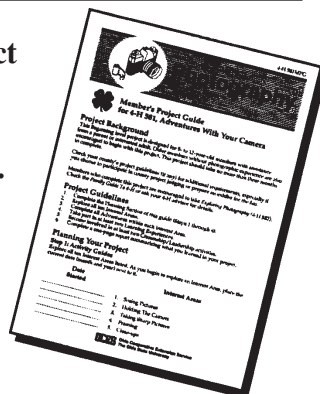
#### **Step 2: Assessing and Teaching**

Follow with meaty questions mixed with project teaching. This should relate to the member’s project exhibit as well as specific aspects of the member’s project plan. Review the planning section of the member’s manual to determine scope of the member’s project involvement. It may also be helpful to have a few standard questions from the project book to ask all participants. This will provide a frame of reference when you compare them with each other for additional recognition like trophies, rosettes and state fair participation.

#### **Step 3: Summary Comments and Recognition**

Come back to the positive aspects of the project before you close the interview and let the members know they have much of which they can be proud! Summarize both the positive aspects and your suggestions as you close. Congratulate members for their work and interview performance. As you hand

Every Ohio 4-H project either contains or is supplemented by a member project guide. See 4-H 956, *4-H Member Project and Achievement Program*, for details.



them their project ribbon, be sure to explain how they matched up to standards for the project and areas for improvement.

### ***After the Interviews Are Completed***

Make your final decisions based on evidence of member performance against standards, as well as evidence of project mastery. Make sure you have valid reasons to support your assignment of outstanding ribbons, trophy winners and state fair participants. For example, a member who planned and completed 4 of 7 project interest areas extremely well, may receive a higher grade than someone who completed 7 of the 7 poorly. However additional evidence may be needed for consideration as project winner including mastery of project knowledge and skills, and significant accomplishments in citizenship, leadership and community service.

Check and double-check your selections to make sure that the right person is named for each selection. Having a different person than you expected stand up to receive an award is a nightmare no judge wants to face!

Sometimes judges are asked to announce the winners and make some general comments, and other times judges simply are asked to give selections to one of the officials. If you are asked to make comments, try to promote understanding by the audience. Comments about general strengths and weaknesses you observed, the criteria you used in making your decision, and so forth are helpful.

Avoid justifying to the audience, other members, parents, etc. why a particular member did or didn't win. If you did a good job in helping the members evaluate their strengths and weaknesses during the interview, no such individualized justifications should be needed.

Give your suggestions for improving the event, enhancing project experiences, etc., to the event organizer. Do this in writing if possible. Handwritten notes are okay and helpful.

## **From Start to Finish**

Have fun! Although being a 4-H judge is sometimes tiring, it's also a most satisfying and inspiring experience! Almost all the 4-H members you interview will have worked hard on their projects and will have some exciting accomplishments to share. Enjoy them and your 4-H judging experience!

### ***Authors***

Kathryn J. Cox  
Extension 4-H Specialist, Older Youth

Revised by Robert L. Horton  
Extension 4-H Specialist  
Educational Design

### ***Resource***

For additional information on the role of county level judging as part of Ohio's member achievement program, refer to 4-H 956, *4-H Member Project and Achievement Program*.

Printed on recycled paper

All educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status.

Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension  
TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868  
Reprinted 5/02—2600—196751

