

# Horse Judging Start Guide



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
EXTENSION



## What is Horse Judging?

Horse Judging is a team contest in which 4-H'ers acquire a better knowledge of horses and develop skills in the selection of horses, while learning the basic principles of animal science. Participants learn to identify breeds of horses and judge classes of horses based on conformation and performance.

Judging teams foster development of self-motivation, self-esteem and responsibility. Students have the opportunity to strengthen their communication and leadership skills in an environment which encourages teamwork and promotes acceptance of differences!



## Learn More

- Cloverleaf, Junior and Senior 4-H members are eligible to compete in Horse Judging. There are Junior and Senior divisions; Cloverleaf 4-H'ers who are in 4th grade may compete in the Junior division.
- **Counties prepare by having practices prior to the contest.**
- The main component of the contest is placing classes of horses in the conformation and performance categories. Participants compare their opinion of an animal against the ideal as specified by industry experts.
- **Conformation classes deal with the physical build of the horse. Performance classes deal with riding and can include but are not limited to Western Pleasure, Hunter Hack, Equitation, Hunter Under Saddle, and Reining**
- Contestants justify their placing decision through a set of oral reasons for selected classes. They learn organizational skills as they compose their thoughts and deliver them to a set of judges.
- **Competing as team members assists youth with the development of social skills, cooperation, and managing feelings as they become comfortable with working alongside others toward a common goal.**
- Integrity, sportsmanship, decision-making abilities, and public speaking skills are also strengthened.

## Breakdown of a Horse Judging Contest

- **Each contestant will judge four conformation classes and four performance classes. The performance classes will be announced upon arrival to the contest.**
- After the judging, contestants will have lunch and an allotted time to prepare oral reasons.
- **Juniors will give two sets of reasons, usually one conformation and one performance class. Seniors will give three sets of reasons. Reason classes will be announced during the contest.**
- Everyone will have a questions class.
- **Winners will be announced at the end of the contest.**



## Preparation Ideas for 4-H Staff



- Each coach can determine the number of practices held during the judging season. Ideal practices last one hour to 1 ½ hours. You can have one to two practices a week. Teams can practice year round for a couple of months before the contest.
- Practices should include live farm visits and classroom lessons.
- Live visits are great, weather and light permitting. All classes at the contest will have four horses, so if you can make a live class with four horses that is helpful. Otherwise, 4-H'ers can evaluate a pair of horses or even one horse at a time.



- Classroom activities can include:
  - Students bring in a picture of a horse and tell the class about it using the correct terms
  - Games to play like horse jeopardy
  - PowerPoints and/or videos to show 4-H'ers what they need to know



- Dedicate at least one lesson to teaching reasons format:
  - Opening statement
  - Comparing pairs (1st/2nd, 2nd/3rd, 3rd/4th)
  - Concluding statement
  - Don't forget about transitions (Furthermore, in addition, moving to my middle pair, etc)
- Try to make learning reasons easier by starting with an easy topic. Have 4-H'ers rank their four top television shows, favorite four desserts, or other area of interest to learn how to start.
- To get to the state contest, look for emails from the state office on registration deadlines.
- Encourage them that this is a fun way to learn about horses, especially if you don't have one.
- Don't forget the snacks at practice!



## Special Considerations

- If staying overnight, be sure to plan in advance since some hotels fill up quickly.
- Be sure to plan for meals or snacks for after the contest.
- Minimal materials are needed. Some recommended resources are free; some may have a fee.
- When looking for local farms, you can look at the trainer directory for breed associations or riding associations.



## Recommended Resources

UGA Conformation Publication: [extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1400](https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1400)

Kansas Youth Horse Judging Manual

[www.kansas4-h.org/events-activities/contests/horse-judging/docs/Kansas\\_Horse\\_Judging\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.kansas4-h.org/events-activities/contests/horse-judging/docs/Kansas_Horse_Judging_Manual.pdf)

<https://georgia4h.org/programs/focus-areas/agriculture-stem/agriculture/livestock-and-animal-projects/judging-teams/horse/>

Staff members have access to the Staff Only Section in 4-H enrollment. Under the Equine folder, there are more resources listed.

## Contact

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