Judging Swine and Oral Reasons 101

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Photos by Cindy A. Kinder

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Overview

This booklet will help youth and beginning producers to understand the five basic criteria for selecting a swine animal. It will also help beginners in 4-H and FFA livestock judging to understand proper note-taking format and the structure to oral reasons.

It should be used by youth and adults together, at club meetings, in classrooms, at field days, or at workshops as a livestock judging reference. As judges gain more experience, they can build their note-taking and oral-reasons skills by attending regional judging camps or clinics.

Life skills

4-H livestock judging programs help youth develop the following life skills that make them better leaders and citizens and build stronger communities.

- **Leadership**
- **Teamwork**
- **Self-motivation**
- **Marketable skills**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Problem solving**
- **Decision making**
- **Communication**
- **Self-esteem**
- **Character**
- **Self-responsibility**

Parts of a swine

Knowing the parts of an animal will help you understand what someone is referring to about that animal. It will also help you give correct information about your animal, to a veterinarian, for example. Study the parts of the pig below. Once you know them, study the next picture that associates specific terms with those parts.

A.	Tail	**H.**	Sheath (barrow)	**O.**	Cannon bone	**V.**	Neck
B.	Valva (gilt)	**I.**	Belly	**P.**	Forearm	**W.**	Shoulder
C.	Ham	**J.**	Teats	**Q.**	Knee	**X.**	Fore rib area
D.	Stifle joint	**K.**	Fore flank	**R.**	Jowl	**Y.**	Back
E.	Hock	**L.**	Elbow	**S.**	Snout	**Z.**	Loin
F.	Dewclaw	**M.**	Foot (toes)	**T.**	Head/face	**AA.**	Rump
G.	Rear flank	**N.**	Pastern	**U.**	Ear	**BB.**	Side

Terms associated with a swine

Knowing the parts of an animal is important, and so is knowing the terms that are associated with those parts. You can build confidence and portray competence when you talk the same terminology as other producers.

A. Underline

B. Deep ribbed

C. Wider skeleton

D. Length of body

E. Top

F. Blade

G. Depth of flank

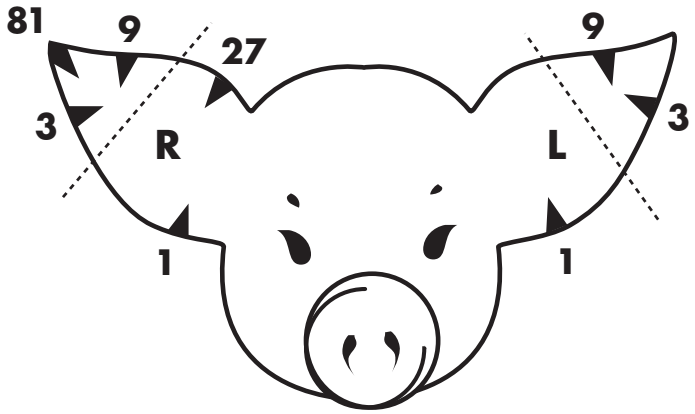
Universal ear notching system

The universal ear notching system is the most common method of permanent identification. Reading ear notches correctly can give you an edge in your oral reasons.

The right ear is used for the litter mark. Notches in the left ear identify the pig's individual number within the litter. All pigs in the same litter will have the same litter mark in the right ear and different notches in the left ear.

Notches have different values depending on their location on the ear. For example, a notch toward the lower outside tip of the ear counts as three. The figures below indicate the number value of the notch location.

When reading ear notches, give the litter number first and the individual number second.



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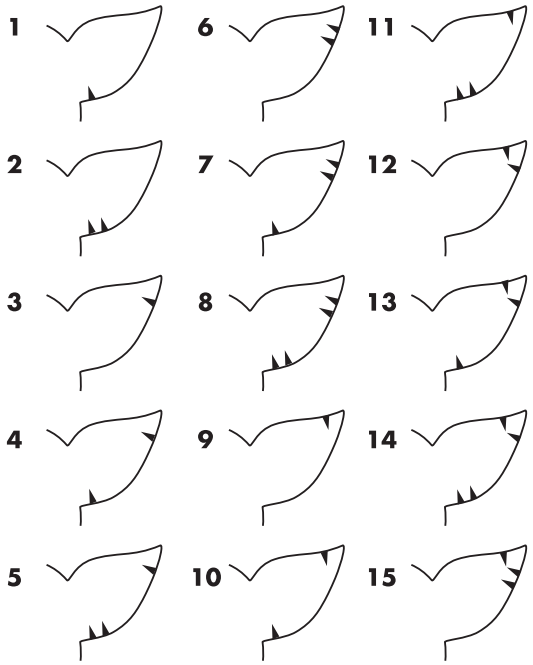


Swine selection

Selecting the right type of swine for your operation is important. Whether you have a small operation, a large operation, or just one animal, having the wrong animal can cost you money. The pigs you select should have the potential for meeting market industry goals for muscle, fat cover, structure, performance, and quality (see the box). Besides these goals there are five main criteria to consider when selecting pigs: (1) performance (size), (2) muscling, (3) volume, (4) trimness, condition, and (5) structure, soundness, balance.

PORK INDUSTRY GOALS

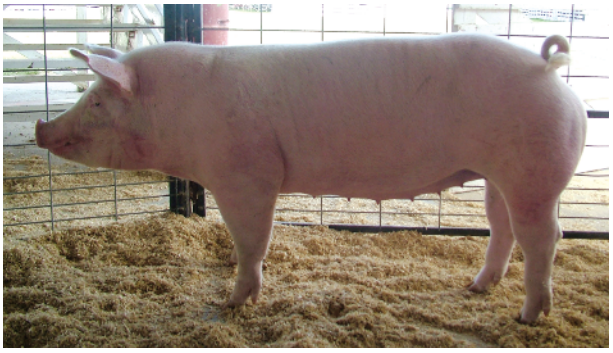
Age at market: 156–164 days
Live weight: 260–270 pounds
Hot carcass weight: 180–205 pounds
Back fat: 0.6–0.8 inches
Loin eye: 6.5–7.5 square inches
Ribeye: 12.5–14.5 square inches
USDA grade: #1
Intramuscular fat: 2.5–2.9 %
Feed efficiency: 2.4 pounds of feed per pound of gain

Performance (size)

Pigs should be of the right size and weight in order to produce a marketable carcass. Producing animals that are too small or too large can reduce the consistency of pork produced. Indicators of size are height at the shoulder, length of the body, and length and size of the cannon bone.

Discussion Questions

Identify the pigs with small, medium, and large frames as measured by body length and cannon bone. (Answer: small, medium, and large pigs are arranged from top to bottom.)

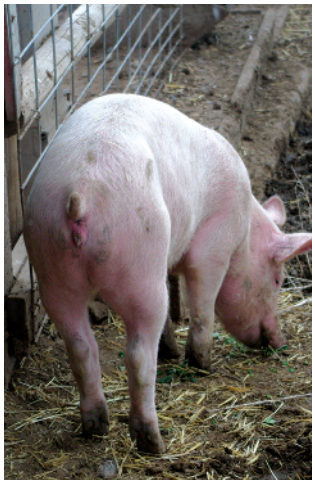


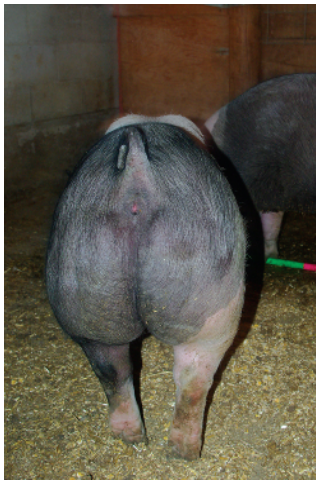
Muscling

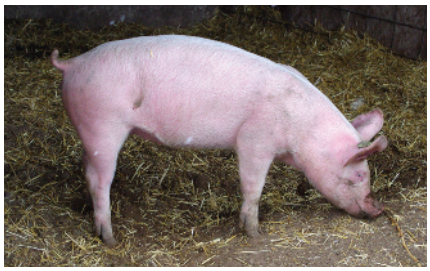
Muscling is important to the meat animal industry. Heavy-muscled animals produce more meat and less fat. You can see indications of muscling over an animal's top, in the width of the stifle, and in the ham region.

Discussion Question

Look at the top, side, and rear views of the white pig and the black and white pig. Which pig is light muscled and which is heavy muscled? (Answer: White pig is light muscled.)





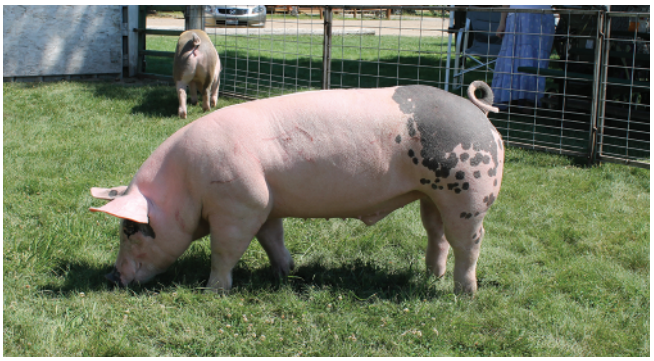


Volume

The volume of an animal indicates how well the animal may perform. You want a deep-bodied animal that can consume large amounts of feed and water to reach market weight faster (6 months of age or less). Indicators of volume are width of the chest floor, width across the shoulder blades, ribcage length and depth, and depth of flank.

Discussion Question

Compare the volume of the two pigs at right. Which pig is deeper ribbed? (Answer: White blue-butt pig is deeper ribbed.)



Trimness, condition

The amount of trimness and condition (fat) an animal has also relates to its performance. You want an animal that is not too fat or too thin. You can see indications of fat in the jowl, over the top and shoulder, over the ribs, in the flank and in the elbow, tail, and underline regions.

Discussion Question

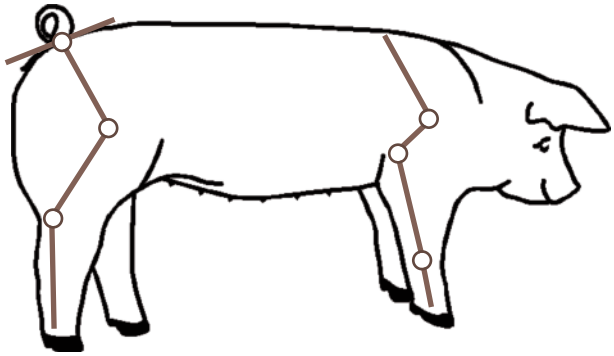
Can you see differences in trimness in the two pigs at right? (Answer: The spotted pig is heavier conditioned.)

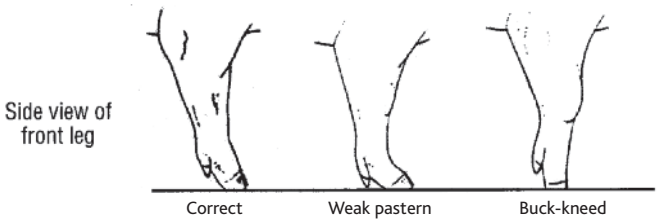
Structure, soundness, balance

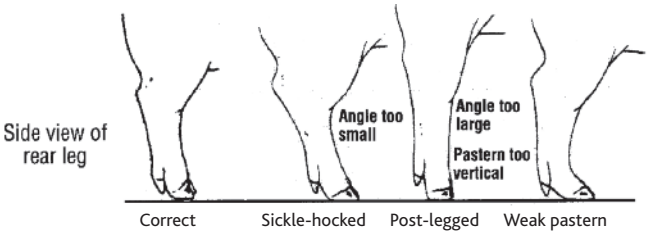
Strong bones and correct skeletal structure are essential for any animal. In the drawing at right you can observe bone structure in the angle of the shoulder, levelness of the top line and hip, pastern angle, and movement. Balance is the overall attractiveness of the animal. Animals should be evenly balanced from the front to the rear.

Discussion Question

Find the correct front leg and rear leg structures in the illustrations at right.







Source: Leg illustrations/adapted from Dr. Ken Stalder, Professor and Extension Swine Specialist, Iowa State University, Department of Animal Science.

Judging swine

Note taking

Presenting oral reasons is the most valuable experience you will have in livestock judging. It helps you to think and state your thoughts clearly. It also demonstrates your knowledge and vocabulary. Being able to defend a decision builds your confidence and self-esteem. No matter what career you choose, communicating effectively is a must to be successful. Success in judging starts with note taking.

During contests, you will judge several different classes in a short time and give your oral reasons later. You will need to take notes on what you see about the animals in each class. You will then study the notes before giving oral reasons to a judge. A good set of notes should help you remember the class in your mind.

You will take notes only on classes that have been assigned as reasons classes. Once you have evaluated and placed the animals in the class, then take notes. A 5- by 8-inch steno notebook is suggested for use in taking notes.

This is what a blank note page should look like. Leave enough space in each box for your notes.

Class Name: **Class Placing:**

Introduction:

# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)

Note-taking format

The format for notes is broken down into rows:

- THE FIRST ROW and heading is the introduction to the class. It tells what you judged (crossbred market barrows, for example) and how you placed the class (4-1-3-2, for example). The introduction also explains how easy or hard it was to place the class of animals.
- THE SECOND ROW explains why the 1st place animal is over the 2nd place animal.
- THE THIRD ROW explains why the 2nd place animal is over the 3rd place animal.
- THE FOURTH ROW explains why the 3rd place animal is over the 4th place animal.
- THE FINAL ROW explains why the last animal is last and is the conclusion of the reasons.

The format has four columns:

- NUMBER AND IDENTIFICATION—Animals are numbered 1 through 4, and an identification point is used to describe individual animals in the class.
- GRANT–Give an overall big picture of an animal by stating a good quality of the animal in that row. Sometimes there may be no grant for an animal.
- CRITICIZE–List 1 or 2 bad qualities of the animal in that row. Sometimes there may be no criticism.
- COMPARE–List two or three good qualities of the animal in that row, stating why it placed over the next animal.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE TAKING AND REASONS

1. Don't start taking notes until you have placed the class and marked your card.
2. Write your notes in the format below in order to help you give a fluid, organized set of reasons.
3. Try to be general in the terms that you use to describe the animal in each box, but write as much as possible to describe the animal. You will have time to use "terms" when you prepare to deliver your oral reasons.
4. Keep your notes readable and brief; this will prevent you from memorizing your notes. You should be able to remember the animals, not your notes.
5. Don't forget to write down an ID point and sex, if needed, for each animal.
6. Be sure to use the correct sex of the animal in classes that are of mixed sex and use your ID points when describing the animals.
7. Use the time during non-reasons classes to look back at your notes and prepare your reasons or complete your notes.

This is how you would fill in your note page.

Class Name: **Class Placing:**

Say how easy or hard it was to place the class. State overall comment about outstanding individual animal or top pair of animals.			
# and ID	**Grant (Good)**	**Criticize (Bad)**	**Compare (Good)**
Animal # and list one ID.	Say why 1st place animal wins the class.	Say any bad qualities of the 1st place animal (optional).	Say why 1st place animal beats 2nd place animal by saying the good qualities of 1st place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 2nd place animal.	Say any bad qualities of the 2nd place animal.	Say why 2nd place animal beats 3rd place animal by saying the good qualities of 2nd place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 3rd place animal.	Say any bad qualities of the 3rd place animal.	Say why 3rd place animal beats 4th place animal by saying the good qualities of 3rd place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 4th place animal.	Say why the 4th place animal is last.	Thank you

Using your notes to prepare oral reasons

Here is an example set of notes. They are color-coded to show you the transfer of information from your notes to your oral reasons.

Class Name: Crossbred Market Barrows **Class Placing:** 2–1–3–4

Top pair, fast growing			
# and ID	**Grant (Good)**	**Criticize (Bad)**	**Compare (Good)**
2 gray rumped	Powerfully constructed and heaviest muscled	Higher in his tail set and more flexible out of hip	Fresher appearing Wider chested Heavier structured and muscled, more lean gain
1 blue masked	Taller shouldered Leveler designed More flexible out of hip	Stale appearing Flattens to base of rib	More shapely Wide chest Sounder moving Set to blade Bigger footed Leaner muscle and carcass
3 blue rumped	Tallest bladed Longest boned	Poorest structured Straight Narrow chested Least top shape of all	Lean value Faster growing Longer
4 Spot	Wider chested and sounder moving	Short Fat Early maturing Lowest cutability	Thank you

Using these notes, here is an example set of reasons:

The words that are highlighted in green are transition phrases that are to be used in every set of reasons. These transition phrases help you move from box to box in your notes.

I placed the **Crossbred Market Barrows 2-1-3-4**. I started with **a top pair of shapely, fast-growing barrows** and used the heaviest muscled, most powerfully constructed gray-rumped barrow. I would like to set him higher in his tail, and make him more flexible out of his hip. But when compared to 1, the freshest appearing barrow is wider chested and heavier structured. He offers more lean gain per day of age and should kill with a higher percent lean.

The blue-masked barrow is taller shouldered, leveler designed, and moves with more flex out of his hip. But he's stale and flattens and tapers to the base of his rib. He is second.

Still, I can use the sounder, more shapely 1 to beat 3 in the middle pair. He is wider chested and bigger footed. He is further set back at his blade. Plus, he displays leaner down his top and loin edge and should kill with a more shapely carcass.

The blue-rumped barrow is the *tallest bladed and the longest in his bone work*. But I placed him 3rd because he is the *poorest structured barrow in class*. He is *straight off both ends of his skeleton*, he is *narrow chested*, and he has the *least in his top shape* of the initial three.

Still, *lean value* places 3 over 4 in the bottom pair. He is *bigger, faster growing, and longer spined*. He displays *leanness* wherever analyzed, and should be more profitable if killed on a *lean-value basis*.

The spot barrow is wider chested and sounder structured. But he is the short, fat, early maturing barrow in class. He should kill with the lowest cutability carcass.

Terms and transitions in oral reasons for swine

Use the "est," superlative form, of a word when talking about an individual animal that is the best of a group. Use the "er" superlative of a word when comparing two animals. The terms below are grouped by criteria you would use in placing a class.

Performance/Volume

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Big skeleton	Short and round in his/her kind
Longer spined	Narrow skeletoned
Wider skeletoned	Short sided
Wider constructed	Narrow constructed
Boldest, deepest ribbed	Flat made, shallow sided
Most pulled apart underneath	Narrow bladed
Big bladed	
Heavy structured	

Muscle

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Widest rump and ham	Round narrow top
More muscle volume and expression through his hip, ham and stifle	Narrow ended, light muscled
Squarer, more musclar top	Inverted in his/her shape
Bolded bladed	Expressionless throughout
	Narrow based
	Narrow chested

Leaness/Fat/Freshness

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Best combination of muscle and leanness	Wasty made
Freer of fat wherever analyzed	Deep jowled
More correct in his finish	Wasty in his lower 1/3
Squarer turn to his/her loin edge	Most mature appearing
Younger, fresher appearing barrow	Old, stale appearing
Youthful appearing	
Fresh topped	

Structure

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Heavy boned, big footed	Small footed, lighted boned
More flex and cushion off both ends	Tightest moving
Loosest jointed	Straightest shouldered
Stouter made and bigger bladed	Tight in his/her top
Most functional skeleton	Narrow structured and frail made
More mobile off both ends	Too straight off both ends
Heavy structured	

continued on page 13

Carcass

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Highest cutability	Lowest cutability
Highest percent lean	Lowest percent lean
Highest percent muscle	Least shapely, least profitable carcass
Most shapely carcass	Most retail trim
Should have the most 10th rib muscle	

Femininity and Underline

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Longer, taller fronted	Short fronted, early maturing
More feminine featured	Short and coarse in her face
Most maternal appearing	Least maternal appearing
More refined in her underline	Blunt and coarse in her underline
More evenly spaced	Least uniform in her spacing

Identification

Down eared	Even eared
Erect eared	Tail tremors
Long toes	Crop eared
Bob tailed	Calcium knots
Swollen jointed	Blue rumped
Speckle rumped	Blue masked
Wide belted	Narrow belted
Off belted	Broken belted
Upturned vulva	Spotted
Littermates	Color
Rough haired	

Transition terms

Use these words to help with the flow of your reasons.

Grants

I realize
I admit
I agree
I saw

Transitional terms

Plus
Besides
Also

Action words

Exhibited
Displayed
Showed
Presented

Opening pairs

Coming to the bottom pair
Moving to
In closing I preferred to
In the top pair

Oral reasons worksheet

Use this worksheet to practice moving your notes into reasons.

I placed the _____ _____

Identify class | Placing

Say how easy or hard it is to place the class

# and ID	Grant	Criticize (est)	Compare (er)
	I started with a(an) _____ (top pair) (outstanding individual) _____ _____	I realize (*Optional: only if class winner has obvious disadvantages*) _____ _____ _____	But in the top pair I placed _____ over _____because _____ _____
	There is no question _____ is the (*What is the second place animal's class advantage?*) _____ _____	But when compared to the class winner _____ _____ _____ he/she is second.	Still in the middle pair I used his/her advantage in _____ _____ to place over (3rd). _____ _____
	I realize that _____ is _____ _____ _____	But I placed him third because _____ _____ _____ _____	In the bottom pair it is a difficult/easy decision to place _____ over _____
	I admit _____is a _____ _____ _____	However_____is the lightest, smallest, poorest, etc . . . so he/she is 4th.	Thank you.