Judging Sheep
and Oral Reasons 101

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Overview

This booklet will help youth and beginning producers to understand the four basic criteria for selecting a sheep 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 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 sheep

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. Study the parts of the sheep below.

A. Ear
B. Pole
C. Forehead/face
D. Muzzle
E. Throat
F. Shoulder
G. Breast
H. Forearm
I. Knee
J. Cannon bone
K. Hoof
L. Fore flank
M. Belly
N. Navel/sheath
O. Rear flank
P. Stifle joint
Q. Hock
R. Dew claw
S. Pastern
T. Leg
U. Twist
V. Dock
W. Hip
X. Rump
Y. Loin
Z. Back
AA. Top of shoulder
BB. Heart girth
CC. Rib
Terms used to describe a sheep

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. Long necked/long fronted
B. U-necked
C. Width of chest floor
D. Top or topline
E. Rack
F. Length of body
G. Spring of rib/bold sprung/middle
H. Depth of flank
I. Level hipped
J. Set to his hock
K. Hind saddle
L. Underline
L & D. Together Parallel/straightness in his lines
Selecting a sheep

Selecting the right sheep 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. Besides the industry goals listed in the box, there are four main criteria to consider when selecting sheep: (1) muscling, (2) condition, trimness, (3) structure, soundness, and (4) balance.

Muscling
Muscling is important to the meat animal industry. Heavy-muscled animals produce more meat and less fat. Lambs are evaluated for muscle in two areas—over the top in the rack and loin areas and in the leg and stifle area.

Circled here are the rack (top) and the loin (bottom) areas.

Discussion Question
Look at the rear views of the lambs at far right. Which one lamb is light muscled and which is heavy muscled? (Answer: The lamb at left is the heavy-muscled lamb.)

Condition, trimness
The amount of trimness and condition (fat) an animal has relates to its performance. Depending on the type of animal you have (market or breeding), you want an animal that is not too fat or too thin. Ideal fat thickness is 0.2 inch for market projects. You can see indications of fat over the rack and loin, in the breast, over the ribs, and in the flank.

Discussion Question
Which of the three lambs at right is the heaviest conditioned? Which is lightest conditioned? (Answer: The lamb at left is the heaviest conditioned. The lamb at right is the lightest conditioned.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHEEP INDUSTRY GOALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at market: 6–10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live weight: 110–150 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot carcass weight: 55–80 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat thickness: 0.15–0.25 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribeye: 2.5 square inches minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality grade: Choice minus or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield grade: 3.0 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADG (average daily gain, national average): 0.68 pounds per day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure, soundness

Strong bones and skeletal correctness are essential for any animal getting to feed and water. You can observe structure in the angle of the shoulder, the levelness of the topline and hip, the pastern angle, and in the animal’s movement.

Discussion Question

Find the correct front leg and rear leg structures in the illustration below.

Balance

Balance is the overall attractiveness of an animal. Animals should have evenly balanced proportions from the front to the rear. From the side view a balanced lamb should be straight in its topline and be as deep in its rear flank as in its fore flank.

Discussion Question

Compare the balance in these two lambs. Which lamb is more balanced? Which lamb is weak topped? (Answers: 1. The lamb on top is balanced. 2. The lamb on the bottom is weak topped.)
Judging sheep

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Name:</th>
<th>Class Placing:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># and ID</td>
<td>Grant (Good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># and ID</td>
<td>Grant (Good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># and ID</td>
<td>Grant (Good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># and ID</td>
<td>Grant (Good)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (Hampshire ewe lambs, 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.
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.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE TAKING AND REASONS

This is how you would fill in your note page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Name:</th>
<th>Class Placing:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Say how easy or hard it was to place the class. State overall comment about outstanding individual animal or top pair of animals.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># and ID</th>
<th>Grant (Good)</th>
<th>Criticize (Bad)</th>
<th>Compare (Good)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal # and list one ID.</td>
<td>Say why 1st place animal wins the class.</td>
<td>Say any bad qualities of the 1st place animal (optional).</td>
<td>Say why 1st place animal beats 2nd place animal by saying the good qualities of 1st place animal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal # and list one ID.</td>
<td>Say one overall good quality of the 2nd place animal.</td>
<td>Say any bad qualities of the 2nd place animal.</td>
<td>Say why 2nd place animal beats 3rd place animal by saying the good qualities of 2nd place animal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal # and list one ID.</td>
<td>Say one overall good quality of the 3rd place animal.</td>
<td>Say any bad qualities of the 3rd place animal.</td>
<td>Say why 3rd place animal beats 4th place animal by saying the good qualities of 3rd place animal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal # and list one ID.</td>
<td>Say one overall good quality of the 4th place animal.</td>
<td>Say why the 4th place animal is last.</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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: Hampshire ewe lambs  
Class Placing: 2–1–3–4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily started, highest performing</th>
<th>Grant (Good)</th>
<th>Criticize (Bad)</th>
<th>Compare (Good)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and ID</td>
<td>Highest quality</td>
<td>Neck ties low into her shoulder U necked, Drops her pins on the move</td>
<td>Big, high performing, wide chested, heavy structured, boldest sprung, most weight per day of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most attractive in class, Neatest fronted and most parallel in her lines</td>
<td>Narrow chested, Shallow ribbed</td>
<td>Balance, longer and thinner necked, flatter shouldered, longer boned and bodied, later maturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wider chested, deeper ribbed, and bolder sprung</td>
<td>Open at the top of her shoulder, shortest bodied of the initial three</td>
<td>Quality, wider chested, heavier muscled, more elevated in her chest floor, leveler docked and longer fronted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Barest headed</td>
<td>No obvious grants</td>
<td>Lowest quality, narrow chested, off in her dock, short boned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

I placed the Hampshire Ewe Lambs 2-1-3-4. I easily began with the big, high performing ewe. Her neck ties low into her shoulder and when on the move she drops her pins. However, when compared to 1 she is a heavier structured, wider chested, bolder sprung ewe that offers more weight per day of age. The most attractive sheep in class is 1. She is the neatest fronted and the most parallel in her lines. But she is the narrowest chested, shallowest ribbed sheep in class. She is 2nd.

However in a closer middle pair I used the balance of the more extended 1 over 3. She is longer and thinner necked and ties in flatter and neater at the top of her shoulder. She is longer boned and longer bodied. She is later maturing. 3 is wider chested, deeper ribbed, and bolder sprung. But, she is open at the top of her shoulder and is the shortest bodied of the initial three. She is third.

Still, quality places 3 over 4. She is wider chested and heavier muscled. She is more elevated through her chest floor, longer fronted, and leveler out her dock.

The barest headed ewe is simply the lowest quality ewe in class; she’s narrow in her chest, the shortest boned, and off in her dock. So I left her last. Thank you.
Terms and transitions in oral reasons for sheep

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.

**Muscle—market lambs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good quality</th>
<th>Bad quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most massive rack</td>
<td>Narrow, sharp topped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widest, flattest loined</td>
<td>Narrow, round loined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More dimension to his/her leg</td>
<td>Flattest leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer hindsaddled</td>
<td>Least top shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures longest from his/her last rib back</td>
<td>Handles with the least muscle shape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leaness, fat, freshness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good quality</th>
<th>Bad quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshest handling</td>
<td>Stalest handling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firmest handling</td>
<td>Softest handling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most correct in his/her handle</td>
<td>Washed out in rack and loin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handles with more touch and tone to his rack and loin</td>
<td>Handles with the least muscle shape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structure, balance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good quality</th>
<th>Bad quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong topped</td>
<td>Weak topped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveler to her dock</td>
<td>Off in her hip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveler hipped</td>
<td>Round made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More correct set to her hock</td>
<td>Too much set to her hock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands squarer up front</td>
<td>Toes in/out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More correct angle to her shoulder</td>
<td>Straight shouldered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long fronted</td>
<td>Short fronted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest and thinnest, necked</td>
<td>Short, thick neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most attractive</td>
<td>Poorest balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most parallel in his/her lines</td>
<td>Quickest patterned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck ties high into the top of the shoulder</td>
<td>U-necked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cow hocked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued on page 11*
### Carcass

**Good quality**
- Higher percentage hind saddle
- More shapely carcass
- Should have a longer shelf life
- Less cooler shrink
- More pounds of higher priced cuts

**Bad quality**
- Least shapely, lightest muscled
- Least shelf life
- Most cooler shrink

### Performance, volume

**Good quality**
- Broody made ewe
- Higher volumed
- Bold sprung
- Big ribbed
- Wide chested

**Bad quality**
- Shallow bodied
- Tight ribbed
- Flat ribbed
- Least rib shape
- Narrow chested

### Transition terms

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

**Grants**
- I realize
- I admit
- I agree
- I saw

**Action words**
- Exhibited
- Displayed
- Showed
- Presented

**Transitional terms**
- Plus
- Besides
- Also

**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 _____________________________

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

Say how easy or hard it is to place the class

I placed the _____________________________________

I placed the _____________________________________

I placed the _____________________________________

I placed the _____________________________________

I placed the _____________________________________