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.

SHEEP INDUSTRY GOALS

Age at market: 6–10 months
Live weight: 110–150 pounds
Hot carcass weight: 55–80 pounds
Fat thickness: 0.15–0.25 inches
Ribeye: 2.5 square inches minimum
Quality grade: Choice minus or higher
Yield grade: 3.0 or less
ADG (average daily gain, national average): 0.68 pounds per day

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.

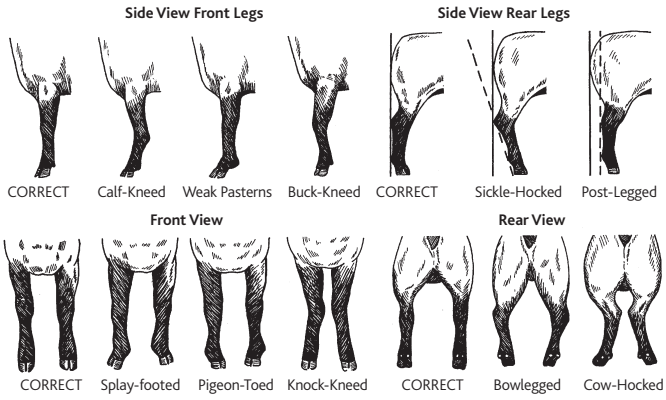
Discussion Question
Which of the three lambs at right is the heaviest conditioned? Which is lightest conditioned? (Answer: The lamb at left is the heaviest conditioned. The lamb at right is the lightest conditioned.)

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.



Sheep feet art used with permission of The Ohio State University Extension, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210

This lamb is too straight in the shoulder structure.

This lamb slopes off the hip.

This lamb is correct in shoulder and hip structure.

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.

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 (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.

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: Hampshire ewe lambs **Class Placing:** 2–1–3–4

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

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

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

Leaness, fat, freshness

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Freshest handling	Stalest handling
Firmest handling	Softest handling
Most correct in his/her handle	Washed out in rack and loin
Handles with more touch and tone to his rack and loin	

Structure, balance

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

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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

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.