

The Danish Merit System for Judging

There are several Evaluation Systems for judging competitions and contests. Three of the most used systems are:

- The American System: Entries are judged in comparison to other entries and placed in a numerical order of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc. place. This system awards only one entry per position and does not use scorecards.
- The Danish System: The entry is judged based on an established standard or quality rather than how it compares to other entries. There can be several entries receiving blues, reds or whites. There is no further breakdown within the category.
- The Danish Merit (or Modified Danish or Merit) system: This system uses comparative and standard quality evaluation methods in the judging.

The Danish Merit System

The Danish Merit system is the evaluation system the Oregon 4-H Program uses for exhibits entered at county and state fairs. With this system, all exhibitors are awarded a blue, red, or white placing and provided a scoring breakdown on an evaluation sheet. The evaluation sheet allows judges to praise the exhibitor's efforts where the standard is met and provide constructive comments on areas that could be improved. To learn more about judging to a standard, see *The Oregon 4-H Judge: Judging to a Standard*.

Other advantages of the Danish Merit system include:

- The standards can be clearly established in the minds of judges and members.
- Judges can easily make fine-point decisions.
- The emphasis on champions and peer competition is tempered.
- Offers judges the opportunity to omit a ribbon placing if there are no exhibits in the class that merit them when comparing to the standard.

The Danish Merit system requires that judges be knowledgeable in the project they are judging and to know the standards so ribbon placing has consistency. Judges must uphold the standards even if it means no or only a few blue ribbons are awarded. If this method of judging is done correctly, it affords the best avenue for members to learn from their efforts.

Blue, Red and White Ribbon Scoring Breakdown

Many judges find the following information helpful when determining scoring and ribbon placement:

- 85-100 points is a Blue Ribbon. This means the exhibit is excellent and well within the ability level of most of the exhibitors. It does not mean perfection; it means high in quality.
- 70-84 points is a Red Ribbon. This means the exhibit is good quality with room for improvement.
- 69 points & under is a White Ribbon. A white ribbon means the exhibit is acceptable, but below the ability level of most of the exhibitors and there is need for considerable improvement.



Additional guide lines to assist in the judging process include:

- 95-100 points: the best of the best.
- 90-94 points: top blue ribbon exhibitor, errors are minor.
- 85-89 points: blue ribbon exhibitors with a few more mistakes taking them out of the “high” blue category.
- 80-84 points: almost blue ribbon quality. Too many mistakes, or a big mistake, or areas of needed improvement to be awarded a blue ribbon, but a little work will get them there.
- 75-79 points: Fair to good quality. Improvement is needed.
- 70-74 points: Many problems or quality issues with much improvement needed.
- 69 and below: Considerable improvement is needed.

Other Recognition

In addition to the Blue, Red and White ribbons, Oregon 4-H uses other awards to recognize the members’ efforts.

- A medallion recognizes an exceptional exhibit that demonstrates excellence in all facets of the project area.
- A Champion is an outstanding exhibit that far exceeds the top established standards. A Champion is not awarded for the top exhibit in a class unless that exhibit is of outstanding workmanship.
- A Reserve champion is a superior exhibit that exceeds the top established standards. A Reserve Champion is not awarded for the second top exhibit in a class unless that exhibit is of superior workmanship. A Reserve Champion is only awarded if the Champion above it has been awarded.
- A participation or “display only” ribbon is used when an exhibit does not meet the requirements of the class. This ribbon and terms are used in place of a disqualification.

Awarding blue ribbons for excellence is equally as important as awarding white ribbons if they are deserved. A white ribbon does not denote failure; it simply means that there is room for improvement. Judges falter in their responsibility if they do not advise the exhibitor on how they can improve. This is a “teachable moment” and valuable lessons can be learned if the member uses the feedback to guide improvement. A white ribbon is only considered a failure if the person fails to learn from the experience.

