

Interview Judging - Giving Constructive yet Positive Feedback

The 4-H judge is an educator (See *The Oregon 4-H Judge: The Role of Educator*). For the members to learn from their mistakes and accomplishments, feedback from the judge is necessary. Therefore the judge needs to not only be knowledgeable in the subject matter but also have effective communication skills. The reasons or comments given to the members are an important part of the overall learning experience. 4-H members recall and utilize the judge's comments when completing new projects in the next 4-H year. When tactfully presented, comments help members understand and accept why their work received the ribbon color awarded and that understanding leads to acceptance of the judge's recommendations and the standards.

For feedback to be effective, a rapport must be developed between the judge and the member. Usually meaningful feedback comes from people we trust-- those who care about us and our future. Members must know that the judge has their best interest in mind. Giving feedback without having established a relationship is not very effective in helping encourage growth and offering guidance.

Though the judge's time with each member is limited, they can still develop a positive relationship and build a rapport that will set the tone for judging. Create a positive and friendly atmosphere by getting to know the participant, encouraging questions and discussions, and explaining the judging process and how decisions are made. Share what you are looking for and the process you use to help you come to conclusions.

Good feedback is given with care and attention. It must be clear, succinct, and sincere. Use "I" statements (I like the way you ..., Next time I would). It is important to give every exhibitor something they can work on to improve. For young and less experienced exhibitors, use the "sandwich" method of giving comments and begin with at least one positive, add in a couple constructive criticisms followed with another positive. For older and more experienced exhibitors, the sandwich method is not as effective as they are looking for constructive comments that will help them improve. However, positive reinforcement is one of the most effective tools in motivating youth and it must be specific and sincere. Being too general or too "flowery" can make the comment sound artificial and phony.

Make sure the member understands by asking for feedback (if you were to create this exhibit again, what would you do differently? What are you most proud of?).

Whatever the age and ability of the exhibitor, end on a positive by helping the member look into the future based on what they learned in this project. Help them set new goals for the next year and be encouraging as they share their goals. Begin and end each judging session by focusing on positive relationships with the members. Take care in what you share; be pleasant and smile, be honest and be positive and encouraging.

