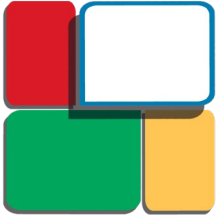




# WHAT IS HORSE JUDGING?

NEW JERSEY 4-H EQUINE PROGRAM



## CONCEPT

Participate in judging a class of horses.

## AUDIENCE

Intended for youth in grades 4-13 (one year out of high school). The activity can be conducted individually or in teams.

## PRIORITY AREA

- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- STEM

## LIFE SKILLS

- Decision making
- Critical thinking
- Cooperation
- Teamwork



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 4-H Horse Judging Contest gives youth the opportunity to experience what it is like to be a judge at a horse show. Participants learn the parts of the horse, how horses should be built and move, and what judges look for in both halter (conformation) and performance classes.

Youth compare each horse in a class to an accepted "ideal" for the breed or discipline. They carefully evaluate strengths and weaknesses, place the horses accordingly, and learn how to explain the reasons behind their decisions. This process helps youth develop observation, analysis, and communication skills that are useful both in and out of the show ring.

Horse judging is designed as an educational experience for all horse project members. Youth do not need to own or show a horse to participate.

## CONTEST OVERVIEW

In a typical NJ 4-H horse-judging contest, youth evaluate classes of four horses. After placing each class, participants prepare to explain their decisions during an oral reasons discussion or question period with an official.

Participants will judge:

- Four Halter (Conformation) Classes
- Four Performance (Riding) Classes

Examples of classes that may be judged include:

- Stock Type Halter Mares or Geldings
- Hunter In Hand
- Western Pleasure
- Hunter Under Saddle
- Horsemanship
- Trail
- Ranch Riding

At the New Jersey 4-H State Horse Judging Contest, youth compete within their age divisions. The contest is divided into Junior and Senior divisions.

Each year, the highest-scoring Senior participants earn the opportunity to represent New Jersey 4-H at the Eastern National 4-H Horse Round-Up in Louisville, Kentucky.



## MATERIALS

The following materials are available on the NJ 4-H Horse Judging page of the NJ State 4-H Competition Resource site. These materials are intended to support learning, practice, and contest preparation:

- **Sample Score Card** – Practice placing classes and recording scores
- **Sample Note Sheet** – Organize observations and key comparisons for each class
- **Horse Judging Resource Links** – Curated educational references from Extension and industry organizations
- **Horse Judging Videos** – Recorded classes and demonstrations for judging practice
- **Additional Helpful Material** – Supplemental resources to support continued learning

*All materials are provided for educational purposes and may be updated throughout the year. Participants should refer to the current contest rules for specific requirements.*

- Practice evaluating horses using photos or videos
- Learn class specifications and judging standards
- Try placing a class and explaining your reasons out loud
- Participate in local, county, or state horse judging opportunities

## REFLECT

- What did you notice first when evaluating a class of horses?
- What was challenging about deciding how to place the horses?
- How did explaining your reasons help you better understand your decisions?

## APPLY

- Join or form a 4-H horse judging team
- Practice judging regularly at club meetings
- Use judging skills to improve your own horsemanship
- Compete in county or state, or regional horse judging contests
- Before watching the official placing, practice oral reasons using your placing.
- Use the official oral reasons scoring reference card to score your reasons.

## RESOURCES

- New Jersey 4-H Horse Judging Contest Rules
- Arabian Horse Judging Resources <https://www.arabianhorses.org/youth/resources/>
- AQHA Horse Judging Resources (Listed under Judges) <https://www.aqha.com/forms-and-resources>
- Extension Horses: Horse Judging <https://horses.extension.org/category/horse-judging/>
- Livestock Judging: Online horse judging videos. <https://www.livestockjudging.com/>
- North Carolina Extension Horse Judging Resource Materials <https://equinehusbandry.ces.ncsu.edu/equinehusbandry-educational-materials/horse-judging-resource-material/>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This fact sheet was adapted from educational resources developed by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and other Cooperative Extension programs. Materials have been modified for use within the Rutgers Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program.