



4-H Poultry Fitting & Showmanship

Member's Guide



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- ▶ Cole Baumann, Livingston County
- ▶ Adriana Beard, Barry County
- ▶ Ben Fritz, Oakland County
- ▶ Sophie Paquin, Van Buren County
- ▶ Kylee Pierce, Eaton County
- ▶ Allie Purves, Oakland County
- ▶ Aaron Rhodes, Eaton County
- ▶ Wolton Sandborn, Ionia County
- ▶ Fox Therrian, Ionia County
- ▶ Jack Weichel, Genesee County

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WELCOME TO 4-H POULTRY FITTING & SHOWMANSHIP

Congratulations on deciding to get involved in fitting and showing of poultry! This exciting aspect of working with birds allows you to show some of the skills not highlighted in other poultry contests. Poultry fitting and showmanship gives emphasis to both the bird and the person showing the bird.

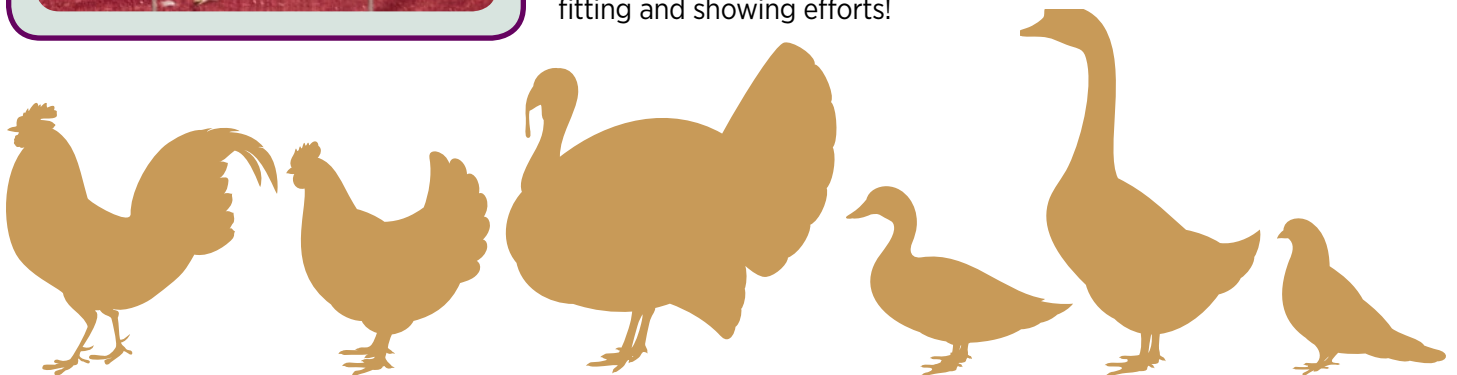


You may have many reasons for wanting to participate in fitting and showmanship contests. Perhaps you have a special interest in all aspects of raising poultry. Maybe you like the opportunity to compete in contests where being a good sport is valued. Maybe you want to use involvement to help educate those in the audience about various breeds and species of poultry. Whatever your reason, your main purpose should be to have fun while learning valuable skills you can use throughout your life.

Since poultry fitting and showmanship contests focus on the bird and you, both will be evaluated. The judge will evaluate your ability to select and care for the bird you show in the contest as well as your ability to demonstrate your knowledge of management, handling, posing and examining the bird. Throughout the contest, the judge will evaluate your skills, attitude and appearance. Fitting and showmanship contests also generally include a quiz as part of the competition.

Fitting and showmanship contests can vary from county to county. Some contests will divide contestants according to age levels (for example, junior, intermediate and senior). Other contests will divide contestants according to the number of years they have spent involved in the poultry project. Before competing, check with your 4-H leader, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension staff person or organization hosting the contest so you know what to expect.

This guide focuses on fitting and showmanship contests for 4-H'ers who work with chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese and pigeons. Perhaps you have an interest in only one of these species. Who knows? Maybe by learning about fitting and showing other species you'll decide you want to get involved in showing those birds too. This resource is your guide to what you need to know for fitting and showing these birds. If you want to know more about the various types of chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese or pigeons, or if you're interested in learning more about how to raise them, contact your 4-H leader or MSU Extension 4-H staff person. He or she can guide you to other helpful resources. Good luck in your fitting and showing efforts!



Fitting refers to the selection of a bird for show and the care of the bird before the contest including feeding, grooming and training. Fitting also applies to the general appearance of the person showing the bird. The information in this section gives an overview of what you need to know and do to be successful in the fitting part of a contest. Check the scorecards included at the end of each showmanship section to see the amount of emphasis placed on the fitting part of the contest.



Choosing a Bird for Fitting and Showmanship

Whether you plan to show chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese or pigeons, keep these points in mind when you choose your bird:

- ▶ Check with your 4-H leader or knowledgeable poultry producer to see which breed is best for you. You should consider which size bird is best for your size, age and experience. Think about the effects of a bird's temperament or age on showmanship contests.
- ▶ When possible, don't choose birds that have obvious defects or disqualifications. Check the American Poultry Association's *American Standard of Perfection* for your bird's breed or variety to find out more about these defects or disqualifications. (Ask your 4-H leader or MSU Extension staff person how you can get a copy of this information.) However, if you have only one bird to work with, you should not get overly concerned with its defects, disqualifications or age.
- ▶ Choose your bird about 8 to 12 weeks before the contest so you have ample time to prepare the bird and train it for showing.
- ▶ Most importantly, look for a bird that will help you demonstrate your knowledge about birds and your ability to handle them.

Note: Using market poultry in showmanship competitions may have an effect on meat quality and is not advised.

Some specific things to keep in mind relating to each bird species are as follows:



Chickens:

- ▶ Any breed of chicken is acceptable for showmanship, but stay away from breeds that tend to be flighty.
- ▶ If possible, choose an older chicken to work with. Younger birds tend to get excited more easily than older ones. However, meat-type birds can be shown anywhere from age 1 to 2 months and over depending on the class they belong to (Cornish game hens, broilers, roasters and others). It is advisable to talk with your 4-H leader or show staff to determine if birds entered in a market class are able to be used in showmanship classes at your local show.
- ▶ You may show either a hen or pullet (female) or a cock or cockerel (male). Select a hen if you want to determine past egg production performance.

Turkeys:



- ▶ Any variety of turkey is acceptable for showmanship. The most common varieties shown in contests are Broad Breasted Bronze and Broad Breasted Whites.
- ▶ A turkey used in a showmanship contest should be at least 16 weeks old.
- ▶ You may show either a hen (female) or a tom (male).

Ducks:



- ▶ Any domestic breed of duck is acceptable for showmanship. Ducks are classified into four classes according to weight:

Class:	Breed:
Heavyweight	Muscovy, Pekin, Aylesbury, Rouen, Saxony, Silver Appleyard
Medium Weight	Cayuga, Crested, Swedish, Buff
Lightweight	Runner, Campbell, Magpie, Welsh Harlequin
Bantam	Call, East India, Mallard, Mandarin, Carolina Wood, Mallard

Each of these breeds includes a number of different varieties of ducks.

- ▶ Keep in mind that some breeds can be flighty and difficult to train, while others are easily trained.
- ▶ The duck you show should be at least 4 months old, but you may show older ducks.
- ▶ You may show either a duck (female) or a drake (male).



Geese:

- ▶ Many breeds of geese are acceptable for showmanship. Like ducks, geese are classified into classes according to weight:

Class:	Breed:
Heavyweight	Toulouse, Embden, African
Medium Weight	Sebastopol, Pilgrim, American Buff, Saddleback, Pomeranian, Steinbacher



Class:	Breed:
Lightweight	Chinese, Tufted, Roman, Canada, Egyptian

Choose a breed that is known to have a suitable temperament to work with.

- ▶ Your goose should be at least 4 months old.
- ▶ You may show either a goose (female) or a gander (male).



Pigeons:

- ▶ You can choose from more than 300 varieties of pigeons for showmanship contests. When selecting a breed to raise, the breed's temperament and flight habits are an important factor. If you choose a performing breed, such as a Racing Homer, Tippler or Roller, you will need to pose it in a cage so the bird doesn't fly away from the show table. The Parlor Tumbler is an excellent breed for any showmanship contest because it cannot fly away. Other breeds you might consider are Fantails, Jacobins, Kings, Pouters and Modenas.
- ▶ Avoid selecting a pigeon that is less than 2 months old, but keep in mind that it's easier to train a younger pigeon than an adult pigeon. Avoid birds that are sitting on eggs or feeding young because they tend to be nervous and want to get back to the nest.
- ▶ You may show either a hen (female) or a cock (male).

Caring for Your Bird

Once you decide which bird to enter in the contest, you must give special attention to that bird in the areas of care and feeding. The first thing you may want to do is to separate the bird from any other birds. Go to a place where you can give it extra attention and where it receives more exposure to people. (You may even want to play loud music around the bird to get it used to noise.) By handling your bird often and providing exposure to other people, you may ensure a better performance during the actual contest.

As with any birds you own, be sure to provide the bird with a balanced diet so it is in good overall condition (body weight). If you need information on the proper diet for the types of birds you own, refer to your 4-H leader or to your local MSU Extension office staff.

Next to training (which is described on page 8 in “Training Your Bird”), the grooming of your bird is most important. Before the show, be sure to do the following grooming tasks:



8 to 12 weeks before the show:

If your bird has any broken or damaged feathers, pull them out carefully so new feathers will grow into their place by the date of the show. Keep in mind that sometimes it may take longer than 12 weeks for replacement feathers to grow back. Frequently check your bird for lice and mites so you can treat it ahead of time. Check around the head, vent area, on the legs and back, and under the wings. If you find lice or mites, treat the bird with a recommended lice and mite treatment (check with your local feed store, farm supply store or veterinarian for the type of treatment). *Be sure to follow directions on the label.*

3 to 5 weeks before the show:

Check again for external parasites and treat the bird if necessary.

3 to 5 days before the show:

Clean and groom your bird. You will need the following materials:

- ▶ Laundry tub with running water or two buckets
- ▶ Mild soap or whitening shampoo (for use with white birds only)
- ▶ Warm water
- ▶ Towels and soft cloths
- ▶ Old toothbrush
- ▶ Blow-dryer (optional)
- ▶ Nail clippers

Depending on how dirty your bird is, use these materials to either give it a bath or do some spot cleaning. Giving your bird a bath is probably a better idea. Remember that ducks and geese that are allowed to swim in a pond will stay fairly clean, but those kept in cages will probably need to be cleaned. Keep the following points in mind as you clean and groom your bird:

- ▶ To give your bird a bath, place it in a laundry tub or use two buckets (one filled with lukewarm soapy water and the other filled with lukewarm rinse water). Make sure the water level is below the bird's ears so the water doesn't get into its ears. Use a soft cloth to wash the feathers and an old toothbrush to scrub the bird's shanks,

toes and feet. Be sure to rinse the bird thoroughly. Remember that by giving your bird a bath ahead of time, the bird has time to recondition its feathers by preening. During the winter, keep the bird in a warm area to dry. You may want to use a blow-dryer to dry the bird. *Caution: Keep the blow-dryer away from any contact with water.*

- ▶ If the bird is not dirty and doesn't require a bath, you may just need to clean some of its feathers. Wash in the natural direction of the feathers lie. *Do not wash against the feathers.* Be sure to rinse the bird thoroughly.
- ▶ Dry the bird's feathers with a soft cloth or towels and a blow-dryer. Use the cloth or towels to remove most of the water before you begin blow-drying. After you finish drying the bird, keep it in a warm place until it is completely dry.
 - **Chickens:** If a chicken has tight feathers (for example, Leghorns), blow-dry in the direction of the feathers. If a chicken has fluffy feathers (for example, Cochins), blow-dry against the feathers.
- ▶ Use the toothbrush and warm soapy water to scrub the bird's feet, toes and shanks. Rinse and dry all parts thoroughly.
 - **Chickens:** Wash the comb, wattles and beak with a soft cloth.
- ▶ Using nail clippers, clip the bird's toenails if they are too long, but be careful not to cut them too short. Trim only the transparent part of the nails, a little at a time; otherwise, the nails might bleed.
- ▶ Trim the beak as needed by using nail clippers to align the top and bottom of the beak.

On the day before the show:

- ▶ Take time to apply a few final touches to make your bird look even better. Place a little mineral oil or petroleum jelly on a soft cloth and apply it to the bird's beak or bill, shanks and toes. Be careful not to apply too much oil or jelly. Do not apply it on the feathers.
 - **Chickens:** Also lightly apply the oil or jelly to the bird's comb and wattles.
 - **Pigeons:** For pigeons with "clean" legs (that is, with no feathers on the shanks or on the toes), apply the oil and jelly on the shanks and toes. For pigeons with "booted" legs (that is, with feathers covering the shank area only but not the toes), apply the oil or jelly on the toes and a little on the beak. Be careful not to get the oil or jelly on the feathers.
- ▶ After you are finished with cleaning, make sure the bird returns to a clean pen. Continue to keep the pen clean so the bird doesn't get dirty again.



Training Your Bird

You should work with your bird before the show for two reasons:

- ▶ First, it gets the bird used to the procedure, making it less likely the bird will be nervous during the contest.
- ▶ Second, it helps you improve your showing skills.

Try to begin training about 6 to 8 weeks prior to the contest.

To train your bird, provide a small table by the bird's cage. Each day, remove the bird from its cage and place it on the table for training. Don't feed the bird before this training. Instead, use food as a reward for its cooperation and posing each day during or after the exercises. During each training session, be sure to run through the posing steps (refer to the "Showmanship" section for each species of birds to see these steps). Try to get the bird to pose for a little longer period each time. You should also work through the handling and examination steps as well so you and the bird become comfortable with this part of the contest.

Transporting Your Bird to the Show

Transport the bird to the contest in a proper carrier. Make sure the carrier you use allows for plenty of ventilation. Put some bedding in the carrier to keep your bird clean. Place the carrier securely in the vehicle to transport to the contest.

Your Appearance at the Contest

Most fitting and showmanship contests have a dress code for contestants. This code can vary from county to county or from state to state, so be sure to review the rules of the show ahead of time so you're dressed appropriately. The proper attire may include neat pants and a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt or a show coat. Even if these are not mandatory, you may want to wear nice clothes to give a good impression to the judges. The primary rule is to be neat and clean.

Make sure to comb your hair properly and wear appropriate shoes. Refer to the section "Your Attitude and Behavior" on page 9 to learn more about how to conduct yourself.



SHOWMANSHIP

The showmanship part of the contest focuses on your ability to demonstrate your knowledge and skill of handling, posing and examining your bird.

Throughout the contest, the judge will evaluate your skills, attitude and appearance. A quiz may also be part of the contest.



The steps for showing chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese and pigeons are included on pages 10 to 38. Photos of the steps are included in these sections.

At the end of each species section is the Michigan 4-H Poultry Showmanship scorecard that should be used during showmanship contests. Check with your 4-H leader or MSU Extension staff member ahead of time to learn about the point system your county uses.

Your Attitude and Behavior

During the contest, every eye will be on the participants, so act properly. Be alert and smile as you complete the various steps of showmanship. Look at the judge from time to time to make sure you have his or her attention. Be courteous to everyone during the contest. If the judge asks you questions, answer them politely. Use the word “sir” or “ma’am” when asking or answering questions. Be sure to be a good sport and congratulate your peers after the contest – no matter who wins.

If all the contestants perform the various steps of showmanship equally well, the judge must then consider attitude and behavior when scoring the contestants.

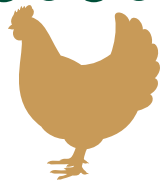
The Poultry Quiz

A quiz may be a part of the fitting and showmanship contest, usually given to each participant at the end of the contest. It tests participants’ knowledge about the particular species of poultry being shown and their general knowledge of poultry. The number and type of questions will depend on such things as contestants’ age division and the amount of time available. The quiz may be written or verbal. Contestants should be prepared for both.

To prepare for the poultry quiz, spend some time learning about the species of your bird and the breed of your bird as well as general poultry science and management principles. Check with your 4-H leader or county MSU Extension staff member for information resources that would be helpful.

Showing Chickens

In the showing part of the competition, you will be asked to remove your chicken from the carrier and take it to the assigned judging area. Judging may begin as soon as you are placed in the judging line.



Chickens: Figure 1



Chickens: Figure 2



Chickens: Figure 3

Handling and Posing the Chicken

Step 1: Entering the bird in the cage

Hold the chicken in front of you so the bird's head is facing you. Your palm should be under the breast area of the bird so that one thigh rests between your thumb and index finger and your remaining fingers wrap around the other leg and extend up the side of the body. Place your free hand on the bird's back to provide additional support.

When you reach the cage, release your hand from the top of the chicken to the open cage.

Turn the bird 180 degrees so that the bird faces the doorway of the cage (**Chickens: Figure 1**).

Slowly place the bird in the cage headfirst. Then turn the bird in a profile position for posing.

Step 2: Posing the chicken in the cage

Make sure the bird is in the profile before you begin posing the bird (**Chickens: Figure 2**). You may use a training stick for posing the bird. Touch the stick under the head area touching the wattles. The bird's head should be up and its neck should be fully stretched. The feathers should be tight and smooth. If you are using a stick, pose the bird with the stick to maintain the position. After your bird is posed, take a step back from the cage so the judge can evaluate your bird.

Step 3: Removing the chicken from the cage

When removing the chicken from the cage, always remove it headfirst (**Chickens: Figure 3**). Your hand should be over the bird's back and your other hand should be under the breast, with your fingers grasping the thighs.



Chickens: Figure 4

Step 4: Final pose

When you have removed the chicken from the cage, close the door, turn toward the judge and stand at attention. Stand steady with your free hand straight down at your side. The bird should face you while sitting in the palm of your hand (**Chickens: Figure 4**). The judge will release you from this pose after a proper examination.

Examining the Chicken

The examination section follows posing the bird. When the judge gives the command to examine your bird, perform the following steps to determine defects, disqualifications and the condition of your bird.

If your bird is a hen, be sure to examine it to determine its past egg production (pigment loss, handling quality, abdominal capacity and molt). If you would like more information on how to evaluate past egg production characteristics, check with your 4-H leader or county MSU Extension staff member.

Step 1:

Examine the head area. Let the bird rest in your hand while you use your free hand to examine the bird.



Chickens: Figure 5

- ▶ Look at both eyes to make sure they are not blind. Point your index finger at the eyes. (The bird should blink or move when pointed at.) Notice the pigment around the eye-ring (**Chickens: Figure 5**).
- ▶ Look for defects on the comb. Point your index finger at the comb. Also, feel the condition (texture) of the comb by holding the comb between your thumb and index finger (**Chickens: Figure 6**).
- ▶ Feel the texture of the wattles and look for any apparent abnormalities (**Chickens: Figure 7**).
- ▶ Examine the condition of the feathers on the head area for any sign of molting (**Chickens: Figure 8**).



Chickens: Figure 6



Chickens: Figure 7



Chickens: Figure 8



Chickens: Figure 9

- ▶ Look at the beak for any defects such as crookedness. Point your index finger at the beak. Also, examine the pigmentation of the beak (**Chickens: Figure 9**).
- ▶ Examine the color of the earlobes to see if they are true to the breed. (Refer to the American Poultry Association’s *American Standard of Perfection* for guidelines.) Point your index finger at the earlobes. Then locate the ear and point your index finger at it (**Chickens: Figure 10**).

Step 2:

Run your fingers over the neck area to feel for smoothness. Also, notice the condition for any sign of molting (**Chickens: Figure 11**).

Step 3:

Examine the back area. Run your hand over the back area to feel for any abnormalities. Use your hand to measure the length and breadth of the back area to check the conformation of the bird. Look at the under-color of the feathers on the back and check for any sign of molting (**Chickens: Figure 12**).

Step 4:

Run your hand down the bird’s tail. Press the tail feathers toward you and examine the condition of the feathers. You may want to count the tail feathers to determine any sign of molting (**Chickens: Figure 13**).

Step 5:

Examine the vent area. As the bird rests on your hand, tilt the bird downward so that the bird’s head is facing the ground and the vent area is toward you (**Chickens: Figure 14**). Look for lice and mites. If your bird is a hen, examine the condition of the vent to see if the hen is in laying condition. Also, look for pigmentation loss. With the bird in the same position, check the “handling quality” of the bird. This is one way used to determine past egg production. Determine by feeling the skin of the abdominal area for thickness or thinness. Pinch the skin below the vent



Chickens: Figure 10



Chickens: Figure 11



Chickens: Figure 12



Chickens: Figure 13



Chickens: Figure 14

area and roll it between your fingers to examine this. Also, at this time, feel the tip of the pubic bones for thickness and flexibility.

Step 6:

If your bird is a hen, measure the abdominal capacity. (Abdominal capacity is another way to determine the hens past egg production.) Use your fingers to estimate the distance between the two pubic bones (**Chickens: Figure 15**) and the distance between the end of the keel bone and the top of the pubic bones. These measurements will indicate the past egg production. In a standard large fowl hen, if the distance is approximately 1.5 inches or less, the bird is not laying at present and has probably not laid many eggs in the past. A distance over 1.5 inches indicates that the bird has laid eggs in the past and may be laying now. A distance of 2 inches or more indicates that the chicken has laid many eggs in the past.



Chickens: Figure 15

Step 7:

Check the abdomen. If your bird is a hen, use your fingers to grasp the abdomen to determine its hardness or softness (**Chickens: Figure 16**). This will further indicate the bird's condition of egg production. A soft, pliable abdomen indicates the bird is currently producing eggs. A hard abdomen indicates that the bird is not producing at present or that the bird is a poor producer. Also, check the abdomen for any sign of molting and the condition of the feathers in this area.

Step 8:

Examine the thighs to determine the amount of meat present (**Chickens: Figure 17**). The thigh area is especially important in meat-type chickens.

Step 9:

Examine the shanks to see if they are clean and whether there are mites present (**Figure 18**). A crusty condition or upturned scales indicate that mites are present. Look at the pigment condition of the front and back of the shanks.



Chickens: Figure 16



Chickens: Figure 17



Chickens: Figure 18



Chickens: Figure 19

Step 10:

Examine the toes (**Chickens: Figure 19**). Check the number of toes present. Remember that certain breeds have five toes. Look for defects on the toes and examine the pigmentation and the condition of the toenails.

Step 11:

Examine the feet. Look at the feet of a hen for pigment loss and correct color. Also, examine the feet for any defects (**Chickens: Figure 20**).



Chickens: Figure 20

Step 12:

Examine the breast. In meat-type chickens, the breast is the most important meat area. Use your palm to feel the length of the keel bone and the meat on it (**Chickens: Figure 21**). Check the straightness of the keel bone and look for any abnormalities such as indentations. Feel and look at the breast area to determine if there are any breast blisters or other defects on it.

Step 13:

Examine the wings. Open and stretch the left wing of the bird with your free hand (**Chickens: Figure 22**). Tilt the bird slightly away from you. Check the primary and secondary feathers for signs of molting. Take a closer look at the skin on the inside of the wing for lice and mites. Transfer the bird to your other hand. Follow the above directions using your free hand to examine the right wing.



Chickens: Figure 21

Step 14:

Examine the crop area. Feel it with your hands for any abnormalities (**Chickens: Figure 23**). It is better *not* to feed your bird on the morning of the showmanship contest so you avoid feed in the crop. If there is a great deal of feed in the crop, the bird will throw up when handled.

Step 15:

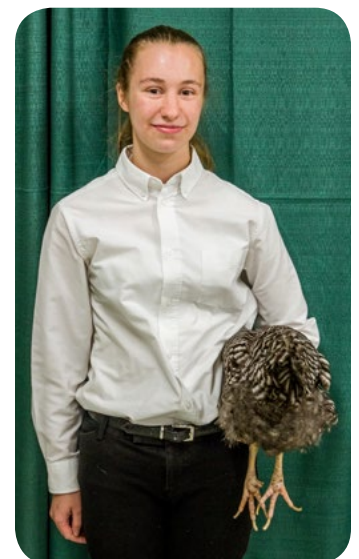
Return the bird to the upright position resting on your hand (**Chickens: Figure 24**). Give support on top with your other hand if necessary.



Chickens: Figure 22



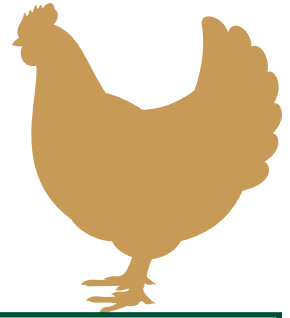
Chickens: Figure 23



Chickens: Figure 24

General Appearance of the Chicken

The judge will also consider your bird's general appearance, which refers to its production characteristics (meat, egg or fancy), feather condition, freedom from defects and general health. The breed characteristics should also be considered. The judge will examine each bird in a general way. This may not be a detailed examination due to a lack of time. However, the judge will thoroughly examine the fitting of the bird to determine how well you have cared for it.



Chicken Fitting and Showmanship Scorecard

Points Allowed

APPEARANCE & ATTITUDE OF SHOWPERSON (10 PTS) _____

- ▶ Keeps attention focused on bird and judge
- ▶ Follows judge's instructions
- ▶ Handles bird considerately
- ▶ Is considerate of other exhibitors
- ▶ Wears conventional clothing; has clean and neat appearance

APPEARANCE OF BIRD (10PTS) _____

- ▶ Is manageable; has evidence of training
- ▶ Is clean; shows evidence of fitting
- ▶ Has good body condition; appears healthy

SHOWMANSHIP (40 PTS) _____

- ▶ Holding bird prior to entry; bringing bird to the judge
- ▶ Caging and removing bird from cage
- ▶ Posing and presenting bird to judge
- ▶ Transferring bird to judge or another person
- ▶ Displaying, examining, finding or naming body parts

KNOWLEDGE OF BIRD (40 PTS) _____

- ▶ Age, sex, breed, variety and class of your bird
- ▶ Judge's Discretion – Remainder of questions may include any or all of the following:
 - The preparation of your bird for this show
 - Purpose of breed (exhibition/eggs/meat/dual purpose)
 - Defects and disqualifications for your breed and variety
 - Identification of strong and weak points of your bird
 - Other varieties in your breed; other breeds in your class
 - Your feed program
 - Your poultry health program; common diseases and parasites
 - Avian anatomy, including internal systems
 - Questions about other competitor's birds

TOTAL POINTS (100 PTS) _____

CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS!

Once you have participated in poultry fitting and showmanship, you can be proud of your accomplishments! In fact, you'll probably be excited enough to continue participating in this enjoyable area of poultry.

After your first contest in poultry fitting and showmanship, think about your experiences and how you felt about them. Take a few minutes to fill in your responses to these statements.

The most important thing I learned from participating in poultry fitting and showmanship was:

One thing I might do differently the next time I do a poultry fitting and showmanship project is:

One thing I learned about in my project that I would like to explore further is:

Here's how I plan to do this:

One way I could teach others about what I learned in my poultry project would be to:

Good luck with your future poultry project activities!



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