



We've interviewed an experienced exhibit judge for their insight into the judging process. Volunteers can use this information to help youth prepare for fair.

When you are sitting down with a 4-Her, what are you looking for in a project?

First, I do a quick assessment of how nervous or scared they are. This is not only with young, first time 4-H members, but 4-H members of all ages. I try to make them feel at ease.

As a volunteer, consider checking in with the youth while they are waiting for the judge, encourage parents to do the same. Encourage the youth to smile and have fun!

What are the most important things you look for in an exhibit?

I'm looking for the whole package in an exhibit. There are basically two pieces to a good exhibit, the project itself and the goal card, or "write up." Additional exhibit factors the judge may consider regarding the exhibit include the goal and the exhibit itself. Was the goal appropriate for the age of the 4-H member? Is the goal complete? Does the goal go with the exhibit? Was this exhibit challenging for the 4-H member? Was this exhibit too easy for their experience level?

Review this information with your club as youth prepare for fair! Helping 4-H members understand the importance of the goal, while their "write up" adds to his or her learning and skill set in a project area. Goals should become more challenging and demonstrate further learning. Goals should have three parts: action, results, and timetable. Details and specifics on setting exhibit goals and goal writing can be found on both the resources "Setting Exhibit Goals" and on the "Goal Writing Worksheet," located on the [record keeping page](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/record-keeping) of the Iowa 4-H Website. (<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/record-keeping>)

How does the goal relate to the judging category?

The goal determines what class the exhibit should be judged in.

Encourage youth to utilize resources and refer to their goal in order to assure that the exhibit is entered into the correct class. Utilize information from the project area web pages and project hot sheets to help determine the best category for their exhibit.

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The 3 questions that every 4-H member needs to be prepared to answer on exhibit judging day, and things to consider when preparing for the questions.

What did you plan to learn or do?

- Goal: Is it appropriate for the age of the 4-H member? Is it complete? Does it “go” with the project?
- Project: Does it challenge them? Was it way too easy for their level of experience?
- Is it attainable? Did they accomplish it?

What steps did you take to learn or do this?

- How did they get inspired to do this? Did they work as a group or have a mentor?
- What was the easiest part of the project? What was the most difficult part of the project?
- Where did they get inspiration from? Did they reference the use of copyrighted material?
- Did they utilize Elements and Principles of Design as they apply to their project?

What were the most important things you learned?

- Did they grow in their knowledge or skill through this exhibit?
- Did they share this exhibit with others? If so, what did they learn?
- What did they learn about themselves from doing this project?

A great resource for summarizing the information regarding helping youth to prepare for the judging experience can be found on the [4-H evaluating exhibits handbook](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/statefair/eehandbook) page at <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/statefair/eehandbook>. Here you can find the resource titled “Strengthening Goal-Centered Learning (for Adults) 4H 203. There is also a version for 4-H members on this page as well.

Making fair a positive experience for youth and volunteers:

- Flexibility and patience are important.
- If the 4-H member has a mishap with their project on the way to judging, smile. Let them know it’s OK, and that things happen. Maybe share a story to take their mind off their immediate problem.
- When dealing with frustrations, listen and try to understand where the other person is coming from.
- If there are problems or questions that you need assistance with, ask county staff or Youth Program Specialists to assist.

Getting youth ready for fair:

- Create a learning environment that encourages growth and ideas. Help 4-H members discover their passions and abilities and encourage youth to learn from mistakes.
- As a volunteer, it is important to be a support to the youth while at the fair. As a caring adult, try to ease nerves, answer questions, and provide reassurance.
- Look for ways to use the exhibit judging experience as a learning opportunity.
- Remember that every judge has their own style and their own opinions. One negative experience is not a reflection of the 4-H member, their 4-H experience, or the fair experience.