

Organization and Format for Note Taking

A good judge can visualize a class of animals in their mind. In contests, several classes are judged in a short time, and oral reasons are given later. Therefore, it is necessary to take notes on what you observe about the animals in each class. Notes are to be used for study before giving oral reasons to the judge and should not be read to the reasons taker. A good set of notes should help you recall or remake a mental picture of the class in your mind.

Take short, simple notes and form a habit of using terms with which you can easily make comparisons. List the main points first for each pair, and then add details or specific differences. In this manner you will always have points to talk about on all three pairs.

A 6" by 9" steno notebook is suggested for use in taking reasons notes. Divide the page into equal sections as shown in the example. Copy the name of the class and your placing at the top of the page. Use the four boxes at the top of the page for general descriptive terms for each animal. Use the boxes on the left side of the notebook for advantages for each pair and the right side for the grants and faults of the second place animal in each pair.

The reasons can be read directly from the notes in a logical fashion – left to right. Notice how the terms and phrases are read directly from the notes, flowing and blending to make a complete set of reasons. The example set of notes of Market steers 1-2-3-4, can be seen in reason form following the suggested form for your notes.

	Class Title	Placing
1	Positive attributes of 1 Negative attributes of 1	
2	Positive attributes of 2 Negative attributes of 2	
3	Positive attributes of 3 Negative attributes of 3	
4	Positive attributes of 4 Negative attributes of 4	

Market Steers		1-2-3-4
1-red		3-black
Opening Statement , i.e. top pair, standout winner, etc.		
Compare Discuss why 1 placed over 2	Grant Discuss place(s) where 2 is better than 1	Criticize Discuss why 2 places 2nd
Compare Discuss why 2 placed over 3	Grant Discuss place(s) where 3 is better than 2	Criticize Discuss why 3 places 3rd
Compare Discuss why 3 placed over 4	Grant Discuss place(s) where 4 is better than 3	Criticize Discuss why 4 places 4th

ORAL REASONS

Oral reasons are an important part of livestock judging. Many students are reluctant to give oral reasons. Although giving oral reasons at first may be difficult and frustrating, with hard work and many hours of practice it can be mastered.

Why are oral reasons so important? First of all, in most senior college livestock judging contests, oral reasons make up 40% of the total points. Thus, proficiency at reasons will improve your score in contests. Second, giving reasons involves important skills. Public speaking skills, persuasive technique, organizational skills, and the ability to think on your feet will improve with practice in giving reasons.

This section focuses on the procedure as well as many details of preparing and presenting oral reasons in a livestock judging contest. Also attached are several sample sets of oral reasons. They may help give you some ideas on how to prepare and present your oral reasons

Format

The format used for reasons at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is simple and straight forward and allows for a complete description of a class. This style does require a thorough understanding of livestock evaluation as animals are analyzed in detail and one must have the ability to recognize important differences and place these differences in a prioritized order.

A class of livestock consists of three pairs; a top pair, a middle pair and a bottom pair. In each pair we have three basic sections: **compare, grant, and criticize**. The type of terminology used in each section of the reasons is important. In the opening statement on the top animal you may use either descriptive terms or class comparison. Following is an outline that demonstrates the basic format: (Figure 13)

Introduction to the class	I placed the...1-2-3-4-
Opening statement	I started the class with ...
Comparison of 1 over 2	I used 1 over 2 in the top pair because he is ...
Grants 2 over 1	I admit 2 is ...
Criticisms of 2	But I admit 2 is...so is second In the middle pair I preferred 2
Compare 2 over 3	over 3

Organization

Reasons should be presented in a manner so that the reason taker can follow the class description. The organization of your thoughts prior to presenting your reasons is very important. However, accuracy is by far the most important quality in evaluating reasons. The value of accuracy can be largely lost unless reasons are presented in an easily followed manner. It is important to note that a set of reasons is not a discussion of each animal separately, but rather a comparison of the top, middle and bottom pairs of animals. A combination of describing the livestock in order of priority and anatomy is best.

Priority – most important differences first, leaving the minor differences to the end
Anatomically – front to rear.

An example of this style of reasons is as follows, where you will see **priorities in bold** and anatomical order underlined:

Even so, I preferred the **extra power** found in 2 over 3 in the middle pair. The black steer reads with more true shape and expression behind his shoulder and handles with the bigger, fresher loin. Plus, he's the **nicer balanced** steer that's more extended up front, cleaner through his chest floor and sounder on the move as he's more correct in the build of his hip and hind leg.

Notice in the above example how the priority list given earlier for market steers is followed. Muscle was discussed first, followed by balance, and ending with structure. Within each of those priority areas, the description of the animal was always given from front to rear.

Proper Wording

It is important that the presenter be accurate and easy to follow. It is equally important that the presenter use wordings that are easy for an official to follow. The following is an example of using too many terms in close succession:

2 is a thicker, longer, taller, cleaner fronted, straighter topped steer.

As one can imagine, the terms are being spoken so quickly that the listener **cannot** possibly comprehend everything that was said, plus it doesn't come off conversational. The example should be broken into two sentences:

2 is a thicker made, longer bodied steer. Additionally, 2 is nicer balanced, as he is cleaner fronted and more correct in his lines.

Another important part of reasons is being descriptive. For example, where is he thicker? We can modify these sentences to instead say:

2 is thicker and more expressive down his top and a longer bodied steer. Additionally, 2 is nicer balanced as he is cleaner fronted and more correct in his lines.

Now, it's important to make sure that the sentences come off as natural and conversational. Reasons should always sound like a normal discussion, not like a rehearsed, prepared set of terms. Therefore, we can change the example even more to say:

The longer bodied steer is thicker and more expressive down his top. Additionally, he's the nicer balanced, cleaner fronted steer that's more correct in his lines.

Transition Words

Conjunctive words are used to help tie sentences together. If used properly, they can help you move smoothly from one part to the next. Overuse of conjunctive words can cause the set of reasons to be excessively wordy. However, when used properly, they add to the smoothness of the set. Listed below are some more commonly used conjunctive words.

- Additionally...
- In addition to...
- Also...
- Plus...
- As well as...
- Furthermore...
- This, coupled with...
- More importantly...
- On top of that...
- Beyond this...

In addition to conjunctive words, transitions can also aid the presenter in delivery of a set of reasons. Transitions are simply a way of moving smoothly from one section to another. Transitions should be done as simply as possible while still maintaining sentence structure that is grammatically correct. Excessively wordy transitions are strongly discouraged. It is also important not to be redundant or use double transitions. Listed below are some simple words to use when moving into a grant:

- I grant...
- I recognize...
- I realize...
- I admit...
- Sure...
- Yes...
- No doubt...
- No question...
- On the other hand...
- On the flipside...

When moving from a grant to a criticism you may try this example: I realize that 2 is a straighter lined steer that is cleaner fronted, (however or but) he is (move to criticism) the lightest muscled steer of the four. To move into a criticism we may also use:

- I realize that 1 is ..., nevertheless I used him in the top pair over 2 because ...
- (However or But) I fault 2 and left him second...
- (However or But) I criticize 3 and left him third because he is...
- Even so, I still put him third...
- Still, he's still second on my card...

Transitions can also be used to move from faults/criticisms into pair comparisons.

- Despite this, I still prefer 2 over 3 in the middle because...
- However, in the middle pair, I used 2 over 3...
- Still in the bottom pair I preferred 2 over 3...

**Reasons should be clean and free of verbal garbage as much as possible.
However, properly used, transitions can be effective.
As a reminder: don't be redundant, be creative and original, yet conversational.**

Class and Comparative Advantages

This can sometimes be the hardest concept to grasp in evaluation and oral reasons. Most often, you use “-er” to describe the comparative advantages between two animals – i.e. 3’s the stouter, bigger topped steer. This is great when appropriate, but it’s also important the use “-est” when a class advantage exists. Use of “-est” would be appropriate when the individual is the heaviest muscled, soundest structured, etc. in class. Using “-est” when it applies will add a layer to your reasons that will improve your score because you understand when an animal has a class advantage, not just a comparative advantage. Do not be afraid to use “-est” on animals besides your first place animal. Even your third or fourth place animals may have a class advantage, but fall short in the combination of traits that are necessary to sort up within a class.

Words or Phrases That Should be Avoided

One of your goals in presenting oral reasons is to present information as concisely, accurately, and professionally as you can within the time limit you are given. Using an incorrect word or a phrase that is not specific enough can cost you points and may even turn out to be the determining factor in your placing as an individual or team.

Below is a list of words and phrases that should be avoided:

- **Number:** Avoid using this word. If the animal’s number is 4, refer to him as “4” as if that were his name, not “the number 4 steer.”
- **It:** Use “he” or “she” instead. Be sure to use the correct gender.
- **Animal or Individual:** Instead say “steer,” “bull,” “barrow,” etc.
- **Lacks:** This term is not direct enough. Rather than “fault 2 because he lacks muscling”, you should “fault 2 because he was light-muscled”.
- **For being:** Instead of saying “I fault 2 for being light-muscled,” say “I fault 2 because he was light-muscled.”
- **I would like to see:** This is wordy and informal. Instead of saying “I would like to see 2 wider-topped,” point out that “2 was narrow-topped” or say “Ideally 2 would be wider-topped.”
- **Placing:** Instead say “I placed the _____”.
- **Criticizing or Faulting:** Instead say “I criticize” or “I fault.”
- **Kind of or Type of:** Say a “more complete heifer” instead of a “more complete kind of heifer.”
- **Throughout, Overall, or From end to end:** Be more specific.
- **Carries or Carrying:** Instead of “carries into a thicker quarter”, say “was thicker through the quarter” or “had a thicker quarter.”
- **My:** Do not say “in my middle pair.” They are not your animals. Instead say “In the middle pair.”
- **In the class:** The official knows you are talking about this class, so these are unnecessary words.

How a Set of Oral Reasons are Evaluated

On the collegiate level, having a consistent reasons format is vital. Reasons should be presented in the same “compare, grant, criticize” format that notes are formulated. Many different delivery styles of reasons are practiced. Virtually all can be successful if used properly. Style is not the most important factor as long as reasons are accurate, concise, and conversational. When aiming for high scores on oral reasons, the most important qualities to strive for are:

- Accuracy of statements presented.
- Completeness - all important points must be discussed.
- Emphasize the most important differences between two animals.
- A complete vocabulary of livestock-related terms.
- Variation in the use of descriptive terms (avoid repetition).
- A conversational tone of delivery.
- A sincere, emphatic and persuasive delivery.
- Use of correct grammar.
- Use of pauses and voice inflection for emphasis.
- Volume that is appropriate for the size of the room and for remaining conversational.
- A logical, organized format that is easy for the listener to follow.
- Proper eye contact.
- Correct posture.
- Absence of distracting movements.

How Do I Present My Reasons?

The biggest mistake many contestants make is trying to memorize their reasons from their notes. The notes on each reasons class are to be used as reminders as to how each animal looked. Notes should also be used to help the participant place the class. By listing the good and bad points of each animal, one can properly weigh the good from the bad. It is critical that any student interested in livestock judging be able to develop the skills required to recall a class of livestock. If a student is familiar with the terminology and can picture the class in the mind while presenting the reasons, then notes are not needed. If your set of reasons is good and properly delivered, it will be perceived as a persuasive explanation and logical discussion. In addition you will be thought of as a confident and knowledgeable stock person. Consider the following tips when making your presentation:

- Contestants are allowed two minutes for a set of reasons, but to score high they should usually be shorter. It is rare to observe a class that requires more than 90 to 105 seconds to be completely and accurately described. Inaccurate statements cost points and redundancy is considered poor style; thus, the student is advised to be concise and minimize all unnecessary comments. Almost anyone can discuss a class if given a long time and no pressure. Superior reason givers are those who can do so in 90 seconds.
- Enter the room confidently, but do not act arrogant.
- Try not to stand too close to the official. Between 8 and 10 feet is about right depending on the strength of your voice and the size of the room.
- Stand with your feet at shoulder width and both hands behind your back.
- Vary your delivery. Use pauses and voice inflection to emphasize main points.
- Use facial expression to add emphasis to key points. You may use slight head gestures, but be aware that other body movements may be distracting.
- If a pair is very close, be certain to give several advantages to the lower placing animal.
- Try to visualize the class of animals as you give reasons. This will become easier through practice.
- Avoid mixing up numbers of animals.
- Use class comparisons when appropriate. For example, when granting describe the second place heifer

as “the most **structurally** correct heifer in the class,” if that statement is accurate. This is more complete than simply granting that the animal is more correct than the first place heifer. Similarly, it may be appropriate to criticize the second place animal as “the smallest framed heifer in the class” even though you do not place her last.

- Introduce your set of reasons with the name of the class exactly as it was given to you.
- Do not abbreviate breed names such as “Hamp” for “Hampshire.”
- Mention the breed name when discussing breed character. “1 had more ideal Dorset breed character as evidenced by...”
- Include points of identification in your reasons. For example, “the white Shorthorn heifer” or “a partial belt Hampshire gilt.”
- Be prompt, concise, and polite with your answer if the judge asks you a question after your reasons. **DO NOT ARGUE!**

What Type of Voice Presentation Should I Use?

Reasons should be presented in a fashion that is pleasant to listen to. One must speak with authority, but in a conversational tone. Do not scream or shout your reasons. It is equally important not to talk so fast that the official cannot comprehend everything that was said. Reasons should be presented in a tone slightly louder than conversation. Your tone should be convincing and sincere but not overbearing.

Avoid a dry, monotone delivery. Be enthusiastic and confident in your delivery. Terms or phrases of importance should be emphasized. Emphasizing terms or phrases allows the presenter to fluctuate his/her voice and keeps the listener attentive. Students need to pause at the periods at the end of sentences to allow them to get a breath of air.

You should enunciate terms clearly and use sentences that are grammatically correct. You can be rewarded with a good score if you remember to be accurate, use good livestock terminology, and present convincingly in a conversational manner.

EXAMPLE SETS OF REASONS

The following example set of reasons is included to give you the opportunity to visualize how the format and transitions are utilized in a set of reasons. Try to follow the format as you read through this example.

*Compare/Grant/Criticize format maintained
Use of ID's throughout
The terms used are not repetitive
Transitions make it easy to read and listen to*

Market Steers 1-4-2-3

I placed the Market Steers 1-4-2-3. 1's power and stoutness make him the standout winner for me and he needs to beat 4. He works the most dimension down his top and has the most shape and expression through his quarter. Additionally, he's a smoother handling steer and should have the best chance of grading choice. I grant 4 is the nicest profiling steer in the class and is longer necked and leveler through his hip. However, the black steer is narrow based, flat through his stifle and handles bare over his last two ribs, so he is second.

Still, in the middle pair, I like the balance and look of 4 to beat 2. He's the cleanest fronted and strongest topped steer who's clearly sounder on the move with the more correct set to his hock. More importantly, he's the higher cutability steer who should go to the cooler with the trimmer carcass. I recognize that from behind, 2 has the advantage. He's set wider at his pins and works more genuine muscle from there down, but the Hereford appearing steer goes third for me. He's pushing the upper limits of fat cover and is the softest handling.

Even so, I like 2 over 3 in the bottom pair. 2 is still the wider built, more powerful steer that should have more total end product. I admit that the black and white faced steer is longer bodied and clearly trimmer. However, it's easy to see he's also the barest handling, narrowest made steer that needs to go fourth.

Charolais Heifers 2-1-4-3

I like the Charolais heifers 2-1-4-3. The branded heifer is the obvious winner that combines female look and structural correctness. Her advantages at the ground and on the move are apparent, and this only aids her look and easily makes her the maternal kind. I realize 1 is more powerful from behind, but with this she's also the coarsest made, boldest shouldered heifer in class, so she's second.

But, in my middle pair, I prefer 1 over 4. She's bolder in her ribcage and is set wider at her pins with more genuine dimension throughout. Sure, 4 has the advantage up front and is clearly the more feminine heifer of the pair. But I can't look past the fact that she's the narrowest based, shallowest bodied heifer, so she's third.

Yet in my bottom pair, I still liked 4 over 3. 4 is a longer, more extended heifer that handles her topline more correctly and has the more attractive build to her hip and hind leg. I grant 3 is deeper ribbed and more powerful, but she's obviously the pounds-light heifer that's the poorest balanced and more concerning, she's too straight up front and restricted on the move.

Crossbred Market Hogs 3-4-1-2

I placed the crossbred market hogs 3-4-1-2. The truly carcass driven gilt needs to sort up in 3. She's the most opened up driving at me, and still impressive going away and this sets the stage for her advantage in topline shape. She's the squarest and freshest topped and I'd expect her to rail with the shapeliest carcass that has the most pounds of product. I grant 4 is bigger footed and stouter structured, but I like her second. She's too short up front, is pushing some extra cover and hits me as plain and round in her top shape.

Even so, it's her productive look that makes the middle pair easy to place 4 over 1. 4's more pulled apart underneath, softer centered, and clearly the more practical kind. No question, 1's a leaner designed gilt that works more shape directly behind her blade. However, she's the small, light-weight gilt in class that just doesn't have the skeletal width to compete, so she's third.

With this aside, lean cut-out value places the bottom pair. 1's advantage in genuine shape should translate to cooler value and a larger, leaner eye. I admit 2 is bigger outlined, but this does not compensate for the fact that she is the closed up, narrow made gilt of the drive that needs to go fourth.

Yorkshire Gilts 2-1-4-3

I placed the Yorkshire gilts 2-1-4-3. I started with 2 as she has the practical basics of structure and body with extra power and stoutness. She's the square footed gilt that's the most comfortable on the drive and still opens up with the most chest floor and works the most dimension throughout. I'll admit, 1's the long, extended gilt in class that's the most attractive ahead of her blade with the most feminine, far-reaching underline. I just wish she was built wider at the ground, so I like her second.

However, her structural integrity and practical look place her over 4 in the middle pair. She's more correct in the angles of her skeleton and hinged looser out of her hip. Plus, she's bolder centered and deeper through her flank. I admit that 4 is larger outlined and longer sided. But at the same time, she is tight ribbed, fine boned and has a pin nipple on her right side.

Even so, in my final decision I liked 4 over 3. Her extra length and extension is a plus, and it's clear she's also more durable in her basic build, as she hits the surface with more flex off either end. No doubt, 3's bolder and more practical centered, but I can't get past her structure and I like her 4th. She's too forward in her blade, steep out of her hip on top of being the most closed up gilt of the drive.

Suffolk Ewes 1-2-3-4

I placed the Suffolk ewes 1-2-3-4. 1's combination of structural correctness and extension wins the class for me. She's the most attractive, levellest patterned ewe and on top of it, her extra lateness of maturity and growth give her the edge over 2. I admit, 2's rounder ribbed and more correctly wedged down low. Yet, I prefer her in second because she is an early maturing ewe that is short fronted and coarse shouldered.

With this aside, 2 places over 3 in a close middle pair. Her extra body shape and power is obvious, especially from behind where she's the bigger hipped, more powerful sheep. I grant that 3 shows more Suffolk breed character being blacker about her points with a longer, more bell-shaped ear. But I placed her third as she is tightest ribbed and shallowest made ewe in the class.

Now in the bottom pair, I still like 3 over 4. 3's more feminine about her head and neck and ties her neck higher into her shoulder. I recognize 4 is stouter and bolder ribbed but she goes fourth for me as she is the earliest maturing, most compact and coarsest made ewe in class.

Market Lambs 4-3-2-1

I like the Market Lambs 4-3-2-1. In a close top pair of compositionally correct, powerful sheep I prefer the extra look and pattern in 4 to beat 3. He's the longer, neater fronted sheep who's more correct in his lower body balance. Plus, he has the edge in rack shape when I get my hands on him. I realize, 3's the bigger hipped sheep with more shape to his twist, but I slid him second. He's the coarser fronted, deeper chested sheep who gets rounder out of his dock.

Still, I'll side with 3 to beat 2 in the middle pair. He's the rounder ribbed, wider built sheep and to no surprise he meets my hand with more width over his rack and extra shape to the edge of his loin. Ultimately, I see him going to the cooler with more pounds of hindsaddle. Sure, 2's the longer, leveler patterned option. But, he's 3rd for me as he is flatter bodied and accordingly narrower topped.

But, in the bottom pair I still prefer his extra leg shape to beat 1. He comes wider to his dock and works more dimension through the base of his leg. Plus, he's the trimmer handling sheep who's more correct in terms of cover. Yes, 1's a round ribbed sheep. However, he's just too far past his prime. The softer handling, more mature sheep tapers to his dock and flattens down low, so he's fourth.