

Quick guide

Poultry Judging



Young judging provides young people with the opportunity to develop lifelong skills in visually and physically assessing poultry and public speaking through comparing birds. These skills not only develop a better understanding of the different poultry, they also enable young people to make a valuable contribution to the industry.



Exhibition poultry breeders invest time and money into continually improving their birds, maintaining the standards and genetic pool of breeds of domestic land (hard feather and soft feather) and waterfowl in Australia. Breeders strive to perpetuate the characteristics and excellence of type required to conform with the recognised breed Standard.

It's important to remember that exhibition poultry breeds are maintained to be a physical (phenotypic) representation of the breed standard, which sometimes has little emphasis on laying eggs or producing meat. The Exhibition Poultry industry is the 'genetic archive' of the commercial poultry industry, by keeping and promoting vast seed-stock flocks and maintaining genotypic traits that are no longer represented in the commercial poultry flocks of today. The best way to ensure that breeds of domestic poultry are not extinct is to evaluate – or judge – the characteristics of their animals by examining their type, plumage and condition against the breed standard.

Being able to understand and identify the characteristics of the breed standards and orally present to an audience are skills that can be learnt and take practice. Importantly, this process develops competitors' confidence, decision making and attention to detail, which are skills that will also translate into future careers.

While many young people become involved in young judging and other agricultural show competitions through their school, tertiary education institution or from a farming background, there are other ways to become involved. By approaching a local show society, members can provide guidance and support to anyone interested in participating. Many shows now hold education days and there are opportunities to connect with farms, markets and other local shows to learn more.

Generally, young judges compete at a local show first. Winners then go on to compete at their state final or royal show and from there one competitor will be selected to represent each state or territory at the National Poultry Championship. Young judging is for entrants aged 15 and under 25 years old on May 1 in the year of the competition.

This is intended to be a general guide and there may be some variations in rules and expectations between shows. Individual shows will provide further advice and clarification.

Further reading

To find out more about local shows near you visit: agshowsaustralia.org.au/shows

The National Poultry Championship rules and regulations can be found here: agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines





Where to start

There are many types of poultry within the categories of hardfeather, softfeather and waterfowl. This can include fowl/chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys and their subsequent breeds, separated into sizes: standard and bantam. It is important to learn about the different breeds as their breed standards and scale of points vary significantly. For example, the Wyandotte chicken is a softfeather, heavy, breed, with more emphasis on feather colour and markings and body shape (type), compared to the Australian Game chicken, a hardfeather breed which is judged on body symmetry, strength, size and condition, with no points allocated to feather colour.

Top tip

It is very important that you read up on the Australian Poultry Standards (2nd edition). Birds in each class should be the same breed and they should be judged to the specific breed characteristics, as set out in the Australian Poultry Standards.

Further reading

An overview of poultry breeds in Australia can be found in the Australian Poultry Standards Edition 2.

Form and function

When judging it is important to consider key characteristics for judging poultry, including: type, size, colour and condition.

Their type is the most important quality to identify. The reason we focus on type through judging is because this is the most identifying characteristic to determine breeds of poultry – if it does not display the TYPE of the breed, it should be disqualified. Most 'true to type' birds, as listed in the standard, are birds that are identified by their best breed qualities, that breeders want to pass on to the next generation for continual improvement of the breed. Remember, a good type is representative of good structure and these features enable an animal to feed, breed and maintain the standard of the breed for future generations.

Top tip

Good practice is to quickly let the handler of the animal know you are going to touch or assess their animal.

What to look for

You will need to get to know the different parts of the animal and be able to name these correctly, as these will be the judging points. It is important to examine the bird standing in the pen and removed from the pen 'in-hand'. It is important to understand the judging priorities for different types of poultry – hardfeather, softfeather and waterfowl. It's important to reflect on the bird's type, the plumage (feathers), as well as looking at the legs and feet, checking again for colour and uniformity. When examining the head, consider the comb, the eye colour and beak colour.

Top tip

Practice handling poultry of all types. Remember to be gentle, hold the bird close to your body and support it from underneath. Practice handling birds of all sizes, both in and out of the pen. The judge will be looking for correct techniques for moving the birds in the pen, securing the bird for safe removal and return to the pen – plus how well you assess the bird in hand.

Further reading

For a comprehensive visual guide to all the judging points:

agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines





How judging works

For each type of poultry – hardfeather, softfeather, waterfowl – birds will be divided into two classes, a male class of four birds of one breed and female class of four birds of another breed. They will be numbered in their pens and will be judged by competitors one at a time.

Visual judging will take place first and competitors will be allowed eight minutes to judge the four birds and complete a visual judging card. These cards are simple, with competitors ranking the animals in order from first to fourth place.

Competitors choose one class for their oral presentation. It's important to stick to the allocated time – for every 10 seconds a competitor goes over their time, they will be penalised one point.

Competitors are judged on three components – their visual rankings, their handling technique and their oral presentation.

Young Judging speech

Competitors in the oral section are scored on their accuracy of observation, their ability to compare birds, speaking skills and their own presentation.

Have a start, middle and end: begin with an introduction (for example, I placed this Class and list the numbered placings), then go into the comparisons of pairs, and finish with a conclusion (thank people for listening). The speech only goes for two minutes, so keep to the point.

The main goal is to explain to the judge why you have placed the animals in the order you have chosen by comparing the animals in pairs – first place with second, second against third, and finally third against fourth. Rather than describing each animal individually, competitors draw comparisons against the attributes of each pair.

For example: *“In the top pair, I placed animal numbered [eg four] ahead of [eg one] because ... [highlight the strengths then weaknesses, if any are present].”*

Remember to prioritise the most important reasons first and pick only two or three differences.

Judging is objective, while there are characteristics about an animal to look for, what the judges will be paying close attention to is how clearly competitors express their decision and how they validate it.

It's not all about the animals – a competitor's appearance is also important and judges can mark down for poor presentation. Competitors must wear closed in shoes and a long-sleeved shirt or jacket. Long hair must be tied back, and only minimal jewellery is allowed. Male competitors must wear a tie and long pants.

Chewing gum and shorts are definitely not permitted. Female competitors may consider wearing a tie or neck scarf or necklace.

Top tips

- Speak clearly and concisely – show you believe in what you are saying and pack a punch with your words.
- Deliver your speech to the championship judge – remember eye contact.
- Don't call the final animal “last”, as this can be insulting to the owner. Instead refer to it being fourth placed.
- Get to know the terminology and don't be afraid to implement it – the judges will be looking out for it.
- Choose one end of the animal to begin speaking on and move to the other end, from front to rear or vice versa. This will help organise your presentation and make it easier for people to follow what you are saying.
- Be as descriptive and explanatory as possible. For example, use gender terms rather than “it” and go beyond saying explain one characteristic is “better” when comparing a pair by highlighting why the characteristic is superior.

Further reading

For a comprehensive list of terminology:
agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading



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