

Consumer Judging

**Learning How to Make Good Decisions
in the Marketplace**

A 4-H Consumer Education Activity

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Welcome to 4-H Consumer Judging! This activity provides a wide range of learning experiences that can help you develop many important life skills.

Did you know that you are a consumer judge every time you buy something? Since you usually do not have as much money to spend as you would like, you have to make consumer decisions. Understanding the differences between your needs and wants and learning how to obtain information about consumer goods will help you be a wise and selective buyer.

Whenever you make a decision, you have more than one choice or alternative from which to select. It is necessary to compare the choices in order to select the item best suited to your need or situation. Seldom is one alternative perfect or another alternative completely wrong. You usually have to weigh the importance of one item's strengths and weaknesses against another item's strengths and weaknesses. After making this comparison, you make a decision based on your individual needs, goals, values, and resources.

Through consumer judging you will learn to:

- make knowledgeable, rational decisions when purchasing goods and services;
- select and use goods and services to meet personal needs and reflect lifestyles, goals, values, and resources; and
- communicate your justification of consumer choices and decisions in a logical and articulate manner.

The consumer judging contest is designed to see how well you have learned these three skills. In the contest you judge classes of goods or services that are available in the marketplace. You are given a hypothetical (pretend) buying situation with several choices or alternatives provided. A **situational statement** gives the product to be judged and its intended use, as well as the personal preferences, needs, lifestyle, and resources available to the buyer. Since you are not making the

purchase for yourself, the situational statement helps you identify the standards to consider in judging the class. It is not possible to consider every standard in a short period of time.

You Be the Judge!

You use your best judgment every time you make a purchase consciously or unconsciously, weighing factors like time, energy, price, quality, and need. You decide how important each of these factors is and compare the weight of each factor to make your decision. In judging you do the same thing. You learn standards of quality for goods and services and then practice making comparisons. The more you practice, the easier judging becomes. Most judging champions say that once you learn to be a good judge, you can judge anything if you know the criteria and the terms for the category.

Consumer judging teaches the principles and methods of evaluating goods and services. These skills are used daily by any person who makes a purchase or chooses a service. Training in consumer judging can help you become a better consumer right now and it is a skill you will use all your life.

Future success can hinge on the ability to make the right decision at the right time. Judging helps develop life skills in decision making, organizing thoughts, and defending decisions orally. Practice in making decisions and supporting them with oral reasons trains you in problem-solving and decision-making. The practice you get in thinking and talking in front of people when you give oral reasons has lifetime benefits.

Judging helps you develop:

- decision-making skills as you gain knowledge of the subject, apply the decision-making process, and recognize standards of quality;
- self-confidence and skills in verbal expression as you identify reasons for choices made, use the language of comparison, organize thoughts and ideas in a logical order, and think and speak spontaneously; and
- consumer skills that carry over into other projects and everyday living.

To become a good consumer judge, you must learn how to develop:

- a clear, definite idea or mental picture of items and their characteristics;
- quick and accurate observation skills;
- sound judgment, the ability to weigh and evaluate what you see objectively;
- courage and honesty;
- ability to give good reasons; and
- a desire to excel.

How to Judge

In judging, you learn one thing at a time in small steps. It is easier to learn if you understand what you are doing. Practice makes learning easier. First, recognize and appreciate the

characteristics of the item. This study fixes an image of the ideal item in your mind. Judging practice forces you to expand your observation skills. You also learn how to become a better decision-maker.

The basic principles of judging are the same for any item, even though characteristics may vary for each. Look for the strong and weak points of each item. This helps to form a habit of seeing the same characteristics in other problems. There is no substitute for a mind that is trained to see all sides of a problem. A successful judge is always objective, free of prejudice, and considers only the facts. An honest appraisal of the differences between items and a decision based on sound reasons are the heart of judging.

Your first judging experience may have been so long ago that you cannot recall it. However, judging is often done every day. When was the last time that you selected an item from among several choices?

In judging, you do your own work and learn to depend on your own judgment, not someone else's. As you develop confidence in yourself, others will have confidence in you, too.

Steps in Judging

Developing a routine to gather information needed to place a class makes judging much easier. It does take some time and practice to develop this skill.

Here are the important steps in the judging routine:

1. Information

Be totally informed about the intended use of the item you evaluate. Learn the parts and their correct names, so that you can use them when making comparisons and giving reasons. Be aware of the relative economic differences between characteristics of each item. Compare the advantages and disadvantages that different features offer the consumer.

To gain information on a class, check to see if a fact sheet for the class is available. Further information may be obtained from consumer magazines, such as [Consumer Reports](#) or [Zillions](#). You can also check with your local library.

Now you are ready to begin judging a class. Four items make up a class. The situational statement for the class will help you determine the needs of that consumer.

2. Observation

Take a broad first look at all items in a class to get a clear overview of the whole class. Look for something that stands out. Then examine the items closer, individually. Observe each item carefully and evaluate how it meets or fails to meet the requirements necessary for the situation given. As you examine the items, make a mental picture of each.

Hint: Many times first impressions are the best ones. Stick with your first ideas, unless close inspection gives you good reason to change. If the class has an easy (close) top or bottom pair, note it and spend more time on the more difficult placings.

3. Comparison

When you judge a class of items, you really should have five items in mind: **the four in the class and the ideal item for the person in the situational statement.** Recall the most desirable features of the items you have seen, and then compare each item with others in the class to establish differences and similarities.

Next, make your decision. Try to “break” the class by dividing the four items into top, middle, and bottom pairs. You will automatically include the differences between each item when making pairs as well as providing a solid basis for giving oral reasons.

Do not try to place a class on little things. Look for the big differences that affect use and cost. Always keep in the mind the situational statement.

4. Conclusion

Arrive at a logical ranking for the items based on the relative merit of usefulness to the situation given. Rank the items assigning them 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th places, in the order you feel that they would meet the criteria established in the situational statement.

Spend a few minutes taking notes on the class for which you will have to give reasons. Write down your placings and a brief description of each item in order to recall the class, two to four definite differences in each pair, and a list of all grants.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Were there differences and similarities to note for each pair?
- Does your placing reflect the criteria?
- Did you change your placing after you began taking notes?

<p>CLEMSON UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE</p> <p>4-H Judging Card</p> <p>⊗</p> <p>Group No.</p> <p>Contestant No.</p> <p>Class:</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Placing Score:</p> <p>Reason Score:</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Check Your Placing!</p> <p>*****</p>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
	1 - 2 - 4 - 3 <input type="checkbox"/>
	1 - 3 - 2 - 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
	1 - 3 - 4 - 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
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4-H Judging Card

After you judge a class, the next step is to mark your placing on the official judging card. The card has the class number and your assigned contest number. Add your county's name. Then mark your placing on the correct card by circling the one group of four numbers that has the four numbers in the same order as your placing. For all classes, except the reasons, hand the card to the group leader class as you leave the class. For the reasons class, make sure that the placing you mark is identical to the placing in your notes. Give that card to the reasons judge after you have finished giving your oral reasons.

Preparing and Presenting Oral Reasons

The good judges are separated from the lucky guessers when reasons are given. Oral reasons are the most valuable part of judging because they help build confidence and develop skill to think and speak while on your feet.

The purpose of giving reasons is to convince the judge that you saw and evaluated the class correctly. Tell why you placed one item over another and explain where and how one item is better than another using comparative terms.

Giving reasons may be the hardest part of judging, but the experience provides lifetime benefits. Oral reasons are given to help you:

- develop a system for judging consumer goods and services;
- get acquainted with consumer terminology;
- develop a system for analyzing a specific class;
- explain why you placed a class as you did;
- state your thoughts more clearly;
- improve speaking poise and presentation;
- develop self-confidence;
- improve your speaking voice; and
- develop your memory.

It takes some natural talent to give reasons, but it mostly takes skills that you can develop with lots of practice, such as:

- accurate observation;
- vocabulary of correct terms;
- logical thinking;
- decision-making ability; and
- ability to talk in a pleasant and convincing manner.

A good judge must be able to explain the reasons for the placing. Reasons should be accurate, organized, clear, complete, concise, interesting, sincere, and presented in a pleasing and confident manner.

Important points in giving reasons include the following:

Accuracy is the most important part of giving reasons. A set of reasons is less satisfactory if the information presented is wrong. Tell exactly what you saw. Accurate comparisons convince the listener that you understood the class. You can make perfectly accurate comparisons even when your placing does not agree with the official's. Do not say anything that is not true. Do not use a set of "canned" reasons.

Organization is arranging information in a logical order. Bring out major and general points first. Use a system in organizing and giving reasons. Your system will be determined by the way you placed the class and why. Were there definite top and bottom items and a close middle pair? Or, was there a definite top pair and a definite bottom pair? Get to the point without repetition. Reasons should be organized, but not memorized. Train yourself to retain a mental picture of the items and the good and bad points of each.

Delivery is your ability to present your reasons in a pleasing, confident manner, and to be easily understood and easily followed. Speak slowly and distinctly, but without hesitation. Use a conversational tone and speak loud enough to be heard. Speak with confidence and state reasons in complete sentences, using correct grammar.

Ignore any distractions that occur around you while giving your oral reasons. Keep the judge interested in what you have to say. The value of your accuracy may be lost in poor presentation if most of what you say does not get through to the listener.

Look directly at the reasons judge. Stand firmly on both feet and place your hands behind your back. Act and speak with confidence and avoid distracting mannerisms.

Convincing delivery comes through many hours of **hard work**. Confidence, voice, posture, and personal appearance combine to create a convincing image. These factors combined with accurate comparisons presented in an **organized manner** will help you become a good consumer judge.

Completeness is your ability to bring out all major good and bad points in your reasons. Avoid small points that may be close or controversial. Reasons should be brief and emphasize the major criteria. Present the differences first on each pair. Point out the differences only; do not describe them. Claim strong points that make one item superior to the other. Then grant (**identify**) the advantages of other items. Be concise and definite. Do not hunt for something else to say. If you cannot remember, move on to the next pair.

Criticism of the top item is given last. Never start reasons by criticizing the first place. You may grant an advantage to the second place rather than criticize the first place. End reasons with a strong, but concise statement of why you placed the last item last followed by a repeat of the class placing.

Length should be no more than two minutes. This is adequate time to give well-organized and properly presented reasons.

Terms should be simple, understandable, generally accepted words used to describe consumer goods and services. Know what appropriate terms mean and use them correctly when giving reasons. You must have a good vocabulary of consumer-related terms to give a good set of reasons. Using incorrect terms detracts from the value of what you say. Use comparative terms when describing characteristics of one item in comparison with those of another.

Eliminate unnecessary words or phrases that add nothing but more words to reasons. Examples of extra or undesirable words and phrases follow.

Don't say "**item ...**"

Instead use **specific name**

Don't say "**I would like to see ...**"

Instead use "**I criticize 2 because ...**"

Don't say "**kinds of types ...**"
Instead use **specific name**

Don't say "**number 2 over number 1 ...**"
Instead use "**2 over 1 ...**"

Don't say "**it ...**"
Instead use **item number**

Don't say "**lacks, an item lacks something ...**"
Instead use "**the item is (point out fault)**"

Don't say "**in the order of 2 over 1 ...**"
Instead use "**2 over 1 ...**"

Don't say "**I am placing ...**"
Instead use "**I place ...**"

Don't say "**I am criticizing ...**"
Instead use "**I criticize ...**"

How Good are Your Reasons?

The judge will assess the value of your reasons based on appearance, delivery, proper use of terms, accuracy of statements, and importance of points covered.

Organization is the key to effective communications. The organization of reasons determines how easy it is to follow what you say. In giving reasons, a class of four items should be divided into top, middle, and bottom pairs. Different systems can be used. Here is one way that is logical, clear and easy to use, based on a placing of **1-2-3-4**.

1. State name of class and placing

Top Pair

2. Reasons for placing **1** over **2**, using comparative terms
3. Grants for **2** over **1**, pointing out advantages of **2** in comparative terms
4. Criticisms of **2**, using comparative or descriptive terms

Middle Pair

5. Reasons for placing **2** over **3**

6. Grants for **3** over **2**

7. Criticisms of **3**

Bottom Pair

8. Reasons for placing **3** over **4**

9. Grants for **4** over

10. Criticisms of **4**

11. Repeat class placing

Making Notes

Your reasons will be easier to develop if you follow an orderly system. Begin by making good notes. They should be short, simple, and easy to use. Here is a sample format that may help you.

Reasons Work Sheet

Following this pattern, a sample class of reasons should be:

“I place this class of _____, **1-2-3-4**.

In the top pair, I place **1** over **2** because **1** is _____

_____.

I grant **2** is _____

_____.

_____ is also

_____ than **2**.

In the middle pair, I place **2** over **3**, since **2** is _____

_____.

2 is _____

_____.

I admit that **3** is _____
_____ than **2**.

Coming to my bottom pair, I place **3** over **4** because **3** is _____
_____.

3 is _____
_____.

I place **4** last because it is _____
_____.

For these reasons (or therefore), I place this class of _____
_____, **1-2-3-4.**”

Prepare and Give Good Reasons

Giving reasons for your decisions is an important part of consumer judging. When you explain your placing, you are giving reasons. You will need to:

- have a clear picture of the entire class in mind;
- know the qualities or standards for the judged class;
- be able to compare the good and poor points for each choice; and
- make notes and study them before giving reasons.

Practice

Here is a sample class for you to use to practice giving reasons.

Situational Statement

Pat is planning to invite some of his classmates over to study and wants to serve fresh popped popcorn. He is planning to use his electric popper and needs to watch his costs carefully. Some of Pat's friends prefer no salt and some want their popcorn salted. Pat needs at least 10 cups of popcorn.

Class Items

1. Betty Crocker Microwave Popcorn - 3 bags = \$2.19 for 24 cups popped, salted
2. Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Popping Corn - \$2.79 for 90 cups popped, unsalted
3. TV Time Popcorn - \$1.59 for 44 cups popped, unsalted

4. Golden Flake Popcorn - \$1.39 for 10 cups popped, salted

Placing

2-3-1-4

Reasons

I place this class of popcorn

2-3-1-4.

I place **2** over **3** because **3** is more expensive than **2**. I grant that both can be freshly popped in an electric popper and are unsalted. I place **3** over **1** because **1** is more expensive, already has salt, and must be popped in a microwave oven. I place **1** over **4** because **1** can be freshly popped. I place **4** last because **4** is not freshly popped, is the most expensive, and is already salted. For these reasons, I place this class of popcorn **2-3-1-4**.

Reasons for Placing

2 is \$.031/cup popped

3 is \$.036/cup popped

1 is \$.091/cup popped

4 is \$.139/cup popped

Admit or Grant

2 = 3 can be freshly popped in electric popper, both unsalted

1 can be freshly popped

Faults

1 has salt, needs microwave

4 not freshly popped, has salt

To organize your reasons a set of short, simple, easy to use notes may help. Use them as study aids before you present reasons to the judge. Do not read your notes to the judge or refer to notes while you speak. Notes should be used only to help you remember the class.

Here's a set of sample notes:

Class: _____

Placing 1-2-3-4

(Item) Criticize	Reason	(Placing) Grant
1	Reasons for 1 over 2	Grant to 2
2	Reasons for 2 over 3	Grant to 3
3	Reasons for 3 over 4	Grant to 4
	Criticize 4 and place last	

Top Pair = 1

Middle Pair = 2

Bottom Pair = 3

Reasons Score Guide

Total Possible Points = 50

Criteria	Standard Score
Correct organization and format	10
Accurate descriptions	10
Correct terminology	5
Complete descriptions	5
Confident and convincing (good, sound reasoning)	5
Good grammar	5
Good delivery*	10*

* Maximum penalty for use of notes = 10 points

When notes are used, the following scale may be used to determine the penalty:

	Minus
Reading	-10
Heavy Use	- 8
Medium Use	- 6
Light Use	- 4
No Use	- 0