



Department of
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Beef cattle and meat sheep junior judging guide



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Judging meat sheep and beef cattle



Junior judging is a skill which can be developed with practice. It incorporates the skills of visual assessment of livestock and public speaking. It is essentially about comparing one animal's merits to the merits of other animals in a class.

Livestock producers, breeders, feeders and buyers all judge and evaluate livestock for their potential as either breeding or market animals. When evaluating livestock, it is always important to try to relate the 'form' of the animal to its 'function'.

For example, different livestock functions or purpose include wool production, meat production, milk production, egg production or breeding progeny.

This booklet will solely focus on meat sheep and beef cattle judging and provide tips for note taking and structuring a reasons talk. It should be used as a guide to assist students in preparing to judge meat sheep and beef cattle at shows.

Where to start?

Before learning to compare animals of the same breed, it is important to develop an understanding of different breeds of livestock. This can be achieved through attending local shows, saleyards, studs, farms or through research to find out more about different breeds of sheep or cattle and their distinguishing characteristics.

There are hundreds of breeds and crossbred variations of cattle and sheep produced in Australia for different purposes. Common pure breeds to know characteristics for include:

Sheep	Beef cattle
• Merino (ultrafine, superfine, fine, medium, strong or Dohne merino - wool) • Poll dorset (downs wool - meat) • White suffolk (downs wool - meat) • Southdown (downs wool – meat) • Polworth (dual purpose) • Corriedale (fine crossbred - dual) • Border Leicester (coarse crossbred - dual) • Australian White (shedding - meat) • Dorper (shedding - meat) • Tukidale (carpet wool)	• Red/black Angus (Bos taurus - British) • Poll/horned Hereford (Bos taurus - British) • Shorthorn (Bos taurus - British) • Murray Grey (Bos taurus - Australian) • Speckle park (Bos Taurus – Canadian) • Simmental (Bos taurus - European) • Limousin (Bos taurus - European) • Charolais (Bos taurus - European) • Brahman (Bos indicus) • Santa gertrudis (Bos indicus) • Droughtmaster (Bos indicus)

Things to be aware of for different breeds include:

- Average frame size
- Average mature female weight
- Average mature male weight
- Production purpose
- Maturity type. For example, late or early maturing breed
- Any special markets. For example, domestic, export, or niche

Form and function

'Form and function' of the animal is important to consider when judging. It is very important because it determines what the animal has been grown or produced for. For example, all beef cattle are obviously grown and produced for the function of producing beef, but the sex of the animal also gives an idea of its purpose which must be considered when judging.

It sounds obvious, but cows, heifers, ewes, rams and bulls are produced to restock and breed on within a herd or flock. Steers and wethers are produced for their carcass and that alone, they do not breed.

So, when judging breeding animals, the emphasis is on judging form or structure and characteristics which effect productivity. For example, muscle, amount of milk, size of testes, volume and capacity. These are traits that these animals will breed on into a herd or flock.

It is important to have a high selection criterion for superior structure and production traits for all breeding animals, but especially important when selecting bulls or rams. This is because, sires contribute 50% of the genetic material to every offspring. Within a natural joining group this means that the sire is responsible for approximately 50% of the genetic makeup of all offspring, whereas a cow or ewe contributes approximately 50% solely, to the offspring she naturally rears. In comparison in steers or meat wethers, the emphasis is on judging the carcass and then to a lesser extent structure.

Beef cattle

Parts of the animal

After you have become familiar with different beef breeds production characteristics, the next step is to learn the names of the parts and carcass regions of the animal. It is important to know the different parts of the animals so that you use the correct terminology in your judging reasons.

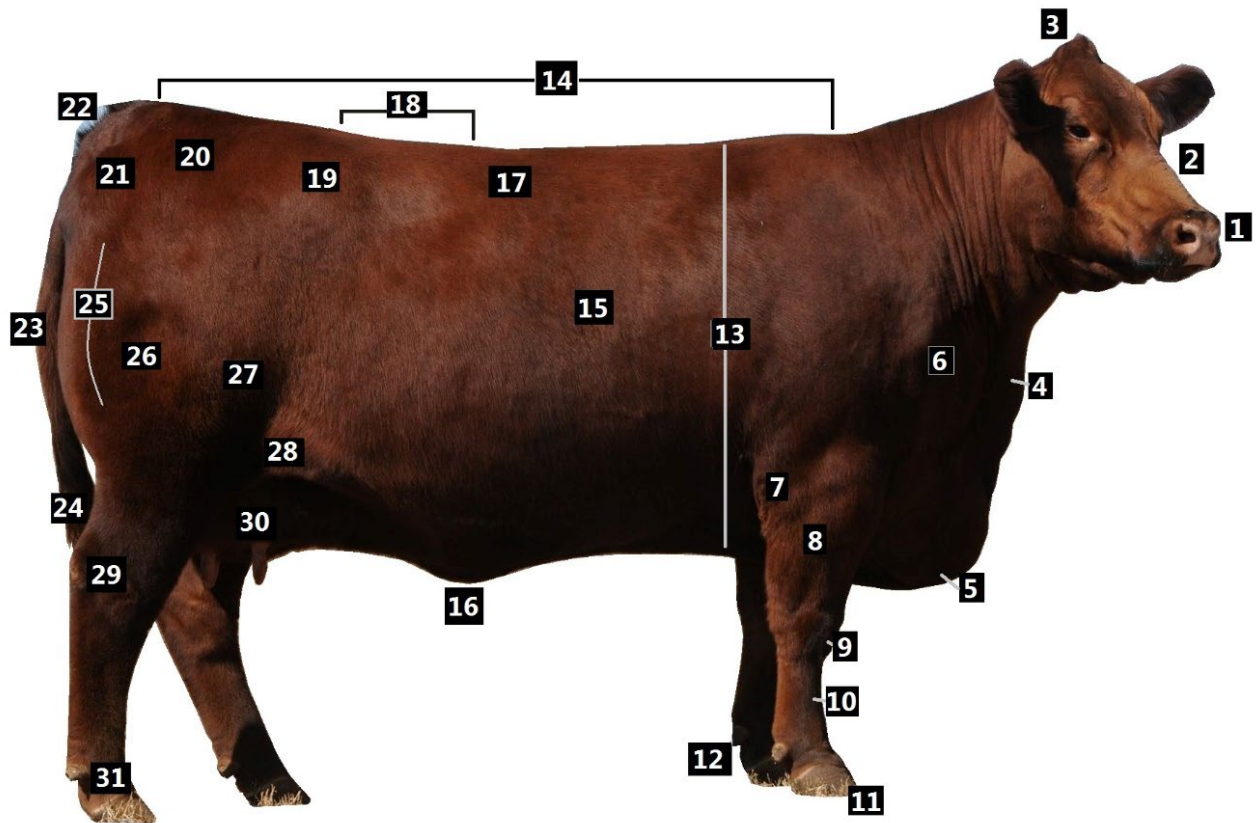
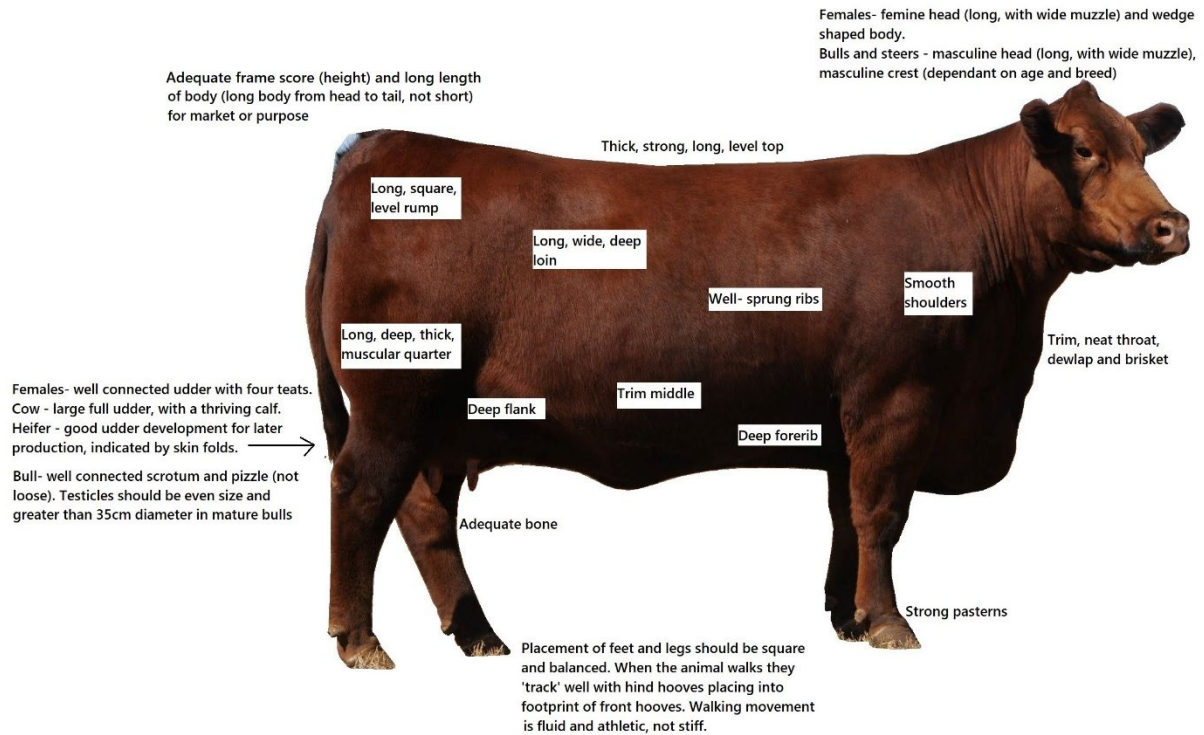


Figure 1 Source: [Goondoola Red Angus - Goondoola Miss D](#)

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|
| 1. Muzzle | 12. Dewclaw | 22. Tail head |
| 2. Face | 13. Heart girth | 23. Tail |
| 3. Poll | 14. Back or top | 24. Switch |
| 4. Dewlap | 15. Ribs | 25. Muscle seam |
| 5. Brisket | 16. Navel (heifer/cow);
sheath/pizzle (bull/steer) | 26. Quarter/ thigh |
| 6. Point of shoulder | 17. 12 th /13 th rib site | 27. Stifle region |
| 7. Elbow | 18. Short ribs of loin | 28. Flank |
| 8. Forearm | 19. Hip or Hook | 29. Hock |
| 9. Knee | 20. P8 Rump site | 30. Udder (cow, heifer); cod
(steer); scrotum (bull) |
| 10. Cannon | 21. Pin bone | 31. Pastern |

Characteristics of an ideal beef animal

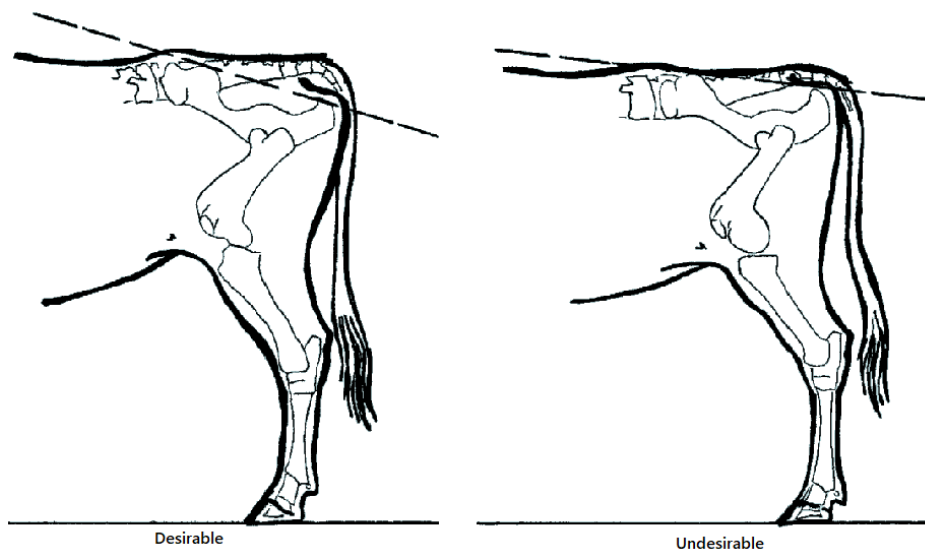
Characteristics to look for depending on the function and sex of the animal.



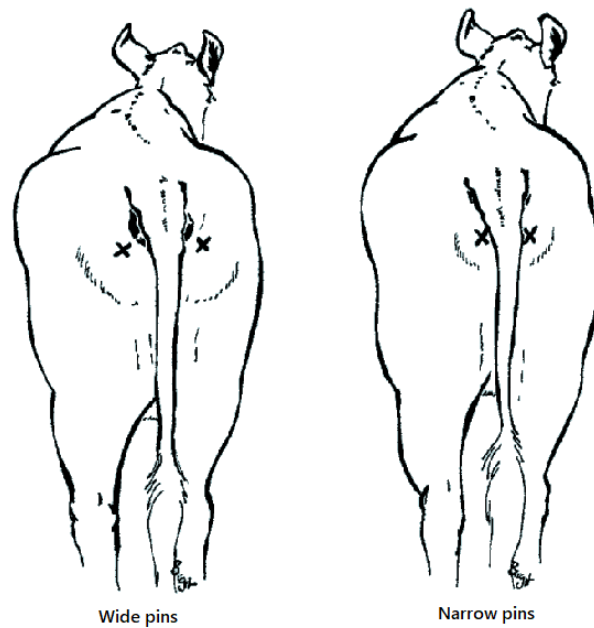
Reproductive soundness in breeding animals

When judging breeders (bulls, heifers, cows) it is essential to consider animal fertility and reproductive soundness. You want a breeding animal to produce as many offspring as possible throughout its lifetime. An animal's ability to do this is dependent on their structural soundness.

When assessing both females and males in terms of reproductive soundness structural aspects to consider include the angle from the hipbone to the pin bone and the width between pin bones. The greater the angle of the line drawn between the hips and the pins of the pelvis and the horizontal, the greater the vertical diameter of the pelvis will be allowing for the calf to get through which improves calving ease. Even though bulls obviously do not calve down, they pass this feature on to their daughters.



Rump angle and rump width affect pelvic shape, and pelvic shape is correlated with calving ease (direct, maternal and paternal); animals with high and narrow pin bones are more likely to have calving difficulties.



Bulls

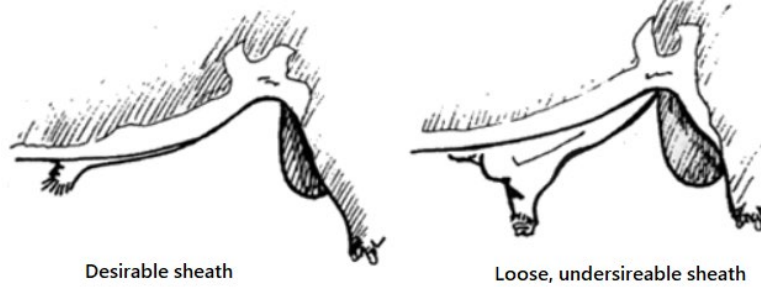
When assessing bulls, it is important to look at the scrotum and testicles for size, circumference, tone, shape and any abnormalities. Testes need to be 'firm and springy' and free of lumps. Soft testes may indicate degenerating semen-producing tissue. Also, check the head and tail of the epididymis for any swelling or hardening.

When looking at the scrotum, size does matter! There is a direct link with testicular size and sperm production. In *Bos Taurus* breeds a minimum scrotal circumference of a mature bull is 32-24cm but aim for 35cm plus. If the bull is used for breeding replacement heifers, scrotal size (SS) is of importance. Bulls with large SS sire daughters with better fertility. The female fertility link is thought to be a mix of earlier puberty and earlier conception. *Bos indicus* breeds have slightly longer, smaller-diameter testicles.

This table gives a guide of minimum scrotal circumference (SC) requirements for age in *Bos Taurus* cattle.

Age of bull	Acceptable minimum SC (cm)
12–14 months:	26 cm
14–16 months:	28 cm
16–18 months:	30 cm
18–20 months:	32 cm
Over 20 months:	34 cm

Also look at the sheath for angle and connection and any abnormalities. Bulls can break down from penis injuries while mating, due to poor structure or accidents. A broken-down bull in the middle of a joining season reduces numbers of calves, increases calving period and reduces production efficiency.



Females

In females it is important to look at the udder in cows or udder development in heifers. The udder should be free from excess fat and fibrous tissue, as this tissue does not excrete milk. In cows, the fore udder should be moderate in length and firmly attached to the belly. The rear udder should show capacity and be firmly attached by the lateral ligaments onto the thigh of the cow. The centre of the udder is supported by suspensory ligaments. These ligaments go from the floor of the udder up between the thighs and join onto bone structure at the base of the pelvis. If these ligaments are strong the floor of the udder will show a distinct division between halves of the udder, especially between the back teats. Each of the four teats should be placed squarely under each quarter of the udder and be of a desirable size and shape for a new born calf to easily find and drink from.

Many of the problems experienced with poor udders and early breakdown of udder ligaments are a direct result of young heifers being over conditioned in body and udder fat prior to being joined on their first pregnancy.

In heifers, look for signs of future udder development. Good development is seen as distinct folds of skin between the hind legs, which will later allow for the development of the rear udder halves. Also look for four squarely positioned teats of equal length and size. The foundations of udder development are completed within the first 15 months of life, so what you see in a heifer will determine the potential udder that animal will have as a cow.

Another important aspect to consider when judging reproductive soundness in females is whether that animal is already being bred. For example, if you were judging a class of older heifers of the same age and one is in calf, one has a calf at foot and the other two are empty, the heifer in calf is already proving that she is more productive than the empty heifers in the class. However, the first calf heifer with calf at foot is the most productive as she is a proven breeder. The empty heifers may potentially never get into calf or rear offspring. If you were to judge a class of cows with calves at foot, you only judge the cows (not the calves). However, you look at the calves to consider which cow is doing the better job on rearing a healthy, thriving calf. A fat calf indicates it is on superior nutrition as provided in part by the cow's milk along with pasture or hard feed.

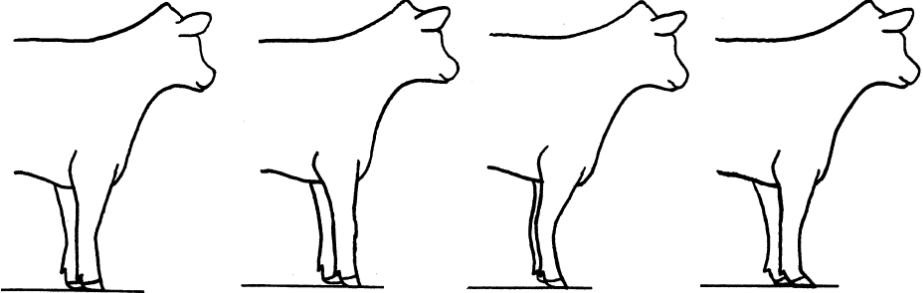
Structural soundness

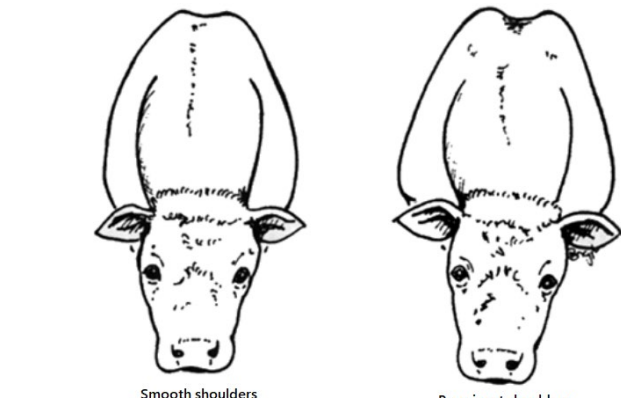
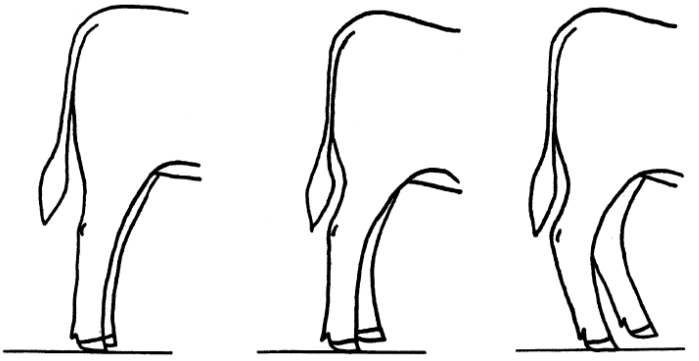
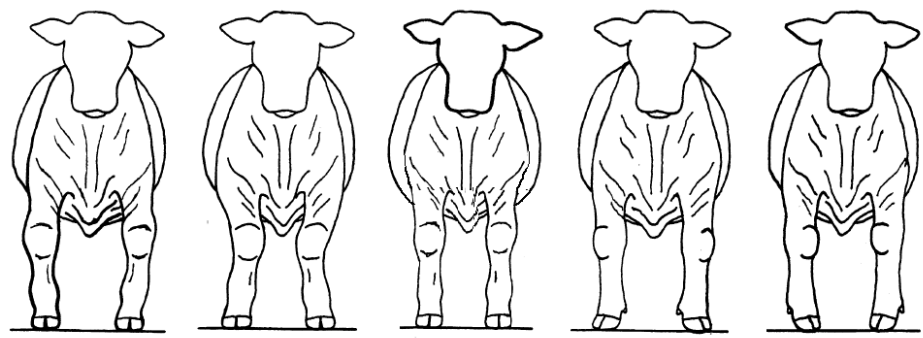
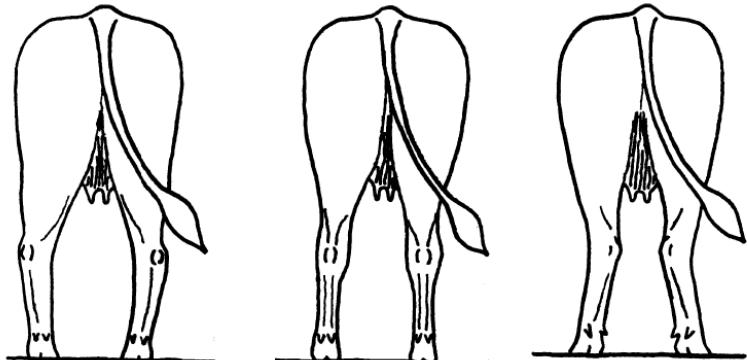
The following will concentrate on beef cattle, but the principles of structural assessment is transferrable between both cattle and sheep.

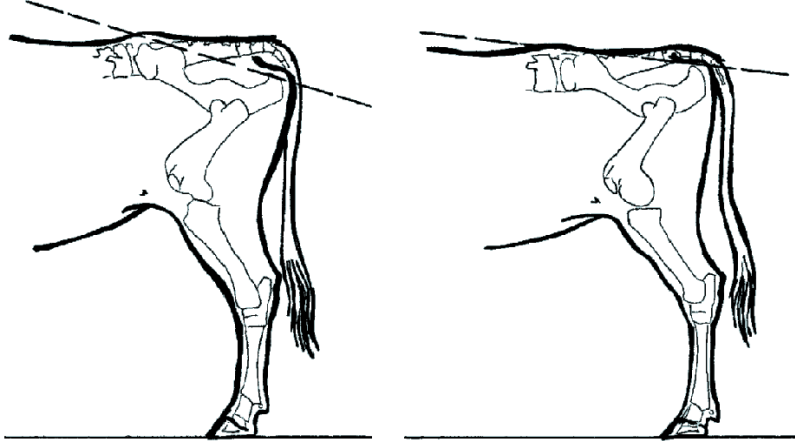
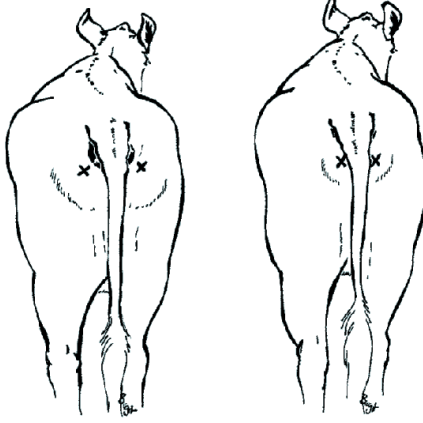
In breeding animals, structure and conformation are very important. They are highly heritable characteristics but also affect the longevity and production potential of an individual animal. An animal with good structure will live longer, produce more offspring, freely travel greater distances around a paddock and essentially graze more, thus making them potentially more productive. Structural defects can lead to impaired mobility, pain, reduced libido in sires and eventually to unsoundness. Therefore, structure in breeding stock is an essential characteristic you must consider when judging stock.

The following images illustrate issues with structure to look for when judging. The terminology and issues here are applicable to both meat sheep and beef cattle.

Consider how and why each undesirable structural feature impacts an animal's production.

Jaw	 Overshot jaw (parrot - mouth) Correct Undershot jaw
Front leg set	 Correct Over at the knee Back at the knee Weak pasterns
Shoulder angle	 Correct Straight leg (boxy foot, head down, straight shoulder) Too much angle (long toe and calf knee)

Shoulder smoothness	 Smooth shoulders Prominant shoulders
Rear leg set	 Extremely straight (post legs) Correct Extremely curved (sickled)
Front leg alignment	 Bowlegged Knock - kneed Correct Splay footed (toes out) Pigeon - toed (toes in)
Rear leg alignment	 Bowlegged Correct Cow hocked

Hip to pin angle	 Desirable Undesirable																
Pin width	 Wide pins Narrow pins																
Hoof angle	 Correct Too much angle Too straight																
Hoof	<table><tr><td></td><td>Correct</td><td>Large outside claw and curled toe</td><td>Scissorclaw</td></tr><tr><td>Side</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Sole</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Front</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>		Correct	Large outside claw and curled toe	Scissorclaw	Side				Sole				Front			
	Correct	Large outside claw and curled toe	Scissorclaw														
Side																	
Sole																	
Front																	

Go to the NSW DPI "[Bull soundness - structural](#)" to read more information about what to look for in beef cattle when selecting an animal.

Observing an animal's structure

To understand all aspects of the animal's structure and be able to compare one animal to the next, it is wise to stick to a routine examination. Carry out the same order of evaluation and repeat that sequence with every animal in the class. One pattern to use may be this:

1. Start with head (check the eyes, nostrils and bite, then the poll or horns and ears), neck, brisket, shoulders and front legs and feet.
2. Next view along the underside of the animal to the sheath, then testicles in males; or udder in females and the back legs and feet.
3. Follow your way up to the pin bones and hips, then the topline and back to the shoulders and neck.

The animal should be viewed from the side, from the front, and from behind. It should be allowed to walk out, and again be viewed from the side, from the front and from behind to confirm any suspicions of poor leg structure or tracking problems such as a stiff gait or under stepping.

Determining carcass finish through feel

The primary objective of running your hand over an animal is to estimate the amount and uniformity of finish (fat cover) and to determine the quantity of the muscle in the loin and quarter, which helps you determine the total muscle volume.

Only carry out the following steps with quiet, handled, restrained animals. Always be gentle with animals when manually handling and do not surprise them.

The way the animal stands can affect what you are able to feel. The animal should be standing square.

Once again, it is wise to stick to a routine examination. These steps should be carried out following steps 1-3 where you assessed structure.

Steps:

4. Place your flattened and outstretched hand at the top of the shoulders with your fingertips closest to the spine. Use your thumb to feel and estimate the width and thickness of the muscle directly behind the shoulders. Heavily muscled animals will be wide and full; lightly muscled animals will be narrow and angular.
5. To determine the amount of loin muscle, move your hand from the shoulder, down the topline (spine) to the last rib. Lightly squeeze or reach your hand over the loin to evaluate the depth and width of loin. The loin should be a wide, deep and long muscle, containing the 'expensive' cuts in the animal.
6. Determine the finish (fat cover) over the animal's top line (spine), progressing back toward the top of the shoulder. Then determine the finish near the elbow and run your flattened hand toward the last rib.
7. Look at the animal's brisket, udder in heifers, cod in steers and pin bones/tail area for signs of excess fat. Fat is important for carcass eating quality and tenderness. Inadequate fat cover results in tougher meat and excessive fat provides carcass wastage and mobility and reproductive problems in breeding animals. Excessive fat in udders of heifers can reduce lifelong milk production.
8. Take note of the amount and uniformity of finish over the various areas of the animal's rib region. Fat feels soft, muscle feels firm and bone is hard.
9. Next handle the animal to determine the width and length of rump and size or capacity of hind legs (hind quarter) using your hands to feel and measure. The leg muscle should feel firm and the muscle should extend down the lower thigh toward the hock.

Interpreting animal condition into a fat and muscle score

Fat score

Fat score is used for live animal assessment of slaughter animals and body condition of breeding stock. The reference points used for fat assessment are shown in Figure 2. P8 site and 12th rib sites for fat measurement can be accurately carried out with an ultrasound which gives an objective measurement. Manual palpation will give a subjective indication of how much fat is present.

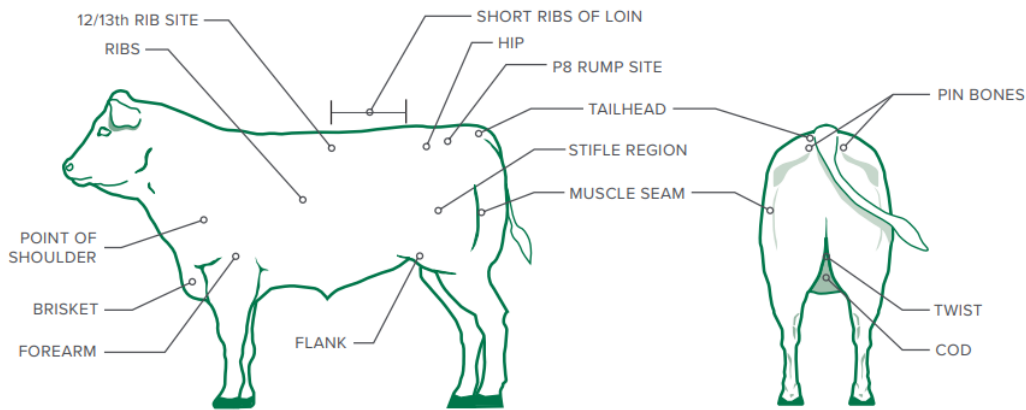


Figure 2 Source: [MLA, Cattle assessment manual](#)

Condition Score	Characteristics	P8 site (mm)	12 rib (mm)	Description
1	- short ribs sharp to touch - hip bones and ribs prominent	0-2	0-1	Skinny
2	no fat around tail head	Over 2 up to 6	2-3	
3	- can feel short ribs individually but they feel rounded - some fat over tail head, hip/hook bones and flank - individual ribs not obvious	Over 6 up to 12	4-7	Lean
4	- can feel short ribs only with firm pressure - can feel fat on either side of the tail head - hipbone carrying some fat cover	Over 12 up to 22	8-12	Good condition
5	- can't feel short ribs - folds of fat are beginning to develop over ribs and thighs - can feel "rounds" of fat around the tailhead	Over 22 up to 32	13-18	Over-conditioned
6	- cow has blocky appearance. - tail head and hip/hook bones are buried in fat - can feel folds of fat over thighs and ribs - mobility is impaired by fat	32+	18+	Fat

Table 1 Adapted from [MLA, Cattle assessment manual](#)

- No breeding animal should be in score less than 2.5
- Breeding animals in score 3.5-4.5 will provide optimum production and profitability.
- Breeding animals that are too thin (<2.5) will have poor production, increased risk of mortality and poor reproduction.

- Animals that are too fat (>5) will have good production but stocking rate will be compromised which has a direct impact on profitability.
- No growing calves (i.e. weaners) should be less than score 2.5

Muscle score

Muscling is scored on a scale from A (very heavy) to E (very light). This scoring system can be increased to a 15 point scale by including pluses and minuses around each score (e.g. A+, A, A-... to ...E+, E, E-). Muscle score describes the shape of cattle and is the degree of thickness or convexity of an animal relative to its frame size, after adjustments have been made for fatness. Note that very fat (more than 18 mm at the P8 site) animals may look more muscular than they are. The more muscle in an animal the more profit.

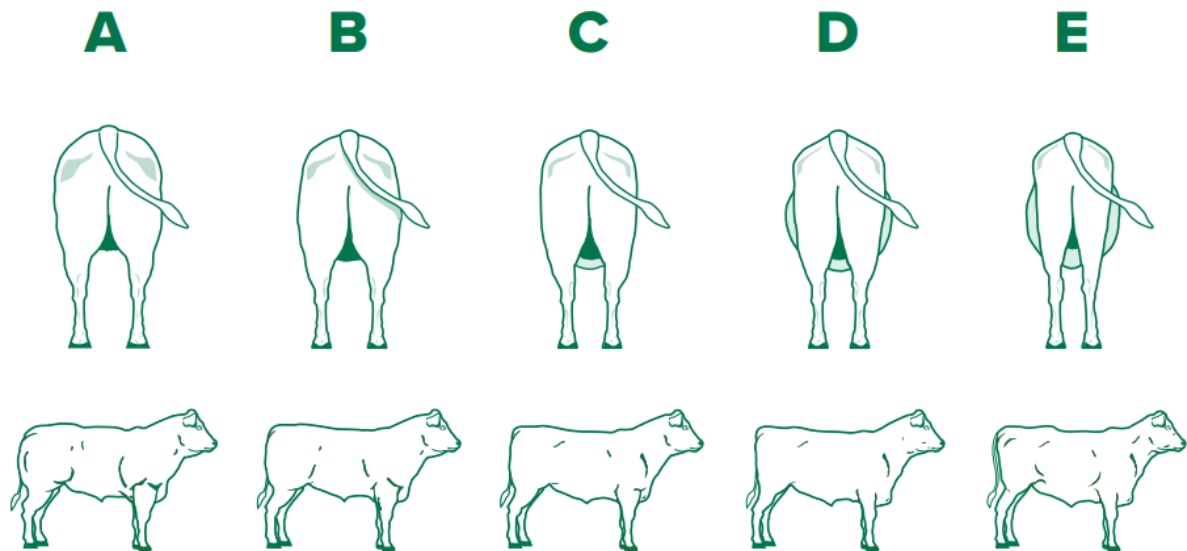
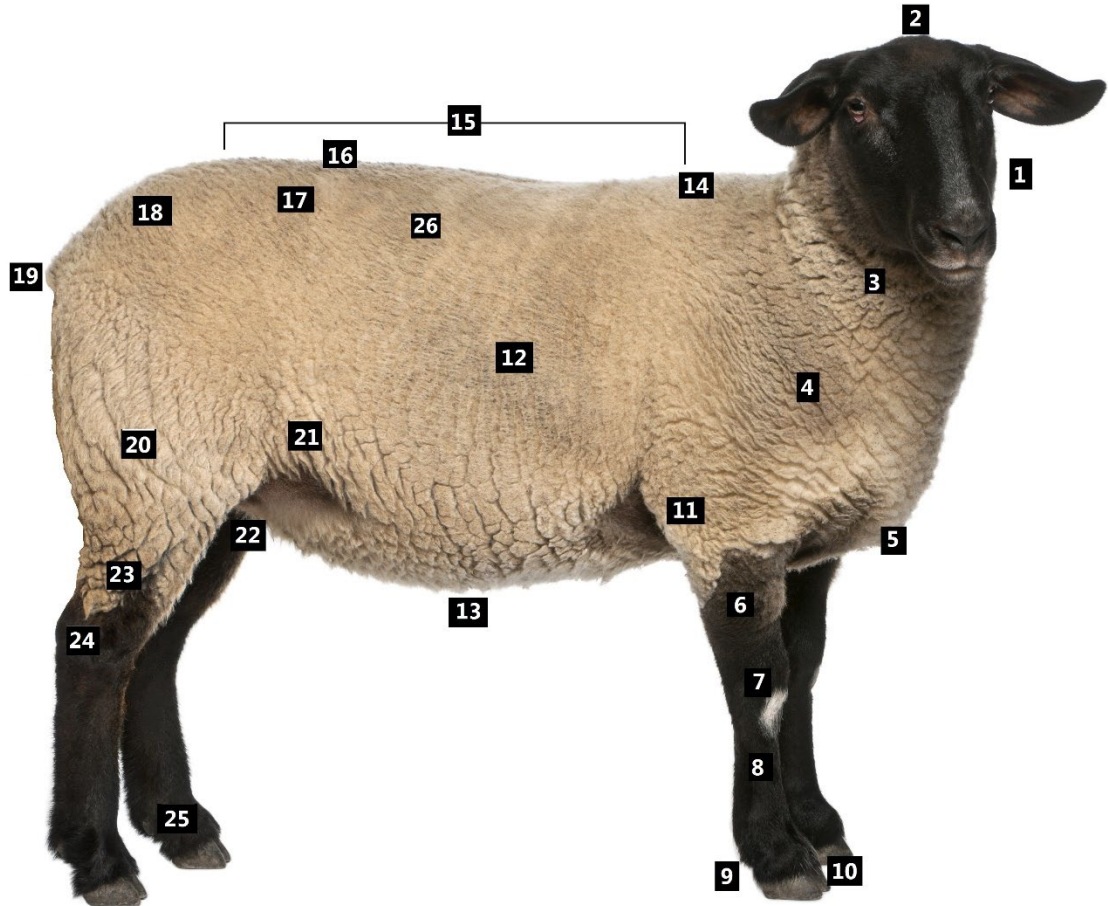


Figure 3 Source: [MLA, Cattle assessment manual](#)

Meat sheep

Parts of the animal

After you have become familiar with different meat sheep breeds production characteristics, the next step is to learn the names of the parts and carcass regions of the animal. It is important to know the different parts of the animals so that you use the correct terminology in your judging reasons.



- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Face | 11. Elbow | 20. Leg |
| 2. Poll | 12. Rib | 21. Flank |
| 3. Neck | 13. Pizzle/sheath (male) | 22. Scrotum/testes (ram); |
| 4. Point of shoulder | 14. Top of shoulder | cod (wether); udder |
| 5. Brisket | (wither) | (ewe) |
| 6. Forearm (foreshank) | 15. Back or top | 23. Rear shank |
| 7. Knee | 16. Loin | 24. Hock |
| 8. Cannon | 17. Hip | 25. Pastern |
| 9. Dewclaw | 18. Rump | 26. 12 th rib (GR site) |
| 10. Hoof | 19. Dock/tail | |

Characteristics of an ideal meat sheep

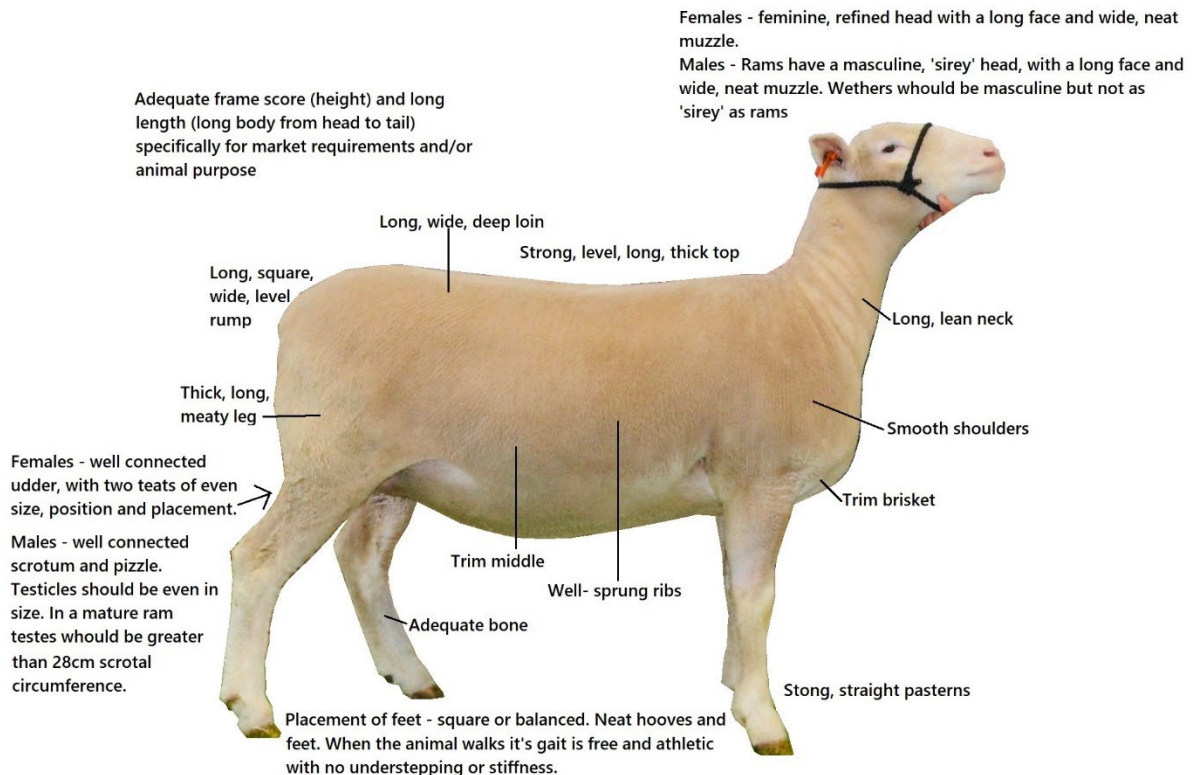


Figure 4 [Allendale stud, Allendale 190/18](#)

Reproductive soundness in breeding animals

Rams

The occurrence of physical abnormalities, particularly arthritis and abnormalities of the testes, epididymis and penis, increases with age. A physical examination for reproductive soundness involves an examination of:

- the scrotum for thickenings, injuries, abscesses, likely to interfere with cooling.
- the spermatic cord for swellings, abscesses, lumps or hernias.
- the head, body and tail of the epididymis for any swellings or abnormalities likely to interfere with the movement of sperm from the testicles to the penis.
- the testes for firmness and uniform size. Soft, flabby testes often indicate poor fertility, associated with poor nutrition, age or disease, for example footrot, foot abscess or flystrike.

In rams, size does matter! There is a close relationship between testicular size and sperm production. Rams with small testes may not produce enough sperm throughout the joining period to maintain good fertilisation rates. Small scrotal circumference can be a result of several causes, including immaturity, poor nutrition and developmental defects. Small testes in well grown young rams should be viewed with suspicion. The scrotal circumference should be at least 28 cm and preferably 30 cm at the time the ram is to be used. Some rams in good condition may have scrotal circumferences of up to 40 cm. Scrotal circumference increases with age.

Females

Udder assessment of ewes is essential to determine the potential reproductive performance of the animal. Ewes should have a broad and wide stance in the rear. Close-set rear legs can rub against udder and teats when full of milk. Checking udders is a simple operation, in a commercial setting the easiest way to assess a ewe's udder is to turn her over on her rump. You do not do this in the judging ring though. Instead, on a quiet, restrained animal, carry out the following:

- Reach down, between the animals' hind legs and cup the udder in the palm of your hand.
- Place your other hand on the ewe's back, which will steady her and help balance you.
- Feel the size and density of the udder, and whether both sides are equal. Use your thumb and fingers to feel the length of both teats for evenness.
- If the ewe is wet (in milk), her udder should be much larger than your cupped hand.
- If the ewe is dry (a maiden ewe or ewe without lamb), her udder will have some size and development but is smaller than those of wet ewes. Dry ewes often have some cleavage between the two sides, not seen in wet ewes.
- In dry sheep teats can feel greasy or dirty.

Structural soundness

Refer to the cattle section for main concepts and structural issues. These structural issues are transferrable to sheep.

Observing an animal's structure

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1. Start with head (check the eyes, nostrils and bite, then the poll or horns and ears), neck, brisket, shoulders, front legs and feet.
2. Next view along the underside to the sheath, then testicles in males; or udder in females and the back legs and feet.
3. Follow your way up to the pin bones and hips, then the topline and back to the shoulders and neck.
4. Examine the wool (unless the sheep are wool-less) making sure it is even, has no black fibres and is growing on soft, loose, pink skin.

The animal should be viewed from the side, from the front, and from behind. It should be allowed to walk out, and again be viewed from the side, from the front and from behind to confirm any suspicions of poor leg structure or tracking problems such as a stiff gait or under stepping.

Determining carcass finish through feel

The primary objective of running your hand over an animal is to estimate the amount and uniformity of finish (fat cover) and to determine the quantity of the muscle in the loin and quarter, to determine the total muscle volume.

Only carry out the following steps with quiet, handled, restrained animals. Always be gentle with animals when manually handling and do not surprise them.

The way the animal stands can affect what you are able to feel. The animal should be standing square. If the animal is not freshly shorn, you must work your fingers through the wool to the skin level.

Steps:

5. Place your flattened and outstretched hand over the top of both shoulders with the spine in the centre of your hand. Feel the width and smoothens along the top of the shoulders. Heavily muscled animals will be wide and full; lightly muscled animals will be narrow and angular.
6. To determine the amount of loin muscle, move your hand from the shoulder, down the topline (spine) to the last ribs. Lightly squeeze or cup your hand over the loin area to evaluate the depth and width of loin. The loin should be a wide, deep and long muscle, containing the 'expensive' cuts in the animal.
7. Next handle the animal to determine the width and length of rump and size and fleshing of hind legs using your hands to measure. The leg muscle should feel firm and heavily muscled and the muscle should extend down the thigh toward the hock.
8. Determine the finish (fat cover) over the animal's top line (spine), progressing back toward the top of the shoulder. Then determine the finish near the elbow and run your flattened hand toward the last rib.
9. Take note of the amount and uniformity of finish over the various areas of the animal's rib region. Fat feels soft, muscle feels firm and bone is hard.
10. Look at the animal's brisket and pin bones/tail area for signs of excess fat. Fat is important for carcass eating quality and tenderness. Inadequate fat cover results in tougher meat and excess fat provides wastage.

Interpreting animal condition into a fat score

Fat score is used for live animal assessment of slaughter animals and body condition of breeding stock. In New South Wales, fat score has been adapted to assess the nutritional status of adult sheep. Scores are based on the tissue thickness (both fat and lean muscle tissue) at the GR site. The GR measurement site is 110mm from the carcass midline over the 12th rib. This site is used as a reference point because it is easy to measure on both the live animal (by manual palpation) and the hot carcass and provides a good indication of the overall fatness (and yield) of the whole carcass.

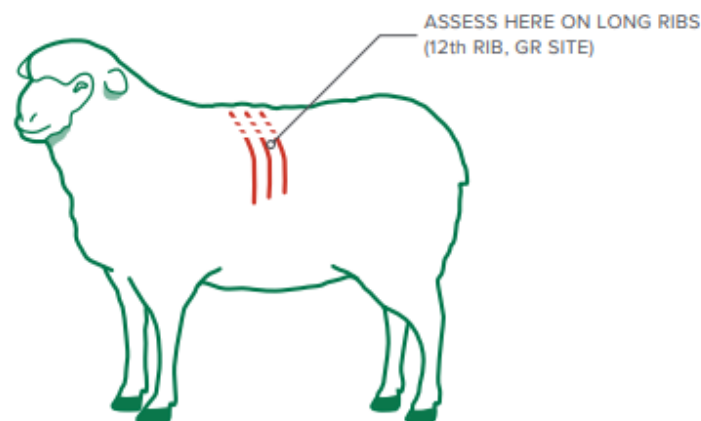


Figure 5 Source: [MLA, Sheep assessment manual](#)

Fat score	1	2	3	4	5
Condition at GR site over spine and loin					
	Fat score 1	Fat score 2	Fat score 3	Fat score 4	Fat score 5
Images source: MLA, Sheep assessment manual					
GR tissue depth in mm	0 to 5 mm Not eligible for MSA	6 to 10 mm	11 to 15 mm	16 to 20 mm	20 mm and over
Feel at the GR 12 th long rib site	Individual ribs felt easily. Cannot feel any tissue over the ribs	Individual ribs easily felt but some tissue present	Individual ribs can still be felt. Can feel more tissue over the rib	Can only just feel ribs. There is fluid movement of tissue	Ribs cannot be felt. Tissue movement very fluid
Overall description	No fat and very little muscle on the backbone and ribs. Seriously low body condition. Quite unacceptable — prone to disease and at risk of death.	Individual ribs easily felt but some tissue present. A small amount of muscle along the backbone but no fat. The least acceptable condition for thrift. Nutrition requires attention.	Good level of fat and muscle with rounded ends of ribs and top of backbone. A good level for Merino ewes from joining to lambing and an ideal condition for young sheep.	Can only just feel ribs. Over-round across backbone, lots of muscle and fat. Tending towards over-fat.	Ribs or backbone cannot be felt. Over-fat and too fat for slaughter.

Table 2 Adapted from [MLA, Sheep assessment manual](#)

- No breeding animal should be in score less than 2.
- Breeding animals in score 2.5-3.5 will provide optimum production and profitability.
- Breeding animals that are too thin (<2.5) will have poor production, increased risk of mortality and poor reproduction.
- Animals that are too fat (>3.5) will have good production but stocking rate will be compromised which has a direct impact on profitability.
- No growing sheep (i.e. weaners) should be less than score 2.

Judging - quick checklist

- ☒ *Take notes on each animals strengths and weaknesses.*
- ☒ *Determine the class purpose (carcase only or breeding and carcase)*
- ☒ *Are all the animals the same breed?*
- ☒ *Are all the animals the same sex?*
- ☒ *Are all animals the same age?*
- ☒ *Compare the frame size between all animals in the class*
- ☒ *If it's a class of females are there any females that are proven breeders (carrying offspring or offspring at foot)?*

For each animal:

- ☒ *Check head (check the eyes, nostrils and bite, then the poll or horns and ears), neck, brisket, shoulders, front legs and feet.*
- ☒ *Check underside of the animal including udders in females and scrotum and sheath in males, followed by back legs and feet.*
- ☒ *Check the pin bones and hips, then the topline and back to the shoulders and neck.*
- ☒ *View the animal from the side, from the front, and from behind.*
- ☒ *Watch the animal track looking for athleticism, under stepping or any signs of pain or stiffness.*
- ☒ *Conduct a visual and manual assessment of carcass concentrating on evenness and amount of fat cover and volume of muscle*
- ☒ *Make placings*

Junior judging talk

Good judges of livestock have a special quality, in that they can accurately and concisely describe an animal or group of animals so that an audience knows exactly what the judge was thinking and saw. The ability to describe animals accurately and concisely is the foundation of the judging reasons process.

Giving reasons will help you do the following:

- Develop a system for analysing livestock
- Improve your public speaking and presentation skills
- Organise and state your thoughts more clearly
- Develop your memory

Every animal and judging class is different. Every judge has a different experience of viewing the class in front of them and threshold of what they will tolerate in animals in front of them. Therefore, there is no one correct way to place a class. Nor is there a right or wrong way to deliver or present a set of reasons. The judge's ability to explain exactly what they see is what places them above others. The following sections should be used as a guide to help you structure your reasons talk.

What is the judge looking for?

The judge will determine the value of your reasons and presentation throughout your talk based on the following factors:

- **Accuracy:** You must tell the truth! You must mention the important characteristics of the animals in the class correctly. Accuracy is very important. You will lose points for incorrect statements that do not match the animals in the class you are judging.
- **Terminology:** Use correct terminology. Incorrect terminology detracts from the value of your reasons.
- **Ability to compare animals in the class:** Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each animal in the class then put them into a place order from first to fourth. Describe all the major differences in your reasons for putting each animal in their place. Leave out small things that leave room for doubt.
- **Presentation and delivery:** Present your reasons in a logical manner that is pleasant to hear, is clear and is easy to follow. If reasons are poorly presented, the value of accuracy may be lost because most of what you say doesn't 'get through' to the listener. Use well-organised statements and use correct grammar. Emphasize the important comparisons and be confident in your talk.
- **Speaking ability:** Speak slowly and clearly in a conversational tone. Speak loudly enough to be understood but avoid talking too loudly or too rapidly. Own your talk! For the 2 minutes you are talking, you are in charge!
- **Length:** A well-organised, properly delivered set of reasons must never be more than 2 minutes in length.
- **Dress:** the following excerpt is [regulation from the Agricultural Societies Council of NSW](#), the governing body surrounding agricultural show competitions. *"Competitors must be neatly and suitably attired. Male competitors must wear a tie and female competitors must be attired to a similar standard (e.g. tie or scarf). Blazers/jackets are normally worn at Zone, State and National Finals. In Meat Breeds Sheep Judging, hats need not be worn unless outdoors, and jackets may be removed when handling sheep. Points will be deducted for poor presentation. Blue jeans are not normally worn for major competitions. Shorts and thongs are not permitted."*

To read further on Agricultural Societies Council (ASC) rules and regulations for meat sheep and beef cattle judging read the following documents.

- [Agricultural societies council of NSW- Meat breeds sheep judging competition](#)
- [Agricultural societies council of NSW- Beef cattle judging competition](#)

The following is a copy of an Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Judging Competitions scoring sheet. Note the breakdown of total marks for importance of each element from above, in your reasons talk.

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES COUNCIL OF NSW JUDGING COMPETITIONS ORAL CLASS

Competitor's No.....

Breed/Class.....

	POSSIBLE SCORE	SCORE
ORAL:		
(a) Accuracy of observation	15	
(b) Ability to compare exhibit	15	
(c) Speaking ability	10	
(d) Presentation and dress	10	
	Sub Total (50)	
	Less time penalties	
	TOTAL ORAL SCORE	

Figure 6 Source: [ASC NSW, Beef cattle judging competition.](#)

Note taking for junior judging (formulating an oral response)

At most shows in the junior judging competition you will be given a card to fill in then hand back to the organisers. It will look something like this.

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES COUNCIL OF NSW JUDGING COMPETITIONS NON-ORAL CLASS

Competitor's No:
Breed:

Placings:

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

Figure 7 Source: [ASC NSW, Beef cattle judging competition.](#)

You will not get this card back, so it is recommended while you are beginning at junior judging to always bring your own notepad and pen and be prepared! There is nothing more unfortunate, then seeing a junior judge giving an oral presentation on a class who has got nervous and completely forgotten the animals or placings they made. Use your notes until you get to the skill level where you don't need them.

Attached at the end of this document is a reason notes card which structures the types of notes you should take for each class. You can print it off to take to a competition or set up a page in your notepad using its structure. The next page shows how the reasons notes are broken down to link to your talk structure.

Remember in most classes you will only have up to 10 minutes to look at the animals so

- write notes quickly in point form or shorthand and
- record your placings

Competition section: _____ Class: _____

Breed: _____

Placings: 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____

1st place number _____

Why you placed first (strengths)

2nd place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 1st because:

Placed above 3rd because:

3rd place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 2nd because:

Placed above 4th because:

4th place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 3rd because:

What to say? - Talk structure

Look at the colours on the previous page to work out what information goes where in your talk structure.



This is a guide, always make your talk your own. However, you could start with...

I'd like to thank the _____ Show Society and organisers for putting this Junior Judging competition on. I would also like to thank the breeder and owners for the line-up of animals that we are judging. I would lastly like to thank and commend the other competitors.

I have placed the animals in the following order _____ (e.g. 3,4,1,2)

I have placed animal number _____ in 1st place because

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____ etc. (List the features and strengths using terminology that make it stand out as the most appropriate animal in the class in terms of characteristics for its purpose. Justify why those features make it the 1st place animal)

I have placed animal number _____ in 2nd place. This animal _____ (briefly list some strengths and features) _____ however I placed it behind the animal in first place because _____ (list some less desirable features as compared to the animal placed above it. Justify why these features make the animal stand in 2nd place) _____.

I have placed animal number _____ in 3rd place. This animal _____ (briefly list strengths and features) _____ however I placed it behind the animal in second place because _____ (list some less desirable features as compared to the animal placed above it. Justify why these features make the animal stand in 3rd place) _____.

With your final animal NEVER say it is last- this is rude to the breeder, and unprofessional. Instead say:

I have placed animal number _____ in 4th place. It is a good animal, _____ (briefly list some strengths) _____ however does not have the _____ (explain some of the more desirable features of the animals you have stood above it. Justify why this animal stands in 4th place) _____.

Finish with... I'd like to thank you all for listening to my talk and the opportunity to judge these animals today. THANK YOU!

Useful words and phrases

Delivering your reasons for placing animals in a order is almost as important as the actual order you selected. Remember, you are required to give both descriptions of what you have seen and comparisons between the animals you are asked to judge.

You only have 2 minutes, so don't go overboard. Be accurate, concise and descriptive and do not 'waffle' on. If you don't remember a point go onto the next pair, you are to discuss.

The following provides some useful expressions that will help you give accurate reasons that are both descriptive and comparative, so gaining extra points without going over time.

Descriptive terminology		
- Balanced - Volume of saleable meat - Highest proportion of lean muscle: fat - Frame - Compact - Wide/Width - Deep/Depth - Proportioned - Strong - Tremendous - Prime	- Sound - Percent of high-priced cuts - Suitable for today's market - Outstanding - Fullness - Rounded - Convex/concave muscle - Capacity - Growth for age - Converter of forage - Fleshy	- Muscle development - Greater hip (or hook) to pin ratio - Area or depth of eye muscle - Dressing percentage - Fat cover - Muscle development - Masculine or feminine - Strength of spine - Athletic or stiff - Meaty - Superb

Comparative terminology – used to make comparisons between animals		
- Greater - Thicker - Wider	- Deeper - Better proportioned - Stronger	- Shorter - Narrower - Meatier

	More desirable characteristics	Less desirable characteristics
General	- Growthier - Great size, volume and performance	- Lacks growth and do-ability - Needs more size, volume and performance
Structure	- More structurally correct - Stronger topped, stronger loined - Squarer, leveller rumped - Wider at the pins	- Poorer structure or structurally incorrect - Weaker topped, weaker loined - Drops at the pins - Narrower at the pins
Frame and growth	- More performance - Larger framed - Earlier maturing - Adequate bone - Great growth for age	- Lacked growth and performance - Smaller framed - Later maturing - Finer boned - Less growth for age

Chest, neck and shoulder	• Laid in shoulder or smoother shouldered • More size and scale • Smoother behind the shoulders • Trimmer dewlap or brisket	• Coarse shouldered or open shouldered • Lacked size and scale • Devils grip behind the shoulder • Too much condition in front end or wastey in front end
Condition	• Ideal condition • Even fat coverage • Possessed less wastage through... • Easier doing	• Less or too much condition • Uneven fat coverage • Wastey, fatter, over finished • Harder doing
Volume and capacity	• More arch and spring of rib • Deeper • Greater volume • Greater length • Greater hip to pin length	• Flatter ribbed • Shallower • Less volume • Less length • Less hip to pin length
Muscling	• Heavier muscled • Deeper through the flank and hind quarter • Wider, thicker topped • Greater volume of muscle • Greater percent of high-priced cuts • Greater percent of lean meat to fat	• Lighter muscled • Shallower through the flank and hind quarter • Narrow through the top • Less volume of muscle • Less volume of high-priced cuts • Greater percent of fat to lean meat
Feet and legs	• Heavier boned or adequate bone • Stood square and balanced in feet • Stood wider both front and rear end • More desirable set of hock • Strong pasterns	• Finer boned or heavier boned • Splay-toed, pigeon-toed, toes out • Stood narrower both front and rear end • Post legged, sickle hocked • Weak pasterns
Gait and movement	• Moved out further, freer, more agile and easier moving • Moved with greater strength of top • Moved with more levelness of rump	• Restricted in his/her movement, appears stiff • Roached top while moving • Dropped pins when moving

Delivering your talk

Presentation and delivery are necessary for a good talk. Everyone is nervous the first time they give a set of reasons, but with practice, it will become easier. These six factors for delivering a good set of reasons will help you:

- **Flow** – The way you put words together into phrases, sentences, and paragraphs is considered flow. A group of short, choppy phrases, each standing alone, is boring and difficult to follow. A group of long, smooth-flowing phrases is enjoyable for the listener. Begin your reasons at one speed and keep a similar pace throughout the entire set. Don't talk too quickly or too slowly. Speaking without hesitation will allow you to receive a higher score for your reasons. The only times to pause are between pairs and when you need to take a breath.
- **Inflection** – Voice inflection is one of the most important items in your delivery. Place emphasis on the words that describe the important characteristics of each animal. Careful selection of key words to emphasise will take some practice, but in time, it should become a normal part of your oral reasons.
- **Volume** – The volume you use to deliver your reasons will depend on how you normally speak and the size of the room. If you are soft spoken and are in a large room, increase the volume of your voice in order to be heard and understood clearly. If you are normally loud and are giving reasons in a small room, decrease the volume of your voice so it doesn't echo.
- **Eye Contact** – Try to look at the person who is listening to your reasons. If you maintain eye contact throughout the entire set, your reasons will be more professional. Direct your discussion toward the overjudge even if you do not look the judge straight in the eye. It is easier for some people to look at the top of the judge's head, or tie when giving reasons rather than looking him or her directly in the eye. You will receive a higher score if you do not gaze into space or look at the ground. If you are using notes, don't fiddle with the paper or read solely from the notes. Use them as a guide and remember to keep eye contact with the overjudge and listeners.
- **Distance** – Depending on your voice and stature, the distance you stand from the judge will vary. A short, soft-spoken person should stand closer to the judge than a tall, deep-voiced person whose voice carries well. Nonetheless, 6 to 10 feet is generally adequate. If you feel confident enough and have a portable microphone, try a little bit of movement to calm your nerves. You could step toward the animal you are talking about then step toward the overjudge and audience and vice versa.
- **Stance** – When giving a set of reasons, make the situation as comfortable as possible for the judge and for yourself. Stand upright, with your hands behind your back or placed at your sides. Do not put your hands in your pockets. If you have a microphone, place one hand firmly on the microphone and the other hand at your side. If you are using a microphone, pause to check it is on before you start your talk, as it can be flustering to start a talk and then restart again when the microphone kicks in. Place your feet squarely at shoulders' width. Avoid rocking back and forth or rolling on the balls of your feet.

Further Reading

ASC, 2017, "[Beef cattle judging competition](https://www.agshowsnsw.org.au/files/competitions/Group%20Finals/2017%20Beef%20Cattle%20Judging%20Sheets%2010%20May%202017V2.pdf)", Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Limited, [https://www.agshowsnsw.org.au/files/competitions/Group%20Finals/2017 Beef Cattle Judging Sheets 10 May 2017V2.pdf](https://www.agshowsnsw.org.au/files/competitions/Group%20Finals/2017%20Beef%20Cattle%20Judging%20Sheets%2010%20May%202017V2.pdf), viewed 24/02/202

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Reasons notes for competitors

Competition section: _____ Class: _____

Breed: _____

Placings: 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____1st place number _____

Why you placed first (strengths)

2st place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 1st because:Placed above 3rd because:3rd place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 2nd because:Placed above 4th because:4th place number _____

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Placed below 3rd because: