



Kentucky 4-H Poultry Judging Contest Past Production Division



Giving Oral Reasons

Jacquie Jacob and Tony Pescatore, Animal and Food Sciences

Oral reasons are a very important part of a poultry judging contest. This is the opportunity participants have to defend their placings of an egg production class. In addition, oral reasons are an important tool in the development of organization and communication skills, which in turn will build self-confidence.

Oral reasons are evaluated on a number of criteria including Appearance and delivery (24% of the final score); Proper use of terms (20%); Accuracy of statements (20%); and Completeness of coverage (36%).

Appearance

The participant giving oral reasons should stand on both feet and face the judges. They should stand straight without putting their hands in their pockets. Excessive use of the hands during the presentation of reasons can be distracting. One method to prevent this is to clasp both hands behind the back. The judges will be sitting about 5-6 feet from the person giving a set of oral reasons. It is important that the participant stand reasonably still. Constant rocking back and forth can be distracting. No caps or hats should be worn, and the participant should not be chewing gum. Long hair should be kept away from the face.

Delivery

Participants should speak clearly, distinctly, and loud enough to be heard without shouting. Opening and closing statements should be used. An example of an opening statement is:

I am contestant number five and I place this class of White Leghorn past production hens 1-2-3-4.

Similarly, a good closing statement is:

For these reasons I place this class of past production hens 1-2-3-4. Are there any questions?

The reasons should be given without long pauses between statements and the participant should look confident in his or her opinions.

Proper Use of Terms

Participants are evaluated on their use of the correct terms (which are discussed later in this publication). It is also important that the terms be used correctly—just mentioning them is not sufficient to demonstrate an understanding of the terminology. The judges may ask the participant to define some terms that were not used or that were used but without a definition of the term given.

Accuracy of Statements

While this section is worth 20% of the oral reasons score most judges try not to dock points if you got the placing wrong since this would be a ‘double-deduction’ on the placing of a particular class of hens. Instead, many will give extra points if the participant has clearly demonstrated that he or she saw all the hens in the class.

Completeness of Coverage

It is important to indicate why one hen was placed over another rather than just describing the hens individually. It is important to stress the crucial differences and indicate the importance of these differences in the placement of the class. Just stating that you “placed a class 1-2-3-4 because of bleaching” is not sufficient. You need to indicate what the specific differences in pigmentation between the hens were. It is important to mention as many comparisons as possible.

In order to present a complete set of oral reasons the following is required:

- Knowledge of what constitutes a good egg layer
- Knowledge of the body parts of a hen and terminology for describing past production
- Knowledge of reasons organization
- Ability to write accurate notes
- Confidence

For information on what constitutes a good egg layers, see the factsheet 4AJ-07PA: *Kentucky 4-H Poultry Judging Contest: Evaluating Past Production Hens*.

During the time allotted for examining the hens it is important that accurate notes are taken. Even though participants might not be able to use these notes while giving oral reasons (juniors can use notes but seniors may not), they will be helpful in organizing the oral reasons presentation. Each participant has only two minutes to give their oral reasons. It is possible to get a lot of information within those two minutes, but organization is a must.

First time participants can use the note-taking form included at the end of this publication. In the Kentucky state contest, all participants can use the form to make notes, but seniors cannot bring any notes in with them when giving oral reasons. It is important to remember these note-taking sheets are meant as a learning tool and cannot be used during national poultry judging contests.

Correct Terminology

You should know the appropriate names for the various parts of the chicken (see Figure 1).

It is also important to know the meaning of some key terms.

Abdomen: The rear region of the body of the hen which includes the area between the ends of the pubic bones and the tip of the keel.

Abdominal capacity: The distance of the pubic bones (width) and between the pubic bones and tip of the keel bone (depth).

Abdominal fat condition: Condition of the fat pad as indicated by the softness and pliability of the abdominal region.

- **Softness** and **Pliability** of the abdominal area are determined by gently rolling a pinch of skin just below the pubic bone.
- **Softness** indicates a lack of fat in the abdomen while **hardness** means considerably more fat is present.

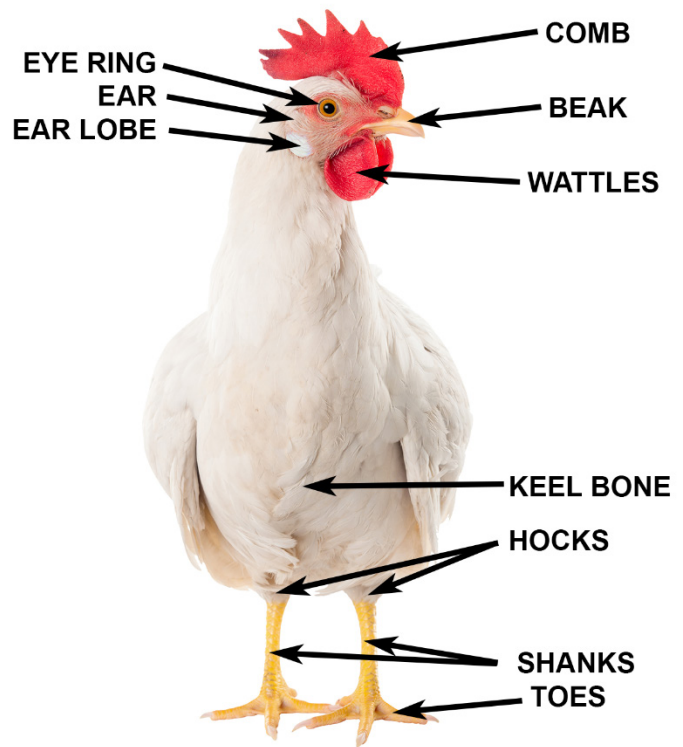


Figure 1. Anatomical reference for the locations of the key body parts important in evaluating an egg laying hen.

Abdominal fat pad: The location in the abdomen where fat is deposited in a hen.

Bleaching: The disappearance of the yellow pigment.

Keel: The breast bone of the hen.

Pigmentation: The presence of yellow pigment in the various parts of the body of yellow-skinned breeds.

Pubic bones: The two slender, flat bones that terminate at the side of the vent of the hen.

Vent: The opening at the back of a hen where she expels waste and the opening from which she lays her eggs.

Vigor: Refers to the health and activity of the hen.

Reasons Organization

An egg production class in a 4-H poultry judging contest consists of four hens. Oral reasons are given to describe and compare the individual hens. Each class of four has three pairs—top, middle, and bottom. Most of the comparisons and descriptions will take place within these pairs.

The important factors in evaluating a laying hen should be discussed in order of importance. That is:

- Pigmentation/bleaching
- Abdominal capacity
- Abdominal fat condition
- Molt

Each set of oral reasons should follow the same format and be divided into the following sections:

- Introduction.
- Class winner's description compared to the rest of the class or Top pair comparison.
- Middle pair comparison.
- Last place hen's description compared to the rest of the class or Bottom pair comparison.
- Summary sentence.

The **introduction** to a set of reasons is always the same except for the number of the contestant, overall placing, and a description of the pairs.

Example:

I am contestant number 12 and I place this class of Single Comb White Leghorn hens 2-3-1-4. I had an easy top pair, a close middle pair, and an easy bottom pair.

The **description of the class winner** should be a brief statement outlining the advantages or good qualities in comparison to the rest of the class.

Example:

I placed hen number 2 at the top of the class because she was the most thoroughly bleached hen in this class, indicating she has laid the most eggs of the four hens.

Optional:

If I could improve my class winner, I would like to see a slightly larger abdominal capacity.

Each comparison within a set of reasons is organized in the same manner in that they are composed of sentences that compare the two hens within each pair. After introducing the pair, additional important factors within the pair should be mentioned. This allows for the discussion of other areas to compare in each pair.

The phrases “**in addition**” and “**furthermore**” are commonly used. “**Grant**” sentences can also be used to acknowledge a positive aspect of the lower placed hen over the hen placed above it. The closer the placing, the more important and detailed these statements should be. Other phrases for “grant” statements include “**I admit**,” “**I concede**” or “**I realize**.”

Example:

*In my **top pair**, I placed hen number 2 over hen number 3 because hen 3 showed considerably **more** pigment remaining in the front of the shanks than did hen 2 indicating she had not laid as many eggs as the top placed hen 2. While both hens had similar abdominal capacities, hen 2 had less abdominal fat as indicated by a softer, more pliable abdomen.*

*For my close **middle pair**, I placed hen 3 over hen 1, again on the basis of pigmentation. While both hens showed **similar** bleaching, I felt that hen 1 had **slightly more** pigment remaining in the front and back of her shanks. **I do grant**, however, that hen 1 had a **slightly larger** abdominal capacity than hen 3, being slightly **deeper** and **wider** between the pubic bones and with a little more spread between the pubic and keel bones. Both hens had similar abdominal fat condition.*

*In my **bottom pair** I placed hen 1 over hen 4. hen 4 had a large amount of pigment remaining in her shanks. She also had the **smallest** abdominal capacity of the class and a considerable amount of fat in her abdomen. These factors indicated that hen 4 was clearly the **poorest** layer in the class.*

The reasons are then finished off by repeating the overall placing of the class in a **summary sentence**. It is important that the placing at the end of the reasons be the same placings given at the start.

Example:

For these reasons I place this class of Single Comb White Leghorn hens 2-3-1-4.

Optional: If molt was not used in placing the class, that can be mentioned as well.

Example:

Molting was not a factor in placing this class, or none of the hens showed any signs of molt, or molt was present but did not play a role in the placing of the class.

Optional: You can finish up by asking if there are any questions.

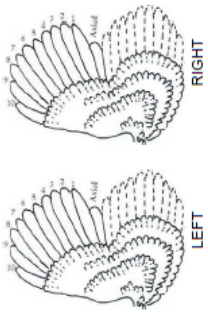
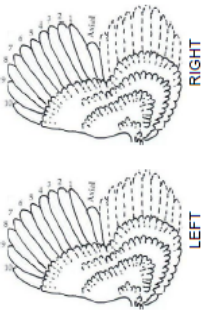
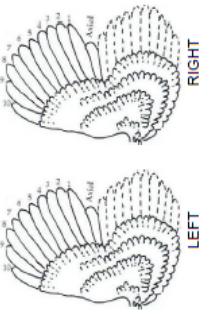
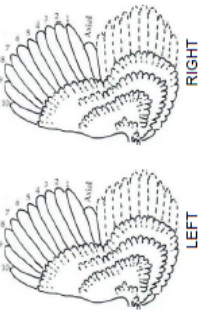
It is important to remember that there is no perfect set of reasons, and it is unlikely that any two participants would give the exact same oral reasons.

Taking Notes

The key to giving accurate and polished oral reasons is notetaking. It is the opportunity to write the descriptions and criticisms in an orderly manner. The goal in studying notes is not to memorize the notes while preparing each set of reasons. Instead, the notes serve to help in recalling the hens from the class.

For those just learning to judging past production hens the poultry reasons card can help with notetaking (see Figure 2). This form can be used at the Kentucky state contest and will be made available to those wishing to use it while examining the hens in a past production class. It is important to note that seniors cannot use notes while giving oral reasons.

Figure 2. Notetaking card for use when evaluating a class of past production hens.

POULTRY REASONS CARD			ABDOMINAL FAT	MOLTING <i>(Indicate missing or new 1* feathers)</i>	NOTES						
CAGE	PIGMENT REMAINING	ABDOMINAL CAPACITY									
	BODY PART	COLOR*									
1	Vent	V DY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 Depth 2 3 4 5 X	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK vs THICK vs THIN vs VERY THIN VERY HARD vs HARD vs SOFT vs VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT							
	Eye ring	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Ear lobe	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Beak	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Bottom of feet	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Front of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Back of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Side of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Top of toes	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Hock	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	2	Vent					V DY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 X Depth 2 3 4 5	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK vs THICK vs THIN vs VERY THIN VERY HARD vs HARD vs SOFT vs VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		
		Eye ring					V DY DY Y PY VPY W				
Ear lobe		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Beak		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Bottom of feet		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Front of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Back of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Side of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Top of toes		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Hock		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
3		Vent	V DY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 X Depth 2 3 4 5	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK vs THICK vs THIN vs VERY THIN VERY HARD vs HARD vs SOFT vs VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT						
		Eye ring	V DY DY Y PY VPY W								
	Ear lobe	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Beak	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Bottom of feet	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Front of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Back of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Side of shank	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Top of toes	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	Hock	V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
	4	Vent	V DY DY Y PY VPY W					Width 2 3 4 5 X Depth 2 3 4 5	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK vs THICK vs THIN vs VERY THIN VERY HARD vs HARD vs SOFT vs VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		
		Eye ring	V DY DY Y PY VPY W								
Ear lobe		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Beak		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Bottom of feet		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Front of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Back of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Side of shank		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Top of toes		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									
Hock		V DY DY Y PY VPY W									

*Color: VDY = Very Dark Yellow; DY = Dark Yellow; Y = Yellow; PY = Pale Yellow; VPY = Very Pale Yellow; W = White

Figure 3. Example of notes taken using the poultry reasons card for a set of past production hens.

POULTRY REASONS CARD						
CAGE	PIGMENT REMAINING		ABDOMINAL CAPACITY	ABDOMINAL FAT	MOLTING <small>(indicate missing or new 1" feathers)</small>	NOTES
	BODY PART	COLOR*				
1	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 Depth 2 3 4 5 X	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK VS THICK VS THIN VS VERY THIN VERY HARD VS HARD VS SOFT VS VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		Second hen handled Bleached to top of toes Very light pigment on t-o-t Shows good health and vigor 5 new feathers - both wings Obvious top hen
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Top of toes	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Hock	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
2	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 Depth 2 3 4 5 X	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK VS THICK VS THIN VS VERY THIN VERY HARD VS HARD VS SOFT VS VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		Third hen handled Bleached to hock Light pigment on t-o-t and VL on hock Shows good health and vigor 5 new feathers - both wings
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Top of toes	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Hock	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
3	Top of toes	VDY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 Depth 2 3 4 5 X	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK VS THICK VS THIN VS VERY THIN VERY HARD VS HARD VS SOFT VS VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		First hen handled Pigment in all parts DY in vent Shows good health and vigor 7 feather molt on both wings (7 new + 6 new and 1 missing) Obvious bottom hen
	Hock	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Top of toes	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Hock	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W					
4	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W	Width 2 3 4 5 Depth 2 3 4 5 X	PINCH AND ROLL ABDOMINAL SKIN VERY THICK VS THICK VS THIN VS VERY THIN VERY HARD VS HARD VS SOFT VS VERY SOFT POOR FAIR GOOD EXCELLENT		Last hen handled Bleached to tip of beak Shows good health and vigor 7 feather molt on both wings Slightly less pigment than hen 3
	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Top of toes	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Hock	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Vent	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Eye ring	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Ear lobe	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Beak	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Bottom of feet	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Front of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
	Back of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W				
Side of shank	VDY DY Y PY VPY W					

*Color: VDY = Very Dark Yellow; DY = Dark Yellow; Y = Yellow; PY = Pale Yellow; VPY = Very Pale Yellow; W = White

RANKING = 1 2 3 4 3

An example of a set of notes taken when using the poultry reasons card to evaluate a class of past production hens is shown in Figure 3. The notes can then be summarized to help organize a set of oral reasons for the class. The notes in Figure 3 have been summarized in Figure 4. We have the ranking down the left side – 1-2-4-3. Then there are summary notes comparing each pair. With this summary, it is very simple to give your oral reasons. All the information is organized in a logical manner and follows the outline recommended for oral reasons.

Example Set of Oral Reasons

You start out the oral reasons with an opening statement to catch the judges’ attention.

Good morning. I am Contestant number 4. I place this class of White Leghorn production hens 1-2-4-3. I had a close top pair, easy middle pair, and a close bottom pair.

Then you give a short introduction to the main points of the first pair of hens placed.

For my close top pair, I placed hen 1 at the top of the class and over hen 2 because of pigmentation loss.

Then give a short paragraph discussing the key differences of this top pair.

Both hens were bleached through to the hock and tops of toes, but the intensity of pigment remaining was least in hen 1. This indicates that she has laid the greatest number of eggs, placing her at the top of the

class. hen 1 also had the largest abdominal capacity, being wider between the pubic bones. This indicates that she currently has a higher rate of egg production than the other hens in the class. Both hens had similar levels of abdominal fat, as indicated by the thin pinch of abdominal skin and the soft condition of the abdomen.

Note the particular counts of fingers in the abdominal capacity are not state. It is simply noted that hen 1 was wider between the pubic bones. It is the comparison that is important, not the actual number of fingers, since everyone’s fingers will be different.

Then you do the same thing with the middle pair of hens, starting with a short introduction to the main points comparing the hens.

For my easy middle pair, I placed hen 2 over hen 4 based on pigmentation.

Again, you give a short paragraph discussing the details of the key differences between the hens in this middle pair.

While hen 2 was bleached to the hock and tops of toes, hen 4 was only bleached through to the beak, having some pale-yellow pigment remaining in the tip of the beak. I do grant, however, that hen 4 showed better abdominal fat condition with a thinner pinch of abdominal skin and a softer feel to the abdomen. In fact, hen 4 had the best abdominal fat condition of the class, indicating she has the least amount of abdominal fat of all the hens in the class. Both hens had similar abdominal capacities.

Figure 4. Organization of the notes from Figure 3.

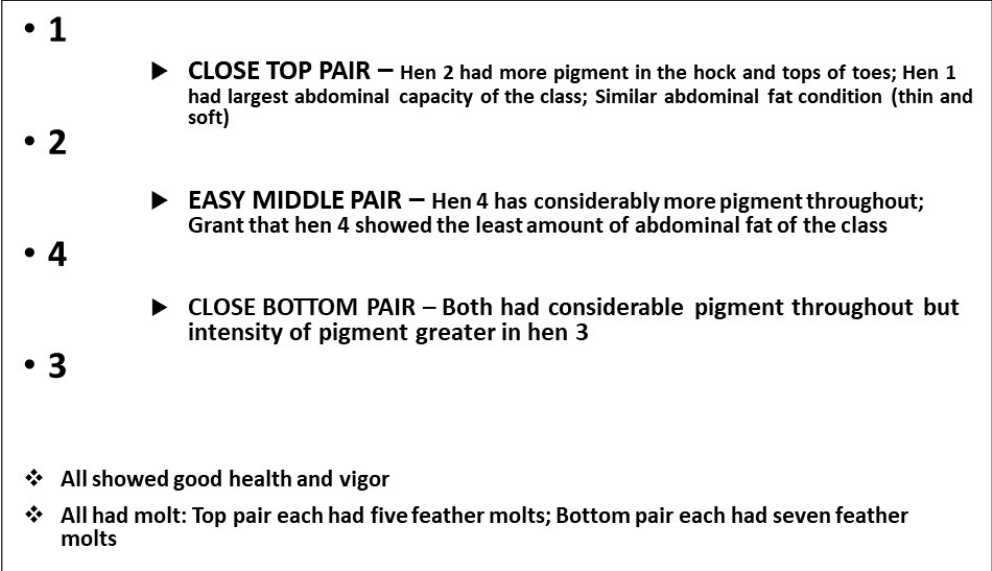


Figure 5. Blank table for taking notes at the national 4-H poultry judging contest where the poultry reasons note card in Figure 2 cannot be used. Note: You will have to draw this table on a blank sheet of paper at the start of the contest since you cannot bring the table into the contest with you.

HEN #1	HEN #2	HEN #3	HEN #4
P-	P-	P-	P-
C-	C-	C-	C-
F-	F-	F-	F-
M-	M-	M-	M-
Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Class placing: - - -			

Where:
P = Pigmentation
C = Abdominal capacity
F = Abdominal fat condition
M = Molt

Again, note the specific finger counts for abdominal capacity are not given, just that they are similar.

And then you do the same thing with the bottom pair.

For my close bottom pair, I placed hen 4 over hen 3 based on pigmentation.

Then you give a short paragraph discussing the key differences in this final pair.

While both hens had considerable pigment remaining throughout, I felt the intensity of the remaining pigment was lower in hen 4.

Then mention the last place hen, and why she is last.

hen 3 had the most pigment remaining in the vent, eye ring, ear lobe, beak, shanks, hock, and tops of toes, clearly placing her at the bottom of the class. hen 3 also show the most amount of abdominal fat of all the hens in the class.

Then you can mention any factors that were not used in placing of your class.

Molt was present in all hens but did not factor in the placings. The top pair of hens each had 5-feather molts while the bottom pair of hens each had 7-feather molts. All hens showed good Health and Vigor.

And finally, you finish with a closing statement.

For these reasons, I place this class of White Leghorn past production hens in the order of 1-2-4-3. Are there any questions?

National 4-H Poultry Judging Contest

Seniors participating in the national event are not allowed to bring any notes. They can bring in blank sheets of paper which can then be used to create a simple note-taking table such as that shown in Figure 5. The make-believe notes in Figure 6 are used to demonstrate how this can be done. It is important to remember that seniors can NOT use notes while giving oral reasons.

Figure 6. Example of a set of notes taken using the table in Figure 5.

HEN #1	HEN #2	HEN #3	HEN #4
P- Through bottom of the foot, most intense yellow in shanks	P- Throughout	P- Well into shanks, slight yellow over top of toes and shanks	P- Through shanks with slight yellow on toes
C- 2x2	C- 3x4	C- 2x4	C- 3x4
F- Fat, hard abdomen	F- Soft, pliable abdomen	F- Soft, pliable abdomen	F- Fat, hard abdomen
M- One feather in each wing	M- None	M- None	M- None
Notes: Small, pink comb	Notes: Bright eye, large red comb	Notes:	Notes:
Class placing: 2 - 4 - 3 - 1			