

What is 4-H Rabbit Showmanship?

Rabbit Showmanship is an excellent activity for young 4-H members. The purpose of the contest is to recognize youth who have taken proper care of their animals, learned important information about them, and become proficient at handling them correctly. The spirit of friendly competition appeals to kids who thrive on challenge, and 4-H shows offer opportunities for kids to make friends who share their interests.

Unlike ARBA breed classes, which are based solely on a rabbits' appearance, Showmanship is a team effort between bunny and owner. To develop a line of show rabbits that will excel in breed classes takes years of trial and error, multiple generations of breeding, and a sizable bankroll. But all that Showmanship requires is one bunny, the supplies to properly care for it, and a dedicated youth who is eager to learn.

In 4-H Rabbit Showmanship, contestants show off their ability to properly handle and care for their rabbits. Contestants must demonstrate that they can pick up, hold, and carry a rabbit. Sometimes they are even required to remove it from a cage. They must examine it for signs of illness and for ARBA showroom disqualifications. Judges give points for the cleanliness, health, and condition of the rabbit, as well as for the personal tidiness and professionalism of the contestant. Lastly, participants must answer verbal quiz questions about rabbit husbandry and their breed's standard.

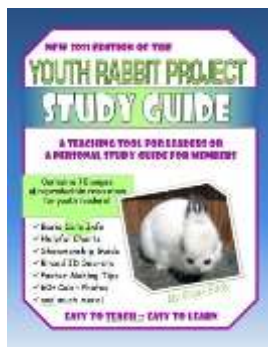
The exact guidelines for rabbit showmanship contests vary from region to region. For example, some counties require the 4-H'er to verbally explain their actions while examining the rabbit. Other formats expect the exhibitor to be silent unless the judge asks them a question. But though some of the details are different from place to place, all showmanship formats require the same basics from the contestants. The tips below will apply to pretty much every 4-H member who hopes to take home the showmanship rosette.

Youth Rabbit Showmanship Contest Tips and Guidelines

- Take your time. Showmanship is not a race. Don't rush your examination. If you do, you may forget steps, or even if you do them all, the judge might miss them. Calm and steady wins the prize.
- If while you're holding your rabbit upside-down, it flips back on its feet, don't worry! Simply turn it back over and pick up where you left off. You don't have to apologize to the judge or anything like that. Don't act distressed. It happens.
- Use a small to medium-sized breed. We're talking Dutch, Havana, Mini Rex, Thrianta, Florida White size. Though many winners have used dwarf or giant breeds, my opinion is that the small-to-medium sized ones work best. They are small enough to handle without difficulty, but large enough that the judge can see each step clearly. My state

has us "feel the meat" on the shoulders, midsection, loin, and hindquarters separately. If you ask me, that's kind of ridiculous on a Netherland Dwarf.

- Take extra good care of your showmanship rabbit. Keep his cage clean so there is no chance of him getting dirty from droppings. Don't use a white rabbit: he could suddenly pee his coat the day of the contest and you'd be in trouble. Before the contest, trim his toenails.
- Trim his toenails. Trim his toenails. Trim his toenails. (Got that? A lot of kids don't seem to!)
- Know your breed's Standard of Perfection. This is essential. Memorize the schedule of points and the min/max/ideal weights. Know the disqualifications. It helps if you know other breeds, too, but it's crucial to know your own very well.
- Look the judge in the eye when you are speaking to him or her. Really, this is important!
- Make sure your rabbit has a legible tattoo in its left ear. And please, make sure you know what its tattoo is in case the judge asks!
- If you have long hair, tie it back so it won't fall in your face. Do not wear jewelry or sandals.
- On the day of the contest, keep your rabbit in his cage or carrier as long as possible. While you are waiting for your turn, don't hold your rabbit in your arms. The longer you hold him, the more antsy or hot he may become, and he will be less willing to sit still on the table during the contest.



If you liked this article, check out the book "The Youth Rabbit Project Study Guide" for more like it! Available from Rabbit Smarties Publishers, this book is written to help young 4-H and ARBA members excel with their rabbit project. The Study Guide is **rich in advice** on rabbit care, health, showing, and breeding, and includes **expert study tips for contests** like 4-H showmanship and ARBA royalty. Designed to be a 4-H rabbit leader's aid, the **pages may be reproduced** for use in a club setting. Includes an abundance of charts and color photos. 72 pages. Full Color. \$20.00

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