

Central Washington Animal Agriculture Team



Fact Sheet # 1011-2003

Training, Grooming and Showing Market Lambs

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SHOWMANSHIP: EXPECTATIONS

Showmanship:

Showmanship can be defined by an effective presentation of your lamb. You are judged on your ability to:

- 1) Control your lamb
- 2) Present your lamb
 - a. Bring out its best characteristics
 - b. Show out the faults of your lamb so they are less obvious to the judge
 - c. **MAKE YOUR LAMB LOOK ITS BEST**
- 3) Knowledge of your lamb and the sheep industry.

With this in mind, you must commit yourself to hard work and practice in advance to arrive at the fair with a lamb that is well trained and groomed, and to have the confidence in yourself needed to compete successfully.

My Perspective on Judges and Showmanship Styles

Each judge has a slightly different philosophy and style when it comes to evaluating showmanship. These different styles are probably the most noticeable in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). Modern showmanship techniques are to: show lambs slick sheared or in very short fleece; show standing-up, with the lamb braced at all times; and show the lamb from both the left and right side. The more traditional style, which is still seen around the PNW, is to show a lamb in a 60-90 day fleece. In addition, most traditional judges prefer exhibitors to only work the lamb from the left side or

the front of the lamb, and to remain squatting, only standing when the judge handles the lamb or when the exhibitor is moving the lamb. One judge is no more correct than another, but because of these differences it is critical to attend the judge's demonstration, ask questions, and watch the judging of other classes if possible. As an exhibitor, parent, leader, advisor, or spectator you do not have to agree with the judge; however it is good sportsmanship and within the "Show Ring Code of Ethics" to respect the decision of the judge.

Because of these large differences between judges and styles it is critical for show personnel and superintendents to hire a judge that compliments the style of the show. This makes for a positive experience for all involved in the show, including the judge. So, in short, if your show does not want to change showmanship styles, don't hire a judge that expects the exhibitors to change with times. Also, don't ask a judge to change their style—it is unfair to both the exhibitor and judge; and unhappy kids, parents, leaders and judges are likely.

With this being said, there are things exhibitors can do to be prepared for whatever style of judge shows up at their fair. As a showperson in today's show rings it is critical that you have a well-trained lamb, know the basics of showmanship, have knowledge of your lamb and the sheep industry, and be prepared to listen to "what the judge is looking for" AND be willing to modify your showmanship style to meet the request of the judge.

BEFORE THE SHOW

Rules/Regulations:

It is your responsibility, as an exhibitor, to read the general and special rules governing the show you are attending. By sending in your entry form you are agreeing to abide by and uphold the rules of the show. If you are unwilling or unable to fulfill these obligations, it is best that you do not exhibit at that show.

Show Box Equipment:

• Show Box	• Fitting Stand
• Electric shears*	• 20- and 23-tooth combs with cutters*
• Wool card	• Small wool card or poodle comb
• Lamb blanket and/or sock	• Halter
• Hoof trimmers	• Hand Shears (Sharp)
• Livestock Soap	• Hot air blower or towels
*optional	

Training:

Time: Spend time with your lamb—clean their pen, provide them with feed and water, and they will quickly learn you are “OK” and they will become your friend. I believe in “training” an animal, not “breaking” an animal. Therefore, you must start preparing for the show months before the actual date. Gain your lamb’s trust, and you will be rewarded with friendship and success from your lamb. There is no “Quick-Fix” for hard work and time when training an animal.

Halter Training: Halter training is a great way to train your lamb to handling, while gaining valuable exercise needed by your market lamb to develop muscle definition. Each time you handle your lamb, handle the lamb’s legs and practice leading your lamb with your hand. The lamb will quickly become accustomed to you handling it, and the training of your lamb for showmanship will be easier.

Practice Showing: Practice showing your lamb with someone acting as the judge, remembering to keep the lamb’s head held high, back straight, and feet positioned correctly. The lamb will quickly learn its job and what you expect of it. Reward your lamb when it performs as expected and then return it to its pen. Do not overwork your lamb, which will create bad habits and fatigue for both you and the lamb.

Trimming:

Hooves: Trim the lamb’s hooves about one (1) week prior to the show. This will allow the lamb to heal if you accidentally cut into the quick and the lamb becomes temporarily lame. Remember, the general

public will be viewing your lamb and developing opinions about the sheep industry in general—so we want our lambs to be healthy and happy.

Fitting:

As stated earlier, some shows in the PNW allow slick shearing, while others require lambs to be sheared by specific dates. Know the rules and follow them accordingly. If you are given a choice—most modern judges prefer slick sheared lambs, whereas; traditional PNW judges will prefer the lamb to be exhibited in at least a 30-day fleece.

Slick-shearing: The main reason for slick shearing is to place emphasis on the confirmation of the lamb. Slick shearing lambs for show requires more than simply “shearing” the lamb. These lambs will be in the public eye and evaluated for market quality. For these reasons, it is important that lambs are slick-sheared uniformly without ridges, nicks, or cuts. See enclosed handout, “*Successfully Slick-Shearing Show Lambs*” by Sarah M. Smith, edited by Paul Kuber.

In-Fleece: If you will be showing your lamb “in fleece” (30 days or more since the lamb was sheared) I also suggest following the “slick-shearing” methods when you have your lamb initially sheared so there are no ridges or nicks. This will make preparing your lamb easier with a more successful outcome. The lamb should be washed, dried, and blanketed 3-4 days before the show so the wool has time to completely dry and set prior to fitting. The goal of fitting a fleece and slick shearing are still the same: Enhance the overall appearance of the lamb, while maintaining a natural look.

Spot-Shearing, Blocking, or Cutting-Out: Some exhibitors “spot-shear”, “block-out” or “cut-out”, leaving wool longer on the rump and/or back to make the lamb appear taller or more muscled. If you are going to do this, be sure to blend the longer wool avoiding a “bloomer” or “square box” look. A GOOD FIT JOB IS the enhancement of the lamb’s positive attributes without the judge “knowing” those enhancements have been done—keep your fit job “natural looking”. Many shows have made rules against leaving the wool longer on the rump region because of the devaluation to the pelt. YES-slick-sheared lambs are worth more than lambs that have been “cut-out”, because many show lambs do not go directly to slaughter. They are often fed out for another 30-45 days, and in this case a uniform pelt is worth more than an uneven fleece.

Belly/Lower Legs: When trimming the belly and the legs keep the look natural by blending the edges. Do not leave blunt edges or cuts. This will enhance the trimness, balance and overall eye-appearance of the lamb.

DON'T: As a judge, I have seen youth take small animal clippers and remove the hair from the legs and/or head of the lamb. I recommend against this fitting style, because it makes the lamb look thin-boned and refined—and this is not the characteristics we are looking for in the sheep industry.

Carding/Clipping: When preparing your lamb, be sure to secure your lamb safely on a fitting stand. Never leave a lamb unattended on a fitting stand. Most fitters lightly dampen the fleece with a soapy water mix, which can be applied with a spray bottle. It is critical to card the lamb completely before using the hand clippers. It doesn't matter how great of fitter you are—if you don't thoroughly card the entire fleece, it is impossible to get a smooth fit on the lamb. Also, pay attention not to "rip card"—if you hear a ripping sound and the lamb stamps its feet and moves in pain, you are probably "rip carding". "Rip carding" not only hurts the animal, but it also yields an uneven carding of the fleece.

AT THE SHOW

Dress:

Exhibitors should not only dress neatly, but they also need to pay attention to appropriateness of their dress. Remember, you will be bending over and squatting down at times, so wear clothes that are comfortable and appropriate. **YOU ARE SHOWING YOUR LAMB—NOT YOURSELF.** You do not want to wear cloths that distract from your lamb. Some good rules of thumb concerning dress code are:

- 1) Leather boots or shoes for safety.
- 2) Clean jeans and slacks. No faded or ripped jeans.
- 3) Button-down shirts or polo shirts—**Conservatively buttoned up.**
- 4) No hats

- 5) No grooming equipment needs to be brought into the show ring for safety reasons (i.e. wool cards in back pockets).

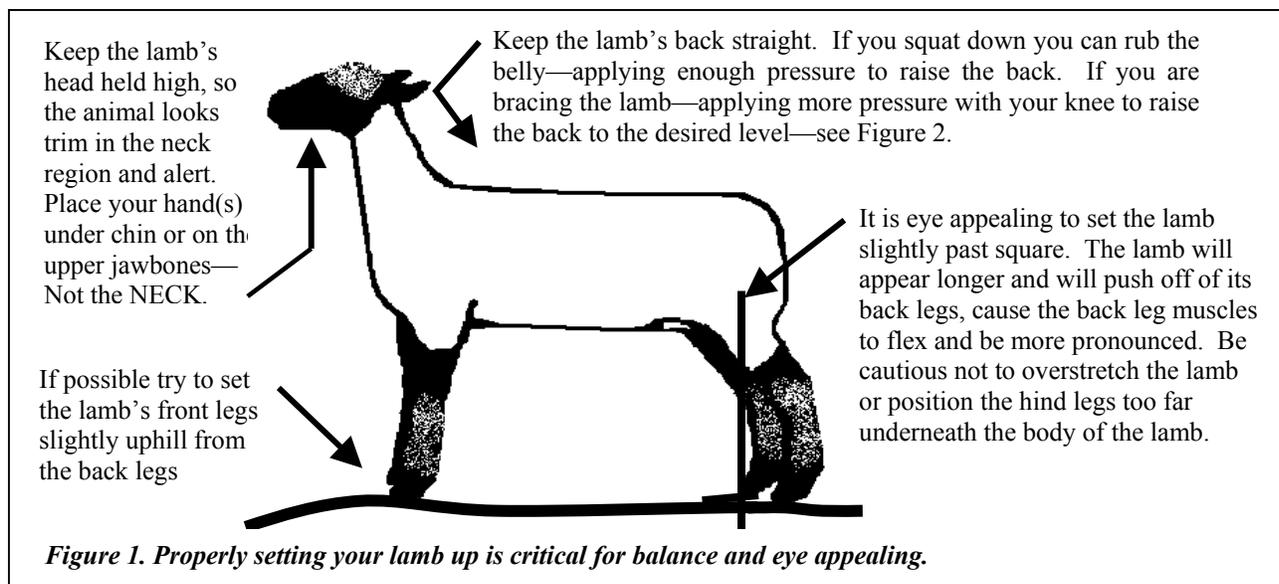
Showing:

Before the Show: Evaluate the show ring prior to showmanship, paying close attention to where low spots are located. You want to make sure the lamb's front feet don't end up in the low spots. You always want to set the lamb going uphill .

Leading: Lead the lamb from the left side with the left hand when possible. Keep your hand under the CHIN of the lamb, not on the neck. This will allow you to keep the lamb's head held high and alert, while not choking the lamb. Keep the lamb between you and the judge. If your lamb will not move, gently lift up on the lamb's dock. For smaller exhibitors, who cannot reach the dock of their lamb, apply pressure behind the head of the lamb.

Lining Up: If the judge pulls you into line, your lamb's shoulder should line up with the shoulder of the first lamb in line. Keep your lamb parallel to the other lambs. If the judge lines you up head-to-tail, always line up straight behind the lamb at the front of the line. **KEEP THE LINES STRAIGHT**—this will make it easier for the judge to evaluate and compare lambs.

Setting Up: Set the lamb up so that the legs are square, with the front legs square under the lamb. When placing the hind legs, some judges prefer the exhibitor to set the lamb slightly past square to make the lamb appear longer. Lambs that have good feet and legs look very eye appealing when this style is used. However, if your lamb does not have straight back legs, be sure to set the lamb's legs so they remove the judge's focus from the lamb's faults. If you are going to squat down, be sure to rub your lamb's belly, keeping the lamb's back straight (Figure 1).



Bracing: Train the lamb to brace or push against your knee. When the lamb braces, its muscles flex and tighten up to make the lamb feel firmer. The muscles also appear larger and more defined.

- 1) To brace a lamb, stand so the inside of your left knee is placed against the lamb's breastbone. Gently push back on the lamb, encouraging your lamb to push into you. With proper training your lamb will learn to gently push back on your knee causing the leg and loin muscles to flex and be more defined (Figure 2). →
- 2) ALL FOUR FEET SHOULD REMAIN ON THE GROUND AT ALL TIMES. Never pick the lamb up so that the front feet are off the ground. This is poor showmanship and portrays the show sheep industry in a negative light for the general public watching the show.

General: Know where the judge is and stay alert. The judge may handle your lamb at any moment or ask you to move to another place in the show ring. ENTER THE RING SHOWING YOUR LAMB AND LEAVE SHOWING YOUR LAMB. First impressions are critical, especially in large shows. Only stop showing if the judge informs you that you may do so.

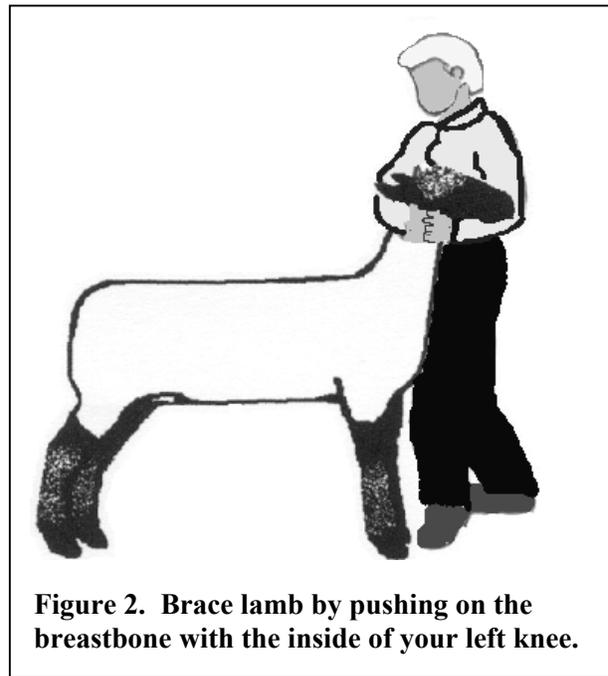


Figure 2. Brace lamb by pushing on the breastbone with the inside of your left knee.

CONCLUSION

Finally, remember the goals of showmanship are to learn about your lamb and the sheep industry, to showcase lamb and lamb products in a competitive event for the general public to observe and learn from, and last, but not least—HAVE FUN. If you have done your best—leave the ring with your head held high, despite your placing. Learn from your successes and mistakes, watch other showpersons, and improve your skills for the next time you enter the show ring. Showmanship is a constant learning experience, because showmanship styles and philosophies are constantly changing all over the country. And last, but not least; REMEMBER GOOD SHOWMANSHIP ETHICS—Win with graciousness and lose with dignity—then everyone a winner.