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# **Perceived Educational Value of Two Teaching Approaches for Improving Knowledge of Youth Leaders and Team Coaches**

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**Abstract:** Surveys were completed by equine leaders/coaches to measure changes in perceived judging competency and to assess if a judging Web site and an on-line resource are effective teaching aids. Results found that participants felt more knowledgeable about performance horse classes and better understood proper format, organization, and presentation of oral reasons. Data indicate that the information presented to participants in the workshop and Web site was informative, significantly increasing participants' understanding of judging procedures, and, in turn, presented an easily accessible way to potentially improve the competency of coaches and the ability of the youth they instruct.

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## **Introduction**

Youth horse judging activities continue to grow in numbers and number of interested persons. In the state of Texas alone, approximately 1,500 contestants competed in 10 multi-county contests in 2006 (Gibbs, Edwards, & Acuff, 2006), and many of them also participate in contests at major stock shows or at the state

4-H level. Top teams represent the state of Texas in several National and World show contests as well. The strength and growth of the state youth horse evaluation program is grass roots, starting at the county level. There are approximately 200 coaches and leaders throughout the state of Texas. With this many coaches and students exhibiting interest in horse judging, the need exists for a heightened degree of knowledge/skill supported by easily accessible, new information. The skills and abilities of local volunteer leaders largely determine how effectively 4-H Horse clubs function as an educational environment (Brady, Kinsler, & Balschweid, 2005).

Therefore, Texas A&M University is actively involved in offering preexisting seminars and clinics to aid in the development of youth. However, a need to offer new adult learning environments exists in order to provide additional resources and support for youth. Additionally, educational opportunities are needed to further support existing printed material (Davison et al., 2007).

Web site information has been determined to be one successful approach to disseminate information, specifically equine-related material (Denniston & Callahan, 2005; DePew & Griffin, 2005; Williams & Malinowski, 2005). Therefore, an adult workshop and judging Web site were designed to address the need to offer information to a broad spectrum of students and coaches in order to meet the demands of a dynamic horse industry.

The objectives for developing an adult based workshop and a Web site were to:

- Expand the availability of educational resources needed to increase the competence and confidence of those individuals instructing judging team participants and other interested persons,
- Instruct coaches and leaders on methods to teach oral reasons and the defense of judgments made by contestants, and
- Measure learning outcomes of individuals accessing two types of direct contact education.

## Methods

Two new educational tools were developed, implemented, and evaluated to further support an established history of teaching horse evaluation. A seminar was designed and conducted to engage adult leaders and coaches in instruction on an advanced level with room for questioning and discussion. A 1-day seminar was taught by Animal Science faculty who are also professional horse show judges. The subject matter consisted of classes commonly seen in youth judging contests, such as western pleasure, western riding, reining, hunter under saddle, and hunter hack. Additionally, a section on development and delivery of oral reasons was presented to workshop participants. This workshop was designed to introduce the basics of equine evaluation and the specific criteria used to place each class, along with discussion on common problems encountered when teaching and coaching youth.

A post-seminar exit survey was utilized as the evaluation method. Validity of the survey was established by a group of industry professionals to ensure proper interpretation of each question, as well as to secure the appropriate questioning for this research idea. In this way, face validity was established.

The second educational tool developed was an on-line equine evaluation page placed on the Texas A&M Animal Science Web page <<http://animalscience.tamu.edu>>. The Web page is designed to offer on-line conformation classes to be judged and utilizes a combination of slide presentations, audio, and script. The

main page has a written description of the criteria for judging conformation classes and offers practice classes to be judged that contain either two or four horses per class. The two horse classes are offered as a means of teaching beginners to focus on an individual pair; this way a more detailed approach can be taken when judging the more traditional four horse classes.

Each class is critiqued in advance by professional judges in order to provide official placings and class cuts. Classes also contain a written and oral explanation of the official placing that is presented by previous members of the Texas A&M Horse Judging Team. The program used for the construction of the classes was Microsoft Powerpoint®, and the voice-over was accomplished using Camtasia studio® software. An on-line evaluation has also been developed to be completed (voluntarily) by those accessing the information on-line. Each Web site survey asks if the participant is a coach. This way the surveys can be screened to only include responses from the target population: adults and coaches.

## Survey Development and Data Analysis

The post-seminar exit survey included 13 questions related to the comprehension of the presented material. Routinely used response criteria allowed participants to answer:

- No
  
- Maybe
  
- Probably yes
  
- Definitely yes
  
- Already knew

Each individual was also asked to identify the number of years they had spent coaching/teaching youth.

The on-line survey was prepared with the assistance of an on-line survey program (SurveyMonkey.com) in order to measure the effectiveness of the judging material on the Web site. This survey uses responses such as no, undecided, probably yes, and definitely yes and was made available for a period of 90 days. Persons accessing the judging Web site were asked to volunteer to participate in the on-line survey once they had viewed the judging material. Survey responses were monitored via e-mail addresses to ensure that each individual was only credited for completing one survey. The data collection resulted in 51 responses out of 60 workshop participants and 26 adult/coach responses out of 2,082 persons accessing the Web site, respectively. A software program (Analog 6.0®) was used to track the number of times the on-line judging Web page was accessed; however, multiple viewings by individuals accessing the site could not be verified. Face validity was established in the same manner with the on-line survey as the workshop survey.

The study used descriptive statistical methods to measure learning outcomes. The results included percentages and means in order to summarize and interpret the data. Additionally, reliability of the surveys was measured using Cronbach's alpha. Both programs were examined by equine professionals versed in conformation and performance in order to establish content validity.

## Results and Discussion

### Workshop

The post-seminar evaluations were completed by 82% females and 18% males, consistent with the gender of those attending. The mean years of coaching experience was 6 years, and the mode was 1 year.

Responses from the survey indicate that the overall judging ability of participants increased after participation in the workshop, with a high reliability measure of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80; mean =  $3.58 \pm 0.78/4.00$ ). Participants were asked if the material presented in the workshop and educational delivery process increased their ability to teach the evaluation of both Western and English classes. The majority of respondents answered either probably or definitely yes in regards to Western (86.3%) and English (84.3%) categories (Table 1). Furthermore, individuals reported that their understanding of oral reasons increased (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83; mean =  $3.83 \pm 0.55/4.00$ ). When asked if the information presented during the reasons lecture would help them do a better job teaching students proper reasons format (90.2%), organization (92.1%), and presentation (94.1%), the majority indicated either probably or definitely yes (Table 2).

**Table 1.**

Responses of Workshop Participants When Asked If They Are Now More Competent at Teaching Contestants to Evaluate Western and English Performance Classes

Percent Response					
Class	No	Maybe	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes	Already Knew
Western (n = 153)	2.6	6.5	26.8	59.5	4.6
English (n = 102)	1.0	9.8	23.5	60.8	4.9

**Table 2.**

Responses of Workshop Participants When Asked If the Information on Oral Reasons Would Help Teach Contestants How to Prepare and Deliver Oral Reasons

Percent Response (n = 51)					
Reasons Category	No	Maybe	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes	Already Knew
Format	0.0	3.9	11.8	78.4	5.9
Organization	0.0	2.0	23.5	68.6	5.9
Presentation	0.0	2.0	13.7	80.4	3.9

At the time the workshop was conducted, the Web site had been completed but not posted to the Internet. Workshop participants were given a preview of the Web site and questioned regarding the on-line material.

The mean response to questions concerning the perceived usefulness of the Web site as a training aid was  $3.80 \pm 0.45/4.00$ , with an internal consistency of 0.86. The participants answered affirmatively when asked if the Web site would assist coaches in teaching beginners (98.0%), contest preparation (98.0%), and oral reasons (98.0%). These responses are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

Responses of Workshop Participants When Asked If the On-line Conformation Training Seen at the Workshop Would Supplement Coaching/Teaching of Youth

Percent Response					
Category	n	No	Maybe	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
Beginning youth	48	0.0	2.0	6.3	91.7
Contest preparation	49	0.0	2.0	18.4	79.6
Oral reasons	48	0.0	2.0	20.8	77.2

The responses from the exit surveys clearly demonstrate that a short course addressing adult leaders/coaches can be successful in improving horse judging knowledge and understanding. Based on the mean and mode years of experience and the responses from the workshop, this form of delivering information to the public is needed, especially to better assist coaches and leaders who are either new to judging or are inexperienced.

## Judging Web Site

Completed surveys suggest the material from on-line conformation classes positively affected coaches' overall knowledge of halter judging (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80; mean =  $3.23 \pm 0.84/4.00$ ). Positive responses were received from participants when they were asked if the information presented increased their ability to teach conformation (83.3%), balance (91.6%), structure (82.6%), and quality (92.0%). Additionally, participants were asked if the information presented increased their understanding of oral reasons (92.3% positive responses) (Table 4). The most overwhelming statistic is the consistency with which judging Web site participants, as well as participants in the workshop, responded positively to their improved ability to understand and teach oral reasons (98.0 and 92.3%, respectively).

**Table 4.**

Responses from On-line Judging Participants When Asked If the On-line Conformation Classes Increased Their Knowledge to Teach Youth to Recognize Correct Conformation, Balance, Skeletal Structure, Quality, and Preparation of Youth for Oral Reasons

Percent Response					
Category	n	No	Undecided	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
Conformation	24	12.5	4.2	37.5	45.8
Balance	24	4.2	4.2	45.8	45.8
Structure	23	0.0	17.4	52.2	30.4

Quality	25	8.0	0.0	36.0	56.0
Oral reasons	26	0.0	7.7	11.5	80.8

The ability of a youth leader/coach to understand and teach sound judging practices is imperative to the learning of youth participants. In support of this concept, prior testing of students' knowledge of various equine categories (i.e., health and diseases, breeds, anatomy, equipment, conformation, nutrition, reproduction and history) revealed that the lowest scores were from the conformation section. This data indicates that conformation is an area that requires improvement and that states should target this area for program learning (Nadeau, Alger, Hoagland, & Chameroy, 2004). Program development is important as participation in youth programs has proven to have a positive relationship with the development of life skills (Gamon & Dehegedus-Hetzel, 1994; Ward, 1996). The purpose of both teaching programs in the study was to increase adults' knowledge in the area of horse judging in order to improve their ability to teach youth judging team members. The results of completed surveys from participants in a 1-day clinic indicate that this type of teaching program is extremely effective and is definitely viewed as a needed educational delivery system.

Society has become dependent upon educational material that can be accessed quickly and easily. Research indicates people are currently using the Web as a means of gathering information, and this is a proven means of distributing information to people interested in equine (Denniston & Callahan, 2005). Furthermore, in the study reported here, the total number of times the on-line judging classes was viewed in a 3-month time period was 2,082. This does not take into account the individuals who accessed the site multiple times, but is still a large population of interested individuals and further substantiates the interest in on-line learning.

The offering of an adult leader workshop, along with the organization of an on-line judging Web site, meets the demand for disseminating judging related information to the public. Furthermore, on-line access to teaching material is beneficial for people from a multitude of geographical locations. This allows people desiring to improve their understanding of judging access to a more economical and timely means of learning. There are many programs geared to the educational development of youth, but the discussed equine workshop is the only one of its kind in the state of Texas that is completely focused on the development and training of adult leaders and coaches. Future comparable programs will benefit the educational training of equine industry youth.

## Summary

The objectives of the study reported here, as stated previously, were to measure the learning outcomes of individuals accessing two new, modern forms of education for adult coaches and leaders. The initial goal for implementing these educational tools was to improve the ability of horse judging team coaches to teach the youth under their guidance. The results clearly show these objectives were met and that this type of program is beneficial to leaders/coaches.

In order for youth to be successful and receive the maximum benefit from participation in these types of programs, they require intelligent guidance from adults. However, all adult leaders/coaches may not have the experience to further advance the youth under their guidance; therefore, they need a way to gain access to supplemental information. The creation of workshops and on-line judging Web sites, such as those described here, provide a needed service to the public and in turn enhance youth programs. Additionally, this form of outreach education may be effective in other areas of Extension education, such as providing easily accessible information concerning various livestock species, economic topics, and other educational subjects.

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