SHOWMANSHIP TRAINER

4-H Dog Project

TRAINING TIPS FOR SHOWMANSHIP CLASSES

For the trainers:

- Remember-dog and child’s attention is short-and there is much information to be learned, absorbed, and practiced until it becomes routine, then improved upon again. Don’t do long cram sessions, especially if at the end of agility, obedience, rally practice!
- Start with the basics. If they get a good foundation of the skills, and have basic knowledge of their breed, questions they may be asked, and general all around functions, the rest will come.
- Short exercises work best. Break things up. I suggest that you do a portion of class on skills such as stacking (should be done every class, multiple times, hand stacking, free stacking, quickly and frequently) gaiting, and patterns. Then teach a concept--how to utilize your ring, use a table, free stacking, presentation, show the bite, etc--then take the last 15-20 minutes and work on knowledge and/or grooming.
- Grooming of the child and dog should be as the manual states. Do not, as the trainer, vary on either side of the issue.
- Prepare the 4-H’er for any and all things that can happen, within your ability. Then give them the speech every week until the show that strange things will happen--weather, dog lame, kid sick, vermin running through the ring, leash breaks, the possibilities are endless. Judges know this, and will reward the child who handles the situation to the best of their ability. Teach them that showmanship is about being fluid and working with that dog on that day.

Attitude starts with you as the trainer and mentor.

- One of the best examples I was ever given was from a senior 4-H judge who said if we all judge obedience or agility, we should all within a couple minor points, give the same score and placements. Showmanship will not be the same way, and it should not be the same way because there is not a standardized set of rules, points and deductions. There cannot be, as it is not performance based.
- Stop dealing in absolutes. If you, as the trainer, understand the subjective nature of showmanship judging, and explain that it is all right and how it works, your 4-H’ers will do better.
- If the 4-H’er understands WHY they are learning and performing these skills, they will grasp them better. Try to compare it to halter class for horses, FFA judging, livestock judging, etc. Show them videos of breed shows, utilize your resources. There is one question I always ask at state, and it is one of my deciding ribbon factors. We will discuss this at training.

Above all-make it fun. Showmanship should always be about a good team, with the handler focusing on presenting that dog to the best of their ability.