



## **Poultry Showmanship** (Updated: November 2011)

The purpose of poultry showmanship is for the exhibitor to have the opportunity to prove to the judge that the exhibitor is knowledgeable about poultry in general, their showmanship bird and that he or she possesses the proper handling ability. Proper handling means that he or she can catch, restrain and hold the bird without hurting it and without that bird hurting the handler.

**Showmanship is the time for the exhibitor to be judged, not the bird per se' since the bird has already been judged.** It is the exhibitor's time to shine.

### **CHOOSE THE CORRECT BIRD.**

Choosing the correct bird can make the difference between winning and losing. This bird should be exhibition quality and you will probably enter it in every show, but it does not need to be a champion bird per se' although if it is you would get higher points in your knowledge of picking the best representation of the breed that you own.

Shop carefully for the temperament you want and the proper size. A small child should be using a bantam bird, as it will fit their hands better than a large fowl, while older exhibitors can use any size bird. The bird should be clean, gentle; cage trained and trained to pose in the cage.

*Judges want to see your skill* in choosing the best bird you have according to the APA and ABA Standards. This shows them you have knowledge about a good exhibition quality type bird.

You should be working with more than one bird training it for showmanship. If you get to a show and one bird goes into a molt or develops other problems you will have a good back up bird to use for showmanship. A bird with missing feathers, broken feathers, goes into a molt or other problems should not be used in showmanship. This does not bode well showing your knowledge in picking the right bird for showmanship exhibition and shows the bird is not in show condition. No, the bird is not being judged in the way it would be in the poultry judging class but you and your skill at choosing a bird is being judged.

## **THE BIG THREE**

### ***TRAINING YOUR BIRD***

Cage training, posing, and handling are the three areas that you need to teach your bird. The goal of this training is to make the bird comfortable staying in a cage, going in and out of the cage, standing in a pose to look like the bird in the Standards, and being held and passed without the panicked flapping around. This training takes time; some birds learn quicker than others and some breeds are naturally calmer.

### ***CAGE TRAINING***

Your showmanship birds should be handled daily. It is so important that it trusts you and will not panic or try to escape when you hold it. Hand feeding makes this chore fun, easy and perhaps is the best way to teach your bird to trust you.

A few weeks before the show, place your bird or birds in a small cage about the size of a show cage. Provide water but no food. Twice a day, provide food by hand. It will not take long for your bird to eat from your hand. When it does, you can provide food in the dish and hand feed once a day. If it still walks to you when you open the cage door, then you can provide food in the dish twice a day and only give treats by hand. If you provide treats, (small pieces of bread or fruit work well) each time you go to the cage, the bird will walk to you when you open the cage door. This is what you want the bird to learn. He will relate opening the cage door means it will get a treat and will do this when the judge opens the cage door to examine the bird during judging.

## ***TRAINING FOR THE POSE: THE ART OF STANDING STILL***

Many judges ask for you to pose your bird either in the cage or on a small pad outside of the cage. Birds must learn to do this and while it sounds difficult, in reality it is quite simple. Posing in the cage is very important.

The first thing you must know is what the bird looks like in the *Standard of Perfection or Bantam Standard*. Brand the outline of that picture into your mental vision. You want your bird to stand just like that: the same head posture, tail angle, and wing position. You want the judge to see this too, so you will always pose your bird so the judge has a perfect side view.

Use a small rug on a table to practice your training, as this best resembles the show table. Start your training by holding your bird with the legs between your fingers and the breast resting in your palm. When the bird is calm, lower it until the feet are touching the rug. While still holding the breast, use your other hand to move the head and tail to the positions that are in your head. Some birds respond quickly to being gently stroked under the beak. Slowly remove your hand that is holding the bird. If the bird moves, pick it up and start over. Do this as many times as is necessary to train your bird. Your goal is for the bird to stand for about 10 seconds after you remove your hands. Never place your hand on the bird's back as this will make it set or squat. Work with your bird for about 10 minutes several times a day. You should see improvement each time. On rare occasion, a bird will not cooperate. If this happens, start working with another one.

Learning the basics of handling is so very important. The main ones are, the "home position", the "hand off", the "pick up" and the "take back". These will become automatic as you practice them.

## ***HANDLING: THE ART OF RESTRAINT***

### **THE HOME POSITION: HOLD YOUR BIRD CORRECTLY**

The birds' legs should be hanging down between your fingers, the head is toward your elbow, the bird's breast resting in your palm, your thumb holding the wing away from the body and the bird's body held against yours at the waistline. Your free hand can rest at your side or on the birds back. This is the "home position". Never hold them by their wings or (the worst) upside down by the legs. .

### **THE HAND OFF: PASSING YOUR BIRD**

When you pass your bird to a judge or anyone, use this technique. It always looks smooth, and does not allow the bird a chance to flap or worse yet, escape.

Starting at the "home position", your free hand will take the leg and wing that is away from your body, slightly roll the bird away from you at the same time your hand that has been under the bird slides up and hold the other wing and leg. With the bird's head pointing toward the person ready to receive it, wait for them to place the legs between their fingers and get possession of the bird. Watch their face and they should glance up at you when they have control and then you can release your bird. This is your "hand off".

### **THE COOP IN: PLACING YOUR BIRD IN A CAGE**

Starting with your bird in the "home position", you will open the cage door with your free hand then proceed to the "hand off". The only difference is that you will be placing your bird in the coop. Remove your hand that is holding the breast first and then smooth the bird with the other hand before closing the cage door. Place your hands to your side and turn to face the judge.

### **THE COOP OUT: TAKING YOUR BIRD OUT OF A CAGE**

At some point, the judge will ask you to pick up your bird while it is in the cage. This is when you will be thankful that you chose the right bird and have taken the time to teach it proper manners. Ideally, when you open the cage, your bird will walk toward you. If not, you will need to turn the bird toward you. Place one hand on the back securing the wings and slide your other hand under it so that you can secure the legs. Once you have total control of the bird, bring it out of the cage head first and take it to the "home position". This is the "coop out".

## THE TAKE BACK: RECEIVING YOUR BIRD

When receiving your bird from a judge or anyone, they should pass the bird with its head toward you. If a judge hands you the bird, tail first or side first, they are actually seeing if you will take it. If you just stand there, they will turn it so that you can conduct your “take back” correctly. It is allowed for you to say, “Turn my bird around please”. If you take the bird tail first, you will not receive your handling points.

As the judge holds the bird, slide one hand under the bird and one on top securing the legs and wings. Glance up to let them know you have control, then take the bird to the “home position”. This is the “take back”.

Now is when all of your work will pay off. When the judge asks about your bird, you will know all of the answers. If they ask a question that you do not know, don’t panic, simply say, “I do not know the answer to that question”. You are not expected to know all of the answers all of the time because there is always something to learn. If this happens, many judges will tell you the answer but will not give you the score. (But knowledge is more important than a score. Yes, really it is.)

## STUDY

The knowledge part of showmanship is usually the most difficult to prepare for. This is because one does not know what the judge is going to ask. Learn the basics first: know the class, breed, variety, sex and age of the bird you are holding. Know the anatomy of a bird including the wing parts and use the correct terms. Remember: the older you are, the more you are expected to know.

Judges’ questions have a very wide range. At county fairs the questions are usually simpler than they are at a state or national level. At times, the questions are geared toward the fair focus. For example: if the fair has a focus on nutrition, then many of the questions will be about nutrition. Remember: the older you are, the more you need to know.

Many times they ask about health issues such as diseases and parasites along with the symptoms, treatments and immunizations if applicable. Remember: The older you are.....

The exhibitor is expected to know other varieties of the breed they are holding and other breeds within the class of the bird they are holding. This shows the judge you know which birds are in competition with yours. Again, remember: the older you are.....

The *basics* of what you should be studying and learning are available in this showmanship section. If you are a junior – the knowledge you should be studying is there just waiting to be printed off. This will give you a nice head start. If you plan to attend a “national show” study those standards available from the APA and the ABA. The same sheets are available for intermediates and seniors. Remember: the older you are the more you are expected to know.

## SHOWTIME

Now the homework is complete and the show will be a breeze. You really are ready for showmanship. You have the correct bird, a trained bird and you have studied. When the judge asks about your bird, you will probably know the answer. If they ask a question that you do not know, don’t panic, simply say, “I do not know the answer to that question”. You are not expected to know all of the answers all of the time because there is always something to learn. If this happens, many judges will tell you the answer but will not give you the score. (But knowledge is more important than a score. Yes, really it is)

## THE DO’S

Stand tall, smile, look directly at the judge, listen intently to the questions, follow directions, and speak clearly and loud enough for the judge to hear. Be considerate of the other exhibitors. Your hair and clothing should be clean, neat and proper for the show. Follow your fair or exhibit rules exactly. If the fair wants you to wear black jeans, wear black jeans, not white slacks. Be a gracious competitor, win or lose.

## THE DO NOT'S

There are some of things that will keep you from getting the score you deserve. Not following exhibit rules is a big one. The show rules will state all of the requirements from time to clothing, and these must be followed. Handling your bird incorrectly or using a wild bird shows that you have not put in the time needed to be successful in showmanship. Talking too softly causes the judge to miss what you are saying. Talking too much is just as bad. Remember the judge has about 4 minutes to determine what you know and if you waste the time by telling a chicken story, you will not receive a high score. Never bring a cell phone into the showmanship lineup.

## THE DRESS CODE

I wish we could say the dress code was the same at every show across the county but it's not. There is one basic dress code that all seem to share.

**BOYS AND GIRLS:** White collar shirt, tucked in. Dark pants: black, brown, dark blue, dark denim jeans. Most judges like to see a belt to hold up those britches. All 4-H and FFA dress uniforms (as designated by these respective clubs) are acceptable in the basic dress codes. Dark shoes, closed toe. No sandal's or flips flops allowed.

**GIRLS:** You are allowed to wear skirts of course. They should be knee length or just very slightly above the knee. Skirts should also be dark colors; black, brown, navy blue or dark denim. This should also be worn with a white collared tailored type blouse, no ruffles or see through, tucked in.

### **Optional Accessories:**

Show coats are very well accepted and appreciated by the majority judges. *This seems to be one of their favorite modes of your appearances in the showmanship classes.* Any and all pins and patches are a nice addition.

Ties really dress up the basic shirt and dark pants. Pins and patches are also a way of dressing up your outfit.

A special note: Most judges do not give the highest score of 5 points for the dress code. Many judges score high at 4 points. It all depends on the judges interpretation or his standard. So if you get a 4 you are doing just fine. This is not the most important part of showmanship although we all want to look our best.

Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge is where you gain the most points.

Remember to utilize the "SUGGESTED" Showmanship guide available on the website. Hopefully this will gain you the high scores you want in showmanship.