



RINGCRAFT

Good Ringcraft Techniques are the result of careful planning, and observation of fellow judges. Next show you attend, watch the judge carefully as they judge several breeds. Consider carefully how they use the ring; make allowances for size variations within a group (as an example, in the Non-Sporting Group they range from Toy Poodles to Great Danes); announce placing's; examine the exhibits; interact with the steward; manner of approaching the exhibits; are their methods of examination consistent and thorough? Are they working to time, or too slow, or maybe even too fast? If you like their methods, then consider adopting them and work with them. Flexibility is essential and you will always find ways to hone your procedures.

Efficient methods are usually the result of trial and error until you hit upon the system that works best for you. There are many considerations that must be factored into your Ringcraft skills.

The major one is ring set up. The first consideration will be the number of dogs you are required to judge and the time allowed. Unless you are given a guide by the Show Manager, you should aim to judge 40 dogs per hour. If you have received a reporting schedule, it is a good idea to mark on the schedule where you expect to be at the end of each hour of judging. This considered, you set your table and place markers in a position that will allow you to either judge right up to speed, or in a position that allows you to move the dogs more and use a little more time. Bear in mind that some toy breeds will be at the first corner in the same amount of time some gundogs would have completed a lap.

Most importantly, if the ring is not working for you, then be prepared to shift it so it does. The sun shifts during the day, the wind may change direction, you may start judging a new group.... all factors that require different considerations.

The table can be used as a benchmark, even for exhibits that will not be using it. A correctly placed table allows you to send the dogs "To the Table", if the breed is tabled, ask the first one to set up on the table, if not tabled, then ask the first one to set up in front of the table. If you are unsure if a breed is tabled or not, this method will usually ensure the exhibitor will take the guess work out of it for you and set up in the correct manner.

While the first dog is setting up, take the opportunity to look over the other dogs in the ring, when the first exhibit is settled, ask the remainder of the class to relax and begin your examination. Remember, once you have relaxed them, do not look back along the line and expect them to be standing to attention.

After you have examined the first dog and sent them either out and back, or a triangle, if you step away from the "set-up area" you can request that the next dog moves up to the table and sets up. This usually ensures that by the time you have finished watching the movement of the first exhibit, the next one will be settled and ready for examination.

The way you move the dogs is also influenced by time factors, as well as ring set up and size. Some ask the exhibits to move in a triangle, while others prefer an out and back. You may have observed side gait when the exhibits entered the ring, and may wish to observe it again and ask the exhibit to move round the ring and relax at the back of the line. Again, experimentation will give you the feeling for what will work best for you.

Once you have finished judging the classes and are doing best dog or bitch you may want to send each exhibit out and back one more time, you may even want to run the whole class around and place on the move. Some judges already know exactly what they want so bring the class in and then award. The choice

is yours but whatever you chose to do, make sure you have a reason for doing it and not because you have seen another judge operate the ring that way.

Tabled breeds rarely give their best while they are set up on the table. Check for expression and correct ear placement or ear use when they return from their triangle or out and back. A list of tabled and ramped breeds is on the NZDJA website.

It is important that you NEVER examine, or re-examine, a dog that is normally tabled while it is on the ground. You will startle the dog and may cause it to become distressed. This is never a good idea if you are considering the dog for group honours! If you want to re-examine the dog, then simply ask the handler to place the dog back on the table.

The exhibitor has set the dog in the stack the way they want to present the dog to you. When they have returned to you from their movement, this is an opportunity for you to observe how they free stand and you can check feet, pastern and elbow/hock alignment.

The position of the sun has an enormous influence on ring set up. Avoid having the sun behind the table, or you will spend your time squinting into it. If you have the dogs looking into the sun, they will squint, which alters expression and eye shape somewhat! If you move them out into the sun, you will see little of their hind movement, if they are moving back to you and the sun is low and on your back, you may “suddenly appear” out of the sun and startle the dog!

The wind, or driving rain, also deserves important consideration in particular; dogs with semi-erect ears will suddenly possess erect ears! Wind can also carry dust and pollen, which will cause the dogs to squint and eyes may run.

In the case of wind or rain, make sure your steward knows where your wet weather gear is. If you wear glasses a sun visor can assist in keeping the rain from your glasses. If it is summer, make sure you apply plenty of sunblock and have a good sunhat. If you wear sunglasses in the ring, be aware that you will not see the true colour of the eye and coat, so it is a good idea to observe this without your sunglasses at some time during the examination of each dog.

The Show Regulations state that a copy of New Zealand Kennel Club Official Standards of the breeds, for every breed being judged by each judge, must be available in the ring for the judge’s reference at the time of judging. This requirement may not be fulfilled so it is a good idea to pack your own standards, this can be a printed copy or on a digital device. Never be afraid to refer to them. Exhibitors would prefer you checked and made the correct judgement than guess and make the wrong one!

If time is a factor, then do not hand out ribbons or prize cards, allow your steward to do this for you. If you are unlucky enough to have an inexperienced, or inefficient steward, then you may have to help them along. A steward is an integral piece of a successful show, and it is imperative that your working relationship is harmonious if you want to enjoy your day. If you are short of time, allow the steward to assemble the next class close to the ring entrance and get them to hand over the class immediately you have placed the current class in the ring. Request the exhibitors stand on their place markers while the steward marks their sheets. Many judges will place the class prior to the final go around and in doing so ensures everyone knows the result and it makes it easier and clearer for both the steward and the exhibitors. After the first few breeds your steward will begin to understand your requirements and a well run ring with judge and steward working harmoniously makes everything run smoothly.

Lunchbreaks, along with morning and afternoon teas can disrupt your flow and it may take the first few classes to settle back to your job. Every club is different, some want breaks taken at specific times, others allow you to break at the end of a breed or group. However, it is their show and the Show Manager has final say on these decisions.

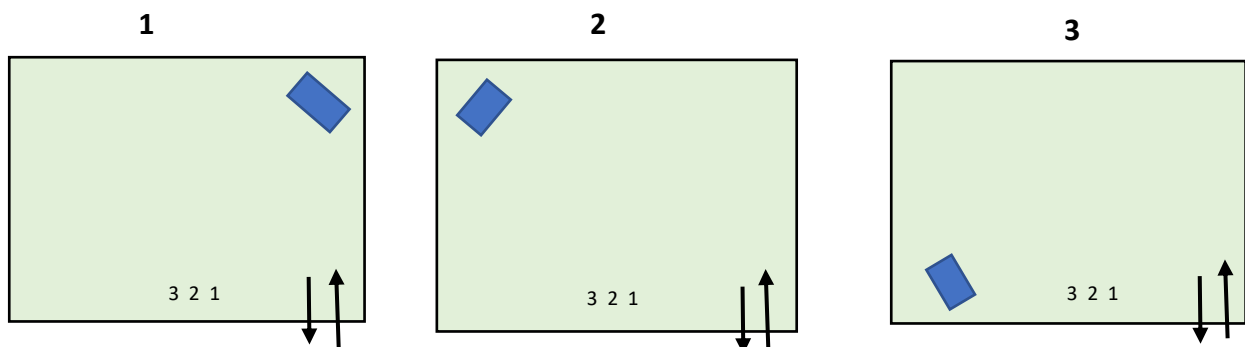
Example of ring set-ups

Below are several examples of different ring set-ups and the pro's and cons. Without doubt, the most efficient position for the place markers (if available) is just inside the ring exit, however not all clubs provide place markers. Some rings have gazebo covers over the entrance, some rings have separate entry and exit. Take a few minutes when you arrive at the ring to assess the most suitable ring set up taking into account a number of different factors. Sun – is it high overhead or a low winter sun, will it be raining, is it hot, which direction is the wind coming from, do you have a gazebo for shelter, is the ring square or rectangle, is it large or small. What about obstacles, eg hollows in the ground or is the ring sloping. Not every ring is a perfect size, on perfectly mown grass, or indoors where there is no weather to consider. All these things need to be considered.

Example 1,2 and 3 show the same ring set up, with the table placed in different positions. Example 1 is ideal if you have a large number of dogs to judge and multiple numbers in classes. You could move the class once right around the ring and request they stop behind the table and with the table in the corner there is room for that. However, if you move them in a triangle from this position, you will be moving them into the entrance for one corner of that triangle, but, if you only move them out and back, then they are moving into a free uncluttered corner of the ring.

Example 2 is not ideal unless weather or other conditions require as you will be walking a lot further than you would with the other two examples.

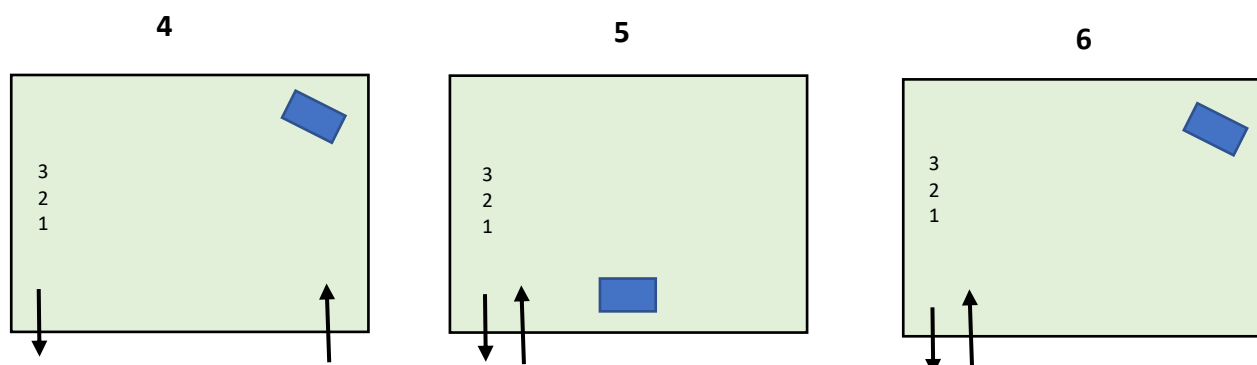
Using Example 3 for the Toy Group will see you spending a large amount of time waiting for dogs to arrive anywhere near the table but a good option for breeds you want to move first. You could place the table along the 4th side but this would restrict your ability to place the dogs on the pegs.



A separate exit as in Example 4, removes the clutter from the assembly area but means you may be waiting longer for exhibitors to change dogs between classes. It also gives the steward more time walking.

Example 5 is a good option if you have time constraints (as is example 1). It allows you to take the dogs directly to the table. You would, however, have to move them around to the markers so an out and back may be preferred over a triangle.

Example 6 is similar to Example 1, it simply moves the entrance to the left hand corner. Probably not ideal as similar to example 2, you (or your steward) will be doing a lot of walking.



Hands on examination

This is an important part of your ringcraft and one that takes time to master. As with the ring set up, watch other judges. You will know by your own experiences as an exhibitor which judges impressed you with their hands on examination and which ones disappointed.

Consider how to approach each dog you are to judge. Most dogs dislike the Judge approaching them directly from the front and it is often advisable to approach them from slightly to the side. Remember some breeds (particularly sight hounds) are far-seeing and may back up a little if you approach them directly from the front. Some Judges offer a hand to the dog, some don't. You must do whatever you are comfortable with. Some Judges ask exhibitors to mouth their own dogs to avoid cross-contamination of any diseases. Once again, this is entirely your own preference but remember to be consistent with all exhibits. Do not have long conversations with the exhibitors, it not only wastes time but is often misconstrued by those watching. But do be polite and friendly and keep the verbal exchanges to pleasantries and asking the age of the dog only. Even if you know the exhibitor personally, refer to them as you would any other exhibitor, use of the titles Sir and Madam is recommended.

Be gentle and try and put each dog at ease. No exhibitor wants his or her precious dog to be roughly handled by a Judge. Be particularly gentle and patient with puppies – a bad experience in a show ring can sometimes destroy that puppy's potential show career.

To judge a dog effectively, one must start with the overall balance. Stand back and look at the dog before you. Absorb a mental picture of how the dog looks to you, look at the silhouette. Does it fill the expectation of your ideal shape for that breed? Is it balanced front and rear? Now, approach and begin your hands-on judging at the head. Consider proportions and what the standard asks for. Check the skull proportions, ear placement, eye colour and shape, foreface, nose, mouth and underjaw. Check teeth. Look for overall balance in the head and then how it fits into the neck.

Now progress from the head to considering the neck proportions and how it fits into the shoulder assembly. Remember what the standard says about the neck, whether it is long, short, has a slight arch or not, has a nape or not.

The neck should fit into the shoulder in a harmonious way. You will then be able to examine the shoulder and front proportions. Check wither placement and how the shoulder and upper arm angles fit with what the standard calls for. This is the time for you to check the chest depth from the side as well as in front. See how the legs fit in the overall front examination and check elbows, bone, pasterns and feet. Do not be afraid to pick up feet and examine the pads if the standard has something specific to say about this aspect of the dog.

Run your hands over the dog's body feeling ribs, checking topline and tuck-up. On short-coated breeds your eyes can tell most of what you need to know but on long-coated breeds it is important to actually feel how the dog is constructed under the coat. Do not hesitate to get your hands underneath all that abundance and check what is under the coat. Do not be swayed by colour, by excessive grooming or by flamboyant handling if the exhibit is built wrongly.

Check the rear proportions of the dog, the croup, tail-set, the length of the tail, the stifle angulation. And don't forget to check muscle tone and testicles for the boys. Step back and re-assess your first impression of the dog before you now that your hands have confirmed what you first saw or found something that you didn't see.

Now it is time for you to assess the dog's gait. How you move them is your choice, but you need to be able to assess their front and rear movement as well as the side-gait. You should have a fairly good idea what the movement will be like after your hands on assessment. Assessing gait takes time and experience but always remember that not only are you assessing for soundness of movement but for the correct gait for the breed. This is where a thorough knowledge of the breed standard requirements is invaluable. Don't be afraid to ask

a handler to slow down and be aware of the slick handlers that can make an average dog look great. Remember you are looking for correctness in movement, not the fastest or the flashiest.

Once you have judged all the exhibits in your class, it is time to select your placing's. Some Judges like to place the dogs in their minds as they judge; others like to have one last look before selecting their winners. Some judges will place from the stacked position, others prefer to place whilst moving the class around the ring. Whatever you do, be decisive in your decision and clearly announce the class winners to your steward for him/her to place on the winning pegs. Always treat the exhibitors with courtesy, after all, they have paid for your opinion.

Sometimes it is said that dog showing is the competition between an exhibitor's ability to hide or disguise the faults of his/her dog and the cleverness of the Judge to see past that disguise and judge the dog on its own merits not those displayed by the handler.

One final point to remember, whilst type and soundness are the most important factors it also needs to be remembered that your winning dogs should be able to fulfil the function they were bred for. After all, the future of breeds are often determined by judges opinions.

Good luck!