

The nuts and bolts of dog judging

by Lavina Diamanti

A five-minute conversation with a mechanic about the workings of a car engine will highlight that they know stuff that the average motorist doesn't. They will talk about cam shafts, pistons, clearances, distributors, alternators and torque like it is everyday language. They know what bits go where and how everything connects to make it run perfectly.

Most professions are the same. Those in the building trade use terminology that ensures the architect, the builder and the building inspector are all on the same page and the construction of the building is as planned by the architect. The average person doesn't know what 'chamfer' means but the builder sure as heck needs to know that was what the architect wanted. And then there are the people who work in IT. Well, they just talk a totally different language!

Dog show judges... well, we talk about patellas, stifles, occiput, scapula etc, etc. And just like the mechanic who needs to understand the workings of an engine and all the terminology that the average person doesn't understand, dog judges need to understand the anatomy of a dog, the terminology that goes with it, and how all parts are connected.

Some may question the importance of knowing the difference between the scapula and the femur or the maxilla and the occiput but when you are studying breed standards, knowing the difference is vitally important. We need to know where everything is located and what its function is. We need to understand how everything connects and what happens if something isn't as it should be. And we need to understand what the writers of breed standards were describing.

Canine anatomy and terminology is the basis of dog judging. We start off with it in our aspiring modules, we include questions in every group exam paper, and 50% of the Open Show panel exam paper is on anatomy and glossary of terms. Plus, it is now a mandatory study item for those looking to progress through the judging panels.

Some of the terminology and anatomy is pretty straightforward. We all know the forearm from the lower thigh and the shoulder from the pelvis. But do you know your carpus from your tarsus or your maxilla from your mandible? What about the button ear from the rose ear or the sabre tail from the snap tail? Can you describe the colour isabella or the dolichocephalic head shape? Do we need to know all these terms? Sure we do. How can we be a competent inspector in the art of breeding purebred dogs if we don't understand the language? How can we correctly interpret the breed standard if we

don't have an in-depth understanding of anatomy, the terminology and what it means?

In days past, access to information wasn't as readily available as it is now. Harry Spira's *Canine Terminology* has long been regarded as the book which should be on every judge's bookshelf but for some time it was difficult to source. Written in 1982, it has stood the test of time and is still regarded by many as the best book on the subject. Although it has been out of print for some years, copies are still available from some online book sites.

The Dogs New Zealand 'Glossary of Canine Terms' was updated in 2020 and is now a comprehensive stand-alone document which is available on both the Dogs NZ (dogsnz.org.nz) and NZDJA (nzdogjudge.com) websites. This is the document from which all our study and examination material is referenced. Another excellent source of information is Gilbert & Brown's *K-9 Structure & Terminology* (which is available in Kindle format). Not only does this book detail information on canine terminology and anatomy but it delves further into the workings of the dog, how everything is connected, and how variances affect different breeds, their movement and their function. I am sure there are many other reference books as well which our experienced judges have on their bookshelves.

Our branches are tasked with delivering the training for the six mandatory items each year. Because we rely on volunteers there will invariably be a variation in delivery of learning material around the country and this often shows in exam results. If you are one of our judges progressing through the system, I strongly recommend that in addition to the branch training you receive you make sure you have a copy of the reference material referred to above. Not only will this help you with your exams, but it will also help you in so many other areas of your judging. I am a firm believer that we should all take control of our own learning, and this is a great place to start.

Happy judging. 🐾

Important Dates

1 July 2023	Judges' Seminar, Auckland
2 July 2023	NZDJA AGM, Auckland
15-16 July 2023	North Island Practicals
29-30 July 2023	South Island Practicals