



# **NZ Dog Judges Assn**

## **Training Guide for Branches and Discussion Groups**

Updated November 2025



## INTRODUCTION

This document is intended as a guide for the executive and training leaders of NZDJA Branches and Discussion groups to assist them with the operational requirements of the Branch and as a guide to training requirements. It is not intended for general circulation. Please respect this.

In recent years we have placed higher expectations on our branches to deliver quality training to our aspiring judges. The requirements are set out in the NZDJA regulations, and this document will give you additional information and guidance as to how the National Training Syllabus should be delivered and what the National Board expects from each branch or discussion group. Please note: for the remainder of this document, where branch is referred to this also, unless specifically stated, includes discussion groups.

As Branch leaders, your attendees will be looking to you for guidance and clarification. They will expect you to be up to date with regulation changes and assist them with their examination preparation. Not all Branch leaders are senior judges so please, do not be afraid to ask for assistance, we are here to help. We have a wealth of knowledge on our Board plus the Training and Education section of the website has new resources being added regularly. Similarly, not all branches have access to senior judges to assist with training, but options are available such as running a full day seminar and inviting senior judges from other districts to assist with the training. We recommend larger branches appoint one of their members as a Training Co-ordinator, whose responsibility it is to ensure all judges seeking promotion fully understand the requirements for promotion and provide them with support and guidance in meeting all the criteria and completing the relevant application forms.

All trainee judges should be in control of their own learning path and the rate at which they progress but as Branches we have the opportunity to guide them to be competent, confident judges we can all be proud of rather than just supporting them to simply pass an exam. It is expected that our judges should always be striving for excellence, and this is where our Branches can assist and guide them in achieving that goal.

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR BRANCHES

All branches are required to fulfil the following requirements:

- Hold a minimum of 8 meetings per year and record minutes of those meetings.
- A meeting may or may not include a training component. It is recommended that a training and meeting calendar is produced early in the year and circulated to all members.
- Maintain attendance records for every meeting or training session and submit these to [nzdogjudge@gmail.com](mailto:nzdogjudge@gmail.com) after each meeting or training event.
- Assist candidates with completing record sheets. We recommend that a senior judge check these before they are submitted with their application.
- Deliver the 'hands on' components of the National Training Guide and support members completing online training.
- Hold an Annual General Meeting prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March each year at which time the branches financial records should be presented and results of any elections announced. Term of Office for executive members is 2 years and elections should be held in accordance with The Constitution.
- Operate a bank account in the name of NZDJA XXXXXX Branch. Funds held belong to the National Board and a financial return must be submitted to the Treasurer annually. The branch financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December. These funds are available for the general running of the branch throughout the year plus costs for training activities e.g. travel costs for a presenter at a seminar. If additional funds are required, branches can apply to the board for assistance.
- Ensure the Constitution and Regulations of the NZ Dogs Judges Assn are upheld.

## CONDUCT OF MEETINGS AND TRAINING

- Meetings will vary depending on the size of your branch and the number of members who are regularly attending and their proximity in location to where meetings are held.
- Meetings can be held in person, preferably at a neutral location such as Club premises, community meeting rooms, etc or via an online facility such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet etc or a combination of both. Winter meetings held online usually get better attendance.
- Meetings held at private residences are not encouraged unless there is a breed lecture or kennel visit included as part of the training component.
- The Chairperson will chair the official part of the meeting, and the secretary will record attendance and any discussion. Once the official part of the meeting has concluded the Chairperson can then, if they wish to, hand over to whoever has been nominated to conduct the training element.
- It is recommended that a calendar is produced at the beginning of the year setting out the meeting and training dates and circulated to all members. Note: All members must be provided with reasonable notice of meetings, lectures and hands on training. Last minute, or 'on the spot' training cannot be counted as an official event. In producing a calendar of planned events, this ensures that those conducting the training have ample time to prepare for each training event and Trainees can plan around fulfilment of requirements.
- Where branches arrange lectures via an online medium, and in particular where an overseas judge or breeder is delivering the lectures, then please open it up to **ALL NZDJA** members to attend. Contact the Secretary so we can advise details to other judges.
- Branches are encouraged to use a variety of people to deliver training. Often experienced judges and breeders are more than happy to help, they just need to be asked.
- Meetings that include a training component can be conducted at a Ribbon Parade or other show which will allow access to a variety of dogs for the training.
- Branches with a larger membership base may want to appoint Leaders within their membership to take responsibility for different areas. For example, you may allocate a senior judge to mentor all Aspiring and Ribbon Parade judges. Another may be responsible for mentoring those aspiring to a group panel etc.
- Remember, a variety of opinions is healthy and encourages judges to think for themselves rather than judge 'parrot fashion' because they have only been shown one option. Encourage your Trainees to talk to as many breeders and fellow judges as possible. This is especially important when learning ringcraft and studying for exams.
- Branches may, and are encouraged to, run full day training seminars. If funding is required to cover costs associated with these events, an application can be made to NZDJA.
- Branches may conduct Ribbon Parades for their members who are looking for hands on opportunities.
- If Trainees are looking for opportunities to judge so they can progress, Branches may put their name forward to Clubs. This is not considered soliciting for appointments.

## COMPLETING RECORD CARDS AND APPLICATION FORMS

Appendix I in the NZDJA regulations details the mandatory syllabus items. Appendix II details promotional credits, the activity, the number of credits available, the maximum number of credits that can be claimed plus definitions of each activity and who should sign off the credit record sheet. Where an activity is required to be signed off by an Authorised Validator, this **must** be sent to the Board Secretary to arrange for checking and validating.

A common occurrence we see in applications is an 'overclaiming' of points or judges not understanding that unused points can be carried over. Please ensure your members seeking promotion understand that each criteria has a maximum number of points that can be claimed each application e.g attendance at a judge's seminar (20 points) can only be claimed once. However, if a further seminar is attended then these points can be carried over to a following application provided, they have not expired. Please refer to the NZDJA regulations section V for further information.

In addition to the credit record card there is a mandatory items card to simplify the process. Please ensure all your judges are using the latest versions of record cards and application forms which can be downloaded from the website under Resources/Judges Forms.

We recommend that at a meeting early in the year, some time is spent with judges who are looking to progress, to ensure they all have the appropriate forms and fully understand the requirements for promotion. Judges that leave it to the last minute to complete mandatory requirements risk their application being declined as no leeway can be given if all the requirements are not met. It is also unfair and unreasonable to expect branches and clubs to hold events in December to help get candidates over the line. Good planning to ensure all requirements are met is important and it is expected that branches check in with their Trainees throughout the year to ensure they are on track.

Judges should also be looking to attend as many training activities as possible and should be encouraged to do so. The criteria is a minimum only and it is expected that all judges should achieve this easily and ideally exceed these requirements.

The following is the list of the most common reasons applications for promotion are declined.

- Application fee not received prior to cut off date.
- Annual membership fee unpaid.
- Insufficient credit points.
- Mandatory syllabus items not completed or completed after cut-off date (31<sup>st</sup> December).

Each year the Board receives requests for dispensation for non-complying applications, or requests to sit the exam overseas or at a different date/time. As per our regulations, these requests will be declined.

## NEW AND ASPIRING JUDGES

Support for our new judges is crucial. This is where they will decide if it is for them or walk away. Many never get past the aspiring list and often this is because they feel that, for whatever reason, they don't want to continue, but sometimes, they haven't received sufficient support and guidance and just give up.

Make sure someone from your Branch contacts the new judge and welcomes them. It may be that this task is allocated to a particular person or if you are a small branch, then this will often fall to the Chairperson or Secretary. Make sure they know when and where the meetings are being held, anything they need to bring with them and are welcomed on arrival.

The other things to help them with are:

- Make sure they have the appropriate record forms or show them where they can download them from.
- Give them information about training events, a copy of your branch training calendar and include those at other branches as well, they may not know that they can attend other branch training.
- Make sure they know and understand the requirements to progress to the next level.
- Teach them to correctly approach exhibits in the ring.
- Show them how to feel the points on the dogs, shoulders, checking bite etc, and what to look for.
- Discuss movement and soundness, what it means and what to look for.
- Talk them through setting up a ring and when to use the table and/or ramp.
- Show them how to interact with exhibitors, their steward and clearly indicate placings.
- Have a discussion with them about keeping themselves safe from a dog that may be aggressive and when to excuse a dog and what to do.
- Talk them through making decisions with confidence.

You may wish to print this page and tick off each requirement when completed.

Remember, they will be very nervous when they first show up for a meeting and especially when going over dogs or talking about dogs in front of others. Ease them gently into these activities. And also remember, they will be extremely nervous the first time they step in the ring so the more help and support you can give them when they are on the aspiring panel, the better equipped they will be.

Learning good habits early is important. It is the Branch's role to set our Trainee judges up for success and to encourage them to strive for excellence.

**Recommended:** Download a copy of the 'Tips for the Newcomer' – NZDJA Training Guide on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/> and have available for new judges.

## THEORY EXAMS

Any exam can be overwhelming, and branches are expected to guide and support those sitting theory exams. There are many ways a branch can do this, but some suggestions are:

- Ensure candidates are well prepared and commence study early (we recommend up to 12 months study time be allowed for).
- Make sure the candidate knows where to find the study guides on the website. (Resources/Training and Education)
- Discuss different methods of study with candidates to assist them to find which works best for them. Everyone learns differently. Options are:
  - Copying the standards on to card, cutting them into sections and using them as 'flash cards'.
  - Writing out the breed standards numerous times.
  - Using the Quizlet app.
  - Using a reader app – especially good to use when driving.
- Whichever method they choose, learning the key points and key words of standards are important.
- Encourage them to not just learn what is written but to actually gain an understanding of the breeds. Guided discussion can benefit here e.g. the differences between the Pembroke and Cardigan corgis, the origins and purpose of terriers etc.
- Hold quiz style training nights for the Glossary of Terms & Anatomy questions.
- Hold mock theory exam nights for candidates using questions from old exam papers. This is especially beneficial for those where it is their first exam as this helps familiarise them with the exam style.
- Arrange one-on-one breed knowledge questioning for those sitting group papers. If more than one person is sitting the same paper these can be done together.
- Assist the candidates to find mentors that would be willing to help.
- The writing of exams is covered by a set of protocols, and these are published on the website. Familiarise yourself with them so the candidate has a full understanding of the study requirements.
- Check on their progress regularly and offer support where required.

**Recommended:** Download a copy of the 'Preparing for Theory Exams' on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/> and share with Trainees.

## PRACTICAL EXAMS

Branches are expected to guide and support those sitting practical exams. Hands on experience is invaluable as it builds confidence. Again, there are many ways to do this, and some suggestions are:

- Make sure the candidates study the history of the breeds. They must be able to verbalise this and practicing with a senior judge is a good way to do this.
- Make sure the candidates understand the form and function of the breeds i.e. what characteristics does that breed have that makes it good at the job it was originally bred to do. Again, they must also be able to verbalise this. Where there are similar breeds, the candidates should be able to explain the differences eg; Cocker Spaniel and American Cocker Spaniel. Welsh Corgi (Pembroke) and Welsh Corgi (Cardigan).
- Provide as many opportunities as possible to practice ringcraft and get them used to setting up different ring configurations for maximum efficiency taking into consideration the entry and exit points, placing numbers etc. Ensure the candidates are confident in running a ring suited to judging at the rate of 250 dogs per day i.e. two minutes per dog as this is expected at the practical exam.
- Make sure the candidates are confident examining dogs and know what they are feeling for. Do they really understand and can confidently identify shoulder angulation, head planes, hindquarter angulation etc? Are they feeling for each point or just massaging the dogs? What about breed specific examination? Make sure trainees know how to 'go under' the coats of coated breeds and especially important with breeds such as the Poodle and Hungarian Puli. Make sure Hound group Judges know to approach sight hounds at a 45 degree angle. Again, provide as many opportunities as possible to practice.
- Expand on the critiquing mandatory training session by getting the candidates to critique multiple dogs until they become fluent. There is no substitute for practice. It can be photos of dogs, dog statues etc but it is important that they verbalise what they see and feel and are not just quoting the standard.
- Guide them with suitable dress and presentation.
- Discuss exam conditions, what style of questions to expect, what to do if they feel they have made a mistake, how to answer questions which demonstrate in depth knowledge.
- Discuss verbalising the justification of decisions i.e. why they prefer dog A over dog B referencing the breed standard and form and function of the breed.
- Discuss awarding and withholding the Challenge Certificate and how to verbalise the decision.
- Discuss controlling nerves on the day, use of visualisation with different scenarios.
- Run mock exam days in the lead up to the exams and utilise senior judges either in your area or from other regions. Encourage non-judges as well to attend and bring as many dogs as possible. Take the opportunity to invite commentary from those attending as to what is important in their breed and what they expect judges to look for and any breed specific examination that shows an understanding of the breed.

**Recommended:** Download a copy of the 'Preparing for Practical Exams' and 'Guidelines for Examination Candidates' on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/> and share with Trainees.

# NATIONAL TRAINING GUIDE

## Mandatory Syllabus items.

This guide is intended to help branches deliver these syllabus items. All mandatory items are expected to be covered thoroughly and at least once a year. Some Branches that have large numbers attending may find that it is easier to split into smaller groups to allow for discussion which is encouraged. Under no circumstances are these to be delivered in a 'speed dating' style event to just 'tick the box'. Branch Leaders are expected to ensure that all members attending have a grasp of the requirements and if required, provide additional support for trainees.

**NOTE:** From 2026 items 1,2 & 3 will be available for judges on the JOLTED online training portal. This will allow branches to spend more time on 'hands on' activities. However, branches may also deliver these activities at branch level and are encouraged to do so as this provides for discussion and is a more in-depth learning method. If all branch Trainees are completing these requirements via JOLTED then it is recommended that Branches re-enforce this training with one or two questions each meeting to encourage discussion.

## 1. Rules and Regulations

This section of the mandatory training is designed to ensure all judges seeking promotion are kept up to date with regulations as this is an important part of judging. This can be completed online via a branch controlled online training or at a branch meeting. This activity can take the form of 15-20 multi-choice questions, 'fill in the gaps' style questions or a presentation where a scenario is depicted and the group is asked for the appropriate action and the reason for that action. Our recommendation is that this is offered at least once a year in a group environment. This allows for discussion and examples where the rule or regulation can be applied. As this an annual requirement new questions should be prepared for each training session. Branch Leaders are expected to check for regulation updates before preparing this training.

## 2. Anatomy of the Dog

It is vital that judges understand the general anatomy of the dog. This will help them understand how the dog is made and why a dog looks the way they do for that breed. You can make the learning fun by incorporating anatomy into a quiz night. One method is to use a picture of a skeleton and give everyone pieces of paper with the names of the bones or part of the dog and get them to put them where they think it belongs. Or you could use online tools such as Quizlet or ChatGPT to generate a quiz, you may even want to provide some prizes to make it a bit more fun. Understanding anatomy is important because these terms are used in breed standards and it is important to understand their meaning to ensure correct interpretation of the requirements. There are many resources on anatomy both online and in books. Dr Harry Spira's book, Canine Terminology is an excellent source of reference, and all judges should be encouraged to have a copy.

### 3. Glossary of Terms

An important feature of learning dog standards is to understand the different terminology that is used to describe the various features of the breeds. Understanding terminology used in breed standards is a requirement for all judges, so branches should spend time delivering this training. Ideally, this mandatory training item can be delivered quiz style and again, it can be made into a fun event. It is preferable if the correct answer includes a visual aid to cement the learning e.g. a photo of a dog exhibiting the term used in the question. Again, the resources are available in a wide variety of places but the main source of reference for our judges is the Dogs NZ Glossary of Canine Terms (2020 edition). This is comprehensive and is the source material for all exam questions on Anatomy and Glossary of Terms.

### 4. Verbal & Written Critiques

All judges are required to verbally critique dogs at their practical exams. Critiques at FCI shows and specialty shows can be either written or verbal. A quality critique is a skill which takes time to master so it is very important that this requirement is covered off on a regular basis, preferably more than once a year. This is an area where many trainees struggle at practical exam time. This syllabus item is designed to teach the judges what constitutes a good critique and how to critique nose to tail. It is recommended that branches use the material on critiquing that is on the website.

**NOTE:** This syllabus item is separate from the Intensive Critiquing requirement. This mandatory item is about teaching our judges to critique – the Intensive Critiquing requirement is putting it into practice.

Items to include in the training are:

- Describe what you see, not what you think the standard calls for.
- Start with the overall impression of the dog then work nose to tail and finish with a final impression.
- Use of descriptive words such as correct, excellent, quality etc and removing words like nice, lovely, gorgeous etc.
- Be careful when using the word good as in FCI good is only average. Describing a dog as ‘good’ this and ‘good’ that cannot then be graded excellent!
- Concentrate on the virtues in the first instance.
- Use of words like ‘I would prefer...’ when describing where a dog can be improved.
- When there are multiple dogs in a class or breed, use of the critique to justify placings.

Sometimes the very word ‘Critique’ can put our judges into a spin. You may need to gently guide the newer judges and ask them to just describe the dog in front of them. Forget the standard, forget trying to use the ‘correct’ words, just get them to describe what they see. Once they start to get their eye in and become more confident, then progress to using the breed standards and deciding if it is correct or could be improved. Remember – some of our newer trainees will struggle in a group environment. It can be beneficial to start them on a one-on-one situation or in pairs, maybe starting with their own dogs that they know well. This will get them used to verbalising out loud and writing down what they see in front of them.

For the more experience judges and those sitting group exams make sure they are using the right terminology and referencing the breed specific requirements. Make sure they correctly identify breed characteristics and any faults that the standard requires them to penalise. Make sure they use the correct anatomy terms. Encourage trainees to practice at ring side at shows (being discreet whilst doing so) and get used to using the critiquing forms.

**Recommended:** Download a copy of the ‘Critiquing by Ray Greer’, ‘Critiquing by Andrew Burt’ on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>.

## 5. Ringcraft – Demonstration of Handling and Assessing Dogs

There is not a 'one size fits all' right way for Ringcraft, but there are a lot of tips and tricks that can be learnt. The key issues for Judges to consider are: They need to be able to adjust their ringcraft to the appointment. They may only have a small entry which will allow them to spend a little more time with exhibits or they may have a large entry and be judging up to 250 dogs in a day. It is recommended that they learn good habits early and learn to adjust to the conditions. An efficiently run ring will not only be less tiring for the Judge but also affords better communication with the steward and handlers and ensures that the judge completes the assignment in a reasonable time. Factors to be considered:

- What is the number of dogs to be judged?
- Will there be multiple dogs in some classes?
- If you put the table too close to the entrance, where will the other dogs in the class be waiting?
- Is there an entrance and exit to the ring? And if so, will that determine where they put the table?
- If you are using a ramp, where will they put it, will it be in the way?
- Where will they line up their classes, best dog/bitch, best of breed and best of group?
- Are they giving clear instructions to the exhibitors?
- Are they giving clear instructions to the Steward and are they positioned close enough for good communication?
- How clearly are they communicating the placings?
- What about completion of JBO forms if judging a Championship Show in NZ?
- What are the forecast weather conditions?
- Is there a shelter provided for rain or sun, and if so, will that change where you ask for the dogs to be set up?

All these scenarios need to be explored, and it is worthwhile having discussion around them remembering in most cases, there is no right or wrong, some are just better, and some will provide challenges!

Then there is the examination of the dogs. Ideally, this training would be delivered with a variety of dogs of different sizes. It is recommended that an experienced judge conduct this session, especially with new trainees. Points to cover are:

- How to correctly approach the dog. (e.g. Sight hounds should be approached from a 45-degree angle rather than front on).
- What to say (and what not to say) to the handler.
- How to correctly go over a dog – nose to tail examination.
- Ensure trainees are really feeling the dogs and not just massaging or 'going through the motions'.
- Do they understand what they are feeling – shoulder angulation, forechest, tail length in coated breeds, hock length, foot shape etc?
- Do they understand balance?
- Assessing height – discuss options with table dogs and ground dogs.
- Assessing movement – discuss reach, drive, parallel movement, single tracking etc.

Ribbon Parade and Open Show judges will be required to be observed and receive at least two favourable observations before they can apply for promotion to the next level. Observations are completed by one of the NZDJA approved observers and this observation concentrates on the Trainees ringcraft. A list of the observers, protocols and observation forms are available on the website under Member Resources.

**Recommended:** Download a copy of the 'Ringcraft' – NZDJA Training Guide on the website under <https://nzdogiudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

## 6. Breed Knowledge including Breed History, Form and Function

Breed knowledge is not just a matter of learning the written standard for the breed. To truly understand a breed, we need to understand what it was originally bred for, what was its intended purpose and what characteristics and construction make that breed capable of performing its intended task. The more a judge understands a breed, the better we are as judges. There are a number of ways a branch can deliver this activity. Some options are:

- You can set homework for trainees to pick a breed from the group they aspire to and get them to write a brief paper on a breed explaining what it was bred for and how that task related to the way the dog is built. This can be reviewed by a senior judge. (Be careful that the Trainee is actually researching the breed and not just using AI to write it for them.)
- Alternatively, they can present their research and findings to the group. This may or may not include illustrations and/or diagrams but if this method is used each presenter will need to be limited to presentation time to ensure everyone gets a fair opportunity to present the breed they have chosen.
- A trainer can present a 'build a breed' style lecture, with the history and function of a breed being shared without naming the breed and then encouraging discussion on what form would best suit the required function. This could finish with an illustration or photo of the chosen breed and discussion on the breed standard. This method encourages trainees to think about how construction and breed characteristics influence the dog's function. For example, the chosen breed may be the Saluki. You would advise a little bit of history and where it came from, what its function was, i.e. to chase and catch prey and what the conditions were that it was required to work in. Then discussion would centre around size, coat, head shape, eye shape, ears, neck length, angulation, leg length, bone shape, body shape, feet shape, hindquarters, tail, movement, temperament etc. Encourage attendees to think of the effects e.g. type of foot required for running over sand, neck length for pick up prey, body shape for galloping, front and rear angulation for maximum speed and agility, coat for the desert conditions etc etc.

Whichever method is used to deliver this training, remember the intention is to get our judges thinking beyond the breed standard and fully understanding and appreciating our breeds. Our newer judges should be encouraged to start with their own breed(s) and then build from there.

**Recommended:** Encourage judges to review articles and videos on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/> . Another source of material is breed websites (but be aware of overseas breed standards) and Facebook groups such as Show Judges NZ Education Group, Canine Construction and Conformation or Dog Show Judges.

## RESOURCES

Branches are encouraged to provide guidance to our judges and help them access the wealth of information that can be accessed online and to encourage purchase of some of the excellent books that are available. A list of recommended resources for our judges is:

### Online:

**Dogs NZ Breed Standards** <https://www.dogsnz.org.nz/judges/breed-standards>

**NZDJA Training and Education** <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/> There is a large library of information on our website.

**Dogs NZ Glossary of Canine Terms** (2020 edition) – On the Dogs NZ website under the judges tab and also on the NZDJA website under the Resources tab.

### Books:

**Canine Terminology** by Dr Harry Spira – This book is regarded as the ‘bible’ for judges on anatomy and terminology.

**Structure in Action: The makings of a durable dog** – by Pat Hastings

**Canine Form Follows Function: Separating Fact from Fiction** - By Jeanne Joy Hartnagle-Taylor

**K-9 Structure & Terminology** – By Edward M. Gilbert Jr & Thelma R Brown

**Solving the Mysteries of Breed Type** – By Richard G Beauchamp

**An Eye For A Dog: Illustrated Guide to Judging Purebred Dogs** – By Robert W Cole

Most of these books are still available from overseas websites such as [www.dogwise.com](http://www.dogwise.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) and [www.thenile.co.nz](http://www.thenile.co.nz)

