



## **Guidance Manual for NZ Dog Show Judges**

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## Background

New Zealand Dog Judges Association Inc was formed in 2013 as an autonomous organisation to provide training and an assessment process for our dog show judges. This responsibility was previously carried out by New Zealand Kennel Club (Dogs New Zealand) via a small subcommittee. Our role is to provide you with support, training tools, guidance and to conduct examinations. As Dogs NZ 'owns' the judges panel, we then make recommendations to Dogs NZ Executive Council for promotion.

NZDJA is run by a board of volunteers voted on by the membership for a two-year term of office. Our Annual General Meeting is held every year, usually in June. The board consists of the following positions:

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

3 North Island members

2 South Island members

For general enquiries, correspondence and applications, the main contact for the board is via the secretary: [secretaryNZDJA@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryNZDJA@gmail.com). For queries regarding payments contact the treasurer: [treasurerNZDJA@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerNZDJA@gmail.com).

This manual is designed as a guide only and is not intended to replace the current Dogs NZ Show regulations, NZDJA Regulations or the NZDJA Code of Conduct. This manual does not contain specific information for promotion requirements and readers should familiarise themselves with the current regulations to ensure they are following correct process. Where reference is made to items on the website, they are current at the time of publication. All relevant forms, training guides, regulations etc can be found on the NZDJA website – [www.nzdogjudge.com](http://www.nzdogjudge.com). It is strongly suggested that you bookmark the website and familiarise yourself with its contents, so it becomes your go-to place for regulations, forms, fee information plus contact details. It also contains many informative articles to assist you with your learning.

The purpose of this manual is to present trainees with a comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive, reference manual – aimed at helping them progress through their first years of training, and on to their first and subsequent Championship level exams and appointments. It is designed to encourage some basic principles that will stand them in good stead throughout their judging career, wherever in the world it takes them.

The first few years of Judges Training are recognised as the most formative, but it is also the most daunting time. Help and support is available via the Branch, members of the Judges Association Board or fellow judges. Trainee judges are encouraged to ask questions and to be curious. There is no magic wand to gaining knowledge and asking questions is the best way to learn.

Sometimes we can be reluctant to ask questions for fear of appearing ill informed. And some Trainees live remotely and can't attend training organised by some of the bigger, more active branches. As a result, some of the basic tips on judging procedures fail to get passed on; these can often make the world of difference. Hopefully, this Manual may go some way towards helping the information transfer.

## So, You Want to be a Judge?

Becoming a judge is, for some, a natural progression from years of interest in the sport of purebred dogs. If you have bred litters, you will have trained your eye to evaluate your dogs. From there you learn to make comparisons of dogs you compete against in the ring and learn to form opinions regarding the decisions and judging of others. But it isn't for everyone. Many see judging as glamorous and providing opportunities to 'see the world' - the reality, however, is very different. Yes, we have some wonderful opportunities but sometimes we are judging in trying conditions and this can be arduous. A level of physical and mental fitness is necessary and there is a huge commitment to your study and training is required if you want to become a competent judge. You will spend many hours poring over breed standards and study material, attending lectures, talking dogs, being assessed, all in the pursuit of excellence. Plus, this commitment never stops, for we continue to learn, even after attaining All Breeds status. Many of us have failures along the way, but those failures become our best learning opportunities. If you think you are ready for the commitment to becoming a judge, read on.

We often hear of the term 'Having an eye for a dog'. For some, this comes naturally, they have that almost instinctive ability to recognise true quality in an animal, and often this is not just limited to dogs, in true 'stockman' fashion, a natural eye will apply to most species. However natural a gift, this 'eye' must still be honed by study of anatomy, breed standards, breed history and the examination of a large number of dogs themselves. For others this 'eye' must be developed with hard work until you gain the instinctive appreciation of quality.

Many hours will be spent ringside or attending kennel visits, workshops, seminars, or reading as much information on breeds as possible and discussion with fellow judges and breeders. To investigate each breed's history helps to comprehend the purpose for which it was developed, and therefore the qualities that help characterise the breed. A judge must learn the true meaning of type, be able to recognize sound, correct movement and be able to evaluate what is hiding underneath a heavy coat. Above all, a judge must learn that mere familiarity with the words of a breed standard is valueless without understanding and correct interpretation of their meaning, plus the ability to visualise the ideal specimen.

Without doubt the personality, temperament and demeanour of a judge is paramount. The need to be knowledgeable, poised, calm and possess the ability to stay this way under the most unexpected circumstances. A great deal of self-confidence is needed, as well as the ability to make quick and decisive decisions. Of course, being strong-minded with the courage of your own convictions is also a bonus!

Also of prime importance, is understanding that judging is also work! A large assignment with a full day's judging can be draining on the fittest of judges. Not to mention the need to repeat the exercise the very next day when getting swollen feet back into shoes can be more than a trial.

Always remember, that an exhibitor is paying us a compliment when they spend their money, time, work and confidence when they bring in an entry. In return they expect their dog to be judged impartially, honestly and to the very best of our ability. This is their minimum entitlement, should they receive less, the reflection is only upon you as a judge.

You will have times when friends exhibit under you or known successful handlers, or a top winning dog comes into your ring. This can be challenging, especially for newer judges who want to be seen to 'do the right thing'. The best advice we can give is that written by Tom Horner, famous English all breed judge in his book 'Take Them Round Please':

"When judging dogs, you must not be swayed by any consideration, except by the relative merit of the dogs in front of you. You have but one duty: to judge the dogs. Forget the handlers and forget what the dogs have won previously. Place the dogs as you think they should stand, never mind if the winner belongs to your best friend or your worst enemy. Disregard the fact that you won under one of the exhibitors last week, and that another is judging at the next show. Be completely selfish – please yourself and simply judge the dogs and safeguard your reputation. That is the only way to gain respect from your peers"

So, considering the pitfalls mentioned, you must be wondering about the good side ....there is indeed one. Being blessed with a ring full of quality dogs is breathtaking, a feeling quite hard to describe. When a dog full of quality and showmanship enters the ring, the 'hairs-on-the-back-of-the-neck' can stand up and you know you have found your winner.

OK, are you still interested in becoming a judge? If so, read on.

## The First Steps

If you have never been on the Dogs NZ judges panel before you will need to start with the Aspiring List. This is the first step in your Judging journey and is designed to familiarise you with the basics and prepare you for when you step into the ring as a Ribbon Parade judge. The time on this panel can be short or long; it is up to you and there is no time limit. As part of your application, you will need to pay a membership fee to the Association, and this is a reduced fee for the first year. Refer to the fees section on the website for the appropriate fees for the first year on the Aspiring List and subsequent full membership.

You will need to meet the criteria laid out in the Judges Regulations section: Conditions for Appointment to the Aspiring Judges List and the Official Show Judges Panel <https://nzdogjudge.com/regulations/>. This regulation will outline the minimum requirements, and this will include indicating the amount of time you have been actively involved with dog showing and membership with Dogs NZ or a recognised Canine body.

Once you have checked the regulations to ascertain that you meet the minimum requirements, you must complete the Application form that is available from the NZDJA website under forms. Include any information that you may need to support your application and deposit the appropriate fee to the NZDJA bank account shown on the application form. If you have any questions regarding completion of the application, contact our secretary at the address shown on the website.

Once you have been approved you will need to join a branch. A list of these and the relevant contact details is on the NZDJA website on the National Board page. Contact the Branch Secretary and obtain details from them for when and where their meetings are held and what events they have planned for Trainees.

## Aspiring Judges List

Your time spent on this list allows you to familiarise yourself with ringcraft, how to go over a dog and a few other tips to prepare you for your very first Ribbon Parade appointment. If you haven't done so already, contact your closest branch to find out when and where they hold their meetings and make arrangements to attend.

Your first judging appointment may well be at an All-Breeds Ribbon Parade, where you may have entries of only a few dogs or up to 50 or more. To ensure your first judging appointment is enjoyable and rewarding it is expected that you will have at least a basic understanding of correct ring procedures. Much of this you will have learned as an exhibitor but being on the other side can be a different experience. Take every opportunity to learn about ringcraft before you step into the ring for the first time and there is information on ringcraft included in this guidance manual.

During this period on the Aspiring List, you will need to attend Branch meetings and any training and lectures, plus it is a good idea to start to become conversant with the Show Regulations and Judges Regulations, anatomy of the dog and the Canine Glossary of Terms. Your branch will assist you with learning basic ringcraft techniques and guide you on the correct way to approach dogs etc.

Whilst during this initial introduction period you will not be judging, it is a valuable learning time. You may be offered a match parade opportunity, and you are permitted to judge this. You should now be looking to complete the requirements for promotion to the Ribbon Parade Panel. Please refer to the latest version of the NZDJA regulations on the website for details of the activities you will need to complete before you can apply for promotion. <https://nzdogjudge.com/regulations/>

You will see that there are requirements for stewarding, being on a committee of a club, attending branch meetings and completing the mandatory activities. If you have never stewarded before, there is a recorded lecture available to view on the NZDJA training platform – JOLTED. Mandatory items are delivered by your branch, and some are available on JOLTED. You will need access to the JOLTED platform and if this hasn't been provided to you already, contact the secretary and they will pass on your request to the correct person. You will also need to provide evidence of your term on a committee and a copy of the clubs AGM minutes and/or committee meeting minutes showing your attendance and contribution will suffice.

You must now start to record details of activities completed as these will need to be included with future promotion applications. All the relevant forms can be found on the NZDJA website under the Resources / Judges Forms tab. You will need:

- Stewarding Record Card.
- Mandatory Activity Card
- Credit Record Card

You will be required to complete a new mandatory activity card each year however, the stewarding record card does not require a new one each year. The credit record card can be used for more than one year but refer to the regulations for the maximum number of times an activity can be claimed and the expiry of the credits.

## Promotion to the Ribbon Parade Panel

Application for promotion to the Ribbon Parade panel can be made at any time once you have completed all the requirements. Make sure you have the records signed off by the correct persons at the time of completion to ensure records are accurate. When you are ready to apply for promotion to the Ribbon Parade panel complete the application form which can be found on the website and send to the secretary address shown on the form and pay the required application fee. You will also need to ensure that your membership is current before applying.

Once your application is received the Board of NZDJA will assess it against the regulation requirements and if approved it will then be forwarded to Executive Council for approval. If this is granted you will be promoted to the Ribbon Parade panel and will then be able to judge at any All Breeds, Group or Specialty Ribbon Parade.

It is important to note that now you are officially on the Dogs NZ Judges Panel and as a member of the judging panel you have agreed to abide by the Code of Conduct. This is an important document, and you are expected to familiarise yourself with the requirements and expectations. Breaches of the Code of Conduct can result in disciplinary action, so it is expected that you have a good knowledge of this document. A copy of the Code is at the end of this manual and can also be found on the Judges website under Regulations. <https://nzdogjudge.com/regulations/>

You will be eager to step into the ring however, you cannot approach clubs to request an appointment as this is considered soliciting and is contrary to the Code of Conduct. However, your name will have been included in the list of promotions circulated and in the EC minutes plus both the Dogs NZ and the NZDJA website will have been updated following your promotion to the panel and you must wait for clubs to approach you. This can take some time so it is important that you continue to learn as much as possible and your name will soon 'get out there' and appointments will be forthcoming. Once you receive an offer to judge you will need to complete the contract the club sends you. Refer to the section in this manual on **Contracts and Appointments**. You should now also download the Judging Record Card from the website and include this with your judges' forms, ideally in a folder set aside for all your judging records.

New Zealand is different to other countries with our training process. Judges in most countries are licenced to judge either a single breed or a group at open show level first. In NZ we start you judging all breeds of dogs without restriction other than the type of event. This can be daunting as you will have no idea of which breeds will be represented until you step into the ring. No one expects that you will have an instant recall of every breed standard and be fully conversant with all the breeds.

The first time you judge you will be nervous, that is to be expected. Just judge the dogs based on what you know from observing at shows. Does it look like its breed? Does it have the breed characteristics you expect from your knowledge of the breed? Is it sound i.e. not limping? Does it move ok? Is the temperament ok? Ribbon Parade experience is invaluable for gaining ringcraft skills and getting used to being in the ring making decisions. You will be more familiar with some breeds than others and that is to be expected. Some clubs will give you a heads up on the expected breeds or any unusual breeds that may be there, and you can study these along with those common breeds you can most probably expect. Concentrate on the general appearance and the breed specific characteristics. You may get to judge a specialist Ribbon Parade, and this will give you the opportunity to study the breed in depth prior to the appointment. Most importantly - just enjoy your appointment, have fun and don't forget to smile!

## Promotion to the Open Show Panel

Your next step in your judging journey is the Open Show Panel. At this level you can judge at Open Show level for any All Breeds, Group or Specialty club plus you can judge stake classes at any Group or Specialty Championship show (but not All Breeds Championship shows). You can continue to judge at Ribbon Parade level and are encouraged to do so as every opportunity to step into the ring is a valuable learning experience. You can judge at Ribbon Parade and Open Show levels right up until you become All Breeds.

Again, refer to the current regulations for details of what is required for promotion to the Open Show panel. At the time of writing this manual these requirements include continuing to attend branch meetings, being a member of a club committee, completing the mandatory activities, completing stewarding requirements and credit points, plus you will need to have judged at Ribbon Parade level. You will also need to have been observed when judging a Ribbon Parade and complete the Open Show exam.

**Credit Points:** You are now required to obtain 50 Credits in the two years preceding your application – refer to appendix II of the regulations for details of how many points each activity earns, plus what constitutes an ‘official’ event. These can be gained from Stewarding, lectures, seminars, attending kennel visits, hosting a kennel visit, ringside observations etc. Note – these are a minimum requirement, and you are expected to exceed this requirement each year. If you are regularly attending training events, branch meetings and learning opportunities, accumulation of these points should be fairly easy.

**Observations:** This requirement is designed to assess your ringcraft at an early stage in your judging career and to highlight any areas which require improvement before they become bad habits which are hard to break! This activity **must** be done when you are judging a Ribbon Parade, not in a training environment, and the person observing you **must** be one of the NZDJA Official Observers. A list of these judges is on the website along with the relevant observation forms and protocols. It is strongly recommended that you read these protocols prior to the appointment. It is your responsibility to contact an Observer and make the arrangements. It is also expected that you will make the arrangements well ahead of the appointment, do not leave it until the last minute.

**Open Show Theory Exam:** This exam is designed to test your knowledge and extend your learning of canine glossary of terms, anatomy of the dog and rules and regulations of both Dogs NZ and NZDJA. This exam is now being delivered on our JOLTED system and is closed book style. Refer to the **Reference** section at the back of this manual for where to find study material.

Applications for promotion to the Open Show panel are not taken throughout the year like the Aspiring List and Ribbon Parade panel. Applications generally close on the 31<sup>st</sup> January each year with promotion requirements being completed 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December each year. Applications need to be made using the Open Show Application form annexing all supporting documentation (copies are acceptable) and emailing to the Secretary. Payment of the application fee is required, and your membership must also be up to date.

As with the Ribbon Parade panel, once your application is received the Board of NZDJA will assess it against the regulation requirements and if approved it will then be forwarded to Executive Council for approval. If this is granted you will be promoted to the Open Show panel and will then be able to judge at any All Breeds, Group or Specialty Open Shows.

Open Shows are more structured than Ribbon Parades, it is essentially a Championship Show without the CC's. One benefit is that you will receive a Reporting Schedule the week before the show and can study your standards prior to show day. Again, you are not expected to have the knowledge of a Championship show judge, but you are expected to have put in some preparation prior to the appointment. This is an opportunity to do some research and delve a bit deeper into each breed. Because of this, you will be able to be more confident in your judging decisions as your preparation is more complete.

Open Shows are extremely useful training grounds and all judges with six groups or less are permitted to judge at Open Shows. Specialist Breed Open Shows are usually well supported, and you will find many quality dogs will be entered. It is a precursor to Championship Show judging that is invaluable, and you should accept as many Open Show appointments as you are able to.

## Promotion to Championship Show Panels

Your next step in your judging journey is the Championship Show Panel. At this level you can judge the group you have obtained your licence for at Championship Show level for any All Breeds, Group or Specialty club plus you can judge the stake classes at any All Breeds, Group or Specialty Championship show. In addition to judging at Championship show level you can continue to judge at Ribbon Parade and Open Show level and are encouraged to do so. As stated previously, every opportunity to step into the ring is a valuable learning experience.

Again, refer to the current regulations for details of what is required for promotion to the Championship Show panel. Note – these vary depending on whether you are applying for your first, or subsequent panels. Each step has a different number of dogs to be judged and as you progress through the groups the numbers required increases and these numbers relate to Championship judging appointments. At the time of writing this manual, promotional requirements include continuing to attend branch meetings, being a member of a club committee, complete the mandatory activities, complete stewarding requirements and credit points, plus if this is your first group panel you will have need to have judged at open show level and have been observed when judging a Ribbon Parade or Open Show. From 2026 all judges applying for promotion to group panels must also complete the Intensive Critiquing requirements.

Applications for promotion to group panels generally close on the 31<sup>st</sup> January each year with promotion requirements being completed 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December the year preceding application. Applications need to be made using the Group Application form (note: there are different forms for first and subsequent groups) annexing all supporting documentation (copies are acceptable) and emailing to the Secretary. Payment of the application fee is required, and your membership must also be up to date.

Once your application is received, the Board of NZDJA will assess it against the regulation requirements and if approval is granted you will be required to sit a theory exam for the group you are aspiring to. This exam will be held at a set date and time and will be delivered on the training portal JOLTED. The date and time will be well advertised prior to the exam (usually mid-March) and no dispensation will be given to sit this exam at a different date or time. See **Theory and Practical Exams** section later in this manual for more information. You will receive your mark immediately upon completion of the exam and if you pass, you will be permitted to complete the practical examination.

The practical examination will be held at either Auckland or Christchurch (or sometimes Manawatu) and is usually in July. If possible, it is recommended to attend Judges practical exams, preferably as an exhibitor, to familiarise yourself with the practical examination process.

On passing both your theory and practical exams, NZDJA will recommend you be promoted to the relevant group panel. Note: You must not enter into any contract to judge the group just passed nor can your name be published in a Dogs NZ schedule prior to confirmation of the appointment by Executive Council. This is a Dogs NZ Show regulation. In addition to this you must not judge the group overseas until you have judged it at least once in New Zealand.

## Specialist Breed Panel

Members of the Specialist Breed Panel are qualified to judge all breed classes including Best in Show at a Championship Show for the breed(s) they have qualified for. Currently judges wishing to apply for the Specialist Breed recognition have two paths available to them. Firstly, to qualify for promotion to the Specialist Breed Panel without having the group licence relevant to the breed you aspire to, you will be required to be on the Ribbon Parade panel first and you will have been involved in the breed you are aspiring to for a number of years. For full details on qualifying criteria refer to the current Judges Regulations. You will also need to sit both a theory and practical exam for your breed plus any other requirements such as Rules and Regulations and/or Canine Glossary of Terms which the Board may require.

The other option for Specialist Breed recognition is for those judges who are currently licenced to judge that breed at group level but would like recognition as a Breed Specialist. The current regulations allow for promotion to a specialist breed panel by meeting set criteria as set out in the regulations and forgoes the requirement to sit an exam.

## Theory and Practical Exams

Exams are a necessary part of our education process. New Zealand has, for many years, enjoyed a reputation around the world for producing quality judges. Our training and examination system is designed to support that reputation and uphold the standard of excellence expected of our judges. Our Group and Specialty theory exams are typically held in March and are now done through our training portal – JOLTED. Prior to the theory exams, the board will deliver online sessions with all candidates who wish to attend, to ensure they have the necessary device and access ability for exam night. There is no longer a waiting time for the exams to be marked as everything is online, and candidates receive their mark immediately. We will also run a 'hot desk' for any issues on the night, so all candidates are well supported if there are technical problems. Requests to sit the exam at a different date/time or at an overseas location will be declined.

The theory exam for group candidates consists of 100 multichoice breed questions and 20 questions on Canine Glossary of Terms and Anatomy. The pass mark is 70%. These are closed book exams, and no study material is permitted into the exam venue. The questions are set on the breed standards as at 31<sup>st</sup> August the preceding year and this ensures that everyone is studying, and exams are written from, the same standards.

The writing of the exams will follow the NZDJA protocols for setting theory exams. The bulk of the questions will be on the more common breeds with only one or two questions on each of the rarer breeds. The additional 20 questions are set from the Dogs NZ Canine Glossary of Terms and Anatomy document which you will find on the Dogs NZ website on the Judges tab along with the official breed standards. A copy of this document and a link to the breed standards is also on the NZDJA website. This is accurate at the time writing but as always, check the regulations for any changes or updates.

Study for exams is self-driven. This is *your* learning path and the more time you spend studying and researching the better chance you will have of passing with good marks and hence, having a good knowledge of the breeds. There is no shortcut to learning and understanding breed standards and typically most candidates who do not pass the theory exam cite lack of preparation and time studying. Expect to spend 12 months in preparation and the last three months in intense study. It is recommended that you read the guides on the website 'Studying for Theory Exams' and 'A Guide for Examination Candidates' – under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

Once you have passed your theory exam you can start preparing for your practical. These are typically held in July each year in Auckland and Christchurch and sometimes Manawatu. You will be expected to sit the exam in your area however, if you wish to sit in one of the other locations, contact the board early in the planning process after the theory exams and we will endeavour to accommodate your request. However, if this is approved, all costs will be borne by you.

Study for your practical is a different process to the theory and requires a shift in mindset. The theory exam is about the '*what*' and learning the standards. The practical is more about the '*why*'. If you understand the '*why*' – the '*what*' is easier to remember. The examination process is designed to test your competency as a judge. It is not just about reciting a breed standard, this is about your understanding of a breed, its history, its form and function, how you examine the exhibits, did you look for breed hallmarks, how did you place them, how well can you justify your placings. Were your decisions sound decisions and are you able to explain your decisions to the examiners. You will also be required to critique some dogs during the exam. This is an area where many candidates struggle so it is recommended that you practice critiquing at every opportunity and learn to describe what you are seeing not quote the standard verbatim. Your presentation and ringcraft will also be taken into consideration. Dress as if you were judging at any appointment, and if you haven't judged for a while, try and get some ringcraft practice in during the months preceding the exam.

There will be an expectation that you have studied beyond the breed standard and that will involve reading articles on the history and development of the breeds, watching YouTube videos and much more. You will be expected to know why it is essential for each breed to have the characteristics to do its job and to ensure that form follows function. You may be asked about the origins of a breed and the difference between that and a similar, related breed e.g. The Cocker Spaniel and the American Cocker Spaniel. Specialist candidates are expected to have a broad and deep knowledge of their breed that extends beyond the New Zealand breed standard.

On the day of the exam nerves can take over and it can be challenging to keep these under control. Deep breathing and visualisation exercises can be beneficial for candidates who struggle with nerves. Preparation is key and if you get the opportunity, attend mock exam sessions run by the branches as this will usually help identify any areas you need to work on before the exam.

You may wish to read the articles on the website on practical exams under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

## Contracts and Appointments

Firstly, you need to understand that you cannot solicit for appointments i.e. you cannot contact a club offering to judge for them, nor can you offer to judge when discussing in general conversation or offer to pay your expenses if they would give you an appointment. You must wait for clubs to contact you. The exception to that is when a club puts a call out to judges who are seeking appointments – usually this is to judge a benefit show, Ribbon Parade or Open show.

All offers to judge in New Zealand and Australia include a contract which is normally sent to you by the club secretary. Usually, they will contact you first to check on your availability to complete the assignment. This contract details the date, venue, type of show, groups or breeds to be judged and sometimes will include an offer of expenses the club is prepared to pay. You must sign and return the contract within the specified time, but ideally within 48 hours. Failure to return the contract within the required time could result in the offer being withdrawn. It is recommended that you immediately reply to the club acknowledging receipt of the contract and advising when you will return it if you have to check arrangements e.g. leave from work etc. If the club hasn't completed any information on what expenses you are being offered, then you will need to complete this section yourself. Items to be considered are:

**Travel:** If flying, the contract should state from which airport/town etc. E.g. Return economy airfare from Christchurch to Melbourne. If you have airport parking costs, you may wish to add that as well plus it is a good idea to add airport transfers to the contract too – you don't want to arrive and find you are expected to sort your own transport to your accommodation. If you are within driving distance of the show, what arrangements are there for fuel costs? You will need to specify an amount if the club hasn't indicated what they are offering. E.g. \$150 petrol costs. When you first start judging you might want to contribute to travel costs. Most clubs can't afford to pay full airfare costs for Ribbon Parade or Open Show judges, and group judges with only one or two groups are not yet 'useful' to All Breeds clubs and can be expensive for a club to host. Sometimes a club will offer a new judge an appointment on the condition of contribution of costs e.g. the club might pay for all your accommodation and meals if you pay your travel costs. Or they might pay your travel costs if you agree to be hosted by a club member. This becomes a win/win for both parties.

**Accommodation and meals:** It is recommended that you specify what is required e.g. Single motel accommodation with all meals. Sometimes clubs will want to billet you, and it is up to you whether you accept this or not but whatever is agreed must be included in the contract.

**Judging Fee:** This is your choice. Some clubs specify a judging fee on the contract others leave it for you to complete. We recommend that you pitch this in line with your level of experience and other expenses that you are claiming but a fee between \$50 and \$100 per show is reasonable. Some judges don't charge airport parking but charge a judging fee. Others prefer to forgo a fee so that is one less expense for the club. It is your choice but whatever you decide to include in the contract, the club has the option to accept or reject your costs.

You are also required to document on the contract any other appointments within the stated area. Most clubs want to make sure that you are not judging close to their show prior to the appointment as this could potentially affect their entry. Similarly, clubs will often put a clause in the contract that you must not accept appointments with a specified area prior to judging for them. If you are unsure, then let the club know and let them make the decision as to whether it is acceptable or not.

Once the club has received your returned signed contract then they will be in a position to either accept or reject your conditions. Clubs usually only reject contracts if the expenses are unacceptable to them or you are already contracted to another club.

Your next step is to mark it in your calendar and make any necessary arrangements that you will need to. If the appointment is overseas, check your passport is current and any visa requirements. Refer to the ***Judging Overseas*** section in this manual.

Finally, a contract is a contract and should not be broken except in exceptional circumstances. Lack of planning on your part is not sufficient reason to withdraw from a contract, and withdrawing from a contract to attend another canine event is in breach of regulations and you could be subject to disciplinary action. If, for any reason, you are unable to fulfil the contract e.g. due to accident or illness, then it is important to promptly let the club know so they can make other arrangements. Sometimes they may ask you for recommendations for a replacement judge or they may require you to arrange for cancellation and refund of airfares if you have booked these yourself. Whatever the circumstances, it is important that you work with the club to get the best outcome. This ensures that your reputation stays intact.

## Ringcraft

Good ringcraft techniques can be the difference between a club running to time or running late. A judge that completes the assignment in good time, makes the exhibitors feel that they have each been fairly considered and is pleasant to exhibitors and officials is a club's dream judge. 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. You will be required to complete the Ringcraft mandatory item each year, and this is an opportunity for you to get hands on and practice and discuss different options with experienced judges.

**Setting up and running an efficient ring:** The first consideration is how you will set up your ring. Where you set your table up will determine how efficient your ring will be. Every ring is different, and we need to learn to be flexible for different ring set ups. You should consider how many dogs are you required to judge? If you have a full day of 250 dogs you will need to set your ring up for maximum efficiency. If you have a smaller entry, you may be able to spend a bit more time with each breed. The show manager will advise you on timing expectations. What about weather? Is there a gazebo for you to set the table up under if it is pouring with rain? Where is your steward positioned? Can you communicate with them easily without having to do much walking? Some judges seem intent on getting in a high step count for the day – unless you are really fit, it is a good idea to position yourself so you do minimal walking. If judging a championship show in NZ you will have JBO forms to complete which will require you to walk back to the stewards table to complete these. Most clubs expect you to judge at between 30 and 40 dogs per hour. After a while you will get to know at what speed you judge at but it is a good idea to mark on the reporting sheet where you expect to be by the end of each hour of judging. Something to note - if each dog takes an extra 20 seconds in the ring that adds another 1.5 hours to your judging if you have a full day of 250 dogs to get through – that can be the difference between finishing on time or finishing your judging in the dark! Most importantly, if the ring is not working for you, then be prepared to shift it so it does. Changes in the sun, weather conditions or you may start judging a new group.... all factors that require different considerations.

The next consideration will be do you send them straight to the table or around the ring first? Again, this may be dependent on the number of entries, but it is worth noting that some toy breeds will be at the first corner in the same amount of time some gundogs would have completed a lap. Some breeds are better if they are allowed to settle first with an 'around the ring', especially working and gundog breeds.

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. Provided you have observed the dogs gait while going away, coming back and side gait, the choice is yours. Again, experimentation will give you the feeling for what will work best for you.

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. If you want to re-examine the dog, then simply ask the handler to place the dog back on the table.

If time is a factor, then ask your steward to hand out the ribbons or prize cards. If you are short on 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.

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.

**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, talk to those in your branch and practice whenever you can. There are a number of components to the hands-on examination, and each one has its challenges.

Firstly, stand back and take in the whole dog, looking at its profile, balance and general condition. Next approach the dog from a slight angle. This is a good habit to get into for when you are judging sight hounds. It is advisable to speak to the handler, greet them with "Good morning, how old is your dog?" Not only is this polite and helps with assessing the age of the dog against what you are seeing but it helps to put the dog at ease, especially the guarding breeds. You may want to offer a hand to the dog or give it a little rub on the chest, so it knows you are friendly.

If you are going to mouth the dog yourself, you can do this at the start or you can do it once you have completed the rest of the hands-on examination. Alternatively, you can ask the exhibitor to do this, it is entirely your choice, however if you are going to ask the exhibitor to, make sure you see everything you need to, and nothing is being concealed by a strategically placed finger or thumb.

Once you are judging at championship show level it is expected that you will know which breeds you need to check just the bite, which breeds require you to check for full dentition and which breeds require you to check the colour of the roof of the mouth and the tongue. Most show dogs are used to having their teeth checked and it is easy to do but if the dogs are young or reluctant to let you check the mouth, then ask the handler to mouth the dog for you.

The next part of your assessment requires you to really feel the dog's construction starting at the head. If the dog is a coated breed, then you need to get your hands in under that coat and really feel the points of the dog. Your hands should be confirming what your eye has seen, or it may be telling you a different picture. Clever handling, grooming or markings may give an illusion, but your hands should give you the true picture. This is an area which takes time to master, to gain confidence with assessing dogs of all sizes and to understand what you are actually feeling when examining the dog. We often see judges that appear to just 'massage' and don't really feel the construction, then there are the judges who just check the teeth, topline and testicles for the boys, or those that are very heavy handed and frighten the more sensitive dogs. You will need to find a balance which is kind on the dogs but still allows you to feel everything you need to.

When we first start our judging, it is good idea to mentally tick things off in your head as detailed in the guide below. As you become more experienced you will do this automatically and mentally compare each point with the requirements of the breed standard. This takes time and practice and again, there is no substitute for experience. Here is a guide for what this might look like:

- First impressions when the dog is set up – Does it look like the breed, does it carry the hallmarks of the breed, is it balanced? Is it square, rectangular, long on leg, short on leg? What is the topline like, is it level, roached, arched over the loin?
- Moving to the head. Check the bite. Is it a scissor bite, undershot, overshot? Do you need to check full dentition – if so, are there any teeth missing? Check for inverted canines or a wry mouth. Then look at the eyes - what shape are they, what colour are they? Are they forward facing or obliquely set? Next the stop, is it shallow, moderate or deep? How long is the muzzle, what shape is it, what about the underjaw? Next look at the skull shape. Is it broad, narrow, flat, domed, arched? Are the planes parallel or divergent? Is the occiput prominent? What about the ears? Are they small, medium size or large? Do you need to measure their length? What shape are they? Where are they set – high or low?
- Next move to the neck. Is it long, medium or short? Thick or slender? Round or flattened? How does it flow into the shoulders – is it smooth or is there a definite junction?
- Now on to the front. First check the shoulders. What is the width between the blades at the withers? What is the layback of the shoulder, is the upper arm of equal length or short? How tight are the elbows, what shape is the bone or the forelegs, round, oval or bladed? Put your hand in the front between the legs, is the fore chest prominent or is there a gap, how narrow is the front or is it wide? What about the pasterns – are they well flexed, do they have a moderate spring or are they straight? What about the feet? What shape are they – oval, round, cat-like, hare foot or splayed? Where are the feet placed – are they turning in or out?
- Next feel the ribbing, the loins and the topline. What is the spring of rib like – barrel, slab sided, moderate? Where does the last rib end and the pelvis begin – how long or short is the loin? What about the underline, how much tuck up is there?
- Now you have reached the rear end. Check the croup – is it flat, steep or rounded? That will determine the tail set – is it high, low or flowing off the back. How long is the tail, how is it carried? Feel the stifle angulation, is it well angulated, moderately angulated or straight? How long is the second thigh? What about the hocks? Are they long or short? Are they parallel or cow hocked or bow hocked? Don't forget to check the back feet and feel the muscle on the thighs. And while you are there – check the testicles for the boys. Gently – don't squeeze them!

- Finally check the coat. Run your hand up the side for short, coated dogs, and part the coat for the longer ones. Is the coat dense or sparse? Is it a double coat or a single coat? What about the texture – is it soft and silky or coarse, is it fine or harsh or is it full of grooming product? What colour is the coat when you part it?
- Now stand back and have another look at the dog taking into account everything you have felt. How does it compare with your knowledge and understanding of the breed standard?

**Assessing gait:** This is where you will confirm what you found on your hands on examination. Learning to assess gait takes time and experience and there is no shortcut to this knowledge. Plus, not only are you assessing for soundness of movement but also for the correct gait for the breed. This is where a thorough knowledge of the breed standard is required. Be aware of exhibitors over-handling and don't be afraid to ask a handler to slow down or to loosen a tight lead. Remember you are looking for correctness in movement, not the fastest or the flashiest.

A few considerations when assessing gait:

- Are the front legs straight or are they bent? Is the dog out at the elbow or very narrow in front or are the front legs wide apart? Is it paddling at the pasterns in a circular motion or flicking its feet out and winging? Are the front legs converging when coming towards you or are they moving parallel? Are they crossing over?
- What about the going away gait? Are the hind legs converging or are they parallel? What are the hocks doing – are they turned in or out or moving in a circular motion or are they straight? Is the dog moving straight or is it sidewinding?
- What is the gait like from the side profile? Is the gait smooth with minimal lift of the front legs? How far forward are the front legs reaching? Are the front legs lifting high or the back legs kicking high? Is the dog driving from the rear? What about the footfall, how far forward do the hind legs reach? Is it overreaching with the hind feet?
- What about the topline when it is moving? Is it bouncing up and down or staying level and smooth? And the head carriage – is it dropping down or carrying it high?
- Is the handler affecting the gait – holding the lead too tight or jerking on the lead?
- Is it sound or is it lame? Is it dropping on a shoulder or skipping with one or both of the hind legs?
- And your most important consideration – is the gait correct for the breed?

Understanding correct movement takes time and comes with experience. Recognising unsound gait can also take time. There are now some excellent video's on YouTube which will help you to understand the correct gait for the breed.

**Selecting your placings:** Once you have judged all the exhibits in your class, it is time to select your placing's. (For information on making decisions, refer to the section ***Making Decisions – Type!, Type!, Type!*** further in this handbook.) How you indicate your selection is up to you and it is your decision whether you place the dogs on the move or on the stack. You may vary – sometimes you have a clear winner, other times you are still undecided and want to see them move some more. You may only have one or two to choose from or you may have multiple dogs in the class in which case it is ideal if you place them in order and then send them to the steward, so everyone is clear on the order you have awarded. When awarding Best Dog/Bitch or Best of Breed you may wish to gait each dog again or just one or two. This may depend on timing and how many dogs to you have to judge as this all takes up time. Whatever you do, be decisive in your decision and clearly announce the class winners to your steward. It is your decision whether you shake the winners' hand or not, but neither the exhibitors nor the steward should be left wondering which dog was awarded.

When judging your group or in show awards you need to be seen to give every exhibitor a fair opportunity to show their dog to you. Sometimes, you get a surprise when a dog that didn't perform in the breed classes shines in the group ring or vice-versa. If time permits, run every dog. Never, ever run most of the class and leave just a few standing. If you are short on time, then only run the 3 or 4 that you are considering or alternatively stand in the first corner and have them come in one at a time, so you see the coming and going away gait again. A word of caution for our less experienced judges, if you are going to short list you need to be 100% sure that you remember every dog that you have considered when it comes to the age classes.

**Table and Ramp Breeds:** The use of tables and ramps is covered by the Dogs NZ Show regulations so it is important that you familiarise yourself with these regulations and understand what you can and can't do. Typically, in both Australia and New Zealand table breeds must be examined on the table. Use of the ramp is optional and is at the discretion of the judge. However, if you are going to use the ramp you must examine all the exhibits in that breed on the ramp.

**Communicating with exhibitors:** The best advice is to keep all communication to pleasantries only. We are a small country, and you will have friends and acquaintances that exhibit under you, that cannot be avoided. It is recommended that you call all exhibitors 'Sir' or 'Madam' regardless how well you know them and never call them or their dog by their name. Sometimes judges feel the need to comment on a decision or some other commentary while in the ring – the best advice is 'just don't – keep your thoughts to yourself'! Judges' reputations are often tarnished by innocent comments. Protect your reputation and always be professional.

Final ringcraft tip – Whatever you do with your ringcraft, have a reason for doing it. Don't follow what others do without understanding the reason. There are many different techniques, and you need to establish your own style and rhythm.

**Recommended:** For a more in-depth look at ringcraft, download a copy of the 'Ringcraft' – NZDJA Training Guide on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

## Making Decisions – Type! Type! Type!

Judging dogs is really all about making decisions. The better your knowledge and appreciation of breed type, the better your decisions will be. At Ribbon Parade and Open Show level you are not expected to have an in-depth knowledge of breed type but once you reach championship show level then your focus must change. At this level you are looking to award dogs that not only **look** like the breed and are sound in body and temperament but also carry the **hallmarks** of the breed. Hallmarks are those characteristics that define that breed, distinguish it from other breeds and allow it to do the job it was bred to do. Anne Rogers Clark, a very famous judge, instructs judges to "First choose the individuals in your ring with the **BEST BREED TYPE**, and then reward the soundest of those type individuals".

The best decisions are those that are made quickly and with confidence. You will make mistakes, you will second guess yourself, even the most experienced judges sometimes reflect on a decision and wonder if they got it right. Sometimes we just need to listen to our heart as our subconscious has picked up things our conscious mind hasn't, make a decision, point to the dog and then move on. If we overthink it because we want to make the 'right' decision we can sometimes miss seeing the overall quality of a dog. How often do we see judges going back and forth trying to decide what to do and then miss the one with the best breed type. Or we see judges that 'fault' judge and in doing so they sometimes discard the best dogs and end up with a lineup of dogs with no real

faults but no real virtues either. The key here is to always consider the overall dog. Yes, sometimes the standard instructs us to penalise a fault, but we must always consider the degree of the fault along with the dogs' virtues. It is said that every dog has faults, some just carry them better. You will almost always have to compromise as it is rare to find an exhibit that you wouldn't want to improve something on.

A good mantra to guide you when making decisions is to consider with each dog – 'What do I reward and what do I forgive?', 'What does this dog have to offer the breed?' and finally, 'Can this dog do the job it was bred to do?' As previously stated, no dog is perfect, but if we go back to the very reason for dog shows, we are assessing breeding stock. Yes, it has become a show of handlers and grooming but the very basis of what we do is to assess breed type. We have a responsibility to the future of each breed and to enable us to competently assess type we must have a good understanding of the breed, not just know the breed standard, but really *understand* the breed. What was it bred for, what makes this breed capable of doing that job, what are the hallmarks that define that breed. When a breed no longer carries the hallmarks and characteristics that define it and has become a breed of generic show dogs, then we, as judges, have failed that breed.

As you gain more experience you will automatically recognise quality and breed type and will be able to make sound decisions with confidence. Be aware that sometimes the odd one out is the correct one and you may need to be brave with your decisions. Never be afraid to check your breed standards if you are unsure of something. Just stop the judging and explain that there is something you wish to check. The exhibitors and the breed will thank you for it. If you are ever in a dilemma deciding between several dogs, choose the dog that, in your opinion, can best do the job it was bred to do. If you always do this, you can't go wrong.

## Withholding the Challenge Certificate

Firstly, let's drill down on what we are awarding. Yes, we all know that we need CC's to get champion titles but do we know what the Challenge Certificate actually says? We are signing a certificate that states 'I hereby certify that having judged the above named dog at the place and date detailed, I am of the opinion that it is worth of the title of champion'. So essentially, in awarding the CC we are of the opinion that it should be a champion. Our system is such that unless the judge specifically states 'No Challenge' then it is automatically awarded. Some judges like to make a point of saying – 'Best dog and challenge is....' But this isn't as common as it used to be. However, it is worth letting your steward know what your preference is and whether they can assume the CC is awarded unless you say otherwise.

The first time you withhold (or refuse or decline) the awarding of the challenge is, like anything in life, the hardest – but remember what you are there for and what the challenge certificate says. To receive the challenge, it should look like the breed, it should present the main characteristics of the breed, and it should be sound in both movement and temperament. If it fails on any of these counts or has a very serious fault according to the breed standard, then you must decide if this dog is worthy of being a champion.

This also applies to the reserve challenge. Remember – if, for any reason, the challenge winner has the CC withdrawn – maybe it didn't show for group judging or was entered in the wrong class – then the reserve will be elevated. You must be confident that your reserve CC winner could also be awarded the CC.

If you make the decision to withhold, then it is common courtesy to explain to the exhibitor why. Don't get into a debate with them, just say something along the lines of 'In my opinion this dog .....' or 'Today, I am not going to award the challenge because ....' Don't let the exhibitor hijack your time in the ring demanding a full explanation or arguing with you. You have made the decision, stick with it and move on. If they persist, offer to discuss it with them at the end of the days judging and suggest they bring the dog and a copy of the breed standard with them so you can both use it as a learning exercise.

Some judges don't want to upset exhibitors so will never withhold the CC which is questionable in itself. Sometimes we are dealing with a brand-new exhibitor and that is a really hard decision if the dog isn't of good quality. Some judges are tough and are known for withholding challenges. Sometimes we are in a position where the quality in a group is lacking and we are in a dilemma as to whether we withhold and potentially eliminate many breeds from the group line up. All these things must be considered. Always remembering it is your decision and as a judge you have a duty to the breed when making that decision.

## Tips for New Judges

You will find that there is so much to learn about judging and you will continue to learn for many years. Mostly we learn by experience, but it is nice to have some information at the start of our judging journey to help us. Download a copy of the 'Tips for the Newcomer' – NZDJA Training Guide on the website under <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

Judging is tiring and mentally draining. You are concentrating and standing in the middle of the ring for a good few hours, sometimes a full day. Make sure you are wearing comfortable shoes and clothing.

Be prepared. Not all clubs are great at looking after judges. Take a hat and sunblock if in summer. Buy a really good raincoat that packs down light and take it with you regardless. Many a judge has been caught out with rain that wasn't forecast.

Keep the social side to a minimum. Judging with a hangover is not acceptable nor is the alcohol induced loose lips after the show. Be professional!

Be curious. Use your breed standards. Always have your standards on hand, either a printed copy or on your device. Look up things while they are fresh in your mind.

And finally – Aim for excellence and have fun.

## Judging Overseas

Your first overseas appointments are usually to Australia. They are the only country that New Zealand has a reciprocal agreement with. Australian judges do not need approval to judge in New Zealand, and we do not require special approval to judge in Australia. **However**, remain aware that you must judge the group appointed to once in New Zealand before you can judge it overseas, and this **DOES include Australia!**

For all other countries, the governing body will request that your qualifications be ratified by the Dogs NZ, before you are approved to judge. Judges are reminded that you can only accept appointments for clubs where their governing body is recognised by Dogs NZ. For example, there are several governing bodies in the USA, but Dogs NZ only recognises the American Kennel Club. Other countries such as Canada, United Kingdom and countries which are FCI are also recognised, but some Asian countries and some clubs in countries such as Russia are not. A full list of FCI recognised associations can be downloaded at <https://www.fci.be/en/members/> It is important that if you are judging overseas other than Australia, you ensure the organisation extending the invitation applies to Dogs NZ for approval for you to judge. Severe penalties have previously been applied to judges that have accepted appointments for non-recognised clubs. If in doubt, check with the Director/Secretary before accepting an appointment to judge.

Overseas controlling bodies usually produce a Guide for Overseas Judges who have been invited to judge in their country, and they may include providing you with a copy of their breed standards. FCI countries all follow the FCI standards however, USA, Canada and Great Britain do not. For these countries they may ask you to sit an open book exam on the breeds you have been invited to judge.

If you are judging for an FCI show, you may be required to critique and/or grade some or all of the dogs. All FCI shows are run to the FCI regulations, including those in NZ and Australia so it is important that you familiarize yourself with FCI regulations and breed standards. For more information visit the FCI website <http://www.fci.be>. For FCI breed standards <https://www.fci.be/en/nomenclature/>

The following is a list of things to consider when you are judging overseas:

- Airfares – who will be booking the flights and if you are making the bookings yourself, when will you receive reimbursement? If you have a preferred airline, make sure it is stated on the contract and be prepared to pay the difference between the cheapest fare, and your preferred airline should this be the situation.
- Accommodation – What style of accommodation will be provided, what will be included in the package and who will be paying?
- Transfers to and from the hotel – what are the arrangements and how will you identify the person if someone is meeting you?
- Ensure sundry costs such as parking, visa (if required), insurance, etc are clarified in the contract.
- Ensure you are covered with travel insurance, either your own or supplied by the club. Illness or injury in a foreign country can be very expensive.
- Is a Visa required? If so, make sure you have allowed plenty of time for the application and approval of this. If you travel on a New Zealand passport you do not need a visa to travel to Australia however, other countries may have visa requirements.
- Obtain the address of the accommodation where you will be staying as you will need this for the customs/immigration forms. Always take a copy of your judging contract with you.
- Will you require vaccinations for rabies, malaria, yellow fever etc?

- Any prescription medication you may require – does it need certification from a professional or doctor? If you wear spectacles/contact lenses, make sure you take spares.
- Think about what you should carry in a 'judges bag' which you take with you each time you judge. Consider if you are judging in the outback of Australia or a foreign country where you don't speak the language - you may be accommodated in a small motel with not a shop in sight. What might you need in a hurry?
- Bottled water (which you may need to purchase on the way to the accommodation). Not all tap water in foreign countries is drinkable.
- Often it is advisable to purchase some snack food on arrival, unless you have specifically organised for a meal to be served to you.
- Panadol/pain killers and any other medication you may require (e.g. anti-nausea and/or anti diarrhoea.)
- Sewing Kit
- Not all hotels/motels will supply a Hair Dryer or a face cloth – in fact these days some don't even supply soap.
- Don't forget to take travel adaptor plugs for your appliances. Check the electrical supply voltage of the country you will be visiting and ensure your appliances will operate.
- Your wet weather gear should include a jacket for rain protection, and another one for warmth if required. Some footwear protection will keep your feet dry for the day. You will also need sun protection gear, a hat, and a good sun block! Take care in choosing your judging clothes on hot days. You don't want to suffer from sunburn. Insect Repellent is another 'must have'.
- Another consideration is that airlines seem most able to lose your bags, when your best judging outfit is required the very next day! Consider, if practical, that you may be able to pack in your hand luggage a basic toiletry kit, a change of underwear and a set of clothes that may be acceptable to judge in.
- If you have any special dietary requirements, please advise the club before departing.
- Many clubs will now provide you with a daily meal allowance which permits you to eat wherever and whatever you like. Some clubs will not provide alcohol. If, however, the club is entertaining you at their expense please remember that while alcohol in moderation is quite acceptable, many countries frown on excesses and your ability to judge thus may be impaired once you have had a few drinks. It is always best to err on the side of caution and remember at all times that you are an ambassador for your country.

## Dealing With Shy, Nervous Or Aggressive Dogs

The difficulty with beginning your judging at the Ribbon Parade level, is that frequently you are dealing with inexperienced dogs, handlers and stewards! And sometimes they all seem set on ruining your day out!

There are no set guidelines on which breeds you need to be most cautious of, however shy or nervous dogs can be difficult to judge, and this is when they are most like to nip or bite. Most standards will list this as a fault and caution is required when handling a nervous or shy dog. Some breeds are more confident than others and some breeds are bred for protection however, aggression towards humans should not be tolerated.

Without doubt, there are breeds that require a different judging approach. We have already talked about approaching sight hounds from the side but also consider that some of the guarding breeds perceive the area around the top of their withers as an area of domination. And some breeds are naturally cautious of strangers. In most cases these characteristics will be outlined in the relevant breed standard, and you will learn the particular traits for breeds as you gain experience judging. Couple a few more of these 'breed specific' features with a new or nervous person, and the recipe starts for potential trouble, irrespective of the size of the dog.

At Ribbon Parade level, it is important to acknowledge that it is a training ground for many dogs and handlers. Shy and/or nervous dogs require additional time if you are to win them over. How much time you are prepared to devote to this naturally depends on the response from the dog. Age is also a determining factor, and you could expect to spend a bit more time with a puppy than a mature dog.

A factor to consider is that this may be the first outing to the show ring, and the way you treat the dog will play a large part in determining the dogs' attitude to future shows. If you are struggling to complete a physical examination of the dog, ask the handler to move the dog, then reset the dog and attempt the process again. If you are still struggling, then it is seldom worth persevering. It is your option on whether the dog remains in the ring and is considered for placing, or if you should dismiss it from the ring. At Ribbon Parade level there is a higher level of tolerance expected however, at Championship Show level, it is considered that if you are unable to physically examine the dog due to shyness, nervousness or aggression then you should excuse it from the ring.

There are Show Regulations that deal with the correct procedure for dealing with aggressive dogs, or any dog which is excused from the ring. All judges are expected to be familiar with these regulations and ensure that correct procedure is followed.

If you are of the opinion that any exhibit is not in a fit state for exhibition you have to ability to excuse the dog from the ring and report it to the Show Manager.

## **Dealing With Aggressive Exhibitors**

The reality of being a judge is that there will always be some who disagree with your decisions. Unfortunately, that is never going to change. Often the only person who is really happy is the one you have awarded Best of Group or Best in Show too, many others will think you could have done better, and some will think you should have stuck to your stewarding! Sadly, a proverbial suit of armour is sometimes required, however, that doesn't mean to say that judges should tolerate bad behaviour from exhibitors either. There are no protocols for dealing with aggressive exhibitors however, it would be in your best interests to involve the Show Manager if you feel the situation is getting out of hand.

If you have an exhibitor questioning your decisions, the best option is to advise the exhibitor that you will be happy to discuss your decision regarding their dog, after the completion of the judging. Also ask them to bring their dog and the breed standard with them. This has the benefit of allowing a 'cooling down' period for the exhibitor and it also allows you to have a discussion based on facts not opinion! If this does eventuate and you do have a calm discussion with the exhibitor treat it as a learning opportunity for both of you.

Just like aggressive dogs, there is no excuse for aggressive exhibitors! Often a firm response will prevent the incident escalating, and the best action is to not engage with the exhibitor and never allow yourself to be caught up in a heated debate.

Always remember, that judging is your opinion, they have paid for your opinion and have received it. They may not agree with it, but you are the judge, and it is your prerogative to make the decision based on your knowledge and understanding of the breed standard. Also, once awarded, placing's cannot be changed so any abuse is pointless.

In New Zealand we don't have an exhibitors Code of Conduct however some countries overseas do. As with dogs, abusive exhibitors have no place in the show ring and you have the ability to lay a formal complaint. Ensure you are aware of complaint procedures in the event that you feel it necessary to use them.

## Code Of Conduct

The following Code of Conduct for New Zealand Judges was amended in 2025. All judges, when making application for promotion or when renewing their membership, agree to abide by the Code of Conduct. Breaches of the Code can be grounds for official complaint and subsequent disciplinary action.

1. Judges, as experienced members of the Dog world, must at all times act with courtesy, professional integrity and complete impartiality and, by their actions, act as an example to other New Zealand Kennel Club members.
2. Judges must demonstrate a sound knowledge of anatomy, New Zealand Kennel Club Rules and Regulations and all relevant breed standards.
3. Judges must be seen to be honest and have integrity in all their dealings relating to judging.
4. Judges must impartially evaluate each dog they judge and award each animal the appropriate placing relative to the written NZKC standard, regardless of the dog's record, advertisement, friendship, or any other consideration.
5. Judges must not solicit or tout for judging appointments nor seek entry or cancellation of any particular dog. Soliciting or touting is defined as actively seeking or offering their services to judge, particularly if offering to contribute to expenses. Invitations to judge must be based solely on the judge's reputation and experience.
6. Judges must at all times be suitably dressed and groomed when judging.
7. Judges when exhibiting must by their demeanour and sporting behaviour, set an example to other exhibitors.
8. Judges must not criticize by act or word the work of other judges, nor offer criticism of any previously judged dog(s) to anyone including other officiating judges during the course of the show. Except for authorised ringside mentoring.
9. Social Media: Discretion must be used at all times. Judges must refrain from offering criticism of any dogs, judging or other judges on any of the social networks.
10. If a judge has judged with a panel of judges at one or more Championship Shows, or at an event where the judge is contracted by the same organizing committee, whether in New Zealand or overseas, they must not handle any dog or bitch under any of those judges for a period of 28 days after any such event. (Junior Showmanship and Young Kennel Club heats and finals, Ribbon Parades and Open Shows excluded).
11. Except in unavoidable circumstances, judges must honour all contracts and be punctual when fulfilling judging assignments.
12. A judge who withdraws from any contracted appointment for any reason must not be permitted to judge or attend any other canine event wherever held on any date that would prevent him/her from attending the originally contracted event, unless written dispensation has been granted by the contracting club.
13. Judges must not smoke or vape in the ring or the immediate vicinity and must abide by Government Regulations regarding smoking and vaping.

## Resources

Trainee judges are lucky to now have immediate access to so much information online however, there are still some excellent books that are available, and you are encouraged to purchase these as they are a valuable source of information, and you should reference them often. A list of recommended resources is:

### Online:

**NZDJA Website** <https://nzdogjudge.com/>

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

**NZDJA Training and Education** <https://nzdogjudge.com/training-tools-and-articles/>

**Board and branch contact details** <https://nzdogjudge.com/national-board/>

**Judges Code of Conduct** <https://nzdogjudge.com/judges-code-of-conduct/>

**Judges forms** <https://nzdogjudge.com/judges-forms/>

**List of Approved Observers for all levels** <https://nzdogjudge.com/observers-for-trainee-judges/>

**Dogs NZ Glossary of Canine Terms** – <https://www.dogsnz.org.nz/judges/breed-standards> or <https://nzdogjudge.com/member-resources/> .

**JOLTED training and examination platform** <https://breed.judges.org.nz/>

**FCI Website** <http://www.fci.be>.

### 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)