



BEST PRACTICES FOR NATIONAL TEAMS

PRE-CONVENTION

1. Ensure you review the scantrons for the competition with your team so they are familiar with both the layout and the proper marking techniques. While parts of the team activity will utilize a virtual scantron, it is identical to the paper version.
2. Please review the official dress code for competitions. While skirts are acceptable as official dress, your team members may feel more comfortable wearing dress slacks during the live judging.
3. Many practice resources are available; please refer to the official handbook for our recommendations. There are numerous valuable free videos covering many classes on YouTube, as well as other practice materials.
4. Make sure to review the specific judging class rules with your students before the competition. It is essential to understand what constitutes a disqualification or zero score, as opposed to mere penalties in scored classes. For example, in reining, executing 5 spins when the pattern calls for 4 spins results in a zero score and will place the team below all other qualifying scores.
5. In 2024, we modified the written exam to encompass a broader range of horse knowledge (topics include the equine industry, horsemanship, breed identification, management and anatomy/ physiology). This exam will be administered on computers, and the students will be eligible for the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association (NHJTCA) Equine Management and Evaluation Certification. We recommend using the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association Equine Study Guide ([link](#)) to prepare. Students will have to achieve minimum scores on the exam and the evaluation portions of the event to earn the NHJTCA certification (this is an additional benefit in competing at the National Horse Evaluation CDE).
6. In 2024, we removed two team activities and replaced them with two additional individual video judging classes: "Cull/Keep," more commonly referred to as "Advance to Finals/Don't Make the Finals." Reference the [handbook](#) to determine the classes to be included for the current year. We will present 8 video runs for each class, and the students will be expected to select their top 4 runs to "Keep/Advance." The classes will be scored on a scale of 50 points for selecting the correct top 4 runs. Selecting 1 or more runs that shouldn't advance will result in a score lower than 50 points. Both [AQHUniversity](#) and [HorselQ](#) are excellent resources for evaluating these classes, and there are numerous YouTube videos available as well.



CONVENTION

Please take note of the following important details regarding the competition:

1. Students are not permitted to bring rulebooks or any pre-printed materials into the competition. Blank paper and blank steno pads are acceptable. All necessary materials for evaluating classes will be provided by the National FFA Committee, including official score sheets for scored classes like reining and ranch riding. While students are not required to use these official score sheets, they will be available for teams that wish to utilize them.
2. If possible, please obtain your badges from the National FFA before the competition day. Security at the competition sites tends to be strict about badge requirements, and failing to have them can delay entry.
3. Review all event locations and account for potential traffic when planning to attend both the live judging and team activity portions of the competition. We have had instances where teams missed the start due to traffic issues.
4. Students who bring backpacks and cell phones to the competition will need to turn these items in before the competition begins. They will be returned at the end of the competition day. It is recommended to have advisors hold onto backpacks for easier management during the event.
5. A box lunch will be provided on the day of the live judging; however, we strongly recommend having breakfast beforehand, as the boxed lunches will be served after the video judging and live judging take place.
6. Many teams are unprepared for the timing of the oral reasons presentations. Students will be divided into four main groups and will receive instructions regarding the order in which they will present their reasons. Large whiteboards in the preparation area will display the order of reasons and class presentations. Upon receiving lunch, students will have approximately 40 minutes to prepare before the first student presents their oral reasons. The groups will rotate through the presentations quickly; consequently, students will have about 35-40 minutes to prepare between each set. Each student will present four sets of reasons in a relatively short time, so practicing the timing in advance of the convention will be beneficial.
7. Remember to review the oral reasons, preparation, and timing, including lunch and setup for the first set. There will be approximately 35-40 minutes between each set/round of reasons. The order of presentations will be predetermined, so make sure to check the boards for this information.
8. Again, it's advisable to obtain badges early from the National FFA.
9. Be mindful of the handling of backpacks and cell phone usage during the competition.
10. Following these guidelines will help ensure a smooth and successful competition experience.