

JUDGES GUIDE
National FFA Nursery/Landscape CDE
Verbal Customer Assistance, 2023

Judges Only

Purpose: This verbal sales practicum is designed to evaluate participant knowledge of and ability in verbal communication, sales and customer assistance skills, and landscape materials.

Setup: Three to six containers of mulch samples will be displayed on the sales table along with a sample of plastic film and landscape fabric (weed barrier). Contestants will be given a brochure on mulches from the fictitious company Mulch Masters of Indianapolis prior to the event to prepare them for this activity. A copy of the brochure will also be on the sales table.

Greeting: As the judge approaches the sales table the salesperson should extend an appropriate welcome greeting.

Customer (Judge) Introductory Statement: *"I am looking for landscape mulch to put around some trees I just planted in my yard. What do you suggest?"* The salesperson may begin determining the need and preferences at this point, asking questions, discussing the various mulches available, showing products, etc.

Procedures: The judge may ask questions or make comments at any time during the sales session. The salesperson should provide a good overview of the products. The judge may ask question listed in the FAQ's or formulate their own as the sale progresses. It is not necessary to ask all the questions in the FAQs. The conversation should simulate a normal sales scenario.

The sales person should help the customer decide on a type of mulch. It does not matter which mulch the judge decides to purchase.

After selecting a type of mulch, the customer should ask the salesperson how much mulch is needed for their trees. The salesperson should determine that the customer has 2 trees with a 4-foot diameter mulch ring around each.

The sales person should recommend 4 cubic feet of mulch per tree. That is 8 cubic feet for 2 trees – 4 bags of mulch. See the chart on mulch brochure. Each bag of mulch contains 2 cubic feet.

Notes: Do not discuss cost since the students are not given prices. Cost calculations might make this exercise in sales communications unnecessarily complicated for the limited time allotted.

Frequently Asked Questions: Contestants were given these FAQs with answers as possible questions from the judges. However, judges may want to formulate other questions based on the conversation.

1. Which mulch lasts the longest? Stone, of course, is the longest-lasting mulch. Rubber mulch lasts a long time as well, while shredded wood products lasts longer than pine straw and compost.
2. How deep should I apply the mulch? Apply mulch about 2-4 inches deep.
3. Is using landscape fabric necessary? Landscape fabric is optional, but it makes controlling weeds easier.
4. Will weeds grow through landscape fabric? Not as long as the fabric has not deteriorated or been damaged. However, if soil accumulates into the mulch, weeds may grow on top of the fabric.
5. Can I use plastic instead of landscape fabric? Plastic or poly sheeting is not recommended due to poor water penetration and restriction of soil air movement. In addition, plastics are non-biodegradable.
6. What if I don't use a mulch, and let grass grow around the tree? Grass and weeds around the tree trunk competes with the tree for water and nutrients, and control of grass and weeds close to the trunk is difficult without damage to the tree trunk.
7. What time of the year should I apply mulch? Mulch may be applied any time of the year, but it is generally applied in the spring or fall, or anytime to replenish or improve faded colors.
8. What color of mulch should I buy? That is a personal preference. However, bear in mind that mulch serves many purposes including enhancing the appearance of the landscape, not to stand out as the star of the show.
9. What is a drip line? See the diagram. The drip line is the area directly under the outer most tree branches.
10. What are some advantages of using mulch? Mulch helps in controlling weeds, moderating soil temperatures, conserving moisture, adding organic matter and some nutrients, and preventing compaction and erosion.

Scoring:

Contestants will be scored using the following rubric:

Indicator	Very strong evidence of skill is present 5-4 points	Moderate evidence of skill is present 3-2 points	Weak evidence of skill is present 1-0 points	Points Possible
First impression	Individual identifies themselves with a good first impression.	Individual mostly identifies themselves with a good first impression.	Individual poorly identifies themselves with a good first impression.	5
Personal rapport	Individual asks questions and utilizes information from answers in an attempt to build personal rapport.	Individual mostly asks questions and utilizes information from answers in an attempt to build personal rapport.	Individual poorly asks questions and utilizes information from answers in an attempt to build personal rapport.	5
Clarifying questions	Individual asks questions to learn about the customer's situation and to confirm preliminary customer information.	Individual mostly asks questions to learn about the customer's situation and to confirm preliminary customer information.	Individual poorly asks questions to learn about the customer's situation and to confirm preliminary customer information.	5
Needs and wants	Individual confirmed and discovered customer needs and wants.	Individual mostly confirmed and discovered customer needs and wants.	Individual poorly confirmed and discovered customer needs and wants.	5
Features and benefits	Individual applied features and benefits of their product to the customer's needs/wants.	Individual mostly applied features and benefits of their product to the customer's needs/wants.	Individual poorly applied features and benefits of their product to the customer's needs/wants.	5
Matching needs and wants	Individual allows customer to participate in matching their wants/needs to the product features.	Individual mostly allows customer to participate in matching their wants/needs to the product features.	Individual poorly allows customer to participate in matching their wants/needs to the product features.	5
Trial close	Individual uses appropriate technique to confirm customer understanding.	Individual mostly uses appropriate technique to confirm customer understanding.	Individual poorly uses appropriate technique to confirm customer understanding.	5
Objections	Student listens and clarifies customers objections and discusses the features/benefits of the product information to address the customers objections.	Student mostly listens and clarifies customers objections and discusses the features/benefits of the product information to address the customers objections.	Student poorly listens and clarifies customers objections and discusses the features/benefits of the product information to address the customers objections.	5
Close transaction	Student closes or attempts to close the transaction.	Student mostly closes or attempts to close the transaction.	Student poorly closes or attempts to close the transaction.	5
Active listening	Individual actively listens to comments and answers from the customer.	Individual mostly listens to comments and answers from the customer.	Individual poorly listens to comments and answers from the customer.	5