



4-H Consumer Decision Making Guide

Introduction

Making decisions about what to purchase is an everyday activity. You use your best judgment every time you make a purchase. Consciously or unconsciously, you weigh factors such as time, energy, price, quality and need. You decide the importance of each of these factors and then make your decision.

In consumer decision making, you do the same thing. You learn the standards of quality for goods and services. Then, you observe, compare and make decisions based on the facts you have collected.

Consumer decision making teaches you to organize your thoughts and defend your decisions with oral reasons. You learn principles and standards for evaluating the quality of goods and services.

The skills you use in the consumer decision making activity are skills you will use throughout your life. The more you practice and use these skills, the easier they will become. Practice in making decisions will provide you with opportunities to improve your problem-solving skills. Giving oral reasons will develop and polish skills you will use as you work with others in the future.

Consumer decision making helps you develop...

- decision-making skills by applying the decision-making process and by recognizing quality standards for selected goods and services.
- self-confidence and skills in verbal expression by identifying reasons for choices made by using comparative language, by organizing thoughts and ideas in logical order and by thinking and speaking spontaneously.

A good consumer judge has...

- a clear idea or mental picture of an item's characteristics.
- quick and accurate observation skills.
- the ability to weigh objectively and evaluate what is seen.
- the ability to defend choices made.

Definitions

Contestant: Contest participant.

Contestant's number: This is the number assigned to a contestant during registration. It is used as identification throughout the contest.

Class: This includes the articles of one kind to be judged. Four similar products make a class (for example, four credit cards, four cordless phones or four pairs of sunglasses).

Situation statement: For each class, a buying problem is presented. This problem describes a hypothetical set of circumstances. As you place a class, consider which item is the "best" for the situation described.

Placing: The contestant examines articles in a class and decides which is best, second best, third best and poorest. This process is called placing.

Placing card: A card that has the written name of the class, the number of the contestant and the scores. The placing card also has a listing of all possible combinations in which a class of four items can be placed.

Oral reasons: An oral explanation of why the articles are placed as they are. An official will listen to your reasons and will score you on accuracy, information presented and delivery.

Organizing the Contest

There is one division in the Consumer Decision Making Contest: Each entry is composed of a team of three or four members each from the appropriate age group.

Each team member will make individual decisions about the four items within each of three categories. Team members will have 5 minutes per category for ranking the items. Individuals also may participate in the event but are not considered a team.

The written reason will be given for the decision in one category. The written reason will determine the winner in the event there is a tie. The category for written reasons will be announced the day of the judging activity.

In the oral reason section, after individual team members have turned in their score cards, the team as a group will decide on the ranking in one category. The captain of the team will present oral reasons to the judges for the choices made. The method for selecting the captain will be explained by the chair of the consumer judging activity the day of the contest.

The team will have 15 minutes to make its ranking and develop the reasons for its decision. The captain will have 5 minutes to present the reasons to the judges.

The Judging Procedure

The judging activity involves combining your knowledge of consumer products with your decision-making skills. The following steps will help you combine these two important types of knowledge.

1. Identify the Class

When you judge a class, follow a logical sequence. What is the class you are going to judge? As soon as you identify the class, consider the general characteristics of the item, its use, and the service that might be expected.

2. Analyze the Situation Statement

Read the situation statement carefully. Pick out the standards. If cost and construction are not included in the situation statement, add them. Below are some things to look for as you read a situation statement.

- WHO will use the item?
- HOW and WHERE will the item be USED?
- What CARE (or upkeep) will the item require?
- What COST is involved? (Consider both purchase and upkeep of the item.)
- How LONG WILL THE ITEM LAST?
- What is the QUALITY of the item? (Is it well-made and durable?)

Preparing for Reasons

Giving reasons for your decisions is an important part of consumer judging. When you explain your placing, you are giving reasons. To give reasons, you will need to do the following:

- Have a clear picture of the entire class in mind.
- Know the quality or standards for the judged class.
- Be able to compare good and poor points for each choice.
- Take notes and study them before giving your reasons.

Pairing

It is easier to evaluate and discuss two items at a time instead of comparing all four at once. With four items, there are three pairs: top, middle and bottom. For example, suppose you ranked a class of athletic shoes 3-2-4-1.

Top pair	Middle pair	Bottom pair	
3	2	4	1

This means: 3 and 2 are your top pair, 2 and 4 are your middle pair and 4 and 1 are your bottom pair.

When there is little difference between a pair, it is called a **close pair**. Items that are obviously different are referred to as an **easy pair**.

Making Notes

Your reasons will be easier to develop if you follow an orderly system. Begin by making good notes. They should be short, simple and easy to make. Here is an example outline for taking notes:

Reasons for Placing Admit or Grant Faults

Giving Reasons

There is a basic format for giving reasons. The format helps you organize your thoughts for presenting reasons, and it also helps the person listening to the reasons. The following four steps will help you plan your reasons:

1. **Open Statement:** Give the **name of the class** and the **order of placing**. Example: "I placed this class of athletic shoes 3-2-4-1."
2. **General Statement:** Give a general impression of the overall class. Example: "This was a somewhat difficult class to judge, with a close middle pair and an obvious bottom athletic shoe."
3. **Explanation of Reasons:** Tell why one choice was placed over the next by comparison. Explain the major difference between the top pair, the middle pair and the bottom pair. Example: "I place 3 over 2 and at the top of the class for its overall good quality for the price. Both the materials and the construction are of good quality. It meets the easy-care requirements for Rob. Style, features and details are typical of athletic shoes. I admit that 2 has the same materials and requires similar care. It also costs less. However, I fault athletic shoes 2 for lacking the quality of material and the construction details of athletic shoes 3."

"In the middle pair, I place 2 over 4 because the overall quality is better. In general appearance, materials and construction, it is superior to athletic shoes 4. Granted, athletic shoes 4 is the least expensive, a good value for the money and easy to care for. I fault it for poor-quality materials, poor construction and general appearance. The high man-made-material content will make it hot to wear and could result in irritation to the feet."

"I place 4 over 1 because the price, \$40, is more in line with the budget and the material content will make it easier to care for. I grant that athletic shoes number 1 is the best quality; best construction; and with 100 percent cotton fiber, the most comfortable to wear in warm or hot weather. I fault athletic shoes 1 because of the high cost, even on sale, and the life expectancy. One-hundred-percent cotton will stain more easily and will not stand up to the everyday use as well as some of the shoes with blends of man-made materials."

4. **Closing Statement:** Repeat the opening statement, but begin with "therefore" or "for these reasons." Example: "Therefore, I place this class of athletic shoes 3-2-4-1."

Tips for Oral Reasons

In the preparation of oral reasons, try to inform the judge that you saw and analyzed the items in relation to the given situation.

When you are being scored on your oral reasons, what you say will have the greatest influence on the judge. However, the way you present your reasons also influences the judge. Your reasons will be scored on the following:

- accuracy and completeness about the placings and facts given.
- confidence exhibited about the decision-making process and the belief that your placing is correct.
- experience as shown by the knowledge and use of specific terms for the specific item.
- poise as exhibited by being at ease, by use of grammar and speaking skills and by being wide awake and alert.

For the class on which you are to give oral reasons, you should...

- have in mind a clear picture of the entire class.
- know the qualities or standards for judging that particular class.
- be able to compare the good and poor qualities of each item.
- make notes and study them ahead of time. (Do not read your notes.)

Remember, the basic format for giving oral reasons is an opening statement, a general statement, an explanation of reasons and a closing statement.

Additional guidelines and terms you may find useful as you prepare and give your oral reasons:

- Be serious, but pleasant. A smile is always welcomed.
- Use good posture. Stand on both feet and keep your hands relaxed.
- Don't fidget!

- Have confidence in yourself.
- Look at the judge.

Scoring

Before starting a contest, you will be given placing cards with your contestant number and team number on them. You will have one card for each class. If the cards are not already numbered, you will be given instructions for doing this. After each class, turn in your placing card to the person in charge.

The placing card has a listing of all possible combinations in which a class of four items can be placed. Find the placing you believe is correct and put a check mark (✓) immediately to the right of it. For example, if you place the items 3-4-1-2, mark the card as illustrated in the next column. This means you placed item number 3 first, item number 4 second, item number 1 third and item number 2 last.

The score for the ranking will be determined using the Hormel Computing Slide. This allows for differences in class placings to be taken into account. For example, if two items differ only in minor areas, fewer points will be deducted than if major differences exist between the two items. A perfect score for rankings would be 50.

Consumer Judging Placing Card		
	1 2 3 4	
	1 2 4 3	
Contestant No. _____	1 3 2 4	
Class _____	1 3 4 2	
Placing Score _____	1 4 2 3	
Reasons Score _____	1 4 3 2	
Total Score _____	2 1 3 4	
	2 1 4 3	
	2 3 1 4	
	2 3 4 1	
	2 4 3 1	
	3 1 2 4	
	3 1 4 2	
	3 2 1 4	
	3 2 4 1	
	3 4 1 2	✓
	3 4 2 1	
	4 1 2 3	
	4 1 3 2	
	4 2 1 3	
4 2 3 1		
4 3 1 2		
4 3 2 1		

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