

# The Good - The Bad - The Ugly

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Participating in the 4-H Rabbit Project can be a very rewarding, positive experience that helps you learn valuable life skills. However like any other activity there can be good times and then some not so good times – especially if you are participating in Showmanship. You can practice & practice and still the experience may not be what you expected, so you need to prepare yourself and your rabbit as much as possible.

First let's start with you, the exhibitor and your preparation for show day – or the Good Part. On show day, you will be not only in front of the judge during Showmanship, but in most cases you will be in a ring or roped off area surrounded by the other exhibitors and their families. Because you are visible to many people, you need to make sure that you are dressed appropriately with clean clothes, clean hands, face and hair neatly combed and secured out of your sight. Appropriately dressed means wearing a blouse or shirt that is long sleeved and buttoned to the correct height. Even if you are wearing a show coat, whether you're a boy or a girl, avoid wearing a tank top or other low cut top underneath the coat. Keep the coat buttoned correctly as the purpose for wearing the coat is to protect your clothing. Remember people are watching you.

The second “Good Part” of showing rabbits is making sure your rabbit is properly groomed and ready for the show. This means trimming the toenails, removing any dirt or other substance off the fur as well as removing dead hair in the coat. Trimming the toenails is easy and you can do it with a pair of special nail trimmers or fingernail clippers. The important part is to trim off the very sharp tip of the nail – usually down to near the blood line. If your rabbit has white toenails this is easy to see – if they are dark trim back to just before the nail starts to widen. You also need to make sure the coat is clean and free of dead fur. You can remove the dead fur by wetting your hands, don't drench the rabbit, and gently stroking the fur from the rump to the head and back again. You will notice the fur sticking to your hands. Do this process several times to remove the fur and remove excess dirt. This will help your rabbit's coat look prime and avoid loose fur blowing into the judges face. This is never a good thing.

The last Good Part is the numerous positive or good things about a rabbit show and showmanship. You get to spend time with and meet other rabbit project members from your county or around the state. This interaction will help you as you participate in other activities throughout your life. Participating in a show helps you learn to be a gracious winner as well as a gracious loser. Sometimes it is harder to be the gracious winner. Be a Showman and not a Show off. You also learn to deal with the unpredictable – make adjustments and continue as if nothing had happened. You make friendships that just might last a life time.

Remember:

1. Prepare your rabbit for the show. Trim toe nails, remove dead fur, clean the rabbit's cage
2. Practice with your rabbit so that it is comfortable with being handled.
3. Work with your rabbit so that it is used to the table and will stay posed for you.
4. Prepare yourself for the show. Clean clothes, clean & trim fingernails, long hair tied back, show coat or shirt/blouse properly buttoned.
5. Learn the proper order of the showmanship steps.
6. Know what you are checking for - why - and how would you recognize the disqualification
7. Read and study about your breed of rabbit as well as general rabbit care & management
8. Keep good eye contact with the judge - look at the judge even if the judge is not looking at you.
9. Have a good rhythm to the examination sequence - not too fast or not too slow.
10. If your rabbit flips over - restart your exam from that point - not from the beginning.

11. Practice - Practice - Practice - Practice

12. HAVE FUN! PRACTICE GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP - CONGRATULATE THE WINNER

Now let's talk about the Bad part of the 4-H Rabbit Project or Showmanship Contest.

You may have to talk to the judge- somebody you have never met – or another exhibitor. But that is not a Bad thing. It teaches you how to interact with other people, which will help you become more confident and make a good impression.

Maybe your rabbit decides when it gets on the table that it just doesn't want to cooperate as you have practiced and practiced. But is that really a Bad Thing? When this happens you improvise or deal with your rabbit's behavior in a confident unexcited manner. This is really a good thing as it teaches you to be prepared for the unexpected.

Maybe the judge will ask you a question that you do not know the answer – don't panic as that is not a bad thing. It simply means that you will probably go read to find the answer so that you can correctly answer the question next time. It is a good thing to increase your knowledge.

What if you are taking your rabbit out of the cage for the showmanship class and he breaks a toe nail. Is that a bad thing – at that very moment that it is bleeding maybe it might be – but it is also a good thing because you get to use the skills you have learned to stop the nail from bleeding. Also your new skill of accepting a situation and doing what is needed.

Ok, I think you get the picture that even if it might seem to be a bad thing at first – it can really be a good thing and will help you gain knowledge and skills that will help you now and in your future.

To help you avoid the Bad things here are a few things not to do when participating in Showmanship.

1. Do not wear rings, earrings, nail polish, sandals, short sleeved shirt, low cut blouses, pins or fancy buttons on your shirt or show coat. Be a showman – not a showoff!
2. Do not look at your parents - friends - or the other exhibitors while at the show table.
3. Do not lean on the table - keep your hands out of your pockets – button your show coat.
4. Don't let your rabbit run all over the table - quickly repose your rabbit if it starts to move.
5. Do not give the judge a fake grin or smile after completing each step.
6. Do not talk to the judge unless the judge asks you a question.
7. Do not talk to the other exhibitors at the show table.
8. Do not share questions with the other exhibitors who have not been judged.
9. Do not hit or slap your rabbit!
10. Do not scoop your rabbit up off the table during the handling part.
11. Do not pick up your rabbit only by the skin over the back of the neck.

If you relax – practice and basically prepare for the Show Day – you can decrease the Bad, eliminate the Ugly and have a really fun time. And this is what being in 4-H is all about.