

Quick guide

# Alpaca Judging



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AGRICULTURAL SHOWS  
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Young judging provides young people with the opportunity to develop lifelong skills in visually assessing alpacas and their fleeces as well as public speaking through comparing animals and fleeces against each other. These skills not only develop a better understanding of alpacas, they also enable young people to make a valuable contribution to the industry.



Stakeholders in the livestock industry invest time and money into continually improving their stock. The best way to do this is to evaluate – or judge - the characteristics of their animals and their products. In the case of alpacas, judging is divided into two classes to assess the animal's conformation (body) and its fleece. It's important to be able to identify and understand why certain traits have significant commercial value. Not only do these qualities have higher value at sale, but breeders will want to pass these desirable characteristics onto the next generation to improve the overall herd.

Being able to understand and identify these characteristics and orally present to an audience are skills that can be learnt and take practice. Importantly, this process develops competitors' confidence, decision making and attention to detail, which are skills that will also translate into future careers.

While many young people become involved in young judging and other agricultural show competitions through their school, tertiary education institution or from a farming background, there are other ways to become involved. By approaching a local show society, members can provide guidance and support to anyone interested in participating. Many shows now hold education days and there are opportunities to connect with farms, studs, saleyards and other local shows to learn more.

Generally, young judges compete at a local show first. Winners then go on to compete at their royal show and from there one competitor will be selected to represent each state or territory at the National Alpaca Championship. Young judging is for entrants aged 15 and under 25 years old on May 1 in the year of the competition.

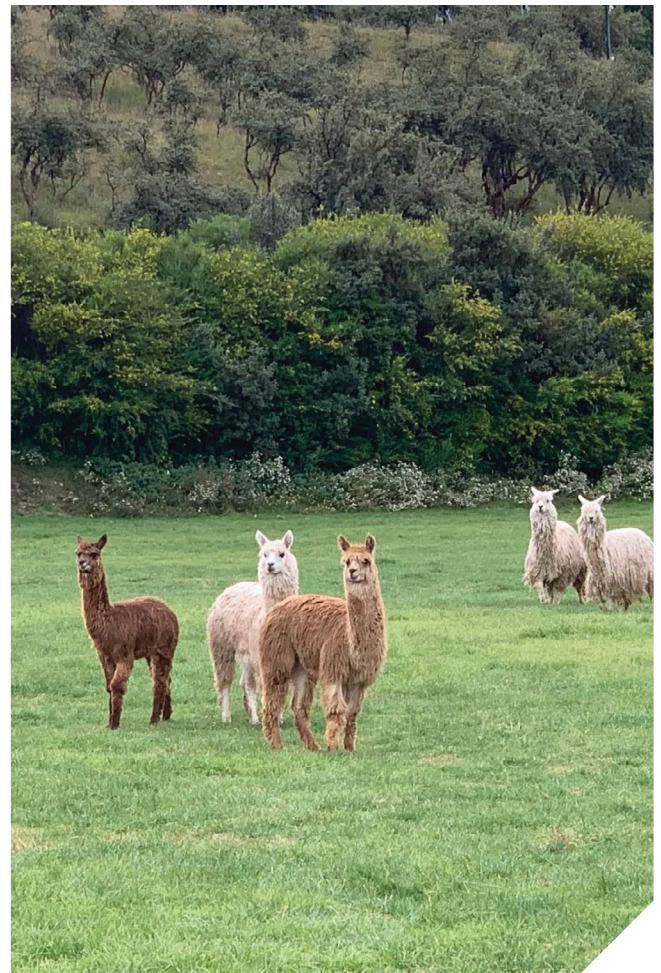
This is intended to be a general guide and there may be some variations in rules and expectations between shows. Individual shows will provide further advice and clarification.

## Further reading

To find out more about local shows near you visit: [agshowsaustralia.org.au/shows](http://agshowsaustralia.org.au/shows)

Australian Alpaca Association provides an industry overview: [alpaca.asn.au](http://alpaca.asn.au)

The National Alpaca Championship rules and regulations can be found here: [agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines](http://agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines)







## Where to start

There are two different breeds of alpaca in Australia, Huacaya and Suri. The Huacaya is most common and its fibre is crimped and grows outwards from its body, similar to a Merino sheep. It is also identifiable by a fluffy bob or bonnet on its forehead and mutton chops on its cheeks. The Suri fleece is much more silky and soft, draping over the body. Alpacas originated in South America and so males are referred to as "machos" and females "hembras".

The competition is divided into four classes, the animals' conformation for Huacaya or Suri and their fleeces. While the animal's form is important for reproduction purposes and improving the herd, alpacas are predominately kept for their fleece and breeders will give strong emphasis to the quality of an animal's fleece for its breeding program as a higher quality fleece fetches a higher price. This emphasis on the fleece is represented in the competition's point allocation.

### Top tip

The two breeds' body form is similar. However, there are distinct differences between the fleeces of Suri and Huacaya alpacas so ensure particular attention is given to learning what these are. A list of the most important characteristics in order of importance can be found here: [agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading](https://agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading)

### Further reading

A comprehensive overview of the two breeds: [agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading](https://agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading)





## Form and function

When judging it is important to consider the “form” and “function” of the animal as this determines what it has been grown for. In the case of alpacas, the dominant function is to produce a fleece for high quality clothing while coarser fibre is used for carpet. However, it is important to look at form as well to identify the best qualities as breeders want to pass on these superior traits to the next generation to continually improve their herd.

## What to look for

You will need to get to know the different parts of the animal and sections of the fleece and be able to name these correctly, as these will be the judging points. When considering the animals' form, the animal should carry its head high and have a smooth, even body. When it comes to the fleece, it is important to understand the difference between the two breeds' fleece. For example, when assessing the Huacaya fleece the density will determine the quantity of saleable fleece as well as preventing dirt and moisture penetration. This compares to the Suri fleece where the lustre and lock structure are considered most important.

### Top tip

Good practice is to quickly let the handler of the animal know you are going to touch or assess their animal.

### Top tip

Start from the feet and work your way up.

## Further reading

For a comprehensive visual guide to all the judging points, what an ideal animal looks like and the correct terminology:  
[agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines](https://agshowsaustralia.org.au/member-resources/national-competitions-guidelines)



## How judging works

The animals are divided into four classes – four Huacaya alpacas and four Suri alpacas, then four fleeces each from the respective breeds. The alpacas will typically be the same sex and age. Entries will be numbered and include measurements.

Visual judging of the animals will take place first, followed by fleece judging. Competitors will have 10 minutes to assess each class and complete a visual judging card. These cards are simple, with competitors ranking the entries in order from first to fourth place.

Competitors will be judged on their interaction with the animals, handling of the fleeces and their chosen rankings, compared to the findings

of an experienced judge. Competitors who score high enough in the visual section will go on to compete in the oral section where they choose one class for their presentation.

Before oral judging starts, each competitor will ask the Ring Steward to line up the exhibits in the competitor's placing order: first, second, third and fourth placings.

For the oral presentation, competitors are allocated two minutes to explain their reasoning behind how they've placed the entries in both classes. It's important to stick to the allocated time – for every 10 seconds a competitor goes over their time, they will be penalised one point.



## Young Judging speech

Competitors in the oral section are scored on their accuracy of observation, their ability to compare animals and fleeces, speaking skills and their own presentation.

Have a start, middle and end: begin with an introduction (for example, acknowledging those involved and provide a short overview of characteristics an ideal animal would have in that class), then go into the comparisons of pairs, and finish with a conclusion (thank people for listening). The speech only goes for two minutes, so keep to the point. There is no penalty for not speaking for the full two minutes.

The main goal is to explain to the judge why you have placed the animals in the order you have chosen by comparing the animals in pairs – first place with second, second against third, and finally third against fourth. Rather than describing each animal individually, competitors draw comparisons against the attributes of each pair.

**For example:** *“In the top pair, I placed animal numbered [eg four] ahead of [eg one] because ... [highlight the strengths then weaknesses, if any are present].”*

Remember to prioritise the most important reasons first and pick only two or three differences.

It's not all about the animals – a competitor's appearance is also important and judges can mark down for poor presentation. Competitors must wear closed in shoes and a long-sleeved shirt or jacket. Long hair must be tied back, and only minimal jewellery is allowed. Male competitors must wear a tie and long pants. Female competitors may consider wearing a tie or neck scarf or necklace. Chewing gum and shorts are definitely not permitted.

### Top tips

- Speak clearly and concisely – show you believe in what you are saying and pack a punch with your words.
- Deliver your speech to the championship judge – remember eye contact.
- Don't call the final animal “last”, as this can be insulting to the owner. Instead refer to it being fourth placed.
- Get to know the terminology and don't be afraid to implement it – the judges will be looking out for it.
- Choose one end of the animal to begin speaking on and move to the other end, from front to rear or vice versa. This will help organise your presentation and make it easier for people to follow what you are saying.
- Be as descriptive and explanatory as possible. For example, use gender terms rather than “it” and go beyond saying explain one characteristic is “better” when comparing a pair by highlighting why the characteristic is superior.

### Further reading

For a comprehensive comparison of what characteristics to look for and the faults:

**[agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading](https://agshowsaustralia.org.au/educational-resources/further-reading)**





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