

Beef Showmanship Guide

A good showman is a person that has a sense or knack for an effective presentation of an animal. Showmanship is the one area of exhibiting beef cattle over which you have the most control. In showmanship, you are judged on your abilities to control and present your steer or heifer to bring out its best characteristics. Advanced planning and hard work are the keys to becoming a good show-person. Showing beef cattle not only generates enthusiasm and competition in the show ring, but also teaches valuable lessons that can be used in day to day life. These lessons include responsibility, learning about work and determination to reach a goal, winning graciously and losing with dignity.

Start Early

Success in beef cattle showmanship starts at home. The first step is to halter break your calf. Properly put a rope halter on the calf and allow the lead rope to drag on the ground for two to three days. This makes the calf aware of the halter.

Next, tie the calf for an hour, working up to three to five hours a day. During this time, brush and talk to your calf. This will assist in calming the calf and allow it to become accustomed to you. In time, the calf will respond to your hand movements with the halter and show stick.

Training your calf to walk, stop, and set up easily will take time and patience. First, try to lead the calf to and from water and feed. Then begin leading the calf around the barnyard. Make sure the calf is accustomed to setting up with the halter and show-stick.

Practice in several short segments, not long drawn out sessions. After the calf is used to being walked and set up, practice having another person move in close to handle the calf with you at the halter. This will allow the calf to remain calm under a judge's close inspection.

Using the Halter

The halter should be properly placed on the calf's head with the lead strap on the calf's left side. The halter strap that crosses over the muzzle or nose of the calf should be approximately two inches below the eye. Rope halters and show halters can be adjusted for proper fit. Do not have the halter too big so that the nose cross piece is down by the mouth.

When leading, you should be on the calf's left side with the halter in your right hand. Your hand should be six to twelve inches from the animal's head. With show halters, this is usually at the junction of the chain and leather strap. **Firmly grip the lead so your thumb is up and toward you with your little finger nearest the chain.** Your wrist is stronger this way and provides better control over the animal.

The strap length should be long enough for control, but not long enough to touch the ground. If the strap of the show halter can touch the ground, you or the calf may step on it and it becomes awkward to switch hands. Any extra strap may be folded and held in the right hand, or the extra length may be held in your left hand. If the strap is long, holding the extra length in your left hand is preferred. If the calf is spooked you will have two hands on the strap. **DO NOT** wrap the halter strap around your hand or fingers in order to prevent any injury.

Using the Show-stick

There are five basic uses for the show-stick. They are:

- Assisting in placing the feet.
- Calming the animal.
- Controlling the animal.
- Keeping the top level.
- For scotch-driving the animal.

When setting up your calf –

- Switch the lead strap from the right hand to your left hand quickly and smoothly.
- At the same time switch the show stick from the left hand to your right hand.
- Slowly scratch the calf's belly a couple of times to help calm the calf.
- Set the calf's feet in the appropriate position.

Remember: You have two tools in your hands to set the feet. One is the halter, the other is your show-stick. Set the rear feet first if necessary. If you want a rear foot to be moved back, push backward on the halter and press (do not jab) the soft tissue where the hoof is split with your show-stick (**Figure 1**). If you want a rear foot to move forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with your show-stick under the dew claw (Figure 1). Remember it is easier for the animal to put a foot back than forward. When the rear feet are too close together, apply pressure to the inside of a leg just above the hoof and they should stand wider.

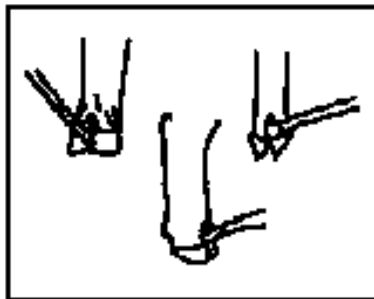


Figure1: Proper use of showstick in placement of the feet.

Front feet can be moved by using your boot or show-stick to apply pressure in the previously mentioned areas while pushing or pulling with the halter in the desired direction you want the foot to move. Younger, less experienced show-persons will be safer if they use the show-stick.

Placement of the feet depends on what view is provided to the judge and what makes the animal look its best. When the cattle are lined up side by side, in a straight line, the feet should be set at all four corners under the animal (bearing their full share of the animal's weight). At this view, the judge is looking at the rear and front of the animal. When the cattle are lined up on the profile (head to tail), the feet should be set as if a professional photographer is taking a picture. The rear feet should be staggered so that the far-side foot is slightly in front of the foot closest to the judge. Usually a heel to toe relationship works best (**Figure 2**). That means the heel of one foot is parallel with the toe of the other foot. The front feet should be set square or staggered less than the rear feet. The toe of the front foot away from the judge should be set back half the width of the hoof on the judge's side. By setting the feet in this manner, you provide the judge with a perception of depth and thickness. It also makes it easier to correct a top line and rump structure. As the judge moves to the rear of the calf on profile, an experienced exhibitor will again square the feet. As the judge moves back to the side view, profile the rear feet again.

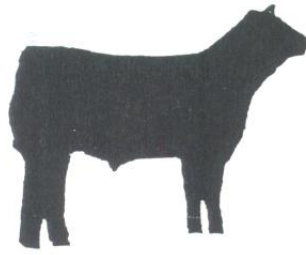


Figure 2: Set up when viewed on the profile.

The show-stick can also be used to correct a top line.

When using the show stick to correct a top line --

- Apply pressure at the navel or flank with the hook of the show stick if the top is weak and needs to be raised.
- If the rump is steep and the loin is high, apply pressure to this area to bring it down; continue to scratch the calf's belly to keep it calm.

The show-stick may also be used to help control your calf while walking and to "scotch-drive". While showing, always keep the point of the show-stick down for safety reasons. While walking, the show-stick is in your left hand at the handle or about one-third of the way down. This will allow use of the show-stick as an additional control tool if needed. If the animal is moving too fast simply use the portion of the stick between your left hand and tip or hook end for tapping the nose. Never hit or beat, merely tap on the nose.

"Scotch-driving" is when your calf will not lead or walk and no one is around to help you get started. If this happens simply push forward on the halter with your right hand and tap the animal with the show-stick on its side or rump. Sometimes you need to hook the animal in the tender area right below the tail-head. This will make the animal think someone is behind it and it should start to walk.

While showing, always keep the point of the show stick down for safety and professional appearance.

Using the Scotch Comb

The scotch comb is used to groom the hair that may become messed up from the judge, another person handling your calf or another animal bumping it. The corner of the scotch comb may also be used to apply pressure to the loin or top to straighten the top line, like the show-stick. The scotch comb should be carried in your back pocket, or in a scotch comb sheath with the teeth toward you. This is for safety and courtesy reasons as you would not want someone else to get injured due to your equipment.

Showtime

Prior to the show, inspect the show ring to find any high and low spots of the show ring surface. This will help you to avoid these areas when setting up your calf. When possible, position your animal so that the front feet are placed on higher ground than the rear feet.

Dress neatly, look like a livestock exhibitor. Leather boots should be worn for safety and appearance reasons. If the calf steps on your foot, the calf's foot will slip off a leather boot much easier than a tennis shoe, with less opportunity for injury. Wear nice jeans or slacks. Faded blue jeans look less professional and should not be worn.

Wear nice jeans (dark blue jeans preferred) or slacks; avoid faded blue jeans because they do not "look professional." Wear a nice button-down or polo shirt that is pleasing to the eye. T-shirts can be worn if they are 4-H or FFA issue or perhaps special shirts for a show or event. Also, tuck your shirt in and wear a belt for neatness. Leave hats back at the grooming area. Hats may distract the judge's concentration. Planning and neat appearance will help you to gain success.

Enter the show ring promptly when your class is called and have the proper equipment. Be sure to have the correct exhibitor number, show-stick, and scotch comb. Know where to line up and how the classes will move through the show-ring. If you are not in the first class, watch a class or two to learn specific techniques or show style the judge prefers. The advanced exhibitor is able to adapt to any situation and provide the judge with exactly what he/she is looking for on that particular day.

Generally cattle are lined up side by side to start a class. When pulling into line, look where you will be and head into that position. Do not simply follow the person in front of you as this usually ends up in an "S" configuration. You can end up brushing against the calf that was in front of you as you pull into line. When pulling into line, "check" your animal a few feet before reaching your destination to slow the animal. To "check" your animal, simply lift up slightly on the halter so that the animal knows you are about to stop.

As you walk into the ring, line up where the ring person indicates. If you are third or fourth in the ring, line up even with the other calves, leaving three or four feet on both sides of your animal. This allows ample room for all exhibitors to set up the calves. Smoothly, yet quickly, get your calf set up as discussed earlier with the head held high. Be alert, keep a close eye on your calf, keep the feet set square, and know where the judge is located. If your calf is not set square and the judge is nearby, set your calf up. Most judges will wait for you to present your calf in the best way. Always allow the judge to see the view he or she is seeking. Try not to get between the judge and the animal.

When it is time to walk the cattle --

- Move as the judge or ring steward instructs. Most likely you will pull the cattle up to the rail, turn left, go three-fourths of a circle, and walk right behind the tail of the other cattle in the side-by-side line.
- Assist the exhibitors in front of you in moving a calf if he/she is having trouble. Tap the calf's rump with your stick, or preferably put your show stick in your right hand and twist the tail of the calf in front of you with your left.
- Let your calf walk out freely. Move at an easy pace, not too slow or too fast.
- Being courteous to others is a must!

When it is time to stop on the profile --

- **Stop in a straight line head to tail.** Remember to "check" the calf and then stop by lifting the head. Allow 4 to 6 feet between your calf and the one in front. This allows the judge space to move freely around the cattle and helps to prevent calves from mounting or disturbing others in the line.
- **Position the feet as discussed earlier; keep the top line level and the calf's head up.**
- **Locate the judge and wait calmly.** Do not "saw" your calf in half with rapid stick movement while waiting for the judge. Use slow deliberate strokes with the show stick. Do not "saw" your animal in half with rapid stick movement while waiting for the judge. Do not make noises or rattle the chain of the halter.

The judge may handle the cattle and ask a few questions. As the judge moves around your animal, move a half step back to allow the judge the full view he or she seeks. Be prepared to answer questions about your

animal: weight, birth-date, sire, dam, pregnancy status of your heifer, feeding program, parts of the animal, yield grade, quality grade, and where retail cuts of meat come from.

If your animal has not moved and the judge has gone to the next animal, use the scotch comb to fix the hair that has been messed up. If the animal has moved or gotten out of line, pull your animal out in a clockwise circle in the ring and move the animal back into line. Set the animal up and then fix the hair. It is more important to first have the animal set correctly and looking its best as the hair may be minor compared to how the animal is standing.

Be alert and aware of the judge. Look for a sign or motion to be pulled into line for the placing. This may be another profile line or side by side. As the judge pulls cattle from the profile line, empty spaces will occur. If two or more spaces between cattle become empty, move forward in the line. Remember to allow proper distance between calves, and set the calf up at its best. By moving forward and filling the empty spaces, it becomes easier for the judge to make comparisons.

When turning an animal --

- **Always turn to the right (clockwise) unless the ring steward gives other instructions.** Pushing the calf's head away from you prevents the possibility of the calf stepping on your foot, causing harm to you or the calf.

Once pulled into a side by side line you are nearing the end of the class, but it is not over. Pull into the side by side line as discussed earlier, and set the animal up. Be alert as sometimes positions may be switched.

Certain situations may occur in changing placings ([Figure 3](#)). Note that you pass back through the same hole you left, then to the proper position. If positioned up to a rail, do not turn around in the line. Back the calf out by pushing back on the halter with your left hand and applying pressure with your right at the point of the shoulder. Pull into the line at the instructed position.

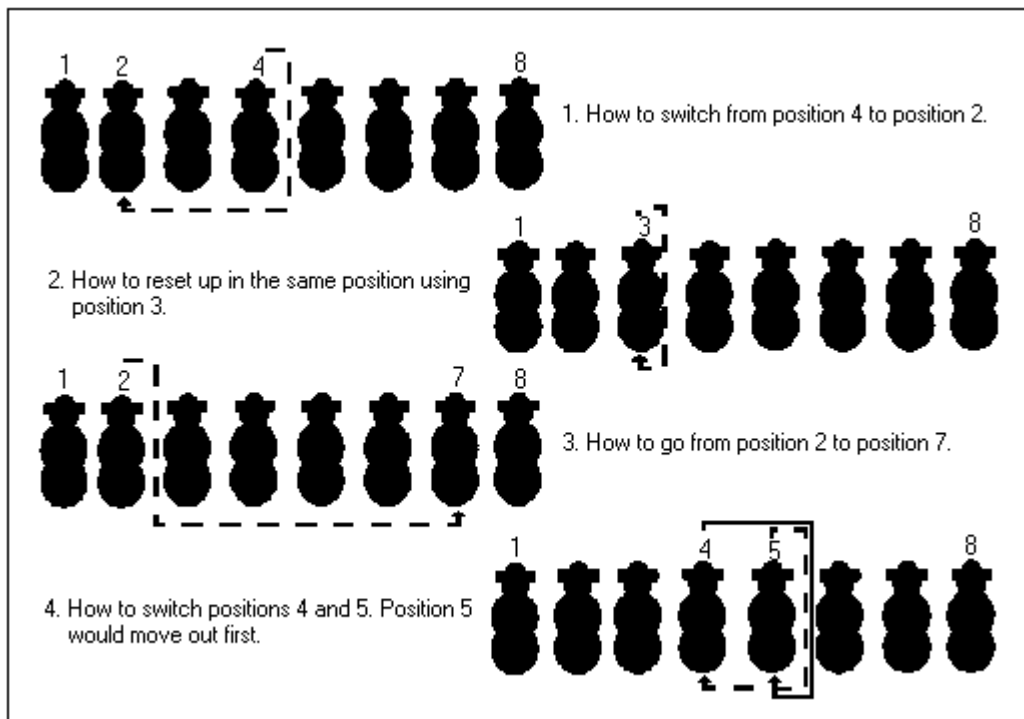


Figure 3: Switching positions.

If you are positioned up to a rail, do not turn around in the line. Back your animal out by pushing back on the halter with your left hand and applying pressure with your right at the point of the shoulder. Then pull into the line at the instructed position.

When the judge starts his reasons the class is over, but your job is not. You should continue to work hard and display good sportsmanship. Leave the ring in an orderly manner as instructed by the ring person and pick up your awards.

Exhibitor Courtesy and Sportsmanship

Remember to keep straight lines so that the judge can compare all the animals. If you are blocking the view of another animal and have space, move so that the judge can see all animals. However, if you are the one hidden, it is your responsibility to be where your animal can be seen. Do not rely on the other exhibitor as he or she may not have room to move.

On the profile, pull back in line where space is available. This may be at the end of the line.

Avoid bumping, crowding, or hitting other animals. If your animal becomes nervous or unruly, act like a professional. Be patient, remain calm, and never get discouraged or lose your temper.

Finally, congratulate the class winners and those that stood ahead of you. **Remember this is a learning experience.** Leave the ring with your head held high, knowing that you have given this project your best effort. Learn from your mistakes, watch other show-persons, and improve your skills for the next show.

You are a winner by trying and participating in a worthwhile fun activity.