

Maryland 4-H Animal Science Program Guidebook

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Animal Science Skill-a-thons

What Is a 4-H Skill-a-thon?

A skill-a-thon is a method of involving youth in challenging, competitive or non-competitive, learn-by-doing activities. Skill-a-thons help 4-H'ers develop both personal and project skills. Skill-a-thons are designed as a series of mini-learning stations where participants rotate from station to station attempting to perform the task they are given. Many times skill-a-thons also include a written exam and sometimes a team problem or judging class or two. A Skill-a-thon works well during 4-H club meetings or at project workshops. It is an excellent way to involve several project areas at one time in the program. 4-H'ers can participate in a skill-a-thon individually or as a team. Because of the learn-by-doing nature of 4-H projects, any single project or a combination of projects could be used to put together a successful Skill-a-thon.

Purpose:

The purpose is to offer a positive opportunity for youth to enhance and demonstrate their breadth of knowledge and understanding of animal science, management knowledge and skills related to 4-H projects that interest them. It is a competitive setting where attitudes of friendliness and fairness prevail. Skill-a-thons should provide an educational experience for both participants and spectators. 4-H skill-a-thons help to improve and expand the quality of educational experiences that emphasize learning and it uses science and technology to maximize teaching and learning with youth. Skill-a-thons can be done when the weather prohibits outdoor activities. The main goal is to have FUN while learning.

Skill-a-thons teach many life skills to 4-Hers including:

- Enhance project knowledge and develop marketable skills
- Enhance self-motivation, self-esteem and self-responsibility skills
- Learn to manage feelings
- Develop reasoning, critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Develop acute listening skills
- Develop goal setting and organization skills
- Develop teamwork, cooperation, sharing, and social skills among group members
- Develop character skills
- Contribute to a group effort
- Improve communications skills
- Improve leadership skills

Projects that offer skill-a-thon competitions at the state level:

- Goat (as a part of Dairy Goat Judging)
- Horse (Hippology)
- Livestock (Beef, Meat Goat, Sheep & Swine)
- Poultry (as a part of Poultry Judging)
- Rabbit (as a part of Rabbit Judging)

General information:

- Junior, Intermediate and Senior individuals are determined by the county/city selection process. State contests are held in March-September.
- High scoring senior individuals from the state contest in the Horse (Hippology) and Livestock areas may earn a position on the state team where they compete at the National Competition in Louisville, Kentucky.
- Make sure you do not miss the entry deadline for the state competition and be sure to follow the rules and regulations.
- **Just because there is not a state competition in your project area does not mean that you can't have a county or club practice or competition.**
- There are many Junior skill-a-thon competitions (these events are not sponsored by Maryland 4-H but offer a wonderful learning opportunity) that are held including:
 - The Farmer's Coop Swine Skill-a-thon in Frederick County
 - Beef Skill-a-thon held in various locations
 - The Sheep and Wool Symposium Skill-a-thon in Howard County (During the Sheep and Wool Festival)
 - The Youth Goat Skill-a-thon in Washington County (During the Western Maryland Goat Field Day and Sale)
 - The Dairy Cattle Skill-a-thon in Frederick County (During the Maryland Dairy Industry Association and Maryland Dairy Shrine Joint Convention)

Skill-a-thon Related Station Topics:

- Breed identification
- Equipment identification
- Retail meats identification
- Hay and wool judging with questions
- Meats judging class
- Feeds identification
- Anatomy, which may include external, skeletal, internal organs, parts of gastrointestinal tract, male and female reproductive organs
- Management records, tools and systems
- Disease & parasite identification
- Product identification
- Equipment identification and uses
- Management, nutrition, health & physiology questions
- Quality assurance
- Anything project related

Conducting a 4-H Skill-a-thon

As a Leader when working with Skill-a-thon study group:

- Supply youth with study materials, Don't just supply questions that can be memorized, but actual materials youth can learn from
- Communicate with both youth and their parents
- Develop a practice schedule
- Always be honest and fair to everyone participating
- Teach youth that everyone is important and give them all equal opportunities to participate
- Don't exclude a member because you dislike them or their parent

What is needed to start up Skill-a-thon event:

- Interested youth
- Help from volunteers
- Adequate facility
- Tables
- Chairs
- Score sheets
- Items & questions
- Pens/Pencils for tabulating
- Awards
- Official references
(Make sure you get the approved list)

Checklist for a Skill-a-thon Committee:

- Decide on the stations wanted. Consider time and resources available.
- Create a realistic situation and task for each station.
- Decide on the equipment or supplies needed at each station.
- Decide who will be in charge of each station.
- Delegate responsibility for gathering supplies.
- Ask someone to be in charge of dividing the members into groups and assign each group to a work station, and explain the process of rotating from station to station every 10 minutes.
- After all of the groups have rotated through the stations, praise everyone's efforts.

Responsibility of a Station Assistant:

The station assistant may find it challenging and rewarding to be a helper at one of the Skill-a-thon stations. The extent to which the participants develop project skills and life skills depends largely on how successfully you relate to them. Here are suggested steps:

- Become familiar with the topic and any available project materials, supplies, and training aids.

- Compile a list of questions to ask each team. Remember: do, reflect, and apply.
- Set up your station to include a stand up situation, task sign, and necessary supplies.
- Provide the 4-H'ers with a realistic situation and task so as to encourage a response.
- Following the Skill-a-thon, take inventory, and pack up all equipment, materials and signs for use again.

If you have any questions contact:

- Your Local Extension Office
- Livestock - State 4-H Youth Development Specialist, Animal Sciences
- Horse - Horse Extension Specialist

References:

- Maryland 4-H Skill-a-thon Rules and Regulations online at <http://www.maryland4h.org> (Under the Animal Science Link)
- Maryland 4-H Horse Bowl Rules and Regulations online at: <http://www.4horse.umd.edu/activities/horsebowl.html>
- Missouri 4-H Conducting a Skill-a-thon Guide at <http://4h.missouri.edu/projects/skill-a-thons/docs/LG733Skill-a-thon.pdf>