



## Tips on judging junior handling in Finland

Junior handling is very popular in Finland. As a reference, in 2019 there were more than 1,500 competition visits and there are an estimated 200 enthusiasts of the sport all over Finland. Young people who enjoy the sport have a huge desire to develop and become even better handlers. The level of handlers in Finland is generally high. Each competitor will receive a written critique of their performance, the feedback of which will serve not only as a basis for the placements of that day's competition, but also as a guideline for personal development. High-quality and skilled handlers also need feedback so that they can develop further.

### How we define junior handling

Junior handling belongs closely to the dog show world. The purpose of the sport is to teach young people to present their dogs at dog shows, to bring out the best in their dogs and to make the judge's job easier. The aim of the junior handling competition is to increase young people's involvement in the dog world, teach in-depth dog knowledge, promote, and improve cooperation between dogs and young people.

The junior handling competition should not differ significantly from the breed rings, and it should resemble usual breed judging. The focus of the judging should be on the cooperation between the young handler and the dog, as well as on the breed-specific presentation, as it would best serve in the breed ring. In other words, *we have a very strict rule not to ask for any other patterns than the ones that are asked in the breed rings, and we do absolutely not follow the so called 'golden rule'*. It is not allowed to use these as a criterion in your judgement.

### Basic rules

We have two age groups, 10-13-year-olds, and 14-17-year-olds. Only the Finnish Championship final, the qualification competition for the National Team and district championships are organized in one age group, 10-17. First, the younger group competes and five are placed. Then the older group competes and again five are placed. In the end the winners of the younger and older group compete against each other for the title of Best Junior Handler of the Day.

The dog must be at least 9 months old, and it needs to have a temperament that allows the dog to be swapped to another handler safely. It can have qualities that would be disqualifying in the breed ring, i.e., wrong color, incorrect bite, no testicles and so on. That said, the dog must be healthy.

Double handling is not allowed.

Apart from swapping dogs or bringing outside dogs as swap dogs, the judge can allow the handler to change the dog mid-competition if the situation requires that. The reason could be e.g., that the dog starts limping. It is up to the judge to decide whether it is allowed, but it's advised to remember that we want all kids to go home with a smile on their face.

## Judging sequence

The course of the competition should be similar to the judging in breed rings and only the patterns commonly used in the breed rings will be used, i.e., circle, triangle, back and forth and together back and forth. The judgement must include both group and individual judgement. Group movements refer to when all or part of the competitors move together around the ring or back and forth in pairs.

Individual evaluation is done, as is the evaluation of a dog in a breed ring. The dog is examined, and the judge may ask the handler to show the dog's teeth or bite. The judge may also ask questions about the dog or breed. For example, the age of the dog, the breed / breed group, the original purpose of the breed, etc. However, we do not encourage to make it a quiz for the junior, i.e., stick to questions/a question that bring(s) value in that moment. For example, asking the number of ribs is not that kind of question. Also, questions should not be a priority in your evaluation, so please don't use them to choose who makes the cut.

Each competitor is asked to perform individual movements, the patterns can be back and forth, triangle and / or around. At this point, the judge will give each competitor a written critique, which will be filled out by the ring steward. More on this in the next section.

Once all competitors have been judged individually, the judge may pick out a shortlist of competitors, swap dogs, move competitors again, etc. before the final placements. Swapping dogs is often an efficient way to differentiate between handlers. The handler should be able to establish good contact with the swap dog and know how the breed is presented. It is advised to give the handlers a moment to get to know the new dog before continuing the competition.

## Written critiques

Each competitor will receive a written critique of their performance using the Kennel Club's junior handling evaluation form.

A well-completed critique will give the young handler valuable feedback on their performance. Comments don't have to be long, but for a young person, they are very important when they analyze their performance. Judges are encouraged to use the widest possible scale in the judging. Not everyone needs to get an excellent grade in every area. A few words about what went well or what could be improved is better than blank paper and a line of "very good" checks in the boxes.

Before starting the judgement, think about what kind of performance would be the perfect performance for you and compare the handlers to this. If it's anything other than excellent, write a few words as to why it wasn't excellent. Or if something was particularly good, that is definitely worth mentioning. Read more on the different evaluation criteria below.

How the handler dresses is not something we comment on in the critique.

## Rules of absence

When you agree to judge junior handling, please remember that the junior handling judge is subject to the Kennel Club's general rules of absence in all respects.

# Tips to help with the judging

The following topics are part of the evaluation criteria present in the evaluation form and you will grade the juniors in different areas with sufficient, good, very good or excellent in addition to a short, written feedback. The evaluation form can be found here: <https://www.kennelliitto.fi/lomakkeet/junior-handling-critique-form>

## Movement in group:

In addition to the dog she presents, a good handler takes into account other competitors. She makes sure her own dog is ready to move. She makes sure that the competitors in front have reached an adequate distance before she starts moving herself. If the competitor is first, a good handler will also check the situation behind her to make sure whether the other handlers are ready to go.

A good handler always gives room to those who run in front of her and doesn't run over them. She pays attention to the judge's position and tries to regulate her own pace by showing her own dog's movements as the judge looks in the best possible way.

## Individual movements:

A good handler knows the breed and individual she is showing, knows how to choose the best pace for it. She encourages the dog kindly and with a soft hand to show his best in motion.

She listens to the judge's instructions before moving the dog, she notices the space available and makes the requested pattern according to the size of the ring and the size of the dog. She makes sure that the judge sees the dog's movements from front, behind and / or from the side, i.e., she is aware of where the judge is standing.

A good handler also anticipates when to stop the movement and stacks the dog at a suitable distance to make it easy for the judge to continue judging.

## Stacking the dog:

A good handler will stack the dog in a way that is typical for the breed, i.e., hard-stacked or free-stacked or both. For examining the dog, she stacks the dog on a table or on the ground, depending on the size of the dog. She makes sure that the dog stands in the best possible way, in balance, all the limbs in their right places and the coat finished in a way typical of the breed. She makes sure that it is easy for the judge to examine the dog from head to tail.

## Showing bite or teeth:

At the request of the judge, a good handler will show the dog's teeth or bite calmly but surely and so that the judge can see what she has asked for. Bite means showing front teeth up until canines. Teeth means showing all sides, so front and both sides.

## Cooperation with the dog:

At its best, the cooperation between the dog and the handler in the ring is smooth, seamless, and beautiful to watch. The handler focuses on the dog, works with it happily and encouragingly, allowing the dog to be relaxed and able to give his best in the ring. If the dog is in a lazy mood, a good handler will be able to encourage the dog throughout the competition with a happy attitude. An eager dog may require a calmer

hand and more concentration from its handler. A good handler will also remember to thank the dog after the performance and also pays attention to the dog between performances.

## Different types of competitions in Finland

### Qualifying competition for the Finnish Championship final

During the year there are 20 qualifying competitions for the Finnish Championship final. The Best Junior Handler of the Day is the one who qualifies, and if she has already qualified, she cannot compete in the qualifying competitions throughout the rest of the year. These 20 qualified handlers compete in the Championship final at the Finnish Winner show in one age group.

### Finnish Championship final

20 qualified handlers compete in the Championship final at the Finnish Winner show in one age group, 10-17 years. In the end the judge places five handlers. The 1<sup>st</sup> placed will be the Finnish Champion and will represent at Cruft's and at the World Championship final. The 2<sup>nd</sup> placed will represent at the European Championship final.

### District championship

There are 19 kennel districts in Finland. Each of them organizes a district championship in junior handling. There is always a regular junior handling competition or a qualifying competition for the Finnish Championship alongside the district championship. The district championship is a separate competition, and the juniors compete in one age group, 10-17 years. They often have a different dog for both competitions that day, but the junior can just as well use the same dog. The judge will place 5 best handlers and the winner is the District Champion of the year, who will go on to compete at the Best of the Best junior handling competition, which is an invitational competition for the district champions.

### Qualifying competition for the National Team

The Nordic Championship in junior handling is organized every year at the Nordic Winner show. Here the juniors from five Nordic countries compete as teams. A team consists of four members that have been chosen in a way that the specific country has decided. In Finland we host a qualifying competition yearly, and the four best placed will make it to the national team and the fifth is an alternate who steps in if one of the team members can't make it. The qualifying competition is competed in one age group, 10-17 years.

### Regular competition

If the competition is not labeled as any of the above, it is a regular junior handling competition. In these competitions the juniors don't qualify for anything, but they are just as important as the others and should be treated that way.

*Remember that a judge is a role model for young people and that is why it is important to be a good example both inside and outside the ring. Together, we support and encourage every junior handling*

*enthusiast and value the sport as an equal part of the dog shows as it is.*

**Enjoy your judging appointment!**