

SHOWING AND FITTING YOUR FIRST 4-H LAMB



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SHOWING AND FITTING YOUR FIRST 4-H LAMB

Showing a lamb is a good way for you to develop skills in showmanship and to teach an animal to do things for you. To be successful, you must work with the lamb so that it can become familiar with you and you with it.

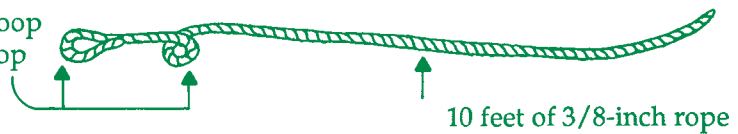
If you have worked with lambs before, 4 weeks of work daily (1 hour a day) is usually enough time to have a lamb ready for showing. If this is your first lamb, you will need more time for breaking and training. Advice from someone who has trained and shown a lamb successfully may save training time.

Remember that each lamb is different and may require different methods of training. It takes work and devotion to do a good job!

HOW TO MAKE A HALTER

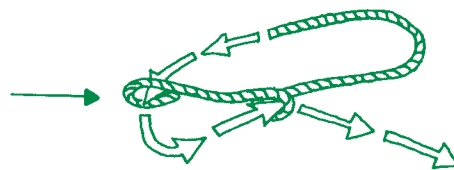
Breaking the lamb to be led by a halter is your first step. Buy a good rope halter or make one from any 3/8- to 1/2-inch-diameter rope. The rope should be at least 10 feet long.

Nose piece—7 inches
from end of one loop
to end of other loop



Make two loops, fastening the rope together by sewing, plaiting, or pig rings at these two spots where ropes touch.

Halter is completed
by pulling loose end
of rope along the
path of the arrows.



Place the halter on the lamb
so that the rope you hold is
on the left side of the lamb's head.



BREAKING A LAMB TO LEAD

The first time the lamb is haltered, it may buck, run over you, kick, roll over, drag you down, fall down, and make a real scene. This is normal, and if you will hang in there, the lamb will calm down after a day or so and start obeying your directions. When the lamb learns to walk when you walk and stop when you stop, you are well on the way to being ready to show.

After your lamb is responding nicely to the halter, your next step is to teach the lamb to ignore being touched, especially by a stranger. On show day the judge will be a stranger to both you and the lamb. You need to show this stranger how good a showman you are, and the lamb needs to learn that the stranger in the ring has no intention of hurting it. During showmanship contests, judges will feel of your lamb to see how well you can control it and also how much fat and muscling the lamb has. Usually, they will walk up behind the lamb (the lamb may not even see them coming), so you need to have the lamb trained to stand still when touched.

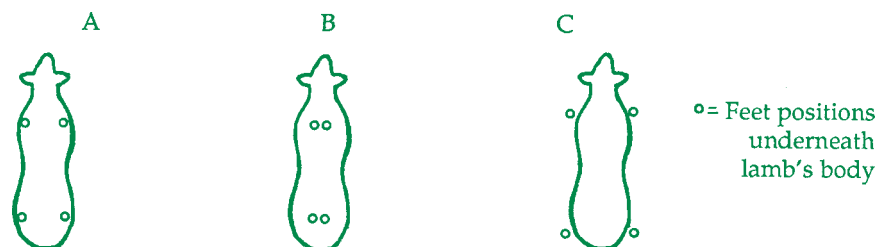
One way you can do this is to have a friend, parent, brother, or sister touch and handle the lamb while you brace it (later we will discuss how bracing is done). It will take a lot of handling before the lamb will ignore the touch. This may be frustrating for you, but you will soon gain control.

If you must do all the training by yourself, try breaking the lamb by backing it into a fence or bale of hay. To the animal, striking the hay hits the “go button” just like a judge touching the back or leg. If you repeat that move long enough, the lamb may no longer jump when being touched on the rear.

In the final steps of training the animal to lead, do not use the halter. For young, less experienced showmen, the halter may be left on the sheep’s head during a show, with the other end of the halter looped around the showman’s wrist. This makes sure that your lamb will not break free and run away. Although the halter may be left on the animal, the lamb is shown by holding its lower jaw in your left hand. If the lamb stops or balks, you may have to use the right hand behind the head to help push it along. You may even have to reach back with the right hand to the dock (stub left after tail was removed) and pull forward to get the lamb back on the move. Again, practice is the secret to success.

"SETTING UP" THE LAMB

Another training step involves “setting up” the lamb. When the lamb is stopped, its feet should be positioned squarely under the corners of its body (see A below).



Two “wrong foot positions” are B, where the lamb stands with feet side by side, or C, where the lamb stands too spread out, allowing its back to sag downward.

When setting up the lamb to show its side view, squat down (your knees up, and your bottom down) and turn so that one knee is in front of the lamb’s chest and neck and other knee alongside lamb’s shoulder. Keep your knees off the ground—they might pick up dirt that later could be wiped onto the lamb’s wool and take away from its appearance. The leg and knee against the neck and under the jaw make the lamb feel more secure as you bend down to lift its feet to place them as you want them under the animal’s body. This also keeps the lamb from moving forward when you lift its legs. (You could set up the lamb while you are standing, before you assume the squatting position.)

To move the foot and/or leg, simply lift the foot. The sheep’s reaction will be to jerk its foot from your hand. Usually it will put the foot down in a better position. If the feet are not in the proper position now, keep lifting them until your lamb sets them down correctly.

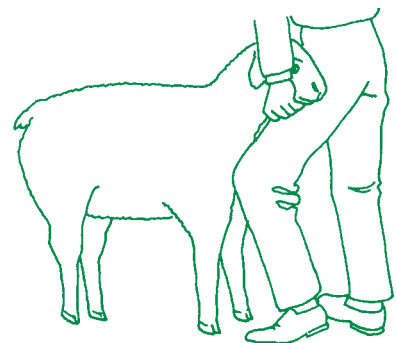
Once the animal is set up, an occasional scratch to the middle of the lowermost belly will keep the animal calm. Also, scratching the belly will make the lamb lift its back if it is sagging. Scratching the belly can be useful also when the judge feels of a lamb’s back because this causes the lamb to lift and strengthen its back muscles.

BRACING THE LAMB

Solid control of the lamb in the showing is a must. Bracing involves controlling a lamb’s natural tendency to move forward when touched or excited. Keep the lamb from moving by controlling the head and neck positions and also by using your legs and hands as braces against the lamb’s neck and shoulder. Let’s look at some examples of when you use bracing and how you might use it.

Bracing is used to show the rear view of the animal to the judge. In this illustration, you are standing in front of the lamb and the lamb’s rear is pointed toward the judge. Place your left hand over the head of the lamb and grasp its right jaw. Take your left leg and position it under the lamb’s jaw and neck, holding the head firmly against your leg. From this position, you can lean over the lamb and, with your free right hand, pick up its legs from either side to set it up correctly. Also, from this position, you are ready to brace the lamb for handling by the judge. If your lamb is still ticklish to the judge’s touch, you can use your free right hand to push the lamb’s breast area backwards and upwards toward the judge.

Braced lamb



A second way to brace is to leave the lamb's neck over your thigh as before and reach down with both hands to the front of the shoulders, pushing backwards slightly to brace the lamb.

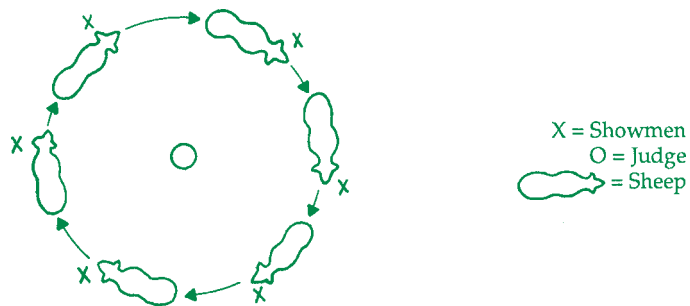
A third way to brace is to grasp the lamb's jaws with both hands and push downwards and backwards toward the judge. This procedure does not give the novice as much control as the other two.

Remember—you are not trying to shove the lamb over the judge; you are trying to keep the lamb from jumping forward or running away when handled. Since most handling is done when presenting a rear view, most bracing is done at that time. Bracing may well be the most important showmanship tool you can have because most failures occur when animals are handled.

THE SHOWRING

When you work with your lamb, always work as if show day were here! What can you expect as you lead your animal into the ring with all the other contestants?

The judge will stand in the center of the ring and will ask you to move all the lambs around him/her. Always keep your eye on the judge. Try to keep your lamb at least 8 feet behind the lamb in front. If you get too close to the lamb in front, you may spook that lamb and yours, too. Move clockwise.

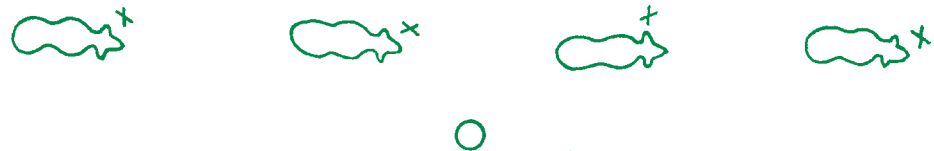
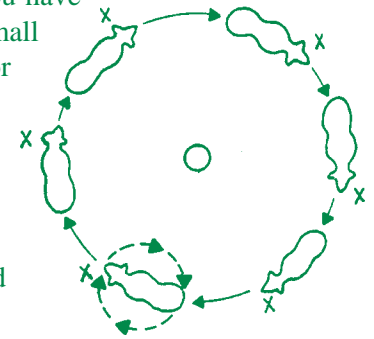


Remember to stand proudly, left hand under the lamb's jaw and with your eyes always on the judge. You should be neatly dressed, with no chewing gum in your mouth and no cap, and have a nice smile on your face. You want the judge to see that you are attentive, have your animal under perfect control, and are as happy as can be showing what you brought to the show.

Perhaps the judge will ask you to stop in the circle. Stop immediately and keep your eye on the judge, who will turn and look at all the sheep. As soon as the judge's eyes are on someone else, go to brace position, lean over your lamb, and set it up. Do this quickly and return to your relaxed holding position, carefully keeping your eye on the judge.

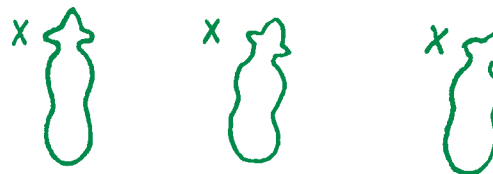
If your lamb is nervous and jumps around when you have stopped, very calmly pull your lamb out and into a small circle, then go back to where you were. Never fight or wrestle with your lamb. Moving it will calm the lamb much quicker than wrestling with it. Keep your eye on the judge when you are doing this!

Next, the judge will want a side view. Lambs will be lined up end to end with your lamb between you and the judge. Quickly brace, set up the legs, and assume your proper showman's position.



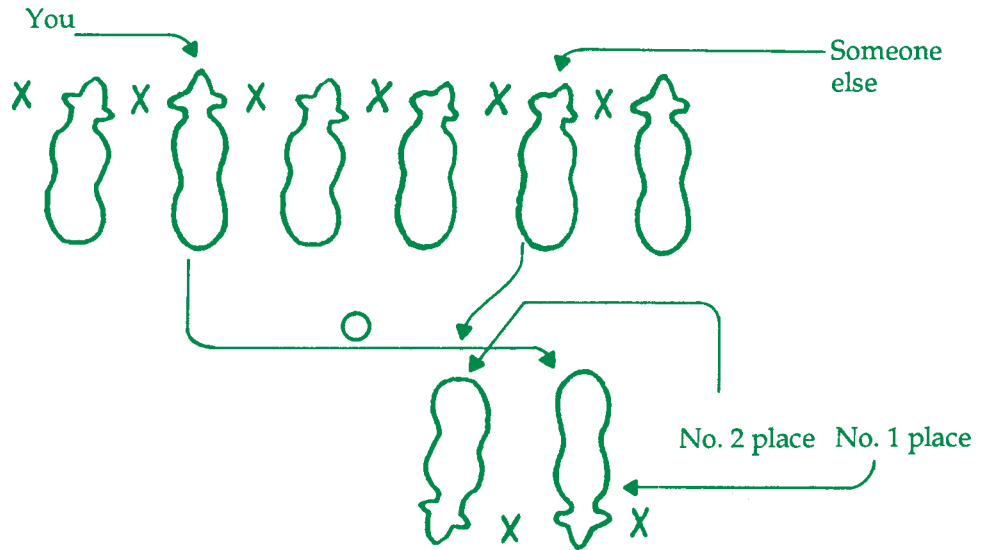
Smaller, younger showmen may stand behind their lamb, left hand grasping the jaw. Larger and more experienced showmen may squat behind the lamb. The lower your head is in relation to the sheep's back, the taller the lamb will look. You want the lamb to be presented in its most attractive position. Never place your hand on top of the lamb's back. This is considered a major mistake by many judges.

A rear view (with handling) may be called for by the judge. Lambs should be lined up side by side for this. Try to put your lamb a few feet away from lambs on either side of you.



Once in position, brace and set up your lamb. Then back away, keeping your eyes on the judge. Position yourself as much in front of the animal as you can. If the judge is coming to handle your lamb, brace again by stepping in with your left leg under the neck, left hand over the lamb's head grasping the right jaw, and your right hand on the front and lower side of the shoulder or the breast to hold. If your lamb is jumpy, turn it in a short circle and repeat the set up process, trying not to draw the judge's attention.

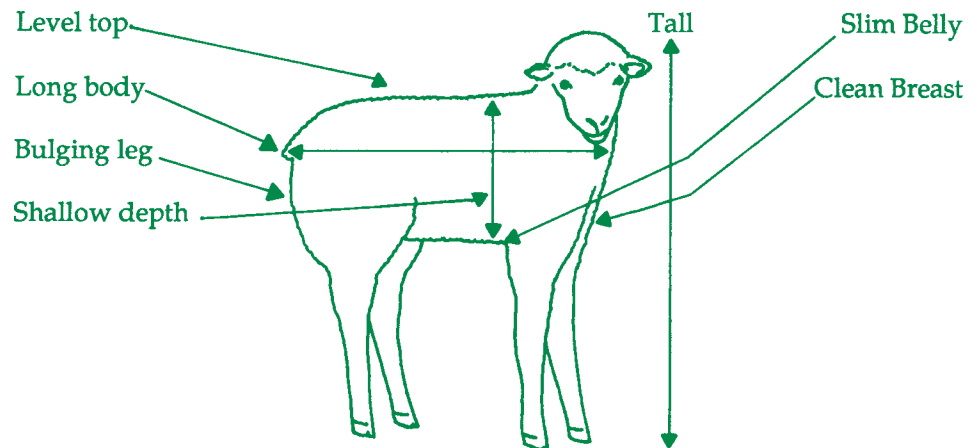
Finally, the judge will begin to pick the winners of the class. The judge will point at you and tell you to bring your lamb out and place it somewhere else.



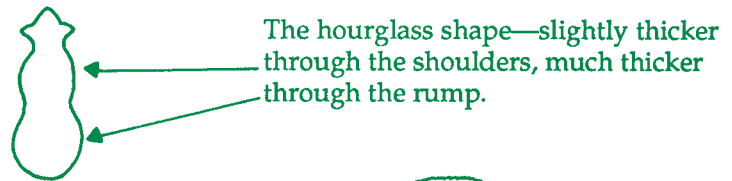
Move your lamb and set it up. Try to do everything correctly because the judge will turn, look at the placing one more time, and perhaps switch one or two animals if a showman is asleep on the job. Be alert, attentive, and happy. Your hard work just paid off! You won the class!

FITTING THE LAMB

Cleaning and shaping the wool on a lamb to give the proper body shape is called "fitting." You want to have a clean animal that looks very muscular but not fat. Shaping the wool properly can cause the muscling to look better than it really is. From the side, your lamb should have these characteristics:



From the top side:

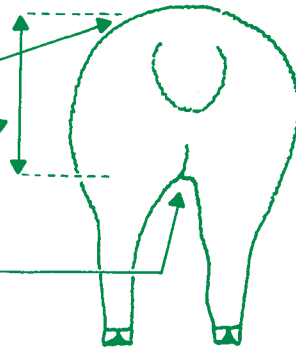


From the rear:

Rounded top

Deeply muscled

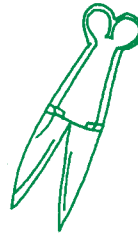
Twist clean, deep



To properly work the wool into its desired shape, these tools are needed:



Electrical shears



Hand shears



Card



Spray bottle

INITIAL SHEARING

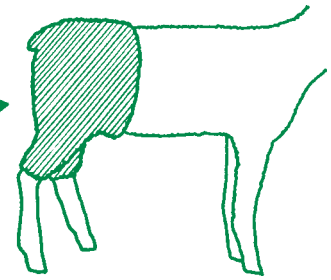
Eight weeks before show time, completely shear the lamb's body—legs, belly, neck, head, face—all of it, with the electrical shears. The wool grows back rapidly on a freshly shorn lamb and you will use this rapidly grown wool to shape your lamb later.

SECOND SHEARING

Two weeks before the show, clip the body close again except the rear legs. Ideally, you want 3/4-inch wool on the rear of the animal for the final fitting on or about show day. You can always cut excess wool off but you can never put wool back on.

For the second shearing (and all shearings thereafter), use special blocking combs that are available for either 2 1/2- or 3-inch shearing heads on electrical shears. You want the wool remaining on the body to be smooth and free of ridges and creases. If your lamb's wool is not smooth, criss-cross the rough areas with your shears to remove most of the high spots.

Leave wool in shaded area on the second clipping.



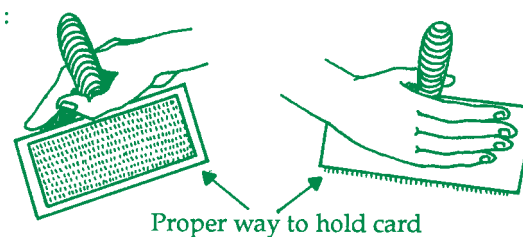
WASHING

The lamb must be washed 3 or 4 days before the show. Use warm water and any good shampoo to clean the wool. Since the fleece contains much lanolin (grease), washing takes quite some time. Always spray water downward on the head so that ears and eyes are protected. Work in the shampoo and thoroughly scrub all the wool. In rinsing, be sure that soap is removed from under the flanks, chest, and belly regions. A curry comb with serrated (toothed) edges is useful in removing stubborn materials and knots from the wool and also for removing some of the excess water the wool will retain. The lamb may also be towel dried.

INITIAL CARDING

The rear legs still have significant amounts of wool on them. After the lamb is almost dry, there will be enough dampness in the wool for carding. A card is a tool that has the same use as a brush in grooming human hair—it pulls the fibers in one direction. If you are carding a dry sheep, lightly spray some water from a bottle or use a damp cloth to wet the wool a little. For carding and clipping, you may want to build a fitting stand that restricts the animal's movement.

In carding, try to pull all the wool fibers out straight from the body so the wool will look and feel firm and dense. Also, by pulling the fibers outward, you can begin to trim and shape the leg area into whatever shape you desire. Carding followed by hand shearing will soon turn your fuzzy-looking lamb into a more show-worthy lamb. To use the card properly, it should be held as shown below:

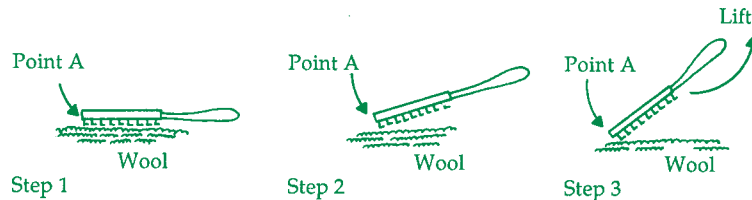


Always remember to hold the card with your hand flat against the back side of the card and your thumb around the handle. The movement of the card is important.



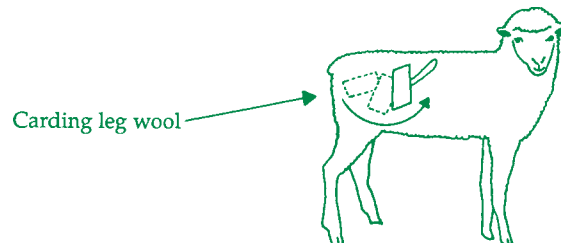
Card lying flat, side view

The teeth of the card are sharp little wires with a hook on the end. These teeth hook the wool and pull it outward. The teeth points are angled toward the handle, so when the handle of the card is lifted, fibers are straightened.

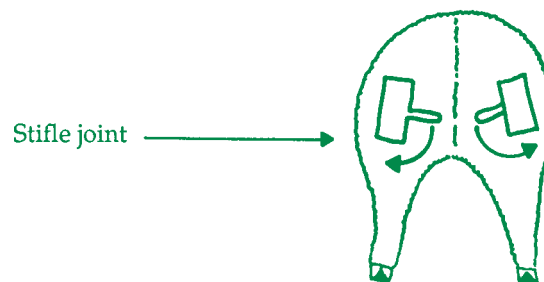


This series of steps shows how a card is used. In Step 1, the wool is hooked; Step 2, the handle is raised but Point A does not move; and Step 3, the handle is pulled upright, all teeth are now out of the wool, but Point A still has not moved. These steps are repeated over and over.

The direction you card depends on what you want the wool to do for you. Since you want the leg to look thicker, card the wool on the side of the leg upward.



On the rear, card the wool outward from the center of the rump to make the lamb look wider. When the rear is hand sheared, the widest point on the fitted lamb should be through the stifle. Be careful with the card—it can hurt if used where wool is too short.



The wool can be “packed” to make it firmer. After it has been carded and hand sheared smooth, use the back of the card to gently pat the wool down. This will make the lamb feel firmer where more wool was left on the body.

HAND SHEARING

Hand shearing is a safer final shearing technique than shearing with electrically powered shears because you are less likely to cut “gaps” in the wool. If the wool is too wet, be very careful with hand shears, too, because they can cut more than desired.

When cutting with hand shears, let one blade rest flatly on the wool surface. As you squeeze the handles together on the shears, the blade resting on the wool should stay still while the other blade moves back and forth doing the very slight amount of cutting desired. This takes practice, but it is best to learn the proper way. Once learned, you have greater control than you would have with both blades of the shears moving simultaneously.

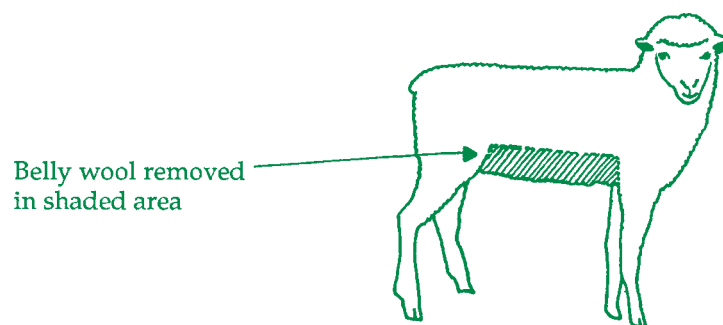
Remember that you are trying to make the legs of your lamb appear thick. Work slowly, trimming only small amounts of wool. Leave your final trim to show day. Be sure that the wool blends in from one spot on the body to the next. You want to create the illusion of a sheep that is beautifully proportioned in body shape and whose wool looks the same all over. Practice makes perfect. You must be very careful in trimming near show day because the wool will not grow back if you mess up somewhere.

FINAL WASH AND TRIM

On show day, there is a lot to do. Re-washing is first, followed by drying. Use cold or lukewarm water but no heated blow dryers—heat will make the wool feel sharp and abrasive. Remember that wool takes 4 to 6 hours to dry, so start early.

After washing, you will spend the rest of your time on show day on final trimming. Until now you have largely ignored the middle of the lamb and concentrated on legs, neck, and face. Today, finish these areas and put the final carding and trim on the rear legs.

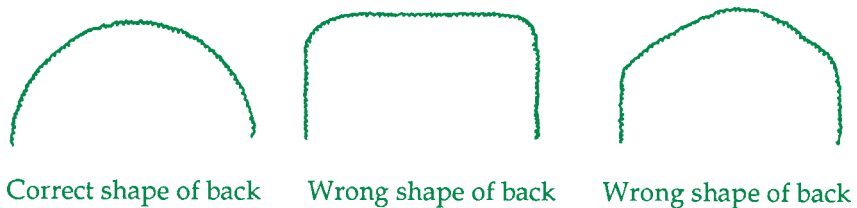
Trim the belly very close to the skin. Small animal clippers or human hair clippers will remove the short wool right down to the skin. This makes the body depth look shallower, which helps give a longer appearance to your lamb. Closely trim an imaginary area below a line drawn from flank to flank.



Trim the head so that it looks like it has a minimum of 2 weeks of wool growth. Two weeks of wool growth looks like the amount of wool left on by shearing with a 9- or 10-tooth comb on electrical shears. In other words, wool on the head should not be too short. Cutting too much wool off the neck and head makes them look narrow or more like a goat. This is not the appearance you want.

Use your own judgment as to whether the chest and neck need to look wider or thicker. If so, leave extra wool in these places to provide that thickness. Since different breeds treat the head and facial wool differently, look at pictures of animals winning other shows so you will know what your animal should look like.

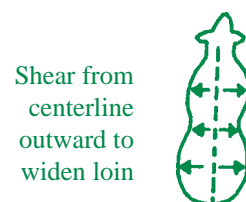
The back and loin areas are next. Showmen want their sheep to have thick muscling down the back. Also, they want the back to be as flat as possible from the top of the shoulders all the way to the rear of the rump (from a side view). With electrical shears, apply a crew cut down the back. Remember to keep flatness front to rear but keep the loin as pronounced as possible. Do not cut too much at a time or you might cut away the wool necessary to widen the loin. How should you shape the loin? Viewed from the animal's rear, the top of the back should be rounded.



You will also need to blend the wool on the rump and shoulder with that remaining on the loin. If the shoulders are naturally thick, shorten the wool cover to a shorter length to get the right body shape..



If the lamb is narrow down the back, shear from the center outward to provide a wider appearance.



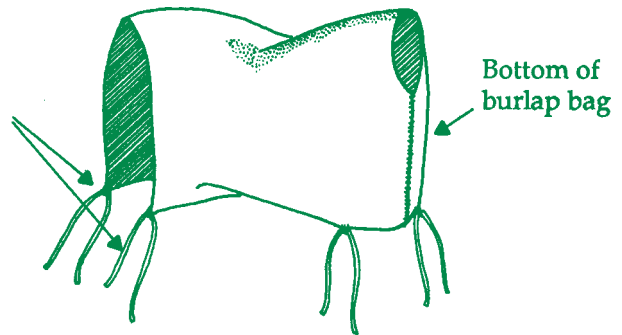
Blend legs with the rest of the body. You do not want black toothpicks under your muscular lamb; neither do you want patches of 2-inch hair here and there. Trim so that the legs will look balanced with the rest of the body.

BLANKET

After you have done your best, you can hardly wait to get your lamb into the showring. Since you may have to wait some time before your class begins, it is a good idea to put a sheep blanket over the lamb to keep it clean. The blanket can be tied to the legs or it can be pinned beneath the flanks to keep it from falling off. Leave the rear of the blanket open so that the lamb will not soil it.

You can make a blanket from a clean burlap bag. First, split one of the long edges. Next, cut out the corner of the sack's bottom opposite the side you split for the lamb's head to fit through. Now you have a sheep blanket that will keep straw, sawdust, and dirt away until show time.

Burlap bag, split down one side, one corner of bottom cut away. Ties to tie around legs



Bottom of burlap bag

FEEDING

The last day or two before the contest, take away hay and grass and keep the lamb on the same amount of grain that he has been receiving. Hay and grass will make the belly bulge, which you do not want on show day. Do not increase the grain to offset the hay — this can kill the lamb.

SUMMARY

The rest is fun. Relax, do your best in the showring, and be proud of what you accomplish. If you do not win this year, then next year you will be a veteran and will have an edge over the competition.

See you at the fair!