**Steps to Judging Sheep**
When judging sheep, the evaluation should begin from the ground and then working your way up, and then from the rear and working your way forward. The animals in the class should be ranked based on the traits of importance they possess, while putting the greatest emphasis on the most valuable traits in the production of sheep. Contestants should also eliminate any easy placings in the class, and place the remainder of the class based on the volume of the important traits.

**Ranking of Traits**

**Ranking of Traits for Market Lambs**
The ranking of traits in the order of their importance for market lamb judging is as follows:
1. Degree of muscling
2. Degree of finish
3. Balance and style
4. Frame size
5. Soundness and structural correctness

**Ranking of Traits for Breeding Sheep**
The ranking of traits in the order of their importance for judging breeding ewes is as follows:
1. Balance and style
2. Frame size
3. Soundness and structural correctness
4. Capacity or volume
5. Degree of muscling
6. Degree of leanness
7. Wool

**Evaluating Degree of Muscling**
Degree of muscling should first be evaluated through the center of the leg for thickness. The second place to examine the lamb is width between the rear feet when it is on the move or standing. It is very important to compare base width, or width at the ground, to top width, and in heavy muscled lambs these should be equal. Be careful to not be tricked by additional thickness due to fat cover. Visually judging tops can be very risky, and is not recommended on fat animals. Other areas to evaluate when determining degree of muscling include length of hindsaddle (the loin and the leg), width and length of loin, and the shape over the rack (a grooved shape to the rack is desired)
**Center Leg & Base Width**
These three pictures below show lambs that are light muscled, average muscled, and heavy muscled. Note the differences among these lambs in thickness through the center of the leg and base width. The heavy muscled lamb on the far right shows the muscle shape that is desired, being extremely thick through the leg and having a square, wide top shape.

![Light Muscled (narrow)](light_muscled.png) ![Average Muscled (average width)](average_muscled.png) ![Heavy Muscled (wide)](heavy_muscled.png)

**Width and Length of Loin**
A long, wide loin is desirable in market lambs and breeding ewes. These two pictures illustrate the areas to evaluate in determining width and length of loin.

![Width and Length of Loin](width_length.png)

**Source:** University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
**Length of Hindsaddle**
The hindsaddle (the loin and leg) contains the most valuable cuts on lambs. Because of this, the hindsaddle should be greater in length and weight than the foresaddle.

![Hindsaddle and Foresaddle](image1)

**Shape over Rack**
The rack is also a fairly high-priced cut in lambs. A grooved shape over the rack would indicate a high degree of muscling.

![Shape over Rack](image2)

**Evaluating Degree of Finish**
Ideally, lambs should be lean with 0.15 to 0.20 inch of backfat thickness. The desired backfat thickness in lambs is less than that wanted in hogs (0.60 inch) and steers (0.4 inch). Degree of finish is influenced by the amount of muscling, frame size, and stage of maturity. Be wary of small framed, light muscled lambs, as they will tend to be too fat. Also remember that fat sheep will be the widest over their top. Lambs that are lean will be trim over and behind the shoulders, and clean and neat through their underline.

*Source:* University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
This lamb in this picture exhibits several indicators of too much fat. This lamb has a flat, wide top, a sloppy, loose middle, and is very heavy fronted. When judging a class of lambs, a good rule to follow is that "fat sheep go last".

The rear view of this lamb shows that it is very trim with its base width being at least as wide as width of top. Again, fat sheep will be widest at the top.

The lamb in this picture has great length and leanness. This lamb is very clean and trim over and behind the shoulder, and is also extremely trim and neat through the underline.

Source: University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
Evaluating Balance & Style

A sheep with balance has equal portions of width, depth, and length, with special emphasis being placed on length. An example that is often used to illustrate this point is that if we cut the lamb in half, both halves should fall to the center. In order to achieve this balance sheep should be constructed in the form of two Christmas trees. These Christmas tree shapes should be evident when sheep are viewed from behind and from the side, such that they should be wide and deep through the rear (leg) and tight and trim through the front end. Proper balance is important so that the majority of the weight is in the back half of the sheep were the high priced cuts are located. Style deals with correctness of structure and straightness of design. Sheep should have a straight top line and a neat shoulder that blends smoothly into the neck and ribs.

This picture shows a "nasty" lamb that is very unbalanced. This lamb is heavy fronted, deep and low necked, broken topped, too heavy through the middle, steep rumped, and broken topped. If this "nasty" lamb were cut in half, everything would fall towards the front.

This lamb in this picture is straight and stylish, but lacks balance because it has the wrong Christmas tree shape when viewed from the side. This lamb is heavier in the front half than in the rear half.

Source: University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agriпedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
The lamb shown here has excellent balance with the volume of weight in the loin and leg. The lines indicate the correct Christmas tree shape this lamb possesses when viewed from the side.

The picture on the left shows a lamb that is lacking style due to being too deep necked, too low in its neck placement, and too open shouldered. The combination of being ewe necked and wide over the shoulder blades gives the lamb an appearance of having excess weight in the front half. The lamb shown in the picture on the right also lacks style, as it is weak topped and too steep rump in its rump.

Source: University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
The picture on the left shows a lamb with a straight top line and a neck-shoulder connection that is very high and correct. The picture on the right shows the level rump structure that is desired in sheep.

The ewe in the picture on the left has a stylish, neat front with no obvious excesses in its front end. This lamb is very smooth at the point of the shoulder, has a clean, flat breast, and has a very high set to its neck. This lamb also blends smoothly from its neck to its shoulder and its rib. The lamb on the right is tight over the top of the shoulders and has the correct angle (Christmas tree shape) as you compare width at the hip to width at the top of the shoulders.

**Evaluating Soundness & Structural Correctness**

Like cattle, sheep need to be sound and structural correct so they can walk long distances to graze. When evaluating soundness and structural correctness, start at the ground level and work your way up one joint at a time paying special attention to feet and pasterns, hocks, knees, rumps, and shoulders.

**Feet & Pasterns**

Pasterns on sheep should be strong with a slight angle that provides cushion for the other joints. The picture on the left shows a pastern with too much set, resulting in poor depth of heel (the hoof-skin junction is too close to the ground). The picture on the right shows a pastern that is in danger of breaking down (extremely weak), resulting in extremely poor depth of heel.

**Source:** University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp
Sheep should have big feet with even toes that set flat on the surface and square with the animal’s body. The left picture shows a foot with nice, big, even toes. The picture on the right illustrates the pastern and foot structure that is desired in sheep. This lamb has the correct set to its pastern, good depth of heel, and it has a big foot that sets flat and even on the ground.

**Hocks**
Correct hock structure is critical to the mobility and longevity of sheep. The hocks on sheep should have about 20 degrees of set to provide maximum flexibility and power. The bone structure of the hock should be clean, flat and free of swelling of any kind. The picture on the left shows hocks that have too much set, which forces the rear legs up under the animal making it difficult and awkward for it to handle its rear end. This condition of too much set to the hock is referred to as being "sickle hocked". The picture on the right shows a ewe with the correct set to its hock. This hock structure gives the ewe flex and power when she is on the move. A good measure of correctness for the hock is the animal’s ability to get its rear leg beyond the dock (tailhead) when it is walking.

**Knees**
The knees should be square with the body when viewed from the front, and should be slightly set back when viewed from the side to give cushion when the sheep is on the move. The picture on the left shows a knee that is "bucked-over", which lacks cushion and will restrict movement through the front end. The picture on the right shows knees that are bowed slightly inward ("knock-kneed"). Both bucked-over and knock-kneed animals should be discounted, especially in breeding classes.

*Source: University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp*
The picture on the left shows a strong, straight knee structure that could be slightly improved with a slight degree of backward set for flexibility. The picture on the right shows the proper knee flex that should be observed when the animal is on the move.

**Rump**
The ideal rump design in sheep is average to above average in length and very slightly sloping from front to back. A short, steep rump will restrict length of stride and limit the volume of muscle that could be functionally placed on the rump. A rump that is very long and level, results in good flexibility and angle to the rear leg.

**Shoulders**

![Open Shouldered](image)

![Coarse Shouldered](image)

The proper angle to the shoulder is critical for good length of stride. The shape and tightness of the front end is also important for proper balance. The point of the shoulder of the lamb in this picture is not smooth, resulting in the lamb appearing to be heavy and coarse in its shoulder. This lamb is also open shouldered, giving the look of a wide thick heavy front end.

The picture on the left shows a ewe that has the desired tight shape at the top of the shoulder. The lamb in the middle picture has the smoothness at the point of the shoulder that is desired, and the shoulder of the lamb in the picture on the right blends smoothly into the neck and forerib.

**Source:** University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Science, www2.ca.uky.edu/agripedia/agmania/Livestock/Sheep/shemuscle.asp