



NATIONAL  
FFA ORGANIZATION

# Agricultural Proficiency Awards

## National Judge Suggestions to Improve Applications

Created: 03/2017

*The following suggestions are from judges who have judged proficiency award applications at National Finalist Selection.*

### READ

- Read the Proficiency area descriptions carefully. Make sure you are applying in the correct area.
- If unsure of the correct area to apply in contact [proficiency@ffa.org](mailto:proficiency@ffa.org) for a determination.
- Read the directions that are in the Proficiency Award Handbook (*available on the National FFA website at: <https://www.ffa.org/participate/awards/proficiencies>*)
- Review the Proficiency Rubric for the type of application you are completing. This shows you exactly what the judges are looking for.

### WRITING THE APPLICATION

- When writing the application only include information and records that are directly related to the award area you are applying in. Do not include information from another SAE enterprise that does not qualify in the award area.
- Be specific, to the point and direct. Answer the question and only the question.
- Be sure the actions shown in your photos are related to the SAE enterprise your application is based on.
- Try to make your SAE unique and different. Try to show yourself as being in charge and involved. If you have an item that is unique or unusual in your program or application, explain it to the judges within your application.
- Use your answers to the questions at the beginning of the application to thoroughly explain your SAE enterprise, especially if there are unusual circumstances.
- Specifically list how your SAE affected your growth and development of skills.
- Be creative in writing narratives, "Ever since I was little . . ." is overused and does not set an application apart from the other applications.
- Explain everything completely. Remember the judge reading your application has never seen your project. Do not assume the judges know something.
- Look on it as if you are telling a story, not just answering questions.
- BE HONEST!!!!
- Take pride in your work, you are representing your state association

### SIGNATURES

- Be sure to include all signatures on the cover of the application. The signatures are the validation of the application.
- An employer signature must be provided on all placement applications.

### HOURS DEDICATED TO YOUR SAE

- In reviewing applications, applicants sometimes present a completely unrealistic number of hours dedicated to directed lab/SAE. In a single year, a person working a full time 40 hour per week job will work a total 2080 hours (52 weeks X 40 hours = 2,080). It is important to consider the hours a student must also dedicate to school, sleep, extracurricular activities, etc.
- For award and degree purposes, no unpaid or directed lab/SAE hours dedicated to owning and managing an entrepreneurship/ownership type project are eligible for consideration at the national level.
- For award purposes all unpaid or directed laboratory/SAE hours must occur outside of instructor directed class time.

### SKILLS

- Fully explain skills and activities and how they relate to the proficiency area.

### PROOF READING YOUR APPLICATION

- Proof read, Proof read, Proof read!!!

- Check spelling, grammar, Re-Read.
- Give your application to someone who will read your application and know exactly what you are trying to convey.
- Utilize English instructors and/or local news people to proof read your application.
- Having someone read your application will decrease the number of mistakes that affect your overall outcome in the judging process. For example, if time permits have someone else from your state look at the application.
- Be sure all information is complete and all pages are in the application

### **FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

- DO NOT include any current year information. For example, you are applying for award in 2017. The financial records should stop at December 31, 2016.
- Check your math!!! Make sure all figures are accurate and correct, even when it says "MET". Check, double check and triple check for technical accuracy (i.e., finances)
- Financial records need to be explained in the written part of application.
- If trading labor expenses, etc. make sure you are accounting for them in your application.
- Include a beginning assets amount – You should have some finances when the SAE was started.
- Account for all money. Leave no guessing on the judge's part.
- If the student has a large sum of money missing, or listed as an expense it should show up somewhere.

### **ADVISOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Advisors should present letters of recommendation on letterhead.
- If you are filling out a placement application, you can put both your employer and advisor statement on one page.

### **PICTURES**

- Use good quality digital photographs (Larger than 1MB).
- Take good/clear pictures – show diversification
- Think "Safety" in your pictures, wear the proper protective gear for the activity you are performing
- Be doing something within your SAE not posing, you are not the subject of the picture your activities are.
- Use action photos of your SAE.
- Make sure photos demonstrate your skills and knowledge pertaining to the proficiency area you are applying in.
- Ideally, show growth of project through pictures.
- Be realistic in your photos, don't wear your FFA jacket to muck out stalls or change oil in a truck.
- Don't change the size of the caption box or the text font.

### **PICTURE CAPTIONS**

- Tell the judges something they can't already see in the photo – or explain, what they are looking at. Not, "here I am watering".
  - Why are you watering?
  - How often do you water?
  - Or, tell more about the overall operation.

### **PERSONAL PAGE**

- This page can be anything as long as it is just one page, make it work to your advantage.
- Include a personal page that further explains the SAE, alternate pictures, newspaper clippings, collage of awards in one picture, inventory you couldn't list elsewhere, etc. There are no points for information about your personal life.
- If your SAE has been in a news article in the paper, have a clean copy of that as the personal page. Have it labeled personal page.
- One judge commented, "Some of the most impressive personal pages were an actual accounting of the SAE from the beginning of the SAE. This really cleared up the questions in my mind as to why and where money was coming from".

### **CHECK SHEET**

- Double check the "Checklist of Minimum Qualifications to be sure there are no unmet items.
- Use the "Manual Review Sheet & List of Attachments" to give a final check to your application.

### **RUBRICS AND SCORECARDS**

- The rubrics and scorecards are available on the Proficiency Award webpage located at <https://www.ffa.org/participate/awards/proficiencies> both you and your advisor should judge your application as if you were looking at it for the first time, using the rubric. This will point out your strengths and weaknesses. These rubrics are used by the judges to judge your application.
  - Be certain you are using the correct rubric for your type of application (Entrepreneurship, Placement, Combined, Agriscience Research)
- Follow rules printed on the rubrics.