

# An introduction to Critique Writing for Dachshund Judges

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## What is a Critique?

As a judge, a critique is a way to express your written opinion on the dogs you judged and your reasons behind your placings. It gives you an opportunity to explain what you saw as each dog's virtues and to highlight aspects which you felt were less than ideal, when compared with the Breed Standard.

It is generally accepted that many judges will also include a short preamble where they offer an overall view of the entry they judged and their conclusions on the "state of the breed" from that evidence. Such a preamble is not essential, but can provide a useful perspective on the breed when written by a knowledgeable person.

Exhibitors look forward to reading a judge's critique; not only of their dog, but also others present. They draw conclusions about a judge's competence and integrity from the critique; can the judge explain their placings in relation to the Breed Standard and do the descriptions match what everyone else believed they saw from the ringside? [*"Was I at the same show as this judge?"*]

## The Kennel Club's requirements

It is a part of every judge's contract of appointment that they are required to submit a written critique to the dog press. This requirement will be written into a judge's letter offering the appointment and failure to submit a critique should result in the judge being reported to the KC for breach of contract. The KC will investigate such breaches and the usual penalty is a £50 fine and an embarrassing announcement in the Kennel Gazette. The Dachshund Breed Council takes a serious view of judges who fail to submit critiques and has omitted judges from its lists for that reason and reported the perpetrators to the KC.

A Breed Club's invitation to judge will usually also state that the critique must be submitted within 6-8 weeks of the appointment and a copy should be sent to the Club Secretary as proof. It's not unheard of that the dog papers have lost copies of critiques and sending a copy to the Club Secretary provides reassurance that the contract has been fulfilled.

## What makes a good critique?

In his book **Take Them Round Please**, Tom Horner says:

*In writing reports, caustic criticism is no more called for than extravagant praise which cannot be justified. A good report does not need to be too detailed but it should be graphic. If classes are mixed it should mention sex (unless that is obvious from the name), breed (if in a variety class), colour (if it varies in the breed), and it should give a brief description of type and relevant details. It should explain why the animal won or lost and mention any outstanding features or faults if there are any.*

*People, especially the exhibitors concerned, look forward to these reports and hundreds of others are interested in what the judges have to say, so it should be written and sent off as soon as possible. It is most disappointing to have a good win and then find no report on your breed among the others when the papers come out. p144 [1975]*

Each dog's critique should be unique to that dog, primarily describing its virtues and perhaps highlighting aspects you feel would make the dog more compliant with the Breed Standard. Although not essential, describing why one dog scored its placing over the next dog can provide an alternative way of highlighting the faults of a lower-placed dog.

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Not everyone is a gifted writer, so recording your observations into a digital or tape recorder enables you to listen to your audio “notes” before typing them into a critique. It's far easier to speak into a recorder and simply describe what you see in front of you, than to try to write a critique there and then. Similarly, if you feel you wish to take digital photographs of your class winners these can help jog your memory when it comes time to write your critique. After all, they say a picture paints a thousand words. Your critique will probably be longer and more descriptive if you adopt either of these approaches.

### Some examples of good critiques

Each of the following is a **complete critique** of an individual dog:

- ▲ Promising puppy with a good dark brindle coat. Correct size. Good front. Top-line running up slightly at present, not helped by tail-set, Good front movement; not so good behind. Lovely temperament.
- ▲ Quality black and tan of different type to 1<sup>st</sup>, being slightly longer-bodied. Strong masculine head to be admired. Presents a well-balanced picture with correctly constructed fore and hindquarters and, as to be expected from his quality of conformation, moves out freely and keeps his shape well in profile.
- ▲ Far better moving than stood. Strides out well and holds a firm top-line. Super head, eye and expression. Long neck, so clean through the shoulders. Upper arm OK. Good body and rib. Superb coat. Very well made behind. Perhaps a touch long in back and lost top-line stood, but moving it firms and she shortens. Not far away from higher awards.
- ▲ Red dog with excellent amount of forechest but more upright in shoulder and not the front construction of 1. Close to ideal proportions for length to height, and showing adequate ground clearance. Good hind feet and moved parallel going away from me.
- ▲ Large brindle, quite impressive for type, pleasing expression, excellent long neck, immaculate front assembly, beautiful tight feet, top-line firm and held on the move, just needs to firm behind.
- ▲ Found him better constructed in front than 1 with good tight-fitting elbows and better width between his front legs. True, parallel movement coming towards me. Good underline, with keel running back neatly and not with excessive cut-up, like some here today. Slightly round in eye. His topline was not as firm on the move as 1.
- ▲ Impressive chocolate dapple with great ring presence. Compact and well bodied with moderate angulation at both ends. Tight feet. Really comes into his own on the move. Parallel action coming and going and free mover in profile, holding a level topline at all times.
- ▲ Loved his head and super front assembly. Well ribbed-up body and well-angulated rear. Held his outline at all times and really powered round the ring. So sound coming towards me. He is a lovely size for a male.
- ▲ 8 month B/T dog who presented a good outline, with prominent forechest and he held a good top-line at all times. I found him to be slightly out at elbow. Average length of ribbing and would prefer a bit more length of neck. Well-angulated hindquarters although he moved slightly close behind when moving away from me. Not excessively coated.

### Things to avoid

In English lessons at school, probably most of us were told to avoid using the word “nice”, yet it appears with monotonous regularity in critiques. The worst examples are those of the “nice head and eye” or “nice outline” variety, which tell us very little about the dog.

You can't write a good critique if you don't understand the Breed Standard. The following examples really should not be appearing in critiques of Dachshunds:

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- ⤴ Long, low and level [please read the Breed Standard!!!]
- ⤴ Nice square type [proportions should be 2:1, length to height]
- ⤴ Lovely and low to ground, or Lovely low keel [usually this means lack of ground clearance, which is a fault]
- ⤴ Short hocks [strictly speaking, the hock is a joint and cannot be long or short; although we all know what is meant by this term and “long in the hock”]
- ⤴ Would prefer more length [highly unlikely given the 2:1 length:height requirement]

Other descriptions such as “enjoying his day out”, “well turned out”, well-handled” may be appropriate, but should not just be used as ways of avoiding saying a dog was badly behaved, or it was of such poor quality that only the presentation or handling was worth mentioning!

Here are some not so good examples, each of which is also the **complete critique** of individual dogs who were class winners at Championship Shows!

- ⤴ Nice head and eye, good forechest and rear angulation. Moved with drive.
- ⤴ Just 6 months, very much a baby.
- ⤴ Feminine red brindle of correct type.
- ⤴ Lovely youngster, stood four-square.
- ⤴ Yet another of lovely type. Well constructed powerful mover.
- ⤴ Baby who loved her day out, nice overall picture, should have a promising future.
- ⤴ Well balanced, nice size.
- ⤴ Nicely balanced for age. Full sister to MPD winner.
- ⤴ Small, feminine.
- ⤴ Good length of neck. Level topline. Well-presented and handled.

### How much should you write?

There is no right answer to this question, but you will be more likely to be criticised by your readers for a short critique. Very few exhibitors will complain about a long critique (providing it is sound and knowledgeable).

If you're worried about how much you're writing, try this...

For each dog you have written about, add up the number of words you have used to describe each dog, excluding its age, sex or colour (so, “18 month brindle dog” would not be counted). Work out the average number of words you have used in your total report by adding the word count for all the dogs together and dividing by the number of dogs critiqued. For example:

Dog 1 = 8 words, Dog 2 = 10 words, Dog 3 = 12 words, Dog 4 = 10 words  
Average for this critique is 8+10+12+10 divided by 4 = 10 words per critique

If your average is less than 15, most people will probably think your critique is too short. Between 25 and 35 words per dog will be better. Critiques of 35-50 words per dog are not so common, but are often much more interesting to read because they can demonstrate a real insight into the breed and the Breed Standard. The average word count in the examples of “good critiques” above is around 45 words per dog.

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## Do and Don't – Dog World's advice

We are grateful to Dog World for sending us the following advice:

- ⤴ Please provide the numbers of entries for each class judged. There is no need to include the number of absentees as these are omitted due to space.
- ⤴ Please provide the owners' and dogs' names of the first three places in each class (please try to spell them correctly as we do not always have a catalogue to check them in). Please do not simply supply the dog's ring number.
- ⤴ Only provide critiques for the first placed dog in each class for general open shows and for the first and second placed dogs in breed club open shows and breed club and general championship shows.
- ⤴ Please record the breed of dogs placed within AV, NSC, imported register and rare breed classes.
- ⤴ Try to keep any preamble or general comments relevant to the dogs judged rather than the show in general (except when judging BIS). For example, only mention weather conditions if they had a direct impact on the dogs or your ability to judge.
- ⤴ As all judges are, as a matter of course, grateful to their stewards and the committee for the original invitation, it is therefore unnecessary to thank them within the report.
- ⤴ Although good sportsmanship is always expected, any incidents, conflicts or disputes should be raised officially with the society or Kennel Club and not within the show reports.
- ⤴ When typing reports please avoid using capitals throughout, strange fonts and formatting. Please do not supply PDF documents of your report. Word Documents are preferred.
- ⤴ If reports must be handwritten or faxed then please make them legible. Avoid wide margins if faxing to ensure all text is received.
- ⤴ If submitting paper copies of reports via the post, please secure all pages to keep them together (stapled or paper clipped).
- ⤴ Please remember to include the name of the society, the breeds judged and your name on the report. Please include the same detail in the subject line of your email.
- ⤴ Remember to include all wins and awards, such as: BOB, RBOB, BP, group wins, CCs and RCCs.
- ⤴ Due to space restrictions we cannot guarantee to print reports from general open and limited shows submitted more than four weeks after the show.

## A humorous view

To get the maximum benefit when reading critiques you have to understand not only what is written, but what is left out. It's a bit like reading the particulars presented by an Estate Agent; you have to read between the lines and appreciate the alternative possible perspectives. So, let's have a not so serious look at the other side of the Judge's Report...

What the judge actually said...	What the judge might have said...
I enjoyed my first CC appointment in this delightful breed recently	I tried to be controversial when I judged recently, as I like to upset as many people as possible
He has been campaigned sparingly	He has only been shown under friends

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I had a small, but very select, entry when I judged the breed last year	Most people know I'm crooked and I might as well have posted the CCs out before I judged
She excels in movement, holding her head proudly, looking at all those around the ring as she races past	Nervous of everything, she moves as if she can't wait to get out of the ring
He has great length	His length comes from short ribbing and a long loin
Temperaments are not all they could be	Temperaments are appalling
This dog looks superb when stacked by his clever handler	This dog falls apart on the move and there is no way to disguise its appalling top-line and atrocious movement
There are very few dogs that have made a significant impact on the breed recently	I don't like the top-winning dog in the breed and I can't stand the current top breeders
Some exhibitors have taken to stringing their dogs up when moving, to give the impression of flashy movement	Exhibitors who string their dogs up when moving them are often trying to hide bad front construction or nervous temperaments, or both
Some lines are a little bit timid on the judging table	There are some nervous wrecks that should never be shown
The working side of the breed is an insignificant minority	The working side of the breed could teach us something about conformation, type and temperament
Seem to have lost my notes on this class	They were so awful I couldn't put into writing what I really thought about them
What more can be said about this top-winning dog	I jumped on the bandwagon with all the other judges that awarded it so highly, but I am completely clueless about this breed

The above was first published in the SDA Newsletter "Lowdown" in 2001.

### Finally...

Remember, showing is a hobby and a dog show is supposed to be an enjoyable day out. Most judges are exhibitors as well and they know how much they enjoy reading about their own dogs in a critique. A short, badly written critique just adds to exhibitors' annoyance! A well-written critique adds to the exhibitors' enjoyment and will almost certainly be cut out and kept to remember the show and the judge.