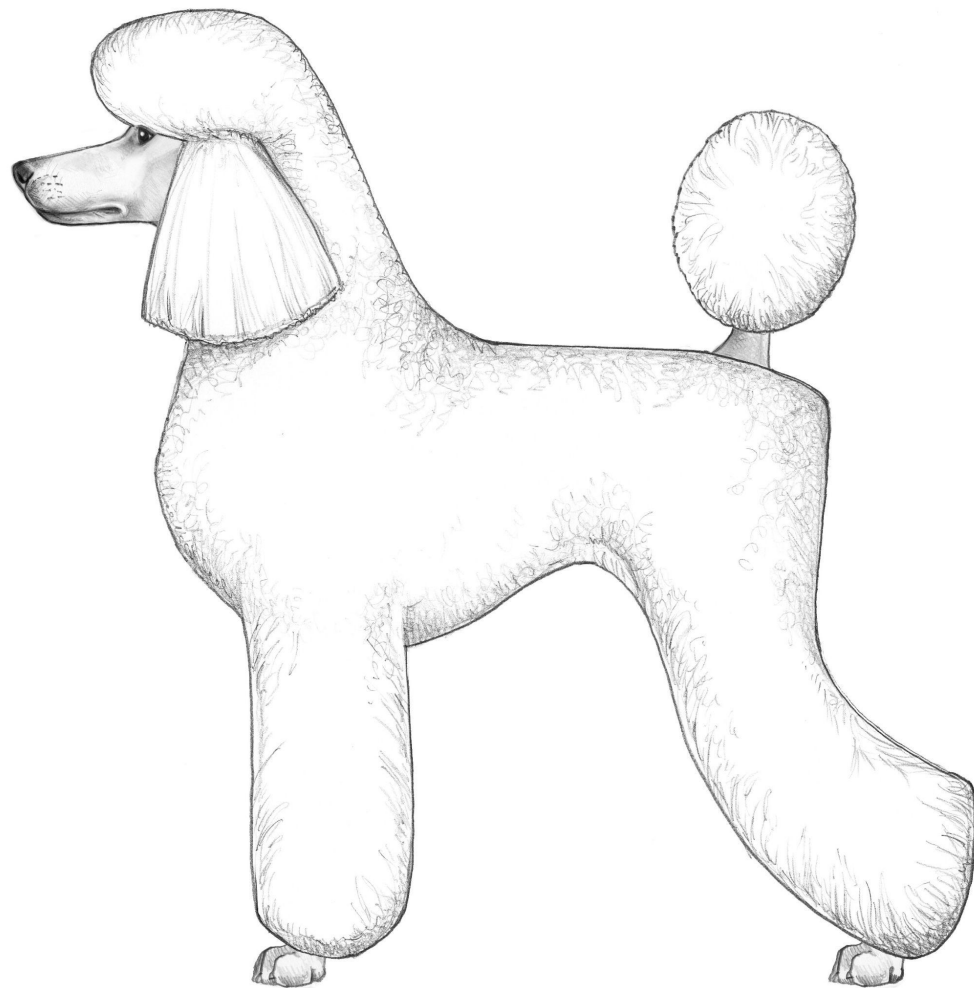




United Kennel Club (UKC)

Judges Handbook





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# 1. Introduction

## Welcome

*Thank you for your commitment to judging with knowledge, fairness, and integrity.*

*The United Poodle Association (UPA) celebrates and preserves the versatility, soundness, and true character of Poodles of all sizes and colors.*

*Our goal is to help you confidently recognize correct Poodle structure, movement, coat, color variations, and temperament in UKC events, honoring the breed's purpose and history.*

*We appreciate your time and dedication to the future of our breed.*

## Purpose

This handbook provides **essential judging guidelines** for the Poodle across all sizes, colors, and coat presentations.

It offers **quick facts** and **visual examples** to support fair, informed, and consistent evaluations focusing on:

- Recognizing correct structure, movement, and type
- Understanding natural color changes and coat variations
- Prioritizing function, balance, and breed essence over grooming tricks

It is not meant to replace official breed standards, but to **supplement them with practical ringside information** specific to the United Poodle Association's goals.

*"Judging dogs is not about finding perfection; it is about recognizing excellence and honoring it with integrity." ~ Anne Rogers Clark, legendary American dog show judge, breeder and handler*

## Importance of Breed Preservation and Judging Consistency

Judges play a key role in preserving the true Poodle — a sound, athletic, intelligent dog bred for both form and function.

Consistent judging:

- Protects correct structure, temperament, and movement.
- Rewards dogs that represent the breed's historic purpose.
- Guides breeders toward maintaining the Poodle's integrity, not just trends.

By prioritizing the essence of the breed over fleeting styles or extreme grooming, judges help ensure the Poodle remains versatile, healthy, and true to its heritage for future generations.



## 2. Overview of the United Poodle Association

### Mission

*The United Poodle Association (UPA) is dedicated to preserving the versatile, athletic, and intelligent Poodle across all sizes and colors. We promote soundness, structure, temperament, and the historic purpose of the breed.*

### Relationship to Parent Club

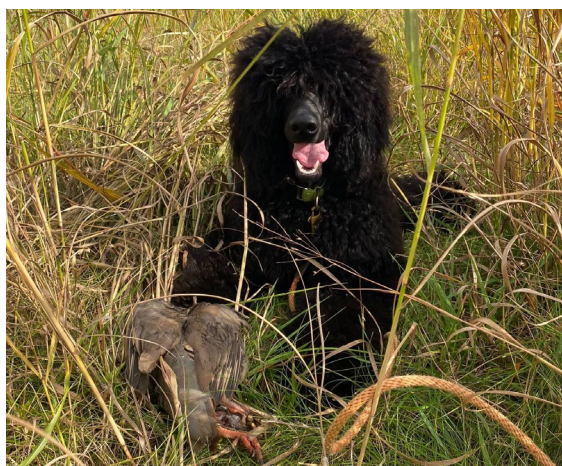
UPA is the National Breed Club for Poodle breeds in UKC. UPA supports and complements the standards published by the parent club United Kennel Club (UKC). Our programs align with preserving true breed type while offering broader opportunities for education and competition.

### Focus on Multipurpose Poodles

UPA recognizes and celebrates Poodles who excel in:

- **Conformation:** Correct structure, movement, and breed type
- **Performance:** Athleticism, versatility, and working ability
- **Temperament:** Intelligence, confidence, and willingness to partner with humans

Our emphasis is on rewarding the *whole dog* — not just presentation — to honor the Poodle's history as a working companion.



### 3. The Essence of the Poodle

#### History and Origin

The Poodle originated as a water retriever in Europe, bred for strength, endurance, and intelligence. Both **multi-colored and solid Poodles have existed since the earliest days of the breed**, with color and pattern having no bearing on their working ability. The traditional clip protected vital areas while allowing freedom of movement in water. As the breed evolved, Miniature and Toy Poodles were developed primarily as companions, prized for their charm, trainability, and portability.



Today, Poodles thrive in a wide variety of roles and disciplines. They excel in agility, obedience, rally obedience, nosework, dock jumping, precision coursing, barn hunt, weight pull, and SPOT — actively competing in nearly every recognized UKC and AKC sport. In addition to modern events, Poodles continue to perform their original role as capable water retrievers and compete successfully in field and hunting trials. Beyond the show and sport arenas, Poodles are also highly effective service and therapy dogs, valued for their intelligence, sensitivity, and eagerness to work closely with people.

#### Purpose-bred Function

Poodles were bred to work — retrieving waterfowl, performing tasks, and adapting to a variety of jobs with speed, agility, and intelligence.

#### Key Breed Characteristics

Judges should prioritize these essential traits:

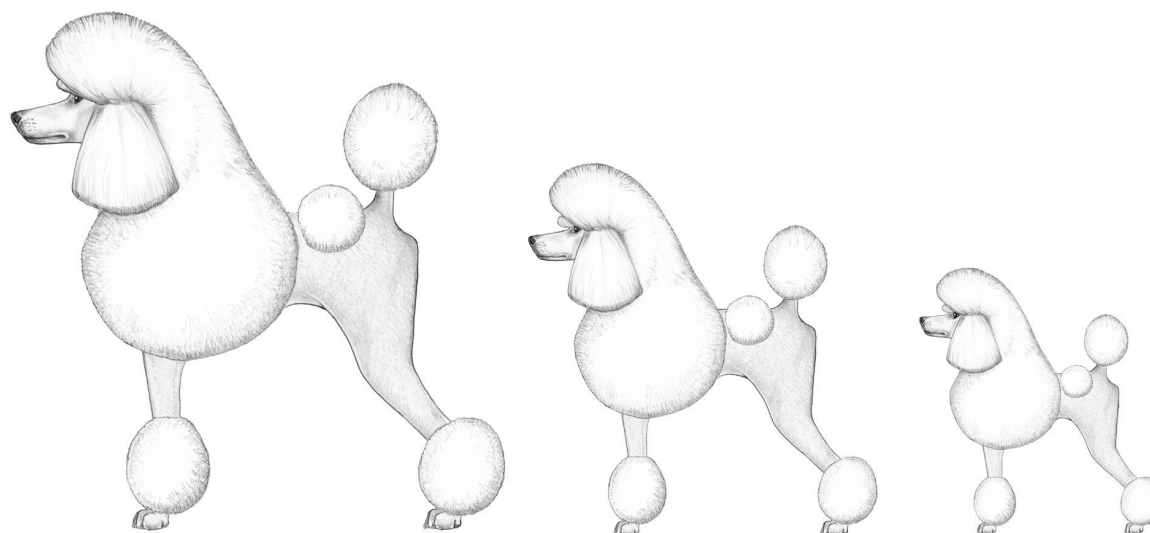
- Intelligence: Quick learners with a strong desire to work alongside humans.
- Structure: Balanced, athletic, and capable of efficient, effortless movement.
- Temperament: Alert, eager, confident, and steady under pressure.
- Movement: Light, springy, and ground-covering; showing energy without exaggeration.
- Presentation and Grooming Expectations: Grooming should serve to highlight the dog's natural, correct structure — not create the illusion of balance, angulation, or substance where it does not exist.

Poodles must be evaluated on soundness first, not on grooming style or finish.

## 4. Sizes: Standard, Miniature, and Toy

### Size Breakdowns and Proportions

	Height at Withers	Key Traits
<b>Standard Poodle &amp; Multi-colored Standard Poodle - Gun Dog Group</b>		
<b>Standard</b>	Over 15 inches	Powerful yet elegant, light, efficient movement
<b>Poodle &amp; Multi-colored Poodle - Companion Group</b>		
<b>Miniature</b>	Over 10 to 15 inches	Balanced, sturdy yet refined, true Poodle type
<b>Toy</b>	10 inches and under	Small but correct; sound, square, light on feet





## 5. Structure and Movement

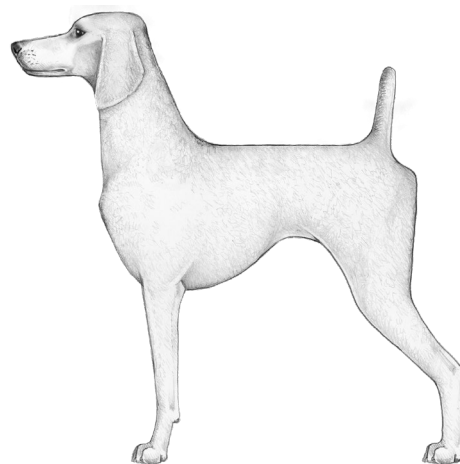
### Critical Elements of Poodle Conformation

- **Square Outline:** Height at the withers should equal body length from the point of shoulder (prosternum) to the point of buttock, giving the Poodle its ideal square silhouette.
- **Head:** The head should be elegant and refined, with a slight stop, long straight muzzle, and a moderately rounded skull. The eyes are dark and oval, with an intelligent, alert expression. Ears are set at or just below eye level, hanging close to the head and covered in hair that may be shaved, trimmed or naturally long depending on the trim.
- **Bite and Dentition:** The UKC breed standard for Standard, Miniature, and Toy Poodles specifies a scissor bite, where the upper incisors closely overlap the lower incisors in a clean, even alignment. Judges should inspect the incisors. A full set of teeth is expected, but missing teeth are not considered a fault.
- **Neck:** The neck should be of **sufficient length and strength to permit the head to be carried high**, flowing smoothly into well-laid-back shoulders. While many Poodles exhibit elegant, longer necks, judges should focus on the **function** of the neck — its ability to support proper head carriage — rather than length alone. A correct neck is one that supports confident posture and blends cleanly into the body, not necessarily one that is “exaggerated” in length.
- **Forequarters:** The shoulders should be well laid back, forming a 90-degree angle with the upper arm, placing the elbows directly beneath the withers. Forelegs should be straight and parallel, with strong pasterns and compact, well-arched feet.
- **Feet:** Feet should be small, oval, and tight, with well-arched toes and thick, elastic pads. Proper feet contribute to efficient movement and reduce strain on joints.
- **Topline:** The back should be level and strong, beginning with slightly rounded withers and ending in a gently sloping, well-muscled croup. A proper topline should remain firm and level in motion.
- **Chest and Ribs:** The chest should reach to the elbows, with well-sprung ribs that are deep and slightly oval — not barrel-shaped — allowing for lung capacity and endurance.
- **Loin:** The loin should be short, strong, and moderately tucked up, contributing to the Poodle’s compact, athletic build.
- **Hindquarters:** Rear legs should be powerful and moderately angulated, with short hocks that allow for efficient propulsion. Viewed from behind, legs should move in parallel lines, converging slightly at higher speeds
- **Tail:** The tail is set equally between the pin bones and hip bones and carried up in motion, reflecting the Poodle’s alert and proud carriage. Natural or docked tails are both acceptable, but the tail should never curl tightly or droop over the back.

## Outline and Symmetry

The hallmark of the Poodle is its **distinctive silhouette** — square, athletic, and elegant, with balanced proportions and smooth transitions throughout the body. The overall impression should convey elegance and strength, emphasizing the balance between front and rear assemblies to support efficient, graceful movement.

- The silhouette should be **well-balanced**, neither coarse nor fine, and free of exaggeration. Every part of the dog should contribute to a harmonious outline, whether standing naturally or in motion.
- The length of the **head** should be in balance with the length of the neck and the body to maintain the overall harmony of the silhouette.
- The neck, topline and tail contribute to the **outline and symmetry** that are vital to the Poodle's proud and athletic appearance. The strong topline connects the neck and tail fluidly.
- The Poodle's **rear angulation** should complement the **front assembly**, creating a balanced, coordinated structure. Proper balance between front and rear angles ensures efficient, ground-covering movement and contributes to the square, flowing outline that defines the breed.



All structural elements work in harmony to achieve the correct silhouette. Evaluate these features as interconnected parts of a unified whole - only when they flow together in balance does the Poodle's athletic, elegant silhouette truly emerge.

## Movement: Reach, Drive, and Efficiency

**Movement:** Poodle movement should be light, springy, and ground-covering.

- The trot should be effortless, demonstrating fluid reach in the front and powerful rear drive.
- The topline remains level while moving, with the head and tail carried proudly. Front and rear legs move in straight lines, converging slightly toward the center as speed increases.
- Front and rear legs move in straight lines, converging slightly toward the center at faster speeds.



## Recognizing Correct vs. Incorrect Movement

- **Correct:** Light, springy, ground-covering stride without waste.
- **Incorrect:** Short-stepping, paddling, crabbing, weaving, pounding, hackney, or rolling movement indicate structural faults.
- Watch that coat or grooming doesn't disguise faults like straight upper arms, cow-hocks, narrow rears, or lack of front extension.

Judges must be mindful not to reward overdone dogs — those whose exaggerations in angulation, coat, or outline compromise true breed function.

### Correct Movement



### Incorrect movement (hackney, short stepping and paddling)

*Note: We will be adding more photos later to the digital document.*



## 6. Color and Coat Considerations

### Coat Presentation: Curly, Corded, or Straightened

The Poodle's coat is naturally dense, harsh, and curly — a hallmark of the breed. The UKC standard permits the coat to be presented in its natural curly form, in cords, or straightened through brushing or drying techniques. None of these presentations is to be preferred over another, and judges must not penalize or reward a dog based solely on coat presentation style.

#### Natural Curly Coat

- The coat is dense and resilient, forming even, tight curls when left in its natural state.
- This presentation emphasizes the breed's functional origins as a water retriever and requires maintenance to prevent matting but minimal sculpting.
- Judging should focus on structure and movement, not on sculpted outlines.

#### Corded Coat

- Cords are formed by separating the coat into long, rope-like strands as the hair mats naturally, then is maintained intentionally.
- This is a historically correct presentation, once popular in European show circles, and still allowed and respected today.
- Corded coats require significant maintenance and skill. Judges must use hands-on examination to assess structure, as visual outline may be obscured. Corded dogs must not be penalized for lack of sculpted outline, as long as type and soundness are evident.
- Evaluating the corded coat: <https://unitedpoodleassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Examining-Structure-in-Corded-Poodles.pdf>

#### Straightened Coat

- Some exhibitors blow-dry the coat straight to allow for more defined scissoring and shaping.
- This is permitted as long as no product is used that would violate UKC grooming regulations (e.g., sprays, mousse, texturizers). In practice, sprays may be used for scissoring, but the dog must be bathed and blown dry without product before the show.
- Straightened coats may showcase the outline more clearly, but judges must evaluate all dogs equally regardless of presentation method.

#### Key Points for Judges:

- Presentation style is a personal or practical choice, not an indicator of breed quality.
- All coat presentations must reflect the coat's correct texture (harsh and dense), regardless of curl or grooming style.
- Judging should prioritize structure, balance, movement, and breed type over grooming technique or finish.
- Time may be needed to palpate key landmarks on corded or densely curly dogs.

## Acceptable Colors

UKC recognizes Poodles in both solid and multi-colored presentations. While they are the same breed, they are shown in separate classes based on color grouping. Both are judged by the same standard and are considered equal in quality and importance.

Coats should be of proper texture—straightened, naturally curly or corded.

## Solid Colors

Poodles are recognized in the following solid colors:

- |          |           |                |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| • Black  | • Red     | • Brown        |
| • Blue   | • Apricot | • Café-au-lait |
| • Gray   | • Cream   | • Silver Beige |
| • Silver | • White   |                |

These colors should be solid and even, with uniform pigmentation at the skin. Natural variations in shading of the coat are acceptable.

### Note:

- Many colors—blue, gray, silver, cream, apricot, cafe au lait, and silver beige—naturally fade as dogs mature. As these color poodles mature, their coats may show a range of shading, sometimes including areas so light they appear white, or transitional tones between their birth color and lighter adult shades. Creams and apricots, in particular, may display natural darker shading on the ears or along the back during puppyhood and into young adulthood, even when the rest of the coat appears nearly white or pale. However, the underlying skin pigment remains uniform and does not show distinct boundaries between light and dark areas. Areas that commonly fade last include the topknot, neck, shoulders, and ears.
- In cases where a few barely noticeable white hairs occur on the chin, a chest spot, or the toes, the exhibitor may show in solid poodles rather than multi-colored standard poodles.
- To assess whether white markings are present, part the coat and examine the skin. Look for a clear change in skin pigmentation beneath the hair—true white markings will usually correspond to lighter (pink or unpigmented) skin, while solid-colored areas typically have darker pigment.
- Color changes along the length of individual hairs — sometimes called **banding** or **segmental pigmentation** — can occur naturally. These variations are influenced by factors such as health, nutrition, age, and seasonal coat changes. Such natural color shifts are not considered faults and should not be penalized.

## Multi-colors

Multi-colored Poodles exhibit a variety of color combinations and patterns, including but not limited to parti, phantom, sable, brindle, abstract, and multi-patterned. A multi-patterned Poodle displays more than one of the acceptable color patterns—for example, a parti-color with phantom face markings, a brindle parti-color, or a brindle-pointed phantom abstract. Regardless of specific colors or markings, all multi-colored Poodles are judged as one breed and must be evaluated to the same breed standard for structure, type, and movement.

### Note to Judges:

Judges are *not* required to determine the specific multi-color pattern (e.g., parti, phantom, sable, etc.) of a poodle in the ring. Their responsibility is solely to determine whether the dog should be exhibited in the **solid** or **multi-colored** class. For judging purposes, solids should display a consistent coat color with uniform skin pigmentation, while multi-colored poodles exhibit clearly visible patterns or multiple coat colors—excluding merle, which is not an accepted pattern in the breed.

UPA provides detailed descriptions of these patterns for educational transparency and to support informed evaluations of acceptable poodle colors:

<https://unitedpoodleassociation.org/poodle-info/poodle-coat-colors/>.

### Parti-Color

A parti-colored Poodle must have at least 50% white in the coat, with patches or spots of any other acceptable solid or patterned color. The head can be of a solid color, but a white muzzle, blaze, or a combination of both is equally acceptable.

### Abstract

An abstract Poodle displays any acceptable solid or patterned base color with less than 50% white. White may appear on the chest, feet, and/or as a facial blaze, but does not dominate the coat. Some dogs may present with just a single white spot on the chest or limited white on the feet. As previously noted in the section on solids, when white is minimal—such as a few hairs on the chin, a small chest spot, or limited white on the toes—the dog may be shown in the solid-colored classes rather than the multi-colored Poodle classes.

### Phantom

Phantom Poodles have a solid base color with defined markings of a secondary color, typically on the face, throat, chest, legs, and under the tail. These markings should be symmetrical and clearly defined. A phantom without clearly defined face markings or one that presents with its whole face colored in the second color (due to a masking gene) is acceptable, if it maintains all the other specified body markings. Faint phantom markings, while not preferred, are acceptable. Any combination of acceptable colors is allowed.



## Brindle

Brindle is a pattern of darker stripes on a lighter background. It requires a brindle gene (kbr) and presents as striping, often easier to confirm once puppy coat is trimmed. Stripes vary from very fine to broader widths. Brindle may lighten with age, especially in black-based dogs.

## Sable

Sable Poodles are born dark with lighter points (head, feet), then lighten over time. Adult sables may appear cream or pale with darker ear tips unless shaved out. Shaded sables retain some darker shading along their backs. Because sable fades over time, **injuries that regrow with darker hair** can mimic a **merle-like pattern**, making visual distinction challenging. Judges should consider age, coat texture, and pattern symmetry when evaluating these cases.

For full details on color and patterns, refer to the article:  
<https://unitedpoodleassociation.org/judges-education/>

## Understanding Color Fading and Injury-Related Pigment Changes

Poodles often experience natural color changes as they mature. Certain colors in both solids and multi-colors, such as blue, gray, silver, cream, apricot, cafe au lait and silver beige, **fade** progressively from their birth color to a lighter adult shade. Depending on the individual dog and the color, this process can take months to years. Skin pigment, on the other hand, tends to remain one consistent color.

It is important to understand that **injuries, surgical procedures, or skin trauma** can cause **regrowth of hair in the dog's original, darker pigment**. These isolated dark spots are a normal response to skin trauma and are not indicative of a genetic color pattern like parti or merle. These darker patches are a normal biological response and are not evidence of artificial coloring or coat tampering. Over time, as the hair cycle continues, these areas will typically **fade again** to match the surrounding coat.

Because of the genetics behind red, apricot, and cream coats, the merle pattern may not be visibly apparent on these colors. However, subtle differences in pigment may still be detectable.



## Distinguishing Naturally Occurring Markings from Merle

Poodles can display several **natural pigment patterns** that may be mistaken for merle by the untrained eye. Understanding these differences is essential for accurate evaluation.

- **Clearing colors** (blue, silver, café au lait, silver beige, apricot, cream) may show darker hairs in healing areas after injury, licking, or skin trauma. These spots reflect the birth color and fade over time. This is normal and not indicative of merle.
- **Brindle** appears as dark **striping** on a lighter base in solid or multi-color poodles. Stripes may fade with age but remain distinguishable from merle's irregular patches.
- **Phantom multi-colored Poodles** may show freckling or brindling in both the body and tan-point areas.

For full details on color and patterns, refer to the article here:

<https://unitedpoodleassociation.org/judges-education/>

PATTERN	DESCRIPTION
<b>Ticking</b>	Small, isolated spots of color on <i>white areas</i> of parti or abstract Poodles. These typically match the base color (e.g., a blue parti has blue ticking). Ticking only occurs in white areas and never affects solid-colored regions, unlike merle, which creates mottling or diluted patches on solid color.
<b>Freckling</b>	Small skin or hair pigment spots, often reddish/brown; caused by environmental factors; may show through light coats; not genetic coat marking.
<b>Sabbling</b>	Dark-tipped hairs over a lighter base coat, giving a shaded effect; not spotted like ticking; common in young poodles and may fade with age.
<b>Injury-related Dark Pigment</b>	Temporary darker hairs sometimes grow in places where the coat has regrown after injury or irritation (such as surgery, hotspots, or pressure sores); can resemble ticking or freckling but is localized and fades over time.
<b>Segmental Pigmentation</b> (aka "Banding")	Natural color changes along individual hairs, influenced by nutrition, health, or age; not merle; can give a shaded or banded effect.

These variations are common in poodles and should not be penalized or mistaken for merle.



## Merle

<b>Merle (Not Present in Purebred Poodles)</b>	Irregular patches of diluted color on a solid base coat, often creating a mottled or marbled appearance. May include blue eyes or pigment gaps on nose and skin. Merle is <b>not a naturally occurring pattern</b> in Poodles and is a disqualifying fault in UKC competition.
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Merle is a pattern, not a color, that does not exist in purebred poodles.

### Visual Differentiation of Merle vs. Parti-Color Pigment Changes

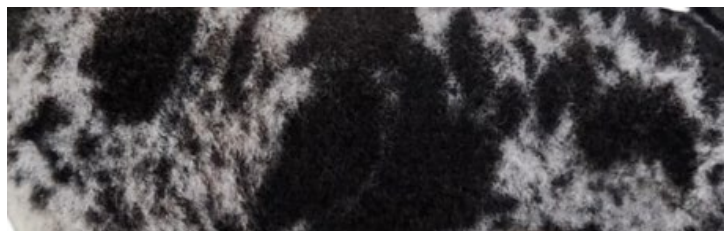
Understanding the visual effects of genetic patterns is essential for accurate and fair evaluation. Both merle and parti-color Poodles may exhibit pigment variations in the nose, eyes, and toes, but the causes and patterns differ. Ticking, a separate genetic pattern, adds further variation in white areas.

Feature	Merle	Parti-Color-Linked Pigment Loss	Ticking
<b>Affected Area</b>	<i>Pigmented areas</i> only: merle pattern often visible elsewhere (if not masked by cream or red)	Corresponds directly with areas of <i>white coat</i> , especially where skin underneath is pink	<i>White areas</i> of the coat only
<b>Pigment Pattern</b>	Mottled, marbled, or diluted patches	Clean demarcation; pigment missing in white coat areas	Small, distinct flecks or spots of pigment
<b>Eye Color</b>	May have blue, marbled or heterochromatic eyes	Eye color matches genetically expected pigment (e.g. brown or amber in blacks, liver in browns)	Eye color unaffected; matches genetically expected color
<b>Symmetry</b>	Often random or asymmetric	Typically, symmetrical to coat pattern (white markings)	Irregular but confined to white
<b>Nose/Toes</b>	May show mottling (e.g., butterfly nose)	Pink or partially pigmented nose correlating with white coat areas	Not present on nose or toes unless white extends there
<b>Timing of Appearance</b>	Often visible early (may be masked in cream or red coats)	Present from birth if coat is white in that area	Develops gradually after birth
<b>Skin Pigment Clues</b>	Marbling visible on exposed skin (e.g., belly, around eyes)	Pink skin under white coat areas without pigment pattern	Ticking visible only in coat, not on skin

Merle Nose and/or Eyes (occurs some of the time, and must be evaluated in combination with coat pattern)



Merle splotches present in solid areas (gray in the example) of the coat



Merle is not present in areas of white coat



### Judging Tips

- Examine **symmetry**: If pigment loss on the nose or toes is mirrored with white coat areas, it's more likely pattern-linked (parti).
- Look for **pigment mottling**: True merle will often have random speckles, spots, or swirls of pigment on the nose leather or toes.
- **Evaluate known merle-masking colors**: In reds, apricots, and creams, merle may not be visible on the coat but could still express as irregular pigment on the nose or toes. This is harder to confirm without genetic testing.
- Use **skin pigment** clues: Check for marbling in exposed skin (belly, inner thighs, around eyes) which may suggest merle. Darker pigment on pigmented areas, not dark on areas lacking pigment or white.

### Caution

Visual inspection alone may not always be conclusive, especially in faint merles or cream-based colors. If needed, the exhibitor may provide documentation (e.g., genetic test results), though UKC does not require this for conformation judging unless registration eligibility is in question.

## Judging Considerations:

- A proper coat of harsh, dense hair is preferred in an adult poodle over 18 months. It may be presented straightened, natural (curly) or corded.
- Colors like blue, gray, silver, cream, apricot, cafe au lait and silver beige may fade unevenly as the dog matures.
  - Silver and silver beige dogs often retain darker pigment on the head, ears, and neck, while the body fades to pale silver or a very pale, almost white, beige especially at the bracelets.
  - Temporary dark regrowth in the original coat color from injury is common and should not be penalized.
- Overall coat color consistency is ideal but not required for fading colors.
- Judges should distinguish between natural pigment variation and artificial enhancement.
- Quality is never to be sacrificed in favor of color, grooming skill or the type of clip in which a dog is presented.



## 7. Temperament and Presentation

- **Correct Poodle Temperament:** Poodles should be alert, proud, and intelligent — confident and responsive, carrying themselves with natural dignity. Shyness, nervousness, or aggression are considered faults. However, judges should make reasonable allowances for puppies, novice dogs, or those with inexperienced handlers who may be unfamiliar with the show environment.
- **Assessing Expression and Demeanor:** Look for lively, intelligent eyes; proud head carriage; and a willing, confident attitude in natural movement and stacking.
- **Appropriate Handling Styles:** Poodles should be presented to showcase their natural movement, carriage, and alert expression. Effective handling is supportive and smooth, allowing the dog to perform with confidence and poise. Handlers may use appropriate baiting and hand-stacking techniques to highlight structure, balance, and engagement, recognizing that skilled handling and training are part of polished presentation. Judges should reward presentation that enhances — rather than masks — the correct breed type and temperament, while being mindful that novice dogs and handlers are developing their teamwork over time.
- **Judging Beyond Grooming:** Prioritize structure, temperament, and movement over elaborate grooming or flashy presentation. Soundness and breed essence must always take precedence over cosmetic enhancements.

## 8. Grooming and Trims

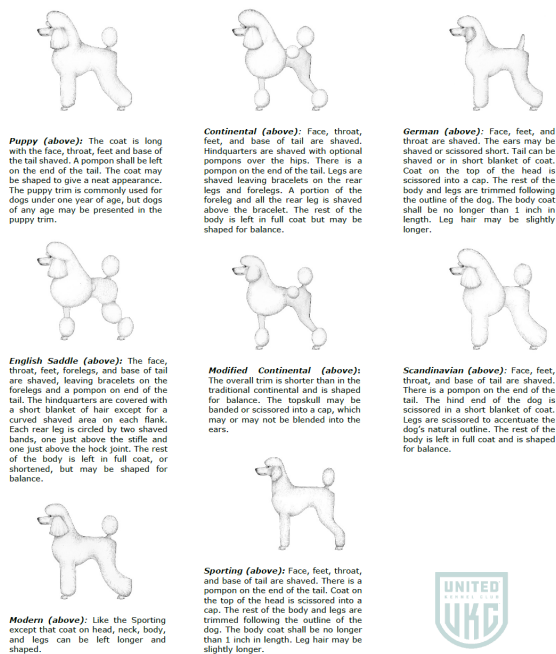
### Overview of Acceptable Grooming Styles

Exhibitors may show in any trim. Recognized trims include:

- Puppy, Continental, German, English Saddle, Modified Continental, Scandinavian, Modern, and Sporting Clips

(<https://www.ukcdogs.com/docs/breeds/multi-colored-poodle-companion-group.clips.document.pdf>).

Poodles may be presented in any trim, and handlers of all skill levels should be welcomed. Judges should focus on evaluating the dog's structure, movement, and temperament, not the grooming or scissoring skills of the exhibitor. Presentation should not overshadow correct breed type.



## Grooming Techniques That Enhance vs. Mask Structure

Grooming should showcase a Poodle's natural structure, balance, and athleticism — not disguise or exaggerate features.

### Techniques That Enhance:

- **Clean Lines:** Sculpting that follows true bone structure without over-padding or distortion.
- **Balanced Proportions:** Even shaping of coat to reflect the dog's square outline and natural angles.
- **Correct Topline Presentation:** Grooming that highlights a level, strong topline without artificial arching or sagging.
- **Tail Set and Carriage:** Tail grooming that enhances the natural high set and proud carriage without exaggeration.

### Techniques That Mask:

- **Excessive Sculpting:** Over-padding shoulders, rears, or ribs to create false angulation or depth.
- **Stacked Coat on Croup:** Fluffing hair over a sloped or weak croup to simulate a better topline.
- **Camouflaging Faults:** Using heavy coat shaping to hide poor front assembly, cow-hocks, or straight rears.
- **Artificial Outline Changes:** Over-grooming to make a fine dog appear more substantial or a coarse dog appear more refined.

While every exhibitor works toward presenting their poodle at its absolute best, judges must see beyond grooming artistry to evaluate the dog's *actual* structure, balance, and movement.

## 9. Faults and Disqualifications

Judging must be guided by the UKC breed standard, where faults are deviations from the ideal that may compromise the Poodle's purpose, function, or type.

Disqualifications are severe departures that eliminate a dog from competition.

### Faults (Structure, Movement and Temperament)

Faults should be penalized to the extent of their impact on the dog's ability to work, move, and represent correct breed type.

#### Structural Faults:

Fault	Description	Viewpoint	Possible Cause(s)	Why It's a Fault
<b>Lack of a square outline</b>	Body noticeably longer than tall or vice versa	Side	Poor proportions, incorrect bone length, or incorrect development	Affects balance, gait efficiency, and adherence to breed standard
<b>Coarse or incorrect head</b>	Head is too broad, short, or lacks refinement; skull too rounded or prominent, lacking flatness between the ears; may lack distinct stop or have an exaggerated stop	Side Front Top	Incorrect proportions, skull shape	Disrupts breed type; head should be long, fine, and well-proportioned for elegance and balance
<b>Short or snipey muzzle</b>	Muzzle too short, narrow, or lacking depth	Side Front	Structural imbalance in head	Reduces balance, affects bite and function; weakens correct Poodle expression
<b>Ear set and leather</b>	Ears set too high, too low, or placed unevenly; Ear leather is too short or heavy, lacking the desired long, flat shape	Front Side	Poor ear cartilage, incorrect head proportions, breeding away from breed standard	Affects balance of head and expression; breaks outline and type; reduces refinement and elegance; detracts from typical silhouette

<b>Lack of chin, loose lips</b>	Weak or receding lower jaw, little to no forward projection; Lower jaw recedes into the upper jaw, giving a weak or unfinished appearance; may also include loose lips	Side Front	Genetic head structure; underdeveloped mandible, incorrect head proportions, weak muzzle muscling	Disrupts balance of head, weakens expression, may affect bite integrity; loose lips detract from clean outline
<b>Ewe neck</b>	Neck curves upward rather than arcing smoothly into the shoulders	Side Stacked or moving	Poor neck set, weak topline, incorrect muscle tone	Breaks flowing outline, restricts natural head carriage, affects balance and elegance
<b>Short neck</b>	Neck lacks sufficient length to balance body proportions	Side	Structural proportions, incorrect bone length	Compromises proud carriage, affects outline and balance
<b>Poor topline</b>	Roached (arched), swayed (dipped), or excessively sloped back	Side	Weak musculature, poor structure, incorrect conditioning	Impacts movement and overall structural integrity
<b>Cow-hocked or straight stifles</b>	Hocks that turn inward or lack of angulation in the stifle	Rear	Structural fault, incorrect angulation, weak musculature	Reduces drive, affects movement, may lead to long-term joint issues
<b>Poor front assembly</b>	Straight or short upper arms, lack of shoulder layback	Side Front	Genetic conformation faults, poor muscle development	Limits reach and front extension, reduces efficient movement
<b>Wide or narrow front</b>	Legs too far apart or too close together	Front	Chest development issues, incorrect shoulder placement	Affects support, stride width, and front-end efficiency
<b>Weak, splayed, or flat feet</b>	Feet that are not tight and well-arched	Front Rear Standing	Poor conditioning, structural issues, or soft tissue weakness	Reduces soundness, traction, endurance, and agility; can lead to injury

<b>Long loin</b>	Loin is weak-muscled and/or too long	Side Top	Genetic conformation faults, poor muscle development	A weak or long loin disrupts balance and can compromise movement.
<b>Poor tail set</b>	Tail set too low or curled tightly over the back	Side Rear Stacked or moving	Incorrect croup angle, poor spine/tail structure	Breaks breed outline, may indicate poor hindquarter structure or balance
<b>Overdone rear</b>	Excessive angulation; rear appears longer or disconnected from front	Side Rear	Over-angulated stifles and hocks, poor front-rear balance	Leads to inefficient movement, overreaching, and imbalance
<b>Straight rear</b>	Lack of angulation in stifle and hock joints	Side Rear	Genetic trait, poor structural development	Reduces rear drive and shock absorption, shortens stride

### Movement Faults:

<b>Fault</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Viewpoint (Where It's Seen)</b>	<b>Possible Cause(s)</b>	<b>Why It's a Fault</b>
<b>Paddling</b>	Front feet swing outward and make a circular motion before landing (like oars)	From the front, while moving	Weak ligaments, loose elbows, upright shoulders, poor front assembly	Inefficient, wastes energy, reduces endurance and correct reach
<b>Pounding</b>	Front feet hit the ground hard, creating a jarring, vertical action	From the side, in profile	Poor front angulation, short upper arm, lack of balance with rear	Causes wear, lacks smoothness, shock-absorbing stride is lost



<b>Weaving</b>	Legs cross over the center line (or crisscross) when moving	From the front	Narrow chest, poor muscle tone, structural imbalance	Risks tripping, inefficient movement, stresses joints
<b>Hackney</b>	Exaggerated high-stepping front action with excessive flexion at the wrist	From the side	Often genetic or encouraged in some breeds, not correct for Poodles	Wastes energy, breaks outline and fluid movement; not characteristic of the breed
<b>Sidewinding</b>	Rear and front legs do not track on the same line; body appears slanted in motion	From above or front/behind while moving	Lack of coordination, poor front/rear assembly balance, core weakness	Reduces efficiency and forward drive, interferes with straight tracking
<b>Pacing</b>	Both legs on the same side move forward together (like a camel)	From the side	Fatigue, immaturity, poor conditioning, structural imbalance	Disrupts breed-specific gait; lacks spring and coordination; inefficient
<b>Single Tracking (Too Soon)</b>	Legs converge excessively under the body too early in movement	From front and rear	Over-angulated rear, narrow chest, weak core	Can cause instability and joint stress; reduces gait efficiency if excessive
<b>Crabbing</b>	Dog moves with hindquarters at an angle to the front (not aligned)	From above or behind	Poor coordination, uneven musculature, structural imbalance	Reduces efficiency, may mask faults in gait, disrupts straight and fluid motion
<b>Overreaching</b>	Rear feet reach so far forward they interfere with or clip the front feet, or the front legs extend too far beyond ideal reach	From the side	Over-angulated rear, short or steep upper arm, imbalance between front and rear assemblies	Disrupts timing and rhythm, risks tripping or crossing, breaks fluid motion, and indicates structural imbalance

## Temperament Faults:

Fault	Description	Viewpoint	Possible Cause(s)	Why It's a Fault
<b>Shyness, fearfulness, or instability in the ring</b>	Hesitant, overly submissive, easily startled, or unable to be examined calmly	In-ring behavior, judge's interaction	Poor socialization, genetic temperament issues, past trauma	Undermines confidence, trainability, and ability to perform as a companion or show dog
<b>Aggression toward people or other dogs</b>	Snapping, lunging, growling, or attempting to bite	In-ring behavior, interaction with dogs or people	Poor temperament, inadequate training or socialization, genetic factors	Dangerous, unacceptable in show settings, and contrary to breed purpose and standard

## Disqualifications per UKC Standard

According to the UKC breed standard, the following are **disqualifications**:

- Unilateral or bilateral cryptorchid (missing one or both testicles)
- Viciousness or extreme shyness
- Albinism
- Color patterns not permitted by the standard (e.g., merle)
- Blue eyes, or any variation of, including flecks and marbling

### Specific Color Disqualifications:

- Any color other than the acceptable solids or recognized patterns (parti-color, phantom, abstract etc.) described in the breed standard.
- **Merle patterning is a disqualification.**

### Cosmetic Alterations:

- Docked tails and dewclaw removal are permissible but not required. Judges must not penalize a dog for natural tails or intact dewclaws, consistent with the UKC standard.
- The use of dyes, color-enhancing shampoos, chinks, or any chemical agents intended to alter or intensify a Poodle's natural coat color is considered a cosmetic alteration and is not permitted under UKC regulations. Such practices compromise the integrity of the breed evaluation and are grounds for disqualification.

- UKC also prohibits the use of any products on dogs exhibited at UKC conformation events. This includes not only substances that affect coat color, but also those that modify coat texture or appearance—such as hairspray, finishing spray, texturizing spray, mousse, or similar grooming aids.
- However, because dry brushing can damage Poodle hair, UKC makes an exception for the use of water mixed with a small amount of conditioner as a brushing spray.

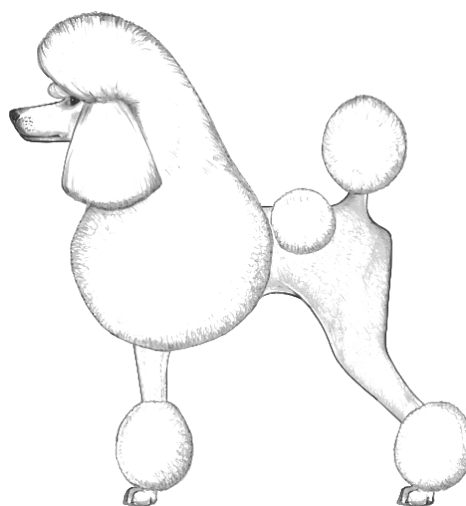
Judges are expected to be familiar with all disqualifications listed in the full UKC Poodle standard and apply them consistently and impartially.

## 10. Best Practices for Judging

### Evaluating Consistently Without Bias

Judges have a critical responsibility to evaluate each Poodle fairly, using the breed standard as the foundation. Best practices for consistency include:

- **Stick to the Standard:** Always judge according to the UKC Poodle standard, regardless of trends, grooming styles, or personal preferences.
- **Judge the Dog, Not the Handler:** Presentation and handling should not overshadow soundness, structure, and temperament.
- **Consistency Across Classes:** Apply the same standards to every entry, whether novice or champion level.
- **Guard Against Color, Size, or Clip Bias:** All acceptable colors, size varieties, and presentation styles should be judged with equal weight and objectivity.



Fair, knowledgeable judging protects the breed's future and maintains exhibitors' trust in the ring.

### Ethics and Integrity in Judging

Judging is a privilege and a service to the breed. Ethical conduct is the foundation of fairness, respect, and trust — qualities that protect the future of breeds.

### Key Principles for Success:

- **Commit to Impartiality:** Evaluate every dog on its own merit, free from outside influence, friendships, or reputation. Consistent judging strengthens the credibility of the ring.
- **Honor Confidentiality:** Respect the privacy of exhibitors and the judging process by keeping decisions and critiques within appropriate channels.
- **Embrace Humility:** Recognize that every judging assignment is an opportunity to learn and grow. When in doubt, lead with fairness, honesty, and transparency.
- **Model Professionalism:** Approach every interaction with courtesy, calmness, and respect. True leadership shines even in challenging moments.

By judging with integrity and positivity, you play an essential role in nurturing excellence, encouraging exhibitors, and preserving the authentic character of the Poodle for generations to come. *"The first duty of a judge is to the breed — not to the exhibitor, not to the crowd, not even to oneself."* — **Michelle Billings**, renowned AKC judge and mentor

### Professional Communication with Exhibitors

Clear, courteous communication maintains the integrity of the judging process.

- **Remain Neutral:** Interactions with exhibitors should be friendly but professional; avoid excessive conversation that could appear biased.
- **Offer Brief, Constructive Feedback if Appropriate:** If asked and allowed by venue rules, provide feedback that is objective and educational, not personal.
- **De-escalate Calmly:** In case of exhibitor concerns or disagreements, remain calm, factual, and respectful — do not engage emotionally.
- **Be Approachable, But Firm:** Exhibitors appreciate judges who are fair, clear, and respectful even when delivering difficult decisions.

A positive experience in the ring promotes respect for the judging process and the sport overall.

## 11. Appendix

### Glossary of Poodle Terms

**Topknot**

The hair on the top of the Poodle's head left long in the Continental, English Saddle, and Scandinavian trims, or shaped neatly into a rounded or sculpted form in all other trims. The topknot may be secured with bands or left free, but should complement the dog's head structure.

**Jacket**

The body coat left longer and shaped to create a smooth, flowing outline over the shoulders, back, and ribs. The jacket should enhance the dog's natural topline and not hide or distort the structure underneath.

**Bracelets**

The rounded bands of hair that are left on the Poodle's lower legs in certain traditional clips, notably the Continental and English Saddle. Properly shaped bracelets should be symmetrical and enhance the appearance of strong, straight legs.

**Pom (Pompon)**

A ball of hair left on the end of the tail. The pom should be neatly rounded and proportionate to the tail and overall size of the dog.

**Rosettes**

Small domed puffs of hair shaped along the hips in the various Continental clips; sculpted equally in size and position on left and right point of hips.

**Banding**

The use of small rubber bands to section and secure parts of the coat, most commonly the topknot and ears, to maintain coat condition and achieve a neat, lifted appearance before and during competition.

- Rules for Judging: Competitors may use any number of bands in the ring as long as the hair is not banded past the occiput (the back of the skull).
- Banding behind the occiput may artificially affect head carriage or topline and is not permitted.

**Fluff Drying**

A grooming technique where the Poodle's coat is dried straight while being brushed, creating a lifted, full appearance that allows precise shaping.

## Breed Standard Quick Comparison Chart

(For those who judge in both venues: AKC vs. UKC for Poodles)

Category	AKC Standard	UKC Standard
<b>General Appearance</b>	Active, intelligent, elegant. Square outline.	Intelligent, active, squarely built. Strong emphasis on athletic ability.
<b>Temperament</b>	Smart, alert, self-confident.	Good-natured, proud, and intelligent; extreme shyness or viciousness is disqualifying.
<b>Sizes</b>	Toy: under 10" Miniature: over 10" up to 15" Standard: over 15"	Same as AKC: Toy under 10", Miniature over 10" to 15", Standard over 15".
<b>Proportions</b>	Square: height at withers approximately equal to length from breastbone to rump.	Same square proportion; strong topline emphasized.
<b>Head</b>	Moderately rounded skull, slight stop, long straight muzzle.	Same basic structure; slightly more emphasis on clean chiseling and flat cheeks.
<b>Eyes</b>	Very dark, oval, set well apart.	Dark, oval, set far enough apart; blue, café-au-lait, and silver beige may have lighter eye colors.
<b>Ears</b>	Long, wide, set at or slightly below eye level, hanging close to head.	Same description.
<b>Tail</b>	Set high, carried up. Docked to proper length for balance (optional for Standard Poodles).	Set high, carried up. Docked or natural tails permitted; no preference.
<b>Coat</b>	Curly: naturally harsh texture. Corded: hanging in tight even cords.	Same. Both curly and corded accepted. Texture emphasized as harsh and dense.
<b>Colors</b>	Solid colors only (black, white, brown, blue, gray, silver, apricot, cream, red).	Solid colors <b>plus</b> accepted multi-colored patterns. No merle.
<b>Gait/Movement</b>	Light, springy, effortless. Straight, true movement.	Same emphasis: Light, springy, efficient movement with proud carriage.

<b>Faults</b>	Size faults; aggressive or shy temperament; poor movement; poor structure; unsoundness.	Same, plus disqualification for incorrect colors (e.g., merle) and albinism.
<b>Presentation</b>	Groomed in specified clips (Puppy, Continental, English Saddle) for conformation; Sporting Clip allowed for retired champions.	Trim or clip style is not to be penalized, as long as it does not interfere with the evaluation of the dog's structure, movement, or overall type.

### Notes for Judges:

- **Color Acceptance** is the most significant difference: UKC allows solids and multi-colored poodles; AKC does not (only solids are permitted in AKC conformation).
- **Tail Docking:** In UKC, both docked and natural tails are acceptable without penalty. In AKC, docked tails are traditional but not explicitly required.
- **Presentation Variety:** UKC accepts a wider range of grooming styles.
- **Temperament:** Extreme shyness is a specific disqualification in UKC; AKC penalizes but does not list as an automatic disqualification.

## Recommended Resources and Further Learning

Continuous education strengthens a judge's ability to evaluate fairly, consistently, and knowledgeably. The following resources are recommended to deepen your understanding of the Poodle breed and judging practices:

### Official Breed Standards

- <https://www.ukcdogs.com/poodle>
- <https://www.ukcdogs.com/multi-colored-poodle>
- <https://www.ukcdogs.com/standard-poodle>
- <https://www.ukcdogs.com/multi-colored-standard-poodle>

### Judging and Breed Education

- **UKC Rules for Conformation Judges**  
<https://www.ukcdogs.com/docs/rulebooks/conformation-rulebook-revised.pdf>
- **United Poodle Association Educational Resources**  
<https://unitedpoodleassociation.org/judges-education/>

## Grooming and Presentation

- **UKC Accepted Grooming Clips for Poodles**

<https://www.ukcdogs.com/docs/breeds/multi-colored-poodle-companion-group.clips.document.pdf>

### **Encouragement to Judges:**

True expertise comes from a combination of study, hands-on experience, and mentorship.

Judges are encouraged to attend specialty shows, study high-quality dogs in person, participate in continuing education, and seek feedback from senior mentors whenever possible.

**Share this Judges Handbook with Colleagues (or bookmark it for yourself):**

