



**USDF**

# UNITED STATES *Dressage* FEDERATION

## Dressage Protocol

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### Introduction

All professional sports have a ruling organization to legislate and administer what is legal and illegal. Many sports also have a protocol that clarifies the etiquette of the sport and the way you go about the business of competing.

A protocol explains the difference between what is acceptable and what is not. Thanks to the work of the USDF Technical Delegate Committee, the sport of dressage has its own protocol. Competitors who follow this protocol before, during, and after competitions can take comfort in the fact that, whatever their score, they will have conducted themselves in a way that brings credit to both themselves and their sport.

### Note

These guidelines were inspired by the wisdom and dedication of Colonel Clarence Edmonds, previous chairman of the USDF Council of Technical Delegates. They are patterned after the U.S. Tennis Association's booklet, "The Code." There are rules governing tennis tournaments, but "The Code" puts into writing the unwritten rules of etiquette and good manners expected of tennis players. Dressage competitions are governed by the rules and regulations of USEF. Dressage protocol addresses the etiquette and manners for dressage competitors.

A review of these guidelines before your competition year begins and periodically thereafter, even for experienced competitors, will make for more enjoyable competition experiences for all involved.

### Planning Courtesy

Preparation is the name of the game in dressage competition. Both horse and rider must be prepared physically and mentally, not only for the tests ahead but for the action and excitement of a competition. Your preparation should also include proper grooming and turnout, along with thorough knowledge of the rules.

The rules for dressage competitions recognized by USEF are published in their rule book. The USEF Rule Book is available online at [www.usef.org](http://www.usef.org). A hard copy USEF rule book may be obtained by contacting USEF at (859) 258-2472 and is also available on a flash drive. Before entering a dressage competition, study the rule book carefully. Keep informed of all rule changes by reading USEF's monthly publication, *Equestrian*. Better still; refer to the online Rule Book, which is up-to-date on rule changes, the latest of which are noted in red and other colors for easy reference.

### United States Dressage Federation (USDF)

Join USDF. If USDF's national dressage awards are of interest to you, become familiar with the USDF award programs. The *USDF Competitor and Member Guide* (available online at [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org) or a hard copy may be requested at time of membership application) explains all USDF award programs and their requirements for the current competition year.

To be eligible for USDF adult amateur (AA) awards, the rider must be a USDF Participating Member and hold a USEF AA card. A list of riders holding current USEF AA cards is on file with USDF. This list is updated frequently and can be accessed at [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org). Notify USDF if you hold a USEF AA card and are not listed as an AA on the USDF Web site.

Resources available from USDF (available as free printouts from [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org)):

- Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional Championship Program Rules
- Qualifying Criteria and Selection Procedures for North American Junior and Young Rider Dressage Championships
- USDF Glossary of Dressage Judging Terms (free to current USDF members)
- USDF Musical Freestyle Rules, Guidelines, Definitions, and Tests
- Technical Delegates Checklist

- Pas de Deux Rules, Guidelines, Definitions, and Tests
- USDF Quadrille Guidelines and Tests
- USDF Competition Management Checklist
- USDF Sport Horse breeding rules and Sport Horse scoresheets –
- Procedures to hold Materiale classes and Materiale class scoresheet –
- USDF Introductory Tests.

## Travel Requirements

Be cognizant of any special state, county, or local laws and regulations on the transportation of horses. There may be specific requirements for immunizations, health certificates, travel, or quarantine.

Health certificates must usually be dated within ten days of interstate travel. Many states now have vehicle weight regulations and special license requirements for horse vans. Several states require a negative Coggins test within six months to one year of travel into the state, whereas other states allow health certificates to be dated within 30 days of travel.

For a reference of each state's requirements, obtain a copy of the annual American Horse Council Directory ([www.horsecouncil.org](http://www.horsecouncil.org) or 202-296-4031).

## Entering a Competition

Like a tax form, the entry form is not valid unless it is fully completed. Complete all items on the entry form legibly (print or type, many shows offer online entries). Use a new form for each horse being entered. Pay careful attention to both USEF and USDF membership and horse identification number requirements. The requirements for entering a USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized competition are generally less stringent than the requirements for entering special competitions or classes (such as USDF Regional Championship qualifying and championship classes) or qualifying for USDF awards programs. Because it is the competitor's responsibility to be aware of the requirements, take time to review them prior to the competition. The *USDF Competitor and Member Guide* is an excellent resource for this purpose. You may also access USDF award program requirements online at [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org).

Competing in most USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized competitions requires submission of USEF and USDF membership cards or proof of USEF and USDF membership for each rider and owner, and a USDF Horse Identification Number (HID) or USDF Lifetime Horse Registration (LHR) for the horse (unless competing only in classes on the exception list, which may be found on the USDF Web site). You are also required to submit USEF membership cards for the trainer and coach. If you do not have these numbers and want to join, it is best to sign up ahead of time rather than trying to do it at the competition, although it is possible to join at the competition, prior to your rides. It is also possible to compete as a non-member of either organization, but you must then complete the paperwork at the show and pay the applicable non-member fees to USEF and USDF. Remember, the trainer is the person responsible for the horse, not necessarily the person you take lessons from or trains your horse at home.

For USDF, you can join or register your horse online at [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org). You can also print out copies of your membership or your horse's HID or LHR cards online. You can print the email verification and use this as proof of membership until your card arrives. These printouts are valid proofs to submit to a competition. Give some thought to your competitive aspirations; if you feel that you want to progress and enter the USDF Regional Championship path, or participate in many of the USDF award programs, you might consider a LHR for your horse rather than the HID and a Participating Membership for yourself.

You must submit with your entry all the USEF and USDF documentation, and use a separate entry form for each horse. You may print all your USEF and USDF cards for horse, rider and owner on one page of paper from [www.eqverification.org](http://www.eqverification.org). If you forgot to bring your USDF documentation to the competition you can sign a USDF affidavit and pay the applicable fee. USEF does not accept affidavits. Many show secretaries will place your entry on a waitlist until they get all the documentation that makes your entry eligible. You will find that submitting an entry that is complete and accurate greatly decreases delays when you arrive on the grounds and during check in. You might even get to be in the express line and receive a gold star or more for a perfect entry! Original signatures for rider, trainer, and owner are required on the entry form. Coaches must also sign the entry form. A "coach" is any adult who receives remuneration for having or sharing the responsibility for instructing, teaching, schooling, or advising a rider or handler in equestrian skills. When the rider is under 18, and the parent or guardian is not available, the trainer or responsible adult must sign the entry on the minor's behalf. The parent who must sign for a junior owner, rider, or handler is exempt from the USEF non-member fee. But remember, the minor rider must be a USEF member or pay the non-member fee.

The “trainer” is the adult (age 18 or older) physically present on the show grounds that is responsible for the health and welfare of the horse. More than likely, that is you, not the person from whom you take lessons, unless your trainer is on the grounds.

Before mailing your entry, be sure that all original signatures are present, even if it means you are signing your name three times. An entry form is incomplete and may be returned without these signatures. Ditto marks, “same,” or photocopied signatures do not satisfy the legal requirements of the document. Also, emergency contact information must be provided on your entry form.

All entry forms must request rider citizenship. Non-US citizens who are not current members of USEF must either provide proof, in English, of current membership in good standing with their own National Federation, or must pay a registration fee with USEF. Non-U.S. citizens are eligible for USDF year-end and cumulative awards and are also eligible to qualify and compete in the USDF Regional Championships if they possess the required membership and horse registrations at the time scores are earned.

Entering a dressage competition takes some thought and understanding of how dressage competitions work. The major source of communication between you and the competition organizer is the prize list. Read the prize list carefully! Special conditions and/or requirements will be stated and explained. Be sure you understand the various eligibility restrictions. If you have questions, call the competition secretary or technical delegate and get the answers you need.

Send your entry form and fee in on time. According to the USEF rules, entries received after the closing date are post entries. Postmark your entry no earlier than the opening date listed for the show. Remember to send a photocopy of the current Coggins test for each horse you bring to the competition grounds, as required by competition management and local or state laws.

Make certain that horse and rider are eligible for all classes entered, as described in the prize list or USEF rule book.

Name and describe each horse on a separate form. Management cannot legally accept “not named” horses as entries.

In order to enter a freestyle class, a horse/rider combination must have received a minimum score of 60% in the highest test of the declared freestyle level or any test of a higher level at a Federation licensed competition held prior to the competition where the horse/rider combination is entered to ride a freestyle class. A copy of the test verifying eligibility must be submitted with the entry.

Clearly state on the entry form or attach a note listing any special requirements or requests, such as:

- Late arrival
- Extra bedding
- Stallion stabling
- Stabling with or near a particular group
- Driving long distance (250 miles or more)
- Order of preference, if riding more than one horse in the same class (the secretary should give you at least 50 minutes between horses or ask your permission if the schedule cannot allow it).

Double check your addition for all required fees, and send the correct amount. Check again to be sure you are entered in the correct classes on the correct dates.

To receive provisional ride times by mail, some shows require you to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard. Most shows now post ride times on their Web site and email you the schedule. Official times will be on the competition’s Web site and/or at the secretary’s office at check-in. Check these daily, especially at the end of each day to confirm your ride times.

## **Before the Competition**

When your ride times arrive, read them carefully and inform the competition secretary immediately of any scheduling problems or conflicts.

Communication with management must be conducted in a polite and concise manner. Respect management’s stated policies and procedures for starting time, schedules, refunds, and post entries, as stated in the prize list. If it is necessary to withdraw a horse from competition, notify the management as soon as possible. “No Shows” are not regarded favorably by management

(who might have been able to fill the time from the waiting list) or by the judge (who does not like staring into an empty arena).

Make sure your tack is clean and in good repair. Double check your tow vehicle and trailer for fuel, wiring, brakes, lights, fire extinguisher, tire pressure, etc. The U.S. Pony Club has an excellent pamphlet called “Travel Safety” that can be found at [www.ponyclub.org](http://www.ponyclub.org).

Planning ahead will allow you to be calm and organized upon arrival at the competition grounds. Prepare an equipment checklist for horse, rider, and trailer. Be sure to include a muck basket, pitchfork, water hose, trash bag, extension cords, and stool or small step ladder. Pack a short-sleeved (not sleeveless) shirt in the event that it is hot and the jacket rule is waived.

Clean the horse and clip him, if necessary. Make sure he is properly shod. Do not expect that a farrier will be on the grounds, and remember that not all facilities have wash racks. The horse, rider, and tack should be immaculate when entering the competition arena.

As much as you love them, leave your dogs and children at home. When you are busy competing, you will find that you cannot adequately care for them. If you do decide to bring your dog, check the prize list to determine whether dogs are allowed on the grounds. If they are allowed, they must be leashed at all times. Because of insurance liability issues, many competitions do not allow dogs at all.

## **In the Stable**

Check in with the stable manager to find your stall and park in designated areas only. Never park in a fire lane, even for a short time. Keep the stall(s) you are assigned—or work out alternatives with the stable manager. Check the stall for nails, loose boards, or any other safety hazards. Never change assigned stalls without first checking with management. Do not put holes in any walls to hang buckets, stall guards, etc. without first checking with the stable manager.

Protect your purse or wallet, tack, and other belongings. Unloading and packing up times are favorites among barn thieves.

Introduce yourself to those in neighboring stalls.

Check with the stable manager prior to using electrical appliances. Your taste in radio stations or recorded music may not be shared by your neighbors. If you must have music, keep the volume down. It is inappropriate to cross-tie in an aisle and obstruct traffic. Use your stall for braiding and grooming.

Hosts of barn parties must keep the aisles clear of tables, chairs, coolers, and food. Rent an extra stall if you intend to entertain.

Stabling varies greatly from competition to competition and from region to region. The prize list should specify the size and type of stalls, whether there are doors or not, and what bedding, if any, will be available. Plan accordingly.

Investigate the area, locating water, muckheap, washing area, and arenas (by number or name). Wash horses according to management’s rules. Dump manure only at designated areas. Some facilities have restrictions on the type of bedding that can be put on the muckheap.

### **No smoking in the barn—ever!**

While unpacking, keep aisles clear for other traffic. Unload your vehicle quickly and move it to the appropriate trailer parking area. Write emergency phone numbers and where you are staying on the stall card posted on your stall(s). It is a great idea to bring your own in the event the competition did not provide one.

Unplug all appliances, especially water heaters, when leaving the stable area. Unplug fans when leaving the grounds for the night, or in extreme heat, ask if you can leave the fans on all night.

If you are trailer stabling, tie your horse safely. Either spread manure according to management’s plan or remove it to the designated area.

Always make sure your horse is safe, secure, and comfortable. Then go see the competition secretary and pick up your competitor’s packet.

## **In the Competition Office**

The tentative time schedule is always subject to change. When you first check in with the secretary, verify your rides, classes, rings, and times. Your competitor packet should include your bridle number, a program, and tickets for any special events you requested.

Set your watch to the official competition time.

After the competition begins, any change in the schedule needs to be worked out with management in a timely manner. Scratches and rider substitutions need to be officially processed and must be arranged before the class begins—the sooner, the better!!

Check the official bulletin board at least twice each day. Also, pay attention to any broadcasted announcements—they may apply to you!

Management will announce when you may pick up your test sheet. No tests can be returned until the entire class is completed, scored, and results posted. Do not disturb the scorers or secretary by requesting your test sheet before the class is finished. You should be able to check your score within 30 minutes of the last ride in your class.

## **Warm-up**

All USEF rules apply from the time the entries arrive on the show grounds (when the show office opens).

If you arrive the day or evening before the competition, ask permission before entering the competition areas. Management sometimes allows schooling in or around the competition ring, but do not assume that you may enter the competition arenas to school. The prize list may describe the schooling policy.

Numbers must be worn whenever a horse is ridden, exercised, or out of his stall or away from the trailer. Some management issue two numbers; if they want you to wear two, the second number is not a spare in case you lose the first one.

The size and layout of the warm-up areas will vary greatly. Find out if management has a stated policy for warm-up and schooling areas. Think of “warm-up” as the arena for the work you will do immediately before entering the competition arena. The warm-up area is not the place to train a horse or give a riding lesson. Other schooling areas for lungeing, exercising, and coaching are to be designated.

The warm-up area is primarily for the use of competitors preparing for an upcoming test. Others should give these competitors priority. Sometimes only the next two or three competitors are permitted in the warm-up ring. Others will be advised to use schooling areas. When entering the warm-up arena, be careful not to cut off another rider. Slower gaits take the inside track.

Pass left shoulder to left shoulder and look where you are going. When overtaking traffic in the same direction, pass to the inside with care and plenty of clearance. Better yet, take a circle or cut across the arena to avoid passing.

Keep at least one horse’s length from any other horse.

Plan halts for the center of the ring.

When turning, check your “rear view” first.

Be careful how you use your whip. Other horses may react more enthusiastically than your own.

Fractious horses should be removed from the area immediately.

Upper-level riders should be careful not to frighten green horses and riders in the warm-up arena.

Make way for ring maintenance crews in the warm-up arena. Some competitions post ring-maintenance schedules. Be aware of them.

Be courteous to other riders who are trying to concentrate on their own warm-up.

Do your schooling in a positive manner. Do not school after a test if you are angry. Perform your warm-up routine with a purpose: do not merely meander around the arena.

Be polite. Foul language is never tolerated.

Horses not entered in the competition do not belong in the warm-up area.

Remember the warm-up arena is for work. Do your final tack adjustments outside of the warm-up arena. Most competitions request that trainers and helpers stay on the rail, with no foot traffic allowed in the warm-up.

Ring stewards are required to spot check tack after your exit from the competition arena. Keep in mind that some equipment allowed in warm-up is not allowed in the performance arena. Tack permitted in the warm-up area and the competition arena is specifically stated in the USEF rule book.

Lunge only in designated areas, and give all horses enough room. When you are finished, pick up your lungeing equipment—do not leave it on the ground as a hazard.

Be especially courteous to show volunteers. They keep the competition running smoothly and facilitate communication between competitors and management. They are there to help you, but it is your responsibility to get to the right arena at the right time.

Inappropriate behavior by a competitor or his/her family members or assistants can be an unpleasant experience for others at the show. In addition, be aware that a competitor can be penalized for USEF rule violations as a result of inappropriate behavior of family members.

## **In the Performance Arena**

Know your test, even if you have a reader.

Instruct your reader to read each movement only once and not to speak to you under any other circumstance; it could result in your elimination. However, a caller may read a movement twice if there is a reason to doubt that the rider heard the original call.

Do not engage in social conversation with the judge while circling the arena prior to performance; however, the scribe does need a chance to identify your bridle number. It is also inappropriate to discuss the test with the judge at the arena, either before the bell or after the final salute.

After the signal from the judge (whistle or bell, and occasionally horn, duck call, clapper, etc.), you must enter at A within the required time. You will not be given a warning that your time is running out. In the case of multiple arenas, be sure you know whether your judge has a bell or a whistle.

If you go off course, get direction from the judge, not from your reader. In times of distress, the rider must ask and receive permission of the judge to dismount or to leave the arena.

After the final salute, it is not necessary to ride to C before leaving the arena. You may simply ride one horse's length forward, turn right or left and leave the arena in the manner specified by the test. Do not circle at A before exiting.

Remember not to speak to the reader or your friends until you have exited the arena.

In the event of a scratch, you do not have to ride ahead of your time. If you do opt to ride ahead of your scheduled time, this schedule variation should be brought to the attention of the judge and scribe.

When you present yourself at the arena area ahead of your time, you are saying you are ready to be judged. Do not expect additional warm-up time around the perimeter of the performance arena.

If you are scheduled to ride immediately following a break, it is inappropriate to enter the arena perimeter early. Wait until the judge is present and expect the judge's signal in short order. Never enter the arena if the judge is not present.

Dressage competitions are scheduled to the minute and most competitions run on time. Check for the official show time with the office or with a paddock steward and adjust your watch if necessary. It is your responsibility to present yourself at the in-gate on time. Arriving late for your scheduled ride will result in elimination.

On occasion, a dressage competition may get behind schedule—by a few minutes or a few hours. While it can get behind, it can also get back on schedule surprisingly quickly. Be particularly observant when a competition gets off schedule. Know when you ride in the class, keep track of scratches and plan your warm-up accordingly. Do not count on management to keep you informed.

## **After the Competition**

Awards ceremonies, organized by management, should be attended to maintain sponsorship participation and as common courtesy to management. Check the prize list for requirements.

At some competitions (especially regional championships and FEI-recognized competitions), you must be present and mounted at the awards ceremony or you risk forfeiting your awards and placing in the class.

Leave your stabling area clean and neat.

Send a thank-you note to anyone who has been particularly helpful.  
If you win, send a thank-you note to the trophy donor.

## **USEF and USDF Evaluation Forms**

USEF forms, which can be obtained from the show secretary or from the technical delegate, may be completed by USEF members participating in the show. The forms are the “Members’ Confidential Evaluation of Judges, Stewards, Technical Delegates, Jumper and Eventing Course Designers” and the “Competition Evaluation Form.” These forms can be used for positive or negative comments or opinions.

USEF Competition Footing Evaluation Forms may be completed and are an effective way to suggest improvements or compliment the show on the quality of the footing.

USDF also has a competition evaluation form, which is available from the show secretary or from the USDF Web site.

Competition officials must be treated with respect. If you have a question about your ride or test sheet, contact the competition committee or the technical delegate to possibly arrange a time for you to meet with the judge.

Before leaving, pick up all tests and awards and return your bridle number. Be sure to thank the competition management and their volunteer help.

Premiums (prize money or awards) not awarded during the show must be paid within 30 days. If management does not satisfy its obligations, contact USEF.

## **The Technical Delegate**

The USEF dressage technical delegate (TD) wears three hats:

- The TD is the official representative of USEF on the competition grounds. It is the TD’s duty to see that all USEF rules are followed.
- The TD is an advisor to competition management.
- The TD is an advisor to competitors. If you have a question about a rule, do not be afraid to ask.

As an advisor, the TD informs management and competitors of rule infractions and interprets the rules when applying them to particular situations that may arise.

The TD is not a judge or a jury, but an observer and impartial advisor. If you have questions about USEF rules or conduct at a dressage competition, contact your TD. TDs are trained to be vigilant about serious rule violations, and can, should they deem necessary, file charges against management, officials, and competitors.

Formal USEF protests can be confusing. If you wish to file a protest, always consult the TD, who will advise you of what can be protested and how to go about it. For example, a violation of the rules by a judge can be protested; the judge's opinion cannot.

You must report to the show management and the TD any suspected rule violation, unsportsmanlike conduct, or animal cruelty. Do your part to keep dressage competitions friendly and fair.

## **Use of Drugs**

The use of alcohol and drugs by people or on horses has no place at an equestrian competition. Although the local police may be called in to control the people, USEF has authority over the horses. Horses may be drug tested, unannounced, at any time by a designated veterinarian.

USEF drug rules are very specific. Any drug that stimulates, tranquilizes, depresses, locally anaesthetizes, or masks said drugs is illegal.

The USEF drug rule does carry an exception. Your horse may be given a drug that is illegal for competition, if the drug is used for a therapeutic purpose. In this instance, the horse must be withdrawn from competition for 24 hours and a special USEF Medication Report Form must be submitted immediately to the TD or the designated show office recipient. These forms are available from the office or the TD.

Obtain and study the USEF drug guidelines. Do not assume that your veterinarian or the TD know all the specifics and intricacies of the USEF drug rules. Go over the materials with your veterinarian and double check the rules when medication is prescribed. If you are unsure, call the hotline at (800) 633-2472.

## **Miscellaneous**

According to the USEF rule book, it is recommended that scribes and apprentice judges not compete before judges with whom they have worked at the same competition.

If you have recently purchased any new item of tack or clothing and you are not sure it is permitted under USEF rules, read the rule book or contact the technical delegate for an answer before you go to the show. You can avoid needless elimination by being informed and prepared.

Offer to volunteer when you have free time. All shows depend on volunteers, so call in advance and let them know when you will be available (before, during, or after the show).

We hope that the information in this section will give you the look and feel of a winner—regardless of your score. The USEF rule book is essential, but understanding the protocol and etiquette of dressage competition will smooth your way to success.