Introducing the 2019 USDF Freestyle Tests

Let the music play! Here’s what you need to know.

By Janet L. “Dolly” Hannon

The USDF Freestyle Committee is pleased to announce that the new 2019 USDF freestyle tests (Training through Fourth Levels) are approved and will be available at the 2018 Adequan®/USDF Annual Convention in Salt Lake City, and online this month.

With the rising popularity of lower-level freestyles and the chance to qualify to compete at the prestigious US Dressage Finals, the importance of lower-level freestyles is at an all-time high. I frequently hear from competitors that one of their goals in dressage is to perform a freestyle. Freestyles are on many riders’ “bucket lists.”

Here’s a sneak peek at what’s changing in the 2019 freestyle tests.

User-Friendly Score-Sheet Layout

The new freestyle test sheets are laid out much more like the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) freestyle score sheets in that each movement has its own line, and there is much more room for multiple scores and comments (see the example below). No more tiny boxes for the scribe to try to cram several scores into!

Bolded lines between the move-

### 2019 USDF 2nd Level Freestyle

**Competitor No.:**

**Horse:**

**Event:** Date: 

**Judge:** Position: 

**Suggested schedule time:** 10 minutes per ride

**Max:** 5 minutes

**Total Artistic Impression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HORSE</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Q</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Harmony Between Horse and Rider</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Choreography</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degree of Difficulty</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Music</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interpretation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Technical Execution**

**Total Artistic Impression**

**Total Technical Execution**

**Total Artistic Impression**

**Total Technical Execution**

**Total Artistic Impression**

**Total Technical Execution**

### ARTISTIC IMPRESSION

- **Harmony Between Horse and Rider:**
  - 10 points possible
  - Judges: Points for efficiency and cohesion between the horse and rider.

- **Choreography:**
  - 10 points possible
  - Judges: Points for the design and execution of the movements.

- **Degree of Difficulty:**
  - 10 points possible
  - Judges: Points for the level of difficulty demonstrated.

- **Music:**
  - 10 points possible
  - Judges: Points for the suitability and integration of the music.

- **Interpretation:**
  - 10 points possible
  - Judges: Points for how well the rider interprets the music.

**Total Score**

**Deductions (overtime penalties)**

**Final Score**

**Percentage (0% if 0 points)**

### TECHNICAL EXECUTION

**COMPULSORY ELEMENTS**

- **1. Medium walk (20m continuous)**
  - 10 points

- **2. Free walk (20m continuous)**
  - 2 points

- **3. Double SMALL RIGHT in collected trot (20m left)**
  - 10 points

- **4. Double LEFT in LEFT collected trot (20m right)**
  - 10 points

- **5. Traverse RIGHT to collected Trot (20m right)**
  - 10 points

- **6. Traverse LEFT to collected Trot (20m left)**
  - 10 points

- **7. Medium trot on straight line**
  - 10 points

- **8. Simple change of walk with SMALL RIGHT**
  - 10 points

- **9. Simple change of walk with SMALL LEFT**
  - 10 points

- **10. Canter center to collected center RIGHT**
  - 10 points

- **11. Canter center to collected center LEFT**
  - 10 points

- **12. Medium center on straight line**
  - 10 points

- **13. Half halt in center on straight line, trot and canter**
  - 10 points

- **14. Flying, energy, and elasticity**
  - 10 points

### Further Remarks:

- **Total Technical Execution**
  - 150 points possible

- **Final Technical Execution**
  - 150 points possible

- **Total Technical Execution**
  - 150 points possible

- **Total Technical Execution**
  - 150 points possible

**Deductions (forbidden movements)**

**Final Technical Execution**

**Total Artistic Impression**

**Total Score**

**Percentage**

### Score-Sheet Layout

**Event:** Date: 

**Judge:** Position: 

**Event:** Date: 

**Comment:** 

**Score-Sheet Layout**

- **User-Friendly Design:** New 2019 score sheets are intended to be clearer and easier to use
ments at each gait will aid scribes in locating movements quickly. Directions of movements that are shown both left and right are also bolded. As a result, walk, trot, and canter movements will be grouped together and will be more clear.

These layout changes will make the tests much more scribe- and judge-friendly.

**Scoring Changes**

**Collective marks.** There are fewer collective marks in the 2019 USDF freestyle tests. On the technical side of the test sheet, there is only one collective mark: for rhythm, energy, and elasticity. This score encompasses the quality of the gaits and the impulsion. (This same score is used in the FEI freestyle score sheets, but it is included in the artistic marks instead of technical.) This change should make it easier for judges to finish scoring freestyle tests and should help them stay on time.

**Errors.** The new score sheets will also enable the judge to deduct points for errors, which have not appeared in previous test cycles. In a lower-level freestyle, the competitor will incur an error for failing to salute at the entry and final halt, and for posting the trot in freestyles at Second Level and above. The judge cannot blow the whistle or ring the bell when errors occur, so any errors given cannot lead to elimination, but two points per occurrence will be deducted from the total score. Errors are not cumulative.

**Omissions.** If you clearly leave out a required movement, you will receive a mark of zero for the omitted movement, and you will also receive marks of 5.5 for both choreography and degree of difficulty. This puts the handling of omissions in national-level freestyles in line with the FEI guidelines. US Equestrian-licensed dressage judges will be instructed in this regard at upcoming forums and continuing-education programs.

This rule also applies when a competitor shows an insufficient amount of a required movement, such as the minimum 20 meters of continuous walk. It could also be applied if a competitor does not show the required 12 meters of shoulder-in, travers, or renvers. So when in doubt, show more than the minimum number of meters of any required movement listed on the freestyle score sheet—say, 20-plus meters of both continuous walks and 15 meters of the lateral movement. It would be a shame to qualify for your Regional Championships only to have your freestyle score lowered significantly because you omitted a required movement.

**Artistic marks.** The artistic marks have not changed. The new tests retain the artistic categories of Harmony, Choreography, Degree of Difficulty, Music, and Interpretation.

Although the FEI score sheets combine music and interpretation into one score, the USDF Freestyle Committee feels that the music is such an important part of the freestyle test that it deserves its own score so that it is
assessed accurately. With a separate music score, the judge can evaluate the suitability of the music for the horse, the way the music is edited, and the cohesiveness of the pieces of music chosen. Does the music form a harmonious composition, or is it a mishmash of styles and genres?

The score for interpretation assesses whether the music expresses the horse’s gaits, and whether the rider hits the changes within the music and interprets the various pieces or phrases within the choreography at the correct time. The rider should be in sync with both halts, especially the final halt, as this is the last impression the judge has of your performance.

**Required, Allowed, and Forbidden Movements**

We have tried to clarify in the new freestyle test sheets what elements are “clearly allowed” and forbidden. Basically, you cannot do any movement or transition from a higher level unless it is specifically listed on the test sheet as an additionally allowed movement. See the chart below for a level-by-level listing of allowed and required movements in the new 2019 freestyle tests. Read the score sheets carefully, as any movement or transition that is clearly intentionally performed above the level being shown will receive a four-point deduction.

*Note:* Competitors, be sure to reference the freestyle score sheets as you plan your choreography. The *USDF Member Guide* and most GMO omnibuses do not include all of the information needed to create a freestyle, including the lists of required and allowed movements.

If the test states that any configuration of an allowed movement is allowed, then you can include a more difficult configuration of that movement. An example from First Level would be a leg-yield zigzag or a more difficult counter-canter pattern than the one from First Level Test 3. However, if a difficult configuration is above your horse’s ability to perform with ease and harmony, don’t include

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**The 2019 USDF Freestyle Tests: Required and Additionally Allowed Movements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Required Movements</th>
<th>Additionally Allowed Movements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>● Medium and free walk (20m continuous each)</td>
<td>● Trot-halt-trot</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● 20m circle in working trot L/R</td>
<td>● Trot-walk-trot</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Serpentine in working trot, with loops no smaller than 15m</td>
<td>● Trot-canter-trot (20m of trot min.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● 20m circle in working canter L/R</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Stretch forward and downward on a 20m circle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Halt and salute beginning and end of tests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>● Medium and free walk (20m continuous each)</td>
<td>● Turn on the forehand (no more than 180 degrees)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● 10m circle at working trot L/R</td>
<td>● Lengthen trot and/or canter on a curved line</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Leg-yield in working trot L/R</td>
<td>● Canter serpentine</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Lengthen stride in trot on a straight line</td>
<td>● Counter-canter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● 15m circle in working canter L/R</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Change lead through trot L/R</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Lengthen stride in canter on a straight line</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Halt and salute beginning and end of tests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>● Medium and free walk (20m continuous each)</td>
<td>● Half-turn on haunches (no more than 180 degrees)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Shoulder-in in collected trot (12m min.) L/R</td>
<td>● Renvers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Travers in collected trot (12m min.) L/R</td>
<td>● Medium trot and/or canter on a curved line</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Medium trot on straight line</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Simple change of lead L/R</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Counter-canter in collected canter L/R</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Medium canter on straight line</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Halt and salute beginning and end of tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>● Medium and extended walk (20m continuous each)</td>
<td>● Walk half-pirouette (no more than 180 degrees)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Shoulder-in (12m min.) in collected trot L/R</td>
<td>● Half-pass zigzag in trot</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Trot half-pass in collected trot L/R</td>
<td>● Canter to halt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Extended trot on straight line</td>
<td>● Counter-change of hand in canter (only one change of direction)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Canter half-pass in collected canter L/R</td>
<td>● Medium trot and/or canter on a curved line</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Flying change of lead L/R</td>
<td>● Flying changes shown in sequence of every 5 strides or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Extended canter on straight line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Halt and salute beginning and end of test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Required and additionally allowed movements in the new 2019 USDF freestyle tests*
it, or redo the choreography to make it easier for your horse. Judges frequently see horses that are overfaced by overly ambitious patterns. The result is a lower technical score for the movement plus a lower choreography and degree-of-difficulty score. Often times the simpler patterns that are within your horse’s scope will score more consistently and are rewarded for their clarity.

General Guidelines
Freestyles take a lot of work and time to put together as well as practice time to make them appear rehearsed and polished. Choose music that suits your horse and show a clear pattern in your choreography that is well executed with harmony, and you will not be disappointed.

Be familiar with the score sheets, USDF freestyle rules, guidelines, and definitions, as well as the US Equestrian rules, so that you know what is allowed and expected in national-level freestyle competition.

At the show, be sure to attend the sound check. Make sure that you can hear your music from the judge’s box as well as inside the arena. Please do not ask the sound person to play your music at a very high decibel level. Some competitors think that loud volume adds impact, but it actually does the opposite. When the judge has to yell out the scores to the scribe and the music is distorted, it actually can lower the music score.

Keep your backup music CD handy in case of a technical failure.

The USDF Freestyle Committee highly recommends that all freestyle enthusiasts attend the USDF L program’s continuing-education program on freestyles, which can be offered by GMOs. See the USDF calendar at usdf.org for availability. This program will help you to understand how freestyles are judged and what judges consider in their evaluations and scores. It is currently being revised and will be updated for the new tests.

Janet “Dolly” Hannon, of Arvada, CO, is a US Equestrian “S” dressage judge and the chair of the USDF Freestyle Committee. With her mare, Electra, she was the 2016 Great American/USDF Region 5 First Level Freestyle champion. The pair ranked ninth in that year’s Adequan®/USDF Musical Freestyle year-end standings at First Level.