

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 free-

style. 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																																															
Suggested schedule time: 10 minutes per ride																																															
Event: _____	Date: _____	Judge: _____	Position: _____																																												
Competitor No.: _____																																															
Name: _____																																															
Horse: _____																																															
TECHNICAL EXECUTION																																															
<small>Note: Omitted compulsory elements receive a "0". Judges Marks for Technical Execution must be given in half or full points (no tenths). Trot work must be done sitting.</small>																																															
COMPULSORY ELEMENTS & PRELIMINARY MARKS		POSSIBLE POINTS	JUDGE'S MARKS	CO-EFFICIENT	FINAL SCORE																																										
1. Medium walk (20m continuous)	10				REMARKS																																										
2. Free walk (20m continuous)	10	2																																													
3. Shoulder-in RIGHT in collected trot (12m min)	10																																														
4. Shoulder-in LEFT in collected trot (12m min)	10																																														
5. Travers RIGHT in collected trot (12m min)	10																																														
6. Travers LEFT in collected trot (12m min)	10																																														
7. Medium trot on straight line	10																																														
8. Simple change of lead RIGHT	10																																														
9. Simple change of lead LEFT	10																																														
10. Counter-canter in collected canter RIGHT	10																																														
11. Counter-canter in collected canter LEFT	10																																														
12. Medium canter on straight line	10																																														
13. Halt with salute on centerline, first and final	10																																														
14. Rhythm, energy and elasticity	10																																														
Further Remarks:																																															
		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Total Technical Execution (150 points possible)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>Deductions (forbidden movements)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Errors (2 points off for each error, not cumulative)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Final Technical Execution (150 points possible)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Forbidden movements will incur a deduction of 4 points from Total Execution for each forbidden movement, but not for each recurrence of the same movement.</p>					Total Technical Execution (150 points possible)		Deductions (forbidden movements)		Errors (2 points off for each error, not cumulative)		Final Technical Execution (150 points possible)																																		
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Second Level Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under Additionally Allowed . Additionally Allowed: Half turn on haunches (no more than 180 degrees), reiners, medium trot and/or canter on a curved line.																																															
ARTISTIC IMPRESSION <small>Note: Non-compulsory movements must be rewarded or penalized under Choreography and/or Degree of Difficulty. Judges Marks for Artistic Impression may be given in tenths.</small> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>POSSIBLE POINTS</th> <th>JUDGE'S MARKS</th> <th>CO-EFFICIENT</th> <th>FINAL SCORE</th> <th>REMARKS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Harmony Between Horse and Rider</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Choreography</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>4</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Degree of Difficulty</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>2</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Music</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Interpretation</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Further Remarks:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Total Artistic Impression (150 points possible)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Deductions (overtime penalties) Overtime penalty will incur a deduction of 1 point from total for Artistic Impression</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final Artistic Impression (150 points possible)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final Technical Execution (150 points possible)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final Score (300 points possible)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Percentage (Final score divided by 300) In case of tie: The higher total for Artistic Impression will break the tie.</td> </tr> </table> <p>Signature: _____</p> <p>Reminders for Freestyle Judges</p> <p>Time: The USDF Freestyles maximum time limit is 5 minutes. There is no minimum time. No bell is sounded at the end of the time limit. Movements executed after the 5 minutes limit are not scored. One (1) point is deducted from the total for Artistic Impression for exceeding the time limit.</p> <p>DR 129: Under penalty of elimination at the discretion of the Judge at "C", a rider must enter the arena within 30 seconds of the music starting. Music must cease at the final salute.</p> <p>DR 129: At the beginning and end of a Freestyle Test a halt with a salute is compulsory. Time begins when the horse moves forward after the competitor's halt and ends with the final halt and salute.</p> <p>Judging:</p> <p>DR 129: All judges of a freestyle test at any level must judge both artistic and technical parts of the test.</p> <p>DR 129: In case of rider's music failing before or during a Freestyle Test and in cases where there is no backup system the rider can, with permission of the judge at "C", leave the arena or start at a later time. There should be minimum interference with the starting times of the other riders and the affected rider should return to complete or restart his/her test during a scheduled break in the competition or at the end of the competition. The rider may decide whether to restart the test from the beginning or to commence from the point where the music failed. Judging must restart at the point of interruption. In any case, the marks already given will not be changed.</p> <p>DR 122: The judge may stop a test and/or allow a competitor to restart a test from the beginning or from any appropriate point in the test, if, in his discretion, some unusual circumstance occurs to interrupt a test.</p> <p>Above the level Movements and Transitions: Movements and transitions "above the level" (found ONLY in a higher level test) receive a deduction of four points from the total for technical execution for each illegal movement or transition, but not for each recurrence of the same movement or transition.</p> <p>Errors: The bell is not rung for errors occurring in USDF Freestyle Tests. Errors occur for failure to salute in the halt or rising at the trot at Second Level and above. Two points will be deducted for each error, however they are not cumulative and will not result in elimination.</p>							POSSIBLE POINTS	JUDGE'S MARKS	CO-EFFICIENT	FINAL SCORE	REMARKS	1. Harmony Between Horse and Rider	10		3			2. Choreography	10		4			3. Degree of Difficulty	10		2			4. Music	10		3			5. Interpretation	10		3			Total Artistic Impression (150 points possible)	Deductions (overtime penalties) Overtime penalty will incur a deduction of 1 point from total for Artistic Impression	Final Artistic Impression (150 points possible)	Final Technical Execution (150 points possible)	Final Score (300 points possible)	Percentage (Final score divided by 300) In case of tie: The higher total for Artistic Impression will break the tie.
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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

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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 omnibus 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

THE 2019 USDF FREESTYLE TESTS: REQUIRED AND ADDITIONALLY ALLOWED MOVEMENTS

Level	Required Movements	Additionally Allowed Movements
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium and free walk (20m continuous each) 20m circle in working trot L/R Serpentine in working trot, with loops no smaller than 15m 20m circle in working canter L/R Stretch forward and downward on a 20m circle Halt and salute beginning and end of tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trot-halt-trot Trot-walk-trot Trot-canter-trot (20m of trot min.)
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium and free walk (20m continuous each) 10m circle at working trot L/R Leg-yield in working trot L/R Lengthen stride in trot on a straight line 15m circle in working canter L/R Change lead through trot L/R Lengthen stride in canter on a straight line Halt and salute beginning and end of tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turn on the forehand (no more than 180 degrees) Lengthen trot and/or canter on a curved line Canter serpentine Counter-canter
Second	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium and free walk (20m continuous each) Shoulder-in in collected trot (12m min.) L/R Travers in collected trot (12m min.) L/R Medium trot on straight line Simple change of lead L/R Counter-canter in collected canter L/R Medium canter on straight line Halt and salute beginning and end of tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half-turn on haunches (no more than 180 degrees) Renvers Medium trot and/or canter on a curved line
Third	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium and extended walk (20m continuous each) Shoulder-in (12m min.) in collected trot L/R Trot half-pass in collected trot L/R Extended trot on straight line Canter half-pass in collected canter L/R Flying change of lead L/R Extended canter on straight line Halt and salute beginning and end of test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk half-pirouette (no more than 180 degrees) Half-pass zigzag in trot Canter to halt Counter-change of hand in canter (only one change of direction) Medium trot and/or canter on a curved line Flying changes shown in sequence of every 5 strides or more

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.

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