

Equestrian

Special Olympics
Coaching Guide

Special Olympics

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Special Olympics

EQUESTRIAN COACHING GUIDE



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Advancing the public well-being through improved communication

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Special Olympics

EQUESTRIAN COACHING GUIDE

Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition Season



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Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition

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Equestrian Sports for Special Olympics Athletes

In Special Olympics, equestrian encompasses several disciplines. Regardless of whether the athlete rides in English or Western tack, the principles of coaching are the same and the safety of the athlete is the primary focus. In planning equestrian training sessions, it is important to make sure the horses are well-mannered and appropriate for the level of the athlete. Providing safe horses and a safe environment is the responsibility of the coach. Only then can equestrian sports be fun and educational for the rider.

Benefits of Riding

- ♦ Develops coordination, good posture, balance, and body awareness.
- ♦ Improves the athlete's total fitness.
- ♦ Teaches self-discipline.
- ♦ Teaches the athlete to respect and enjoy nature and animals.
- ♦ Enhances self-esteem.
- ♦ Provides the athlete with a life-long recreational activity.
- ♦ Provides an activity that family and friends can share with the athlete.





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Setting Goals

Realistic, yet challenging goals are important to the motivation of the athlete at training and during competition. The coach and athlete should work together to set long term goals, which can be accomplished over the course of the training period. Short term goals are the stepping stones to success and should be set so the athlete can feel a sense of accomplishment with each achievement. Goals should vary in difficulty, easily attainable to challenging, and should be measurable so the athlete can chart progress. The Horsemasters program and the Sports Skill Assessment cards, which are explained later in this section, may be helpful in setting goals. Please see the Principles of Coaching section for additional information and exercises on goal setting.

Benefits of Goal Setting

- ♦ Allows the coach to measure the athletes' development and improvement
- ♦ Allows the coach to take a progressive approach to training
- ♦ Allows the coach to manage the training sessions more efficiently
- ♦ Teaches organization and time management for both coaches and athletes
- ♦ Gives the athletes clear expectations
- ♦ Puts the athletes' focus on personal achievement during training, rather than the outcome of the competition

Goal Setting and Motivation

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Accomplishing goals at practice in settings similar to the competition environment will instill confidence. The main features of goal setting include:

1. Goals should be set jointly by the coach and athlete.
 - ♦ Goals that seem realistic to the coach may seem unattainable to the athlete because of a lack of self-confidence. For example, you may feel the athlete can walk and trot independently around the arena, yet the athlete may feel more comfortable having someone either lead the horse or walk close by for security.
2. Goals must be structured as short-term, intermediate, and long-term.
 - ♦ At the beginning of the season, short term goals would be working comfortably around horses on the ground and learning basic riding skills. Intermediate goals would be grooming or leading the horse independently and riding patterns in the arena. Long-term goals would be learning the skills required to participate in competitions.
3. Goals should be viewed as stepping stones to success.
 - ♦ Break complex skills down into parts. Each part is a goal to be accomplished and praised. For example, if the athlete's goal is to ride a dressage test, begin by teaching the entry into the arena, halt, and salute. Then, practice each movement in the test separately so the athlete can learn to ride the patterns accurately. Finally, have the athlete ride the entire test, first with a caller, and then, if appropriate for that athlete, from memory. By breaking the test down into parts that the athlete can accomplish, you can make a seemingly unattainable goal become realistic with small stepping stones.
4. Goals should vary in difficulty — from easily attainable to challenging.
 - ♦ Athletes need to feel successful in each training session and competition. Set goals that are easy for them to reach, such as performing simple warm-up exercises on the horse. Also, set more challenging goals, such as riding steering the horse around cones or performing transitions at specific places in the arena.



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5. Goals must be measurable.
 - ♦ Athletes need to have a tangible way to know when goals are attained. For example, when an athlete is learning to post, the first goal may be to post 5 steps at the walk, adding to the number of steps as the athlete becomes stronger. Then, use the same progression at the trot, with the athlete holding onto the pommel of the saddle for support. Finally, have the athlete post at the trot without using the hands for support, gradually increasing the number of steps or distance the horse trots.

6. Goals should be used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.

Athletes with or without an intellectual disability may be more motivated by accomplishing short-term goals than long-term goals; however, do not be afraid to challenge athletes. Include athletes in setting their personal goals. There are participation factors that may influence motivation and goal setting:

- ♦ Age appropriateness
- ♦ Ability level
- ♦ Readiness level
- ♦ Athlete performance
- ♦ Family influence
- ♦ Peer influence
- ♦ Athlete preference

Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are frequently controlled by others. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a competition because other athletes have performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if all other athletes perform at a lower level. If an athlete's goal is to ride patterns accurately at a competition, the athlete has more control over achieving this goal than winning. This performance goal ultimately gives the athlete more control over her performance.

Motivation through Goal Setting

Goal setting has proved to be one of the most simple and effective motivational devices developed for sport within the past three decades. While the concept is not new, today the techniques for effective goal setting have been refined and clarified. Motivation is all about having needs and striving to have those needs met. How can you enhance an athlete's motivation?

1. Provide more time and attention to an athlete when she is having difficulty learning a skill.
2. Reward small gains of achievement in skill level. Praise the athlete's effort toward improving skills.
3. Develop measures of achievement other than winning awards at competition.
4. Set the athletes up for success by matching them with suitable horses.
5. Show your athletes that they are important to you.
6. Show your athletes that you are proud of them and excited about what they are doing.
7. Instill a sense of self-worth in your athletes.

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence, and the quality of performance. Establishing goals also requires that the athlete and coach determine techniques for how to achieve those goals.



Measurable and Specific

Effective goals are measurable and specific. Goals stated in the form of "I want to be the best that I can be!" or "I want to improve my performance!" are vague and difficult to measure. It is positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether these goals have been reached. To be realistic, measurable goals must establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks.

Difficult, but Realistic

Effective goals are perceived as challenging, not threatening. A challenging goal is one perceived as difficult but attainable within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable amount of effort or ability. A threatening goal is one perceived as being beyond one's current capacity. Realistic implies that judgment is involved. Goals based upon a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks are likely to be realistic.

Long- versus Short-Term Goals

Both long- and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant, long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Once they are identified, unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

Positive versus Negative Goal Setting

Positive goals direct what to do rather than what not to do, whereas negative goals direct our attention too heavily to the errors we wish to avoid or eliminate. Positive goals also require coaches and athletes to decide how they will reach those specific goals. Once the goal is decided upon, the athlete and coach must determine specific strategies and techniques that allow the goal to be attained successfully. For example, a positive instruction is telling an athlete, "Keep your heels down," whereas a negative instruction is telling an athlete, "Don't lift your heels."

Set Priorities

Effective goals are limited in number and meaningful to the athlete. Setting a limited number of goals requires that athletes and coaches decide what is important and fundamental for continued development. Establishing a few carefully selected goals also allows athletes and coaches to keep accurate records without becoming overwhelmed with record keeping.

Mutual Goal Setting

Goal setting becomes an effective motivational device when athletes are committed to achieving those goals. When goals are imposed or established without significant input from the athletes, motivation is unlikely to be enhanced.

Formal versus Informal Goal Setting

Some coaches and athletes think that goals must be set in formal meetings outside of practice and require long periods of thoughtful evaluation before they are decided upon. Goals are literally progressions that coaches have been using for years but are now expressed in measurable performance terms rather than as vague, generalized outcomes.

Goal Setting Domains

When asked to set goals, athletes typically focus on the learning of new skills or performances in competitions. A major role of the coach is to broaden the athlete's perception of those areas, and goal setting can be an effective tool. Goals can be set to enhance fitness, improve attendance, promote sportsmanship, establish consistence, or develop a kinship with horses.



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Short Term Objectives for Riders

- Learn the parts of the horse and tack
- Learn stable management skills
- Learn to groom and tack up the horse
- Learn basic riding skills, such as asking the horse to move forward, halt, and turn
- Learn tests and patterns required in a competition

Long Term Goal for Riders

- Acquire basic riding skills, appropriate social behavior, and functional knowledge of the rules necessary to participate successfully in Equestrian competitions.

Assessing Goals Checklist

Write a goal statement and then ask the following questions:

1. Does the goal sufficiently meet the athlete's needs and is it realistic?
2. Is the goal positively stated? If not, rewrite it.
3. Is the goal under the athlete's control, focusing on his/her goals?
4. Is the goal a goal and not a result?
5. Is the goal important to the athlete so that he/she will want to work towards achieving it? Have the time and energy to do it?
6. What barriers might the athlete encounter in working toward this goal? Are the horses, facilities, and coaching staff available to help the athlete achieve the goal?



Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition Season

As in all sports, the Special Olympics Equestrian coach must have a coaching philosophy. The coach's philosophy should be consistent with the Special Olympics philosophy, which is that quality training and opportunities for fair and equitable competition should be provided for the Special Olympics athlete. In addition, successful coaches include fun, the overall development of the athlete, and the athlete's acquisition of skills and knowledge of a particular sport as objectives of their programs.

It is recommended that an equestrian training group consists of an appropriate ratio of athlete to coach, depending on the skill level of the athletes, the suitability of horses, and safety of the facility. If your Equestrian program has too many athletes to hold only one training session, divide the riders according to ability level and schedule a separate weekly session for each group. In the long run, organization and planning are the keys to a successful season. The following checklist will assist the equestrian coach in planning a season.

Pre-Season Planning and Preparation

- Improve your knowledge of equestrian sports and your coaching skills by attending training schools and clinics.
- Locate a facility (i.e., pony club, riding club, etc.) with the proper equipment for practice sessions.
- Recruit volunteer assistants from local riding programs. Train these assistants in handling techniques to insure athletes' safety during mounting and dismounting and while riding.
- Establish goals and draw up a ten-week training plan, such as the one suggested in the following section. Schedule at least one, or if possible two, practices per week for the ten weeks.
- Plan a mini-competition for your athletes during the final week of their training.
- Ensure that all prospective riders have thorough physical examinations before the first practice. Be aware of any special considerations you need to take into account while working with the athletes, such as fear, sensitivity to heat, or physical limitations.

Season Planning

- Manage a ten-week training program.
- Plan each practice according to what needs to be accomplished, using each athlete's individual progress as a guideline for planning. In general, a practice will include:
 - (i) groundwork;
 - (ii) warm-up
 - (iii) mounted exercises;
 - (iv) mounted lesson;
 - (v) review, games, or coach's comments.

Use Skills Assessment Cards to keep a record of each athlete's progress.

Post-Season Planning

- Review pre-season goals and determine how many of them were achieved.
- Ask for comments regarding the season from the athletes, assistants and parents.
- Write a plan for off-season conditioning-similar to the warm-up section in this Guide-and pass it out to the athletes.



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Essential Components of Planning an Equestrian Training Session

Special Olympics athletes respond well to a simple, well-structured training routine with which they can become familiar. An organized plan, prepared before you get to the facility, will help establish such a routine and help make the best use of your limited time.

Each training session needs to contain the same essential elements. The amount of time spent on each element will depend on the goal of the training session, the time of season the session is in, and the amount of time available for a particular session. The following elements need to be included in an athlete's daily training program. Refer to the Ten Week Training Program for suggestions about how to incorporate these components into your long term plan.

- ☐ Warm ups
- ☐ Previously taught skills
- ☐ New Skills
- ☐ Competition experience
- ☐ Feedback on performance.

The final step in planning a training session is designing what the athlete is actually going to do. Remember when creating a training session using the components listed above, the progression through the session allows for a logical progression of skills. The long term training program should follow the same structure.

1. Easy to difficult
2. Known to unknown
3. General to specific
4. Start to finish



Horses and Supporting Volunteers

In Equestrian, proper attire and equipment are of the utmost importance, not just for learning the sport, but for safety. Horses and supporting volunteers are as much a part of equestrian equipment as are saddles and bridles. The primary consideration is matching athletes to appropriate horses. The horses must be well-mannered, sound, and trained in the discipline they are expected to perform. It is the coach's responsibility to provide suitable horses, and then to match the horses to the riders. In addition, the coach must select knowledgeable volunteers to act as leaders, side walkers, and spotters. Each horse and rider combination has different requirements the coach must consider.



When conducting a training session, the coach takes the lead in assigning horses and supporting volunteers for each rider. Everyone assisting with the lesson should wear comfortable shoes (no sandals). Loose fitting clothes or dangly jewelry can provide a safety hazard. It is important that each person knows the specifics of the job he/she is expected to perform. Volunteers should function as an extension of the instructor, not as a distraction to the rider. The instructor is in control of the lesson and gives direction to the riders. Volunteers help the riders follow those directions

- **Coach or instructor** – The coach/instructor is responsible for teaching the riding lesson. The instructor must have an extensive knowledge of horses and horsemanship, as well as an adequate knowledge of physical and intellectual disabilities. The instructor must always dress and act professionally, promote a positive learning experience for the athletes, and keep safety first.
- **Leaders** – The leader is responsible for controlling the horse, so must have experience working around horses. The rider should be encouraged to do as much as possible, but the leader must insure that the horse starts, stops, and turns when necessary. When several horses are in the arena, the leader should make sure there is adequate distance between horses. When the rider is mounting, dismounting, or doing exercises, the leader should keep the horse still by standing in front of the horse, holding each side of the bit gently. When the horse is walking or trotting, the leader should stand just behind the horse's head, between the head and shoulder.
- **Sidewalkers** – The main responsibility of the sidewalkers is the safety of the athlete. The number of sidewalkers and the amount of assistance they provide depends on the balance of the rider. For riders with poor balance or restricted use of their legs, the sidewalkers may need to support the upper or lower leg. Other riders, however, just need someone close in case the horse makes an unexpected movement.

Sidewalkers providing full assistance:



Securing the rider's upper leg



Assisting with balance



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Sidewalkers providing partial assistance



Securing the rider's knee

Sidewalkers providing confidence



Securing the rider's ankle



Walking close



Walking Close



Equitation class showing various levels of assistance

- **Spotters** – The spotter is used in mounting to assist the instructor as necessary, by performing several duties, such as holding the stirrup on the opposite side as the rider mounts, or guiding the rider into position. The spotter must be trained in mounting procedures and be comfortable with the job that is expected.



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Equestrian Attire

For safety, appropriate Equestrian attire is essential. The coach should discuss the types of clothes that are acceptable and not acceptable for training and competition. For example, shorts and sneakers are not proper Equestrian attire for any event. Boots with heels and approved helmets are necessary for safety when riding or working around horses. Refer to the Official Special Olympics Rules for specific requirements for competition attire.



Boots with heels



Schooling helmet



Appropriate Schooling Attire for English





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Appropriate Show Attire for English





Appropriate Schooling Attire for Western

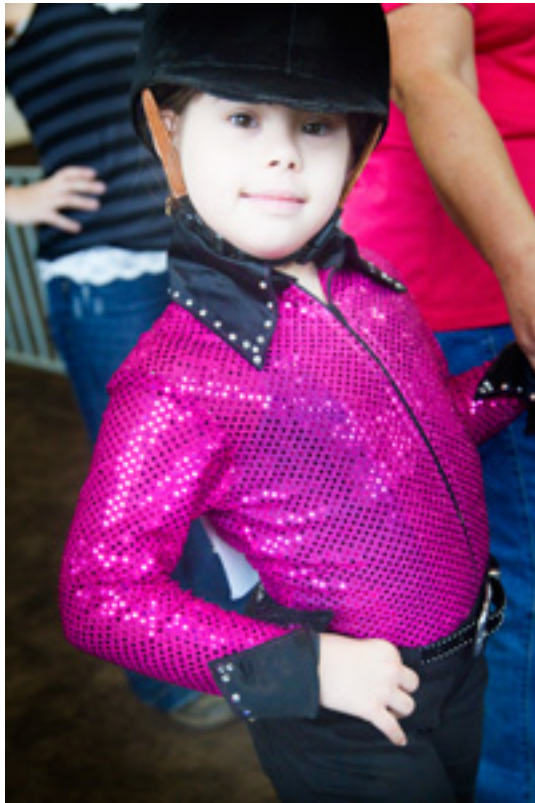




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Appropriate Show Attire for Western





Well Turned Out Horse

In Equestrian events, the horse is the athlete's partner in training and competition. Before each session, the horse should be thoroughly groomed, not just for appearance, but as a check for any physical problems such as cuts, swollen legs, or loose shoes. For competition, the horse must be well turned out, meaning neatly groomed and wearing clean, well fitting tack.



Horse's mane braided for competition



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Horse's tail braided for competition

If a horse kicks, it is appropriate to tie a red ribbon on the horse's tail to warn other riders not to come too close. The bow in the picture below is too big, but it gets the point across.





Equestrian Equipment

For the safety of the athletes, all equipment used in equestrian programs must be clean and in good repair. Different tack is required for English and Western disciplines. Refer to the Skills section of this guide and to the Official Special Olympics Rules for specific information about those requirements. It is not the purpose of this Coaching Guide to instruct coaches in the use of different types of tack and equipment, such as bits, specially adapted saddles, and mounting ramps. Professional trainers and therapeutic riding instructors should be consulted for this information.

Safety stirrups are required for all Special Olympics training sessions and competitions.



Modified tack is often necessary for athletes with physical disabilities. Therapeutic riding instructors are a good resource for learning about modifications. Sometimes, different kinds of tack, such as the reins with colored sections shown below, are useful tools in helping the athlete understand the aids used for riding.





Equestrian Ten Week Training Program

The following is an example of a ten-week training plan for a Special Olympics equestrian program. It provides coaches with a basic progression of riding skills and with guidelines for appropriate training sessions for Special Olympics athletes. Of course, each coach will conduct his or her training program according to the athletes' needs and skills, the facilities and horses available, and the time constraints. This ten-week program takes beginning riders from an introduction to the horse, the stable and basic horse management, to a level of competence on and around the horse appropriate for entry in beginner level competition. In many cases, it will take more than ten weeks to reach this level. If possible, athletes should attempt to participate in a year round training program in order to attain higher levels of equestrian sports skills. The following program is based on one training session per week, lasting one to two hours; however, if facilities and time allow, two sessions per week are recommended.

Week 1

1. Tour of stable area, introduction to horses
2. Unmounted warm-up exercises
3. Hands-on session with grooming tools, learning names and correct usage of each item, and rules for working around horses
4. Short game or activity

Week 2

1. Introduction to tack. Saddling and bridling techniques
2. Unmounted warm-up exercises
3. Demonstration and practice of correct mounting and dismounting procedures, using ramp or mounting block if necessary
4. Mounted pre-riding exercises
5. Demonstration and practice of walking, and of voice, leg, and seat aids for "walk on"
6. Game involving walking and halting

Week 3

1. Demonstration and practice of putting on the halter and lead line and leading horse around ring
2. Mounted and unmounted warm-up exercises
3. Practice walking, halting, and turning horse around ring
4. Game involving mounting, walking, halting or turning

Week 4

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Review and practice of saddling and bridling techniques
3. Mounted pre-riding exercises
4. Demonstration and practice of walking in circles and reversing direction. If riders are capable, add riding off lead line at a walk (with leaders close).
5. Game or worksheet to review the parts of the horse, tack, and grooming equipment

Week 5

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Saddling and bridling the horse
3. Mounted pre-riding exercises
4. Review and practice of previous lessons
5. Demonstration and practice of posting at the walk
6. Game involving skills learned to date

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Week 6

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Tacking the horse
3. Mounted pre-riding exercises
4. Demonstration and practice of trot or jog, with correct aids, position, and halting techniques
5. Cooling down the horse
6. Hands-on practice completely grooming the horse

Week 7

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Tacking the horse
3. Mounted pre-riding exercises
4. Practice of walking trotting or jogging, turning, halting
5. Demonstration and practice of posting trot
6. Games involving skills learned to date, such as a team relay or short obstacle course with ground poles, etc.

Week 8

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Explanation and demonstration of equestrian competition events
3. Saddling and bridling the horse
4. Mounted pre-riding exercises
5. Practice of up to three competition events
6. Short game or worksheet involving skills or terms learned to date

Week 9

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Explanation of rules governing the equestrian competition events
3. Saddling and bridling the horse
4. Mounted pre-riding exercises
5. Practice of competition events, with an emphasis on rules
6. Discussion and planning for a mini-competition for the next week.

Week 10 (If possible, this session should be longer than the previous sessions)

1. Unmounted warm-up exercises
2. Tacking the horse
3. Mini-competition with athletes participating in chosen events
4. Short award ceremony for mini-competition and for training program
5. Cooling down and grooming the horse
6. Discussion and planning for any upcoming competitions and/or for the off-season

Equestrian Practice Competitions

The more we compete, the better we get. Part of the strategic plan for Special Olympics Equestrian is to drive more sport development at the local levels. Competition motivates athletes, coaches, and the entire sport management team. Expand or add to your schedule as many competition opportunities as possible, such as:

1. Host a competition for the riders who train at the same stable.
2. Host an invitational and invite other local riders to participate.
3. Join the local community Equestrian club and/or associations.
4. Incorporate competition components at the end of every training session.



Equestrian Horsemasters Program

The following is an example of a program for the athletes to learn parts of the horse and tack. There are separate sections for English and Western and for all levels.

- A coach can offer Horsemasters as a competitive event at a horse show or as evaluation, either at a horse show or “in house”.
- Horsemasters can be a judged event, with the athletes placed according to scores.
- Horsemasters can be an evaluated event, with athletes earning certificates for completion of a level. To receive a certificate, an athlete must achieve the maximum score for his/her level.
- Horsemasters will be judged/evaluated by a rated judge or a knowledgeable horse owner/rider/trainer.
- Athletes can start at any level in Horsemasters and complete one level per calendar year. Within each level, there are 2 options: A (the athlete touches a part of the horse/tack when asked by the judge) and B (the athlete names a part of the horse/tack indicated by the judge). An athlete who is non-verbal does not need to complete option B before moving to the next level.
- There are separate requirements for English and Western riders.
- Athletes may wear riding attire (no jackets) or neat barn attire (jeans or shorts, polo shirt tucked in). Athletes must wear riding boots and an approved safety helmet.
- An athlete may use his/her own horse for Horsemasters, or event management can provide the horse and tack.
- For safety, event management should make certain that suitable horses are used for Horsemasters.
- The horse should be without tack for the athlete to identify parts of the horse.
- The horse should be tacked up (either English or Western) for the athlete to identify parts of the tack.
- If necessary for safety, event management can substitute another practical test of similar level to the test listed.

Horsemasters – English

Horsemasters will be divided into 3 parts. Athletes must participate in all 3 parts. A score will be given for each part and the final score will be the sum of the 3 individual scores.

Part 1 - Horse identification – Each correct answer will receive 1 point.

Part 2 - Tack identification – Each correct answer will receive 1 point.

Part 3 - Practical Test – The judge will award a maximum of 10 points based on the athlete’s performance.

Note: For safety, the horse must have a halter on at all times (such as a rope halter). The athlete will put the halter or bridle on over.

Beginner – Maximum score: 20

Beginner A – The judge will ask the athlete to touch 5 parts of the horse.

Beginner B – The judge will touch 5 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 5

Mane

Tail

Neck

Nose/muzzle

Hoof



Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 5

Saddle
Stirrup
Bridle
Reins
Bit

Part 3 (practical test) – Maximum score: 10

The judge will instruct the athlete to put on head collar/halter. Help may be given if horse is difficult.

Intermediate – Maximum score: 30

Intermediate A - The judge will ask the athlete to touch 10 parts of the horse.

Intermediate B – The judge will touch 10 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 10

Mane	Knee
Tail	Hindlegs
Neck	Withers
Nose/muzzle	Shoulder
Hoof	Flank

Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 10

Saddle pad	Girth
Stirrup	Cavesson/noseband
Cheek pieces	Stirrup leathers
Reins	Browband
Bit	Throat latch

Part 3 (practical test) – Maximum score: 10

The judge will instruct the athlete to put on headcollar/halter (with help if needed because the horse is difficult) and lead horse at walk to a designated point, turn horse around the marker, and return to the starting point.

Advanced – Maximum score: 30

Advanced A – The judge will ask the athlete to touch 10 parts of the horse.

Advanced B – The judge will touch 10 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 10

Nose/muzzle	Fetlock
Hindlegs	Frog
Withers	Shoulder
Hip	Knee
Flank	Hock

Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 10

Girth	Pommel
Cavesson/noseband	Cantle
Stirrup leathers	Flaps
Browband	Girth strap/billet
Throat latch	Cheek pieces



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Part 3 (practical test) – Maximum score: 10

With someone attending the horse's head (providing as little assistance as necessary), the athlete will lift a front foot and pick it out. Saddle and bridle the horse. The judge will instruct the athlete to trot the horse to a designated point, turn the horse at a walk around the marker, and trot the horse back to the starting point.

Note: For safety, the tacking up of the horse must be done in a stall or other confined area, or a competent horse handler must attend the head at all times.

Horsemasters – Western

Horsemasters will be divided into 3 parts. Athletes must participate in all 3 parts. A score will be given for each part and the final score will be the sum of the 3 individual scores.

Part 1 – Horse identification

Each correct answer will receive 1 point.

Part 2 – Tack identification

Each correct answer will receive 1 point.

Part 3 – Practical Test

The judge will award a maximum of 10 points based on the athlete's performance. Note: For safety, the horse must have a halter on at all times (such as a rope halter). The athlete will put the halter or bridle on over.

Beginner – Maximum score: 20

Beginner A – The judge will ask the athlete to touch 5 parts of the horse.

Beginner B – The judge will touch 5 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 5

Mane
Tail
Neck
Nose/muzzle
Hoof

Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 5

Saddle
Stirrup
Bridle
Reins
Bit

Part 3 – Maximum score: 10

The judge will instruct the athlete to put on head collar/halter. Help may be given if horse is difficult.

Intermediate – Maximum score: 30

Intermediate A – The judge will ask the athlete to touch 10 parts of the horse.

Intermediate B – The judge will touch 10 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

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Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 10

Mane	Knee
Tail	Hindlegs
Neck	Withers
Nose/muzzle	Shoulder
Hoof	Flank

Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 10

Saddle pad	Girth/Cinch
Stirrup	Saddle horn
Curb chain	Stirrup leathers
Reins	Seat
Bit	Head stall

Part 3 (practical test) – Maximum score: 10

The judge will instruct the athlete to put on headcollar/halter (with help if needed because the horse is difficult) and lead horse at walk to a designated point, turn horse around the marker, and return to the starting point.

Advanced – Maximum score: 30

Advanced A – The judge will ask the athlete to touch 10 parts of the horse.

Advanced B – The judge will touch 10 parts of the horse and the athlete will say the name.

Part 1 (horse identification) – Maximum score: 10

Nose/muzzle	Fetlock
Hindlegs	Frog
Withers	Shoulder
Hip	Knee
Flank	Hock

Part 2 (tack identification) – Maximum score: 10

Girth/Cinch	Pommel
Saddle horn	Cantle
Stirrup leathers	Skirt
Seat	Cinch/girth strap
Headstall	Browband/ear loop

Part 3 (practical test) – Maximum score: 10

With someone attending the horse's head (providing as little assistance as necessary), the athlete will lift a front foot and pick it out. Saddle and bridle the horse. The judge will instruct the athlete to trot the horse to a designated point, turn the horse at a walk around the marker, and trot the horse back to the starting point.

Note: For safety, the tacking up of the horse must be done in a stall or other confined area, or a competent horse handler must attend the head at all times.



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Sport Skills Assessment Card

The sport skills assessment card is a systematic method useful to chart the skill ability of an athlete. The Sport Skills Assessment Card is designed to assist coaches in determining athletes' ability level and progress. Coaches will find this assessment a useful tool for several reasons.

1. Help coach match athletes to appropriate horses
2. Help coach determine which events the athlete will train and compete in
3. Establish the baseline training areas of athlete
4. Measure the athlete's progress
5. Help determine athletes daily training schedule

Before administering the assessment coaches need to have a clear set of expectations for each skill and give concise instructions to the athlete.

Special Olympics Sport Skills Assessment for Equestrian

Sports skill assessment is an ongoing process during training sessions. As the athlete progresses, the skills should become increasingly more challenging, but always within reach of the athlete's ability. Remember – set your athletes up for success!

Athlete's Name		Date	
Coach's Name		Date	

Instructions

1. Have the athlete perform the skill several times.
2. If the athlete performs the skill correctly 3 out of 5 times, check the box next to the skill to indicate that the skill has been accomplished.

Stable Management

- ☐ Athlete cleans a stall
- ☐ Athlete cleans tack
- ☐ Athlete puts equipment up in the proper place

Grooming

- ☐ Athlete identifies grooming equipment and knows the use
- ☐ Athlete brushes horse
- ☐ Athlete picks out horse's feet

Leading

- ☐ Athlete puts halter/head collar on horse
- ☐ Athlete leads horse with assistance
- ☐ Athlete leads horse unassisted

Tacking Up

- ☐ Athlete identifies parts of the saddle and bridle
- ☐ Athlete saddles the horse
- ☐ Athlete bridles the horse

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Mounting and Dismounting

- ☐ Athlete mounts the horse correctly
- ☐ Athlete dismounts correctly

Riding at the Walk

- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from halt to walk
- ☐ Athlete steers the horse at the walk
- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from walk to halt

Riding at the Trot/Jog

- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from walk to trot/jog
- ☐ Athlete steers the horse at the trot/jog
- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from trot/jog to walk

Riding at the Canter/Lope

- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from walk or trot/jog to canter/lope
- ☐ Athlete steers the horse at the canter/lope
- ☐ Athlete performs the transition from canter/lope to trot/jog or walk

Riding patterns (at any gait)

- ☐ Half circle to reverse
- ☐ Circle
- ☐ Diagonal line across the arena

Riding in a group

- ☐ Riders walk, trot/jog, or canter/lope, keeping proper spacing between horses
- ☐ Riders reverse
- ☐ Riders line up in the center of the arena

Dressage

- ☐ Rider executes transitions and figures at a specified letter (as determined by the coach)
- ☐ Halt at X and salute
- ☐ Turn onto the centerline

Showmanship

- ☐ Athlete demonstrates the inspection positions
- ☐ Athlete demonstrates correct leading (at the appropriate gait for the level of the athlete)
- ☐ Athlete demonstrates turning or backing the horse

Western Horsemanship

- ☐ Rider executes patterns (as determined by the coach)
- ☐ Rider demonstrates riding on the rail with other horses

Working Trail

- ☐ Rider executes obstacles (as determined by the coach)

Equitation (English or Western)

- ☐ Position of the upper body, including head and arms
- ☐ Position of the legs
- ☐ Holding the reins correctly



Daily Performance Record

Another tool which may be helpful is the Daily Performance Record, which is designed for the coach to keep an accurate record of the athlete's daily performances as they learn a sports skill. There are several reasons why the coach can benefit from using the Daily Performance Record.

1. The record becomes a permanent documentation of the athlete's progress
2. Helps the coach establish measurable consistency in the athlete's training program.
3. The record allows the coach to be flexible during the actual teaching and coaching session because he can break down the skills into specific, smaller tasks that meet the individual needs of each athlete.
4. The record helps the coach choose proper skills teaching methods, correct conditions and criteria for evaluating the athlete's performance of the skills.

Using the Daily Performance Record

At the top of the record, the coach enters his name; the athlete's name, and their equestrian event. If more than one coach works with the athlete, they should enter the dates that they work with the athlete next to their names.

Before the training session begins, the coach decides what skills will be covered. The coach makes this decision based on the athlete's age, the athlete's interests, and his mental and physical abilities. The skill needs to be a statement or a description of the specific exercise that the athlete must perform. The coach enters the skill on the top line of the left-hand column. Each subsequent skill is entered after the athlete masters the previous skill. Of course, more than one sheet may be used to record all of the skills involved. Also, if the athlete cannot perform a prescribed skill, the coach may break down the skill into smaller tasks that will allow for the athlete's success at the new skill.

Conditions and Criteria for Mastering

After the coach enters the skill, they must then decide on the conditions and criteria by which the athlete must master the skill. Conditions are special circumstances, which define the manner in which the athlete must perform a skill. For example, "given a demonstration, and with assistance". The coach needs to always operate under the assumption that the ultimate conditions in which the athlete masters a skill are, "upon command and without assistance", and therefore, does not have to enter these conditions in the record next to the skill entry. Ideally, the coach needs to arrange the skills and conditions such that the athlete gradually learns to perform the skill while upon command and without assistance.

Criteria are the standards that determine how well the skill must be performed. The coach needs to determine a standard that realistically suits the athlete's mental and physical abilities. For example, "ride around the whole arena". Given the varied nature of skills, the criteria might involve many different types of standards, such as – the gait of the horse, transitions, the level of assistance required for the horse and/or rider.

Dates of Sessions and Levels of Instruction Used

The coach may work on one task for a couple of days, and may use several methods of instruction during that time to progress to the point where the athlete performs the task upon command and without assistance. To establish a consistent curriculum for the athlete, the coach must record the dates he works on particular tasks, and must enter the methods of instruction that were used on those dates.



Creating Meaningful Involvement in Unified Equestrian Events®

In Equestrian, unified competition is offered in Team Relays and Drill Team. In training sessions, unified partners can be helpful in teaching athletes to ride in a group, keeping safe spacing between horses on the rail, and lining up in the center of the arena. Unified partners who are accomplished riders can demonstrate correct riding position and accurate performance of figures.



Unified Sports® embraces the philosophy and principles of Special Olympics. When selecting your Unified team you want to achieve meaningful involvement at the beginning, during, and end of your sport season. Unified teams are organized to provide meaningful involvement for all athletes and partners. Every teammate should play a role and have the opportunity to contribute to the team. Meaningful involvement also refers to the quality of interaction and competition within a Unified Sports® team. Achieving meaningful involvement by all teammates on the team ensures a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.



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Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition

Principles of Effective Training Sessions

Be organized	Athletes pay attention when sessions move smoothly from one activity to the next
Create clear, concise goals	Learning improves when athletes know what is expected of them
Give clear, concise instructions	Demonstrate – increase accuracy of instruction
Record progress	You and your athletes chart progress together
Give positive feedback	Emphasize and reward things the athlete is doing well
Provide variety	Vary exercises – prevent boredom
Encourage enjoyment	Training and competition is fun, help keep it this way for you and your athletes
Create progressions	Learning is increased when information progresses from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Known to unknown – discovering new things successfully• Simple to complex – seeing that “I” can do it• General to specific – this is why I am working so hard
Plan maximum use of resources	Use what you have and improvise for equipment that you do not have – think creatively
Allow for individual differences	Different athletes, different learning rates, different capacities.



Tips for Conducting Successful Training Sessions

- ☐ Assign assistant coaches their roles and responsibilities in accordance to your training plan.
- ☐ When possible, have all equipment prepared before the athletes arrive.
- ☐ Introduce and acknowledge coaches and athletes.
- ☐ Review intended program with everyone. Keep athletes informed of changes in schedule or activities.
- ☐ Alter the plan according to weather and the facility in order to accommodate the needs of the athletes.
- ☐ Change activities before the athletes become bored, and lose interest.
- ☐ Keep everyone busy with an exercise.
- ☐ Devote the end of the practice to a fun activity that can incorporate challenge and fun, always giving the athletes something to look forward to at the end of practice.
- ☐ If an activity is going well, it is often useful to stop the activity while interest is high.
- ☐ Summarize the session and announce arrangements for next session.
- ☐ Keep the **fun** in fundamentals.



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Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition

Tips for Conducting Safe Training Sessions

Coaches have a responsibility to ensure that athletes know, understand, and appreciate the risks of Equestrian sports. The safety and well-being of athletes are the coaches' primary concerns. Equestrian is not a dangerous sport, but accidents do occur when coaches forget to take safety precautions. It is the head coach's responsibility to minimize the occurrence of injuries by providing safe conditions and appropriate horses.

- ☐ Establish clear rules for behavior at your first practice and enforce them.
 1. No horseplay or loud noise around the stable or riding arena.
 2. Wear appropriate attire, including long pants, shoes with heels, and safety helmets.
 3. Respect the horse and obey all safety rules for working around horses.
 4. Work with the horse only under proper supervision.
- ☐ Establish safety rules and procedures:
 1. Maintain a well-stocked first aid kit
 2. Train all coaches and athletes in first aid and emergency procedures. Have someone trained in first aid and CPR at every practice.
 3. Have a plan for inclement weather
 4. Do a safety inspection of the stable and arena before the athletes arrive.
 5. Inspect the tack to make sure it is clean and in good repair
 6. Make sure athletes drink water, especially in hot weather.
- ☐ Train to improve the general fitness level of your riders. Physically fit riders are effective riders.
- ☐ Make sure that riders are matched with appropriate horses.
- ☐ Provide adequate support (horse handlers and side walkers)..



Special Olympics

EQUESTRIAN COACHING GUIDE

Teaching Equestrian Skills



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Warm-up

A warm up period is the first part of every training session, as well as preparation for competition. The importance of a warm up, prior to exercise, cannot be overstressed. Warming up raises the body temperature and prepares the muscles, nervous system, tendons, ligaments, and the cardiovascular system for upcoming stretches and exercises. The chances of injury are greatly reduced by increasing muscle elasticity.

For equestrian sports, it is important for the horse and rider both to be properly warmed up. It is the coach's responsibility to know what type of warm-up is best suited for the horse on any given day. The rider will benefit from mounted and unmounted exercises. The warm-up is a good time for the coach to focus on the rider's strength, suppleness, and body awareness.

Mounted warm-up exercises give the athlete an opportunity to become acquainted with the horse, without the demands of actually riding. The athlete will gain self confidence as he/she interacts with the horse and learns to move freely while mounted.

Warming Up:

- ♦ Raises body temperature
- ♦ Increases heart and respiratory rate
- ♦ Prepares the muscles and nervous system for exercise
- ♦ Stretches the muscles to increase the athlete's range of motion
- ♦ Creates an awareness of correct alignment and body position
- ♦ Begins the practice session with fun and energy

The warm up may be different for each practice session. On cold days, the rider may need a brisk walk around the arena before mounting the horse. On a hot day, stretching exercises may be more appropriate. The coach should choose exercises which will help the rider achieve an elegant position and an effective seat in the saddle. A warm up period will include the following basic sequence and components.

Activity	Purpose	Time (minimum)
Strengthening exercises	Develops muscle strength, especially of the core abdominal muscles	5 minutes
Stretching	Increases range of motion	5 minutes
Body awareness	Introduces movements that will later be incorporated into riding	Depends on the needs of the rider

Strengthening

In order to maintain a stable position and ride effectively, an athlete must have strength in the core abdominal muscles, the arms, and the legs. Cross-training is helpful, but there are many exercises the rider can do on the horse that will develop strength. Please refer to the Strengthening section for more in depth information.

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Stretching

Stretching is one of the most critical parts of the warm-up, especially for an athlete who is not naturally supple. Not only are flexible muscles stronger, healthier and less prone to injury, but they allow the athlete to have an elegant position in the saddle. Please refer to the Stretching section for more in depth information.

Body Awareness Exercises

All skills can be broken down into parts, and it is often helpful for a rider to learn new skills on the ground, before trying them on the horse. Many exercises can be done on a stability ball, which will teach the rider to control each part of his/her body independently, while maintaining a stable position. Athletes will have more fun and experience more success if they can learn complex skills in small segments. When practicing riding skills in an unmounted setting, the athlete can focus on learning the skills without having to maintain their balance on a moving horse, or start, stop, or steer the horse. Make each small segment a goal to be accomplished and reward the attempt, whether the athlete accomplishes the complete skill or not.

Warm-Up Activities

Listed below are numerous warm-up activities that will help the athlete:

- Gain confidence moving on and around horses
- Develop core strength and stability
- Increase flexibility
- Become more aware of a correct riding position
- Learn to use independent aids

Many of the exercises are shown both on the stability ball and on the horse. They can also be adapted for the athlete to practice at home sitting on a chair.



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Around the World

The athlete begins facing forward on the horse, feet out of the stirrups, and then, lifts one leg over the neck of the horse to sit sideways. Next, lifts the other leg over the croup of the horse to sit backwards. The athlete then lifts the first leg over the croup to sit sideways, and finishes by lifting the other leg over the neck to face forward. This exercise should be performed in both directions.

For this exercise, a leader must be in place to keep the horse still, and a spotter in place to assist the athlete.





Hug and Roll Up

The athlete rounds forward to hug the horse's neck, and then, rolls up through the back, one vertebra at a time.

For this exercise, a leader should be in place to keep the horse still.





Stretching & Strengthening Exercises

Flexibility is especially important for athletes participating in equestrian sports, because a supple rider will not only look better in the saddle, but will also be more effective in influencing the horse. Flexibility is achieved through stretching. As with other parts of the warm-up, stretching exercises can be performed on and off the horse. To achieve the maximum benefit, the athletes must do the stretches with correct body position and alignment.

It is also important to breathe deeply while stretching. As you lean into the stretch, exhale. Once the stretching point is reached, continue to inhale and exhale while holding the stretch. Encourage the athletes to make stretching a part of their daily lives. Regular, daily stretching has been demonstrated to:

1. Increase the length of the muscle-tendon unit
2. Increase joint range of motion
3. Reduce muscle tension
4. Develop body awareness
5. Promote increased circulation
6. Improve self image and overall wellness

Riders must have a strong core in order to sit in the saddle with a correct position. They must have the strength in their arms and legs to influence the horse's direction, gait, and balance. When doing strengthening exercises, it is important to keep the body in alignment. A few repetitions with good body position are much more beneficial than many repetitions with bad form.

Neck

Exercises to warm-up the neck will teach the athlete to use the head in different positions. It is important for the body to remain motionless, in alignment, when the athlete moves his/her head. When riding, the athlete will move the head to look in the direction the horse is travelling. Note –when doing neck exercises never circle the head in a complete rotation or move the head forcefully.

For these exercises, a leader should be in place to keep the horse still.



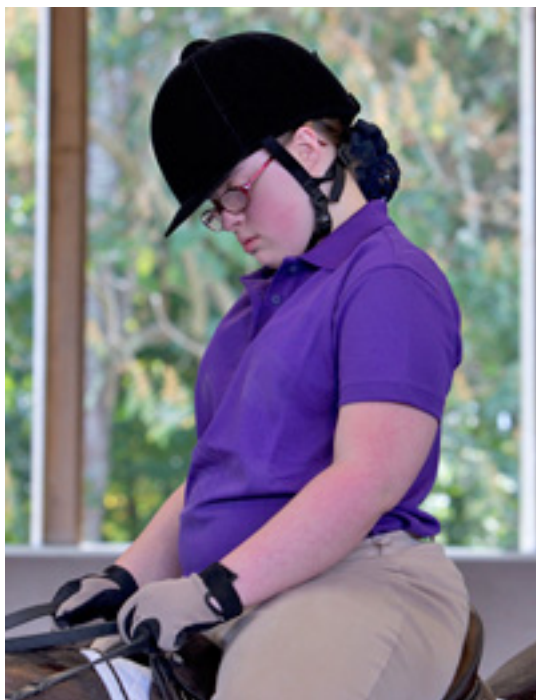
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Look Up and Down

When the athlete looks up, it is important not to arch the back and flare the ribs. When the athlete looks down, it is important to keep the back straight, not collapsing.





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Look Side to Side

When the athlete looks side to side, it is important to keep the torso still and in alignment.



It is incorrect for the athlete to turn the shoulders when she moves her head.





Arms and Shoulders

To achieve a correct riding position, the athlete must have good shoulder flexibility, which is important for an elegant carriage of the upper body. The rider must learn to use his/her arms independently of the rest of the body. The warm-up exercises will carry over into riding, when the rider must maintain a still upper body while doing arm movements such as saluting in a dressage test or steering the horse.

For these exercises, a leader should be in place to keep the horse still.

Arm Circles

The athlete extends the arms to the sides and circles the arms forward and backwards, first small, and then large circles.





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Roll Shoulders

The athlete can begin by lifting the shoulders up and down (shoulder shrug). Next, circle the shoulders forward and back. Finally, the athlete can circle one shoulder at a time, keeping the body still and in alignment, with equal weight on both seatbones.



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Reach Up

The athlete stretches tall, reaching the arms as high as possible without lifting the shoulders.





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Torso and Back

In equestrian sports, torso and back flexibility are very important. The rider must have core strength to maintain a secure position, yet have the suppleness to follow the movement of the horse. A supple torso and back will give the athlete the appearance of moving effortlessly and in harmony with the horse.

For these exercises, a leader should be in place to keep the horse still.

Rotation



Twist with arms crossed in front

To begin learning rotation, it is best for the athlete to hold the arms in a “genie” position, with one arm stacked on top of the other in front of the body. In this position, the athlete can learn to rotate the torso, not just swing the arms to the side. It is important to keep the hips still and facing forward as the upper body twists to the side.



Correct



Correct



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Incorrect





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Twist with arms extended to the sides

Only when the athlete can keep his/her hips still as the torso twists should this exercise be done with the arms extended to the sides. Make sure the rotation comes from the torso and the arms are not just swinging to the side.



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Hinge Back

A good exercise for developing core strength is the hinge back. The athlete can practice this exercise on a stability ball as well as on a horse. It is important for the athlete to grow tall through the crown of the head and to keep a straight body, not flaring the ribs or collapsing the torso. The athlete should only lean back as far as he/she can maintain the correct alignment.



Incorrect – Arched Back



Incorrect – Collapsing



Correct





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Legs and Feet

Strength and flexibility of the legs and feet are of the utmost importance for riders. The athlete must be supple enough to put his/her legs and feet in the proper position, and strong enough to maintain that position and influence the horse.

For these exercises, a leader should be in place to keep the horse still.

Touch Opposite Foot

The athlete leans forward and reaches one arm across the horse's neck to touch the foot on the opposite side. This exercise is a great stretch for the athlete's whole body. If the athlete is timid, a spotter should be close to give confidence and insure safety.



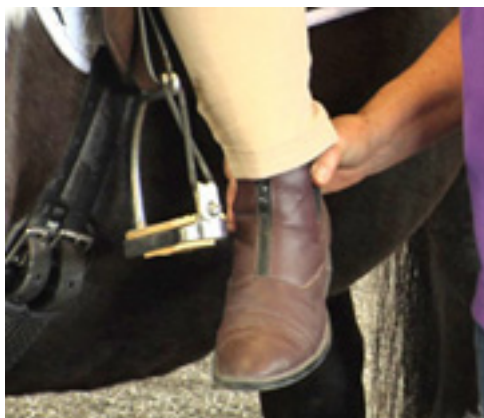
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Point and Flex

With the feet out of the stirrups, the athlete points the toes toward the ground, and then, flexes the feet so the toes point upward. It is important to keep the feet parallel to the horse's side. This exercise will help the athlete develop suppleness in the ankles and also bring an awareness of the correct position of the feet for riding.





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Body Awareness

If a rider has difficulty moving body parts independently on the horse, it is helpful to practice on a stability ball, because the ball reacts similarly to the horse when the rider makes a movement that is out of balance. Many riding skills can even be taught first on the ball and later transferred successfully to the horse.

Bounce and Halt

Sitting straight, with the pelvis and back in alignment and arms in the riding position, the athlete bounces on the ball several times and then halts. During the halt, the athlete should sit tall and scoop the seat bones slightly forward.



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Independent Hands

The athlete sits on the ball, holding the ends of a stretch band as reins. An assistant holds the center part of the stretch band. As the athlete bounces on the ball, she must try to stabilize her hands and keep an even contact on the “reins”. In order to keep her hands still, the athlete must sit straight and tall, with her core abdominal muscles engaged.





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Pulling on the Reins

The athlete sits on the ball, holding the ends of a stretch band as reins. An assistant holds the center part of the stretch band. As the athlete bounces on the ball, the assistant pulls on the stretch band in different directions, trying to pull the athlete out of position. In order to maintain her position, the athlete must engage her core abdominal muscles and keep her shoulders back and down.



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Hips Moving Side to Side

While sitting on the ball, the athlete moves her hips side to side. This exercise is good for loosening the hips and lower back, but is not the correct way to ride. On the video, notice how the ball moves from side to side as the rider's hips move. A horse will react in much the same way.





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Arched and Straight Back

Sitting straight and tall on the ball, the athlete arches the lower back, and then returns to a neutral position, which is the correct alignment of the pelvis for riding. Riding with an arched back can put stress on the lower back, causing pain. The athlete must learn to engage her core abdominal muscles in order to keep her pelvis in a neutral position when she rides. Practicing on the stability ball can help the rider develop this strength and give her an awareness pelvic alignment.





Warm-up - Quick Reference Guidelines

Be Systematic

Start at the top of body and work your way down.

Check body position and alignment

Riders must always have the correct body position and alignment. Remember, stretching and strengthening exercises are also training exercises for riding.

Relate warm-up exercises to riding skills

Remind the athletes that the exercises during the warm-up are important for developing strength and suppleness that will make them better riders. In addition, some exercises will be the same motions they will repeat later when they are on the horse.

Emphasize fluidity and suppleness in stretches

Make slow, progressive stretches.

Do not bounce or jerk to stretch farther.

Never force an athlete to stretch farther than is comfortable.

Use Variety

Make warming up fun!

Exercise on and off the horse.

Breathe Naturally

Do not hold your breath.

Use breathing to increase the amount of stretch.

Allow for Individual Differences

Athletes start and progress at different levels.

Reward any attempt to improve strength, flexibility, and body awareness.

Be aware that some athletes need to focus more on stretching, while others may need strengthening.

Work on Strength and Flexibility Regularly

Do strength and stretching exercises during every practice session.

Encourage athletes to practice unmounted exercises at home



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Teaching Equestrian Skills

Cool Down

The cool-down is as important as the warm up, however this portion of the workout is often ignored. The cool-down gradually reduces the body temperature and heart rate and speeds the recovery process before the next training session or competitive event. Since riding is not a sport that requires constant aerobic activity, especially at the lower levels, the cool-down is most often a good time for the coach and athlete to talk about the session or competition. It is also a good time for the athlete to bond with the horse, and learn grooming and stable management skills. Please refer to section on Stable Management for more information.

Activity	Purpose	Time (minimum)
Dismount	Finishes the lesson with good horsemanship	5 minutes
Walk horse to stable	Allows rider to practice leading skills	
Untack horse	Teaches horsemanship	5 - 10 minutes
	Improves strength and stretch	
Groom horse	Teaches horsemanship	10 minutes
	Allows athlete to interact with the horse	
	Teaches motor skills	



Stable Management

For athletes to become true equestrians, they must learn stable management skills.

Chores such as cleaning stalls and sweeping the barn aisle teach responsibility and add to the athlete's general physical fitness.



Working with horses on the ground instills confidence in the athlete.

Athletes enjoy grooming their horses and can take an active part in preparing their mounts for lessons and competitions.

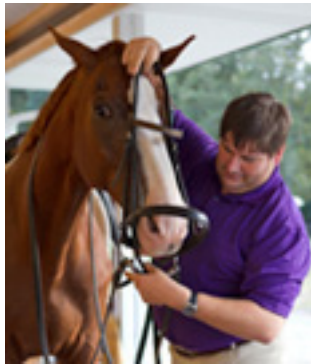
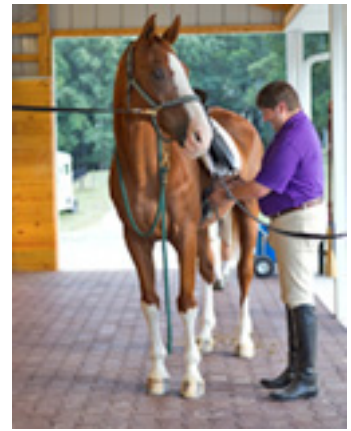
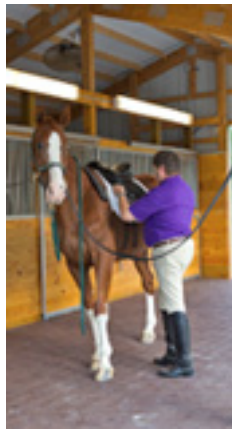




Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills

Athletes who are capable should be encouraged to saddle and bridle their horses.



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Tack

The tack used for Special Olympics should meet the requirements for each separate discipline. FEI guidelines are followed, except when special adaptations are necessary for the safety of the athlete.

One Special Olympics requirement is that a halter/headcollar must be used over or under the bridle. This allows a leader to assist the athlete in controlling the horse.



Safety stirrups must be used at all times. Pictured below are examples of safety stirrups for both English and Western saddles.

Safety stirrups for English saddles

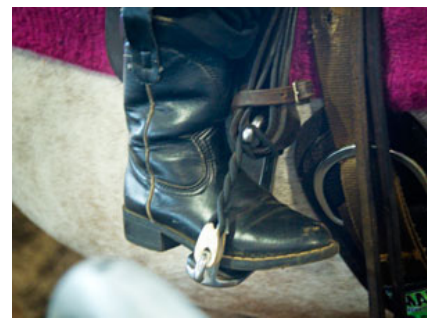
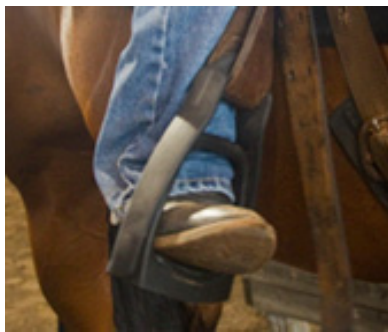




Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills

Safety stirrups for Western saddles



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Leading

Athletes should be encouraged to lead their horses from the ground. This gives them self-confidence in working around horses and teaches them skills that will be useful in competition classes, such as Showmanship.

The first step is teaching the athlete to put the halter/headcollar on the horse. This should be done under the supervision of a knowledgeable horse person.



When teaching the athlete to lead, the coach must insist on safety: walking at the horse's shoulder, using an appropriate length lead rope that is never wrapped around the hand or dragging on the ground. The coach can attach a lead rope to the opposite side and assist the athlete until he/she is in control of the horse.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills

Athletes in wheelchairs can also be taught to lead their horses. It is important for the horse to be comfortable around a wheelchair before the athlete leads from the chair.





Safety – Leaders and Sidewalkers



Safety is the primary consideration in equestrian training and competition. Safe horses are imperative! Many riders require additional assistance, such as leaders/horse handlers and sidewalkers. Refer to the Planning an Equestrian Training Season section of the Guide for more information.





Mounting and Dismounting

Safety is the primary consideration in mounting and dismounting. The following has been reprinted from Aspects and Answers, A Manual for Therapeutic Horseback Riding Programs.

Mounting

One of the most important single phases of the riding program for the handicapped is the mounting procedure. Though relatively simple for the agile non-handicapped rider, mounting for the handicapped rider can be complex.

The difficulty or ease of mounting depends on the availability of a correctly constructed ramp, training of the mounts, the riding instructor, volunteers, and attitude of the rider. Also, the mounting procedure used will depend on the handicapping condition, weight of rider, assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, walkers or canes. Every mounting procedure for a physically handicapped rider should be designed by the physical therapist and discussed with the instructor before implementation. Mounting procedures will change with the increased ability of the disabled rider. However, he may initially be apprehensive about getting on a horse or pony thus causing tension and extreme muscle tightness. These factors can make mounting a more difficult procedure.

As the rider develops more confidence in the instructor and/or physical therapist and horse or pony, mounting procedures will become easier for everyone. Many adult riders, after the first time, can come up with an easier way to mount. Listen to them; allow them to do it their way as long as it is safe. A case in point was a spina bifida rider who liked to get out of the wheelchair and crawl up the ramp to his horse. Then, he would grab the pommel and cantle and pull himself up to a prone position across the saddle. At that point, the instructor and spotter would turn him, so he could push himself up to a sitting position. It was very safe, and he liked the feeling of being somewhat independent.

There are eight basic mounting procedures:

1. Total Lift

The total lift should be done only with a small child who can be lifted easily from a chair. In lifting, the instructor or physical therapist uses his legs and not his back. Remove, if possible, the left arm of the chair. In a squatting position, place the left arm under the rider's legs slightly above the knee; place the right arm across the rider's upper back and right hand on rib cage. From the squatting position with back straight, and using legs, push upward lifting the rider clear of the chair.

Rather than lifting the rider upwards to a horse/pony from the ground, it is much easier to walk part way up a mounting ramp or step on a mounting block to a position where the rider can be lowered to the saddle. Once mounted, support the rider's left leg with the left hand and the back of the rider with the right hand. The off-side spotter receives the right leg, and with his left hand, supports the rider's back. At the same time, the volunteer slowly moves the horse/pony forward until the stirrups clear the ramp or block. Then the rider's feet are placed in the stirrups.

2. Assistive Lift From Wheelchair (near side)

Position the horse/pony in the ramp with the spotter on the off side. With the leader standing squarely in front of the mount, the leader should be ready to lower the mount's head when the instructor tells him to do so. Wheel the chair so rider and chair are facing towards the head of the horse.



Position chair as close to his flank as possible and lock the wheels. Facing the rider, place both hands under his shoulder blades, around the back, but not under armpits; lock wrists if appropriate. The instructor places his knees against the rider's, lifts forward from the chair, pivots the rider, and lowers him to a side-sitting position on the saddle. Since the instructor will be facing the rider and both hands will still be in the original position, the off-side spotter paces his hands around the rider's hips and assists in obtaining a correct side-sit position on the saddle.

Make sure at this point the leader lowers the horse's head, so the right leg of the rider does not have to be lifted up to pass over the crest of the neck. This can result in tipping the rider backwards.

To prevent the rider from slipping off, he must be kept in the center of the saddle while being turned from side-sit to the astride position. To implement the turn from side-sit to astride, move the left hand to the rider's legs, keeping a supporting hand on the back of the rider, and turn him to the astride position. The spotter on the off-side will then take the right leg of the rider, as it comes across the crest, still keeping his left hand on the back for support. The instructor and spotter maintain their position with the rider, while the leader slowly moves the mount forward until the stirrups clear the ramp. Then, the legs of the rider are lowered and his feet are placed in the stirrups. Though wheelchair-bound, most riders can manage this lift; although more complicated, it is preferred over the total lift. The assistive-lift procedure is reversed for mounting from the "off" side.

3. Partial Assistive Wheelchair Transfer

The transfer by a rider, with partial assistance from the near or off side, is done in much the same manner as the regular lift from the chair. With the partial-assistive transfer, the rider is achieving a progressive goal. The side of the ramp from which the transfer is being done, off or near, will determine which arm rests and foot rests are removed. The chair is placed facing toward the head of the horse and as close to the barrel of the mount as possible. The leader makes sure the head of the horse is lowered appropriately.

The rider then takes hold of the pommel with the hand nearest the mount, and with one hand from the instructor supporting the back, moves to a side-sit position on the saddle. A second volunteer on the ramp moves the wheelchair out of the way. The instructor assists in lifting the legs, with the rider helping by using his hand on the pommel. Again, the legs are raised slightly, to be clear of the ramp until the mount is led forward, so the feet can be placed in the stirrups.

A spotter on the opposite side of the mount assists the rider by supporting his back and seat in the saddle as the rider passes his legs over the lowered crest. Progressive development of strength in arms and legs enables the rider to become more independent in the mounting procedure.

4. Wheelchair Transfer with Minimum Assistance

The transfer from chair to saddle by the rider can be poetry in motion. In this transfer, the only assistance needed is to wheel the chair up to the top of the ramp, place it in locked position, and remove the arm and foot rests, if possible. Once this has been done, stand aside and allow the rider to do his "own thing". Usually, a rider who can do this transfer has been taught the procedure in rehabilitation training. Sliding forward in the chair, he will lift his right leg over the saddle and move to a normal astride position on the saddle. Make sure the rider's legs are supported while the mount is being moved forward; then feet can be placed in stirrups irons. The progress from dependence to independence is marvelous to behold and should be encouraged – never discouraged.



5. Crutch Walker Mount from Ramp

No matter what side a crutch walker will be mounting from, near or off, the instructor must remember not to let him start up the ramp alone. To provide support for a crutch walker, who might lose his balance and begin to fall, the instructor should have one knee bent and slightly behind the rider's legs. The instructor will then catch the rider on his knee and balance him until the crutch walker can get his crutches and stand again.

With a near side mount, once on the ramp, the crutch walker will move to the side of the horse. The instructor then places his left arm around the rider's chest while he removes the right crutch. The rider places his right hand on the cantle of the saddle, and the instructor switches to the right arm around rider's chest. The rider hands the left crutch to a volunteer. Then, the rider takes his reins and places his hand on the pommel. With or without assistance, the left leg is raised to the level of the stirrup, and the rider's foot placed well into the stirrup. The instructor then changes hands and places his left arm across the rider's chest using the right arm to assist the right leg over the croup.

If the crutch walker cannot mount normally with leg over croup, the rider turns around and side sits on the saddle, facing the instructor. At that moment, the spotter holds the rider around the hips to make sure he is square on the saddle while the instructor takes the crutches. The instructor lifts both legs, and with the spotter, turns the rider in the saddles so he is facing forward. At this time, the legs are separated into the astride position.

Reminder: Make sure the volunteer has lowered the mount's head. The horse/pony is positioned in the ramp so the rider, in the sitting position, is higher than the mount.

6. Normal Mount Partial Assistance

This mounting procedure is used with many handicaps, depending on individual ability, both in strength and mobility. Generally, mounting is done from the ramp, either off or near side; however, mounts from block or ground are not uncommon.

Often, this method is used by ambulatory riders with various disabilities, physical and non-physical.

Position the mount in the ramp to allow the rider to place his foot in the stirrup with minimum effort. The instructor holds the rider with left or right arm around the chest, depending on off or near side mounting. He then assists in placing the left or right leg over the croup and positions the rider in the saddle. Many riders, who begin their lessons by mounting in this manner, will progress to normal mounting; first from the ramp, ultimately from the ground.

7. Normal Mount Minimum Assistance

Minimum assistance is similar to procedures described in Number 6. However, distinction is provided by the amount of direct physical assistance required to achieve a normal mount (foot with other leg over croup). Riders requiring minimum assistance range from needing a balance-boost of leg or hip from a single volunteer to those who require teamwork of several assistants.



8. Normal Mount

For the able-bodied, in addition to rein control, a normal mount includes the left foot being placed in the stirrup, the body being elevated, and the right leg smoothly passing over the croup.

In essence, this procedure is the guideline for normal mounting for the handicapped.



Dismounting

For an able-bodied person to dismount, it is a simple matter of taking his feet out of the stirrups, swinging his right leg over the croup, holding his weight on both arms and dropping to the ground with both feet hitting the ground simultaneously. Some people prefer to keep the left foot in the stirrup, bring their right leg over until both feet are even; then they remove the left foot and slide down hitting the ground with both feet. Both procedures are correct, but for the handicapped, it is strongly advised to have them remove both feet at the same time from the stirrups before dismounting. Four of the more commonly used dismounts are as follows:

1. Total Lift Dismount

For those who have been mounted by a total lift or from a wheelchair with both legs being in front of saddle (crest mount), dismounting, in most cases, will be done the same way, but not in the ramp. The dismount should be done in an area where there is room to manipulate wheelchairs. The spotter on the off side takes the right foot out of the stirrup and supports the leg with his right hand. His left hand supports the back of the rider. The instructor does the same on the near side, and then places his left hand under both legs, right arm around the rider's back, and lifts him down. Then, the instructor bends at the knees and places the rider in the chair.

2. Crest Dismount

For the larger rider who cannot dismount, everything is done the same until the point of the total lift. This procedure is advised: The rider places his left hand over his legs and grasps the handhold, or mane, as the spotter on the off side lifts the right leg. The instructor then takes both legs in his left hand and assists the rider in rotating hips until his body is lying down across the saddle. The rider slides down until sitting in the wheelchair, with the instructor's support (scissoring the rider).

This is where the training of the horse with the wheelchairs really produces results. The wheelchair's front wheels are under the barrel of the animal, and the seat of chair is just slightly away from his barrel. This is a very simple dismount; it sounds difficult but isn't if practiced correctly.

3. Croup Dismount

The third method of dismounting for children or adults, who have mounted by sitting down on the saddle sideways, is to have the spotter and instructor remove their feet from the stirrups. At this point, the rider leans down on the horse's crest as the instructor and spotter lift his legs, in unison, up to the croup. With the right arm on the legs guiding them into a downward position, the instructor, with his left arm, assists the rider to turn so his upper body is lying across the saddle. Then he is slowly lowered to the wheelchair, or to a standing position, and held by the instructor until his crutches are given to him.

4. Normal Dismount

The fourth method of dismounting is a normal dismount with both feet out of the stirrups and either vaulting off, or sliding off. This can be used for many riders, who use the ramp or block to mount, but don't use crutches or wheelchairs and are capable of walking short distances.



Total Lift Mount from Wheelchair (Near Side)
(To dismount a rider, reverse procedures 1 through 5)



1. Child lifted from chair



2. Child placed on saddle



3. Legs over crest.



4. Legs down into astride position



5. Positioning Legs



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Teaching Equestrian Skills

Assistive Lift from Wheelchair (Near Side)



1. Lift from Wheelchair (note hand position)



2. Rider pivoted to side-sit position



3. Legs lifted over crest



4. Legs lowered to astride position



5. Repositioning rider in preparation for ramp departure and stirrup adjustment



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Wheelchair Transfer – Minimum Assistance



1. Rider begins transfer from chair



2. Rider receives minimum assistance in achieving astride position



3. Rider achieves astride position with assistance for balance



4. Re-positioning in preparation for ramp departure and stirrup adjustment



Crutch Walker Mount from Ramp



1. Crutch walker mount – full ramp



2. Partial side-sit



3. Right leg over crest



4. Preparing for ramp departure



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Normal Mount – Partial Assistance from Half Ramp



1. Partial assist – begin mount



2. Partial assist to achieve astride position



Normal Mount – Partial Assistance

(To dismount, remove both feet from stirrups and reverse procedures 1-4)



1. Assist in placing foot in stirrup



2. Note left and right hand position in assisting rider



3. Assisting rider on to saddle



4. Assisting rider in achieving astride position



Normal Mount



1. Left foot in stirrup



2. Preparing to lift up on to saddle.



Crest Dismount



1. Legs lifted up over crest



2. Rider reaches left hand over and grasps hand hold or mane



3. Rider rotates over into prone position



4. Rider assisted down



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5. Rider guided into chair



6. Dismount completed; horse ready to be led out



Croup Dismount



1. Rider leans forward, legs extended over croup



2. As rider pivots in saddle, legs are extended downward



3. Rider assisted to ground



4. Rider steadied until balance regained



Total Lift Dismount



1. Both legs lifted over crest



2. Lift to wheelchair



English Equitation



In Equitation classes, the athlete is judged on his/her position and ability to control the horse. Refer to the position and riding sections below for more information.



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Dressage

The object of dressage is the development of the Horse into a happy Athlete through harmonious education. As a result, it makes the Horse calm, supple, loose and flexible, but also confident, attentive and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with the Athlete. (FEI)

In all work, even at the halt, the Horse must be “on the bit.” A Horse is said to be “on the bit” when the neck is more or less raised and arched according to the stage of training and the extension or collection of the pace, accepting the bridle with a light and consistent soft submissive contact. The head should remain in a steady position, as a rule slightly in front of the vertical, with a supple poll as the highest point of the neck, and no resistance should be offered to the Athlete. (FEI)

The intent of this part of the Equestrian Coaching Guide is not to teach coaches how to train horses for dressage. That is a job for a professional dressage trainer. Before instructing Special Olympics athletes, coaches should have a solid background in the principles of classical dressage for the horse and rider. In this section, we will give you some basic information about the rider’s position, the geometry of the dressage arena, how to ride figures accurately in the arena, and ways to make dressage more accessible to Special Olympics athletes.



Rider's Position

The Athlete should be well-balanced, elastic, sitting deep in the center of the saddle, smoothly absorbing the movement of the Horse with the loins and hips, supple thighs with the legs steady and stretched well down. The heels should be the lowest point. The upper part of the body should be tall and supple. The contact should be independent from the Athlete's seat. The hands should be carried steadily close together, with the thumb as the highest point and a straight line from the supple elbow through the hand to the Horse's mouth. The elbows should be close to the body. All these criteria enable the Athlete to follow the movements of the Horse smoothly and freely. (FEI)

Rider's Position – Body



Correct position – The ear, shoulder, hip, and heel are in alignment.



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Common faults:



Arched back



Rounded shoulders, collapsing forward

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Leaning forward, chin jutting forward



Leaning back, incorrect head position to counterbalance



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Collapsing to the side



Collapsing



Straight

Collapsing to the side on the ball demonstrates how the rider's action will influence the horse, pushing it sideways. Sitting straight on the ball demonstrates how the horse remains underneath the rider's weight.

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Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Body Position

Error	Correction
Rider's back is arched	<p>Hold a riding whip behind the rider's back and ask him/her to make all parts of the back touch the whip</p> <p>Practice the arched and straight back exercise on the ball, as shown above</p> <p>Develop core strength to maintain correct position of the pelvis</p>
Rider's back is collapsed	<p>Hold a riding whip behind the rider's back and ask him/her to make all parts of the back touch the whip</p> <p>Practice sitting up straight on a ball or chair</p> <p>Develop core strength to maintain erect body position</p>
Rider leans to one side or collapses on one side	<p>Have the rider look in a mirror to see his/her position.</p> <p>In a chair or on a ball, have the rider sit with his/her hands under the seat bones. Lean to one side or collapse on one side and feel the weight distributed unequally on the seat bones</p> <p>Develop core strength.</p>



Rider's Position – Arms & Hands

The rider's arms should hang loosely by the sides, with a right angle bend in the elbow. The athlete's arms and reins should form a straight line from the elbow to the bit.

The hands should be upright, with the thumbs on top, closed on the reins.



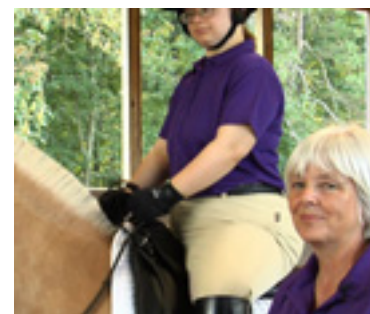
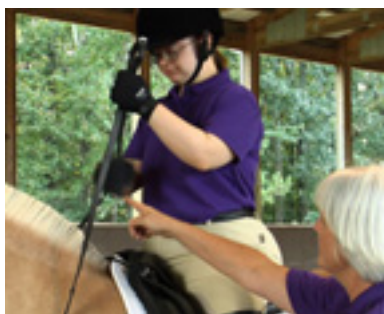
Reins too long



Arms too straight



Elbows Back



How to hold the reins – The rider should hold the reins between the fourth finger and the little finger, with the thumb closed on top.

How to shorten reins - The rider holds both reins in the left hand, slides the right hand to the desired length, and then slides the left hand. The rider should never drop the reins completely.

It is important for the rider to be able to use his/her arms independently of the rest of the body. When the rider moves the arms to give a rein aid, the torso and shoulders should not follow, but remain strong and still. Refer to the Independent Hands exercise in the Warm-up section of this Guide for an exercise on the stability ball which will teach the rider to stabilize his/her hands.



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Correct arm position

The rider should be able to use the arm to give a rein aid without moving the body.



Incorrect



Correct

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Correct



Incorrect



Correct hand position



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Piano hands

Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Arm Position

Error	Correction
Rider's hands are too low, with the elbows straight. Riders hands are too high	Have the rider rest the little fingers of both hands on the horse's withers or on the saddle pad
Elbows are too far back	Have the rider's upper arms touch his/her sides
Rider has piano hands (palms facing down)	Have the rider rest the little fingers of both hands on the horse's withers or on the saddle pad Tell the rider to imagine holding ice cream cones



Rider's Position – Legs

The rider's legs should drape around the barrel of the horse, with a slight bend at the hips and knees. The toes should be directly beneath the knees. In order for the rider's legs to be in the correct position, the stirrups must be adjusted to the proper length.



Correct leg position



Legs too far forward



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Legs too far back



Stirrups too long



Stirrups too short

Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Leg Position

Error	Correction
Legs too far forward (chair seat)	<p>Make sure the athlete is sitting straight, not leaning back</p> <p>Adjust the rider's leg by lifting the thigh away from the saddle, moving it back, and placing it in the correct position.</p> <p>Check the fit of the saddle and the stirrup length</p> <p>Do hip flexor stretches if the athlete's hips are tight</p>
Legs too far back	<p>Make sure the athlete is sitting straight, not leaning forward</p> <p>Adjust the rider's legs to the correct position</p> <p>Check the fit of the saddle and the stirrup length</p> <p>Do calf stretches if the rider has difficulty stretching the lower leg</p>
Stirrups too long or too short	<p>Adjust the stirrups to the proper length, usually touching the ankle bone</p>



Rider's Position – Foot



Too much foot in stirrup



Ball of foot in stirrup

The foot should be parallel to the horse's side, with the ball of the foot in the stirrup, and the heel down.

Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Foot Position

Error	Correction
Toes are turned out	Check the leg position to make sure the inner thigh is against the saddle and the knees are facing forward
Heels are lifted	Practice pointing and flexing the feet Do calf stretches if the rider has difficulty flexing the feet Stand in the stirrups and drop the weight down into the heels



Rider's Position at the Halt



At the halt, the Horse should stand attentive, engaged, motionless, straight and square with the weight evenly distributed over all four (4) legs. (FEI)

The halt is obtained by the displacement of the Horse's weight to the hindquarters by a properly increased action of the seat and legs of the Athlete, driving the Horse towards a softly closed hand. (FEI)

The athlete should sit straight and tall in the saddle, shoulders back, chin up, and back in a straight position. A good way to check the position is by holding a dressage whip against the rider's back.

Learning the correct position by placing a dressage whip behind the back



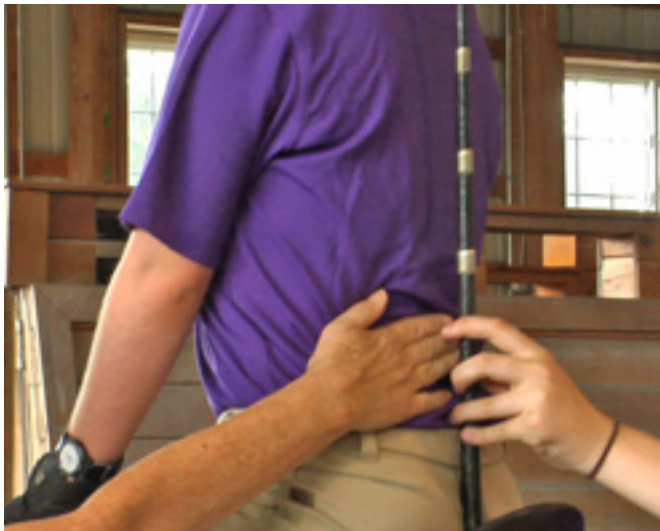
Dressage body position with whip



Common Faults



Shoulders rounded forward



Arched back



Correct position at the halt

Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Position at the Halt

Error	Correction
Rider leans back or collapses during the transition into the halt	Stretch up from the waist during the transition. Pretend there is a string attached to the helmet and it is being pulled up Develop core strength
Rider pulls the hands back with the elbows behind the body during the halt transition	Practice the transition on a ball, with the rider holding reins or a stretch band to learn subtle rein aids Sitting on a ball, more advanced riders can practice scooping the seat bones forward on the transition
Rider fidgets in the halt	Have the rider count how many seconds he/she and the horse can remain motionless, in a good position.



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Teaching Equestrian Skills

Rider's Position at the Walk

The walk is a marching pace in a regular and well-marked four (4) times beat with equal intervals between each beat. (FEI)

In the walk, the rider should sit straight and tall, with the body in alignment. The hips should follow the movement of the horse. Excessive movement, either forward and backward or side to side should be avoided.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider’s Position at the Walk

Error	Correction
Rider’s body is out of alignment	Use the same corrections as listed above for the rider’s position
Rider’s hips move side to side	<p>See the exercise above for hips moving side to side. Have the rider sit on the ball and scoop the seat bones forward instead of moving side to side</p> <p>Develop core strength for pelvic stability</p>
Rider is fearful when the horse is walking	<p>Use a horse handler and sidewalkers until the rider develops confidence</p> <p>Practice the mounted warm-up exercises until the rider feels comfortable sitting on the horse</p> <p>Allow the rider to interact with the horse on the ground and in the stable with proper supervision</p>



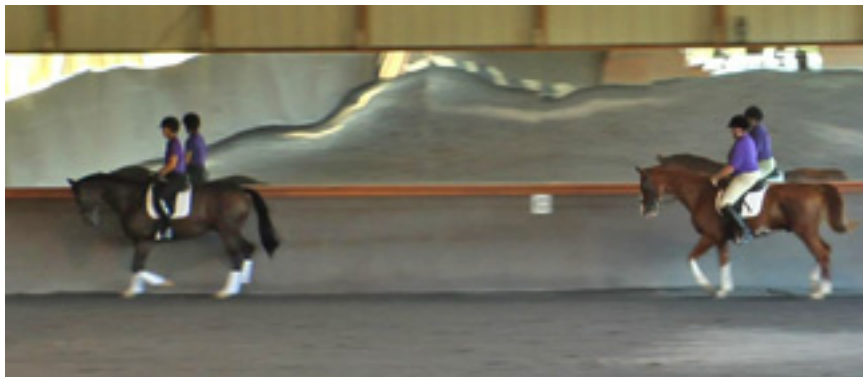
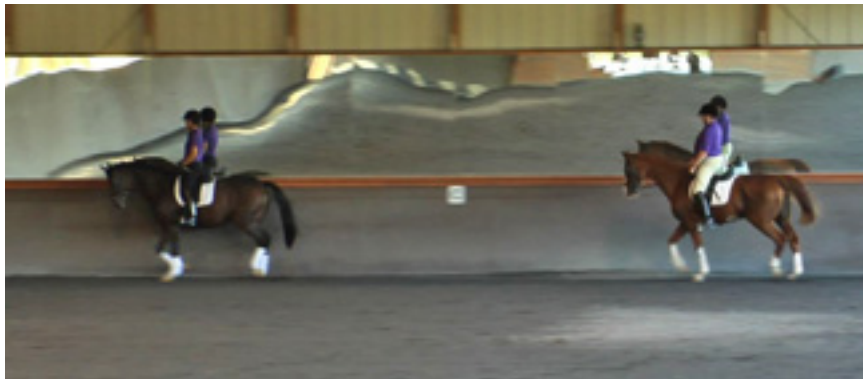
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Rider's Position at the Posting/Rising Trot

The trot is a two (2)-beat pace of alternate diagonal legs (left fore and right hind and vice versa) separated by a moment of suspension. (FEI)

In the posting/rising trot, the athlete rises out of the saddle as the outside foreleg moves forward, and sits as the inside foreleg moves forward. This is known as posting/rising on the correct diagonal.





Teaching an Athlete to Post

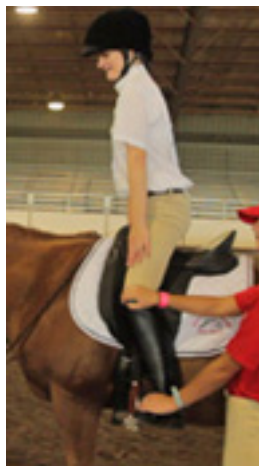


Teach the athlete to post by breaking the skill down into parts, first at the halt, then walk, and finally trot. To develop balance and core strength, teach the athlete first to post holding onto the pommel, then placing hands on the thighs, and finally placing the hands on the head. The rider should be able to post without using the hands to balance on the reins

Posting at the halt



Hold onto the pommel



Place hands on thighs



Place hands on head



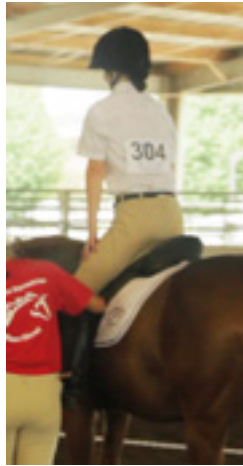
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Posting at the walk



Hold onto the pommel



Place hands on thighs



Place hands on head

Posting at the Trot



With a leader/horse handler and sidewalker



With a leader/horse handler



Independent



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Position at the Posting/Rising Trot

Error	Correction
Rider's body is out of alignment	Use the same corrections as listed above for the rider's position
Rider has difficulty understanding the up and down movement Rider has difficulty understanding diagonals	Practice posting at the halt and walk before posting at the trot Count 1-2, 1-2 (or say up – down, up – down) to develop the rhythm of posting Practice at the walk first
Rider can't maintain position when posting	Develop core strength Develop leg strength Have the rider hold onto the pommel of the saddle until he/she is strong enough to post independently

Rider's Position at the Sitting Trot

In the sitting trot, the athlete remains in the saddle, following the motion of the horse with a supple back.





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Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Position at the Sitting Trot

Error	Correction
Rider's body is out of alignment	Use the same corrections as listed above for the rider's position
Rider is stiff has difficulty following the horse's movement	Practice the arch and straight back exercise listed above to develop suppleness in the rider's back
Rider is loose and bounces in the saddle Rider's head bobs	Develop core strength Practice bouncing on the ball while maintaining a strong position
Rider's hands bounce	Practice the exercise for independent hands, listed in the Body Awareness section above Have the rider hold onto a bucking strap or pommel of the saddle to stabilize the hands

Rider's Position at the Canter

The canter is a three (3)-beat pace where, in canter to the right, for example, the footfall is as follows: left hind, left diagonal (simultaneously left fore and right hind), right fore, followed by a moment of suspension with all four (4) feet in the air before the next stride begins. (FEI)

In the basic dressage tests used in Special Olympics, the horse should be on the right lead (right front leg leading) when travelling around the arena to the right or performing a circle to the right, and on the left lead (left front leg leading) when cantering to the left. The rider must learn to give the correct aids for right and left lead canter. Work with the horse owner or a professional trainer to learn the aids the horse knows for the canter depart.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Rider's Position at the Canter

Error	Correction
Rider's body is out of alignment	Use the same corrections as listed above for the rider's position
Rider is stiff and has difficulty following the horse's movement	Practice the arch and straight back exercise listed above to develop suppleness in the rider's back
Rider is loose and bounces in the saddle Rider's head bobs	Develop core strength Practice bouncing on the ball while maintaining a strong position

Rein Aids

The rider must use the rein aids independently, maintaining the arm in the correct position. Refer to the Warm-up section of this guide for exercises to develop independent hands, and to the Rider's Position section for the body and arm position which will allow the rider to give clear rein aids.



Faults & Fixes Chart – Rein Aids

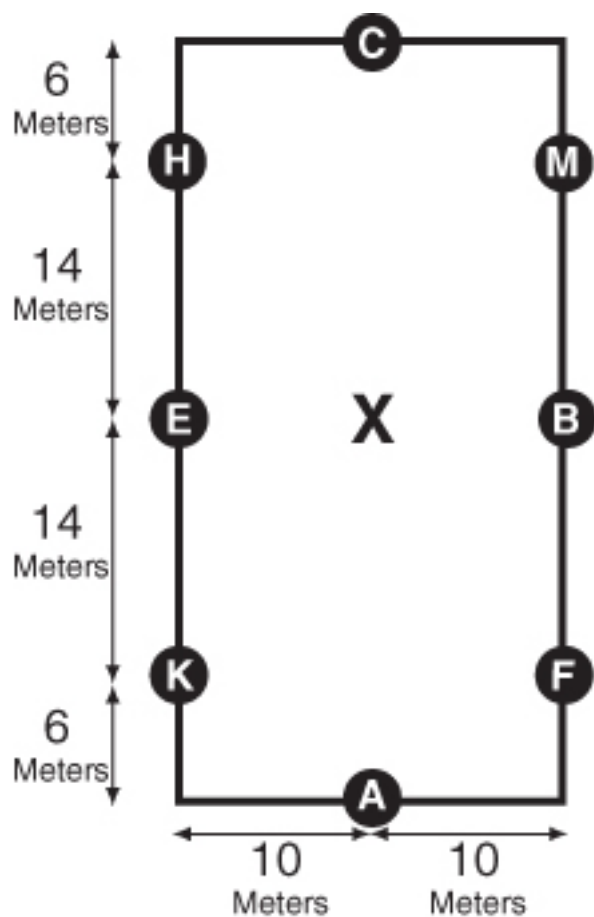
Error	Correction
Rider's body follows the arm Rider has difficulty using each rein separately	Practice the rein aids with the rider sitting on a ball, using a stretch band for the reins, until the rider learns to move the arms independently



Dressage Arena

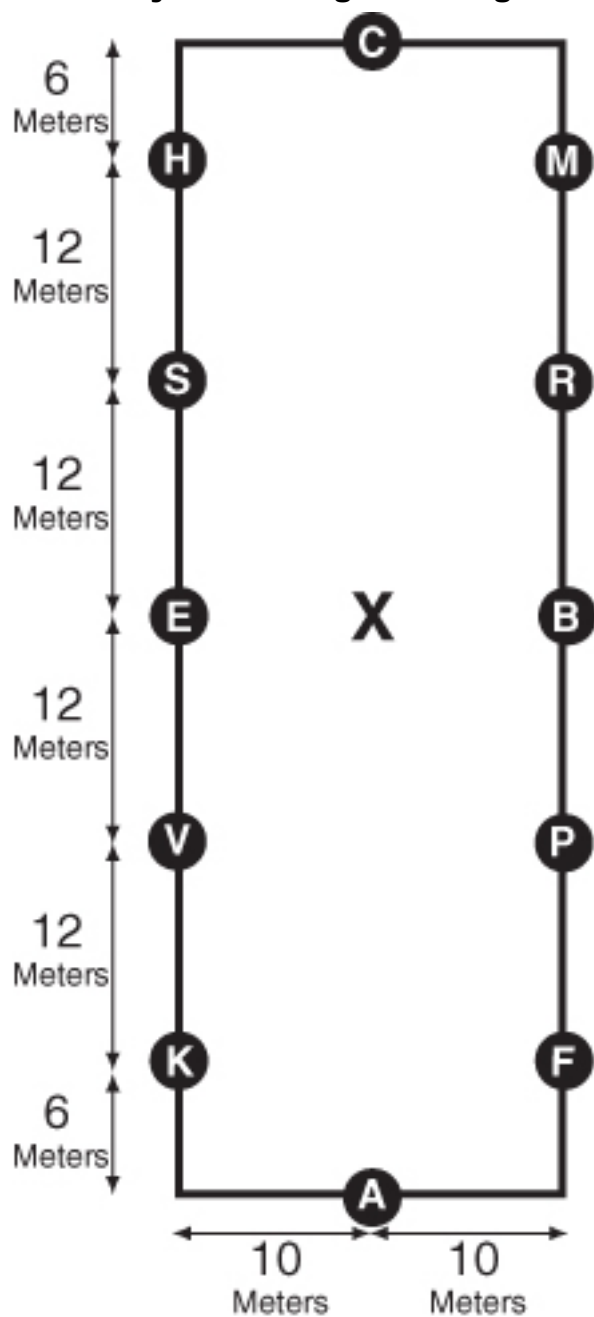
Dressage riders must be familiar with the geometry of both the small and large arenas. Most Special Olympics dressage tests are ridden in the small arena, however, athletes may sometimes train or compete in the large arena. In order to ride dressage tests accurately, the athlete must know how to place each movement in the arena.

Geometry of the Small Dressage Arena (20 meters X 40 meters)





Geometry of the Large Dressage Arena (20 meters X 60 meters)





Execution of Movements

In a dressage competition, the athlete rides a prescribed test, with movements required at specified letters in the arena. When training, the athlete should always strive to perfect the geometry of individual movements and place them precisely.

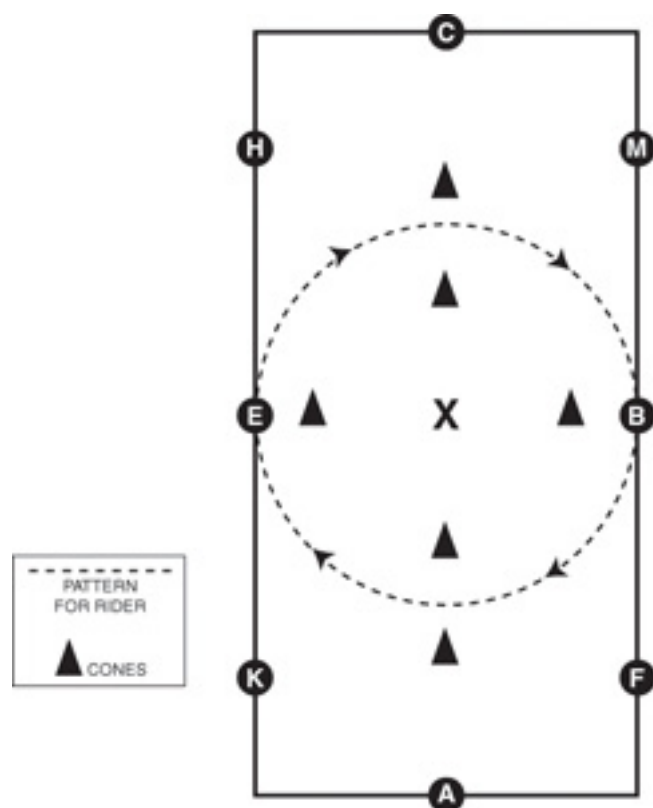
In a movement which must be carried out at a certain point in the arena, it should be done at the moment when the Athlete's body is above this point, except in transitions where the Horse approaches the letter from a diagonal or perpendicular to the point where the letters are positioned. In this case, the transitions must be done when the Horse's nose reaches the track at the letter so that the Horse is straight in the transition. (FEI)

20 Meter Circle between B and E in the small arena

The 20 meter circle between B and E should have 4 turning points:

- 1- B
- 2- On the centerline, 10 meters from X
- 3- E
- 4- On the centerline, 10 meters from X

It is helpful to set 2 cones at each of the turning points. The athlete should ride between the cones and follow a curved line to the next set of cones.



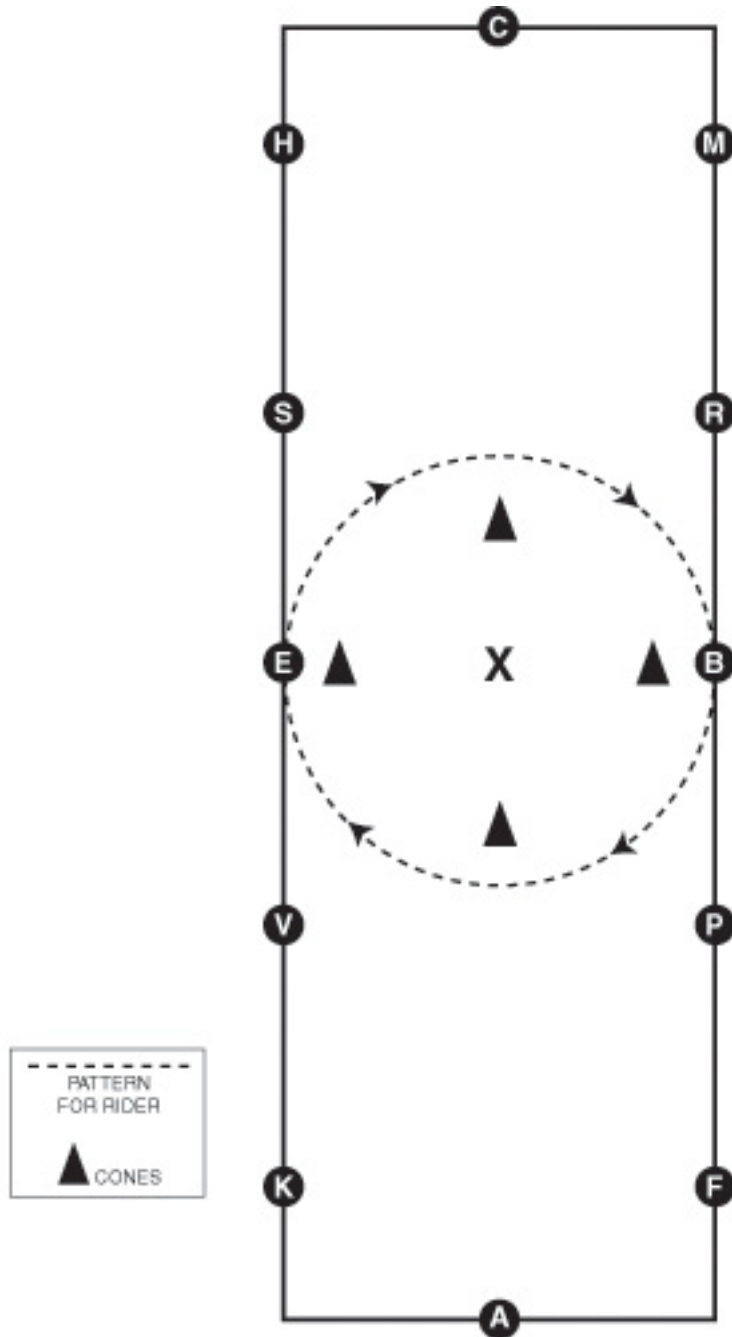


20 Meter Circle between B and E in the large arena

The 20 meter circle between B and E should have 4 turning points:

- 1- B
- 2- On the centerline, 10 meters from X
- 3- E
- 4- On the centerline, 10 meters from X

It is helpful to set 2 cones at each of the turning points. The athlete should ride between the cones and follow a curved line to the next set of cones.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – 20 Meter Circle between B and E

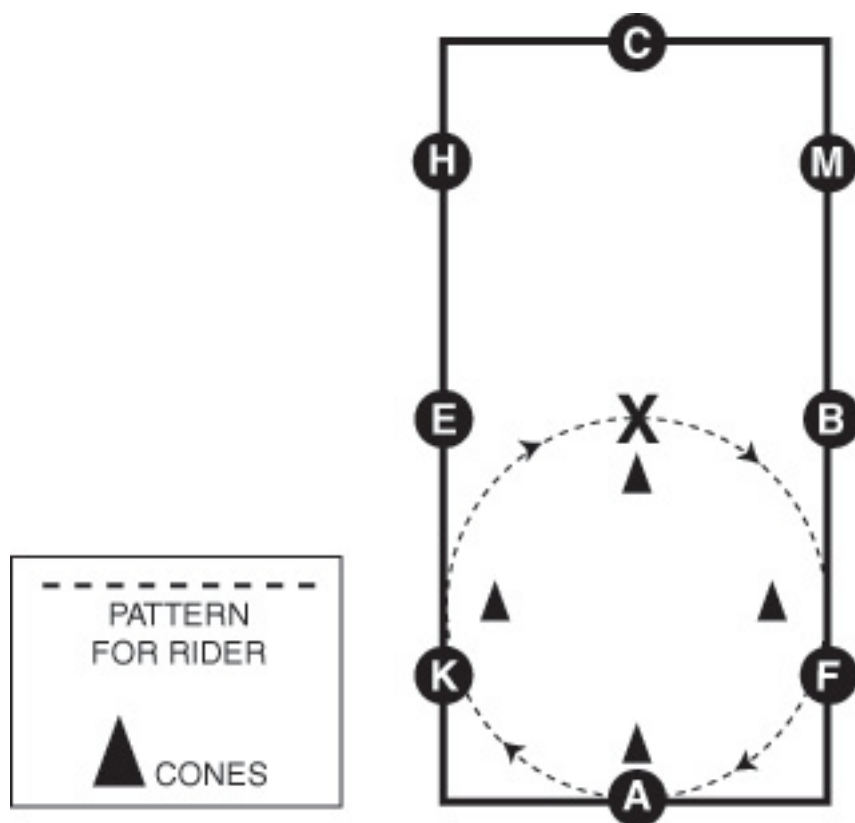
Error	Correction
The circle is too small	Set cones at each of the four turning points of the circle
The circle is not round	

20 Meter Circle at A or C in the small arena

The 20 meter circle at A or C in the small arena should have 4 turning points:

- 1- A or C
- 2- On the rail, 10 meters from the corner
- 3- On the centerline, at X
- 4- On the rail, 10 meters from the corner

It is helpful to set 2 cones at each of the turning points. The athlete should ride between the cones and follow a curved line to the next set of cones.



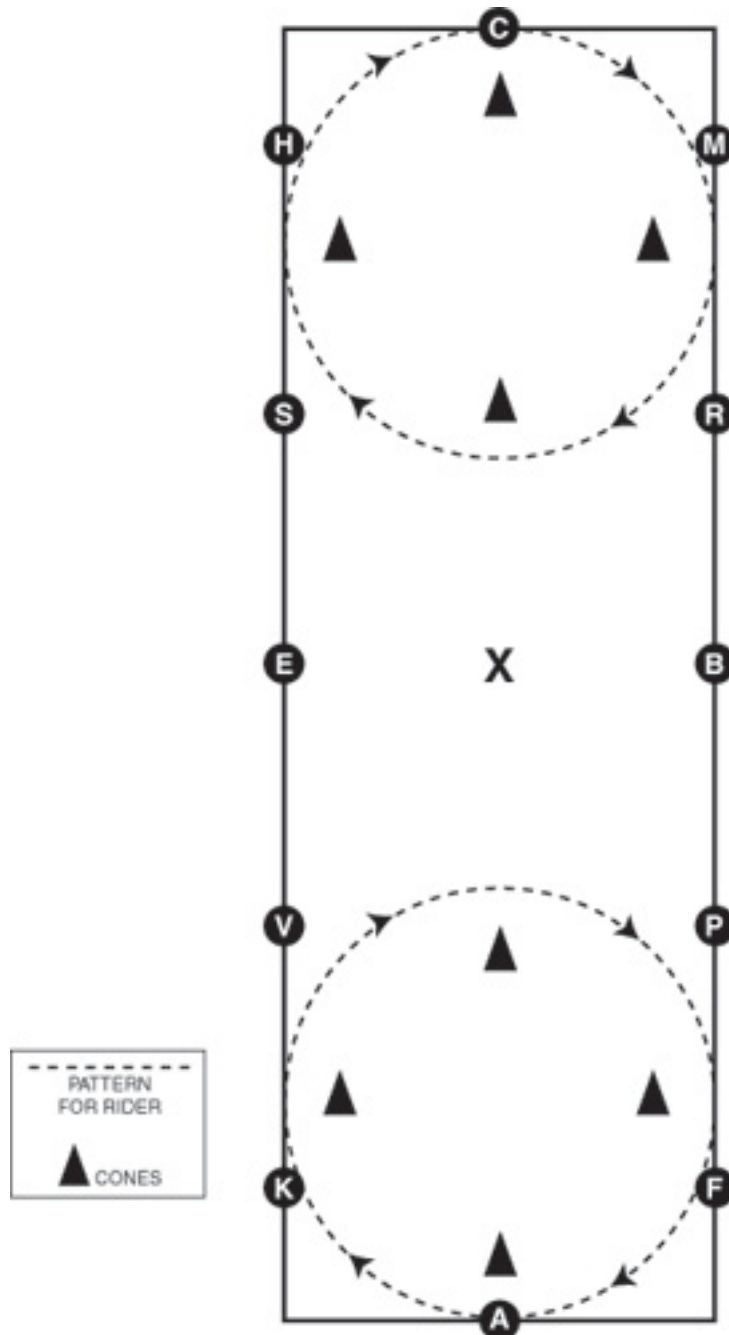


20 Meter Circle at A or C in the large arena

The 20 meter circle at A or C should have 4 turning points:

- 1- A or C
- 2- On the rail, 10 meters from the corner
- 3- On the centerline, 20 meters from A or C
- 4- On the rail, 10 meters from the corner

It is helpful to set 2 cones at each of the turning points. The athlete should ride between the cones and follow a curved line to the next set of cones.



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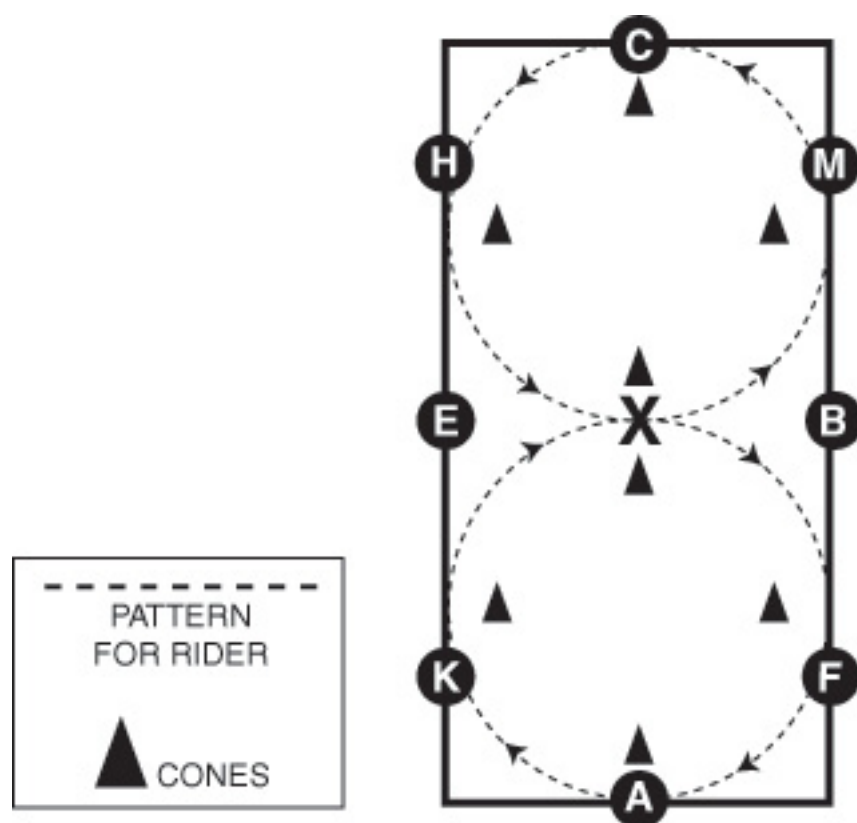


Faults & Fixes Chart – 20 Meter Circle at A or C

Error	Correction
The circle is too small	Set cones at each of the four turning points of the circle
The circle is not round	

Figure 8 in the small arena

A figure 8 is two circles. When ridden in the small arena, the Figure 8 is a 20 meter circle at A intersecting at X with a 20 meter circle at C.





Faults & Fixes Chart – Figure 8 in the small arena

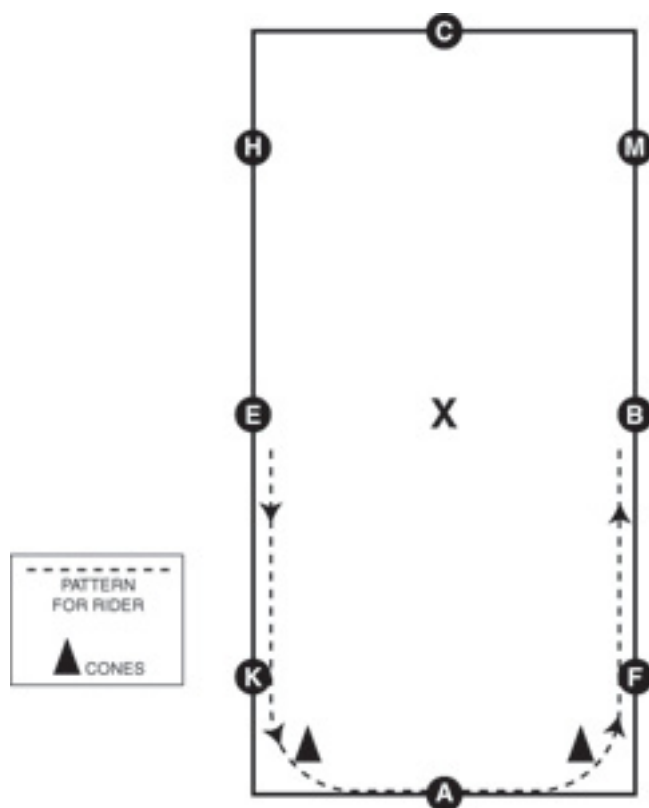
Error	Correction
The circles are not accurate	Set cones at each of the four turning points of the circle Practice the circles at A and C separately

Riding Corners

Riding into corners is a very important skill for dressage riders. The corners are used to prepare for upcoming movements.

The corners should be ridden in an arc. For Special Olympics riders, the bend in the corners can be between the bend of a 10 and 20 meter circle.

It is helpful to place a cone 3 meters from the corner. To ride into the corner, the athlete should go between the cone and the corner.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Riding Corners

Error	Correction
Athletes does not ride into the corner	Set a cone 3 meters in from the corner and have the athlete ride between the cone and the corner

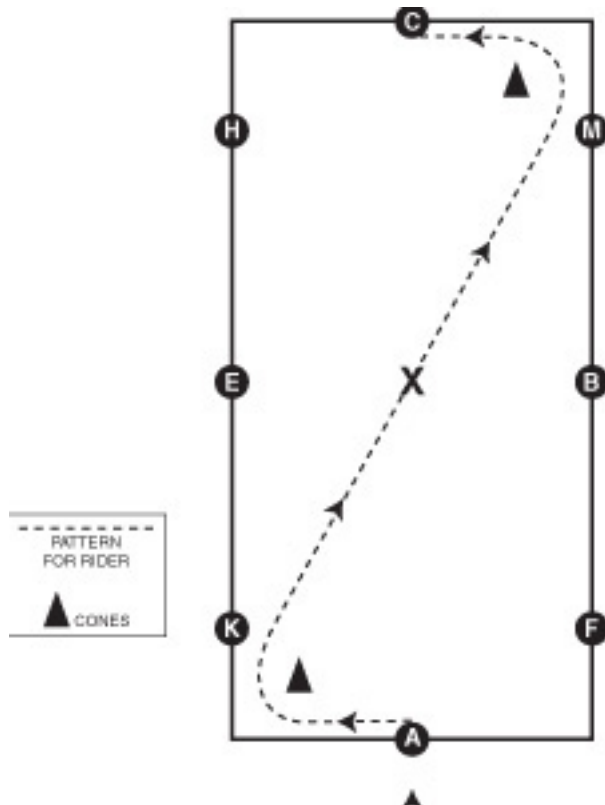


Riding a Diagonal

To ride a diagonal across the arena, the athlete must first ride into the corner.

The rider will turn off the rail when the horse's nose approaches the specified letter.

The rider will steer the horse in a straight line toward the specified letter on the opposite side of the arena, reaching the side as the horse's nose approaches the letter.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Riding a Diagonal

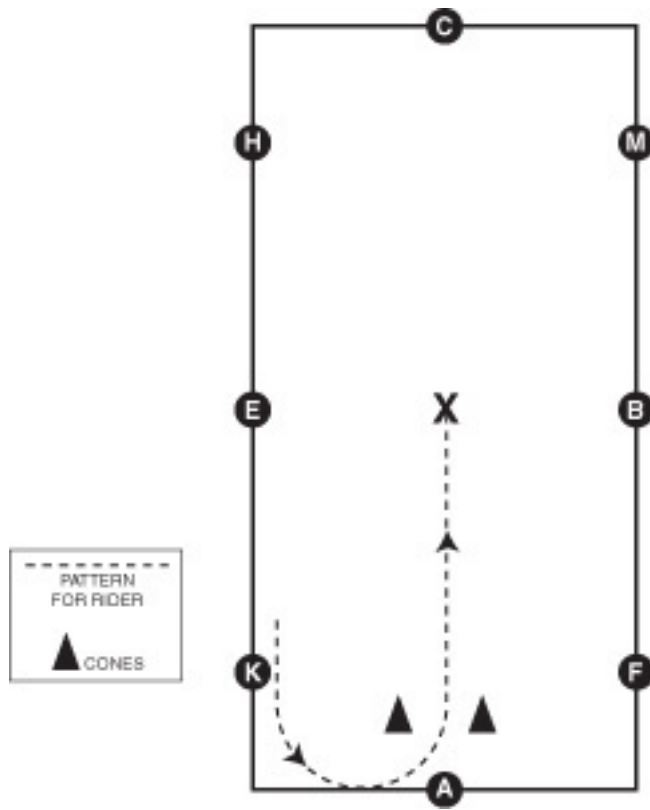
Error	Correction
Rider turns early or late to start the diagonal	<p>Make sure the athlete rides into the corner before beginning the diagonal.</p> <p>Set cones wherever necessary to show the path.</p>
Rider reaches the opposite side of the arena at the incorrect place and does not ride into the corner	<p>Make sure the rider is looking at the letter at the end of the diagonal.</p> <p>Set cones wherever necessary to show the path.</p>
The diagonal is not a straight line	<p>Make sure the rider focuses on the direction of travel.</p> <p>Set cones wherever necessary to show the path.</p>



Turn onto Centerline

To turn onto the centerline, the athlete must first ride into the corner. The turn onto the centerline should begin 10 meters from the corner so the horse will be straight on the centerline.

To teach the rider the turn onto the centerline, set cones on either side of the centerline about 5 meters from A. The rider should turn off the rail on the short side of the arena and ride through the cones.



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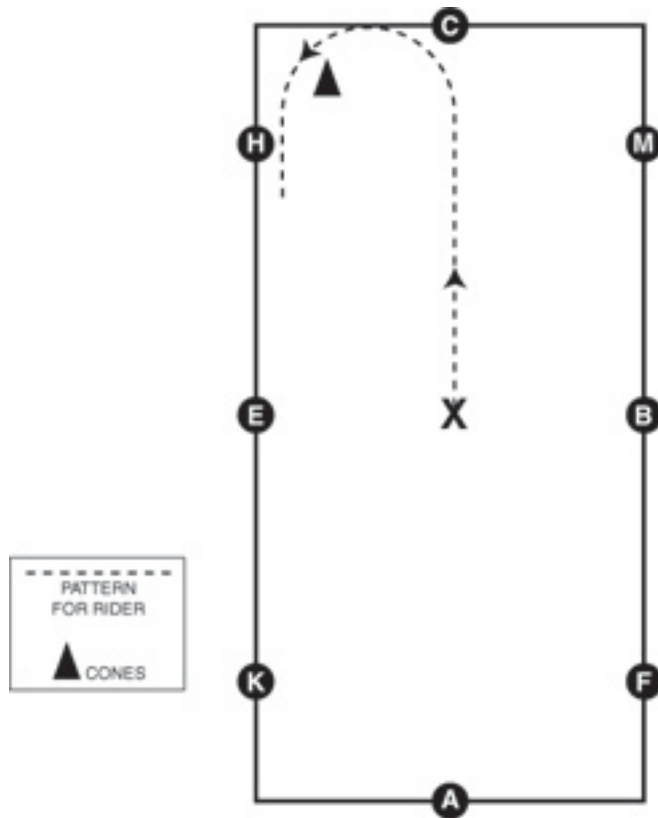
Faults & Fixes Chart – Turn onto Centerline

Error	Correction
Rider turns early or late, and misses centerline	Make sure the athlete rides into the corner. Set cones wherever necessary to show the path



Turn off Centerline

To turn off the centerline, the athlete rides a straight line toward A, and just before the end of the arena, turns either right or left in a 10 meter arc and rides through the corner. Set a cone 3 meters from the corner. The athlete should ride between the cone and the corner.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Turn off Centerline

Error	Correction
Rider turns early or late, and does not ride into the corner	Make sure the athlete rides straight down the centerline. Set cones wherever necessary to show the path



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Salute

A (dressage) test begins with the entry at A and ends after the salute at the end of the test, as soon as the Horse moves forward. (FEI)

Athletes must take the reins in one (1) hand at the salute. (FEI)

For the athlete who collapses when he/she nods the head during the salute, it is helpful to have someone hold a dressage whip behind the back during the salute.



Athletes can practice the salute on the stability ball or on the horse.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Salute

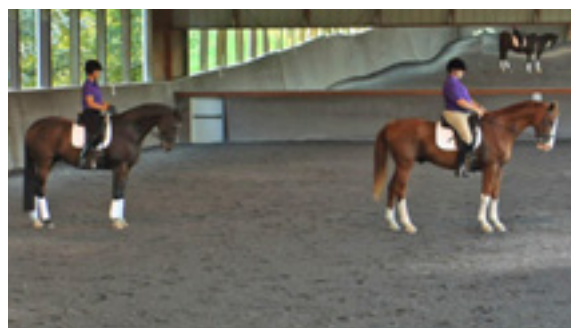
Error	Correction
Rider collapses	Practice the salute with the rider sitting on a ball. Place a riding whip behind the back until the rider can maintain a straight body position while moving the arm and nodding the head Develop core strength
Rider has difficulty placing both reins in one hand	Practice just the motion of placing both reins in one hand, doing the salute, and returning the reins to two hands. This can be done unmounted.

Transition – Walk to Halt

The transition from walk to halt, if ridden correctly, is a forward movement, with the rider's seat pushing the horse into a softly closed hand. For beginner riders, this concept may be too difficult to understand, so the athlete has to be instructed to pull back on the reins to halt the horse. The athlete must do so gently, without moving the arms out of position.



Correct position in the transition to halt





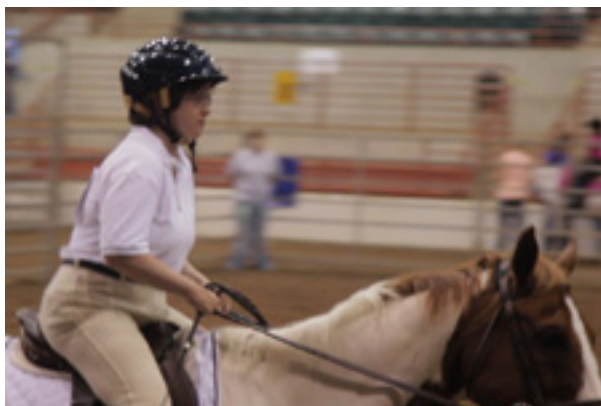
Common Faults



Hands too high



Rider leaning back



Rider leaning forward

Faults & Fixes Chart – Walk to Halt Transition

Error	Correction
Rider pulls back on the reins too far and the elbows go behind the body.	Have the rider shorten the reins.
The horse does not stop	Have a horse handler walk with the horse to aid



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Transition – Trot to Walk

From the posting/rising trot, the athlete should sit for several strides before the transition to walk. It is helpful to practice this transition on a ball. Remember – the transition from trot to walk should be a forward movement, just like the transition from walk to halt.



Faults & Fixes Chart – Trot to Walk Transition

Error	Correction
Rider has difficulty sitting before the transition	Practice the movement on a ball

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Free Walk

The free walk is a pace of relaxation in which the horse is allowed complete freedom to lower and stretch out his head and neck. (FEI)

During the free walk, even though the rider must lengthen the reins, he/she must always maintain enough contact to control the horse.



Faults & Fixes Chart – Free Walk

Error	Correction
Rider cannot steer the horse	Have the rider shorten the reins a little until he/she becomes more proficient riding with the seat



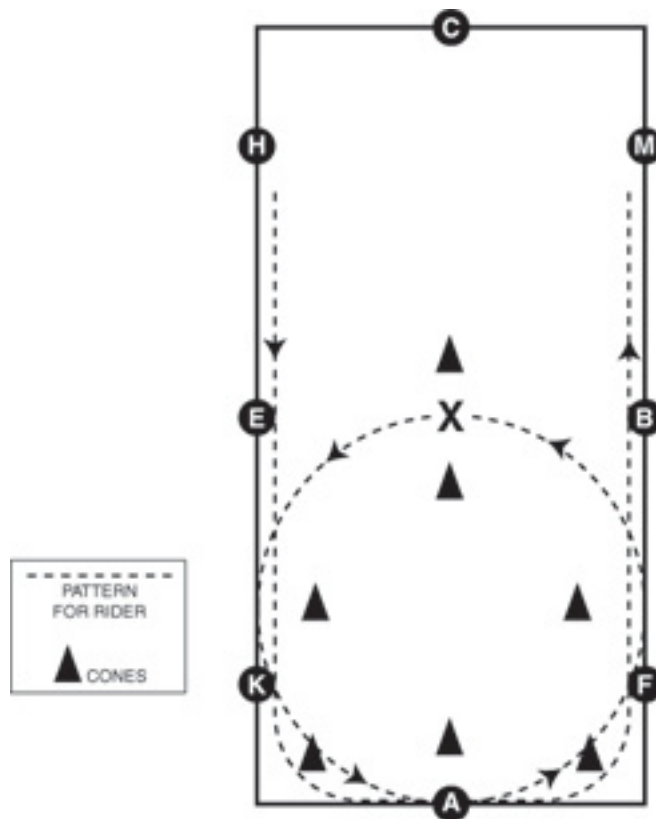
Training Exercises

A dressage test is a series of movements ridden together, one after the other, in different gaits, with transitions and movements performed at specified letters in the arena. Athletes should always strive to ride accurate figures. This takes many hours of practice and many training exercises. To begin, choose two movements and have the athlete ride them in sequence. Space the movements in the arena at specific letters. Earlier in this section, we discussed the use of cones in the arena to help the rider perform each movement. Now, the cones can be set to help the rider combine movements. The exercise below is an example of a training exercise.

Training Exercise - Riding Corners Into and Out of a 20 Meter Circle at C

Here is good training exercise which emphasizes the difference between riding a circle and riding corners. In each corner, set a cone 3 meters from the corner. Cones can also be set at the turning points of the 20 meter circle.

- Ride straight down the long side of the arena and into the corner, riding between the cone and the corner
- At A, ride a 20 meter circle, riding to the inside of the cones in the corners.
- After the completion of the circle at A, ride into the next corner, passing between the cone and the corner.
- Continue down the long side of the arena.





Training Exercise – Turn onto Centerline

To practice the turn onto the centerline, the athlete can ride a 10 meter circle in the corner before the turn onto the centerline. With this exercise, the rider can learn to make the turn exactly onto the centerline, not too early or too late.





Riding a Dressage Test



When preparing to ride a dressage test, riders should first practice movements individually, concentrating on accuracy. When the rider can perform each figure at the prescribed gait and letter, then he/she can begin to ride parts of the dressage test, and finally, combine all the parts into a complete test.

Riding in a Group

In lessons and competition, it is often necessary to ride in a group. For safety, the rider must keep a horse's length distance between the nose of his/her horse and the tail of the horse in front.

At first, it is helpful to have leaders control the spacing between horses.



Walk

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Trot

As the athlete progresses, he/she can ride with a more experienced rider in the arena. For safety, a leader should be close, until the athlete has the skill and confidence to ride unassisted.





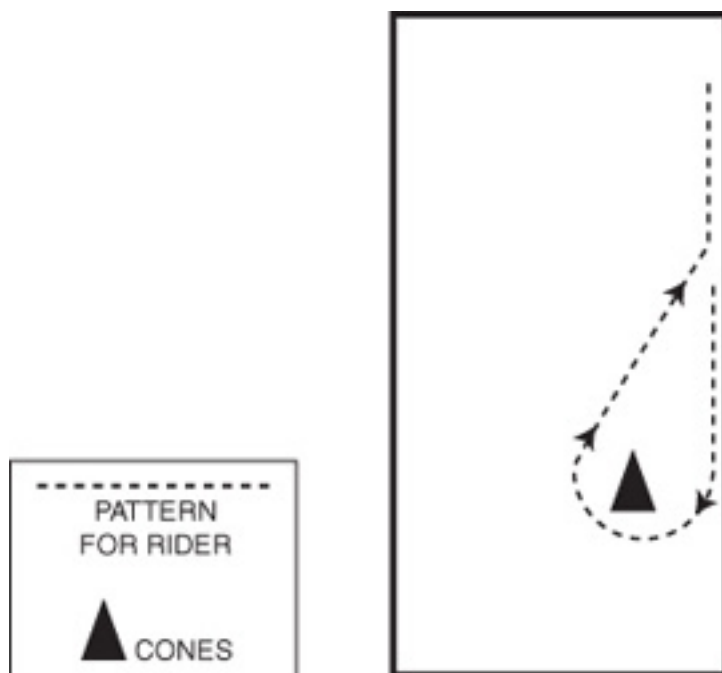
Half Circle to Reverse



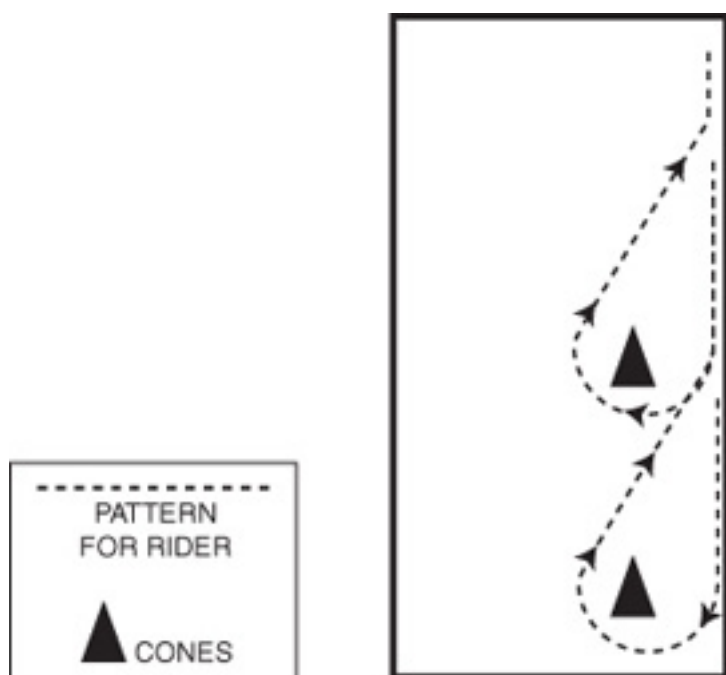
The half circle to reverse is a movement that will be used mostly in equitation classes or when several athletes are riding at the same time. The figure is a half circle toward the center of the arena, followed by a straight line back to the rail. The arc of the half circle is usually between 5 and 10 meters. It is important for the rider to show both the half circle and the straight line.

Unless the rider has a leader, he/she should first learn to ride the half circle to reverse without other horses in the arena. Then, it is helpful to have an experienced rider perform the movement with the athlete to practice keeping a safe distance between horses.

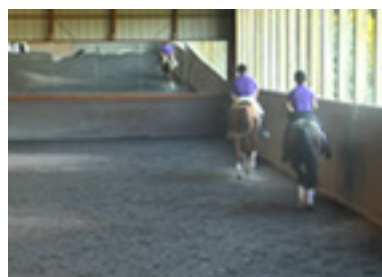
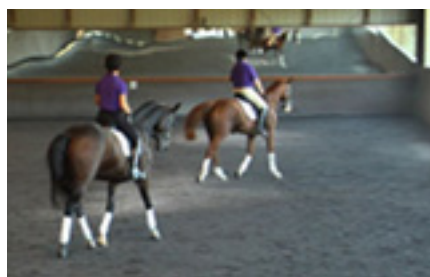
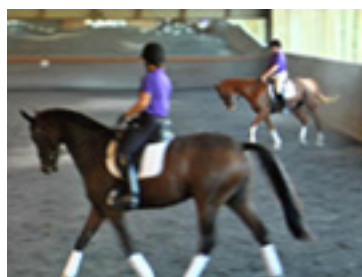
When an athlete is more advanced and has good control over the horse, he/she can ride safely in the arena with other horses, performing any patterns which may be called for by the instructor or by the judge in a horse show.



Half circle to reverse with one rider



Half circle to reverse with two riders





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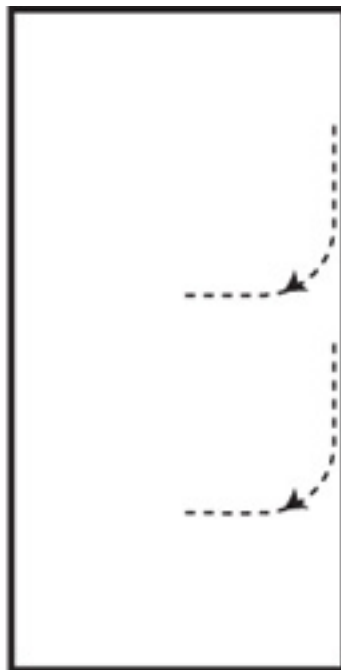
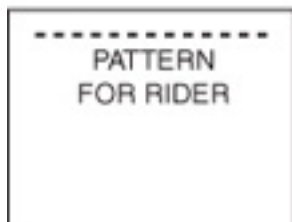
Faults & Fixes Chart – Half Circle to Reverse

Error	Correction
Rider cannot execute the pattern	Set cones wherever necessary to show the path

Turn to Line Up

On the turn to line up in the center of the arena, the athlete must be aware of other horses and keep a safe distance. This movement will be used in group classes, such as equitation, at competitions.

Unless the rider has a leader, he/she should first learn to ride the turn to line up without other horses in the arena. Then, it is helpful to have an experienced rider perform the movement with the athlete to practice keeping a safe distance between horses. To help the athlete turn and line up accurately, a person should stand in the center of the arena. The athlete should look at that person during the turn, and halt in front of the person in line with the other horses.



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Faults & Fixes Chart – Turn to Line Up

Error	Correction
Rider makes the turn too big and does not ride a straight line to the center	Have a leader walk with the athlete Have a person stand at the place where the athlete should halt
Rider has difficulty keeping spacing	Have a leader walk with the athlete Have an experienced rider perform the movement with the athlete
Rider has difficulty keeping the horse still at the halt	Have a leader attend the horse's head Practice the halt without other horses near



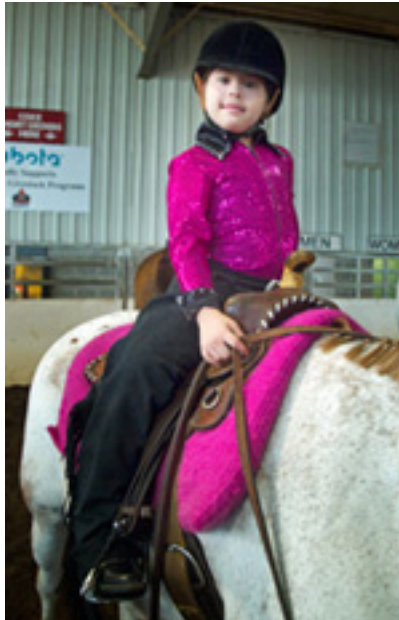
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Western

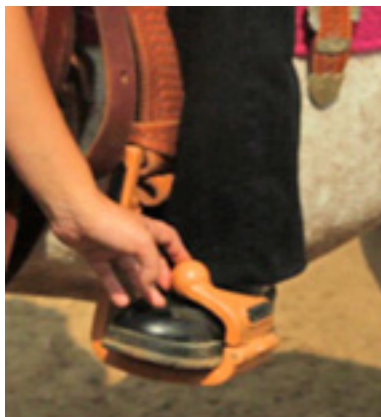
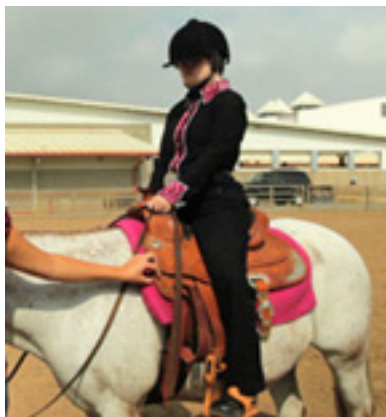
Tack

All tack must fit both the horse and the rider properly. For training and competition, tack should be clean and in good repair.



Saddle

A Western stock type or Australian saddle is appropriate for Western events. Safety stirrups are required.



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Bridle

A Western style bridle with split or Romel reins is appropriate. For an athlete who needs a leader, a halter/headcollar should be worn over or under the bridle.



Holding the reins

For purposes of this Coaching Guide, we will focus on split reins to be used while neck reining. For information on other types of reins, check with a professional for instructions on how to use each style properly and which style would be appropriate for each horse.

- The athlete should have only one hand on the reins, with the index finger between the reins.
- Rein hand should be bent at the elbow, and carried immediately above or slightly in front of the saddle horn.
- Free hand has a few optional positions:
 - Resting on the leg
 - Straight down at the rider's side
 - Bent at the elbow in a similar position as the hand holding the reins





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Western Equitation

In Western equitation, riders are judged on seat, aids, and the ability to influence the horse. Results as shown by the performance of the horse are not to be considered more important than the method used by the rider. Athletes will be asked to perform patterns and gaits appropriate for their level.



Horsemanship

Attire

In a Horsemanship class, the athlete should be presented in clean, well-fitting attire, including, for safety, boots with a heel, and an approved safety helmet. For specific regulations about attire, consult the Official Special Olympics Rules.



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Body Position

Correct horsemanship starts with the correct body position of the rider. An easy way to check proper body position is to do a straight line test. A lunge whip works well to show a straight line from the ear, shoulder, hip, through the ankle, to the back of the heel.



Lower body position

- Rider should sit in the center of the saddle.
- There is a slight bend to the knees, with the lower leg directly under the knee.
- Heels should be lower than the toes.
- Boot is in the stirrup from the position of the ball of the foot in the stirrup to the heel touching the stirrup.
- Thigh, knee & upper calf are in contact with the horse.



Upper body position

- Back should be upright and relaxed
- Shoulders back and square
- Upper arm in a straight line with the body
- Head should be held with the chin level & eyes forward or turned slightly in the direction of travel.





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Faults & Fixes Chart – Horsemanship

Error	Correction
Athlete has difficulty maintaining body position	Develop core strength
Athlete has difficulty holding the reins correctly when riding.	Practice holding the reins when the horse is at a halt

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Horsemanship Patterns



Horsemanship Patterns

The type of horsemanship pattern that is appropriate for each rider is determined by his/her skill level. Some riders will walk only, with or without assistance, while others may walk, jog, and lope independently. As riders advance, the patterns will become more complex, including transitions between gaits and a variety of elements.

Horsemanship

Patterns with Assistance

Athletes should practice many types of horsemanship patterns during their regular riding lessons. At first, it may be necessary for a leader to guide the horse to show the athlete the correct pattern. As the athlete becomes more confident, the leader can stand close, allowing the athlete to control the horse during the patterns.



With Assistance



Independent





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Horsemanship Pattern at a Show

The Western Horsemanship class is designed to evaluate the rider's ability to execute a predetermined set of maneuvers. The rider is judged on his/her ability to influence the horse with subtle aids, maintain a correct body position, and execute the pattern with precision.



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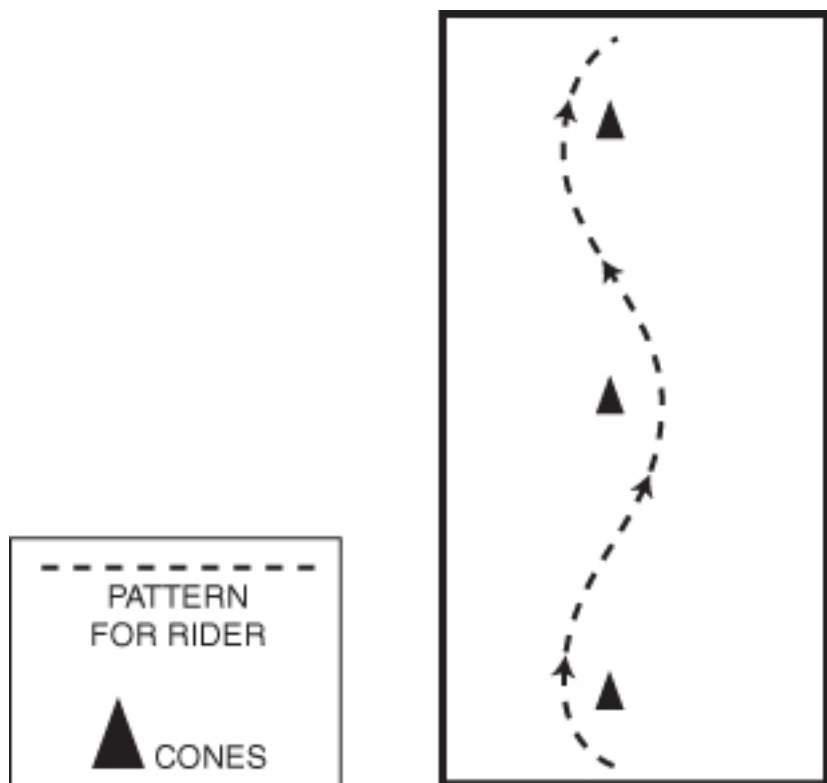
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Athletes will be asked to perform basic maneuvers as elements of an individually worked pattern. These can include:

- Executing a walk, jog, or lope in a straight or curved line
- Halt
- Figure 8 or serpentine
- Circles at a walk or jog
- Backing or pivot on the haunches

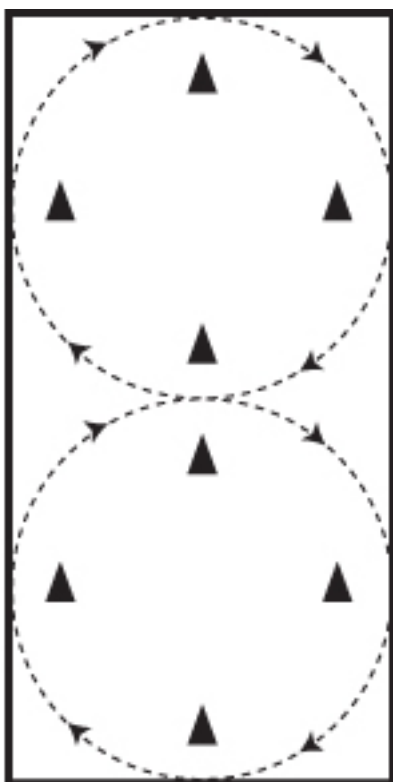
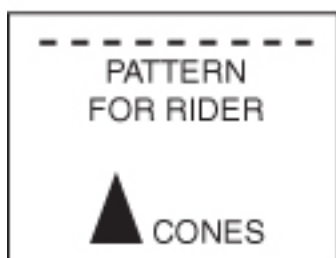
Riders will work predetermined patterns individually, using cones or markers for transition points.





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Exhibitors will then ride on the rail as a group, in at least one direction.



The horse must be trained to perform these maneuvers before asking the athlete to do them. A professional trainer should be consulted if the coach does not have experience in training the Western horse.



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Showmanship

The emphasis in Showmanship should be on the athlete's ability to handle and show the horse, with safety as the main consideration. The horse is merely a prop to show the ability of the showman.



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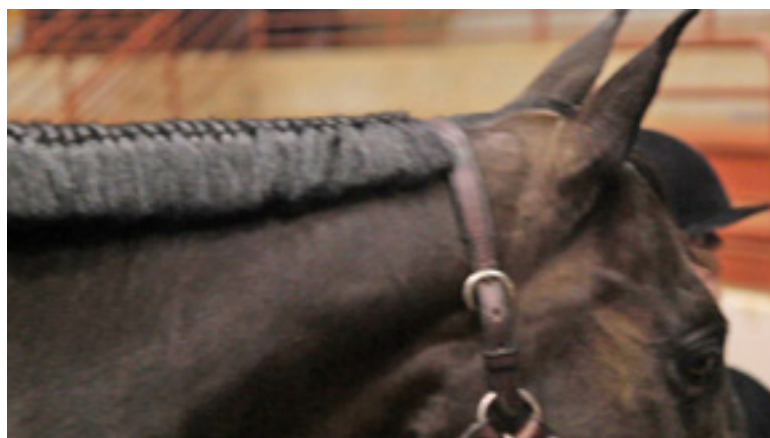
Presentation of the Horse

In showmanship, the appearance of the horse and tack are judged.

Grooming of the horse - The horse's coat should be clean and well brushed around the eyes, ears, muzzle, nostrils, between the legs, and around the tail. The mane, tail, forelock, and wither tufts must be clean and free of tangles. It is prohibited to use any ornaments on the aforementioned.

Trimming of the horse – Manes may be roached, braided, or banded. The inside of the ears may be clipped. Long hair on the jaw, legs, and pasterns should be clipped.

Tack – All tack should be neat, clean, and in good repair.





Showmanship Class



Well fitting halter



Halter with chain



Halter with assistant

Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Western showmanship shows with a halter and lead (with or without a chain). The exhibitor holds the tail of the lead coiled loosely in the left hand, and holds the lead close to the horse's head with the right hand. Arms should be bent at the elbows, close to the side. The exhibitor should never stand directly in front of the horse, and should not touch the horse with their hands or feet at anytime while in the showmanship class. Exhibitors need to maintain a safe distance from other horses. While maintaining eye contact with the judge as much as possible, the exhibitor should be aware of the judge's position in the arena at all times.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills

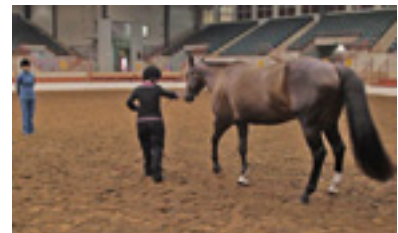
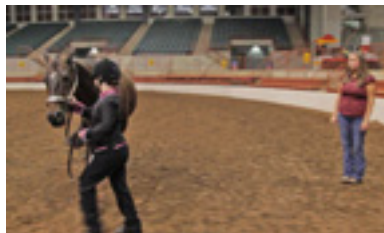
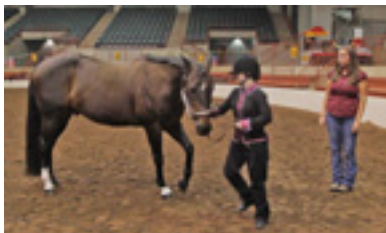
Showmanship Positions

There are 4 basic positions for the exhibitor while showing a horse in a showmanship class.

Leading position – Stand between the eye and midpoint of the neck (at the throat latch) facing forward.



Turning position – (Or halt position) With the horse at a halt, the exhibitor is in the leading position, facing the horse's head, as they stand for a halt, or prepare and execute a turn or pivot.

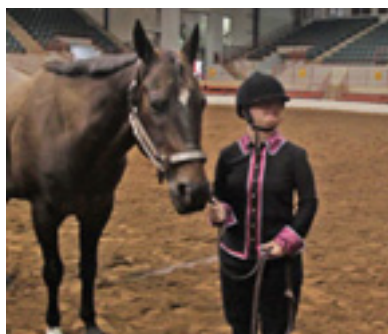
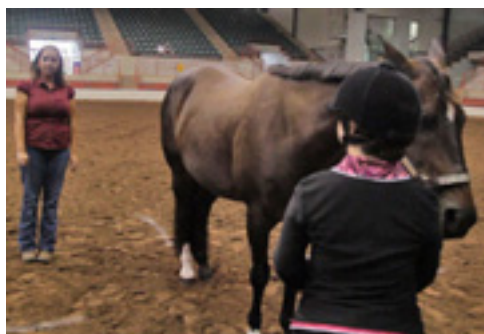
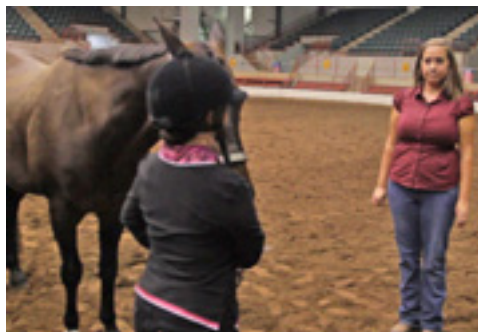


Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Inspection positions – With the horse squared up for inspection, the exhibitor is facing the horse's head, at an angle between the horse's eye and muzzle. As the judges circles the horse to evaluate, the athlete moves from the right of the horse's head to the left.



Backing position - The exhibitor stands in the leading position, facing backwards, towards the horse's tail.





Showmanship Patterns



The pattern requested by the judge may include in any order the following elements:

- Walking or trotting in straight lines
- Halt
- Turns or pivots
- Backing
- Squaring up or setting up for inspection.



Inspection

The inspection element of a pattern consists of the exhibitor setting the horse's hooves in a square or even set up to allow the judge to evaluate the horse. The basic idea is to show the horse to the judge, maintaining eye contact with the judge as much as possible, without interfering with the judge's view of the horse. The exhibitor's position for inspection is usually based on the quarter system. By drawing an imaginary line on the ground, imagine an infinite line running the length of the horse (going between the horse's ears, down the spine, and out the tail). Draw another imaginary line, perpendicular to the first line, crossing the horse at the withers, thus forming 4 imaginary quadrants. When the judge is in front of the withers, the exhibitor is on the opposite side of the horse's head, in the opposite quadrant. When the judge moves behind the withers of the horse, the exhibitor moves into the quadrant on the same side as the judge.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills

Faults & Fixes Chart – Showmanship

Error	Correction
Horse does not stand or lead quietly Horse does not set up squarely Horse does not pivot during the turn	Consult a professional trainer
Athlete has difficulty moving around the horse accurately during the inspection	Draw lines on the ground to designate the 4 quarters of the horse. Practice each segment of the inspection separately.
Athlete has difficulty leading the horse in a straight line	Have a horse handler attach a lead to the opposite side of the horse to assist

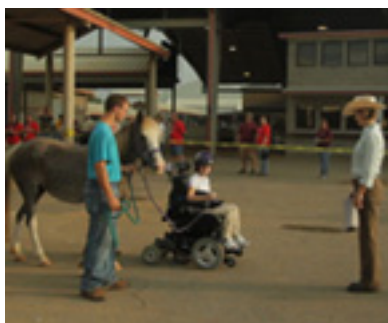
Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Teaching Equestrian Skills



Adaptive Showmanship

Athletes who have physical disabilities can participate in Showmanship. For safety, it is necessary for the horses to be calm, well-mannered, and used to wheelchairs, walkers, and other equipment.





Special Olympics

EQUESTRIAN COACHING GUIDE

Equestrian Rules, Protocol & Etiquette



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Teaching Equestrian Rules

The best time to teach the Equestrian rules is during practice. For example, athletes must learn the patterns they will ride in competition. Please refer to *Official Special Olympics Sports Rules* for the complete listing of Equestrian rules.

Rules for Sport Competition

FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) regulations govern competitions, except when they are in conflict with Special Olympics Sports Rules.

Equestrian Events

The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics.

The range of events is intended to offer competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities. Programs may determine the events offered and, if required, guidelines for the management of those events. Coaches are responsible for providing training and event selection appropriate to each athlete's skill and interest.

1. Dressage
2. Prix Caprilli
3. English Equitation (required as a preliminary test)
4. Stock Seat Equitation (required as a preliminary test)
5. Western Riding
6. Working Trails
7. Showmanship at Halter/Bridle Classes
8. Gymkhana Events
 - a. Pole Bending
 - b. Barrel Racing
 - c. Figure 8 Stake Race
 - d. Team Relays
9. Drill Teams of twos and fours
10. Unified Sports Team Relays
11. Unified Sports Drill Teams



Levels of Competition

Riders are grouped into three levels, A, B, and C. Each level is further sub-divided according to the amount of assistance required by the rider.

A Level - Walk, Trot/Jog, Canter/Lope

- Independent only. Rider is expected to compete with no modifications to NGB rules.
- Can perform any class requirements.

B Level - Walk, Trot/Jog

- BI - Independent, can perform any class requirements.
- BS - Supported, can physically perform any class requirements.

C Level – Walk

- CI - Independent
- CS - Supported

Age Groups

Equestrian athletes are not separated by male-female or by age. All athletes compete according to ability.

Tack

Saddles and bridles must be appropriate for each discipline. Refer to the FEI and the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for more information.

Halters worn over or under the bridle are mandatory for supported riders. Refer to the Skills section of this Coaching Guide for more information.

Safety stirrups are required for all Special Olympics riders at all times. Many types of safety stirrups are available. For Special Olympics riders, the stirrup's design must either:

- Prevent the toe of the rider from moving forward so far that the heel of the rider loses its proper position BEHIND the stirrup.
- Actually come apart in a way to allow the foot to easily slide from the stirrup.

These actions must occur without any proactive movement by the athlete. Shown below are some examples of appropriate safety stirrups. Remember that safety stirrups need to be the proper fit to the foot. Too large or too small and they become ineffective.

- 1) **Peacock Stirrups:** Identified by a rubber band on the outer side of the stirrup designed to give way and allow a foot to fall from the stirrup out the side.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Equestrian Rules, Protocol & Etiquette

- 2) **Breakaway stirrups:** Come in English and Western models. Are designed to release when pressure is applied laterally preventing the rider from being dragged after falling from the horse. The middle bar is designed not to release unless the toe of the foot is pointed upwards, as it does when a rider falls from the horse, hooks the bar and applies lateral pressure. The middle bar will then release, freeing the foot from the stirrup.

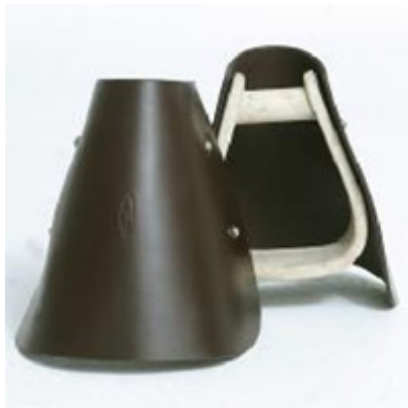


- 3) **Sidestep Safety Stirrups:** designed to “open up” as the foot rotates upward at any angle. Allows total freedom for the foot to fall in any direction.





- 4) **Tapaderos or caged stirrups:** which involve a type of covering over the front of the stirrups. This barrier prevents the rider's foot from slipping all the way through the stirrup.



These aluminum endurance stirrups feature a safety nose with padding and a guards to keep the your foot directly in the stirrup



Toe Stoppers, attaches to regular stirrups



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Equestrian Rules, Protocol & Etiquette

Attire

Helmets: All riders must wear protective SEI-ASTM or BHS approved helmets with full chin harness which must be fastened at all times when the riders are working around horses.



All riders must wear heeled boots.



Riders who must wear other footwear as the result of a physical disability must have a physician's statement submitted with their Rider Profile.

Number: Competitors must wear their assigned number prominently displayed on their backs during competition, practice at the competition, and while in the competition "holding area" (stage).



Regulations pertaining to competition attire can be found in the *Official Special Olympics Sports Rules*. Refer to the Training and Competition section of this Coaching Guide for more information.



Judging

The following points (where appropriate) have equal consideration in judging all classes:

- Rider's balance
- Rider's seat
- Use of aids
- Ability to follow directions
- Ring etiquette and safety
- Sportsmanlike conduct

Results as shown by the performance of the horse are not to be considered more important than the method used in obtaining them.

Unauthorized assistance from horse handlers and side walkers will result in penalties.

Side walkers may not give verbal commands or extra physical prompting, except in case of emergency.

Special consideration will be given to riders with visual or auditory impairments or severe physical disability.

Coaches may not act as horse handlers, side walkers or spotters for their own athlete anytime while that athlete is being judged.

For guidelines about judging specific events, refer to the English and Western sections of the *Official Special Olympics Sports Rules*.

Competition Arenas

Regulations pertaining to competition arenas can be found in the *Official Special Olympics Sports Rules*. Refer to the Training and Competition section of this Coaching Guide for more information.

Protest Procedures

Protest procedures are governed by the rules of competition and may change from competition to competition. Only rules violations can be protested. Judgment calls made by officials or divisioning decisions cannot be protested. The protest must be written, cite a specific violation from the rules, and state why the coach feels the rule was not followed.

The coach should check with the competition management team prior to a competition to learn the protest procedures for that competition. The protest period is time sensitive. Coaches should be aware of the impact on their athletes and competition time schedule.

The role of the competition management team or jury is to enforce the rules. As a coach, your duty to your athletes and team is to protest any action or events while your athletes are competing that you think violated the *Official Special Olympics Equestrian Rules*. It is extremely important that you do not make protests because you and your athlete did not get your desired outcome of an event. Filing a protest is a serious matter that may impact a competition.



Equestrian Protocol & Etiquette

During Practice

Coaches should:

- ♦ Arrive early to make sure the arena is set up appropriately for training (free of clutter, tack in good repair)
- ♦ Set a good example for the athletes by dressing in neat attire. Wear boots and a safety helmet if riding.
- ♦ Have a general plan for the training session, and good knowledge of the skills and teaching progressions to be utilized
- ♦ Maintain discipline and pay attention to safety at all times
- ♦ Be prepared to react appropriately in case of an injury or emergency
- ♦ Interact with all athletes during each practice session
- ♦ Have enough assistant coaches to conduct a well organized training session

Coaches should instruct athletes to:

- ♦ Arrive on time for practice
- ♦ Wear proper attire
- ♦ Be ready to work when practice begins
- ♦ Listen to all instructions and follow all safety rules when working around horses
- ♦ Take care of tack and other stable equipment
- ♦ Respect other riders and their horses
- ♦ Receive the coach's permission when leaving the arena
- ♦ Respect coaches



At Competition

Coaches should:

- ♦ Fill out all entry forms correctly and in a timely manner
- ♦ Tell the athletes the location and the time of the competition
- ♦ Instruct the athletes what to wear for the competition
- ♦ Bring horses and tack, or, if borrowing horses, insure that each rider has an appropriate horse and tack
- ♦ Bring any adaptive equipment necessary for the riders. Make sure there are enough volunteers to supervise the horses and athletes.
- ♦ Arrive early for competition
- ♦ Check with Competition Management to determine that all athletes are entered correctly
- ♦ Notify Competition Management of any scratches
- ♦ Attend all coaches meetings
- ♦ Be responsible for the athletes under your supervision
- ♦ Make sure the athlete is ready to compete when the official calls the class
- ♦ Provide any necessary assistance to your athletes and remain in the designated coaches area when doing so
- ♦ Be respectful of all competition staff, officials, and other participants
- ♦ Be positive and enthusiastic, and promote good sportsmanship

Coaches should instruct athletes to:

- ♦ Arrive on time for competition
- ♦ Wear proper competition attire
- ♦ Bring an extra copy of music for optional routines
- ♦ Display good sportsmanship at all times
- ♦ Respect other riders' and horses' personal space in the warm-up arena and in the barn
- ♦ Stay in the designated warm-up and competition arenas
- ♦ Receive the coach's permission when leaving the arena
- ♦ Respect all judges and officials
- ♦ Keep all personal belongings in designated area. Keep the barn aisle clear of clutter.

Coaches should instruct parents/guardians and spectators to:

- ♦ Display good sportsmanship at all times
- ♦ Respect all judges and officials
- ♦ Stay in designated spectator areas
- ♦ Not wave flags, use noise makers, or anything else that might cause the horses to spook
- ♦ Not use flash photography



Sportsmanship

Good sportsmanship is both the coaches' and athletes' commitment to fair play, ethical behavior, and integrity. In perception and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Lead by example. Below we highlight a few focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes.

Competitive Effort

- Put forth maximum effort during each event.
- Practice the skills with the same intensity, as you would perform them in competition.

Fair Play at All Times

- Always comply with the rules.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play at all times.
- Respect the decision of the officials/ judges at all times.

Expectations of Coaches

- Always set a good example for participants and spectators to follow.
- Instruct participants in proper sportsmanship responsibilities and demand that they make sportsmanship and ethics the top priorities.
- Respect judgment of officials, abide by rules of the event, and display no behavior that could incite fans.
- Treat opposing coaches, directors, participants, and fans with respect.
- Demonstrate a high standard of sportsmanship.

Expectations of Athletes

- Treat fellow competitors with respect.
- Encourage competitors when they make a mistake.
- Respect the judgment of officials and abide by the rules of the competition.
- Accept seriously the responsibility and privilege of representing Special Olympics.
- Define winning as doing your personal best.
- Live up to the high standard of sportsmanship established by your coach.
- Have Fun!

Remember

- ♦ Always display good sportsmanship.
- ♦ Have a positive attitude about competition.
- ♦ Reward the attempt, not only the outcome!



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaching Guide

Equestrian Rules, Protocol & Etiquette

Equestrian Glossary

In Special Olympics, several disciplines are included in Equestrian. It is advisable to work with a professional trainer to learn the specific requirements, terminology, and training methods for each discipline.

Term	Definition
Aids	Signals from the rider to the horse. Hand, seat, leg, and voice aids are used to communicate the rider's commands to the horse.
FEI	Federation Equestre Internationale – the international governing body for equestrian sports
Gaits	English – walk, trot, canter Western – walk, jog, lope
Leader	Horse handler for supported riders
Sidewalker	Assistant who provides confidence and security for supported riders
Supported rider	Athlete who needs assistance and cannot safely ride independently
Tack	Equipment used in equestrian sports (for example – saddle and bridle)

Equestrian

Special Olympics Coaching Quick Start Guide

Special Olympics

March 2012





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Equestrian Sports for Special Olympics Athletes

In Special Olympics, equestrian encompasses several disciplines. Regardless of whether the athlete rides in English or Western tack, the principles of coaching are the same and the safety of the athlete is the primary focus. In planning equestrian training sessions, it is important to make sure the horses are well-mannered and appropriate for the level of the athlete. Providing safe horses and a safe environment is the responsibility of the coach. Only then can equestrian sports be fun and educational for the rider.

Benefits of Riding

- ♦ Develops coordination, good posture, balance, and body awareness.
- ♦ Improves the athlete's total fitness.
- ♦ Teaches self-discipline.
- ♦ Teaches the athlete to respect and enjoy nature and animals.
- ♦ Enhances self-esteem.
- ♦ Provides the athlete with a life-long recreational activity.
- ♦ Provides an activity that family and friends can share with the athlete.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaches Quick Start Guide





Planning an Equestrian Training & Competition Season

As in all sports, the Special Olympics Equestrian coach must have a coaching philosophy. The coach's philosophy should be consistent with the Special Olympics philosophy, which is that quality training and opportunities for fair and equitable competition should be provided for the Special Olympics athlete. In addition, successful coaches include fun, the overall development of the athlete, and the athlete's acquisition of skills and knowledge of a particular sport as objectives of their programs.

It is recommended that an equestrian training group consists of an appropriate ratio of athlete to coach, depending on the skill level of the athletes, the suitability of horses, and safety of the facility. If your Equestrian program has too many athletes to hold only one training session, divide the riders according to ability level and schedule a separate weekly session for each group. In the long run, organization and planning are the keys to a successful season. The following checklist will assist the equestrian coach in planning a season.

Pre-Season Planning and Preparation

- Improve your knowledge of equestrian sports and your coaching skills by attending training schools and clinics.
- Locate a facility (i.e., pony club, riding club, etc.) with the proper equipment for practice sessions.
- Recruit volunteer assistants from local riding programs. Train these assistants in handling techniques to insure athletes' safety during mounting and dismounting and while riding.
- Establish goals and draw up a ten-week training plan, such as the one suggested in the *Equestrian Coaching Guide*. Schedule at least one, or if possible two, practices per week for the ten weeks.
- Plan a mini-competition for your athletes during the final week of their training.
- Ensure that all prospective riders have thorough physical examinations before the first practice. Be aware of any special considerations you need to take into account while working with the athletes, such as fear, sensitivity to heat, or physical limitations.

Season Planning

- Manage a ten-week training program, such as the one in the *Equestrian Coaching Guide*
- Plan each practice according to what needs to be accomplished, using each athlete's individual progress as a guideline for planning. In general, a practice will include:
 - (i) groundwork
 - (ii) warm-up
 - (iii) mounted exercises
 - (iv) mounted lesson
 - (v) review, games, or coach's comments

Post-Season Planning

- Review pre-season goals and determine how many of them were achieved.
- Ask for comments regarding the season from the athletes, assistants and parents.
- Write a plan for off-season conditioning-similar to the warm-up section in the *Equestrian Coaching Guide*-and pass it out to the athletes.



Horses and Supporting Volunteers

In Equestrian, proper attire and equipment are of the utmost importance, not just for learning the sport, but for safety. Horses and supporting volunteers are as much a part of equestrian equipment as are saddles and bridles. The primary consideration is matching athletes to appropriate horses. The horses must be well-mannered, sound, and trained in the discipline they are expected to perform. It is the coach's responsibility to provide suitable horses, and then to match the horses to the riders. In addition, the coach must select knowledgeable volunteers to act as leaders, side walkers, and spotters. Each horse and rider combination has different requirements the coach must consider.



When conducting a training session, the coach takes the lead in assigning horses and supporting volunteers for each rider. Everyone assisting with the lesson should wear comfortable shoes (no sandals). Loose fitting clothes or dangly jewelry can provide a safety hazard. It is important that each person knows the specifics of the job he/she is expected to perform. Volunteers should function as an extension of the instructor, not as a distraction to the rider. The instructor is in control of the lesson and gives direction to the riders. Volunteers help the riders follow those directions

- **Coach or instructor** – The coach/instructor is responsible for teaching the riding lesson. The instructor must have an extensive knowledge of horses and horsemanship, as well as an adequate knowledge of physical and intellectual disabilities. The instructor must always dress and act professionally, promote a positive learning experience for the athletes, and keep safety first.
- **Leaders** – The leader is responsible for controlling the horse, so must have experience working around horses. The rider should be encouraged to do as much as possible, but the leader must insure that the horse starts, stops, and turns when necessary. When several horses are in the arena, the leader should make sure there is adequate distance between horses. When the rider is mounting, dismounting, or doing exercises, the leader should keep the horse still by standing in front of the horse, holding each side of the bit gently. When the horse is walking or trotting, the leader should stand just behind the horse's head, between the head and shoulder.
- **Sidewalkers** – The main responsibility of the sidewalkers is the safety of the athlete. The number of sidewalkers and the amount of assistance they provide depends on the balance of the rider. For riders with poor balance or restricted use of their legs, the sidewalkers may need to support the upper or lower leg. Other riders, however, just need someone close in case the horse makes an unexpected movement.

Sidewalkers providing full assistance:



Securing the rider's upper leg



Assisting with balance



Sidewalkers providing partial assistance



Securing the rider's knee

Sidewalkers providing confidence



Securing the rider's ankle



Walking close



Walking Close



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaches Quick Start Guide



Equitation class showing various levels of assistance

- **Spotters** – The spotter is used in mounting to assist the instructor as necessary, by performing several duties, such as holding the stirrup on the opposite side as the rider mounts, or guiding the rider into position. The spotter must be trained in mounting procedures and be comfortable with the job that is expected.



Equestrian Attire

For safety, appropriate Equestrian attire is essential. The coach should discuss the types of clothes that are acceptable and not acceptable for training and competition. For example, shorts and sneakers are not proper Equestrian attire for any event. Boots with heels and approved helmets are necessary for safety when riding or working around horses. Refer to the Official Special Olympics Rules for specific requirements for competition attire.



Boots with heels



Schooling helmet



Appropriate Schooling Attire for English





Appropriate Show Attire for English



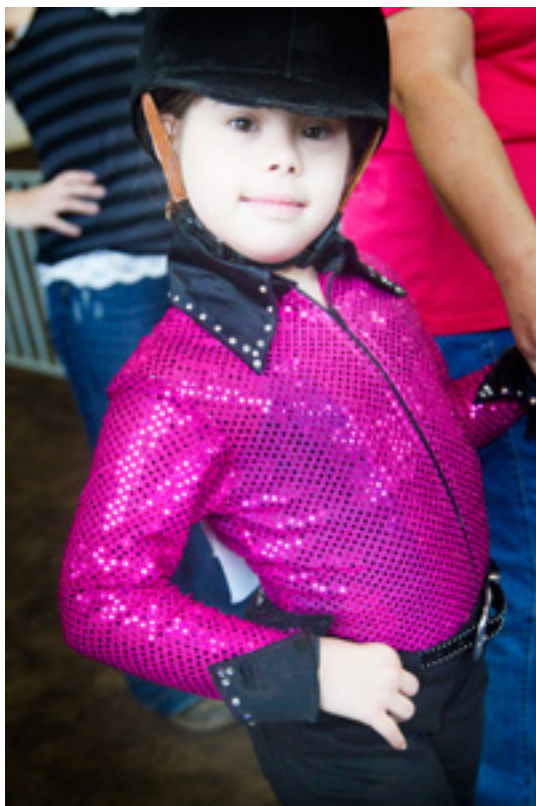


Appropriate Schooling Attire for Western





Appropriate Show Attire for Western





Well Turned Out Horse

In Equestrian events, the horse is the athlete's partner in training and competition. Before each session, the horse should be thoroughly groomed, not just for appearance, but as a check for any physical problems such as cuts, swollen legs, or loose shoes. For competition, the horse must be well turned out, meaning neatly groomed and wearing clean, well fitting tack.

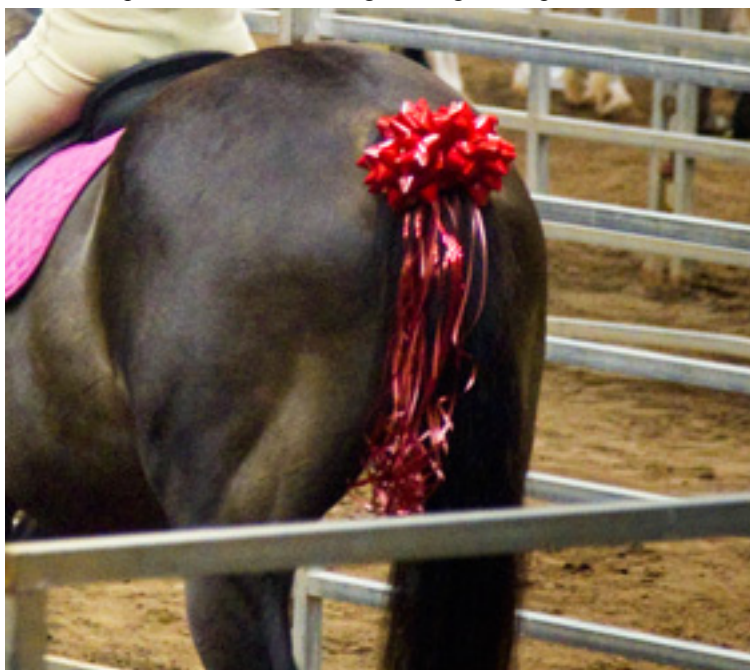


Horse's mane braided for competition



Horse's tail braided for competition

If a horse kicks, it is appropriate to tie a red ribbon on the horse's tail to warn other riders not to come too close. The bow in the picture below is too big, but it gets the point across.





Equestrian Equipment

For the safety of the athletes, all equipment used in equestrian programs must be clean and in good repair. Different tack is required for English and Western disciplines. Refer to the Skills section of the *Equestrian Coaching Guide* and to the Official Special Olympics Rules for specific information about those requirements. It is not the purpose of this Coaching Guide to instruct coaches in the use of different types of tack and equipment, such as bits, specially adapted saddles, and mounting ramps. Professional trainers and therapeutic riding instructors should be consulted for this information.

Modified tack is often necessary for athletes with physical disabilities. Therapeutic riding instructors are a good resource for learning about modifications. Sometimes, different kinds of tack, such as the reins with colored sections shown below, are useful tools in helping the athlete understand the aids used for riding.





Tack

The tack used for Special Olympics should meet the requirements for each separate discipline. FEI guidelines are followed, except when special adaptations are necessary for the safety of the athlete.

One Special Olympics requirement is that a halter/headcollar must be used over or under the bridle. This allows a leader to assist the athlete in controlling the horse.



Halters worn over or under the bridle are mandatory for supported riders. Refer to the Skills section of the *Equestrian Coaching Guide* for more information.

Safety stirrups are required for all Special Olympics riders at all times. Many types of safety stirrups are available. For Special Olympics riders, the stirrup's design must either:

- Prevent the toe of the rider from moving forward so far that the heel of the rider loses its proper position BEHIND the stirrup.
- Actually come apart in a way to allow the foot to easily slide from the stirrup.

These actions must occur without any proactive movement by the athlete. Shown below are some examples of appropriate safety stirrups. Remember that safety stirrups need to be the proper fit to the foot. Too large or too small and they become ineffective.



Special Olympics Equestrian Coaches Quick Start Guide

- 1) **Peacock Stirrups:** Identified by a rubber band on the outer side of the stirrup designed to give way and allow a foot to fall from the stirrup out the side.



- 2) **Breakaway stirrups:** Come in English and Western models. Are designed to release when pressure is applied laterally preventing the rider from being dragged after falling from the horse. The middle bar is designed not to release unless the toe of the foot is pointed upwards, as it does when a rider falls from the horse, hooks the bar and applies lateral pressure. The middle bar will then release, freeing the foot from the stirrup.

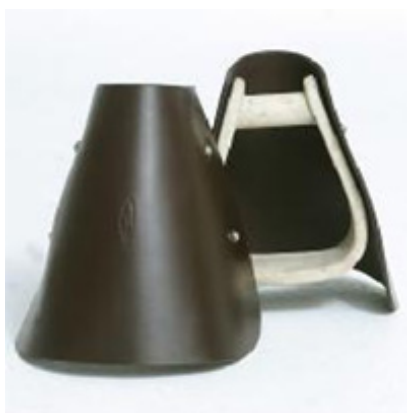




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- 4) **Tapaderos or caged stirrups:** which involve a type of covering over the front of the stirrups. This barrier prevents the rider's foot from slipping all the way through the stirrup.





Special Olympics Equestrian Coaches Quick Start Guide

These aluminum endurance stirrups feature a safety nose with padding and a guards to keep the your foot directly in the stirrup



Toe Stoppers, attaches to regular stirrups



Warm-up

A warm up period is the first part of every training session, as well as preparation for competition. The importance of a warm up, prior to exercise, cannot be overstressed. Warming up raises the body temperature and prepares the muscles, nervous system, tendons, ligaments, and the cardiovascular system for upcoming stretches and exercises. The chances of injury are greatly reduced by increasing muscle elasticity.

For equestrian sports, it is important for the horse and rider both to be properly warmed up. It is the coach's responsibility to know what type of warm-up is best suited for the horse on any given day. The rider will benefit from mounted and unmounted exercises. The warm-up is a good time for the coach to focus on the rider's strength, suppleness, and body awareness.

Mounted warm-up exercises give the athlete an opportunity to become acquainted with the horse, without the demands of actually riding. The athlete will gain self confidence as he/she interacts with the horse and learns to move freely while mounted.

Refer to *Equestrian Coaching Guide* for warm-up exercises for the rider. Coaches who are not experienced in warming up the horse should consult a professional trainer in the chosen discipline.



Cool Down

The cool-down is as important as the warm up, however this portion of the workout is often ignored. The cool-down gradually reduces the body temperature and heart rate and speeds the recovery process before the next training session or competitive event. Since riding is not a sport that requires constant aerobic activity, especially at the lower levels, the cool-down is most often a good time for the coach and athlete to talk about the session or competition. It is also a good time for the athlete to bond with the horse, and learn grooming and stable management skills.



Leading

Athletes should be encouraged to lead their horses from the ground. This gives them self-confidence in working around horses and teaches them skills that will be useful in competition classes, such as Showmanship.

The first step is teaching the athlete to put the halter/headcollar on the horse. This should be done under the supervision of a knowledgeable horse person.



When teaching the athlete to lead, the coach must insist on safety: walking at the horse's shoulder, using an appropriate length lead rope that is never wrapped around the hand or dragging on the ground. The coach can attach a lead rope to the opposite side and assist the athlete until he/she is in control of the horse.





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Athletes in wheelchairs can also be taught to lead their horses. It is important for the horse to be comfortable around a wheelchair before the athlete leads from the chair.





Mounting and Dismounting

Safety is the primary consideration in mounting and dismounting. Refer to *Equestrian Coaching Guide* for in depth information that has been reprinted from *Aspects and Answers, A Manual for Therapeutic Horseback Riding Programs*.



Dressage

Rider's Position

The Athlete should be well-balanced, elastic, sitting deep in the center of the saddle, smoothly absorbing the movement of the Horse with the loins and hips, supple thighs with the legs steady and stretched well down. The heels should be the lowest point. The upper part of the body should be tall and supple. The contact should be independent from the Athlete's seat. The hands should be carried steadily close together, with the thumb as the highest point and a straight line from the supple elbow through the hand to the Horse's mouth. The elbows should be close to the body. All these criteria enable the Athlete to follow the movements of the Horse smoothly and freely. (FEI)

Rider's Position – Body



Correct position – The ear, shoulder, hip, and heel are in alignment.



Common faults:



Arched back



Rounded shoulders, collapsing forward



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Leaning forward, chin jutting forward



Leaning back, incorrect head position to counterbalance



Collapsing to the side



Collapsing



Straight

Collapsing to the side on the ball demonstrates how the rider's action will influence the horse, pushing it sideways
Sitting straight on the ball demonstrates how the horse remains underneath the rider's weight



Rider's Position – Arms & Hands

The rider's arms should hang loosely by the sides, with a right angle bend in the elbow. The athlete's arms and reins should form a straight line from the elbow to the bit.

The hands should be upright, with the thumbs on top, closed on the reins.



Reins too long



Arms too straight

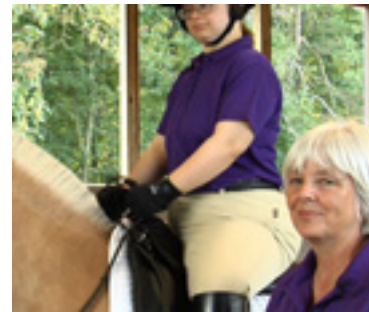
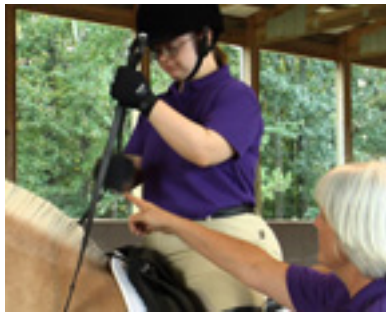


Elbows Back





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How to hold the reins – The rider should hold the reins between the fourth finger and the little finger, with the thumb closed on top.

How to shorten reins - The rider holds both reins in the left hand, slides the right hand to the desired length, and then slides the left hand. The rider should never drop the reins completely.

It is important for the rider to be able to use his/her arms independently of the rest of the body. When the rider moves the arms to give a rein aid, the torso and shoulders should not follow, but remain strong and still. Refer to the Independent Hands exercise in the Warm-up section of this Guide for an exercise on the stability ball which will teach the rider to stabilize his/her hands.



Correct arm position

The rider should be able to use the arm to give a rein aid without moving the body.





Incorrect



Correct



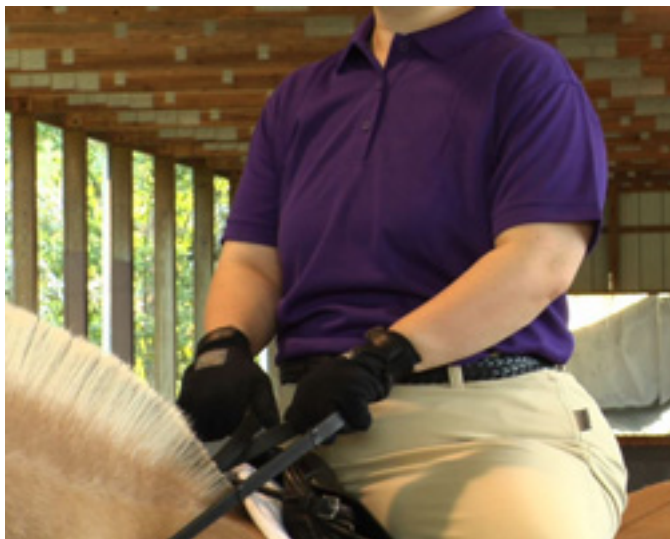
Correct



Incorrect



Correct hand position



Piano hands



Rider's Position – Legs

The rider's legs should drape around the barrel of the horse, with a slight bend at the hips and knees. The toes should be directly beneath the knees. In order for the rider's legs to be in the correct position, the stirrups must be adjusted to the proper length.



Correct leg position



Legs too far forward



Legs too far back



Stirrups too long



Stirrups too short



Rider's Position – Foot



Too much foot in stirrup



Ball of foot in stirrup

The foot should be parallel to the horse's side, with the ball of the foot in the stirrup, and the heel down.



Teaching an Athlete to Post

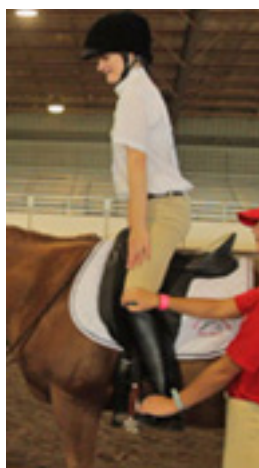


Teach the athlete to post by breaking the skill down into parts, first at the halt, then walk, and finally trot. To develop balance and core strength, teach the athlete first to post holding onto the pommel, then placing hands on the thighs, and finally placing the hands on the head. The rider should be able to post without using the hands to balance on the reins

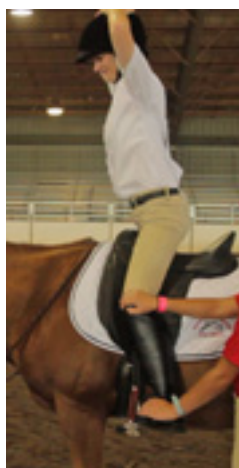
Posting at the halt



Hold onto the pommel

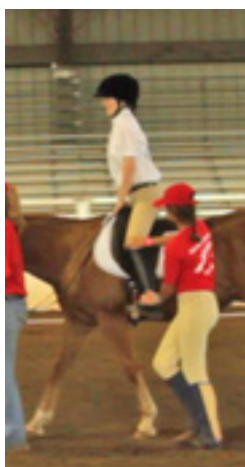


Place hands on thighs



Place hands on head

Posting at the walk



Hold onto the pommel



Place hands on thighs



Place hands on head



Posting at the Trot



With a leader/horse handler and sidewalker



With a leader/horse handler



Independent

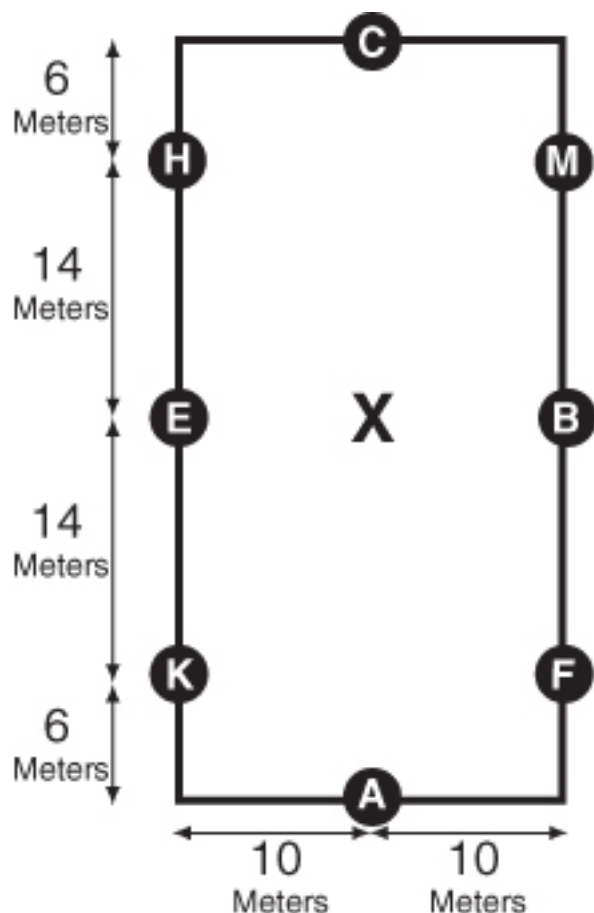




Dressage Arena

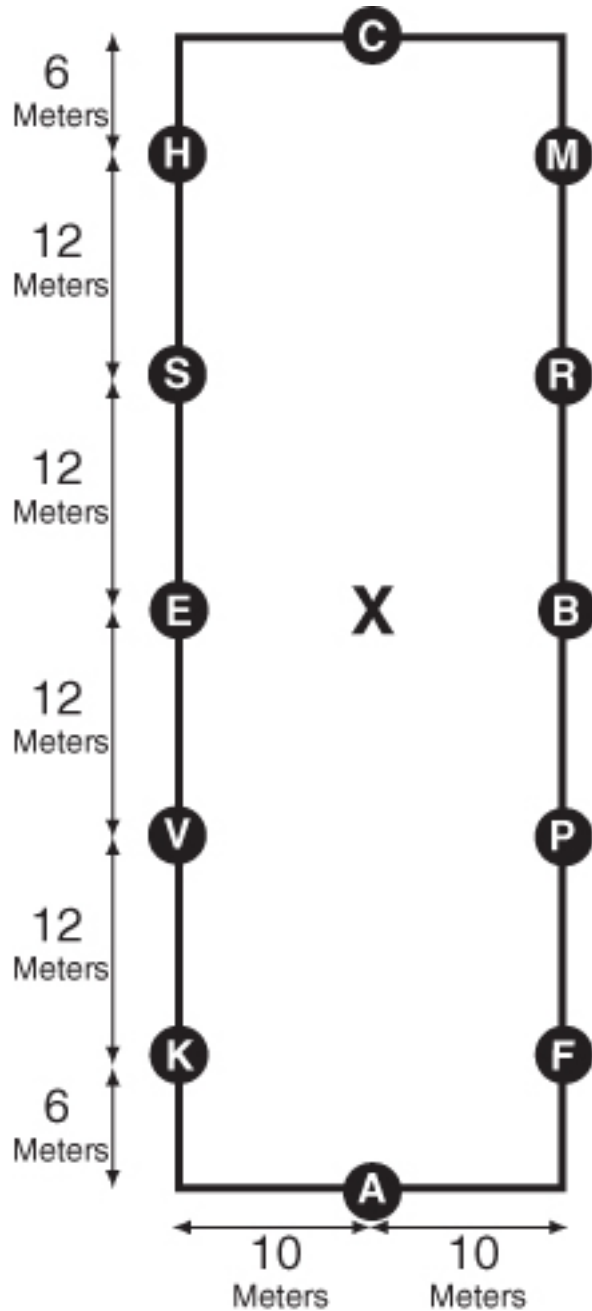
Dressage riders must be familiar with the geometry of both the small and large arenas. Most Special Olympics dressage tests are ridden in the small arena, however, athletes may sometimes train or compete in the large arena. In order to ride dressage tests accurately, the athlete must know how to place each movement in the arena. Refer to the *Equestrian Coaching Guide* for information about riding accurate figures in the dressage arena.

Geometry of the Small Dressage Arena (20 meters X 40 meters)





Geometry of the Large Dressage Arena (20 meters X 60 meters)

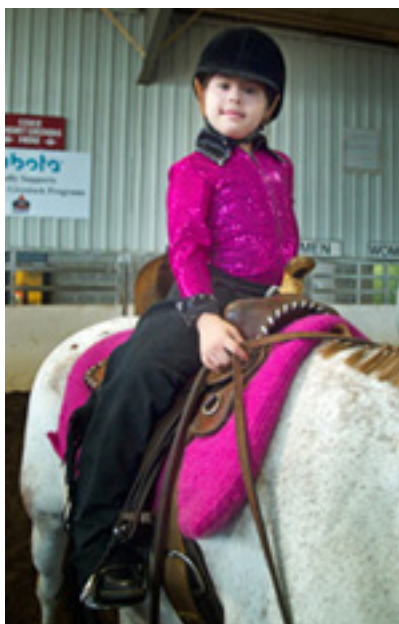




Western

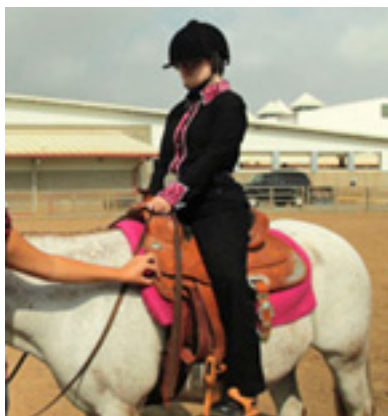
Tack

All tack must fit both the horse and the rider properly. For training and competition, tack should be clean and in good repair.



Saddle

A Western stock type or Australian saddle is appropriate for Western events. Safety stirrups are required.





Bridle

A Western style bridle with split or Romel reins is appropriate. For an athlete who needs a leader, a halter/headcollar should be worn over or under the bridle.



Holding the reins

For purposes of this Coaching Guide, we will focus on split reins to be used while neck reining. For information on other types of reins, check with a professional for instructions on how to use each style properly and which style would be appropriate for each horse.

- The athlete should have only one hand on the reins, with the index finger between the reins.
- Rein hand should be bent at the elbow, and carried immediately above or slightly in front of the saddle horn.
- Free hand has a few optional positions:
 - Resting on the leg
 - Straight down at the rider's side
 - Bent at the elbow in a similar position as the hand holding the reins





Western Equitation

In Western equitation, riders are judged on seat, aids, and the ability to influence the horse. Results as shown by the performance of the horse are not to be considered more important than the method used by the rider. Athletes will be asked to perform patterns and gaits appropriate for their level.



Horsemanship

Attire

In a Horsemanship class, the athlete should be presented in clean, well-fitting attire, including, for safety, boots with a heel, and an approved safety helmet. For specific regulations about attire, consult the Official Special Olympics Rules.





Body Position

Correct horsemanship starts with the correct body position of the rider. An easy way to check proper body position is to do a straight line test. A lunge whip works well to show a straight line from the ear, shoulder, hip, through the ankle, to the back of the heel.



Lower body position

- Rider should sit in the center of the saddle.
- There is a slight bend to the knees, with the lower leg directly under the knee.
- Heels should be lower than the toes.
- Boot is in the stirrup from the position of the ball of the foot in the stirrup to the heel touching the stirrup.
- Thigh, knee & upper calf are in contact with the horse.



Upper body position

- Back should be upright and relaxed
- Shoulders back and square
- Upper arm in a straight line with the body
- Head should be held with the chin level & eyes forward or turned slightly in the direction of travel.





Horsemanship Patterns

Horsemanship Patterns

The type of horsemanship pattern that is appropriate for each rider is determined by his/her skill level. Some riders will walk only, with or without assistance, while others may walk, jog, and lope independently. As riders advance, the patterns will become more complex, including transitions between gaits and a variety of elements.



Horsemanship

Patterns with Assistance

Athletes should practice many types of horsemanship patterns during their regular riding lessons. At first, it may be necessary for a leader to guide the horse to show the athlete the correct pattern. As the athlete becomes more confident, the leader can stand close, allowing the athlete to control the horse during the patterns.



With Assistance



Independent





Horsemanship Pattern at a Show

The Western Horsemanship class is designed to evaluate the rider's ability to execute a predetermined set of maneuvers. The rider is judged on his/her ability to influence the horse with subtle aids, maintain a correct body position, and execute the pattern with precision.

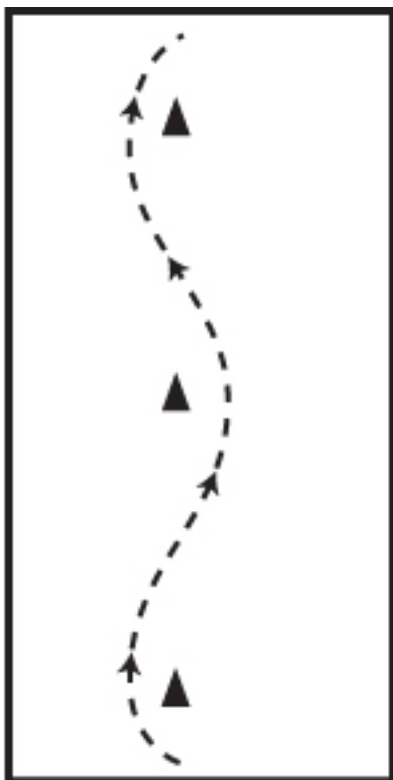
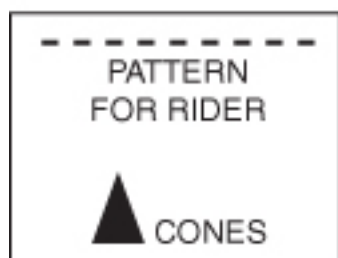


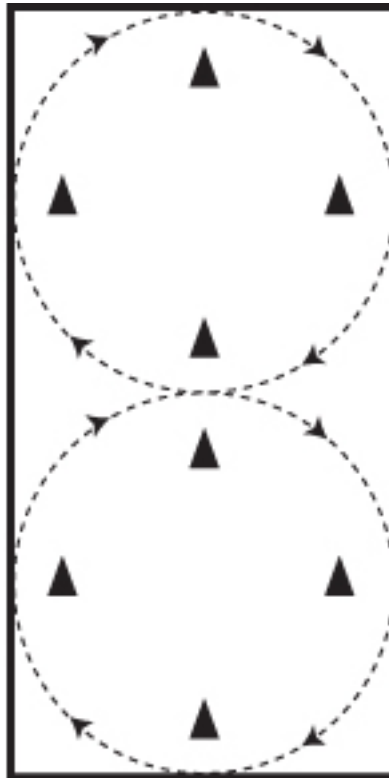
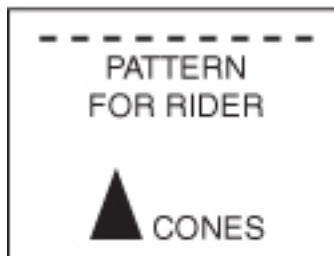


Athletes will be asked to perform basic maneuvers as elements of an individually worked pattern. These can include:

- Executing a walk, jog, or lope in a straight or curved line
- Halt
- Figure 8 or serpentine
- Circles at a walk or jog
- Backing or pivot on the haunches

Riders will work predetermined patterns individually, using cones or markers for transition points.





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Exhibitors will then ride on the rail as a group, in at least one direction.



The horse must be trained to perform these maneuvers before asking the athlete to do them. A professional trainer should be consulted if the coach does not have experience in training the Western horse.



Showmanship

The emphasis in Showmanship should be on the athlete's ability to handle and show the horse, with safety as the main consideration. The horse is merely a prop to show the ability of the showman.





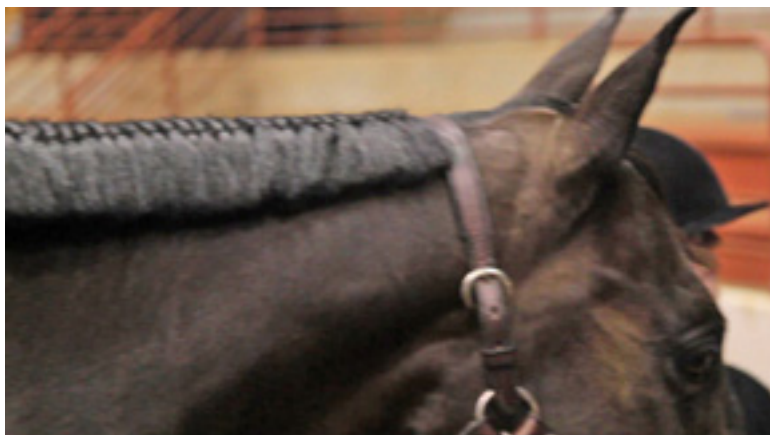
Presentation of the Horse

In showmanship, the appearance of the horse and tack are judged.

Grooming of the horse - The horse's coat should be clean and well brushed around the eyes, ears, muzzle, nostrils, between the legs, and around the tail. The mane, tail, forelock, and wither tufts must be clean and free of tangles. It is prohibited to use any ornaments on the aforementioned.

Trimming of the horse – Manes may be roached, braided, or banded. The inside of the ears may be clipped. Long hair on the jaw, legs, and pasterns should be clipped.

Tack – All tack should be neat, clean, and in good repair.





Showmanship Class



Well fitting halter



Halter with chain



Halter with assistant

Western showmanship shows with a halter and lead (with or without a chain). The exhibitor holds the tail of the lead coiled loosely in the left hand, and holds the lead close to the horse's head with the right hand. Arms should be bent at the elbows, close to the side. The exhibitor should never stand directly in front of the horse, and should not touch the horse with their hands or feet at anytime while in the showmanship class. Exhibitors need to maintain a safe distance from other horses. While maintaining eye contact with the judge as much as possible, the exhibitor should be aware of the judge's position in the arena at all times.





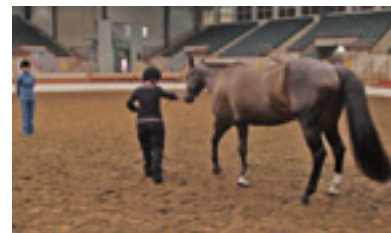
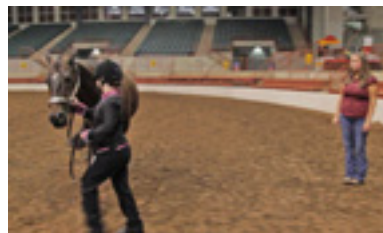
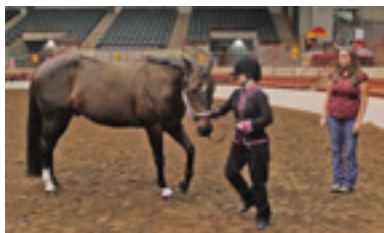
Showmanship Positions

There are 4 basic positions for the exhibitor while showing a horse in a showmanship class.

Leading position – Stand between the eye and midpoint of the neck (at the throat latch) facing forward.

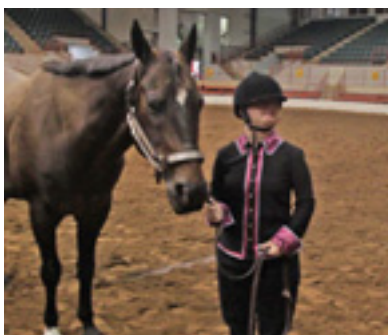
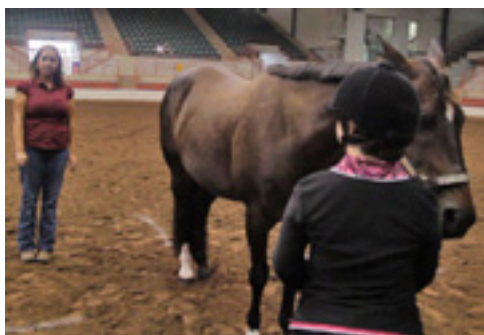


Turning position – (Or halt position) With the horse at a halt, the exhibitor is in the leading position, facing the horse's head, as they stand for a halt, or prepare and execute a turn or pivot.



Inspection positions – With the horse squared up for inspection, the exhibitor is facing the horse's head, at an angle between the horse's eye and muzzle. As the judges circle the horse to evaluate, the athlete moves from the right of the horse's head to the left.





Backing position - The exhibitor stands in the leading position, facing backwards, towards the horse's tail.





Showmanship Patterns



The pattern requested by the judge may include in any order the following elements:

- Walking or trotting in straight lines
- Halt
- Turns or pivots
- Backing
- Squaring up or setting up for inspection.



Inspection

The inspection element of a pattern consists of the exhibitor setting the horse's hooves in a square or even set up to allow the judge to evaluate the horse. The basic idea is to show the horse to the judge, maintaining eye contact with the judge as much as possible, without interfering with the judge's view of the horse. The exhibitor's position for inspection is usually based on the quarter system. By drawing an imaginary line on the ground, imagine an infinite line running the length of the horse (going between the horses ears, down the spine, and out the tail). Draw another imaginary line, perpendicular to the first line, crossing the horse at the withers, thus forming 4 imaginary quadrants. When the judge is in front of the withers, the exhibitor is on the opposite side of the horse's head, in the opposite quadrant. When the judge moves behind the withers of the horse, the exhibitor moves into the quadrant on the same side as the judge.

