

How to Ride a Training Level Dressage Test

I. General Procedures

- A. Schedule: you ride at a specific time. **Be ready at that time.**
- B. When the previous rider finishes, you may enter the area **around** the arena, but do not enter the arena itself, yet. You may ride around the outside of the arena until the judge signals to start the test.
- C. The judge will ring a bell or blow a whistle; you have **45** seconds to enter the arena.
- D. Your first movement includes a halt at **X** and saluting the judge. To salute, put your reins in your left hand, drop your right hand by your side, and bow your head. When the judge acknowledges your salute, you may continue.
- E. If the judge rings the bell or blows the whistle **during** your test, stop immediately and turn toward the judge. This means that you have gone off course. The judge will explain what to do next.
- F. Your test may be read/announced at the county level.
- G. When your test is finished, halt & salute the judge. After the judge acknowledges your salute, leave the arena according to the test.
- H. Do **not** use your voice, click your tongue, “kiss,” etc—that is penalized by 2 points.
 - I. Read the 4-H Contest Guide & Dressage Manual for rules, including tack and attire.

II. The Arena

- A. Size: Small arena is 20 meters x 40 meters; standard/large is 20m x 60 m
- B. Letters: see the diagram for the Small arena.
- C. Judge sits about 5 meters behind **C**; you always enter/leave at **A**.

III. The Movements

- A. Training Level movements include straight lines & 20-meter circles at trot and canter, plus walk, free walk, and halt and transitions between the gaits.
- B. Trot may be done sitting or rising/posting unless the test says which you are to do.
- C. Transitions to and from the halt may be done through the walk.
- D. A 20-meter circle is the width of the arena (see the diagram).
- E. For a circle, the horse should leave the track/rail when its shoulder or the rider is at the letter. **However**, you must begin to ask for the circle well **before** that point.
- F. Transitions are also supposed to occur when the horse’s shoulder or the rider is at the specified letter. Again, you must anticipate that point!
- G. Late transitions are penalized more than early ones.
- H. Corners are **not** the same as circles. You should ride fairly deeply into the corner, depending upon your horse’s training, rather than cut the corner.
 - I. On circles and when turning, the horse should be bent to the inside. Go one or two straight strides between changes of the direction of bend, if possible.
 - J. When changing rein on the diagonal the horse should leave the track at the corner marker and go all the way to the track at the opposite corner marker.
 - K. When turning **across** the ring (see Training Level Test 3, movements 2 & 3), pretend that there is a wall going across the ring a tiny bit beyond the line **B-X-E**. Do **not** wait until you get to the letter to start your turn or you will not hit the right point. Use the same kind of image when turning down the centerline at the end of the test.
 - L. Stretching movement in Training Level Tests 3 & 4 is done at rising trot.

IV. Scoring

- A. Each movement is given a score between 0 and 10; a 5 or 6 is a fairly good score. The full test sheet includes the “directive ideas,” which are the primary factors that the judge considers in giving a score.
- B. Some movements’ scores are doubled—see the test.
- C. Four additional overall factors or collective marks scored and doubled.
 - 1. **Gaits** (freedom and regularity);
 - 2. **Impulsion** (desire to move forward, elasticity of the steps, suppleness of the back, engagement of the hindquarters)
 - 3. **Submission** (attention and confidence, harmony, lightness and ease of movements, acceptance of the bridle, lightness of the forehand)
 - 4. **Rider** (position and seat, correctness and effect of the aids)
- D. Any use of the voice deducts 2 points from that movement.
- E. Errors cost 2 points for the first, 4 for the second. A third error results in elimination.
- F. Total points are divided by the maximum points on the test and converted into a **percentage**. Blue is 58% & up; red is 50.00% to 57.99%; white is 49.99% or lower.

V. State Fair Qualification

- A. You must first qualify for the State Fair based upon your showmanship and equitation (total of 170 points).
- B. If you earned a blue ribbon at Training Level Test 2 or higher, you may ride that same dressage test at the State Fair.

VI. Tips to Improve Your Score

- A. **Accuracy** is very important. While a dressage test is a bit like an equitation pattern, it is longer, the movements occur at specific points, and circles are a specific size.
 - 1. Circles should be **round** and the correct **size**; a circle that’s too large, oblong, oval, or wobbly will be penalized.
 - 2. Straight lines should be straight: coming down the centerline is easy for the judge to see; changing rein on the diagonal is another time to be straight.
 - 3. You have to anticipate and start to prepare and ask the horse for a movement before the letter where it is to begin. How far will depend upon your horse.
- B. **Smoothness** is also very important, especially in transitions.
- C. **Regularity** (even, consistent rhythm) can make a big difference. For example, it’s much easier to make a round circle if the horse’s rhythm is consistent. If the horse speeds up, the circle tends to get bigger; if he slows down, it tends to get smaller.
- D. In open dressage tests, posting diagonals are not considered. However, in 4-H, the judge may take that into account, just as in an equitation pattern. Change posting diagonal when you change direction. When changing rein on the diagonal of the arena or across the ring, change posting diagonal at the middle (usually **X**).