



# UNITED STATES DRESSAGE FEDERATION™

## USDF 2023 Freestyle Rules and Guidelines

*Effective 12/1/2022 -11/30/2026*

### Training, First, Second, Third, and Fourth Level Freestyle

#### Eligibility

Dressage musical freestyle is an exciting combination of the technical and artistic aspects of classical dressage. To foster the highest possible technical quality in freestyle performances, competitors are required to enter a freestyle class only at the level at which they have already demonstrated proficiency. Refer to USEF Rules, DR 129.9 for details on equivalencies: "Except for USEF/USDF Championship classes and for FEI Pony Riders, FEI Junior and Young Rider Freestyles, in order to enter a freestyle class at any level, a horse/rider combination must have received a minimum score of 63% for Training through Fourth levels in the highest test of the declared freestyle level or any test of a higher level at a Federation Licensed or FEI recognized Dressage Competition or "open" Dressage class (i.e. open to all breeds) at a Federation Licensed Competition held prior to the competition where the horse/rider combination is entered to ride a freestyle class (effective 4/1/2013). A photocopy of the test verifying eligibility or copy of the USDF score verification must be submitted with the entry for a freestyle class. For verification, access <http://www.usdf.org/usdfscores/>.

#### General

Musical freestyle is an artistic program created by the rider to present his or her horse to its best advantage in an artistic, musical context.

- It is judged according to technical execution (execution of compulsory movements) and artistic impression (harmony, choreography, degree of difficulty, music, and interpretation).
- It is performed in a standard dressage arena (20 x 60 meters).
- A copy of the program is not submitted in advance.
- It is the responsibility of the rider to remember and execute the choreography. Should disobedience or some other issue cause a disruption in the patterns, it is the rider's responsibility to get back on course.
- Current USDF scoresheets must be used.

#### Time

- The maximum time limit for all USDF freestyles is five minutes. There is no minimum time requirement.
- The bell or whistle will not be sounded at the end of five minutes.
- Movements performed after the time limit has elapsed will not be scored. One (1) point will be deducted from the total for artistic impression for exceeding the time limit. A 10-second grace period should be given before a deduction is taken.
- The program is timed from the horse's move-off after the initial halt and salute and ceases at the final salute.
- The rider must signal the sound engineer within 45 seconds of the entry bell or be eliminated. The rider must enter the arena within 30 seconds of the start of the music, or they may be eliminated at the discretion of the Judge.
- Exceeding 75 seconds before entering the arena after the bell has sounded will entail elimination.

#### Music

- Music is mandatory.
- Exit music is not allowed.
- The music must cease at the final salute.
- **DR 129:** In case of rider's music failing **before or** during a Freestyle Test and in cases where there is no backup system, the rider can, with permission of the judge at "C", leave the arena **or start at a later time**. There should be minimum interference with the starting times of the other riders and the affected rider should return to complete or restart his/her test during a scheduled break in the competition or at the end of the competition. The rider may decide whether to restart the test from the beginning or to commence from the point where the music failed. Judging must restart at the point of interruption. In any case, the marks already given will not be changed.

- It is the rider's responsibility to notify the judge if there is an issue with the music once the test starts. This includes the wrong music or music that cuts out or is corrupted in some way. The rider should stop riding the test and let the judge at C know about the issue with the music.

### Judges

- Freestyle competitions must be judged by USEF-licensed dressage judges, at levels appropriate to their license.
- Freestyle judges are seated as they would be in a standard test, according to the level of competition.
- If more than one (1) judge is officiating, all judges must score both "Technical Execution" and "Artistic Impression."
- "Technical Execution" marks may be given in half or full points.
- "Artistic Impression" marks may be given in tenth (.1) points (recommended for greater refinement of the scoring for more accurate placement of the class).

### Equipment and Turnout

- Attire, tack, and saddlery for all freestyle classes must comply with USEF rules.
- Costume classes, etc., may also be offered, if conditions are clearly stated in the prize list.
- Contact USDF for specific information regarding pas de deux and quadrille freestyle classes.

### ELEMENTS OF A DRESSAGE MUSICAL FREESTYLE

- "Compulsory Elements": All of the elements to be scored in one box on dressage test sheet, whether movement, figure or transition.
- *Movements*:
  1. Test movement: a section of a dressage test to be evaluated with one (1) score on a score sheet.
  2. Dressage Movements: leg-yield, rein-back, shoulder-in, travers, renvers, turn on haunches, half-pass (trot or canter), flying change(s), pirouette (walk or canter), piaffe, and passage.

**For the purpose of the current freestyle tests, *forbidden movement(s)* refers to #1.**

- Movements from the USEF test of the same level or below are permitted. Anything "Additionally Allowed" is stated on the scoresheet.
- All movements follow the rules and requirements listed in the current USEF rulebook.
- Any transitions in and out of required movements, unless separately scored, are included in the movement score.

### Freestyle Definitions

- *Figures*: geometrical component of a dressage test such as circles, serpentines etc.
- *Transitions*: changes between two different gaits or from one gait to another within the same gait
- *Combinations*: direct connection of any movement or figure with another movement or figure
- *Patterns*: geometric design formed in the arena when movements, figures, and transitions are combined
- *Counter-change of hand*: two (2) half-passes where the horse is straight for a moment before changing direction
- *Zig-zag*: three (3) or more half-passes connected by change of direction. Counter-change of hand and zig-zags are scored as separate half-passes.

### REQUIREMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

- All compulsory elements must be incorporated into the freestyle program. These are listed on the score sheet under technical execution.
- Of these, some must be demonstrated on both hands (in both directions).
- Riders must salute during the halt at the beginning and end of the freestyle. The first and final halt must be on the centerline facing C.
- Riders should avoid receiving an error by making sure the salutes are clear to the judge(s).
- Time begins when the horse moves forward after the competitor's halt and salute and ends with the final halt and salute.
- Reins in one hand are allowed.
- Freestyles may include all dressage movements found in tests of the declared level entered or below.
- Permitted movements, figures, and transitions may be constructed into any combination or pattern of the rider's choosing.
- Lateral movements (shoulder-in, travers, and renvers) must cover a minimum distance of 12 meters.
- Errors-The bell is not rung for errors occurring in USDF Freestyle Tests. Errors occur for failure to salute in the first and final halt or rising at the trot at Second Level and above. Two points will be deducted for each error (per occurrence); however, they are not cumulative, and will not result in elimination.

The following is a list of dressage movements (and some combinations and transitions) specifically permitted at each level.

**For all levels - Forbidden- Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.**

**Training Level**

*Compulsory Elements:*

Halt with salute on centerline, first and final; medium walk (20m continuous); free walk (20m continuous); 20m circle in working trot (right and left); 20m circle in working canter (right and left) serpentine in working trot two or more changes of direction with loops no smaller than 15m; stretch forward & downward on a 20m circle.

*Forbidden:*

Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.

*Additionally Allowed:*

Trot-halt-trot, trot-walk-trot, canter-trot canter (12m min of trot)

**First Level**

*Compulsory Elements:*

Halt with salute on centerline, first and final; medium walk (20m continuous); free walk (20m continuous); 10m circle in working trot (right and left); leg-yield in working trot (right and left); lengthen stride in trot on a straight line; 15m circle in working canter (right and left); (must be done in true canter to fulfill the compulsory requirement); change of lead through trot, (right and left); lengthen stride in canter on a straight line.

*Forbidden:*

Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.

*Additionally Allowed:*

Lengthen trot and/or canter on a curved line; canter serpentine counter-canter; (Please note-lengthening in trot and/or canter on a curved line will not meet the compulsory requirement.)

**Second Level**

*Compulsory Elements:*

Halt with salute on centerline, first and final; medium walk (20m continuous); free walk (20m continuous); shoulder-in (12m min.) at collected trot right and left; travers in collected trot (12m min.), (right and left); medium trot on a straight line; simple change of lead (right and left); counter-canter in collected canter, (right and left); medium canter on straight line, Transitions in and out of medium trot and medium canter (within the gait)

*Forbidden:*

Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.

*Additionally Allowed:*

Half turn on haunches (no more than 180 degrees); renvers; medium canter and/or trot, on a curved line. (Please note: medium trot and/or canter on a curved line will not meet the compulsory requirement.)

**Third Level**

*Compulsory Elements:*

Halt with salute on centerline, first and final; medium walk (20m continuous); extended walk (20m continuous); shoulder-in (12m min.) in collected trot, (right and left); trot half-pass in collected trot, (right and left); extended trot on straight line; canter half-pass in collected canter, (right and left); flying changes of

lead, (right and left); extended canter on straight line.

*Forbidden:*

Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.

*Additionally Allowed:*

Half walk pirouettes (no more than 180 degrees); half-pass zig-zag in trot; canter to halt; counter-change of hand in canter (only one change of direction); medium trot and/or canter on a curved line; (Please note: medium trot and/or canter on a curved line will not meet the compulsory requirement); flying changes shown in sequence of every five strides or more.

## **Fourth Level**

*Compulsory Elements:*

Halt with salute on centerline, first and final; collected walk (20m continuous); extended walk (20m continuous; shoulder-in (12m min.) in collected trot (right and left); trot half-pass in collected trot (right and left); extended trot on a straight line; canter half-pass in collected canter (right and left); flying changes of lead every third stride (3 min.); flying changes of lead, every 4th stride (min.3); canter working half-pirouette (right and left); extended canter on straight line.

*Forbidden:*

Any movement or transition found only in tests above the level. Exceptions are listed under *Additionally Allowed*.

*Additionally Allowed:*

Medium trot and/or canter on a curved line; (Please note: medium trot and/or canter on a curved line will not meet the compulsory requirement); half-pirouettes in canter; half-pass zig-zag in trot, and counter-change of hand in canter (only one change of direction); halt to canter.

*It is strongly recommended that competitors obtain and carefully study the current score sheets from USDF*

<http://www.usdf.org/downloads/forms/index.asp?TypePass=Tests>

## **SCORING AND JUDGING**

Two (2) sets of marks are given—one for technical execution and one for artistic impression. Each set of marks is totaled separately, and then those totals are added together and converted to the final percentage score. In the case of two or more judges, scores will be averaged, and these averages will comprise the competitor's final score.

### **Technical Execution**

- "Preliminary Marks" will be given for each execution, of the compulsory elements. For "Compulsory Elements" that must be shown on both hands, "Preliminary Marks" will be given for each direction separately, all attempts will be considered for the "Judge's Marks."
- If a required element is not performed, it will receive a score of zero (0) under "Final Score."
- If a required element that must be shown on both hands is shown on only one hand, it will receive a zero (0) for the direction that was not shown.
- In addition, omission of a required element or direction will affect the artistic impression under "Degree of Difficulty" and "Choreography" depending on what was omitted.
- In scoring technical execution, "Judge's Mark" must be given in half-points or full points (no tenths).
- Movements "Above the Level" (found ONLY in a higher-level test) receive a deduction of four (4) points from the total for "Technical Execution" for each illegal movement, but not for each recurrence of the same movement.

***"Preliminary Marks," "Judge's Mark," and "Final Score" are columns which appear on the scoresheet.***

### **Artistic Impression**

- In scoring artistic impression, "Judge's Marks" may be given in tenths (.1) increments.
- Elements performed after the five-minute time limit has elapsed will not be scored, and a penalty of (1) point will be deducted from the Total Artistic Impression.

### **Tie**

In the case of a tie, the higher total for "Artistic Impression" will break the tie.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ARTISTIC IMPRESSION

(***Bold italic*** denotes the exact wording of the artistic side of the 2023 USDF Freestyle Score sheet. Coefficients listed are for Training through Fourth Levels)

### Coefficients for Artistic Marks by Level:

	Training	First	Second	Third	Fourth
<b>REE</b>	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Harmony</b>	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Choreography</b>	4	4	4	4	4
<b>DOD</b>	1	2	3	4	4
<b>Music</b>	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Interpretation</b>	2	2	2	2	2

- ***Rhythm, Energy and Elasticity (REE)***  
Gaits (Freedom and regularity plus Impulsion (Desire to move forward; elasticity of the steps; suppleness of the back; engagement of the hindquarters)
- ***Harmony Between Horse and Rider***  
The partners' positive connection showing rapport, trust, and confidence in one another; a sense of synchrony, contentment, and unity; the ability to accomplish the choreographic patterns with ease.
- ***Choreography – design cohesiveness, use of arena, balance, creativity***  
Complete and balanced use of space; logical development and clarity of construction; construction of combinations and patterns unlike those of current standard tests at the level shown or below.
- ***Degree of Difficulty***  
Well-calculated risks; the horse/rider team performs a single element or a combination of elements in a way that exceeds the expectation of the level. There is a detailed Degree of Difficulty Guideline available on the USDF website.
- ***Music – suitability, cohesiveness, seamless-***  
Appropriateness of the music to the type and character of horse; music selections are from one genre, style, or theme; cuts and transitions are smooth and create an overall flow of the music.
- ***Interpretation – music expresses gaits, use of phrasing & dynamics***  
Appropriateness of the rhythm and tempo of the music to the gaits of the horse; choreography reflects changes in the music.

## MUSICAL FREESTYLE GUIDELINES

### Music

- Any type of music may be selected.
- It is strongly recommended that music for a freestyle ride be of one genre, style, or theme. Mixing musical genres within one program is not recommended. A cohesive musical theme will be scored higher than a disjointed arrangement of musical selections.
- Strict tempo of music in relation to gaits is not required. However, for an effective freestyle, the tempo of the music should match the tempo of the horse's gaits or suggest the gait.
- Music that can be interpreted choreographically and create highlights is encouraged.
- Vocals are permitted.
- Entrance music is optional but strongly advised, as it provides a sound check.
- Music must cease at the final halt and salute.
- Editing should be fluid and smooth. Choppy or disruptive editing will detract from the overall artistic impression.
- Provide the music in the format(s), method(s), and time frame specified in the prize list. Formats must include CDs and/or digital files (MP3 and/or WAV). CDs and digital files should state the name of both horse and rider.

- Regardless of the requested format, always bring an extra copy of the music to the competition. Mark it in the same way as the original but noting that it is a backup copy. ALWAYS HAVE IT READILY AVAILABLE.
- If the prize list requires that the music be sent in prior to the competition make sure to confirm with the competition management that they received the file, and it plays correctly.
- Consult the competition prize list for information about sound checks. If it is not listed in the prize list, contact competition management for details.
- Freestyle competitors should make every effort to attend the sound check. They should check the volume at the judges stand to ensure it is able to be easily heard but not so loud as to be distorted or make it difficult for the judge to communicate with the scribe.
- Each rider will be permitted one representative in the sound system booth who may communicate with the person responsible for handling music to supervise the handling of the music if so desired by the competitor.
- According to Section 115 of the Copyright Act, a mechanical license must be obtained for the re-recording of music in any format. For information on obtaining a mechanical license, it is recommended that the rider contact the National Music Publishers' Association at [www.nmpa.org](http://www.nmpa.org).
- Competitors must pick up their music before leaving the show. If the competitor does not pick up their music, show management has the option to discard the material.

### Choreography

- Each competitive level has specific compulsory elements that must be performed.
- The horse should be shown to its best ability. Special strengths can be maximized while minimizing weaknesses. The design of the ride should be commensurate with the ability of the horse and rider.
- "Compulsory Elements" are those that are listed on the freestyle score sheets. At each level, certain elements must be shown in both directions.
- Competitors must not use movements that are clearly above the level being shown. Refer to test sheets.
- "Additionally Allowed" and "Compulsory Elements" may be shown in any pattern, placement, or order.
- It is mandatory that a lateral movement cover a minimum distance of 12m. For most levels however, 18m is recommended to help establish the rider's intent.
- A composition that is creative will be scored higher than one that looks like a reworked dressage test set to music. However, the construction should still be logical, clear, and understandable.
- The freestyle choreography should utilize the entire arena, not just the rails and diagonals. Creativity in the use of figures and space is encouraged. Movements should be presented clearly enough to be easily identifiable by the judge.

***Tip- Remember that at championships multiple judges will be assessing your choreography. What is clear from C may not be clear from B.***

- When movements are included with the intent to increase the Degree of Difficulty, care should be taken not to over-face the horse. Points for difficulty are only awarded when the attempt is performed well.
- The letters of the arena serve as markers. Movements or figures need not be executed at the letters.
- To encourage the highest possible technical quality in freestyle performances, competitors are urged to perform freestyles at one level below the level at which they are schooling. This will allow for more confidence in the performance and better artistic impression.

## COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

### The Prize List

- State level(s) and how results will be tabulated and awarded (combined levels, level of choice, etc.).
- State time and place of sound check(s).
- State the format(s), method(s), and time frame for music to be submitted.

### Classes Offered

- Training, First, Second, Third, and Fourth Level freestyles may be offered as four separate classes or as a combined "USDF Freestyle Test of Choice" class. However, it is best to separate the classes if entries warrant. When reporting freestyle scores to USDF, the level of each ride must be indicated. FEI Intermediate I, Intermediate A/B, Grand Prix, Young Rider, and Junior freestyle classes may also be offered, but these are judged according to FEI rules.
- Freestyle tests may be ridden only in classes, including Test of Choice classes that are limited to freestyles.

### Scoresheets

- Current USDF score sheets must be used. USDF freestyle score sheets are available at [www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org).
- FEI freestyle score sheets are available at [www.fei.org](http://www.fei.org).
- These scoresheets are copyrighted. Consult the USDF office for licensing information.

## Judges

- USDF Freestyles must be judged by USEF-licensed dressage judges at the levels appropriate to the license.

## Time

- The rides should be timed with a stopwatch by someone appointed by the competition management. The official timer should have no other duties during the freestyle class except to accurately time the rides. In addition, for championship classes a backup timer is advisable. The timer should inform the judge immediately when five (5) minutes has elapsed, as well as the final total time used.
- If an official timer is not available, a stopwatch or timer should be provided to the judge or scribe so each freestyle test can be timed. Please note there is a one-point penalty from the total "Artistic Impression" for exceeding the time limit.

## Scheduling

- The demands of judging freestyle are considerable and require more time than regular dressage tests, therefore, freestyles should be scheduled at intervals of at least nine or ten minutes.
- Freestyles are intended to be audience pleasers and should always be scheduled at times chosen for maximum audience participation.
- Freestyles should be scheduled so that the music does not interfere with activities in adjacent arenas and so that show announcements do not interfere with the music.
- To encourage entries in freestyle classes, it is suggested to offer a class and awards at each level rather than combining all freestyle levels. At the minimum, classes should be split between USDF/USEF and FEI levels.

## Sound and Sound System

- Unless management can obtain a good, clear, loud sound system, freestyle classes should not be offered. An unamplified portable CD player at B does not supply sufficient sound quality or volume.

***Tip-If the dressage organizers, announcer, or show facility do not have a decent sound system, management should contact schools, clubs, stores, or members to rent, borrow, or buy equipment.***

- Well ahead of the competition date, the sound system and acoustics of the facility should be checked. People should be placed at the location of each judge, in the spectator area and in the arena to determine acoustical distortion and volume requirements of the area. (This will change somewhat when the area is filled with people and horses or in the event of wind or weather changes.)
- Sound checks must be provided to riders in Freestyle classes for no fee, either on the day prior to competition or prior to their scheduled class. The requirements and timetable for scheduling sound checks must be published in the prize list.

## Reporting Scores to USDF

- Freestyle scores from every ride performed must be reported to USDF. Regular USDF Class Report forms may be used.
- Report the name and USDF number of the horse, rider, and owner.
- Report the judges of every freestyle class.
- If several levels are combined into one class, report the level of every entrant's ride.
- For each ride, report the total points for "Technical Execution," the total points for "Artistic Impression," and the total percentage for the ride. If several judges officiate, report the points awarded by each judge.
- In the case of a tie, the higher total for "Artistic Impression" will break the tie.

## Music Licensing

USEF has contracts with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) to license all USEF-recognized and endorsed competitions and events held in the United States effective 7/1/01.

These contracts grant non-exclusive licenses to USEF for its recognized and endorsed competitions and events to perform, present, or cause the live and recorded performance of all non-dramatic renditions of the separate musical compositions in the ASCAP and BMI repertoires. These repertoires include all copyrighted musical compositions written or published by ASCAP or BMI members or members of affiliated foreign performing rights societies. While some competitions feature music as part of the class, for example in dressage — freestyle to music, many use music for entertainment purposes. The licenses provide another valuable benefit to USEF-recognized and endorsed competitions.

Competition management may request additional information regarding the terms and limitations of both agreements by contacting the USEF office at (859) 258-2472.