

STALL TO CENTER LINE

HOW TO PREPARE, ENTER AND RIDE YOUR FIRST DRESSAGE TEST



A non-professional and informal guide
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How to Prepare and Ride an Introductory Level Dressage Test
You CAN absolutely do this!

OVERVIEW

Elements of a Walk Trot Dressage Test:

- There are two Introductory Dressage tests: Intro A and Intro B. Each test only takes 4 or 5 minutes to complete.
- Both Intro tests are ridden in a 40 meter x 20 meter arena. The arena has letters marking locations that you will learn.
- The letters are: All King Edward's Horses Can Make Big Fences, and X is in the center. See attached diagram, p. 12.
- To ride the test, you and your horse will demonstrate the walk, the trot, the free walk and the halt, in various places in the test.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- The WALK: your horse should march, forward at a healthy pace. His hips should swing and he should be relaxed and forward. Tip: engage you seat bones evenly and tick, tick with alternating bumps of the leg, if necessary.
- Enter the ring walking in a STRAIGHT line, down the center line to X, in the middle, no wobbling. This takes practice.
- BEND in corners, even at the Intro level. Your horse should move off of your inside leg to show bend.

- The TROT should be forward and energetic. If you have practiced three trot speeds, slow/sitting trot, forward/medium trot and powerful/extended trot, aim for the medium trot. The goal is a consistent pace.
- BEND on circles-this is important. Judges look for consistent bend in the 20-meter circle. Some horses need more inside leg, others need outside leg and outside rein to keep them on the circle nicely. Practice with your horse to see what works best.
- How big is 20 METERS? No one really knows. Hopefully you can follow someone else's tracks in the ring. If you are circling at A or C, it's 20 meters to X, in the middle. If you are circling at E or B, think 10 meters in each direction from the letter. You can walk it unmounted and place a cone or a poop pile to mark the distance to guide you.
- Geometry: CIRCLES are *round*. Practice trotting and making your circles as round as possible.
- The FREE walk: The horse relaxes and stretches his head and neck down at the walk. You can teach your horse how to do this. You let out the reins gradually, at the walk, across the long diagonal, (H-F or M-K) guiding them forward with your seat and legs, praising them if/when they drop their heads, even a bit. It helps if there's a poop pile handy. The goal is to have the poll lower than the withers as the horse's hind end swings at the walk. Also, aim to have their heads lowest at X.
- Free to Medium walk TRANSITION: gently gather up your reins starting with the inside rein to help establish/keep the bend.

- **The HALT:** breathe out to cue your horse that he needs to stop and stop square. Prepare to halt a few steps before X. If you need to use the reins, release after a tiny squeeze. Practice checking for squareness up front, (two hooves together) by looking at the shoulders. If you can't tell, go ahead and look down. If he's square, praise him. If he's not, use your seat bones and legs to fix him. It may take a few steps and tries, but he'll get it. Praise, praise, praise when he does.
- **SALUTE:** At the end of the test, (and for Intro B at the beginning, too) it is customary to salute the judge. When you halt at X, place both reins in one hand with your whip, if you have one, and extend your other arm to the side as you briefly drop or nod your head. It's best if your horse is square for this.
- **SMILE:** Try to smile at the end of the test as you thank the judge for their service, no matter how badly your test may have gone.
- **PAT** your horse as well to thank him for trying his best.
- **CONTACT:** Collecting your horse is something that takes years to master and is not a requirement at the Intro Level of Dressage. However, your reins should not be loopy, nor should your horse have his nose in the air fighting you. Gentle, effective contact is perfectly acceptable. The rounder your horse is as he moves, the better he shows he is using his back end to push him forward and the better your scores will be.
- **BALANCE** is a goal for many of the movements. Your horse is balanced when he is upright and not falling or leaning in and his legs are underneath him and he is evenly underneath you.

- TIPS for nerves: A sip of Mimosa before you go down center line may help. Deep breaths and smiles can help as well.
- How to MEMORIZE your test: If you practice your test exactly, your horse will remember the movements, maybe even before you do. You can practice unmounted in the arena or in your house. Make an enlarged chart as a cheat sheet to help you.

PREPPING FOR YOUR TESTS 8 or 9 weeks:

Each week, focus on one element of the test as you ride:

1. The walk
2. The trot
3. 20 meter round circles
4. Round circles with inside bend
5. The free walk
6. Transitions: walk to trot, trot to walk, walk to halt
7. The halt
8. The square halt

Stall to Center Line in 8 weeks!

HOW TO ENTER A DRESSAGE SHOW:

Different venues have different methods for collecting entries. Some use paper entries that are mailed to the show secretary or collected from a drop box. Some use online entry systems. Daffodil Dressage is using BlueHorse Entries, an online program designed to help show organizers and competitors enter shows easily. You can find this program at bluehorseentries.com.

You will need to create an account and enter some basic information about yourself and your horse. Most shows will require a current (from the past 12 months) negative Coggins. Some recognized shows require memberships to various organizations such as USEF, KDA or USEA, but schooling shows do not.

Most shows have 'open' and 'close' dates to encourage riders to enter within a time frame. Hopefully, you will enter before the 'close' date to avoid late fees. Some shows are so popular that the entries fill well before the close date.

Once you have submitted your online entry, you are all set.

A few days before the show, RIDE TIMES will be posted online or in an email so that you will know what times you ride. Usually Intro level tests run first, so it's likely you will ride at the beginning of the show, like 8am or so.

ATTIRE: Although dress codes can be strict, most schooling shows only require proper helmets. If you want to dress the part, most Dressage riders wear white breeches, tall boots, a collared riding shirt, a jacket and even a stock tie and pin. However, just looking neat and clean and having your hair tied back is perfectly acceptable. Some riders braid their horse's manes and or tails, but this is not necessary for a schooling show.

A Sample Lesson Plan

How to Prepare for your Test: What do I do when I ride?

Some riders begin each ride with some simple stretches on the ground for their horses. These stretches may include pulling the front legs forward, lifting the hind legs and gently circling them, and using treats to encourage horses to bend their heads and necks side to side and between their knees.

Some horses have better rides if they are lunged for a while beforehand.

A relaxed lesson can begin with 10 minutes of walking, in both directions.

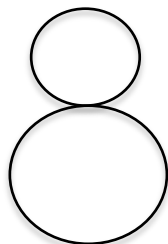
Think about your focus for the day. To begin trotting, you might trot in each direction for 4 to 5 minutes on a loose rein to warm up.

Give yourself and your horse walk breaks as needed.

If you canter your horse, you can do the same as with the trot on a loose-ish rein for 2 minutes or so in each direction. For Dressage, you can (try to) sit the canter.

If you have space to practice 20-meter circles, that can be the next activity. For this, you want a bit more contact with your horse's mouth to guide him to be round *and* forward as you practice your bending.

One activity that makes circles more fun is the 'snowman'. After completing one 20-meter circle, change directions outside the circle with a smaller one, 15 or 10 meters and then resume the 20-meter in the original space. This allows you and your horse to change his bend as you change direction.



Another activity can be to do a 20-meter circle in each corner of your arena, if it's rectangular, in both directions. Whew! That's work!

After a walk break, practice your three trots: slow/sitting, medium/posting and extended/posting, really pushing without breaking into canter.

Next, practice elements of your test without actually doing the test. Practice walking in a straight line. Practice square halts, (front and hind legs together.) Practice your free walk. Practice your walk to trot transitions and your trot to walk and walk to halt transitions. Make note of any challenges to work on in your next ride.

Finish your ride with a nice 8-10 cool out walk, maybe outside your arena on a wee trail ride.

Pat your horse and tell him, 'Job well done!'

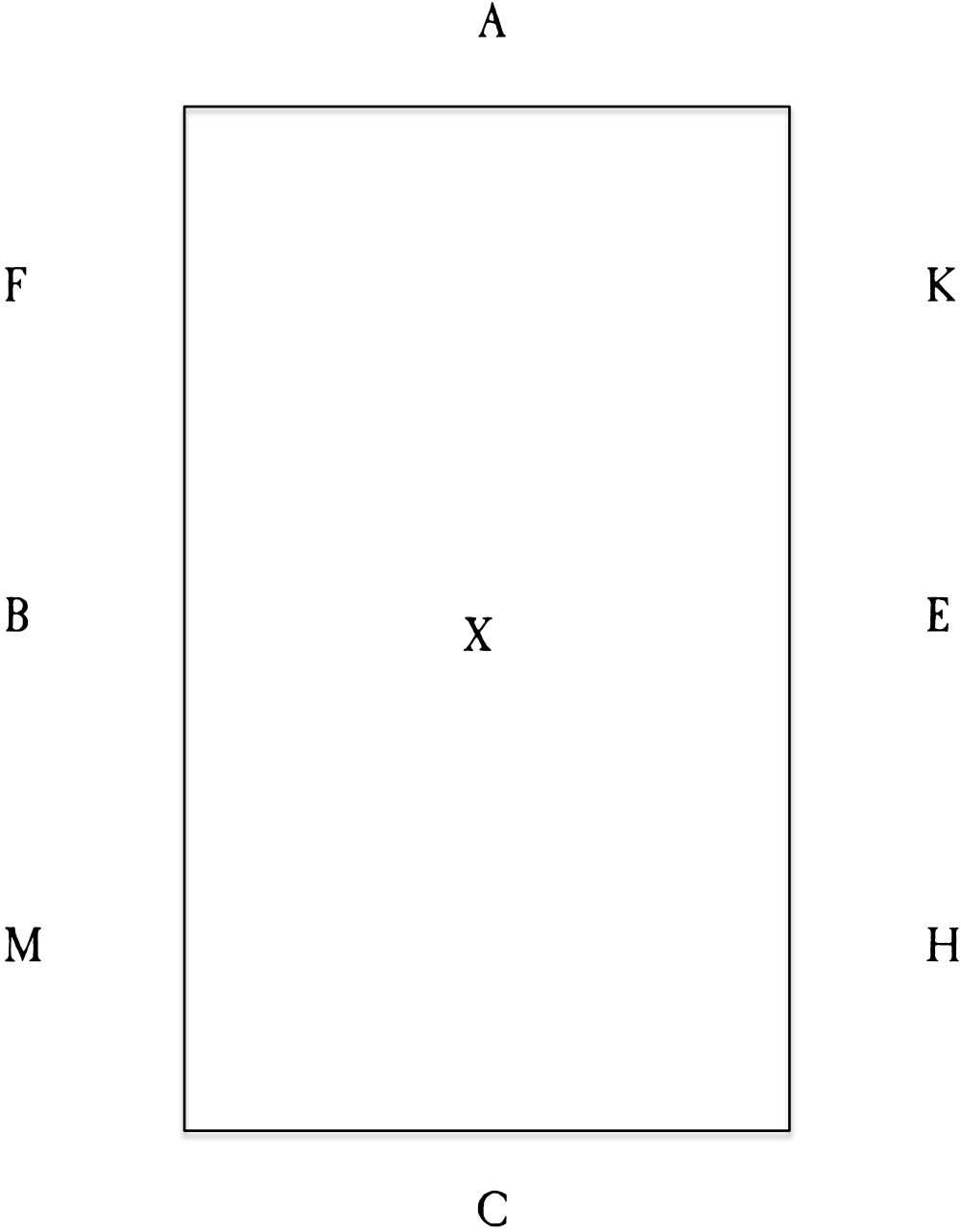
It's SHOW day!

What do you do?

- Arrive at the venue with plenty of time before you ride so that you can be relaxed and not rushing. 60-90 minutes is advisable.
- Stop in at the office to check in and collect your packet and bridle number.
- If you have time, graze your horse for a few minutes so he can relax in the show environment.
- Groom and tack up. Remember to place your bridle number on your horse's bridle. No bell boots, polos or jumping boots are allowed in Dressage. Breast plates are legal, as are neck straps. Wear a watch so you can monitor your time.
- Double check your ride time. You want to be ready to enter the ring or one or two minutes before you are to start.
- Allow at least 20-30 minutes warm up (depending upon your horse's needs) before you ride. Also allow time to walk to the Warm Up area.
- Check in with the ring steward at Warm Up. They will tell you which ring is yours and about how many riders will ride before you. They may tell you which rider you follow, which is very helpful.
- The Warm Up ring can be very crowded and busy. Try to relax and breathe. Let your horse walk around and get used to the environment before starting work. When passing other horses, the general rule is left shoulder to left shoulder. You should also alert riders if you are approaching them by saying, "Inside" or "Outside" depending where they are in relation to you.

- When your ring steward calls you, or about 5 to 4 minutes before your ride time and *after* the rider before you has halted and saluted, walk towards your ring.
- Breathe and relax!
- Most riders trot around the outside of the ring before entering at A. Your judge will be positioned at C. You can trot in either direction, but you may want to have your bridle number on the outside so the judge and scribe (the judge's assistant) can see it when you greet them. Let your horse see the letters and any decorations around the outside of the ring so he is not surprised during the test.
- It is polite to stop, smile and greet the judge and scribe as you circle the outside of the ring. Confirm your name, your bridle number and the test you are riding.
- Listen for the judge's signal, usually either a bell or a whistle. This signifies the judge is ready for you to begin your test. Technically, you have 45 seconds to enter the ring after the signal, but most schooling shows don't strictly enforce that rule. Still, it's considerate to keep the show running on time by entering right after you hear the signal.
- Breathe!
- Start your test! Enjoy your ride!
- About 30-60 minutes after you ride, your scores will be posted at the office or, in some cases, online. You can collect your test and any prizes you may have earned. Your test is yours to keep. Reading the judge's comments will help you prepare for your next show.

Small Dressage Arena, 20 x 40 Meters



The Tests

Below are copies of USDF Introductory Tests A and B. In this document, they are reduced in size. For clearer, larger copies, you can download the tests at usdf.org.

The tests are different, but you are perfectly capable of riding both tests at one show if you so choose. As long as you are hauling to a show, you might as well! If you feel uncertain about memorizing two tests, a friend can read the tests aloud to you as you ride.

Pay special attention to the directives in the third column of each test. These are the qualities the judge is looking for. The closer you and horse come to matching these movements, the better your score will be. Scores range from 0, not shown, to 10, excellent. Most scores will fall in the 5.5-7.5 range. If you get an 8, that's quite an accomplishment. If you get a 9, kiss the judge!

The scores are then tallied with some additional marks for your horse's gaits, impulsion, submission, your position, the effectiveness of your aids, and your circle geometry. In Dressage, the higher the score, the better. If your final/total score is above 65, you have done **VERY** well!

Most trainers do not care much about their students' scores. Instead, the focus should be on the experience we gain, the fact that we made it to the show, the fact that our horse stayed in the ring (hopefully), and that we stayed in the saddle and, ideally, had fun.

2023 USDF INTRODUCTORY LEVEL – TEST A

WALK—TROT

REQUIREMENTS:
 Free walk
 Medium walk
 Working trot rising
 20 meter circle
 Halt through walk

PURPOSE: To introduce the rider and/or horse to the sport of dressage, confirming that they are beginning to develop an understanding of correct dressage basics. The horse should be ridden freely forward in a steady tempo and clear rhythm, accepting contact with the bit. An understanding of test accuracy and geometry should be demonstrated.

NO.

		TEST	DIRECTIVE IDEAS	POINTS	COEF	TOTAL	REMARKS
1.	A Between X & C	Enter, working trot rising Medium walk	Regularity, quality of trot; straightness, willing, calm transition. Regularity, quality, of walk				
2.	C M	Track right Working trot rising	Bend and balance; willing, calm transition				
3.	A	Circle right 20 meters, working trot rising	Regularity; shape and size of circle; bend; balance				
4.	K-X-M	Change rein, working trot rising	Regularity of trot; straightness; bend and balance in corner				
5.	C	Circle left 20 meters, working trot rising	Regularity; shape and size of circle; bend; balance				
6.	Between C & H	Medium walk	Willing, calm transition; regularity, quality				
7.	H-X-F	Free walk	Regularity, reach and ground cover with over track of free walk allowing complete freedom to stretch the neck forward and downward				
8.	F-A A	Medium walk Down centerline	Regularity, quality, willing, calm transition, bend and balance in turn Straightness on centerline.				
9.	X	Halt and salute	Straightness; attentiveness; immobility (min. 3 seconds)				

Leave arena in free walk. Exit at A.

2023 USDF INTRODUCTORY LEVEL – TEST B

REQUIREMENTS:
Free walk
Medium walk
Working trot rising
20 meter circle
Halt through walk

PURPOSE: To introduce the rider and/or horse to the sport of dressage, confirming that they are beginning to develop an understanding of correct dressage basics. The horse should be ridden freely forward in a steady tempo and clear rhythm, accepting contact with the bit. An understanding of test accuracy and geometry should be demonstrated.

NO.

		TEST	DIRECTIVE IDEAS	POINTS	COEF	TOTAL	REMARKS
1.	A X	Enter working trot rising. Halt through medium walk Salute - Proceed working trot rising	Regularity, quality of trot; willing, calm transitions; straightness; attentiveness; immobility (min. 3 seconds)				
2.	C	Track left, working trot rising	Regularity; bend and balance in turn and corner				
3.	E	Circle left 20 meters, working trot rising	Regularity; shape and size of circle; bend; balance				
4.	Between K & A	Medium walk	Willing, calm transition; regularity, quality				
5.	F-E	Free walk	Regularity, reach, and ground cover with overtrack of free walk allowing complete freedom to stretch the neck forward and downward				
6.	E-H	Medium walk	Willing, calm transition; regularity, quality, overtrack				
7.	Between H & C	Working trot rising	Willing, calm transition; regularity of trot; bend and balance in corner				
8.	B	Circle right 20 meters, working trot rising	Regularity; shape and size of circle; bend; balance				
9.	A X	Down centerline Halt through medium walk, Salute	Bend and balance in turn; straightness; regularity of trot; willing, calm transition; straightness; attentiveness; immobility (min. 3 seconds)				

Leave arena in free walk. Exit at A.