UNITED STATES *Dressage* FEDERATION

2027 Musical Freestyle Rules & Guidelines

Effective 12/1/2026 – 11/20/2030

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 Rulebook DR129.9 for equivalencies.** "With the exceptions noted below, 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. For the FEI levels, a horse/rider combination must have received a minimum score of 60% at the declared freestyle level or any test at a higher level. Scores must be received at a Federation/USDF Licensed Dressage Competition 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." A copy of the USDF score verification must be submitted with the entry form for a freestyle class, except to enter USEF/USDF Musical Freestyle Championship classes. Qualification of those entries will be verified by USDF. Riders receiving scores within 30 days prior to a competition may submit a copy of the test verifying eligibility.

General

Musical freestyle is an artistic program created by the rider to present their 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, and 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 pattern, it is the rider's responsibility to get back on course.
- Current USDF score sheets must be used.

Time

- The maximum time limit for all USDF Freestyles is five minutes. There is no minimum time requirement, however riders should strive to include all compulsory elements in a fashion that avoids a "rushed" feeling to the program.
- 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. 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, salute and ceases at the final halt.
- Exceeding the maximum time limit (or failing to meet the minimum, in FEI Freestyles) will result in zero point five percent being deducted from the total artistic score (-0.5%).
- A 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 receive a deduction of zero point five percent (-0.5%) from the total artistic score, or risk being 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.
- The music must cease at the final salute. Exit music is forbidden.
- **DR129** states: In case of a 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. If there is a problem with the music, the rider should immediately approach the judge at "C" to discuss options for restarting their test. There should be minimum interference with the starting times of the other riders and the affected rider should return to complete or restart their 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 the interruption. In any case, the marks already given will not be changed."

Judges

- Freestyle competitions must be judged by USEF licensed dressage judges at levels appropriate to their license.
- If more than one (1) judge is officiating, all judges must score both the Technical Execution and Artistic Impression.
- Technical Execution marks may be given in half or full points.
- Artistic Impression marks may be given in tenth points, which allows for more accurate placement in the class.

Equipment and Turnout

- Attire, tack and saddlery for all freestyle classes must comply with USEF rules.
- Costume classes, etc.., may be offered if conditions are clearly stated on the prize list.
- Refer to the Quadrille and Pas de Deux Rules and Guidelines documents for information regarding Quadrille/Pas de Deux freestyle classes.

ELEMENTS OF A DRESSAGE MUSICAL FREESTYLE

- Compulsory elements: all of the elements to be scored on the technical side of the score sheet, whether a movement, figure, or transition. Any movements that are not scored as compulsory elements will be considered in Choreography and Degree of Difficulty on the Artistic side of the score sheet.
- Movements:
    1. Test movements: 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 the haunches, half-pass (trot or canter), flying change(s), pirouette (walk or canter), piaffe, and passage.

  For the purpose of the current freestyle test, forbidden movements refers to #1.
- Movements from the USEF tests of the same level or below are permitted. Anything "additionally allowed" is stated on the score sheet.
- All movements follow the rules and requirements listed in the current USEF Rulebook.
- Any transitions into and out of required movements, unless having its own box on the score sheet, 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 variation of a gait to another variation of 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. Scored as separate half-passes.
- Zig-zag: three (3) or more half-passes connected by changes of direction. 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 reins (in both directions).
- Riders must salute during the halts at the beginning and end of the freestyle. The first and final halts must be on the centerline facing C. Riders should avoid receiving a technical fault by making sure the salutes are clear to the judge at C.
- Time begins when the horse moves off after the competitor's initial halt, salute and ends with the final salute.
- Reins in one hand are allowed, but the rider may not use a free hand to encourage a reaction from the spectators or to signal to the horse.

- Freestyles may include all dressage movements found in tests of the declared level of the freestyle and below.
- Permitted movements, figures, and transitions may be constructed into any combination/pattern of the rider's choosing.
- Lateral movements (shoulder-in, travers, renvers) must cover a minimum distance of 12 meters.
- The bell is not rung for errors occurring in USDF Freestyle Tests. Errors occur for rising the trot at Second Level or above, however errors are not cumulative and will not result in elimination.

DRESSAGE MOVEMENTS PERMITTED AT EACH LEVEL

Training Level

Compulsory Elements

1. Medium walk (20m continuous)
2. Free walk (20m continuous)
3. 20-meter circle right in working trot
4. 20-meter circle left in working trot
5. Serpentine in working trot, two or more changes of direction with loops no smaller than 15 meters
6. Stretch forward & downward on a 20-meter trot circle in rising trot
7. 20-meter circle right in working canter
8. 20-meter circle left in working canter
9. All transitions between gaits (Halts not included)
10. Halt with salute on centerline facing C, first and final

Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only in tests above Training Level. Exceptions in Additionally Allowed.

Additionally Allowed: Trot-halt-trot; trot-walk-trot; canter-trot-canter (12m minimum of trot).

First Level

Compulsory Elements

1. Medium walk (20m continuous)
2. Free walk (20m continuous)
3. 10-meter circle right in working trot
4. 10-meter circle left in working trot
5. Leg-yield right in working trot
6. Leg-yield left in working trot
7. Lengthen stride in trot on a straight line
8. 15-meter circle right in working canter
9. 15-meter circle left in working canter
10. Change of lead through trot right
11. Change of lead through trot left
12. Lengthen stride in canter on a straight line
13. Halt with salute on centerline facing C, first and final

Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only in tests above First Level. Exceptions in Additionally Allowed.

Additionally Allowed: Lengthen trot and/or canter on a curved line half 20-meter circle max.; canter serpentine; counter-canter. *Please note lengthening in trot/canter on a curved line does not meet compulsory requirement.*

Second Level

Compulsory Elements

1. Medium walk (20m continuous)
2. Free walk (20m continuous)
3. Shoulder-in right in collected trot (12m min)
4. Shoulder-in left in collected trot (12m min)
5. Travers right in collected trot (12m min)
6. Travers left in collected trot (12m min)
7. Medium trot on straight line
8. Transitions in and out of medium trot
9. Simple change of lead right
10. Simple change of lead left
11. Counter-canter in collected canter right
12. Counter-canter in collected canter left
13. Medium canter on straight line
14. Transitions in and out of medium canter
15. Halt with salute on centerline facing C, first and final

Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only in tests above Second Level. Exceptions in Additionally Allowed.

Additionally Allowed: Half turn on haunches (no more than 180 degrees); renvers; medium trot and/or canter on a curved line, half 20-meter circle max.

Third Level

Compulsory Elements

1. Medium walk (20m continuous)
2. Extended walk (20m continuous)
3. Shoulder-in right in collected trot (12m min)
4. Shoulder-in left in collected trot (12m min)
5. Trot half-pass right in collected trot
6. Trot half-pass left in collected trot
7. Extended trot on straight line
8. Canter half-pass right in collected canter
9. Canter half-pass left in collected canter
10. Flying change of lead right
11. Flying change of lead left
12. Extended canter on straight line
13. Halt with salute on centerline facing C, first and final

Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only in tests above Third Level. Exceptions in Additionally Allowed.

Additionally Allowed: Walk half-pirouette (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, half 20-meter circle max; flying changes shown in sequence of every five strides or more.

Fourth Level

Compulsory Elements

1. Collected walk (20m continuous)
2. Extended walk (20m continuous)
3. Shoulder-in right in collected trot (12m min)
4. Shoulder-in left in collected trot (12m min)
5. Trot half-pass right in collected trot
6. Trot half-pass left in collected trot
7. Extended trot on a straight line
8. Canter half-pass right in collected canter
9. Canter half-pass left in collected canter
10. Flying changes of lead, every 4th stride (min. 3)
11. Flying changes of lead, every 3rd stride (min. 3)
12. Canter working half-pirouette right
13. Canter working half-pirouette left
14. Extended canter on a straight line
15. Halt with salute on centerline facing C, first and final

Forbidden: Any movement or transition found only on tests above Fourth Level. Exceptions in Additionally Allowed.

Additionally Allowed: 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; medium trot and/or canter on a curved line, half 20-meter circle max.

SCORING AND JUDGING

Two sets of marks are given – one for technical execution and one for artistic impression. Each set of marks is totaled separately, and the two are added together and averaged into the final score. In the case of two or more judges, final scores from each judge will be averaged to come to the rider'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, a mark will be given for each direction separately. All attempts will be considered to come to the Judge's Mark.
- If a required element is not performed, it will receive a score of zero (0) under Final Score in Technical Execution.
- Omission of a Compulsory Element will also affect the score for Degree of Difficulty and Choreography, where a score of no higher than 6.0 will be given.
- In scoring technical execution, Judge's Mark must be given in half or full points.
- Forbidden movements, or movements above the level, 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.

Artistic Impression

- In scoring Artistic Impression, Judge's Marks may be given in increments of tenths (0.1).
- Elements performed after the five-minute time limit has elapsed will not be scored, and a penalty of one (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 ARTISTIC IMPRESSION

Coefficients for Artistic Marks by Level

	Training	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Rhythm, Energy and Elasticity	4	4	4	4	4
Harmony Between Horse and Rider	4	4	4	4	4
Choreography	4	4	4	4	4
Degree of Difficulty	1	2	3	4	4
Music and Interpretation	4	4	4	4	4

Artistic Impression Quick Reference Guide

Category	Mark	Notes
RHYTHM **Energy, elasticity, gaits & impulsion**	**7.0 – 10** **6.5 & below**	Correct rhythm in all 3 gaits, impulsion/ground cover, elasticity, expression One or more gaits have rhythm issues, variations in impulsion, elasticity, expression *Score is reflective of technical execution*
HARMONY **Rider &** **Submission**	**7.0 – 10** **6.5 & below**	Trust, confidence between horse & rider; horse is calm & attentive Execution shows ease & fluidity Occasional or pervasive tension issues, disobedience *Score is reflective of technical execution*
CHOREOGRAPHY **Design cohesiveness; creativity; use of arena; balance**	**7.0** **(+/-)**	Clarity/logic of structure; easy to follow; elements used in interesting/uncommon way; does not use exact patterns from current tests; uses entire arena with elements distributed *Score is reflective of technical execution*
DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY **Complexity & technical success; meets highest test of level**	**6.5** **(+/-)**	Minimum 63% overall technical execution; movements from highest test of the level; + for each instance of increased difficulty (combinations, transitions, variations of gait) Score of > 6.5 must have D.O.D. at trot AND canter Unacceptable risk causes poor execution; must fit capability of horse & rider; failure to meet expectations for level *Score is based on technical execution*
MUSIC & INTERPRETATION **Suitability; cohesiveness; seamlessness; music matches gaits; music expresses gaits; phrasing & dynamics**	**6.5 – 7.0** **(+/-)**	Enhances the gaits; level-appropriate for all gaits; common genre, theme, instrumentation Editing; quality of cuts & transitions in music; music's beat matches the footfalls (not req. for lower levels) (-) music not suitable for 1 or more gait(s) Music supports gaits; highlights transitions & changes in gait; movements highlight changes in dynamics (-) does not end ride with music, does not express 1 or more gait(s) *Score reflective of technical execution*

MUSICAL FREESTYLE GUIDELINES

Music

- Any type of music may be selected. It is strongly recommended that the music be of one genre, style, or theme, as mixing musical genres within one program can give a disjointed feeling to the freestyle. A cohesive musical theme will score higher.
- Strict tempo of music in relation to gaits is not required, however, for an effective musical freestyle, the tempo of the music should match or suggest the gaits of the horse.
- Music that can be interpreted choreographically and create highlights is encouraged.
- Vocals are permitted but should not overwhelm or detract from the freestyle program.
- Entrance music is optional but strongly recommended, as it provides a sound check.
- Music must cease at the final salute.
- Editing should be fluid and smooth. Choppy or disruptive editing will detract from the overall artistic impression.
- Provide music in the format(s), method(s), and time frame specified on the prize list. Formats may include CDs, flash drives and/or digital files (MP3, WAV, etc.). The name of the horse and rider should appear on any format provided.
- 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 note 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 receipt with competition management and that it plays correctly.
- Consult the competition prize list for information about sound checks. If it is not listed on the prize list, contact competition management for details.
- Freestyle competitors should make every effort to attend sound check. They should check that the volume at the judges' stand is easy to hear but not so loud that it distorts the music or makes it difficult for the judge to communicate with their scribe.
- According to Section 115 of the Copyright Act, a mechanical license must be obtained for the re-recording of music in any format. Refer to copyright.gov for further information, and for information on obtaining a mechanical license, visit the National Music Publishers' Association.
- Competitors must pick up their music after 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 (see pages 3-5). These are also listed on the freestyle score sheet for each level. Be sure to note movements that are required in both directions.
- The horse should be shown to its best ability. Special strengths can be maximized while minimizing weaknesses. The design of the ride should be reflective of the ability of the horse and rider.
- Competitors must not use movements that are clearly above the level of the freestyle. Refer to "Forbidden" on the score sheets.
- Compulsory and Additionally Allowed movements may be shown in any placement, pattern 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 to the judge.
- A composition that is creative will be scored higher than one that looks like a reworked technical dressage test set to music. 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 to the judge.
- Keep in mind that multiple judges will be assessing freestyle rides at championships, and that 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, earning a technical score of 7.0 or above. A technical score of 6.0 or below will result in a deduction from the Degree of Difficulty.
- Movements and figures do not need to be executed at the letters of the arena.

General

- 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 technical execution and artistic impression.
- Any loss of harmony or flow can impact both the Choreography and Degree of Difficulty scores.

COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

The Prize List

- Must state level(s) and how results will be tabulated and awarded (combined divisions, test of choice, etc.).
- Must state the time and place of sound check(s).
- Must 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 combine "USDF Freestyle Test of Choice" class. However, it is best to separate the classes if sufficient entries warrant. When reporting freestyle scores to USDF, the level of each ride must be indicated. FEI Levels, including Young Rider and Junior Freestyle classes may also be offered, but must be judged according to FEI rules.
- Freestyle tests may be ridden only in classes that are limited to freestyles, including Freestyle Test of Choice classes.

Score Sheets

- Current USDF score sheets must be used. USDF Freestyle score sheets are available here.
- FEI score sheets are available here.
- These score sheets 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 their license. There is a Freestyle Designation for judges who have attended a Freestyle forum. This designation is listed on both the USEF and USDF websites.

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 each ride. In addition, for championship classes, a backup timer should be available. The timer should inform the judge immediately when five (5) minutes has elapsed (for USEF Levels) as well as the final total time.
- 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 zero point five percent deduction (-0.5%) from the total Artistic Impression score for exceeding the time limit.

Scheduling

- The demands of judging freestyles are considerable and require more time than standard 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 be scheduled at times that allow for maximum audience participation.
- Freestyles should be scheduled and located so that the music does not interfere with activities in adjacent arena 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 a minimum, classes should be split between USDF/USEF and FEI Levels.

Sound and Sound System

- Unless management can obtain a good, clear, sufficiently loud sound system, freestyle classes should not be offered. An unamplified portable speaker at B does not supply sufficient sound quality or volume.
- Organizers may consider contacting schools, clubs, stores, or members to rent equipment.

- Well ahead of the competition date, the sound system and acoustics of the facility should be tested. People should be placed at the location of each judge, in the spectator area and in the arena to determine any distortion and the volume requirements of the arena. Note that these factors will change a bit with an arena full of people and horses and with wind and other weather factors.
- Sound check must be provided to riders in Freestyle classes with no fee, either on the day prior to the 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 each 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 maintained 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. These contracts grant non-exclusive licenses to USEF for its 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 include all copyrighted musical compositions written or published by ASCAP and BMI members or members of affiliated foreign performing rights societies.

Learn more about Music Licensing Rights at USEF here.

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