



# UNITED STATES DRESSAGE FEDERATION™

**USDF**

Show Biz, Organization and Planning

Whether the financially responsible party for the show is a group (club, GMO or the like) or a private entity, the first step is to decide what level show is to be presented. The Dressage Levels Chart in the USEF Rule book outlines the possibilities and the responsibilities that differentiate between those five levels of competition. ([Refer to USEF Subchapter DR-1](#)). Based on that decision, this is also the time to set up a governing body for the show, a committee or working group that will guide the development of the show and that will monitor all responsibilities from the time recognition is granted to the end of the show.

A suggested composition would be the manager, secretary and as many other members as are deemed necessary. The size of the managing group will be determined by the anticipated size of the show and the number of responsibilities each member is able to complete. The manager and secretary are required to have memberships in USEF, USDF and, possibly, local GMO's that might recognize the show for their award programs. Do not leave this until the last minute! The other members of the managing group need to be familiar with the USEF general and dressage rules and should have the good sense to ask if there is anything that seems confusing or conflicting. Sources of help will be their competition manager (first), followed by the technical delegate (TD), when hired.

The timelines on the [USDF Competition Management Checklist](#) and on this document are suggested only; you will need to adapt to your specific circumstances. Of course, if other deadlines are mandated, those must be observed in order to avoid fines.

Many of the requirements and niceties discussed in this document are more completely covered in the following links.

Competition Personnel

Competition Secretary

Publicity

Finances

Dressage Classes

Prize List/ Entry/ Program

Scheduling

The Dressage Arena

Scoring

Scribes

Dressage Sport Horse Breeding (DSHB)

## At Least One Year Before the Show Date

Obtaining a Date and Recognitions: Obtaining a date for the show is the first decision. There are many factors, beginning with availability on the USEF Competition Calendar if the show is to be USEF/USDF recognized. (Dressage competition mileage radius, [USEF General Rules Subchapter 3-C](#))

Whether it is recognized or schooling, it is advised to take any show or clinic in your geographical area into consideration before committing to a date. Availability of judges, facilities and a work force may also influence choice of dates.

\*Non-recognized (schooling) shows are most valuable to competitors when they mimic the rules that govern the sport. Competitors can then practice in the show environment without being punished for non-compliance.

Once the managing group has settled on a date, they need to obtain the USEF license, USDF recognition and, possibly, local GMO recognition. ([USEF/USDF Joint Application for License Agreement](#)). Although this can be done as late as 60 days before the date requested, it is advisable to obtain the license one year prior in order to begin advertising. Once the license is granted be sure to publicize it on as many platforms as possible in hope of preventing conflicts with other events.

All competitions licensed by USEF as “Dressage Competitions” must also be recognized by USDF in order for scores earned to count for USDF awards and to host USDF Regional Championship qualifying classes or USDF Breeders’ Championship Series classes. USEF Regular or Local competitions may not host those classes.

The licensee must notify USEF if there are any changes to location as the license is venue specific. Any modification of the dates on the license must also be reported to USEF. USEF must agree to the changes in order for the show to be held as requested.

The licensee is financially responsible for the competition with USEF.

There are five different levels of dressage competitions. Please refer to the [USEF Dressage Levels Chart, USEF Subchapter DR-1](#). Levels 3-5 competitions have more requirements due to the various qualifiers, championships and CDI competitions that fall under their auspices. All other shows may be held under Level 1 or 2 unless management chooses to conduct the competition at the standards for a higher level.

Breed Restricted shows (USEF Regular or Local Competitions) must be held under USEF dressage rules, including the use of a USEF dressage judge licensed for the levels of dressage offered. If the show is open only to horses of a specific breed, scores may count toward All-Breeds Awards and Rider Awards. The steward may officiate as the rules allow, however a Dressage Technical Delegate must be hired if classes above Fourth Level are offered or if the dressage classes are open to all horses (not just a specific breed). Refer to [How to Run a Dressage Division at a Regular or Local USEF-Licensed Competition](#) for more details.

Many local and state associations offer year-end awards to their members and will approve your competition for earning points/scores toward these awards or for holding special classes.

Facilities: Review [USEF General Rules Subchapter 12-E](#). Popular facilities may be booked a year or more in advance; so, it is advised that this is your first consideration.

Arenas:

- Are there enough level areas for the number of competition and practice arenas you expect to have?

- Is the footing safe and of acceptable material in all arenas?
- Is there a plan for inclement weather?
- Who will supply and set up the dressage courts, letters and judge stands?

#### Stabling:

- Is there stabling with lights and water for a multi-day competition?
- Stalls need to be checked for safety, size and type of doors.
- If needed, can portable stalls be obtained and is there room for them? Note that portable stalls can be expensive and may impact the price for stabling to the competitors.
- Availability of bedding and type(s) allowed?
- Do competitors need to strip the stalls at the end of the show?

#### Grounds:

- Is the parking area ample and safe for trailers, vans and spectators?
- Is there an inside area for the competition office and scoreboard?
- Are there provisions for security, fire extinguishers, sharps containers, showers, etc.?
- Are there restrooms? If not, are there places for portable toilets?
- If there is an indoor arena, is it suitable?

#### Hotels:

- Arrange for one or more hotels to reserve blocks of rooms for competitors. The hotel will have cut-off dates for competitor reservations.
- Listing a hotel as “host hotel” in the prize list may result in complimentary room(s) or special discounted prices for show personnel and officials.

Officials and Personnel: Many judges accept invitations up to two years in advance. It is advised that you begin a dialogue as early as possible and confirm when the license is granted, and the facility is secured.

#### Judges:

- Be sure to invite judges who are rated to officiate the classes that the show is offering. (Refer to [USEF General Rules Subchapter 10-C](#))
- When choosing a judge, consider whether the judge has recently officiated in the geographical area from which you expect to draw competitors.
- Airfare should be checked as that can put a judge over the show’s budget.
- DSHB classes require a specific addition to the dressage judging card and that will be listed on judge’s listing on the USEF website.
- Normally, shows hire one judge per arena but if there are classes that require more than one judge, then you need to consider bringing in an additional judge for the arena that is not being used while the panel judging is occurring.

\*Shows are asked to offer panel judging whenever possible as the experience is considered to be part of a judge's on-going development.

- E-mail is the norm for contacting judges as it is quick and provides a record of the conversation. If the judge accepts your invitation, follow up with a contract. This can also be done by e-mail, but many shows still prefer to use snail mail, providing a stamped, self-addressed envelope to facilitate the process. USEF (and common sense) require that the show have consent, in writing, prior to the publication of a judge's name as a licensed official for the show.
- If the show must be cancelled, contact the judge immediately. Depending on the terms of the contract, you may have to cover any expenses (normally airfare) and the daily fee.

#### Dressage Technical Delegate (TD):

- Use the same link as for judges, and follow the same procedures: contact by e-mail, followed up with a written contract.
- One TD is required for the competition. "I" TD's can officiate at Levels 1-3; "R" TD's are mandatory for Levels 4-5. If a second TD is required for Levels 4-5, that position can be taken by an "I".
- Regular or Local competitions open to all breeds (an open dressage division) must have a TD. There are different requirements for shows restricted by breed. (Refer to [\*How to run a Dressage Division at a Regular or Local USEF-Licensed Competition.\*](#))
- Once hired, the TD can be a resource for the show (prize list questions, rule questions, etc.) and for competitors.

#### Other personnel:

- Emergency medical personnel must be on the grounds during all show hours.
- A farrier must be on call for Levels 1-3 and on the grounds for Levels 4-5.
- A veterinarian must be on call for Levels 1-3, on the grounds for Levels 4-5 and on the grounds for shows that had more than 200 horses compete in the previous year.
- Written agreements for these personnel are required.
- A veterinary hospital must be identified. The contact information and directions from the facility must be posted at the show office and in the barn area.
- The show should offer a photographer, videographer and announcer. These individuals also need to be contracted well before the show.
- A braider and night watch person are not mandatory but a nice addition to the competition.

Organizing Committee: Sub-committees may not be necessary for smaller shows, but every show needs to consider how it will handle a wide variety of responsibilities and on what time-frame. Please note that several of these sub-headings have their own informational link with a good deal of information Publicity/Advertising. The world needs to know that your show exists, and it is advised to utilize whatever is available, whether it be print or social media, an email campaign or perhaps broadcast media.

- Sponsorship: If the show is relying on donations to balance the budget, someone needs to start on this as soon as the date, location and complexity of the show is determined.
- Hospitality: This is to organize the care, feeding and transportation of officials, before, during and after the event. Special events for competitors, if desired, need to be planned and budgeted. This group or individual is the competition committee's liaison with the competitors and show officials and it is their mission to make sure that everyone is comfortable and happy to be at your competition.
- Grounds: After the choice of facility has been made and, hopefully with the continued help of one of those who made the selection, someone needs to establish on-going contact with the show facility. This person/committee is responsible for all equipment and will either set-up the grounds or oversee that set-up. During the competition, the grounds manager will oversee arena drags and after the show is completed, tear-down and clean-up will fall under their purview.
- Awards: This encompasses regular class ribbons and awards as well as any special awards that will be offered. Some examples of special awards, perhaps divided by division (open, adult amateur, junior, young rider, pony, breed specific, etc.): daily high percentage, show high percentage, high percentage by test levels (each level or maybe Tr-IV, FEI, etc.), high percentage freestyles – however many you decide to offer, they all should be listed in the prize list, along with the disclaimer that the show reserves the right to add to or vary these awards.
- Workers: This is the responsibility of contacting and scheduling all the workers needed for the show.
- Prize List/Entry Blank.
- Program.

### Selecting Classes

- When deciding which classes to have, consider the needs of your specific geographical area, especially in terms of which levels might have enough entries to warrant a class for each test of the level as compared to a test of choice.
- Freestyles, quadrilles and pas de deux are popular. Freestyles may be offered as a test of choice class. Quadrilles and pas de deux may be ridden only in classes, including test of choice classes that are limited to quadrilles and pas de deux.
- Para Equestrian classes – normally offered as a test of choice – are helpful to that part of the dressage community. The procedures for offering and presenting these classes can be [found here](#).

## **Six Months Before the Competition**

### Advertising and Publicity:

- Coordinate advertising and publicity. Many shows rely on mass emailing, utilizing either their own resources or through subscribing to a company that specializes in that method of communication. The entities that recognize the show will list your event on their calendars; check that they have the details correct. Local newspapers, radio and television stations can also be of help.
- Work on posters and flyers if that is part of your plan.
- Decide if you want to offer advertisement space in the prize list, the program or on the show's website.
- Begin soliciting advertisements, class sponsors and/or show patrons.

### Production/Publishing:

- Determine how the prize list will be replicated. Prize lists are generally distributed electronically and posted on websites. Occasionally there will be a request for a printed version.
- Decide on deadlines for submissions to the prize list and program.
- The program is mandatory for Level 3-5 shows but optional for Levels 1-2. There are no stipulations as to the format. Printing generally takes longer than copying. A small program can be distributed electronically to the exhibitors but does not offer the advantage of being available to sell or give to spectators.

### Preparing the Prize List:

- The prize list is your first contact with prospective competitors and specifies the rules by which your competition will be run. It should be accurate, neat, logically organized and informative.

### Planning the Exhibitor's Party:

- A fun event and a way to express your appreciation to those who are attending. If it becomes too expensive or too much of a hassle, then it will be no fun and you should forget it. Simpler, more affordable plans lead to greater success.
- Barbeques, wine/cheese buffets, gatherings at a local restaurant – whatever you plan, make sure all details are in the prize list.
- If it is important to know the number of attendees in advance, include a reservation form in the prize list or incorporate it on the entry blank.

### Ribbons and Trophies:

- Some suppliers offer discounts for winter or off-season orders.
- Ribbons come in a great variety, from the simple single streamer to fancy rosettes with long streamers. The show's budget and anticipated entry form the basis of your choices.
- Trophies/prizes come in a wide range of possibilities ranging from the standard horse show statues, plates and bowls, crystal, glass, tack, bookends, gift certificates or any combination thereof.
- Competition management will need to decide if there will be engraving of a logo and/or show name on the trophies. Ribbons also can have show information on the streamer(s) or button. These options come at extra cost. There is normally a one-time registration fee for a logo at the companies that specialize in awards and ribbons. USEF Rule GR807 describes the accepted ribbon colors by placings.
- How many to order is often a bit of a guessing game but it is better to order extras in case classes need to be split and/or there might be duplicate placings. Alternatively, you can order and ship any missing ribbons or trophies after the show. That adds to your cost and time and is a disappointment to the exhibitor. They really like to receive their awards at the show.
- Prize money is always appreciated, if you have the budget for it.

### Equipment:

- Make a list of all the equipment you will need and determine if anything needs to be rented, borrowed or purchases. The grounds coordinator should provide a list of equipment that is available at the facility.

Insurance: All recognized competitions must be insured.

- The facility will require that they be named as an additional insured on the organizers' policy, as will all recognizing organizations.
- Certificate of Insurance: All USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized competitions are required to carry at least \$1 million insurance liability coverage and provide a copy of a certificate of insurance to both USEF and USDF postmarked at least two weeks prior to the date of the competition, to include the USEF/USDF competition name, number and dates of covered activity.
- USEF and USDF are “additional insureds” on the policy.
- Failure to comply carries serious penalties. If the insurance is not submitted Failure to obtain insurance at all will result in a substantial fine and possible loss of license.
- If you will be offering more than one show during the show season, the insurance company will write a policy to cover all of the days requested and will normally take responsibility for sending copies to the recognizing organizations.

### **One to Four Months Before the Competition**

Prize List Development and Distribution:

- In general, the earlier you can finalize your prize list, the better it is for all concerned. The production of the prize list forces the show organizers to review all aspects of the competition: officials, classes, awards, facility information, specific show rules, etc. If you have not done this before, it is highly recommended that you look over the approved versions of prize lists of shows that are similar (Level, number of days, etc.) in structure to the show you are planning.
- USEF has specific requirements.
  - Checklist of General Prize List Requirements
  - Checklist of Dressage, Eventing, Endurance, Driving, and Vaulting Prize List Requirements
- USDF has specific requirements.
  - Documents to be printed In Prize List
  - Prize List requirements and Recommendations Checklist
  - Entry checklist
  - Entry Form
- Both USEF and USDF send out reminders that they need to receive a copy of the Prize List (including entry form).
- The prize list must be submitted to any additional recognizing organizations.
- It is to the show's advantage to complete and distribute the prize list well in advance of the show.
- Changes can be made to the prize list after the original distribution. The revised copy must be re-submitted to all recognizing organizations and the updated copy must be re-posted wherever the original was posted.
- The original development of a prize list can be daunting, but the approved version can be used as a template for future competitions.

- Most prize lists and entry forms are completely electronic (PDF) documents.
- The more people who know about your competition, the more participants and spectators you may expect. Suggested sources of mail list include the rosters of dressage clubs, combined training clubs, pony clubs and other equestrian organizations, riding schools and previous competition records. If you GMO or USDF Region has an omnibus, this is an excellent way to promote your event.

#### Arrangements for Judges and Technical Delegate:

- Accommodations for officials need to be confirmed. Written permission must be given if you plan to place an official in a private home.
- Transportation to and from the airport. If the show does not have someone to do this, ride shares, shuttles, taxis need to be investigated for cost and timeliness of pick-up and delivery times. Ideally, the host hotel will provide a complimentary shuttle.
- Transportation to and from the showgrounds.
- If there are any food or beverage preferences listed on a contract, be sure that these are obtained.
- Forward the hotel's confirmation numbers to the officials.
- Determine how the officials will be fed during the show. If you offer a per-diem, how many meals does that cover? It may be that lunch on the grounds will be on the show's tab and the breakfast is complimentary at the hotel, in which case the amount of the per diem would be to pay for the dinner(s) only.
- Prepare invitations to any special events. Sometimes the officials prefer to return to the hotel to rest, so do not insist on their participation.

#### Other Staff:

- Re-contact and re-confirm the EMT, farrier, veterinarian, security guards (if required), photographer, videographer.
- If the show is to provide housing/hotel for any of these individuals, forward the hotel confirmation number.
- Have the phone numbers of the EMT, farrier, and veterinarian are included in your Accident Preparedness Plan and prepare several copies to be posted in strategic locations when you arrive on the grounds.

#### Grounds Considerations:

- Check all of the equipment that has been reserved. You may need to paint, repair or clean any or all of it. If the facility is providing any of the equipment, remind them that they are doing so.
- No matter if you have used the public address system in the past, check that it is working to your satisfaction on the day prior to the start of the show.
- If not already provided by the facility, prepare signage for parking, stabling, restrooms, concessions, office, competition and warm-up arenas, and for any other thing that could conceivably cause a problem.
- Freshly painted judge stands make a good impression but the safety of the design and accessibility (steps!) are of paramount importance.



## Day Worker

- Ideally, people will notice that you are having a show and will contact you. Other sources include local dressage clubs and horse groups. If they share their email rosters, prepare a plea for help and make contact. A more personal approach is to call people on the rosters, but that is time consuming.
- Some of the best helpers have come from local colleges that have horse management and/or riding programs.
- Some competitors will offer to help when they are not busy with their horse(s). Do be careful what jobs you assign the competitors; they cannot, for example, scribe as that would be considered a conflict of interest.
- Make sure that the workers understand what their responsibilities will be. If you have written job descriptions, email them.
- Although the specific show schedule may not be available until the week of the show, you can ask workers to plan on arriving at whatever time you anticipate will be at a minimum, a half hour prior to the start of the show. This can be adjusted when the exact schedule is known. This confirmation of duties should include the date, time and assignment, so there is no misunderstanding.

## **Two Weeks Before the Competition**

Everything starts happening at once about this time. If you have followed the timetable up to now, you should not have any last-minute panics involving equipment, hospitality, officials, staff or day workers. The competition secretary will have been processing entries and may have an idea of how many will be participating. After the closing date, confirm the number of workers needed, prepare copies of the tests, prepare the time schedule and email and/or post on the website, ride times. Be sure that any staff that are required to be on the grounds know when the show is scheduled to start.

Check on all orders of equipment to make certain the order(s) have not been lost. If possible, visit the facility to go over the placement of dressage courts, schooling and lungeing areas, office/scoring area, scoreboard and award locations, announcer's placement, first-aid spot, food concession (if not permanent part of the facility). Work with the facility to provide a drug test location and an emergency stall for ill horse(s). Make certain that nothing has happened to the areas you were planning to use for parking for campers, spectators, exhibitors and trailers/vans. If vendors are expected, this is the time to map out where they can be placed. All of these issues need to be confirmed as viable with the facility management.

If you are having a show program, all the ads and sponsors should be received so the document can be developed. If you are offering a printed version, you will need to adhere strictly to the timeline of the printer. Entries and the schedule can be included if entries have closed early enough. If this is not possible, schedules and day sheets can be provided at the show as inserts.

## **The Week Before the Competition**

Now you will see how all your previous organization will pay off!

- Make sure the officials have local contact number(s) and that you have their cell phone numbers. Check that there are no misunderstandings about airport arrival, transportation to the hotel or pickup information the morning of the show.
- Re-confirm schedules with the workers.

- Final set-up of the showgrounds. The deadline for this is one day before the competition and competitors really like to be able to school in the arenas prior to the start of the show, so the set up should be completed by noon at the latest.
- Set up the secretary's office if there is no designated office at the facility. Ideally, the office will be accessible but enclosed so that competitors cannot crowd in and cause confusion.

### **The Day Before the Competition**

- Secretary's office is open and operating.
- A person or signage should be present at the entrance in order to provide directions to those trailering in. Although not a USEF requirement, this is the best time to check for any health papers mandated by state law.
- Prepare snack baskets and beverages for the judge stands. It is also nice to prepare welcome baskets in the hotel rooms of the officials.
- Now is the time to decorate the dressage courts with flowers or greenery. Live decorations will need to be properly watered and tended, especially if they are on loan. Carefully chosen artificial flowers can look nice and are reusable.
- By noon, post the final ride schedule at the office and as many other locations as you deem prudent. This schedule can also be distributed by email to the competitors.
- Determine and post "use of ring" policy. Some shows allow competitors in and/or around the competition arenas until a certain time; some do not.
- You may want to send a final reminder to the show workers.
- Serve as tour guide if any of the officials (judge, TD) have decided to preview the grounds.
- Late in the day, make one last check of the entire grounds to make certain everything is in place and ready. This includes sharps containers (one for each 50 horses stabled). By now, you should have identified an area for drug testing and a level area for pony measurements, if you are offering pony classes.
- Now, you should be ready for the big day.

### **The Day of the Competition**

- The office must open one hour prior to the first scheduled test. Workers should also be arriving.
- Concession stand should open one hour prior to the first scheduled test.
- Announcer needs to arrive early enough that announcements can begin half an hour prior to the first test.
- Although the rule states that emergency medical personnel and equipment are to be on site during "all scheduled performances", most shows ask them to arrive earlier. The show cannot begin without them.
- Judges are generally expected to be on the grounds half an hour before they are scheduled to begin.
- Technical Delegates generally arrive on the grounds an hour before the show begins.
- A quick inspection of judge stands is recommended as dampness and/or dirt can mysteriously appear overnight. Take a rag and be prepared to spiff up the table and chairs.
- It is the manager's duty to see that the competition starts on time and runs smoothly. The secretary will keep announcer, judges, ring stewards and scorers posted on all scratches and changes. If the judges fall behind schedule, a polite note reminding them of the time may help. This, of course, presumes a reasonable schedule to begin with.

- The office – whether the secretary, hospitality person or someone else – needs to make sure anyone who is to be fed by the show has access to an order sheet or meal voucher if there is a concession stand. If the food is being provided in some other fashion, make sure that any special needs of those who are to be fed are met.
- The manager or a designated person needs to keep track of workers and their schedules. Judges prefer to have the same scribe all day, so do not switch unless absolutely necessary and then only between classes. Ring stewards need to be at their positions at least a half hour prior to the start of the show.
- Keep an eye on the restrooms and/or portable toilets to make sure they are clean and well supplied.
- Scores should be posted about every three tests. Do NOT wait until the end of a class to post scores. Live streaming of scores, if you have that capability, makes it less possible that an anxious competitor will be fretting at the scoreboard.
- An end of day walk around is recommended for multi-day shows.
- If a drug tester appears, provide someone to help locate horses, if requested. Do not announce the tester's presence in any way. The show may be asked to provide a clean stall for testing.
- Each day of the competition should be run as the first day. Do not let yourself relax because the first day went well. The time to congratulate yourself is after the last award has been presented.

### **Clean-Up**

When and what you clean up will depend on your agreement with the facility. Stick to your agreement or, if possible, do more than you agreed to as you may wish to continue to use the facility. Make notes on any equipment that has been damaged during the competition, arranging for repairs as soon as possible. Inventory, box and label all office supplies, ribbons and awards for storage.

### **Within Ten Days After the Competition**

The competitors are depending on you to submit all of the results to USEF, USDF and any other recognizing organization. USEF and USDF require electronic submission, using their specifications which are published on the USEF website (Refer to [Results on USEF website](#)). Electronic reporting is mandatory for these two organizations but may be optional for other organizations. Be sure to ask if you are organizing a show that is recognized by a GMO or club but NOT by USEF/USDF.

The deadline for emailing results is ten days after the last day of the competition except for results from competitions held within the last two weeks of September must be in the USDF office within three days of the show, along with the paperwork and fees. Competitions held two weeks prior to the regional championship closing date, in the region where the championship is held, must submit the results, fees and paperwork so that they are received in the USDF office within seven days of the competition. If the competition is held within the week prior to the regional championship closing date, in the region where the championships is held, those fees, results and paperwork must be received in the USDF office within four days of the end of the competition.

There may be other programs throughout the year that will have specific requirements for submission of results that are not covered by this document.

The normal submission of results, paperwork and fees go to:

- USEF

- USDF
- Local sponsoring organizations  
Publications

### **Long Term Follow Up**

- Thank you notes
- Pay all obligations within 30 days
- Report non-negotiable checks and denied credit card payments to USEF within 90 days. USEF has a procedure for following up on these situations that is very efficient.
- Draw up a financial statement as soon as possible
- Keep competition records for three years.