

How to discuss your dressage test with a judge

Judges and riders both want the same thing, better tests produced through happy horses that understand their job, show their training follows The Training Scale, and show willingness to do what is asked of them.

Judges welcome riders' enquiries about their marks and comments on tests if the enquiries are made in a courteous manner.

When conducted in a positive framework these discussions can prove invaluable to riders in the development of their horse's training, so, the judge can better understand how to communicate this to a rider and the rider can better understand what the judge observed in their test.

How should you talk to a judge about your test? The judge may arrange this either at the show or afterwards, in person or on the phone. It may be a brief meeting, or a longer discussion. It can only occur when the judge has time, either at the show or when the judge can find time after the show. In either case, there are several protocols to ensure the discussion is conducted in a polite and friendly manner to adhere to the EA Code of Conduct.

Asking to discuss a test with your judge

Ask the judge politely if you may discuss a test with her or him.

- The judge will endeavour to find a time that suits both parties. The time needs to fit around the judge's commitments.
- The judge will choose a meeting place that is quiet, comfortable, and private (*not* at the scoreboard)
- The rider must provide the copy of the relevant test sheet for the meeting. It is best to check the scoring on the sheet before the meeting commences, in case of errors in scoring or pencilling.
- Please check with the judge if they are happy to have your coach or others present, it is the rider, who the judge will discuss the test with
- The judge may ask a witness to be present for the meeting – this could be another official, an organiser or a knowledgeable colleague
- If the rider is a minor, *one* parent/guardian may be present
- It is not appropriate to approach a judge when their focus is on some other role, eg they are riding at a competition or preparing a horse at a competition or coaching a rider at a competition, then they are wearing a different 'hat' altogether.

"Participants must refrain from abuse, intimidation or harassment. Inappropriate behaviour towards horses, officials, volunteers, or committee members must not be tolerated," (*EA Code of Conduct*, 3 July 2017). If at any time, inappropriate behaviour occurs, the judge is entitled to say: "I am not continuing this discussion at this time" and may walk away. In rare cases, the judge may also say: "In my opinion your behaviour is inappropriate and breaches the EA Code of Conduct, please cease now". The judge may report the matter to EWA.

Dialogue between riders and judges can be helpful for both parties, providing useful feedback. Discussion with a judge about a test is not a matter of whether anyone is right or wrong, it is an opportunity for the rider to discuss a test with the judge and gain a better understanding of the judge's marks and comments on their horse's way of going. One reason why judges are placed in different positions around the arena is so that the final score more accurately reflects the horse and rider's performance, because it is an average of the different perspectives judges gain from their different positions. Riders should understand that judging from different positions around the arena often produces different scores for the same test.

In an ideal world riders, coaches and judges all “sing from the same songbook.” Riders and coaches are encouraged to attend the same dressage education seminars that judges attend, so they gain a greater appreciation of the importance of the Training Scale.

Judges strive to support all sections of the sport of dressage.

The triangle of rider, coach & judge creates the pathway for the sport to improve and progress.

Dressage is the benchmark of training in which each plays a part.

The roles are different but the end game is the same,
we all want to encourage correct training, harmony, and the happy athlete.

W. Barker