

## A - Enter Working Trot. X – Halt Salute

At some point, you have probably been asked at the last minute to read a test for a rider who was ready to go down centerline. Maybe you are an accomplished reader and know how to read a test, but for those who may be pressed into service for the first time or who become anxious every time they read a test, a few pointers can make the experience more positive for both the reader and the rider entering the competition ring.

First, you need to determine whether you are a good candidate to be a reader.

- Do you have a strong voice that carries? Soft-poken people do not make good readers.
- Have you ridden dressage tests before so that you know the general flow of a test? Some people who do not ride are good readers, but it usually helps if you are a rider and it is even better if you have ridden to the level of the test you are reading.
- Are you the parent (or child or spouse) of the person you are reading for? If so, find someone else to read, as it is generally not a good idea for parents, children and spouses to read for each other.
- Do you want to watch the test? If you are reading, and you do a good job, you will see very little of the test. Reading requires concentration to the task at hand, and if you get caught up in watching the ride, you will get behind in your reading and you will not do a good job reading.
- Are you tough enough to handle the rider who comes out of the ring after a poor test? Unfortunately, there are some competition-stressed riders who will initially blame the reader for a bad test and you have to not take it personally.
- If you are riding at the same show, do you have the ability to concentrate on your own horse and your rides and in addition take on the task of reading for others? Your ride times may conflict or be so close that you are late to read, or you don't have time to properly warm up your own horse.

If you think you have the qualities to be a good reader, then volunteer to read for your friends at a few local schooling show. The low-key nature of a schooling show will take the pressure off of you, as making a mistake to the detriment of the rider at a USEF recognized show is a much more 'expensive' mistake for all involved. After practicing at schooling shows then you can step up and read at a recognized show, where there are typically many more pressures and tensions that at a schooling show.

So what should be on your mind when you read at a USEF-recognized show? Here are a few pointers to keep you calm, cool and collected and of the most assistance to the rider going down centerline.

- Do you have the current tests? Tests change every four years, and are available in commercial booklets with all tests, off the USEF and USDF websites, as well as via iphone applications. The rider should have a test copy or book from which you can read.

- In which ring is your rider competing? Sometimes both the reader and the rider can be confused as to which ring is the correct one, or the ring times/schedule may have changed since the initial ride times were posted. At shows with multiple rings, be sure you know how to get down to the ring (sometimes there is only one way to get to the arenas, or what appears to be the logical paths may be blocked off).
- Is the ring running on time? Although the rider does not have to ride before their scheduled ride time, judges sometimes get behind, or accidents happen that delay the show. Time changes will affect the rider's warm up as well as when you should arrive ringside to read. Most of the time, the rider will look to their reader or groom for this information, so be sure to check with the in gate steward for any changes or delays.
- What is the number of the horse in front of your rider? This will help you assure that you are ready at the right moment (regardless of the scheduled ride time).
- Are you listening for a bell or whistle to begin reading? If you begin reading at the wrong signal (bell instead of whistle), your rider may end up in the ring before their signal has sounded (and they can be eliminated for entering before their signal).
- What test does the rider think they are riding? Does that match what the in gate person and program says? Sometimes tests get scheduled out of order, and the rider may not be clued in that they are actually riding Test 3 before Test 2.
- What test is in front of you that you are preparing to read? As the rider circles the arena, it is always a good idea to recite "Training Level Test 1" or whatever the person is riding so that you both confirm the upcoming test.

### The Test Itself

- Read the test ahead of time and make sure that you know the geometry involved in the test. That helps you know when to read a particular movement, and some of the tests are quite "wordy" and require you to read a lot of words within a few meters, and then you may be silent for what seems like a long time before the next movement.
- Hopefully you know the rider for whom you are reading, and know whether they want each movement read long in advance (before they are finishing the movement before) or they want it read only 5 to 10 strides out. Part of this depends on the show and riding experience of the rider, as the further out from the movement you read, the more time the rider has to prepare the upcoming movement. However, if you read too early, then the rider may not hear you as they are still focusing on finishing the half pass, and doesn't really hear you say "F-X-H- medium trot."
- Make sure that as you walk up to the ring, you have the correct test open in your book (or on your phone application). Then as you read, be sure to put your finger on the page as you read so that when you look up to see where the rider is in the test, you can easily find your place on the test again to continue reading.
- Although it is always the rider's responsibility to know the test, the reader is an asset in that if the rider is momentarily confused, the reader can direct them

through creative test reading. For example, for a “broken line” walk diagonal (H-X-K) if the reader sees that the rider is making no effort to change direction at X (because the rider has it in their mind they are doing the HXF diagonal, just before the rider reaches X, the reader can read “K (emphasized loudly) medium walk” and the rider, seeing that they are going toward F instead of K, can quickly correct their line of travel. The same thing can be done when a rider does a 15 meter circle instead of a 10 meter circle – the second time, the reader can read “B - 10 (emphasized) meter circle and the rider will get the idea that they are to ride a 10 meter circle, not a 15 meter circle.

Now for the rules and protocol.

- You must begin reading at the beginning of the test (i.e. you can’t show up in the middle of the test and begin reading).
- You may only read exactly what is written on the test sheet, and there are portions which are marked as not to be read.
- You cannot talk to the rider during the test or give instructions, as this is “unauthorized assistance” and can result in elimination of the rider from the test.
- You can’t re-read a movement unless it is very clear that there was a sound or disturbance that caused your voice not to be heard.
- You must call the test in English unless you have proper permission to read in another language.
- Although there is no set place in the ring from which a test is required to be read, B and E are the normal locations for readers. If there is little distance between the two rings, opt to read from the side furthest away from the other ring.
- If the rider goes off course, the judge will signal the rider and tell them where to re-start the test. During this time, as the reader you are to remain silent; once the rider has resumed the test, you can continue reading where you left off.
- If you find that in addition to being the reader, you are the impromptu groom before the rider goes in the ring, make sure that wraps are off and the rider has a number on the bridle, saddle pad, or boot. Wearing wraps into a test, or failing to exhibit a number can result in elimination by the judge.

Techniques for Reading.

- Be sure that you enunciate clearly, as “B” and “E” sound very similar, especially with noise from fans, squeaky boots on the saddle, or other readers. As you read, look directly at your rider (not at the test book) to project your voice toward your rider (and not to the rider in the other ring or into the ground).
- Project your voice appropriately for the conditions of the arena. If there are loud fans on, or you are outside in the wind, you may have to almost shout to be heard. However, if you are in an arena with very little noise, yelling or a strident voice is very annoying to the judge and scribe (who have to sit there all day trying to tune out readers).
- In the case of an outdoor arena when it is raining, be sure that you have a plastic bag or something water resistant in which you place the test to be read. Wear a

rain hat or rain coat rather than carry an umbrella to juggle and control while you read.

With all these thoughts in mind, you can be a great asset to riders competing at shows. Reading tests is also a great way to become familiar with the show scene and all that is involved in riding and showing. That way, when it is your turn to go down centerline and you choose someone to read for you, you can make sure that they know how to best assist you.