

## **What is Working Equitation (WE)?**

Working Equitation or WE, is an equestrian sport that originates from the Southern European countries of Spain, France, Italy, and Portugal. It tests the partnership a rider has with his/her horse and consists of 3-4 "Trials", or "classes". It has a dressage foundation in that the concepts of balance, suppleness, responsiveness, mobility, and obedience are fundamental to the sport.

There are 7 levels of WE to compete at: Level 1 – Intro (walk-trot only), Level 2 – Novice A, Level 3 – Novice B, Level 4 – Intermediate A, Level 5 – Intermediate B, Level 6 – Advanced, Level 7 - Masters Level 1 is walk-trot only and includes just the first two trials: dressage and Ease of Handling. Levels 2 – 7 all have walk-trot-canter and include the Speed trial in addition to Dressage and Ease of Handling. Sometimes, Levels 2-7 also include an optional Cattle Trial.

The governing body for the sport in the United States is USA Working Equitation (USAWE).

## **What happens at a WE show?**

A WE show is usually done over two days.

Most shows in the US consist of three (3) trials: Dressage, Ease of Handling (EOH), and Speed. A fourth trial, Cattle, is sometimes offered here in the US but it is usually optional.

A WE competitor can ride in almost any kind of tack and attire including dressage, hunter/jumper, western, and traditional Spanish or Portuguese tack and outfit. Tack styles should not be mixed (ex. Western saddle, dressage bridle).

**Day 1** of a WE show consists of the Dressage Trial

**Day 2** of a WE show consists of the EOH and Speed Trials

If the Cattle Trial is offered, it is usually done on a third day.

All trials except for the Cattle Trial are ridden individually. Each rider has a set time for their Trial or "class". A judge and scribe will watch the class and score the rider.

## **What do I need to do to go to a WE show?**

The Working Equitation website provides a ton of information about the sport as well as how to become involved. It is important to explore the website to learn as much as possible: <https://usawe.org/>

## **Here are steps for joining a WE show:**

1. If you just want to try WE out one time, you can sign up for the “ONE TIME Voucher” on the website: <https://usawe.org/membership-horses/voucher/>
2. If you decide you like WE, you will need to become a USAWE member. The cost for adults is a small annual fee; for those under 18 as of January 1, membership is free! - You will need to Join here <https://usawe.org/membership-horses/membership-info/>
3. You will also need to register every horse you plan to use in a WE show which requires a small, ONE TIME, fee: <https://usawe.org/membership-horses/recorded-horses/>
4. You will sign up for a WE show by going to the calendar on the website - <https://usawe.org/events/> - and filling out the online form for the show of your choice. If there is no link to an online entry for the show you’re interested in, contact the show organizer to request information about how to sign up. An invoice is typically emailed several weeks before the show for payment.
5. A few days before the show, you will be sent your stall assignment, your class times, and a course map for both the EOH and Speed Trials.
6. It’s a good idea to arrive at the show facility the afternoon before the show actually begins to settle your horse into his/her stall. Most WE shows will start on Saturday morning and finish Sunday evening. Smaller shows might run all trials in a single day.

## How the show runs once you’re there:

### Friday

- On Friday when you arrive, the dressage court will be set up in the show ring. Often, there will be a few obstacles set out around the outside for practice. Usually there is an outdoor or additional warm up areas. You are welcome to warm up and practice on your horse all of Friday in all the arenas and into the wee hours of Saturday morning before the ring is closed and prepared for the Dressage Trials. Once the arena has been groomed on Saturday morning, the competition arena is officially off limits until the competition begins.

### Saturday

- You will have a set time for your dressage ride. You want to be warmed up and ready to go into the ring at least 10 minutes before your time. The dressage test you ride is determined by the level you compete at. All the dressage tests are on the website (<https://usawe.org/competitions/rules/>) so you can memorize the pattern in enough time before the show. The tests for each level do not change every year, so once you memorize a test you will ride it through all your shows until the test is changed (normally 3-5 years).
- If you are worried about memorizing your dressage test, you can have a person standing on the outside of the dressage court read your test to you. They cannot offer any help and can only read the pattern as you perform it. When your dressage rides are over, it’s usually a good idea to start memorizing your obstacle patterns for the EOH round.
- When all the dressage rides are done at the end of the day, the dressage court will be taken down and the EOH obstacles will be set up (volunteers are encouraged to help with this process)
- Once the EOH course is set up, riders (in their show clothes...unless the judge says it isn’t necessary OR you volunteered to help set up the course and the show organizer has made an

announcement about the rule for show clothes having been waived for those who set up the course) will meet on the course with the judge of their level.

- The judge will normally walk the EOH course with the riders (on foot), explain the obstacles, and answer any rider questions. This is a great time to do a lot of listening, as the judges are very good at explaining all the obstacles. This is also a time for you to memorize the pattern of the obstacles and plan your route of how you will go from one obstacle to the next in the pattern. The path you take between obstacles is your own decision, although the judge may explain what they think would be good routes. But in the end, it is up to you and how best to “show off” your horse’s abilities for the route you take between obstacles. **You are JUDGED on how you do the obstacles, and there is also one part of your score that is based on how well you navigate the course between obstacles.**
- After the judge walks you through the entire course, explaining and answering any questions, you will have a set amount of time (usually 20 minutes) to walk the course on your own to plan how you will do it. Then the course is closed to all riders and horses until the EOH Trial starts.
- The outdoor and other warmup areas will be open for your use and occasionally some additional practice obstacles will be set up for you to work on.

## Sunday

- The EOH Trials will usually begin in the morning of the second day. You will want to have your horse warmed up and ready to go into the ring about 10 minutes before your assigned time.
- When it is your turn, you will go into the ring and ride around until you hear the bell. Usually the judge is finishing the scoring and comments for the person before you.
- You CANNOT practice any of the obstacles at this time. You also CANNOT cross through any obstacle “lines” as that will be an automatic DQ before you even start. You CAN ask the judge for permission to set how the pole is angled out of the barrel for the bull run. Once permission has been granted, you can ride over and set the pole the way you like it.
- When the bell rings, halt facing the judge, salute, then ride through the start markers to start your round. When you are finished riding all your obstacles in the order of the pattern, you ride back through the finish markers, halt facing the judge and salute once more. You are done!
- When all the EOH rides are done, there will be a break to set up the obstacles for the Speed Trial. When your EOH ride is done, it is recommended to start memorizing the pattern for the Speed Trial.
- Once the Speed course is set up, riders will have a set amount of time (normally 15-30 minutes) to walk the course on their own. The Judge will be nearby to answer any questions but normally the Speed course walk is done on your own.
- For the speed round, the only thing that counts is your time, that you do the obstacles in the order given, and you don’t DQ. You are not judged on how you do the obstacles (other than completing them) or how you go between them (abiding by the rules to prevent DQ’s). This is a timed event only, and your goal is to get through the course as quickly and as safely as possible. Many people like to use the Speed Trail to “train” their horses on the obstacles. If your Dressage and EOH scores are high, this allows you to take more time through the course.
- At the end of the Speed Trials and once the course is taken down (again, volunteer help is strongly encouraged), it’s time for ribbons! All riders meet near the show office, and awards and ribbons are handed out.

- You are free to leave anytime after your speed round, but if you don't stay around for awards, you will not get your ribbons. Your scores are tracked online throughout the show weekend on this website - <https://gira.io/>. You can always check your standing whenever you want.

## What are important concepts to be good at WE?

- For the Dressage Trial, understand how and what you are scored on for your dressage level. The tests are broken down into sections and explain what the judge is looking for in each of the movements. Primary are usually obedience, good transitions, willing horse, suppleness, and correct geometry. The website does a good job of explaining what is required for the Dressage Trial - <https://usawe.org/dressage-trial/>.
- For the EOH Trial, understand how each obstacle needs to be ridden for the best score possible. This would include what gait to use for each obstacle according to your level, what obstacles are only done at the walk no matter the level (Bridge), how to do the obstacles for the best score, how you are only allowed to use your right hand on the obstacles (unless you're a lefty...then you'll only use your left), what are considered the "lines" of the obstacles and how to NOT cross them, and other important rules. It is also good to know all the obstacles that can be presented in a show. At the intro level (1), the rider and horse only do 10 obstacles. But there are many obstacles the judge can choose from, so you never know what obstacles will be present until you get the course map. This is explained on the website and through lessons with instructors familiar with WE. Be sure to read about the obstacles on the website! <https://usawe.org/eoh-trial/>
- For the Speed Trial, the rules are the same for every level since the Speed Trial is only judged on "time" and doing the obstacles in the correct pattern. There is no Speed Trial for Level 1 – Intro, so after your EOH round, you are done! It's important to know about the penalties, bonuses, and how to avoid a DQ when doing speed. All obstacles can be done at the speed you want, but it is emphasized that you always ride safely and to the level of your horse and skills to avoid accidents. Keep in mind a rider can be last in Speed (the slowest) and still win the entire level if their Dressage and EOH scores are high. The rules are explained on the website here: <https://usawe.org/speed-trial/>
- If a Cattle Trial is offered, it will be optional and usually done on the final day of the event. Only recently have the Cattle Trials been offered at more shows. There is an additional fee to participate in the Cattle Trial. You are judged individually for penning a cow, but you work in a group of 3, either of your choice or assigned to you, in order to help with the other cattle in the herd while you work yours. The most important thing about the Cattle Trial is that your horse be at least familiar with cattle work. Often a WE show will offer a Cattle Clinic along with the Cattle Trial, and you can elect to do just the clinic for fun and training, the clinic and the Trial, or just the Trial. When you sign up for a WE show you will see an option for this if it is available.

## How can I help my horse be good at WE?

- At the most basic level, your horse should listen to you well. Does he stop when you ask? Will he go into trot the moment you use your legs? Does he turn left and right and backup without a big fight? Having a willing horse partner is of primary importance.
- You want your horse to be used to you handling and touching objects while in the saddle and to remain “immobile” while you do so unless you’re doing the pole for the bull run. Bottom line is the horse should listen and obey what you’ve asked him to do no matter what you might be holding or touching from on top.
- You should be able to move your horse’s shoulders and hindquarters easily and independent of each other. Your horse needs to learn to stop balanced and square. You should be able to ask for at least walk and trot (Level 1 is only walk and trot) easily while also steering. As you go up the levels, you will need more control to be able to ride walk, trot, and canter, do flying lead changes, ride one-handed, and so on.
- The best training you can do for your horse is to teach it to listen to you by being consistent with your cues and helping your horse to understand what your aids mean. Practice these often but don’t drill your horse! Keep things fun and provide lots of different exercises and lessons for your horse that challenge his balance and interest and help you to improve your control of him.

The sport of Working Equitation is fun and exciting! Usually, music is played during all the Trails and audience enthusiasm is encouraged during the Speed Trial! It’s a great sport because it provides a lot of interest for your horse, tests your partnership and communication with your horse, and requires you to plan and strategize your own routes (in EOH and Speed) to best show off the training and skills of your horse.

We hope to see you at a Working Equitation show someday soon!