

# Working Equitation and Attending Your First Competition

An Affiliate Organization Resource



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

Working Equitation, most often referred to as WE, is an equestrian sport that originates from the Southern/Western 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". Working Equitation is open to all breeds, all disciplines, English and Western riders. It has a dressage foundation where the concepts of balance, suppleness, responsiveness, mobility, and obedience are fundamental to the sport.

There are 7 distinct competition levels of WE.

- 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). The World Association of Working Equitation (WAWE), governs the Level 7 - Masters level.

### **Dressage Trial**

Ride a pattern of movements called a Dressage Test. Dressage is the art of riding and training a horse in a manner that develops obedience, flexibility, and balance. This concept is the foundation of Working Equitation.

### **Ease of Handling Trial**

Ride a course through 10+ obstacles. You are judged on your riding and navigation through each obstacle.

### **Speed Trial**

This is a timed event completing an obstacle course. This is a test of a horse and rider's ability to navigate obstacles with accuracy as quickly as possible. It is thrilling to watch and a lot of fun for the rider and horse. The Speed Trial is for Level 2 and above.

## Optional Cattle Trial

A team of three or four riders work together as each rider separates a designated cow from the herd and moves it across the enclosure to a holding pen. Cattle trials are not always offered at each show and are always optional. The Cattle Trial is for Level 2 and above.

## Levels of Competition

There are seven levels of competition. You compete in the Level that is appropriate for the training level of you and your horse. For example: Level 1 is walk-trot only. Level 1 does not do the Speed or Cattle Trial. Level 2-7 is walk, trot, and canter. You may ride with two hands up to Level 5 in order to help your horse with his training. This sport focuses on basic horsemanship, training and partnership with your horse. The Levels give you a way to judge your progress in the training.

What skills are required from the Horse and Rider? Having a willing horse partner is of primary importance. Your horse should listen to your riding aids and cues and respond appropriately. You want your horse to accept you handling and touching objects while in the saddle and to remain calm and quiet. The great thing about WE is that you compete in the Level that is appropriate for the Rider-Horse skill.

Ex. A beginning rider can compete on an experienced horse in Level 1. An experienced rider can compete on an inexperienced horse also in Level 1.

## How is a WE Competition Run?

A WE competition can be run as a one or two-day competition. When run as a one -day competition, there are often 2 competitions, back-to-back, over a weekend.

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

Whether over 1 or 2 days, the trials are always judged in this order:

- Dressage Trial
- EOH Trial
- Speed Trial
- Cattle Trial if offered.

All trials, except for the Cattle Trial, are ridden individually.

## What is Required to Compete in WE?

The Working Equitation website provides all of the information you need about the sport and attending competitions. It is important to explore the website to learn as much as possible: <https://usawe.org/>

Attending a Clinic or a Schooling show is the best way to get ready for a show.

## Steps for Attending a WE Competition

Starting off with a schooling competition is a great idea. The pressure is less and you can often get more feedback from the judge after your ride. Offering to volunteer at a competition, or attending one to watch offers a competitor more insight as to how the competitions run before placing their horse in the ring.

While not necessary to attend clinics or schooling shows, it is required to become a USAWE member if you are going to compete at licensed shows. You can find the details to join here:

<https://usawe.org/become-a-member/>

You will also need to register every horse you plan to use in a WE competition which requires a small, ONE TIME, fee: <https://usawe.org/membership-horses/recorded-horses/>

There are several ways to find out about competitions in your region or area. One is by using the USAWE competition calendar: <https://usawe.org/events/> All licensed competitions are posted here. You may also find out about local licensed and schooling competitions by joining your local USAWE Affiliate Organization, and following working equitation specific FB pages. [Add schooling show calendar link](#)

Prior to the competition, you will be sent your stall assignment, class times, and a course map for both the EOH and Speed Trials.

It's a good idea to arrive at the competition facility the afternoon before the competition actually begins. This allows you to settle your horse into his/her stall and get familiar with the competition grounds. Most WE competitions will start on Saturday morning and finish Sunday evening. Smaller competitions might run all trials in a single day.

## Competition Organization

Always read the rules for the level you are competing at prior to attending a competition. It is your responsibility to know the rules you are competing under. The most recent handbook is always on the USAWE website. <https://usawe.org/rules/>

Whether a 1- or 2-day competition, this is a rough layout of what to expect at a competition. Keep in mind that WE competitions are often using competition grounds that have been set up for cattle work, dressage, competition jumping, etc. so each competition may be laid out differently.

## **Arrival**

When you arrive, the dressage arena and EOH obstacles may be set up. Generally you are allowed to use any area of the competition grounds to exercise your horse until the morning the competition starts. Then rings are closed and prepared for the Dressage Trials to begin. At this time the competition arena is officially off limits until the competition begins. When in doubt, always check with competition staff (competition Manager or TD)

## **Trials**

**DRESSAGE** You will have a scheduled 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/>

If you are worried about memorizing your dressage test, you may have a reader. They cannot offer any assistance, but may only read the pattern as you perform it.

**EASE OF HANDLING** When the Dressage Trial is complete there will be an open EOH course walk. Often volunteers are encouraged to assist in setting up the EOH course. Once the EOH course is set up, riders (in their competition clothes...unless the judge says it isn't necessary) will meet on the course with the judge of their level. The judge will call out any specifics of the course and remain available for questions during the course walk time. 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. The path you take between obstacles is your own decision. In the end, it is up to you to decide 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, with a portion of your score based on obstacle navigation.

The outdoor and other warmup areas will be open for your use and occasionally some additional practice obstacles will be set up.

Again, 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. It is a good idea to practice not crossing through any obstacle "lines" while you are waiting for the bell; once you are judged this could be an automatic DQ. You CAN ask the judge for permission to set how the pole is angled out of the barrel for the bull run and place the cup for the switch cup obstacle. Once permission has been granted, you can ride over and set the pole the way you like it and place the cup on the appropriate pole depending on what hand you are using to work the obstacles. Always ask permission!

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.

**SPEED** Once the Speed course is set there will be a course walk. The Judge will be nearby to answer any questions, but normally the Speed course walk is done on your own.

For the speed round there are three criteria:

- Time
- Completing the obstacles in order
- 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.

**AWARDS** 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 competition 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. Also, volunteer help is encouraged! Your scores are tracked online throughout the competition weekend on the Gira website <https://gira.io/>. You can always check your standing whenever you want.

## Riding Concepts Required to Excel at WE

### Dressage Trail

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/>.

### Ease of Handling 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 (ex: bridge, pen), 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 competition. At the intro level (L1), the rider and horse only complete 8-10 obstacles. However, 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/>

## **Speed 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. If you are competing at L1 you are finished after EOH!

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/>

## **Cattle Trial**

If a Cattle Trial is offered, it will be optional and usually done on the final day of the event. 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 for you before entering a Cattle Trial is that your horse be at least familiar with cattle work. Often a WE competition will offer a Cattle Clinic along with the Cattle Trial. 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 competition you will see an option for this if it is available.

## **How to Train Your Horse for 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 back up 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 handling the pole for the bull run). The 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.

You should be able to move your horse's shoulders and hindquarters easily and independently of each other. Your horse needs to learn to stop in a balanced and square stance. You should be able to ask for a walk and trot (Level 1 is only walk and trot) easily while steering. As you go up the levels, you will need



more control to be able to ride the walk, trot, and canter, do flying lead changes, ride one-handed, etc. The Levels are devised to move you and your horse through them at a progression.

The best training you can do for your horse is to develop a trusting relationship 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. If you would like help during this process, there are many certified Professional Instructors for Working Equitation. You can find a list of them here: <https://usawe.org/local/professional-instructors/>

The sport of Working Equitation can be fun and exciting! Usually, music is played during all the Trails and audience enthusiasm is encouraged during the Speed Trial! Often you can pick your own music for the Speed Trail, customizing your experience. 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 competition someday soon!**