

A DRESSAGE JUDGES ALPHABET – includes FEI Dressage Judges Handbook Glossary Words & FEI Rules updates (updated 2010)

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*A collection of words and phrases to help ring the changes when looking for new ways of expressing what happens in a Dressage Test

Word changes from FEI updates: Riders have become athletes; bit is used rather than bridle; ‘the main contact with the horse’s mouth must be through the snaffle bit’, and ‘without hurrying’ is used for medium and extended paces. In addition the Aim of a movement is now clearly defined as in leg yielding, travers, half pass in trot and canter etc. and more.

A for Aids. “On the aids” means the horse is monitoring the rider’s aids successfully, lifts higher or longer but never runs.

Judges Comment: “Aids misunderstood, strides should lengthen not accelerate”.

Refers to the fundamental process of communication between horse and rider. Acceptance or effect of the driving aids should give the stepping under not speeding up of the horse. Faced with a running, often mechanically and stiffly striding horse, when elastic and supple lengthening is required, the above comment could be made.

The misunderstanding of the aids between horse and rider can be relevant in many situations

See FEI Rules – a reminder of invisible aids....Article 418.

A for Active

Judges Comment: “Needs more active strides”

When the movement is clearly average/ordinary, this comment can use words such as “**more thrust/ power/ drive needed to achieve expression**”, especially that of the hind legs are alternatives.

FEI Handbook: Activity – energy, vigour, liveliness.

A for Attitude

FEI Rules emphasise that 'there should always be a clear difference in the attitude and over-tracking' in medium, collected, extended and free walk.

B for Balance

Judges Comment: 'Unbalanced.....' plus further explanation if time")

Used in relation to shifting of the weight affecting the rhythm. The weight can be pushed forward or to one side.

A balanced horse can keep identical strides through straight and bent paths and make distinct transitions.

B for Bridle and Bit

Judges Comment: "Resistance affecting round frame"

Above, behind, against, too deep, resisting – to be on the bit involves the TOTAL horse skeletally with elastic joints. It involves a shorter base capable of moving deeper under the weight with the hind legs. Too short in the neck, trailing hocks, hocks pushing out often shows up the problem a horse has with accepting the bit.

Handbook: **Above the bit: avoids acceptance of the contact**

Against the bit: pushes against, unyielding

Behind the bit: shrinks from contact with bit

On the bit: supple and quiet acceptance

B for Back (suppleness of)

Judges Comment: "Needs to swing and relax thru' the back"

A horse that does not relax his muscles to carry the rider appears stiff (corpse like!) and cannot produce a swinging vibrating back necessary for supple and elastic movements. A rider can cause this problem.

When riders cannot sit to the trot, this is a clear indication of a stiff back.

B for Bend –1. longitudinal and 2. lateral

Judges Comment 1. "Improve roundness"

Longitudinal bend or flexing results in well engaged joints and contributes to greater impulsion on a more collected shorter base.

Judges Comment 2. "Improve (lateral) bend to right or left"

Lateral bend is when the horse is bent along the entire spinal column towards one side. Very suppling. Needed in lateral movements.

B for Blurred

Judges comment: “Blurred transition” or “too hesitant”.

Clear, crisp transitions from one movement to another i.e. Canter strike off (no extra steps shuffling into canter) or collected walk into Passage (no trot steps before the passage).

C for Contact and Connection (Training Scale No 3)

Judges comment: “Uneven contact” or “Needs connection”

This refers to the horse avoiding the communication of energy between himself and the rider – an aids issue. The horse should seek contact with the rider’s hands.

C for Cadence

Judges comment: ‘Develop a more elastic rhythm’.

A horse with cadence has brilliance artistically. Cadence is the marked accentuation of the beat.

Stephan Clarke Seminar said “**Cadence is pronounced rhythm**”

C for Collection (Training Scale 6)

Judges comment: “Improve collection”

Collection is a major issue – a shorter frame yet taller more active horse. A stretched topline with a shorter mass which makes it easier for the haunches to support and lift upwards. Gives a liberated forehead and freer shoulder.

Horses that can collect can extend successfully, and horses that are not uphill lack collection. It is not achieved by a resisting hand and shortening stride.

C for Carry

Judges comment: “Hinds need to carry more”.

Related to the power in the hindquarters, another way to explain the need for a more uphill frame and lack of engagement, especially if wide behind and **trailing which is a lack of developed strength.**

C for Changes (flying)

Judges Comment: ‘Stepping short to left/right’ “Strides not even”

“Not through or engaged”

Changes may not be divided equally to either side of the centre line and strides can often be short to one side or the other. Lack of engagement will be seen in the need to be uphill and through with the hind legs.

C for Canter – FEI Rules remind judges that the general impression of the canter has an uphill tendency and cadence resulting from the acceptance of the Bridle with the Horse remaining straight on straight lines and correctly bent on curved lines.

C for Counter Canter

Judges Comment: ‘Lost balance or improve balance’ or ‘Deviating hinds’ or ‘escaping hinds’.

The hind legs often do not follow the forehand and the quality of the canter lacks lightness and elasticity. In counter canter horses often seen to be stiff and lacking suppleness.

FEI ‘the hind legs should follow the track of the forelegs’.

C for Crooked

Judges Comment: ‘Crooked, lack of forward thrust’.

Can apply to Rein back, halts, flying changes and riding down the Centreline and long sides.....and bringing the hindquarters either in or out to avoid engagement. Forefeet not aligned with hind feet on straight or curved lines.

D for Diagonal

Judges Comment: ‘Rein back not in diagonal pairs’

A lateral rein back appears quite frequently.

D for Dynamic

Judges Comment: ‘Trot needs to be more dynamic’ Just another power word so that the over used ‘more Impulsion’ can be left in the Collectives.

D for Deep

Judges Comment: “Frame too deep”

Refers to the horse dropping its Poll and tending to behind the vertical. A good way to describe a slight tendency rather than a significant ‘behind vertical’ problem. Not necessarily an insufficient mark.

E for Excellent, which does not mean perfect.

E for Elasticity

Judges Comment “Needs to offer a more elastic frame”.

The horse must be able to contract and stretch its muscles in a round and supple way, allowing him to extend and collect without altering the rhythm.

E for Expression

Judges Comment ‘Needs expression, willing horse, needs more supple and elastic strides’. Refers to the need to see an athletic stride in trot and canter with clear suspension.

E for Engagement

Judges comment: ‘Needs to improve engagement’

No Test is complete without it, **a horse will not be uphill, will not have flexed joints, will not be operating from the engine.**

FEI Handbook: Hind legs stepping under, causes the relative lowering of the hindquarters for more weight bearing.

Without engagement and collection there is no Dressage Test only a riding of the Course. Trailing hocks and wide behind are great giveaways! It also indicates the lack of strength.

E for Extension

Judges Comment “Work to improve thrust/power/energy/ drive/ground cover.....” Use in Walk, Trot and Canter – so much more interesting than ‘needs more’.

FEI Handbook: The hind feet touch the ground clearly in front of the prints of the fore feet.

E for Even

Judges Comment: ‘Loops uneven size’ “Half circles uneven”

Even in this context refers to half circles or serpentines that are not equally of correct size. Uneven used to indicate irregularity.

F for Faded

Judges comment: ‘Faded before F or K’

Refers to an Extended or Medium Canter that is not ridden to the marker. Equally applies to trot.

F for Flexion: FEI Handbook: Articulation of a joint so that the angle between the bones is decreased. Lateral and longitudinal flexion **commonly refers to flexion 'at the Poll'**.

F for Fluent

Judges Comment: 'Strides not fluent'

Often there is an unlevel stride through loss of balance especially in medium and extended paces. Does not always mean an insufficient mark.

F for Forward: FEI Handbook: ...indicates the direction the horse goes, it does not indicate HOW it gets there. The following indicate HOW the horse proceeds 'energy, reach, length of stride and tempo'.

Forward is often incorrectly used in tests and training.

F for Freedom

Judges comment: 'Strides (or rhythm) restricted/cramped – needs freedom thru' shoulder''

Linked to freedom of the joints needed for an elastic, powerful stride. "The Happy Athlete" needs freedom to perform.

FEI Handbook: The reach, scope of the fore and hind limbs.

F for Frame

Judges Comment: 'Frame lacks roundness'.

The roundness of the frame goes with the acceptance of the bridle and engagement of the quarters. Without roundness the horse flattens its outline and cannot collect to a shorter base.

G for Ground Cover

Judges Comment: 'Increase ground cover''

No medium or extended pace is complete without it, walk, trot, and canter.

H for Halt

Judges Comment: 'Not balanced on all 4 feet'

Judges sitting at H and M can see the balance but not the 'squareness' of the horse exactly.

FEI Rules add 'driving a horse towards a softly closed hand'.

H for Half Halts, they are a momentary increase of collection or an effect of the aids to increase the attention and improve the balance of the horse.

FEI emphasises 'every movement or transition should be invisibly prepared by a half halt. See Article 408 for detail

H can be Hollowness /Hurried strides and High croup.
Judges Comment: 'Improve fluent/balanced strides in a round frame'
Alternatively "Needs to engage hinds with round frame".

**I for Impulsion (Training Scale 4) Thrust - it is the release of energy stored by engagement.
It is part of the Collectives (the final analysis), better to try for words that convey power, drive, thrust, spring, activity, through the Test.
Impulsion gives cadence to trot and canter movements.**

J for Jump
Judges comment 'Canter rhythm needs more powerful jump".
A canter with jump has SPRING rather than flattened speed. It will show clear suspension.

K – for Kindness and a Happy Athlete

L for Lightness
Judge's Comment: 'Improve self carriage for lightness'
Related to the liveliness of the pace and acceptance of the bit – the opposite is a laboured heaviness with weight over the forehead.

L for Lift
Often related to piaffe and passage when the stride is too grounded or earthbound, also needed in canter strike off when the horse must sit and engage the hinds. Lift and spring needed to avoid grounding in piaffe.

L for Lengthening
Judge's Comment: "Needs ground cover and power"
Acceleration is not lengthening. In walk, trot and canter extension and medium paces should show increased ground cover and drive from the hindquarters.

M for Movements with More of everything!

There is also improve, work on, try for, go for and needs. 'More'.....can be very overused, variation is possible.

N for Neck

Judges Comment 'Frame very short thru' neck'

Can refer to acceptance of the bit, also to engagement and the uphill travel of the horse in the Test. **Rarely is a swinging back shown with a short, tight neck.**

O for Open

Judges Comment: 'Frame too open, needs roundness'

Often refers to the acceptance of the bridle and lack of collection and engagement – seen in horses working (slightly) above the bit.

O for Overbent

FEI Handbook: Behind the vertical, due to excessive longitudinal flexion in the poll and/or upper joints of the neck.

P for Poll

Judges Comment: 'Poll must remain highest point'

FEI Rules emphasise a 'controlled poll' with 'nose line close to the vertical'. Dr. Moritz has warned about the situation with stallions with exaggerated necks, judges must be careful not to be over zealous. It must be clearly incorrect.

P for Power

Judges Comment: 'Walk/trot/canter need power and ground cover'

Without power there is no elastic change of stride or frame, and without power there is no medium or extended pace.

P for Pivoting

Judges comment: 'Loss of rhythm, pivoting , grounded or stuck''

Refers to Pirouettes in walk – quality of the walk lost. Rhythm, number one in the Scales of Training.

P for Purity (FEI Handbook): Correctness, Purity and timing of the footfalls in walk, trot and canter. Walk must not be lateral, trot must be fluent and canter needs to maintain the 3 beat jump.

Q for Quality

Judges Comment: 'Improve quality of.....''

Without quality there can be no high mark, it is often the missing requirement.

**** FEI Handbook: Quality refers to freedom, elasticity, fluency, not the purity or correctness of the pace.

R for Rhythm (Training Scale No 1)

Judges Comment: 'Losing rhythm'

Can refer to a walk tending to lateral; can refer to an unlevel stride; canter that is not 3 beat. 'Losing rhythm' offers an alternative to irregular or uneven which may be too harsh. Linked to Regularity and purity of pace.

R for Roundness

Judges Comment: 'Tension affecting roundness and elasticity'

Roundness delivers supple elastic strides and a convex top line. The opposite is short, stiff strides and tight, hollow frame.

R for Resistance

Judges Comment: '**Defiance affecting harmony**'

Partnership and understanding between horse and rider a problem – the harmony v. resistance question.

R for Reach

Judges Comment: 'Needs to improve reach and energy'

In extended paces it is better to comment on the reach than the over track. The reason, everyone has a different definition of the over track requirement.

S for Self-Carriage: FEI Handbook: A state in which the horse carries itself in a balanced and unconstrained manner.

S for Suppleness – Training Scale (2)

Judges Comment: 'Work to increase suppleness'

A supple horse engages all its joints and muscles – the opposite is a rigid horse, tight and tense in the back with stiff strides. Suppleness is linked to relaxation, physically and mentally free of tension.

S for Suspension

Judges comment: 'Needs suspension and elasticity'

Refers to the airborne quality in trot and canter – most extreme case shown in passage. Needs strength and power to sustain suspension.

S for Spring

'Spring' is an FEI Rule Book word in Piaffe, adding 'without cadence or spring it is not a true piaffe.' Sometimes the forelegs lack spring and lift appearing too grounded. Spring is also related to suspension in canter and trot.

S for Surging

Judge's Comment: "Rhythm not kept" or "Surging"

At all levels horses are seen changing the rhythm and speed of the movement.

S for Shuffling

Shuffling, often in rein back - refers to no clear steps, usually lots of half dragging half steps. Also seen in Canter Strike Off.

S for See-saw – a rein back, plus forward step + rein back

Judge's Comment: "Keep fluent rhythm"

Refers to the often rushed, unbalanced shuffle between the 2 rein backs and specific number of steps.

S for Straightness (Training Scale 5)

Judge's Comment: "Not tracking true"

Straightness is a precondition for collection, only a straight horse can transfer the weight on to both hind legs equally. The hind legs must push exactly towards the centre of gravity. The fore hand must be in line with the hindquarters.

T for Transitions

The higher you go the more they are emphasised with a separate mark. In Judging everyone needs to pay special attention to the transitions as they set up or complete the movement – every movement has 3 parts, beginning, middle and an end. To achieve a really high mark all 3 have to be well performed. No 8's, 9's or 10's without good transitions!

T for Travelling

Judges Comment: "Travelling"

This word applies to the 1 metre allowed in the Piaffe in the Intermediate 2, which is often exceeded. Or Piaffe not on the spot as required in Grand Prix

T for Throughness or 'thru' for short

Judge's Comment: "Must be more thru"

Refers to trailing hinds that are not pushing under the body resulting in short, stiff hind leg action. See below:

FEI Handbook: The supple, elastic, unblocked, connected state of the horses musculature that permits an unrestricted flow of energy from back to front and front to back, which allows the aids to freely go through to all parts of the horse.

T for Tempo

Judge's Comment: 'Needs livelier tempo'

Alternative to the overused 'more impulsion' – refers to the beats per minute, or speed of the rhythm.

U for Uphill

"Horses must be born to go uphill" – referring to the fact that unless horses work from behind, high marks and success will elude the rider.

FEI Handbook definition: The horse's longitudinal balance, higher in the forehand, relative to the croup.

V for Vertical

Judge's Comment: 'Must seek the bit'

Vertical, as in behind the vertical. Implications of lack of an uphill carriage are involved - acceptance of the bridle, carrying weight, engagement, collection, high poll..... In Extended and Free Walk horses must not drop behind the vertical, 'curl' or evade a purposeful stride, taking the bit forward.

V also for vigorous, vitality and vibrant – all energy words that can make for more interesting comments than Impulsion or 'forward'.

W for Walk

Can be the one pace where a brilliant horse fails. A true walk keeps the 4 beat rhythm and is one that can, in extended, show reach and stretch with a powerful rhythm and clear overtrack;

In medium - offer a clear difference from collected/extended

In collected - be more animated and active on a shorter base

FEI Rules say 'a clear difference in the attitude and over-tracking' in the Med; Coll; Ext and Free Walk.

X for the centre of the arena, X marks the spot for the entry Halt.

Do we see true balance on 4 feet with engaged hinds? Do we see a smooth departure?

X also for Xenophon the Greek General who has the title of the Father of Classical Dressage.

Y for Yield

Judge's Comment: 'Must yield to aids'

A supple horse yields both mentally and physically. Yield is the opposite of resisting and is to give in, surrenders to the aids, becomes pliant. An alternative to the often used resisting or tense.

Z for Zigzag

Judge's Comment: 'Improve the balance and bend'

The counter change is one of the most difficult movements. Often the horse has not the developed strength to achieve a high mark. Rhythm is often lost due to the balance, and the bend is often to the horse's more supple side only.

Z for Zero – In Freestyles there can be a missing movement but in a regular Test there must be something that can achieve a mark! Work to be rider friendly and find a mark for the rider.

COMMENTS FROM RIDERS RE JUDGES PAPERS:

- Please do not use the same phrases again and again
- Never use the term 'appeared' as in 'appeared square' in a halt when sitting at H or M – there are so many more comments that can be helpful relating to balance, the engagement into the halt and the quality of the departure towards C. As well as the fact if you use 'appeared' you are admitting you cannot see whether or not the horse is really square, so why use it!
- 'Good.....', and nice, fair and pleasant. Complaints flow on the misuse of 'good'. Better to leave it 8+ and avoid it for 7 and below. Alternatives such as "Clear transition.....Clear extension or expressive canter.....or balanced for half pass.....". Also "quality....." as in 'quality trot' instead of 'nice trot', all riders know judges are looking for 'quality' paces.

"Athletic trot.....etc" yet another word that means something to the rider.

