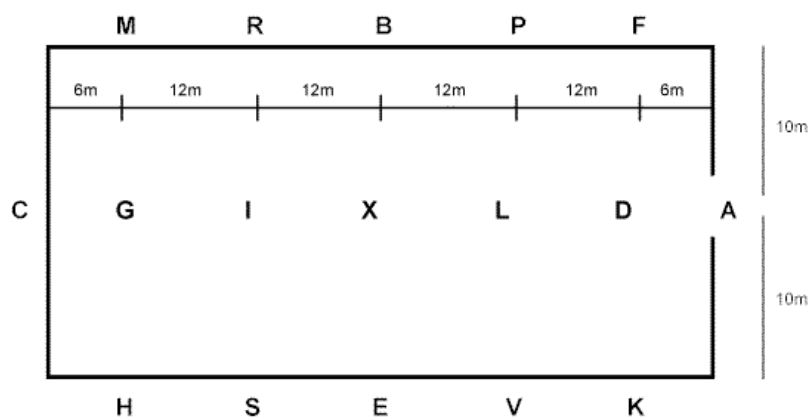


# *Dressage Terminology*



**Above The Bit:** A head position in which the horse avoids acceptance of the contact by putting the muzzle forward and upward, also usually retracting the poll.

**Activity:** Energy, vigor, liveliness-referring especially to that of the hind legs.

**Against the Bit:** The horse avoids initiating softly stretched contact by becoming rigid or unyielding in the neck and poll and/or jaw, although the head carriage may appear superficially correct. Usually accompanied by retraction of the poll.

**Alignment:** The lining up of the horse's body parts from tail to poll. One of the three aspects of straightness.

**Balance:** Relative distribution of weight of horse and rider upon the fore and hind legs (longitudinal balance) and the left and right legs (lateral balance). The horse is in "good balance" in dressage/biomechanical terms,-when it is in 'unstable' balance when the base of support is both narrowed laterally, and shortened longitudinally- thus making it susceptible to small external influences (of the rider) and mobile (especially in the forehand).

**Basics:** The basics from the correct foundation of the progressive training of the horse, independent of the execution of specific test movements. Correctness of the basics is indicated by improvement in 1) The quality of the gaits and paces, 2) The gymnastic ability and physique of the horse, and 3) It's attitude and rideability.

**Beat:** 1) A footfall within a gait. A hoof, or pair of hooves virtually simultaneously, striking the ground. By this definition the walk has four beats, the trot two, and the canter three. 2) In discussion of musicality in freestyle, beat is often used to mean the emphasized footfall. Thus, in a musical context, walk has two (emphasized) beats, trot two, and canter one.

**Behind The Bit, Behind The Aids Behind The Leg:** An evasion in which the horse retracts or shrinks back from the bit/contact, avoiding stepping forward into the contact. The head may or may not be behind the vertical.

**Behind the Vertical:** The head position in which the horse's nostrils fall behind the imaginary vertical line dropped from the horse's eye (i.e., chin toward the chest). NOT the same as "behind the bit."

**Bend:** The laterally arced position in which the horse's body appears to form an even curve from poll to tail. Examples of faulty bend are bending only in the neck, only at the base of the neck, or toward the wrong direction.

**Blocked:** Impaired in function and elasticity due to sustained muscular contraction, creating rigidity.

**Broken Neckline:** The position of the neck in which there is excessive flexion between the second and third, or the third and fourth, cervical vertebrae, so that the poll is no longer the highest point of the skeleton, and the topline of the neck no longer forms an even smooth arc.

**Cadence:** The marked accentuation of the tempo and (musical) beat arising from springiness and elasticity. Expression.

**Camped:** The hind legs placed out behind the horse's body; not engaged. Same as "parked." Used in reference to the halt.

**Carriage:** The posture of the horse, most easily evaluated when viewing the horse's profile or outline.

**Chewing The Bit:** The movements of the horse's mouth-gently and softly mouthing the bit-showing mobility and relaxation of the jaw and causing secretion of saliva for a "wet mouth." Not to be confused with snapping or grinding of the teeth.

**Clarity:** Marked distinction between the footfalls of a gait.

**Closed Halt:** A posture at the halt in which the horse is secure in balance and attitude and has the hind legs sufficiently under the body.

**Collected/Collection:** (Walk, Trot, or Canter): A state in which the horse is gathered together. Relative to working and medium paces, the strides are shorter (yet powerful), and higher in the front legs, the horse's outline appears shorter from bit to hip with the neck rising and stretching unrestrained out of lifted withers.

*At trot and canter* the horse shows a more uphill balance and greater impulsion than in his working pace, producing strides that are shorter, and higher with the front legs, with a more marked phase of support, than in the other paces of trot and canter.

*At walk*, a pace distinguished mainly by the elevation of the horse's carriage (with the neck stretched upward and forward), and by the shortening of the stride relative to the medium walk.

**Confidence:** The boldness and self-assurance with which the horse performs and the trust in his partnership with the rider.

**Connection:** The lack of blockage, breaks, or slackness in the circuit that joins horse and rider together in a single harmonious unit. The unrestricted flow of energy and influence from the rider to (and throughout) the horse, and back to the rider. See “Throughness.”

**Constrained:** Forced or compelled against the will. Not necessarily the same as restrained. (The horse may be constrained to bend or flex, or to move forward at speed. Constricted: Limited by constraint, restraint, or sustained muscular contraction. Held together, forcefully shortened, or physically tight.

**Contact:** Tautness or stretch of the reins. Correct contact, or acceptance of contact, is determined by the elasticity of the connection between horse and rider.

**Correctness:** The straightness of the action of the limbs (e.g., faults would be winging, paddling, ringing hocks). Not the same as purity. Dressage judges deal with correctness only indirectly, that is, to the degree that it affects the purity or quality of the gait. Breeding class judges address correctness directly.

**Crookedness:** 1) Lack of parallelism to line of travel (e.g. haunches left or right of centerline), or to line of reference (e.g. leg-yielding-haunches leading or trailing. 2) Misalignment of the horse’s body parts from tail to poll. (e.g. popped shoulder or twisted neck.) 3) Lack of directness of line of travel (e.g. weaving).

**Cross-Canter:** The horse canters on one lead in front and the other lead behind. Same as “disunited”.

**Disobedience:** Willful determination to avoid doing what is asked, or determination to do what is not asked.

**Dragging:** Refers to dragging of the hind feet or inactivity of the hind legs (rather than to lack of parallelism in leg-yield and half-pass) or dragging of the feet in rein back.

**Elasticity:** The ability or tendency to stretch and contract the musculature smoothly, giving the impression of stretchiness or springiness.

**Elevation:** 1) The raising of the head and neck (including the base of the neck) freely from lifted withers. 2) Applied in piaffe and passage to address the height to which forelegs are raised.

**Engagement:** Increased flexion of the joints of the hind legs during the weight-bearing phase, and of the sacro-lumbar joint, thus lowering the croup relative to the forehead. A prerequisite for thrust/impulsion. Engagement is not flexion of the hocks or “hock action” (as seen most clearly in gaited horses and hackneys) in which the joints of the hind legs are markedly flexed while the leg is in the air. Nor is engagement merely the length of the step of the hind leg forward toward the horse’s girth-that is reach of the hind leg.

**Evasion:** Avoidance of the difficulty, correctness, of purpose of the movement, or the influence of the rider often without active resistance or disobedience (e.g. tilting the head, open mouth, broken neckline, etc.) Bit evasions are means of avoiding correct contact with the bit.

**Expression Cadence/Extended/Extension (Walk, Trot, or Canter):** Stretching and lengthening of the outline and stride of the horse, and in trot and canter, an increased phase of suspension. The horse covers as much ground as possible with each stride, but maintains nearly the same tempo. In a walk, a pace which shows the maximum length of the stride, and stretch and oscillation of the neck.

**Falling In, Falling On Inside Shoulder, Falling Out, Falling Over Outside Shoulder:** Lateral deviation of the shoulders involving loss of balance. Inappropriate abduction.

**Figure:** Geometrical component of a dressage test, such as a circle, change of rein, figure of eight. Erroneously used interchangeably with “movement.”

**Flexibility:** The ability to move joints freely. Suppleness, pliability

**Flexion:** Articulation of a joint or joints so that the angle between the bones is decreased. “longitudinal flexion” commonly refers to the flexion of the head-neck joint (the atlanto-occipital joint). “Lateral flexion” or “position” commonly refers to flexion of the second cervical (neck) joint (atlanto-axial joint).

**Flipping:** Refers to exaggerated or artificial action of the forelegs. Usually applied to trot.

**Forward:** A direction. “Forward” describes where the horse goes, not how he gets there. “More forward” is not an accurate expression to describe more impulsion, speed, tempo, or stride length. Expressions such as “needs energy,” “needs reach,” “needs longer strides,” “needs to cover more ground,” “needs livelier tempo,” etc., more accurately express how the horse should proceed in a forward direction. Accurate usage of the phrase “more forward” is in reference to standing still, moving backward, or too much sideways movement (e.g., in move-off from halt the horse steps sideways or backward; in leg yield or half-pass there is too much sideways component and not enough forward component).

**Frame:** The longer or shorter outline of the horse dictated by the relative degree of extension or collection. Incorrectly used to address the horse’s level of training, as in “Second-Level frame” or “Fourth-Level frame”.

**Freedom:** The reach, scope and lack of constriction in the movement of the fore and hind limbs.

**Free Walk:** A pace of relaxation in which the horse is allowed complete freedom to lower and stretch out its head and neck. Both the horse’s strides and its frame are lengthened. On a long rein: maintaining contact. On a loose rein: with a loop in the rein, i.e., no contact.

**Gait:** Any of the various foot movements of a horse, as a walk, trot, pace, canter, or gallop. For dressage purposes, there are three gaits-walk, trot, and canter.

**Goosestepping:** Refers to exaggerated or artificial action of the forelegs. Usually applied to the walk.

**Half-Halt:** A momentary increase of collection, or an effect of the aids that increases the attention and improves the balance of the horse.

**Hollow Back:** Sagging or depressed back caused by slackness of the back and belly muscles or sustained contraction of the back muscles-lacking springy tension and impeding swing and elasticity.

**Hurried, Hasty, Quick, Rushed, Rapid:** All refer to quickness of tempo.

**Impulsion:** Thrust. Releasing of the energy stored by engagement. In dressage, impulsion is associated with a phase of suspension such as exists in trot and canter, but which does not exist in walk or piaffe. Therefore, impulsion is not applicable to the walk or piaffe.

[Note: It may be enlightening to compare the original French with the later English translation of the FEI score sheets under “Impulsion.” The English translation of the French reads “the desire to move forward,” whereas what the French actually says is “The desire to carry itself forward.” (“Le desire de se porter en avant”.)]

**Inside:** 1) The direction toward which the horse is or should be positioned (laterally) or bent. 2) The side of the horse that is toward the center of the ring (often called “inwards”).

**Irregular:** Impure, un-level, or uneven. Can be momentary or pervasive, and may or may not be due to unsoundness. Does not mean unsteady in tempo.

**Late:** Execution after the aids as applied to flying changes and transitions.

**Late Behind:** In flying changes, the hind legs change after the forelegs.

**Lateral:** 1) To the side, as in flexion, bend, suppleness, or direction of movement. 2) A lack of clarity in the canter.

**Lift:** Applied in a piaffe and passage to address the height to which the legs are raised.

**Lightness:** Refers to 1) the horse’s lightness on its feet, 2)the lightness in the reins, 3) a component of “self carriage.”

**Long and Low:** Carriage in which the horse lowers and stretches out its head and neck, reaching forward and downward into a longer rein. This is the carriage to be achieved when “letting the horse gradually take the reins out of the hands” is called for in the tests.

**Magpie (Magpie Hop):** The hind feet come down together (usually applied to canter pirouettes and flying changes).

**Marching:** Purposefulness in the steps of the walk.

**Medium (Walk, Trot or Canter):** In trot and canter, a pace between collected and extended, with moderate lengthening of the horse's outline and more upward thrust than in extension. In walk, a pace in which the horse lengthens his frame and stride, oscillating his neck.

**Mobility:** Easy maneuverability nimbleness of the shoulders forehand or forelegs, made possible by a narrowing and shortening of the horse's base of support.

**Movement:** 1) The manner in which the horse moves over the ground. 2) Test

**Movement:** A section of a dressage test to be evaluated with one score on a score sheet.

3) Dressage Movement: An exercise, as opposed to a figure, pattern, transition, or combination of those. Dressage movements are: leg-yielding, rein-back, shoulder-in, travers, renvers, half-pass at trot and canter, flying changes, pirouettes, turn on the haunches, piaffe, passage.

**Nodding/Bobbing:** A rhythmic up-and-down or backward and forward action of the horse's head and neck that is not part of the normal mechanic of the gait. It may be caused by the past use of gadgets, by constraint, or by lameness.

**Obedience:** Willingness to perform the movement, transition, or figure asked by the rider. May demonstrate resistance or evasion, yet still be "obedient" (e.g. the horse may perform a series of flying changes without mistakes and in the right place but be behind the bit, tilted in the head with mouth open and tail swishing, reluctant to cover enough ground, etc.; thus he obediently performs the task, but not necessarily submissively, supplely, etc.)

**On The Aids:** Well connected, on the bit and responsive.

**On The Bit:** Supple and quiet acceptance of the contact with a stretched neck and with lateral and longitudinal flexion as required.

**On The Forehand:** The horse leaves the weight on the forefeet too long (picks up the front feet too late in the stride.) The horse 'rolls over it's forelegs' without pushing against the ground sufficiently with the forelegs in order to push the trunk upwards/backwards. Not necessarily an issue of neck carriage or height.

**Outline:** The carriage, posture, profile, or silhouette of the horse.

**Outside:** 1) The direction away from which the horse is /should be positioned or bent. 2) The side that is away from the center of the arena (often called outwards). The former takes precedence if the two are not the same (as in counter-canter).

**Overbent:** Excessive lateral displacement of the neck relative to the body, occurring in the neck itself or at the base of the neck, causing lack of apparent uniformity of the lateral curve of the horse.

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

**Overstep, Overstride, Overtrack:** The placement of the hind foot in front of the forefoot.

**Over-Turned:** Turned more than 180 degrees in a half-pirouette or more than 360 degrees in a full pirouette.

**Pace:** 1) Any of the variations within a gait-collected, working, medium, lengthened, extended. 2) A gait in which the ipsilateral pairs of legs move in unison (also called “amble”- not a pure or correct gait for dressage).

**Parked:** The hind legs placed out behind the horse’s body. Same as “camped.” Used in reference to the halt.

**Passage-Like or Passagey Trot:** A trot in which the phase of support is prolonged, giving a floating, hovering impression. Also called “hovering trot.”

**Pivoting:** Avoidance of picking up a foot in the proper rhythm, turning around a grounded (or “stuck”) foot. Used in reference to pirouettes or turns on the haunches or forehand.

**Poll:** The highest point of the horse’s skull (the occipital crest). In common dressage usage, “flexion at the poll” refers to the lateral or longitudinal flexion of the two joints immediately behind the poll (see “flexion”).

**Position:** 1) The lateral flexion at the atlanto-axial joint so that the horse “looks” to the side, e.g. “position right” or “position left.” 2) The posture of the rider.

**Punching:** Refers to exaggerated or artificial action of the forelegs. Usually applied to trot.

**Purity:** The correctness of the order and timing of the footfalls and phases of a gait.

**Pushing Out:** Hind legs operating too far behind the horse, pushing backwards more than carrying.

**Quality:** The quality of a gait refers to its freedom/amplitude elasticity, fluency, etc. Not the same as “purity” or “correctness.”

**Reach:** Refers to the forward extension of the fore limbs, hind limbs, and neck of the horse (or may be used to refer to any one of these individually).

**Regularity:** Correctness of the gait, to include purity, evenness, and levelness. Irregularities may be momentary or pervasive. In the Collective Mark for gaits, regularity is used to address only purity and soundness (Not used to mean unvarying tempo).

**Relaxation:** 1) Referring to the horse’s mental state: calmness, without anxiety or nervousness. 2) Referring to the horse’s physical state: commonly used to indicate the absence of muscular tension (contraction) other than that needed for optimal carriage, strength, and range and fluency of movement. Often the physical and mental states go hand in hand.

**Resistance:** Physical opposition by the horse against the rider. Not synonymous with disobedience nor with evasion. Can be momentary or pervasive.

**Rhythm:** The characteristic sequence of footfalls and phases of a given gait. For purposes of dressage, the only correct rhythms are those of the pure walk, pure trot, and pure canter (not those of amble, pace, rack, etc.) Not to be confused with “tempo,” cadence,” or miles per hour.

**Rocking/Rocking Horse Canter:** A canter in which the neck/forehand goes too much up and down, due to lack of sufficient ground coverage, lack of sufficient engagement, or interference by the rider.

**Roundness:** 1) The convexity of the profile of the horse’s topline. 2) The circular, as opposed to linear or flat quality, characterizing the movements or action of the horse’s limbs.

**Schwung** (borrowed from the German): The condition in which the energy created by the hind legs is transmitted through a “swinging back” and manifested in the horse’s elastic, whole body movement. See “swinging back.”

**Scope:** Amplitude (reach and roundness) of movement.

**Self Carriage:** State in which the horse carries itself in a balanced and unconstrained manner, without taking support or balancing on the rider’s hand.

**Slack:** 1) Used in reference to the condition of the musculature of the horse’s topline/back- sagging, lacking muscle tone or springy resilience. 2) Used in reference to the reins; lacking contact.

**Snatching:** 1) Attempting to jerk the reins through the rider’s hands. 2) Used in reference to one or both hind legs: picking up the leg(s) jerkily and sometimes excessively high.

**Speed:** Refers to miles per hour, i.e., how fast the ground is covered. The horse’s speed can be increased through increasing the length of stride, increasing the tempo, or both. Increased tempo does not necessarily mean increased speed. Not to be confused with “impulsion.”

**Swing:** 1) A test movement-An uninterrupted sequence of rein-backs interspersed with forward steps in walk. The number of steps is prescribed, and the whole procedure may be repeated several times, followed by an onward transition (as in “back 4, forward 4, back 4, proceed collected trot”). 2) See “swinging back.”

**Swinging Back:** The way in which the horse’s trunk muscles function – with springy tension rather than rigidity of slackness-which creates the impression that the horse’s back swings and allows the energy produced by the hind legs to be efficiently transmitted forward through the horse.

**Swinging Head:** The horse’s muzzle moves left and right (in trot and canter) or in circles (usually in canter), indicating incorrect acceptance of contact or constraint.



**Tempo:** Rate of repetition of the rhythm. Beats per minute (as would be determined by a metronome). Tempo is not necessarily correlated with length of stride or miles per hour. The words “rhythm” and “regularity” are often mistakenly used interchangeably with tempo.

**Tense:** (verb) To contract or shorten the muscles. Generally used to indicate sustained contraction, without the requisite alternating relaxation of the muscles. 1) Referring to the horse’s mental state-anxious, nervous. 2) Referring to the horse’s physical state- strained; showing sustained muscular contraction (impairing optimal carriage, and range and fluency of movement). Often the physical and mental states go hand in hand.

**Throughness:** The supple, elastic, unblocked, connected state of the horse’s musculature that permits an unrestricted flow of energy from back to front and front to back, which allows the aids/influences to freely go through to all parts of the horse (e.g., the rein aids go through and reach and influence the hind legs). Synonymous with the German term “Durchlaessigkeit,” or “throughlettingness”. See “connection.”

**Tilting:** Tipping or cocking the head (lowering one ear)- an evasion.

**Topline:** The horse’s outline from the ears along the top of its neck and back to its tail.  
**Track/Tracks:** 1) (verb) Referring to a foot or feet, to travel in a line or path (e.g., the horse tracks straight with his left behind). (noun) The lines of travel of feet, viewed and counted by the observer as the horse approaches it (e.g., three of four tracks for shoulder-in). 2) Direction of travel, as in “track right” (when all corners are right turns, right hand is toward the center of the arena). 3) Used to refer to lateral movements-movements on “2 Tracks.” 4) The path next to the rail in an arena.

**Tracking Up:** The hind feet step into the tracks of the forefeet.

**Trailing:** 1) Usually applied in half-pass and leg-yielding to describe the lack of parallelism to the long axis of the arena (trailing haunches) 2) Sometimes used to refer to the operation of the hind legs too far behind the horse (as in trailing hind legs).

**Uberstreichen** (No English Synonym) The brief release of the contact, wherein the rider in one clear motion extends the hand(s) forward along the crest of the horse’s neck, then rides for several strides without contact. It’s purpose is to demonstrate that even with loose rein(s), the horse maintains its carriage, balance, pace, and tempo.

**Uphill:** Referring to the horse’s longitudinal balance: higher in the forehead, relative to the croup.

**Whipping Up:** The repeated active upward evasion of the croup (usually in canter or in piaffe, when there is insufficient engagement and forward reach).

**Wide Behind:** The horse travels with the hind feet further apart than the forefeet (an evasion of engagement that occurs most commonly in piaffe, lengthening of stride in trot, and hind legs spread in halt).

**Working (Walk, Trot, or Canter):** A pace in which the horse goes in an energetic but calm way, with a length of stride between that of the collected and medium paces.