

USDF Glossary of Judging Terms

(Some of the most common used terms)

Definitions from the USDF Judges Committee

Above the Bit : A head position in which the horse avoids acceptance of the contact by putting the muzzle forward and upward.

Against the Bit: Horse presses its mouth against the bit with rigid or unyielding hind legs.

Balance: Relative to distribution of the weight of horse and rider upon the fore and hind legs and left and right legs. The horse is in good balance when the weight is distributed evenly left and right and sufficiently toward the rear legs that it can easily manage the task at hand. Loss of balance means the sudden increase of weight onto the forehand and/or to one side.

Behind the Bit, 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.

Bend: The laterally arced position in which the horse's body appears to form an even curve from poll to tail. Faulty bends are bending only in the neck or bending toward the wrong direction.

Contact: Reins stretched such that they form a straight line, not a loop. Correct contact or acceptance of contact is determined by the elasticity of the connection between horse and rider.

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

Evasion : Avoidance of the difficulty, correctness, or purpose of the movement, often without active resistance or disobedience. (e.g.) tilting the head, open mouth

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

Marching: Purposefulness in the steps of the walk.

On the Forehand: Longitudinally poor balance; the horse places too much weight on the forelegs for the task at hand.

Poll: The highest point of the horse's skull. In common dressage usage, flexion "at the poll" refers to the longitudinal or lateral flexion of the joint immediately behind the poll.

Regularity: Correctness of the gait, to include purity, evenness, and levelness. Irregularities may be momentary or pervasive and they may not be caused by unsoundness. In the Collective Mark for gaits regularity is used to address only purity and soundness.

Stiff: Inability to flex the joints or stretch the musculature to the degree and in the way required to perform the task at hand.

Straightness: 1) Parallelism to required line of travel 2) Alignment of body parts appropriate to the task at hand(e.g. not a popped shoulder or twisted neck). 3) Directness of the line of travel (e.g. weaving).