

Welcome to the Galston Equestrian Club's Freestyle Seminar

The purpose of this evening is to demystify the creation of a beautiful musical freestyle for you and your horse.

As you probably all know, GEC is holding an end of year members dressage day, which will include Prep and Prelim tests, as well as Freestyles. So, now is the time to get cracking!

To start with, I'll define:

What is a Freestyle?

Run under Dressage Rules, a freestyle is defined as "competitions of artistic equitation"

A Freestyle includes all the paces and exercises of the classical high school dressage.

The competition is, however, absolutely free in the form and manner of the presentation a rider chooses within a fixed time.

The test should clearly show unity between rider and horse, interpretation of the music and balance of the choreography as well as harmony in all the movements and transitions.

Before you start

Decide on the level of Freestyle you and your horse are capable of.

- Your Freestyle should include ONLY the paces and movements included in the most difficult dressage tests of the same level
- If you are riding a Preparatory Freestyle, you may only show walk and trot, as well as halt. You may ride 10m circles in walk, 20m circles in trot, as well as simple serpentine and changes of rein.
- If you are riding a Preliminary freestyle, you can use any of the movements included in Preliminary tests up to the 1D – this includes working paces only, plus free walk and a stretchy circle.

Further examples, for higher levels, are included in the Dressage Rules.

Basic rules

- Freestyle tests are timed – Between 4 minutes and 4 minutes 30 seconds is standard for tests at Novice level and below
- Entry music is required with a maximum of 20 seconds
- The rider must signal the sound technician after the bell has been rung
- Once the bell has sounded the rider has 45 seconds to enter the arena which includes a maximum of 20 seconds of entry music
- A rider must enter the arena within 20 seconds of the music starting
- If the rider enters the arena clearly late, 0.5% shall be deducted by each

judge from the score

- The music must cease at the final salute
- At the beginning and end of a Freestyle test a halt for the salute is compulsory
- Test time starts after the first halt and stops at the final salute
- If a rider exceeds the maximum time, appropriate penalties as defined on the test sheet shall be deducted

1. Design a first draft test

- Check that you have covered all required movements
- Is it “mirror image” or clearly symmetrical?
- Does it include movements that are too difficult?
- Is each movement recognisable? (is it a certain-sized circle?)
- Don’t get too tied up on clever choreography just yet, as timing and choice of music will probably cause you to change your design

Basic Tools

- Large notepad – I prefer a spiral-bound one, as you often want to go back to previous thoughts and ideas
- Pens and pencils, plus a ruler
- Dressage Arena diagrams
- Copy of Dressage Rulebook

2. Time your test

It is worth doing this now – before you proceed with any more designing and planning

- Time from the first halt to the final halt and salute. You may halt anywhere on the centre line.
- Time each “section” i.e. entry, first trot, walk, second trot, canter, third trot halt
- You may use 20 seconds of music as you enter the arena, so time this part too, and see where you need to start outside the arena to halt at your desired spot
- You can time your test as you ride each section, or video it and time it later.
- It can be worth timing as you go, as you get a feel of what you can actually fit into 4 and a half minutes!

Basic Tools

Horse

Marked out arena

Helper, if possible

Stopwatch
Notepad and pen
Video camera

3. Choose your music – long list

You probably have a good idea of what you like, and what you feel is appropriate for a freestyle

This is your chance to perform, and to ride to music that YOU like.

It does not have to be classical, and it CAN include vocals – judges are getting less hung up on this these days.

Write down ideas for music when you are in the car, or as you remember them. Pull out all your CDs and put them into categories (i.e. Classical Baroque, Classical “Lite”, Movie Soundtracks, Pop, Big Band etc)

- Dig out your own CDs (and your partners, and kids')
- Use iTunes or Amazon to preview music that you think you will like
 - you can sometimes download individual tracks for as little as \$1
- Other sources for ideas include on-line Freestyle databases, in particular www.equimusic.com

Some things to consider when making a long list of music for your freestyle:

- You will need different tracks for walk, trot and canter
- Your music should reflect your taste, and can also suit your type of horse
- This is very subjective, and a big horse does not necessarily need “heavy” music, nor a fine-boned horse “light” music
- Your music pieces should “match” – in that they should come from the same genres, or have a theme, such as a certain type of instrument, or the same composer, or ethnicity (such as Indian)
- Avoid tracks which change in tempo, or which have very loud or quiet moments

Tools

CD player
Notepad
Computer
iTunes

4. Match your music to your horse

This can be done several ways:

Live

Ride in your arena and play your music tracks on a CD player – loudly
or

Play your selected tracks on an iPod or Mp3 player while riding

Indoors

Play your video of your test and try your music alongside it

or

Use a metronome to measure your horse's tempo at walk, trot and canter and compare to music played on a CD player – this is not ideal, but can work if you have no way of playing your music live while you are riding, or no way of videoing your horse

What to look (and feel) for

- The TEMPO of each piece of music should match your horse's gaits perfectly
- The tempo of the walk and the canter can be quite close (about 90-100 bpm), while trot is quicker (about 140 bpm)
- The cadence of the music should emphasise your horse's rhythm and impulsion, and can make him look and feel more powerful and elegant – if your horse looks laboured, or feels hurried when accompanied by the music – ditch the music!
- Do not ever believe that $\frac{3}{4}$ time (waltz) suits a canter! Canter is more like $\frac{2}{4}$ time (da da dum...da da dum...)

Tools

Notepad

CDs and player

DVD player or TV and video camera

Computer

Metronome (not essential)

Stopwatch (useful)

5. Create your Freestyle

Having watched, and ridden to, your selected music, you will now have a short-list of tracks which are matched in genre/style, and which match your horse's paces.

You can use the tracks as they are, or you can start to get clever and find the sections of each track which best suit your freestyle. For example, the start and finish of a track can be good for the start and finish of your test. More powerful builds work well when paired with up transitions to a stronger trot or canter, while segues into a softer section can indicate a down transition to walk.

This is the time to get creative with your choreography!

Make several rough cuts of your selected tracks, and ride to them. It helps to have an assistant video these and record your notes! This process can take as long as you have got....many GP riders spend hundreds of hours getting this part right!

6. Putting it all together

The easiest way to do this is to find a teenager...or a professional audio engineer

However it is not impossible to do on your own.

Organisers now insist on CDs – very few would have facilities for cassette tapes, so you need a system that allows you to output easily onto a CD.

There are several downloadable audio software packages, such as Audacity (which is free) and one from Sony (which isn't) which give you great flexibility in editing your own music, if you have time and patience to learn the system.

The benefits of using an audio editing system is that you can alter the tempo of a track to match your horse, and can achieve very good transitions between tracks.

I cheat – and use iMovies and iTunes on my Mac.

I upload the images from my camera onto iMovies, and cut together a version of my test.

Then I add my music tracks, which I have already organised in a sub-folder in Tunes

This gives me a little bit of flexibility to find the best parts of a track that suit the builds and the changes in the test. There are some opportunities to fade and blend the music, but not in a sophisticated way.

Resources

Freestyle Music

<http://www.equimusic.com/>

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

<http://www.amazon.com>

[http://www.amazon.com/Real-Music-Sampler-\(Series\)/e/B000AQ0TQE](http://www.amazon.com/Real-Music-Sampler-(Series)/e/B000AQ0TQE)

Dressage Rules

<http://www.equestrian.org.au>

Dressage Diagrams

<http://www.dressage.net.au>

Audio software

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

<http://www.sonycreativesoftware.com/soundforgesoftware>

Books:

Dressage Competition Rules
(Equestrian Australia)

Dancing With Your Horse
(Libby Anderson)

Rhythm Riding: A Guide to riding with music
(Cece Maddlone)

Dressage to Music
(Claire Lilley)