

Dressage Warm-up/Schooling/Lesson Arena Etiquette

Riders frequently need to share an arena with others in a group lesson, show situation, or during training. Etiquette is a tool for mutual cooperation. All persons at a facility are to remember that the quality of shared space is defined by the example of all who enter it. Polite conversation and a positive continual flow pattern will avoid many problems in open order situations. Before you show be sure to read the extensive Protocol section of the 2005 USDF Directory.

- Always check your stirrup length and tighten your girth if necessary before you mount and do this ideally before you enter the arena.
- Know the dressage arena geometry and understand that the riders follow the test patterns in all the levels when they are moving around the arena. Good News! The patterns make sense and are easy to learn.
- When at a show, competition, or facility always check for specific rules and listen carefully to the judge and ring steward. All arenas may have assigned times and or uses. Sometimes these arenas have posted rules and sometimes written or declared.
- Horses not entered in a show are not permitted in the warm-up.
- Be Polite. School in a positive manner. Do not meander.
- Lunge in designated arenas only.
- At a show the instructors and coaches should help from the sidelines and not from the arena floor.
- All gates should be closed when inside the riding arenas.
- When entering it is polite to start riding on the same rein (direction) as the majority of the horses in the arena.
- Walk on the inside track, the outside track is always given to horses working the faster gait. The inside track is the track you would be on if you are riding pairs with a horse on the track or rail.
- The international rule is left-shoulder-to-left-shoulder when passing head on (in opposite directions).
- Always keep at least one-horse distance between horses. If you get too close, make a large circle back, pass to the inside or cross the arena to an open spot on the track or rail.
- Do not circle in front of another rider by cutting them off or pinning them against the wall or another horse.
- Never pass between the rail and another rider on the track. Always pass to the inside. Pass wide.
- Look behind you before stopping suddenly. Halting on the track is always unexpected.
- If a rider is obviously working on some advanced moves keep out of the way by flowing through the rules above. The “rules” of passing each other are not license to have a collision. Common sense must come into play. Be aware of your total environment. Be polite and avoid the collision. Share the “rules” with others politely later.
- If you are a more experienced rider take the responsibility on yourself to stay safe and flow out of harms way. Experienced riders can watch for the “greenies” and show by their example the flow and focus necessary to share an arena. It is important to remember that as a rider grows in experience there is “that phase” when someone really thinks they know it all and they seriously do not know that there is more to come! Remember when you were there :-). Show others by example.
- Do not use your whip in such a way as to frighten or touch other horses.
- If your horse kicks put a red ribbon in its tail. If it is a green horse a green ribbon is appropriate. When riding in groups especially trail and hunting ribbons are helpful to other riders. In the arena it gives other riders a heads up. Fractious horses should be removed immediately from the arena.
- If you are having difficulty with your horse and must stop, please move to the center of the arena, out of the way of the other riders. You may say “Heads Up” if you have a problem about to happen.
- If you do get in someone’s way be sure to apologize and be alert ... “learn on the job”.
- In an emergency “Hold Hard” or “Halt” may be called out and the whole arena should halt.

Additional etiquette for lessons

- Know the facility rules for their arenas.
- If a lesson is in progress, please ask permission of the instructor to enter the ring. If permission is granted, the right of way must be given to the mounted students (i.e., wait until the gate area is clear before opening the gate and entering the arena). Always close the gate behind you.
- Always listen to and follow your instructor's directions. Additional riders should listen so they know where the lesson riders are going. It is the responsibility of any additional riders to avoid disrupting the lesson.
- Students should always ride on the track (rail) or a circle unless otherwise directed by the instructor or when moving to another open spot on that same figure.