



Western Dressage Glossary

In an effort to “speak the same language” and enhance communication between judges, trainers, riders and competitors, we recommend the usage of the following terms:

ABDUCT

Movement of a limb away from the horse’s midline

ABOVE THE BIT

The horse avoids acceptance of contact by raising his head/muzzle forward/upward; usually retracting the poll.

ACCEPTANCE

Absence of evasion or resistance. A willing horse responding favorably to the rider’s aids.

ACTIVITY

Energy, vigor, liveliness associated with the motion of the hind legs

ADDUCT

Movement of a limb toward or across the horse’s midline

AGAINST THE BIT

The horse presses against the bit with a rigid neck/poll/jaw

ALIGNMENT

- a) With regard to the horse - the lining up of his body parts from tail to poll.
- b) With regard to the rider - vertical alignment includes ear, shoulder, hip, heel being aligned.
- c) Lateral alignment refers to the even distribution of the rider’s weight left and right.

BALANCE

Relative distribution of the weight of the horse and rider upon the fore and hind limbs (longitudinal balance) and the left and right limbs (lateral balance).

BASICS

- a) The correct foundation of the progressive training of the horse, outlined by the Training Wheel (see Training Wheel Diagram).
- b) Training with the Basics in mind will improve: the purity and quality of the gaits and paces; the gymnastic ability and physique of the horse; the horse’s attitude and rideability.

BEHIND THE BIT

The horse contracts or shrinks back from the bit/contact, the head may or may not be behind the vertical.

BEHIND THE LEG

Slow to move forward off the leg, sluggish or unwilling to move forward into the contact of the reins

BEHIND THE VERTICAL

The head position in which the horse’s nostrils falls behind the imaginary vertical line dropped from the horse’s eye. The horse may or may not be “behind the bit”.

BEND

- a) The laterally curved position in which the horse's body appears to form a uniform curve from poll to tail.
- b) Correct bending includes lateral flexion at the poll, stretching of the outer side of the body, lowering of the inner hip, and adduction of the inner hind and outer fore legs.
- c) Faulty bend would include bending only in the neck, or at the base of the neck, or bent in the wrong direction (counter bend).

BEYOND THE SCOPE

A horse that is over ridden at a level beyond his current stage of training or ability often times resulting in mental and physical tension and resistance.

BIOMECHANICS

The science of movement of a living body, including how muscles, bones, tendons, and ligaments work together to produce movement. Correct biomechanics, with the horse in a positive mental/emotional state, constitute correct Basics.

CADENCE

The marked accentuation of the rhythm and emphasized beat that is a result of a steady and suitable tempo harmonizing with a springy impulsion.

CARRIAGE

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

CHANGE OF REIN

- a) A change of direction within the enclosure in which the horse/rider are traveling.
- b) The "inside rein" is toward the middle of the enclosure,
- c) The "outside rein" is toward the outside of the enclosure.

CLARITY

Correct rhythm of the gaits and paces, often used in relation to the maintenance of the correct rhythm before, during and after a transition.

CLEAN

Referring to a flying change, the change of lead is from a pure lope on one lead to a pure lope on the other lead. A clean flying change takes place during the suspension phase, without jog steps or disunited strides.

COLLECTION

Collection is achieved by increased weight bearing of the horse's haunches, thereby lowering the croup and lightening the forehand to allow the shoulders more freedom. The horse's frame and steps become shorter with more uphill balance while maintaining impulsion. At collected jog and lope the support phase of the hind legs is more pronounced than in the other paces of the gait.

CONNECTION

State at which there is no blockage, break, or slack in the circuit that joins the horse and rider into a single, harmonious, elastic unit. A prerequisite for throughness. The energy generated in the hindquarters by the driving aids must flow through the whole body of the horse and is received in the rider's hands.

CROSS LOPE OR DISUNITED LOPE

The fore and hind limbs are on different leads due to a lack of balance.

DOWNHILL

Longitudinally poorly balanced with failure to elevate the withers and/or lower the haunches. Also known as “on the forehand.”

ELASTICITY

The smooth stretch and contraction of muscles that give the steps spring and bounce, achieved by a horse moving with suppleness.

ELEMENTS

Basic components that may be included in freestyle choreography. The elements are movements, figures and transitions.

ENERGY

The willingness of the horse to give over to the rider the impulsion necessary to do a task.

ENGAGEMENT

Increased flexion of the lumbosacral joint and the joints of the hind leg during the weight-bearing (stance) phase of the movement, thus lowering the croup relative to the forehand (lightening the forehand). Engagement is “carrying power” rather than “pushing power”. A prerequisite for upward thrust/impulsion.

EVASION

Avoidance of the difficulty, correctness or purpose of the movement or the influence of the rider.

EXERCISE

Designated task that may include movement(s), transitions, figures and/or patterns to be performed at designated gaits and paces and sometimes at specific places in the arena. Examples: 20 meter circle at working jog, shoulder-in at collected jog.

EXPRESSION (EXPRESSIVE)

Increased impulsion, with harmony, balance, lightness and cadence giving artistic or dramatic effect.

FALLING IN, FALLING ON INSIDE SHOLDER, FALLING OUT, FALLING OVER OUTSIDE SHOULDER, POPPED SHOULDER

Lateral deviation of the forehand/foreleg(s) associated with loss of balance.

FIGURE

Geometrical component such as a circle, change of rein, or serpentine. A figure is not the same as a movement.

FLEXIBILITY

Range of motion of joints, the ability to move the joints freely. Suppleness, pliability.

FLEXION

- a) In the limbs—the articulation of a joint(s) so that the angle between the bones becomes smaller.
- b) When the poll is rotating correctly, the jaw turns slightly into the neck as the skull softly gives in the direction of the bend you are asking for, and the plane of the jowl remains perpendicular to the ground, allowing the ears to stay level (not tilting.)

FLUID or FLUENT

Flowing or moving smoothly and easily. Unconstrained in movement.

FOOTFALL

A hoof (or pair of hooves simultaneously) striking the ground.

FORBIDDEN MOVEMENTS

In freestyle, movements that are above the level being performed, unless specifically allowed on the test sheets

FORWARD

To or toward the direction that is ahead or in front of the horse or moving or trending toward that direction. Forward indicates direction of travel, not how he gets there. Words like impulsion, energy, reach, length of stride and tempo more accurately express how the horse should proceed in a forward direction.

FREEDOM

The reach, scope, and lack of constriction in the horse's movement. The horse appears to move unfettered through his whole frame.

FRAME

The outline of the horse which changes with lengthening and collecting of the gaits. Incorrectly used to address the horse's level of training, as in "Second Level frame" or "Fourth Level frame".

GAITS

Gaits in western dressage are the walk, jog, saddle gait (gaited horses) and lope and are identified by a unique pattern of footfalls. See rule book for footfall patterns.

HALF HALT

A momentary effect of the aids that increases the horse's attention and improves the balance of the horse. The half halt can be performed in many different ways that may include the use of legs, seat and hands.

HARMONY

References the relationship between horse and rider, a positive physical and mental/emotional connection between horse and rider. The "picture" presented is that of understanding, trust, confidence in one another resulting in a sense of synchrony, contentment and unity.

HOLLOW BACK

Sagging or depressed back caused by slackness of the back and belly muscles (passive) or by sustained contraction of the back muscles impeding swing and elasticity (active).

IMPULSION

The transmission of an eager and energetic, yet controlled positive forward energy generated from the hindquarters into the athletic movement of the horse. It is the desire to move forward with relaxation and swing of the back, elasticity of the steps, correct stepping through and under from behind. Impulsion describes the willingness of the horse to allow its forward energy to be used and shaped by the rider. Impulsion has a phase of suspension in the jog and lope, and therefore does not apply to the walk, which has no suspension.

IN FRONT OF THE LEG

The horse willingly moves forward off the leg into the bit

IRREGULAR

Impure, uneven or un-level gait. Can be momentary or pervasive and may not be due to unsoundness. Should not be used to mean unsteadiness of tempo.

LABORED

Lacking in sufficient impulsion (thrust) to maintain a pure rhythm of the gait often accompanied by nodding up and down of the horse's head and neck especially at the lope.

LATE

- a) Execution after the aids
- b) Execution of transition or movements after the prescribed place in the arena

LATE BEHIND

The hind legs change after the forelegs in a flying lead change.

LATERAL

- a) To the side, as in flexion, bend, suppleness, or direction of movement.
- b) May also refer to an impurity in walk (ambling or pacing) or lope. Rarely used when describing jog.

LENGTHENING OF STRIDE

In jog and lope in which the stride, frame, and phase of suspension are longer than in the working gait, but the degree of uphill balance required in the collected gait is not expected. The tempo remains the same as in the working gait.

LIGHTNESS

- a) Refers to either the horse's lightness on its feet
- b) A non-heavy connection with the reins.

LONGITUDINAL

Referring to the lengthwise dimension (as opposed to lateral), from front to back or back to front.

MARCHING

Taking purposeful steps in the walk

MOVEMENT

- a) The manner in which the horse moves over the ground.
- b) Test movement: a section of a Western Dressage test to be evaluated with a score.

Examples of Western Dressage Movements are: leg yield, rein-back, shoulder-in, haunches-in, haunches out, flying changes, simple changes, half pass (in jog and lope), turn on the forehand, turn on the haunches, pirouette at lope. A Western Dressage Movement is not a figure, pattern, transition, or combination of those.

ON THE AIDS

The horse responds to the rider's aids willingly, confidently, promptly and correctly.

ON THE BIT

The horse is correctly connected from back to front willingly accepting contact with the bit without resistance, tension or evasion.

ON THE FOREHAND

Longitudinally poorly balanced with failure to elevate the withers and/or lower the haunches. Also known as "downhill."

OUT BEHIND

Hind legs operating too far behind the horse, pushing backwards more than carrying.

OUTLINE

The profile or the silhouette of the horse, showing the horse's carriage or posture.

PACE

A variation within a gait and include: working, free, lengthened, collected, extended.

QUICKENS

When the rhythm of the footfalls becomes faster, often seen when going from a working (or collected gait) to a lengthening (or extended gait).

REGULARITY

Purity of the gait, evenness of the length of and levelness of the height of the steps and equality of the time interval between the steps of the left and right forelimbs or hindlimbs. In collective remarks the evaluation of Gaits (freedom and regularity) regularity refers to the purity and soundness of the gaits, not the horse's tempo.

RELEASE

As used in the tests, the release of the contact wherein the rider in one clear motion extends the hand(s) forward, then rides for several strides without contact. This is to demonstrate self-carriage, while the horse maintains uphill balance, pace and tempo.

RHYTHM

The recurring characteristic sequence and timing of footfalls and phases of a gait, e.g. four-beat, three-beat, two-beat. For Western Dressage purposes, the only correct rhythms are those of pure walk, jog, lope and the back. Rhythm is sometimes mistakenly used to mean "tempo" (rate of repetition of rhythm).

ROUNDNESS

The profile of the horse where the topline is convex, with softness of the underside of the horse's neck.

RUSHED

Usually refers to the tempo being fast.

SADDLE GAIT

A collective term used to define the gait in lieu of jog, specific to a gaited horse breed Examples: fox trot for Missouri Fox Trotter, running walk for Tennessee Walker, etc.

SCOPE

- a) Within the horse's natural ability or current level of athleticism, training and understanding.
- b) Also, largeness of range of motion, reach and freedom.

SELF-CARRIAGE

State in which the horse carries itself in balance without taking support or balancing on the rider's hand.

STEP

Referring to either the front or hind pair of legs, the movement that involves the transfer from one limb to the other. For counting purposes, the steps of only the front OR rear pair of limbs are counted. The front limbs should each be counted in a rein back and the rear steps each counted for moving in the direction the horse is facing. Four steps of the back would be counted as right front, left front, right front, left front. Four steps forward: right hind, left hind, right hind, left hind.

STRAIGHTNESS

- a) On straight lines, the horse's shoulders should be directly in front of the hind legs.
- b) On a curved line the horse should be correctly and evenly bent from poll to tail.

STRIDE

Cycle of movements that is completed when the horse's legs regain their initial position of the full count of the gait. Both diagonals of the jog would comprise one stride of the two-beat jog. A stride of the lope is the completion of the three-beat rhythm. (The left lead count is right hind, left hind, and right front together, left front followed by a moment of suspension before the count begins again.)

SUBMISSION

Willing cooperation and harmony between horse and rider working as a TEAM with mutual respect and understanding demonstrating attention and confidence, accuracy, ease of movements, acceptance of the bridle and a willingness to perform the required exercise with correct basics. Expectation of the degree of lightness increases as the horse advances in his training.

SUPPLENESS

Range of motion of the joints and the ability to move the joints freely. Pliability, flexibility, the opposite of stiffness. A horse's suppleness is largely determined by conformation and genetics but may be improved or negatively impacted over time through training.

SUSPENSION

The moment or phase of the jog or lope in which the horse has no feet on the ground.

STRUNG OUT

Horse's outline is too elongated. The horse is sprawled out and often on the forehand rather than gathered up into the connection with good carriage and balance

SWING

- When the horse works from the hind legs through his back to the bit, he uses his whole body and is said to have a swinging back.
- Swinging out refers to the misalignment (or crookedness) in the horse's haunches

TEMPO

Rate of repetition of the footfalls. The tempo best for the gymnastic development is individual to the horse.

TENSE/TENSION

- Referring to the horse's mental/emotional state, anxious or nervous.
- Referring to the horse's physical state: commonly used to indicate undesired muscular contraction.
- Often, the physical and mental/emotional state go hand in hand.

THROUGHNESS/THROUGH

The horse is said to be "through" when the rider's aids can connect the horse's back to his front, and visa versa, without any blocking resistance.

THRUST

Propulsive forward drive from the hindquarters required for greater uphill balance which increases as the horse advances in his training.

TILTING

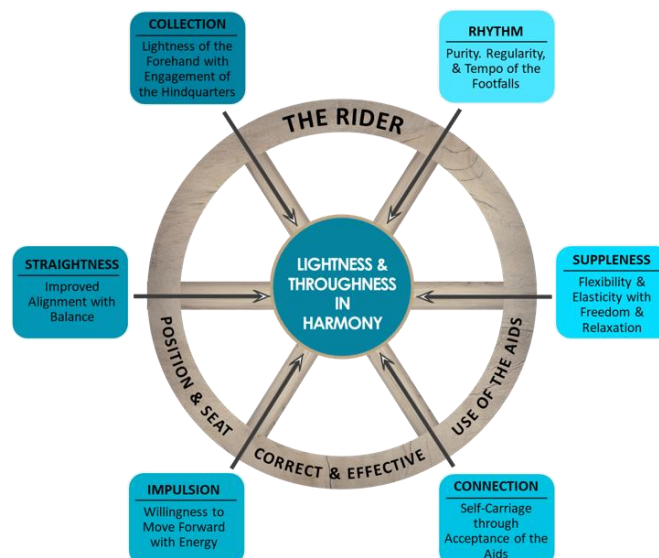
Tipping or cocking the head (lowering one ear), an evasion to lateral poll flexion, bend, and throughness.

TOPLINE

Profile from the poll to the tail along the top of the crest of the neck and along the spine. The horse lengthens or stretches its topline by rounding its neck and back and lifting its thorax and belly. The horse can stretch its topline independently of the height of its neck.

TRAINING WHEEL

A visualization of the general progression of training.



UNEVEN

An irregularity in walk or jog in which the front or hind pair of legs does not move symmetrically, for example the right leg makes a different length step than the left leg.

UNLEVEL

An irregularity in walk or jog in which the front or hind pair of legs does not move symmetrically, for example the right leg makes a different height of step than the left leg.

UPHILL

Longitudinally well balanced as a consequence of engagement of the hindquarters (which allows the back muscles to assist in elevating the forehand) and engagement of the thoracic sling muscles to lift the forehand. The pushing forces from the hindquarters are balanced with the elevating forces of the forelimbs.

WIDE BEHIND

The horse travels with the hind feet further apart than the fore feet (an evasion of engagement which occurs most commonly in halting and lengthening of stride in jog).

ZIG-ZAG

A movement containing more than two half-passes with changes of direction.