

How Many Ways Can You Practice a Dressage Test?!

1. Get to know the Gee-og-raf-eee of your arena. In other words, Cow Girls and Cowboys, know those letters and where they are located, know how big a 20 meter circle is, (or a ten meter or a 5 meter), know where that pesky center line is (and remember: IT'S A STRAIGHT LINE!!!), know where the quarter lines are, know where the judge sits and KNOW WHERE YOU GO IN AND OUT!!!!!!! Once you know all those things then you can do some of the following. You may be the judge of which ones are best!
2. Get on Your Horse and Ride, Ride, Ride AND let a friend Read, Read, Read Your test to you!!!! (This could be considered friend abuse unless you do the same for your friend) (Moms and Dads are good for this, too and they already know how to do stuff for you)
3. Get one of those new fangled tape recorder things that you put in your fanny pack and a tape of your test. Let the tape recorder read to you while you RIDE, Ride RIDE! (This sounds a little pricey and you might get to try your emergency dismount if your horse doesn't like the tape. Be sure he is used to the tape BEFORE you mount up!)
4. Practice trying on your riding clothes and posing in front of the mirror! **NOT!**
5. Go to lots of dressage shows and get your practice there! **NOT!**

Or you could try some of these cheap and safe ideas, except for number 10, which might get you into big trouble if you don't have permission!

1. Practice on foot in the dressage arena, all by your self.
2. Practice in pairs and let someone be the horse and the other be the rider. (NO YOU DON'T Sit on the horse for this! You let them hold a rope for reins and you walk behind. (You've just got to learn to treat your friends better than this!) AND REMEMBER: NO TALKING OR BODY NOISES IN DRESSAGE!!!!!!

3. Practice at home. Write the letters on file cards and lay a miniature arena out in the back yard or the living room (leave the horse out of this) and practice your test. (While you're at it find a step and practice getting your heels down. I know this isn't part of the dressage test but do it anyway!)
4. Make a Breyer horse arena out of your dining room table and practice with your Breyer horse. You can use one of those cheap Wal-Mart horses. You could do a quadrille of Wal-Mart horses for 1 Breyer horse! (Remember- you don't have to own a Warmblood to do well in dressage) (Don't drag the family dog onto the dining room table and expect him to show relaxation and submission)
5. Memorize your dressage test, even if you plan on having a caller. If the caller gets mixed up, you will lose points, EVEN IF IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT!!!
6. It will help you to memorize if you think of your test as a pattern first, and just learn to walk it, finding your way around the arena. While you are walking around the arena, tell your self where to change gaits. You can carry your test with you.
7. Then start to add the gaits to the parts, one at a time
8. Then practice segments of your test to start polishing parts up, such as:
 - a. Practice your halt at x
 - b. Practice your salute
 - c. Then practice your halt and salute at x.
 - d. Practice 20 meter circles ALL OVER THE PLACE. Use cones (or flour) to lay out 20 meters in a field or just practice in different parts of the arena. You don't always have to practice in the same spot. Remember: Circles are round like CHEERIOS. They don't look like something the little Red Hen laid for breakfast.
 - e. Practice transitions; upward and downward.
 - f. Practice riding in a straight line. Pick a target
 - g. Work on your riding, especially things like sitting straight
 - h. Practice breathing (Holding your breath creates tension, besides even an Intro test is 6 minutes long in a standard arena. Passing out in a dressage test will get you eliminated)
 - i. Practice smiling. Smiling has never won a dressage test but judges like to know that Pony Club kids are having a great time.

9. When you can't ride or can't practice on the carpet, picture the movements of the test in your mind. Think of where to stop and start. Think of where you can improve them. Think of the rhythm and smoothness you want to use. Think of each of your movements as successful. Picture yourself doing a good job. (Do not do this during math class. No math teacher would ever understand what you are doing!)
10. Practice on the mirror in your bathroom with a great tube of lipstick! (You never heard me say that!!!!)
11. Now add YOUR suggestions here:
 - a. .
 - b. .
 - c.

But no matter what, you still need to ride your horse, a lot.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, RIDE, RIDE, RIDE! AND **HAVE FUN!**

(remember you're doing this because you LIKE to ride horses!)

10 POINTERS FOR A GOOD DRESSAGE TEST

1. know your test. If you know your test, inside and out, you will be much more confident about what you are doing. Know your test even if you have a reader. Readers can make mistakes.
2. Practice and know BOTH tests
3. Practice, Practice, Practice. You can even practice your test bareback. . But don't forget to take your horse out for a good time, too. (Nothing fancy. Just take him to a party or out dancing!) Actually he'd prefer a trail ride or a change to jumping!
4. Learn to focus on your horse, yourself and your test. Listen for the judge, too. When you go into the ring, tune out the world around you and enjoy.
5. Don't get nervous. Nervousness is the enemy of good riding. Practice keeping your cool. Nervousness rubs off on your horse. Your horse won't know why you are worried but he'll think if his leader is worried, he should be, too. Be as cool as a cucumber!
6. Know that you are doing this because you love to ride. If you focus on winning then you will bring tension into your test.
7. Ride the best you can on that day. Some times horses don't feel like doing dressage (or something else) and sometimes riders just can't get a diagonal. Do the best you can for that day and be happy with the result.
8. If something goes wrong during your test, let it go and don't worry about it. Go on to the next part of your test. Don't let one or two mistakes ruin your whole ride. The show must go on!
9. Know the rules! Know the rules! Know the rules!
10. Have the best possible turn out that you can. Make your horse's coat sparkle. Have his mane pulled and tail brushed out. Clean his hooves . Have your tack super clean. Clean your pad and your bit. Make your hair and clothing neat and tidy and make sure you have everything in good repair. Be prepared with the little things cared for even if you have never done a judged dressage test before.