Rider 3 Overview

Riders at Level 3 will now demonstrate the ability to ride independently. Hand contact should be as steady and sympathetic as possible to the horse's month at all three paces with equal contact in both hands. They have to understand the impact of the hand effect on the horse's mouth to achieve a goal, (i.e. slow down) and to release the pressure when the goal is achieved. There should be evidence of an effective position becoming established.

The movements should be demonstrated with accuracy, although loss of bend etc. is to be expected at this level.

Riders are expected to know and to demonstrate knowledge of correct diagonals throughout the riding portion, including in the "jumping" phase. Although riders at Level 3 are now expected to ride an individual flat test, other horses should be in the vicinity so riders will not have to deal with a panicked, lonely horse.

The flat test is not to be regarded as a dressage test. The tests from this level forward are to provide riders with an opportunity to demonstrate the requirements to ride independently.

The test organizer should provide a ring assistant to ensure safety during independent, group warm up (i.e., have all candidates on same rein at one time). In addition, the test organizer should provide a "caller" for the flat test.

Test organizers should ensure that all items are available for candidates in advance of the test. Examples would include hay nets, blanket types. Well-oiled tack especially bridles will be helpful to candidates.

The minimum arena size must be 60 x 120 in order to facilitate a fair test for candidates. In the event that this is not at all possible, then the evaluator is to use their discretion in setting equipment to best evaluate the candidates.

Mounting, adjusting tack and dismounting are to be evaluated at every level.

Turnout of horse and rider is similar to the previous rider levels but a neck strap is no longer permitted. At this level, candidates should be presenting a well groomed horse with clean well fitted tack.

Rider 3 – Written Test

The written test is an important part of the candidate evaluation. Test organizers are encouraged to have the written tests completed well in advance of the riding evaluation.

The Rider 3 will be questioned on content from the Rider 3-5 and 1-2 Manuals as well as the Stable Management Manual. They should be familiar with, but not limited to: rules of watering, stall flooring and stall sizes, stable vices, measurement of horses and ponies, basic farrier information, thorough grooming, common hoof ailments, and the phases over a jump, balanced equitation theory.

Rider 3 – Practical Horse Knowledge

Turnout should be neat and workmanlike. Paddock boots, work boots, or riding boots are acceptable. Loose or baggy jeans or shirts are not acceptable. Neat sweat pants or slush pants over breeches are also acceptable. Hair should be tied back. Ball caps that cover the eyes are discouraged.

The Rider 3 evaluation is comprised of a written test, a practical horse knowledge component, a flat riding component as well as a jumping component.

The option opens at Rider Level 3 to take either the full riding component or only the flat component.

Who May Examine Candidates?

English Rider Level 3-4 Evaluators

- ✓ Equine Canada current certified Comp Coach, Coach Level 1 or higher.
- ✓ May be evaluated by own current certified Comp Coach, Coach Level 1 or higher.
- ✓ May be evaluated by current IOB With Jump Module (if not their own students).

***Note**: If candidates ONLY are doing Flat Phase, then a current IOB may evaluate (not their own students)*.

English Rider 3 – Evaluation Requirements

A. Practical Horse Knowledge

No.	Requirement	Evidence
A.	**Practical Horse Knowledge**	
1	Take apart and put together snaffle bridle, "put up" figure 8.	
2	Put on and remove a stable sheet. Identify three types of blankets and one reason to use each.	*Riders must put on a blanket, with leg straps and belly surcingles, and remove the blanket. Candidates should be able to identify three different types of blankets, sheets or coolers in the stable and give examples of when used.*
3	Safely tie up a hay net.	*Riders must safely tie up a hay net with attention to the height and the type of quick release knot used.*
4	General Impression: Presentation of candidate, overall confidence and awareness of safety.	

English Rider 3 – Evaluation Requirements

B. Riding Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
B.	**Riding Phase**	
1	**Mount and Dismount:** ▪ Mount correctly (from ground or mounting block) Adjust stirrups and girth correctly, dismount correctly and cool out.	
2	**Tack:** ▪ Identify own mount's equipment.	*Must identify with proper name their OWN equipment, including boots. Knowledge about how the equipment functions is not required. Martingales (not German) are allowed.*
3	**Position:** ▪ Position at all gaits – evidence of an effective position, balance and development of an independent seat.	*Riders are expected to know and demonstrate knowledge of correct diagonals at this level.*
4	**Figures and Movements:** ▪ Correctly identify lead on their horse. ▪ Circles 20M in trot.	*They should know if they are on the correct or incorrect lead but being on the wrong lead is not to be penalized at this level. Candidate should now understand how big a 20m circle is and the circle should be round, starting and ending in the same place. The horse might not maintain bend or straightness throughout the whole circle.*
5	**Effectiveness:** ▪ Quality of progressive transitions.	*Riders should ask for the transition at the letter and not before, but the transition may take a few steps to complete. They should "prepare" their horse for the transition by asking for it slightly before the letter as the transition may take a few steps to complete. If successful, the horse should make the transition on or close to the letter.*
6	**Flat Test:** ▪ Accuracy and control, commitment to arena letters.	
7	**General Impression:** ▪ Overall authority, safety and confidence, rider conduct. ▪ Applicant turnout and horse presentation.	

English Rider 3 – Evaluation Requirements

C. Jumping Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
C.	**Jumping Phase**	
1	**Position:** ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Course ▪ Mane release	*At the trot riders should demonstrate and maintain the jumping position on the approach, over the fence and upon landing over the cross rail.* *Riders should demonstrate medium mane release.*
2	**Control and Straightness:** ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Course	*Simple gymnastic – trotting poles to an X; demonstrate control of trot and straightness of approach and departure. Horse should land at canter and be brought back to trot before reaching the end of the ring. Riders should sit in the saddle to do this.* *Maintain balanced forward seat position. If rising trot is done through turns, rider is to be on the correct rising diagonal.* *Trot a course of cross rails and regain trot before a turn; focus on the path of the course and the ability of the rider to bring the horse back to trot before the turn to prepare for the next trot approach.*
3	**General Impression:** ▪ Overall confidence, safety, control, rider conduct.	

Rider 4 Overview

Riders at this level are starting to co-ordinate the use of the independent aids (i.e. leg being used to support hand contact). Riders can establish but not maintain a soft sensation with the horse's mouth and can feel when the horse is responding softly to the bit (i.e., relaxing jaw, mouthing bit – the "wet mouth"). They can demonstrate bend although not necessarily maintain bend.

The rider should sit naturally and quietly in the saddle. The riders must be able to recognize an incorrect lead within a few steps and correct it without delay. The riders will be able to do an independent warm up with more than one rider in the arena at a time; knowledge of arena rules is necessary as it will be evident during warm-up.

Riders are expected to ride jumps at a height of 2 feet (0.65M).

At this level, riders will now be expected to wear either breeches with tall boots, well fitted half chaps, or jodhpurs with short boots complete with garter straps and pant clips.

Turnout of horse and rider should be appropriate to the weather but immaculate. Ears are to be clipped as well as whiskers, bridle path and feathers on legs. Mane should be pulled to 4-5 inches and "laid over". (All of the above as applicable to the breed of horse.)

The minimum arena size must be 60 x 120 in order to facilitate a fair test for candidates. In the event that this is not at all possible, then the evaluator is to use their discretion in setting equipment to best evaluate the candidates.

Rider 4 – Written Test

The written test is an important part of the candidate evaluation. Test organizers are encouraged to have the written tests completed well in advance of the riding evaluation. However, at Rider Level 4, the candidate will begin more oral interaction with evaluator starting with the practical phase.

The Rider 4 will be questioned on content from the Rider 3-5 and 1-2 Manuals as well as the Stable Management Manual. They should be familiar with but not limited to: knowledge of bandages, basic rules of feeding, shoeing, the healthy horse, stall fittings, types of bits, the training pyramid, dealing with basic riding issues.

Rider 4 – Practical Horse Knowledge

Turnout should be neat and workmanlike. Paddock boots, work boots, or riding boots are acceptable. Loose or baggy jeans or shirts are not acceptable. Neat sweat pants or slush pants over breeches are also acceptable. Hair should be tied back. Ball caps that cover the eyes are discouraged.

Test organizers should ensure that there is a measuring stick available.

The Rider 4 evaluation is comprised of a written test, a practical horse knowledge component, a flat riding component as well as a jumping component.

English Rider 4 – Evaluation Requirements

A. Practical Horse Knowledge

No.	Requirement	Evidence
A.	**Practical Horse Knowledge**	
1	Show how to measure a horse.	*Use measuring stick.*
2	Apply a Stable Bandage to a front and a back leg.	*The bandage should go from just below the knee and either wrap to support under the fetlock or a stove pipe wrap may be used. If bandaging below the fetlock there should be an inverted V centered on the bottom of the front of the fetlock. Masking tape should be used over the Velcro and the tension of the tape should not be greater than the tension of the bandage. Riders must be able to discuss the fit of the materials and the materials should be clean and in good repair. The bandage must end at the top of the leg and the Velcro should be on the outside of the leg.*
3	Demonstrate how to take temperature and pulse (heart rate and know the normal value).	
4	Demonstrate restraining a horse with the use of lead shank (with chain).	
5	General Impression: Presentation of candidate, overall confidence and awareness of safety.	

English Rider 4 – Evaluation Requirements

B. Riding Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
B.	**Riding Phase**	
1	**Mount and Dismount:** ▪ Mount correctly (from ground or mounting block). ▪ Adjust stirrups and girth correctly, dismount correctly and cool out.	
2	Demonstrate jogging a horse in hand as per a veterinarian's assessment, i.e. lameness.	*Evaluator may assist the horse to trot.*
3	**Position:** ▪ Walk, trot and canter in full seat. ▪ Drop and regain stirrups at the trot during warm-up, position at trot rising and sitting (no stirrups) done in a group ride/warm-up.	*All trot will be rising unless specified otherwise. Focus on maintaining position.* *Focus on a balanced seat and riding with the movement of the horse, not grabbing/pinching with knee, tipping body or dropping toe.* *At this level riders should demonstrate the ability to sit quietly and use aids independently.*
4	**Figures:** ▪ Circles: 15M in trot ▪ Circles: 20M in canter	*15m circle at trot: The focus is centered around roughly knowing the size and demonstrating knowledge of bend.* *20m circle at canter: Maintain the canter and reach the tangents.*
5	**Effectiveness:** ▪ Correct use and effectiveness of independent aids at all paces. ▪ Transitions.	*Focus should be independent use of aids. Reflective of the relaxed, balanced seat of the rider.*
6	**Flat Test:** ▪ Accuracy and control. ▪ Commitment to arena letter.	
7	**General Impression:** ▪ Overall authority, safety and confidence, rider conduct. ▪ Applicant turnout and horse presentation.	

English Rider 4 – Evaluation Requirements

C. Jumping Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
C.	**Jumping Phase**	
1	**Position:** ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Course ▪ Release: demonstrate short, medium and long mane release.	*Rider should demonstrate a short, medium and a long mane release. If the rider is doing a more advanced release, then this is acceptable if it is done correctly.*
2	**Effectiveness:** (control and straightness) ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Jump Elements ▪ Canter a single Fence	*Control on approach and landing.* *Focus on ability to ride straight and maintain steady rhythm to a single fence at canter.*
3	**Requirements:** ▪ Gymnastic – Trot into line, counting correctly to second element.	*Gymnastic: Cross rail, 15-18' (4.60 m-5.50 m) to a 2' (61cm) vertical. Trot approach to cross rail, then one canter stride to vertical. Maintain jumping position to the cross rail and upon landing. Gymnastic should be set up progressively, i.e. starting with the poles.* *Trot into the cross rail, canter to the second fence, count strides correctly.*
4	**General Impression:** ▪ Overall confidence, safety, control, rider conduct.	

Rider 5 Overview

Riders at Level 5 have a solid awareness of a horse moving forward willingly and maintaining rhythm and relaxation. Riders should be able to recognize “tracking up” or lack thereof, by observing other horses in the test. This level introduces non-progressive transitions walk to canter/halt to trot. The rider should know the five different rein aids and the theory of their influence on the horse. Riders are in the LTED phase of Learning and Training to Ride.

Turn out of horse and rider at this level should be appropriate to the weather, however should be immaculate. Attire at this level should be as per lower levels except that riders will now be expected to wear either breeches with tall boots, very well fitted half chaps, or jodhpurs with short boots complete with garter straps and pant clips. Boots should be polished.

The horse should be turned out as for competition, clipped or trimmed according to the time of year. Braiding however, is not a requirement. The candidate should be aware of the fitting of tack to the horse, aware of how well the tack fits the rider, and how the tack may affect the balance and position of the rider.

Riders at Level 5 will be jumping fences at a height of 2’3” (0.70M).

Evaluators may now use questions and answers to discover the candidate’s depth of understanding as it relates to the movements, especially if a horse is uncooperative in some movements.

The minimum arena size must be 60 x 120 in order to facilitate a fair test for candidates. In the event that this is not at all possible, then the evaluator is to use their discretion in setting equipment to best evaluate the candidates.

Rider 5 – Written Test

The written test is an important part of the candidate evaluation. Test organizers are encouraged to have the written tests completed well in advance of the riding evaluation.

The Rider 5 will be questioned on content from the Rider 3-5 and 1-2 Manuals as well as the Stable Management Manual. They should be familiar with but not limited to: sequence of legs at all gaits, cooling out procedures, qualities of hay and common grains, common lameness, basic dentistry, farrier knowledge, how bits work, skin diseases, anatomy of the hoof, setting basic gymnastics, basic riding issues, clipping horses.

Rider 5 – Practical Horse Knowledge

Turnout should be neat and workmanlike. Paddock boots, work boots, or riding boots are acceptable. Loose or baggy jeans or shirts are not acceptable. Neat sweat pants or slush pants over breeches are also acceptable. Hair should be tied back. Ball caps that cover the eyes are discouraged.

Rider 5 – Flat Phase

Some evaluators may wish to use a copy of the flat test sheet as a working sheet. Remember it is not to be scored as a dressage test and is not returned to the candidate.

Rider 5 – Lunging Phase

The purpose is to introduce lunging early. Riders should lunge for 5-10 minutes only! Evaluators note that candidates can share a lunge horse if needed.

The Rider 5 evaluation is comprised of a written test, a practical horse knowledge component, a flat riding component, lunging component as well as a jumping component.

Who May Examine Candidates?

English Rider Level 5 Evaluators

- ✓ Equine Canada current certified Comp Coach, Coach Level I or above (not their own coach).

English Rider 5 – Evaluation Requirements

A. Practical Horse Knowledge

No.	Requirement	Evidence
A.	**Practical Horse Knowledge**	
1	Apply front and back shipping bandage.	*Riders will need to put on two shipping bandages – one on a front leg and one on a hind leg. They should apply the bandages with even tension, covering from just below the knee down the leg and covering the bulbs of the heels.* *Knowledge of the proper length of cotton and bandage as well as the bulk of the cotton is needed.* *The tension should be neither too tight nor too loose.* *All bandaging materials should be clean and in good repair. The Velcro should end on the outside of the leg near the top of the bandage. If tape is used, the tension must not be greater than the tension of the bandage.*
2	General Impression: Presentation of candidate, overall confidence and awareness of safety.	

English Rider 5 – Evaluation Requirements

B. Riding Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
B.	**Riding Phase**	
1	**Position:** ▪ Walk, trot and canter in full seat. ▪ Drop and regain stirrups at canter during warm up as directed by evaluator.	*Riders will be tested one at a time dropping and regaining stirrups at canter.*
2	**Warm up:** ▪ Efficient use of time allotment. ▪ Arena safety. ▪ Effectiveness of warm up.	
3	**Figures (accuracy and shape) and Movements (evenness, smoothness of pace and evidence of bend:** ▪ Circles: 15M in trot ▪ Circles: 15M in canter ▪ 3-loop serpentine at trot ▪ Lead change through trot on straight line ▪ Half turn on forehand	*Riders should now begin to demonstrate bend and evenness of gait on circles.* *Serpentine should show correct shape, ½ circles connected by 2 or 3 steps of straightness. Attempting a change of bend is good; however, the horse may lose some rhythm, balance or forwardness through the change of bend.* *The lead change through trot is ridden on a diagonal with emphasis on following the path of the straight line. The transition may be slightly inaccurate or unbalanced at this level.* *Half turn on forehand is the beginning exercise to teach the horse to move away from the rider's leg, while also maintaining the intent or desire to move forward. It also teaches the rider better co-ordination of their aids.*
4	**Effectiveness:** ▪ Correct use and effectiveness of independent aids at all paces. ▪ Progressive transitions –general quality. ▪ Non-progressive transitions: walk-canter, halt-trot.	*All progressive transitions should be accurate and smooth.* *Non-progressive transitions (walk to canter or halt to trot) are introduced.*
5	**Flat Test:** ▪ Overall ability to produce a confident, accurate ride appropriate to the level.	
7	**General Impression:** ▪ Applicant turnout and horse presentation. ▪ Correct mounting, dismounting and handling of the horse.	

English Rider 5 – Evaluation Requirements

C. Jumping Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
C.	**Jumping Phase**	
1	**Position:** ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Course ▪ Use of appropriate release	*Gymnastic should be set up progressively i.e. starting with the poles.* *Gymnastics should be trot into cross rail, 18' (5.50 m) to vertical then 21' (6.40 m) to 2' – 2'3" oxer.* *Evaluators should see ability of the candidate to maintain the half seat and showing instinctive use of various crest releases.*
2	**Effectiveness:** (control and presentation) ▪ Gymnastics ▪ Course	
3	**Requirement:** ▪ Canter the related line of fences and be able to identify if they were long or tight	*Riders should know that their pace on approach will affect the inside distance in the line and be able to tell evaluator if they were long or tight (deep) to the second fence in the line.*

English Rider 5 – Evaluation Requirements

D. Lunging Phase

No.	Requirement	Evidence
D.	**Lunging Phase**	
1	**Lunging:** ▪ Presentation of handler and horse tacked with proper fitting saddle, bridle and boots. Identify equipment and their purpose correctly.	*Horse to wear saddle and bridle, protective boots and/or bandages, halter over the bridle is acceptable.*
2	**Lunging safety:** ▪ Handler's use of lunge line and whip including when reversing horse.	*Evaluators should look for safe handling of lunge line and whip, use of body language, control and confidence.*
3	**Lunging technique:** ▪ Use of body language and confidence while lunging walk, trot in both directions.	*The purpose is to introduce lunging early. Riders should lunge for 5-10 minutes only! Evaluators note that candidates can share a lunge horse if needed.*

Rider Level 3

(Riders are now to be familiar with Rider 1-2 Manual, as well as Rider 3-5 and Stable Management in Canada)

Stable – stall floor materials, size of stalls and doorways	Watering – ways, advantages, disadvantages
Stable Vices	Measurement of horses
Thrush	Grooming – areas often missed
Farrier – frequency of visits, the newly shod hoof	The Horse's Jumping Effort
Horse an human balance point	Arena Safety

Rider Level 4

(Riders are now to be familiar with Rider 1-2 Manual, as well as Rider 3-5 and Stable Management in Canada)

Types of bandages and reasons for use	Signs of health in the horse
Reasons for shoeing	Vaccines used
Colic	Rules of Feeding
Disunited canter	Classical Training Scale/Pyramid
Recognize snaffle bit types	Change of lead
Stall fittings	Run outs and refusals
Exercises off the horse	

Rider Level 5

(Riders are now to be familiar with Rider 1-2 Manual, as well as Rider 3-5 and Stable Management in Canada)

Sequence of pace	Cooling out the horse
Types of grains	Quality of hay
Reasons to clip a horse	Know 5 common lameness's
How to determine unsound leg	Advantages/disadvantages of shoeing
Bones of the hoof	Signs the horse needs dental care
Distances in gymnastic	Skin diseases and treatment
Bit pressure points	Protective Leg Wear
Reasons horse refuse fences	Common rider errors and corrections
Benefits of gymnastics for horse and rider	

About the Rider – Levels 3-5

The rider in levels 3-5 is in the intermediate phase of the Learn to Ride stage and moves toward the beginning phases of the Learn to Compete stage in the Long-Term Equestrian Development (LTED) model. Riders in these levels are continuing to develop a broad skill vocabulary for riding, while beginning to consolidate and refine their skills. Riders in this stage may or may not be beginning to compete in introductory skill levels. Whether they compete or not, emphasis is on skill acquisition with lots of time for practice, testing skill and improving skill while having fun and exploring different equestrian disciplines. The basic foundational building blocks are still being put in place in a rider's learning, so taking the time to progress at the right pace for the individual rider is important. There is much more information available about the types of skills and amount of practice time suggested for these stages, in the various Equine Canada LTED publications and resources.

Skills taught in levels 3-5 require the rider to move beyond the very rudimentary skills to a better understanding of how the horse and rider work, and how they work together. Riders are encouraged to read widely to build on their understanding of horse and rider anatomy and movement as well as other topics such as stable management, equine first aid and training exercises. Riders are encouraged to request suggested reading from their coach which will complement their training program. They are also encouraged to discuss their training program with their coach, to understand the learning objectives of each lesson or activity, and to begin to understand the direction of their learning progressions.

Riders are encouraged to read widely to build on their understanding of horse and rider anatomy and movement as well as other topics such as stable management, equine first aid and training exercises.

At these levels, riders should understand why they are learning the points in their lessons, how to practice effectively in between lessons, and what the near-term goals are. A rider, parent and coach should be working together to set realistic training goals with a focus on skills acquisition and mastery. The more experiences a rider can have, the better a foundation they will be laying for future success. Lessons and practice time are very important for ensuring skill accuracy, and practice that reinforces correct movement patterns. Riding different horses in this stage can also help a rider develop a better feel for riding.

Continuing to make time each week for unmounted exercise is also important. Youth and adults alike benefit from other activities in their week which promote and enhance the athletic skills and abilities needed for riding well.

To make the most of the learning and conditioning opportunities in and out of the saddle, it's helpful to have at least a basic understanding of the rider anatomy.

The rider's anatomy can be divided into some basic categories:

- Head, eyes and neck (cervical spine)
- Shoulders, upper body and upper arm (upper back=thoracic spine)
- Lower back (lumbar spine)
- Seat (pelvis) and thigh
- Lower arm and hands
- Lower leg (calf) and heel

Some of these very simple categories are labeled on the skeletal diagram.

Regardless of the rider's discipline, optimal biomechanics for a horse and rider team occur when the rider and horse are both in balance and alignment. Balance refers to both longitudinal (front to back) and lateral (side to side) balance. Alignment refers to the horse and rider's centres of gravity, as well as the postural alignment of the rider.

The centre of gravity is the point in the body around which the body mass is equally distributed. The human centre of gravity is in the middle of the abdomen just below the belly button. The most balanced position is with the rider's centre of gravity and the horse's centre of gravity aligned. People have a slightly different centre of gravity depending on their body build and this will affect how they move on the horse.

In all sport, there are neutral postures which are considered mechanically efficient because the position does not strain the athlete, and the athlete is ready for movement in any direction required. A rider's goal is to develop the ability to stay in neutral alignment in whatever movement they are doing, or whatever the horse is doing. From a neutral and aligned position, the rider is best prepared to respond accurately to the horse, apply the clearest aids, and also keep their body-weight from impeding the horse's movement. The rider who is in balance is safer in the event of an unexpected movement by the horse. They can also apply nice clear aids.

The rider is always influencing their horse. Positively, the rider uses their body to give commands (aids), or to stay neutral and out of the way of their horse's movement (follow his movement). Negatively, riders who are not in balance often end up sending confusing and conflicting commands to the horse, and also blocking his movement. An example could be a rider with poor balance that

balances by holding on the reins. Such a rider blocks the horse's movement forward through the horse's mouth. They often find that they 'need' to then kick the horse that appears not to be responding to the leg. The rider then kicks the horse as a habit. It is not only unfair and unnecessary for the horse, but the rider is busy reinforcing an ineffective muscle-memory pattern of poor sitting, and poor choice of response to a situation. The bad habit will then have to be undone later.

Blocking a horse's movement causes him to have to compensate by overuse of other areas, which can contribute to strain injuries. The rider is rarely aware of strain injuries that might be caused by a poorly balanced rider. An example could be shin splints that develop because of too much concussion on the forehand, when a horse is put onto his forehand by the position of his rider for a long period of time.

Developing balance early on is very important for effective and safe riding. Sometimes young riders that start early have a better physical advantage than an adult in the same riding development phase because the young person has not yet developed poor postural habits.

In levels 3-5 riders develop muscle memory and riding posture habits which can stay with them a long time. Regardless of age, finding and maintaining balance and good position is critical.

A standing neutral alignment which a doctor, chiropractor or other professional might look for in any client would include the head balanced over a neutral spine (straight, with natural curves), balanced directly over the hip and ankle bone with even weight distribution in the feet of the person standing. They would also look for lateral balance (straight spine and even hips and shoulders).

For riders, the seated neutral posture should have the same characteristics. A direct line should be able to be drawn from the rider's ear, to shoulder, to hip socket, to ankle bone if the rider is aligned. They would also be sitting directly over the horse's centre of gravity, and they would be evenly balanced from side to side of the saddle.

The centre of gravity is the point in the body around which the body mass is equally distributed. The human centre of gravity is in the middle of the abdomen just below the belly button. People have a slightly different centre of gravity depending on their body build, but the rider should still be lowering their centre of gravity toward their base of support on the horse (the area between the hips, below the belly button and above the middle of the saddle).

Riders who have difficulty with a standing neutral posture, will carry their postural issues into the saddle and make their horse compensate for them. It is a good idea to engage in activities that will improve and correct posture generally, so that when a rider is in the saddle they can find good posture easily and have their attention free to learn the riding specific skills. For many people used to walking on the ground, it can take time to learn how to find correct posture once the usual human base of support (feet) is exchanged for the rider's base of support (seat and thigh).

Even riders in short stirrups who are not seated in the saddle, still have their centre of gravity in the seat/thigh area with their basic area of balance over the horse being the area at the centre of the saddle (on or just above it) and the area reaching about halfway around the horse's barrel. In a dressage rider, the seat and thigh would be in good contact with the horse. In a jockey, only the lower

leg would be on the horse, but the base of support is the same. Regardless of stirrup length and degree of bend in the knee and hip, the centre of gravity for riders is in a straight vertical line that would run through the horse's centre of gravity and the rider's ankle. A seated rider doing flatwork would have their shoulder, ear and hip on this same line. A rider in two-point over a fence would have their hip bone and shoulders somewhat behind and ahead of the line respectively, but in balance. The line would go up from their ankle roughly through the middle of the saddle, through the rider's belly.

In correct lateral (side to side) alignment, the two sit bones (the two bones at the bottom of the pelvis that are closest to the saddle) should be in equal contact with the saddle. Riders can also have even sit bones, but collapse one shoulder, curving the spine. Riders can tell if they are not in lateral alignment if they notice uneven sweat-marks when the saddle pad is removed, or they feel that one stirrup is longer or one leg is longer.

If the rider is seated, their weight should be balanced between the sit bones and the front of the pelvis (longitudinally), as well as between each sit bone (laterally). This is the position from which all other positions and movements start and is also the position in which the human spine and pelvis are in neutral. This position requires the least amount of effort and muscle strength to sustain, if the rider is supple. Many riders are not supple and have tension patterns created from seated postures adopted all day, or from other sports. Such tension patterns create structural pull which forces the rider to have to use effort to try and sit neutrally. The effort can be wearing, and is difficult to maintain when a rider also has to be conscious of the riding. It can be very helpful for riders to consult a chiropractor, osteopath or massage therapist to verify natural structural tendencies which may compromise symmetry and balance.

A common example of structural imbalance in adult riders would be tightened hip flexors from a desk job all week, which cause the rider's pelvis to tip forward. To try and sit upright, the rider arches their back, which creates straight on the lower back. Low back pain and strain is very common in riders with such lack of suppleness or balance in the hip structure.

For most people, just as for horses, training straightness is a better option than over-emphasis on correcting imbalance. Most people, as well as most horses, improve symmetry when they have training which promotes even development, suppleness and straightness.

If the rider is seated, their weight should be balanced between the sit bones and the front of the pelvis (longitudinally), as well as between each sit bone (laterally). This is the position from which all other positions and movements start and is also the position in which the human spine and pelvis are in neutral.

The human spine includes a series of bones called vertebrae. There are 24 joints in the spine, and the joints move in multiple directions: forward flexion, backward extension and other degrees in rotation. Like all bones in the human body, the vertebrae do not actually touch each other. They are separated by soft tissue disks, and maintained in correct posture by a lattice weaving of muscles and ligaments which work like a mechanical engineering tensegrity model. Think of a suspension bridge with all its wires, or a telephone pole with several wires around it. In riding, the spine must be capable of constant but subtle motion to maintain posture.

Riding with good posture does not include rigidity, tension or 'freezing' in a position, because the horse is always in motion underneath the rider. With the need for constant motion in multiple directions, it is easy to see how challenging it can be for a rider to learn to hold good posture, while allowing constant motion. This requirement has some parallels in other sport such as skiing and canoeing, or other activities such as dance where flexibility, strength and a changing base of support are common features.

The human spine cannot be neutral over a poor base. The base of the spine is the pelvis. For a rider, the pelvis is also the main point of contact with the rider's 'ground' which is the saddle. Whereas an athlete on the earth's surface connects with ground in their feet, a rider connects with their ground through the sit bones, or at least through the centre of gravity and an a-shaped support frame of the sides and centre of the saddle discussed above. Like the tower of Pisa, the rider's spine depends on a neutral pelvis for good spine posture and mechanics.

The rider's shoulder and sit bones should be in a straight unbroken line, regardless of whether the rider is seated in the saddle, or up in a short stirrup. The difference is only the bend at the hip socket. A seated rider has the sit bones and shoulder lined up with the ankle. A rider in good jumping position is folded at the hip, and the sit bones point to the back of the saddle (cantle). The rider's spine is in a diagonal line pointing from the sit bones, on an upward angle to the shoulders which are now forward in front of the pommel. The rider should not have a broken spinal line either seated or in a shorter stirrup. An example of a broken line would be a hollow low back, or a hunched upper back – two common poor habits that threaten a rider's safety and performance by throwing them out of good balance.

While riding, the seated pelvis opens in and out very slightly, and each sit bone follows the motion of the horse in an elliptical arc (forward and up, down and back in a tilted oval pattern). When this movement is smoothly in time and rhythm with the horse's movement it is called 'moving with the horse'. When the pelvis is in good position and has the suppleness to allow movement with the horse, the rider's spine can undulate as needed to also follow the motion. When the hips are inflexible or locked down, the rider's spine experiences excessive loading and strain as the movement the hips should have absorbed, is added to the normal motion the spine should be experiencing.

It is very important for riders to acquire personal training habits that include flexibility work for hips and spine to maintain the suppleness needed. Tight muscles or ligaments that lock down the hips or spine will compromise the rider's posture, effectiveness and ultimately safety and long term injury prevention.

Suppleness has two characteristics: lack of tension or rigidity, and strength. In the mechanical tensegrity model, or visual of a telephone pole, the pole or column is free of tension, but that is because the supporting wires are arranged in balanced positive tension. The telephone pole would not stay up if any of the guiding wires were slack, or if one wire were adjusted to higher tension than the others.

To support the rider's back and pelvis, the rider needs very good core strength. The core can be described as all the muscles around a rider's torso and hips which play a role in supporting correct posture and function in the hips and back. There are several layers of core muscles affecting and supporting a rider's structural integrity (posture and spine stability) during the ride.

The core muscles which support good posture are in the rider's stomach, sides, back and pelvis from the tailbone and floor of pelvis, up to the occipital joint where the rider's head and neck connect. From a skeletal point of view, the low back is a human weak point where for a few inches of the torso's length, the entire human structure is connected from top to bottom by a few inches of spinal column. The opportunity for injury in the lower back is tremendous because it is the most foldable section of the back.

For riders, it is also the area that can experience the most force and cumulative wear if the motion of the horse is not effectively absorbed by the hips and allowed to travel up the length of the spine. Tight shoulders, dropping head, caving in chest, poor posture, locked down hips all contribute to sending undesirable pressure to the lower back as the motion that is blocked at the top and bottom of the spine seeks to escape through the only remaining moveable part of the torso.

The human body supports the vulnerable lower back area by encasing the mid-section in core muscles that control bend, flexion and rotation. The muscles are supposed to absorb loading. When a rider has a weak core, the muscles do not do their job, and the pressure or loading is transferred closer to the spine. Sometimes the body will respond with hardened ligament and fascial tissue in an attempt to support the stressed area, with the result of further reducing the mobility (suppleness) of the area. The result is that the rider has even less ability to stay supple and absorb the horse's motion.

Assuming they are also addressing tightness issues through flexibility exercises, riders of all ages can do exercises that build core strength. There are resources on bodyweight, balance and exercise ball and band training for children, as well as adults.

Other exercise modalities that promote core activation and strength are also very good conditioning for a rider. Examples are Pilates® and modalities that integrate core activation for maintaining spine stability in movement, such as martial arts, swim, dance, flowing yoga forms, Tai-chi and other integrated movement training. There are ample resources available online and in fitness literature for core training. Riders should be concerned with activation of deep inner core and spine supporting muscles, followed by the outer layer (abs for example). The deeper, structural supporting muscles are not as easy to consciously activate during riding, but they are the first line of postural support.

The outer layers of muscles in the back, abdominals, gluteals (seat), arms and legs are the power muscles. Although they are active while riding, they should be free of tension. Riding does not require power or force from these muscles except in some moments, such as when a horse is bolting, or while a rider must maintain a jumping position over a long course. Most of the time, these muscles should be soft and in active readiness for use, not relied on as primary supporters of posture.

As in any sport movement, muscles that are required in the sport need to be trained and activated outside of 'game', or outside of the actual engagement of the sport movements. Good training will enhance the tendency of the body to activate the right muscles when required in the sport. Riders can activate the deep stabilizing core muscles while unmounted in a variety of ways.

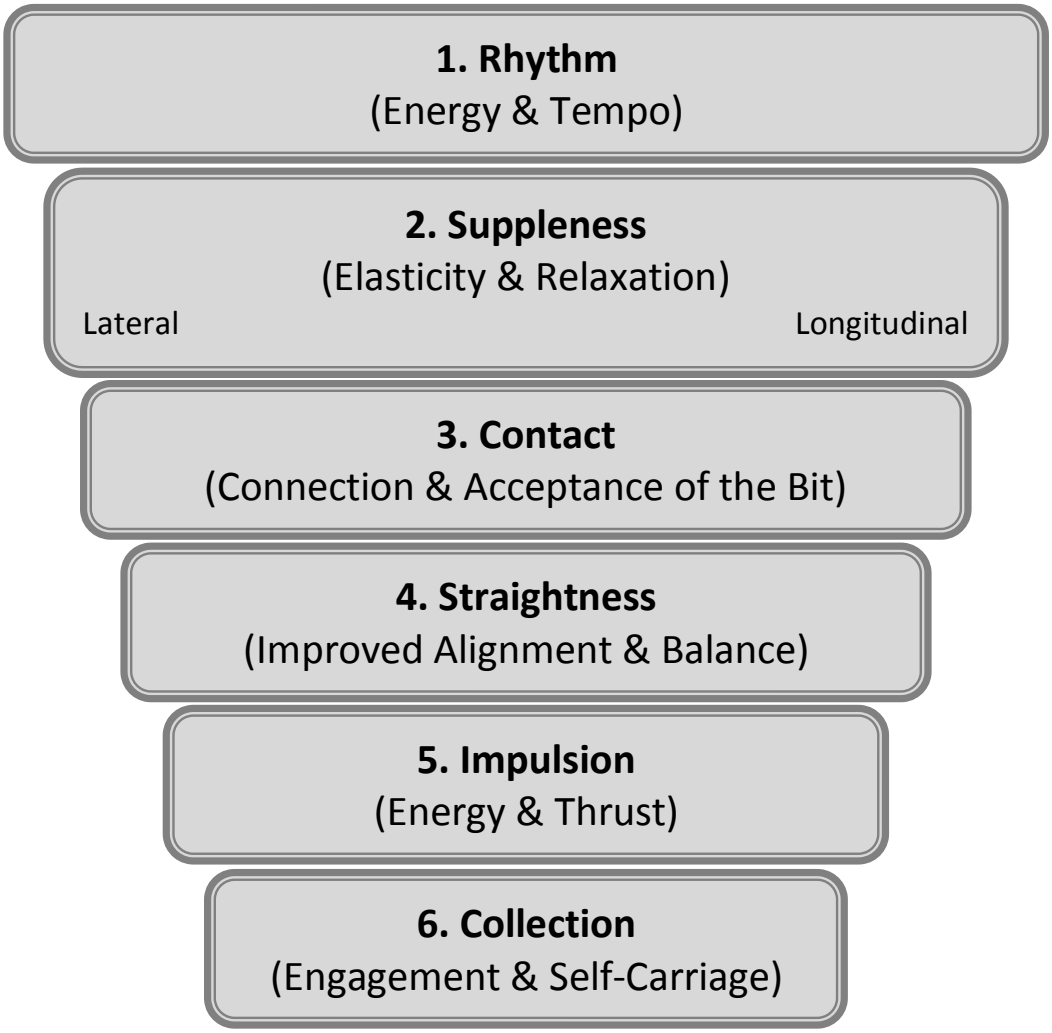
A sample exercise could be standing tall with weight down through their heels and a feeling of growing tall through the spine. The rider should not feel tension anywhere, and should not be hunching up their shoulders to become tall. They should be able to maintain proper diaphragmatic breathing (not sucking all their breath into their chest only). The rider will notice that the deeper abdominal muscles are engaged by imagining they are being pulled up (not sucked in), while maintaining relaxation in the upper body and shoulders. Once the rider has good posture, they can challenge the core stabilizers by shifting to standing on one foot for a few seconds, while maintaining the spinal alignment and relaxation.

When the rider can maintain good posture, free of tension and with good core activation from a standing or other static posture, they are ready to introduce movement. Doing similar exercises on unstable surfaces will help the rider teach their body to maintain core activation without tension when their body is moved around under them, like it would be in the saddle. When they are ready, the rider can transfer the exercise into the saddle, and practice activating their core while mounted. Riders should get feedback from a ground person or their coach who can tell them when they are in good posture, so that they can memorize the position and muscle activation associated.

Riders can further develop core tone and their body's ability to use the core effectively by doing core strengthening or awareness exercises. These can be prescribed by a physiotherapist, conditioning specialist, personal trainer, Pilates or dance instructor or other qualified professional. They can also be easily found in books, magazines or online. Riders are encouraged to discuss their mounted workout plans with their riding coach or instructor. Coaches are encouraged to assist riders in identifying areas that need improvement, and being available to review the riders' unmounted program or work with them to ensure transfer of skills to the riding requirements.

The Classical Training Pyramid

The Classical Training Pyramid is a training system consisting of six building blocks. Jumpers as well as dressage horses will benefit from this system because it is progressive and provides a basis on which to plan the horse's training.



**** Leading authorities have debated about Straightness and Impulsion. One school of thought suggests that these two should be reversed in the pyramid. All agree, however, that they are so interdependent that it is difficult to place one ahead of the other.*

The Six Steps Explained

(Information taken from the September 2006 issue of the USDF Connections Magazine and the 2008 USDF Directory. It is used here with permission from the USDF.)

1. **Rhythm** (Energy and Tempo):

   Rhythm is the term used for the characteristic sequence of footfalls and timing of a pure walk, pure trot, and pure canter. The rhythm should be expressed with energy and in a consistent, forward tempo. (As in music, the tempo refers to the number of beats per minute.) The horse remains in the balance and self-carriage appropriate to his level of training.

2. **Suppleness** (Elasticity and Relaxation):

   Suppleness refers to the horse's ability to move with elasticity and a supple, swinging back, allowing the rider to bend him laterally (from one side to the other) as well as to lengthen and shorten his frame (longitudinal). Relaxation refers to the horse's mental state (calmness without anxiety or nervousness), as well as to his physical state (the absence of negative muscular tension). Usually, the mental and physical states go hand in hand. The horse learns to accept the influence of the rider without becoming tense.

3. **Contact** (Connection and Acceptance of the Bit):

   The energy generated in the hindquarters by the driving aids must flow through the whole body of the horse and be received in the rider's hands. The contact to the bit must be elastic and adjustable, creating fluent interaction between horse and rider with appropriate changes in the horse's outline. The horse quietly chewing/mouthing the bit and the production of saliva identifies acceptance of the bit. The quality of the connection and balance can be evaluated by allowing the horse to stretch down while the rider releases the reins to demonstrate self-carriage.

4. **Straightness** (Improved Alignment and Balance):

   A horse is said to be straight when the footfalls of the forehand and the hindquarters are appropriately aligned on straight and curved lines, and when his longitudinal axis is in line with the straight or curved track on which he is ridden. By nature, every horse is crooked – hollow on one side and stiff on the other side – thereby using one side of his body somewhat differently from the other. This also causes uneven contact in the reins. Some horses have conformation that makes correct alignment and balance more difficult for them. Appropriate gymnastic exercises develop the horse's symmetry. This allows him to engage both hind legs evenly and prepares him for collection. This process improves the lateral as well as the longitudinal balance of the horse.

5. **Impulsion** (Energy and Thrust):

   Impulsion describes the horse's willingness to move forward energetically with a controlled propulsive thrust generated from the hindquarters. It is measured by the horse's desire to carry himself forward, the elasticity of his steps, the suppleness of his back, and the engagement of his hindquarters. Impulsion is necessary to develop medium paces and, later on, with the added ingredient of collection, extended paces.

6. **Collection** (Engagement and Self-Carriage):

   The horse shows collection when he lowers and engages his hindquarters, resulting in lightness and mobility of the forehand. Because the centre of mass is shifted backward, the forehand is lightened and elevated; the horse feels more 'uphill'. The horse's neck is raised and arched, and the whole top line is stretched. Shorter yet powerful cadenced steps and strides should be seen.

The training pyramid may suggest to some at first glance that the concepts can be approached separately and accomplished one at a time. In reality, all the concepts are connected to one another and, therefore, interdependent. This interdependence might be explained as follows:

When a horse is **relaxed, rhythmical** and listening to the aids, he is then in a state of mental and physical **balance**. When the horse is **relaxed**, listening and in **balance**, the rider can ask for more **impulsion**.

Relaxation and **balance** may be lost if too much forward energy is requested for his particular stage of training. It is, therefore, important to be able to control the **balance** and **rhythm** in order to maintain the **relaxation**.

Flexibility and **suppleness** refer to the horse's ability to bend equally right and left, forward and back. The more flexible and supple the horse, the lighter he becomes. A horse must be **flexible** on both sides of his body equally in order to be **straight**. He can then manoeuvre his body more easily.

N.B. It is important to realize that this is a general, simplistic guideline used to approach the training of a horse. It is always important to work with a qualified Coach.

Riders who are in levels 3-5 would be beginning to learn good posture, and may need to frequently slow or pause their ride to reset their position and re-activate good postural support muscles before continuing on. If a rider at this level is going around the arena with tension or other negative postural habits, they are creating a muscle memory for ineffective patterns which will compromise their progress later. With so much discussion about posture, it can be easy to forget that the main goal at this level is to develop effective skills and a comfort level in performing them. Pushing too hard or other ways that introduce tension to the riding experience are counterproductive, especially as the rider is just beginning to integrate and apply their skills to increasing challenges.

Good posture should always be comfortable, relaxed and yet ready and able to respond to the needs of the ride and unexpected demands on the body made by the horse. One of the best ways a rider can learn good posture and balance on a horse, is to try all kinds of different activities on the horse. Getting locked into stylization of one discipline at this stage is not advisable. Riders in levels 3-5 are acquiring basic foundational skills and feeling for riding which they can use in almost any discipline in the future.

If a rider is needing to force posture such as heels down or shoulders back, or sitting upright, they probably have tension or muscle tone or activation issues that should be sorted out on the ground, and then transferred to the saddle. They may also need to do more work on the lunge without need to control the horse, or need a different horse, or to slow down in the progression of their lessons and give some time to get more comfortable with a skill before moving forward.

Equine Canada's Comprehensive Program for Rider Development

Objectives

To create a national program that offers levels of achievement for all riders from recreational to competitive. The program encourages riders to ride, learn and enjoy the equestrian sport, and promotes a continuous and progressive path of learning towards safe and knowledgeable horsemanship. The program encourages participants to continue learning in the sport by offering various attainable levels of achievement that are recognized by certificates. The English Rider Level 1-10 program is a preparation for future Equine Canada certified instructors and coaches. This program will compliment programs offered by riding schools across Canada and provide guidelines to coaches and instructors.

The EC Rider Level program provides NCCP certified Instructors and Coaches a complete and progressive program of instruction to their students. This program is also an important component to aid in the continued promotion, development and recognition of qualified instructional programs and will compliment the national stable registry system as it is developed.

In addition to providing a national standard recognized from coast to coast, this program offers enough levels to maintain the interest of a rider over an extended period of time. For example, the young student starting riding at age 8 can potentially participate in the program for a number of years. This program also meets the needs of achievement and goals for the adult rider.

> ***Note:*** *This program is also tailored for those riders who seek to further their riding skills on the flat but who may not wish to continue over fences. Therefore, the option opens at Rider Level 3 to take either the full riding phase or only the flat phase. This option is continued through Rider Levels 4-10.*

If a candidate elects not to do the gymnastic/jumping phase at a particular level, and has indicated this choice on their application form prior to the test, the evaluator is only to mark the flat phase of the riding test.

Candidates, who have elected to complete solely the flat phase of evaluation, will be issued a certificate of achievement stating that it is for the flat phase.

Candidates intending to pursue their instructor or coach levels should carefully consider the following:

Those candidates who wish to attain their instructor certification must successfully pass either the full riding OR the flat phase at Rider 6.

The Practical Horse Knowledge/Written/Lunging Phases must also be completed. If an instructor candidate wishes to teach over fences then the candidate would be required to complete the full Rider 6 exam.

Those candidates who wish to attain their Competition Coach certification will need to ensure they complete full rider levels up to and including Rider 8.

History and Schedule of Development

At the National English Coaching Committee meeting in January 2003, Jill Barker, Nova Scotia Master Course Conductor, was tasked to develop a pilot program within a four year timeframe.

In 2003, the initial program was developed and a pilot program was run at the Halifax Junior Bengal Lancers – a full-fledged riding school with adult and junior programs with certified instructors and coaches. By 2004, a draft of the Rider Level program was presented to the National English Coaching committee. Concluding the presentation the initial Rider Level program received approval as a pilot program for selected riding schools across Canada. The program was met with great enthusiasm by instructors/coaches, students, parents and evaluators.

Valuable feedback was obtained during the pilot phase and the program was revamped.

In February 2005, the National English Coaching Committee approved the program as a national program in transition until March 31, 2007.

In February 2007, Rider Level 1-8 was approved as a national program. Revisions and changes are to occur every five years thereafter.

In 2009, Rider 9 and 10 were first piloted in Halifax.

The Rider Level Program has been met with enthusiasm across the country and the number of equestrians participating grows yearly.

The 2012 revised Rider Levels reflect a number of exciting developments. The program now complements the LTED – Long Term Equestrian Development Plan that has been a joint venture between Equine Canada and Sport Canada.

Our resources continue to expand – this revision provides riders with an awareness of themselves as athletes and how to become more aware of their physical body's needs.

Whom May Evaluate English Rider Levels

Quick reference March 2014

English Rider Level 1-2

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Instructor or Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- May be evaluated by own current certified Instructor or Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- *May be evaluated by a single evaluator*.

English Rider Level 3-4

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- May be evaluated by own current certified Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- May be evaluated by current *IOB with Jump Module (if not their own students)* who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- *Note: If candidates are NOT doing the Jump Module, then a current IOB may evaluate (not their own students)*
- *May be evaluated by a single evaluator*.

English Rider Level 5

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- Evaluators may not evaluate their own students.
- *May be evaluated by a single evaluator*.

English Rider Level 6-7

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- Evaluators are approved only after they have attended two training events. One may be a classroom presentation of the levels and one event must be to shadow a Rider Level evaluation completing their own set of marking papers to the satisfaction of the Mentor Evaluator (who is a transitioned evaluator at that level). The candidate evaluator may shadow two evaluations as an option.
- Evaluators may not evaluate their own students.
- *May be evaluated by a single evaluator*.

English Rider Level 8

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Coach Level 2, Competition Coach Specialist or High Performance Coach who is trained to evaluate the rider levels.
- Evaluators are approved only after they have attended two training events. One may be a classroom presentation of the levels and one event must be to shadow a Rider Level evaluation completing their own set of marking papers to the satisfaction of the Mentor Evaluator (who is a transitioned evaluator at that level). The candidate evaluator may shadow two evaluations as an option. It is highly recommended that the evaluator be mentored by a Competition Coach Master Evaluator for this level.
- Evaluators may not evaluate their own students.
- *May be evaluated by a single evaluator*.

English Rider 9-10

- Must be an Equine Canada current certified Coach Level 3, Competition Coach Specialist or High Performance Coach, one of which to be discipline specific according to elective of candidate
- *Must be evaluated by two evaluators*

Transitioning from Old System - If an evaluator was approved in the old system to evaluate at any level, they need only be current and presented with the new paperwork in a training event to be eligible to evaluate the same levels in the new system; except where additional training is noted.

Note:

1. *All evaluators must have had a full overview of the Rider Level Program 1-10 presented to them prior to any testing. The list of approved evaluators is to be maintained in the provincial office and all evaluation organizers must use a current approved evaluator.*
2. *Please contact your Provincial Equestrian Federation/Council for additional information on clinics in your region. Failure to do so in advance of the testing date may jeopardize a candidate's results.*
3. *With each revision released, evaluators must attend a provincially approved review to establish a new provincial list of approved evaluators.*

DO NOT JEOPARDIZE A CANDIDATE'S RESULT BY NOT BEING A CURRENT APPROVED EVALUATOR, OR BY NOT USING THE MOST CURRENT TEST SHEETS, FORMS AND WRITTENS.