

1. Testing tips for upper level members

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The following message to our national (upper) level members will be included in the E-news and we wanted to share it with our regional and club leaders as well.

"Testing Tips" for National Level Members--or, thoughts about being a rater at a club level rating.

As national (upper) level members, USPC fully expects you to be able to be Examiners for most club level ratings. In fact, some of our best club-level rating reports come from those ratings conducted with at least one caring and committed recent "graduate" or current member serving as an Examiner or on an Examiner team.

However, no one should ever expect you conduct any rating without some training and coaching from a more experienced Examiner! It is important for everyone testing at the club levels (whether national level members or not) to spend time at tests with experienced Examiners before ever testing alone.

Some "tips" towards becoming the caring and competent Examiner are below. These are not all-inclusive, but are a start.

* Know the Standards. This sounds easy, but you may (or may not) be surprised at the number of club-level Examiners that do NOT know the Standards. There are many ways to be prepared, but the best way is to attend a Standards and Rating clinic within your region or a neighboring region. Standards & Ratings clinics better educate examiners and the membership about the curriculum. For example, the changes in the 2009 Standards of Proficiency (SOP) are not truly changes in the progression, but more clearly explain how to proceed through the curriculum easier and more safely. An Examiner must study the SOP's BEFORE testing it and should always review the Riding Test Expectations with the candidates just before going out into the testing arena.

* Know how to deliver "bad news." Ideally, every candidate will meet standards in every section. However, it sometimes happens that they do not. First, when concerned about a "Does Not Meet Standards" (or DNMS), always go back and compare your concerns to the Riding Test Expectations or the horse management/knowledge. Second, know that sometimes one candidate may "out-perform" the others, but that doesn't mean the others do not meet standards!

Finally, when you talk to the candidates that are having difficulty, make sure you use the words given on the Standards.

* Be capable as an instructor. A rating is not a lesson, but the teaching techniques of managing a group in the ring and so on are still necessary at a rating. If you can't teach the level comfortably do not agree to test it. Period.

* Rating Older Members. If you are one of our accomplished younger national level members, you may be asked to test members older than yourself. Please

refuse graciously! How would you feel if someone younger than you was in charge of your rating?

On the other hand, many of our adult-only Horse Masters programs are very happy to have you do their "ratings." As long as they all agree, you should do it. I guarantee you will have fun!

* Testing your own students and/or your own club members. This is such a sticky situation that we recommend you stay away from it. Never agree to test students that you know or have taught. It might put you in a bad spot having to make decisions about their level of expertise.

Some clubs, however, might be so large you truly do not know the candidates for the rating. We still recommend that you graciously decline--or, perhaps, offer to assist the Examiner or to be an Impartial Observer.

* Regional Rater Roster. Suggest to your region that the RIC keep a list of qualified examiners that can be shared between clubs. Then you can test for another club and someone else can test in yours!

* Ask for an Impartial Observer (IO). The IO (truly impartial--not the mother or coach of one of the candidates) is a great asset to the national ratings. They are not required at club ratings, but they are also a great asset there. IOs may be even more important at club level tests because the members and the parents are often not yet educated about Pony Club and how ratings work. Ask for an IO with a child that might be rating next at that level so they have an opportunity to learn the requirements of the level before their own child's testing.

* Do your homework and pack your bag. We addressed the "Know the Standards," but also read the Examiners' Guide (on the website) and review the DC guide (the ratings chapter) and check out the testing website (under Resources from USPC main site). Start a discussion group on the ning site. Don't count on the Organizer to have a chair or tape measure or clipboard or pens--bring your own!

* Tell everyone what you are going to do, are doing, and what you did. If you didn't contact the candidates or their family before the rating day, make sure you plan at least 30 minutes first thing to introduce yourself, find out about them, go over the schedule, and answer questions. Throughout the day, usually between testing sections, check with the candidates and families (and DC!) and tell them what is happening next.

At the end of the day, make sure you have written all your comments (in a readable format) on the test sheets and you signed the certificates for the DC. Take the time to talk to each candidate about their day--even if they passed!

Finally, check with the DC or organizer before you go to make sure they have everything they need from you.

* Get feedback. The end of the day is a good time to ask for some candid feedback (from the IO, other Examiners, the DC, etc) about how YOU performed as an Examiner. This takes guts, because no one likes the chance of hearing "bad"

things about themselves. However, it is far better to hear it and learn from it right away than to hear about it later.

(You could also call one or two days later and check in the DC or the organizer for more feedback.)

Also, send your old-fashioned thank you notes to anyone who hosted you (a meal or a place to stay). Politeness is something people remember!

As you can see, it is very important that we all proceed with logic and ethics when testing at any level.

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