

American Vaulting Association

2013

**GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL & REGIONAL
HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY TESTING**

This Guide is intended to assist AVA Clubs & Regions in the conduct of safe and impartial Horsemanship Proficiency Testing (HP1, HP2, & HP3). Direct any questions to the current Horsemanship Program Secretary.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	p. 2
II.	MISSION STATEMENT & PHILOSOPHY.....	p. 2
III.	PURPOSE OF HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY EXAMS.....	p. 3
IV.	EXAM GUIDELINES.....	p. 3
V.	ORGANIZERS RESPONSIBILITIES.....	p. 6
VI.	EXAMINERS RESPONSIBILITIES.....	p. 8
VII.	CANDIDATES RESPONSIBILITIES.....	p. 10
VIII.	TEST SITE REQUIREMENTS.....	p. 10
IX.	RECOMMENDED TIME FRAMES FOR TESTING.....	p. 11
X.	SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TESTING.....	p. 11

I.

INTRODUCTION

The American Vaulting Association aspires to expand the recognition and accessibility of equestrian vaulting throughout the U.S. To do this the AVA is constantly growing, learning, and teaching with a variety of educational opportunities for their members and for the general public.

The AVA Horsemanship Program is specifically designed to provide opportunities & recognition for ***“horsemanship”*** both individually & at a club level; which will contribute to the development of safe, responsible, well educated future horse owners, riders, trainers, lungers, & vaulting coaches.

The AVA HP Standards of Proficiency describe the skills and knowledge required for each Level of the Horsemanship Program and covers what may be included in the Proficiency Examination content. The Standards (SOP's) are the core of the horsemanship curriculum and they provide an educational outline; ***a progression of levels that every member can and should pursue at their own individual pace.***

II.

MISSION STATEMENT & PHILOSOPHY

Equestrian vaulting is many things including a competitive sport, a fun and challenging recreational activity, and a fantastic therapeutic opportunity to work with horses.

To keep this sport/horse activity enjoyable and safe GOOD HORSEMANSHIP is a necessity. Horsemanship is the ability of a person to care for and handle, ride, lunge, or train a horse safely. Good horsemanship positively impacts the welfare and health of the horse as well as everyone who interacts with the horse.

The goal of this program is that not only can our members vault with perfect harmony and expertise but that they are also skilled in the care of horses and equipment developing responsibility, confidence, communication skills, and an understanding of the functions and the partnership between horses and equestrians.

The gymnastic and physical skills developed by equestrian vaulting paired with good horsemanship practices creates an invaluable foundation for every person aspiring to be an equestrian; with these skills they will be fully capable of pursuing any horse sport or horse inspired dream they are passionate about.

III. PURPOSE OF HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY EXAMS

The purpose of a Horsemanship Proficiency exam is *“to measure and identify an individual member’s current skill level in a positive, educational testing experience”* and to recognize achievement with Certificates of Proficiency and Horsemanship Patches. The exam should be administered by a well qualified and prepared examiner in a safe and appropriate environment that encourages the candidates to “show off” their skills and knowledge.

IV. EXAM GUIDELINES

SECTION 1. SELECTION OF THE HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY EXAM ORGANIZER

- a. The Head Coach is responsible for selecting the exam organizer and approving all of the officials for a local club examination & the Regional Supervisor is responsible for selecting the exam organizer and approving all of the officials selected if the exam is organized by the Region.
- b. The AVA Vice President of Education is responsible for selecting the exam organizer and approving all of the officials for a nationally organized examination.

SECTION 2. SCHEDULING HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY EXAMS

- a. Advanced scheduling of proficiency examinations is important to the overall success of the Horsemanship Program. It allows members to set their goal to achieve a targeted level within a specific time frame; and makes it easier to schedule and plan for.
- b. Clubs are encouraged to plan & announce *“local examinations”* at Regional Meetings at least 3 months in advance to the desired date and to post the selected dates on the Region’s Web Page located on the AVA website.
- c. Regions are encouraged to announce *“regional examinations”* at the AVA Annual Conference for the upcoming year and to post the selected dates on the Region’s Web Page located on the AVA website.
- d. *“National examinations”* will be announced at the AVA Annual Conference and posted on the AVA Calendar on the AVA website. To facilitate availability national exams may be planned in conjunction with existing national events such as the AVA Annual Conference and/or AVA National Championships.
- e. It is recommended that the testing site and examiners/officials be selected at least 60 days prior to the examination date or even earlier if possible.
- f. Plan on securing one examiner for every four to five candidates and clearly designate a head examiner.

- g. The Exam Organizer is required to notify the Horsemanship Secretary by email of a Horsemanship Proficiency Exam. We recommend this be done 30 days prior to the testing and the following information is recommended to include in your notification: the testing date and time as well as including listing of the candidates, horses, examiners & officials selected, and the location/test site.
- h. At the same time; again we recommend 30 days prior to the testing date a general schedule of events should be provided to all of the officials & candidates including the location, directions to the facilities, and the start time for the exam briefing.
- i. The examination should begin with a briefing which should include but is not limited to facility issues, introduction of the Examiners and Impartial Observer if present, the general schedule and flow of events for the day, where candidate's support teams can watch without interfering with the examination, and any other pertinent information.

SECTION 3. COLLECTION & PAYMENT OF HORSEMANSHIP EXAMINATION FEES

- a. Each Club or individual candidate must submit an online application located on the Horsemanship page of the AVA Website. The application will generate an invoice that can be paid online or a check sent to the National Office. Examination Fee is \$15 per Exam for Levels 1 &/or 2.
- b. A Club or candidate may also submit a printed application with a \$15 examination fee to the Exam Organizer on site at the beginning of the day for the examination. The Exam Organizer will need to send in any applications received with payment within 14 days of the exam date along with the copies of all the examination sheets to the AVA Horsemanship Secretary.
- c. Note patches will only be sent for the Applications received 30 days prior to the exam date. Additional patches will be sent to the Exam Organizer after the Examination has been completed and processed by the AVA Horsemanship Secretary.
- d. Individual Fees will NOT be refunded or credited but may be transferred to another vaulter in the same club for an Exam on the same date only.
- e. A \$100 fine will be imposed on the host Club or Region if copies of the exams and any unused patches for the examination are not returned within the allotted 14 days after the exam date.
- f. An Examiner may waive compensation but it should always be offered in a clear contract/agreement at least 30 days prior to the exam date.
- g. Compensation for the Examiner is at the discretion of the Organizer. Reimbursement for all travel expenses and provision of appropriate meals during the testing period are also the responsibility of the exam organizer and should be included in the contract/agreement.

SECTION 4. SELECTING EXAMINERS

- a. The following qualifications are highly recommended & desired when selecting an examiner:
 - i. a knowledgeable equestrian who has attended/participated in an AVA Horsemanship Program Standards of Proficiency Clinic in the last 2 years, and/or
 - ii. a knowledgeable equestrian who has received training with an experienced AVA Horsemanship Examiner, as well as scribing for or shadowing an experienced Examiner at one or more Horsemanship Proficiency Examinations, and/or
 - iii. a C-3 or higher rated Pony Clubber ideally who has been involved in Pony Club Ratings and have been familiarized with the AVA Horsemanship Standards are also qualified to be Examiners, and/or
 - iv. a British Horse Society member certified in Stage 3 or 4 or as an assistant instructor or instructor and have been familiarized with the AVA Horsemanship Standards are also qualified to be Examiners, and/or
 - v. a CHA Level 3 or 4 certified instructor in English or Western and have been familiarized with the AVA Horsemanship Standards are also qualified to be Examiners.
 - vi. a local equestrian professional who has Excellent horsemanship practices can be used to test levels 1 & 2.
- b. It is strongly recommended to choose a knowledgeable and qualified Examiner from the local Region or a neighboring club, & NOT someone from within your own club or who works with your vaulters on a regular basis.
- c. Head Coaches are encouraged to network with other Head Coaches and Regional Supervisors in the surrounding area to find the best examiners.
- d. Provide or make sure Examiners have the current HP Standards of Proficiency, Test Sheets for each Level they will be testing, & these Guidelines to review carefully as they prepare for the examination. The Organizer should also discuss/ask how the Examiner interprets specific skills or requirements to ensure that everyone is on the “same page” as candidates prepare for the examination.
- e. The Organizer must ensure that the Examiner selected is capable of recognizing when a candidate DOES NOT meet the Standards and is capable of telling the candidate when they DO NOT meet the standards including WHY in a clear and encouraging manner. The candidate’s safety as well as the integrity of the AVA Horsemanship Program are compromised if the Examiner is not able to fulfill this responsibility.

- f. Treat Examiners with respect and consideration providing them with a quiet place to eat lunch and for filling in and making comments on test sheets.
- g. Discuss with the Examiner any local conditions of which they need to be aware.
- h. Inform the Examiner if any candidate has a learning, physical or other disability that has been disclosed to the Organizer with the parents or legal guardians written consent.
- i. When using a non-adult Upper Level Vaulters as an Examiner for the HP 1 or HP 2 Level Examinations they must have earned the Horsemanship Level 4 Proficiency Certification and there should be an appropriate age difference between the Examiner and the candidates; 3 or more years is recommended.
- j. A team of Examiners is highly beneficial for any group of 5 or more candidates. Teams of examiners may split the candidates into smaller groups to help facilitate the testing process.
- k. It is very important for the Organizer and/or Impartial Observer to be present during all sections of the examination providing visible support and assistance during the conduct of the test. An individual Examiner, whether adult or junior, should never be left alone with the candidates during the testing process to help ensure and witness the impartiality of the exam.

SECTION 5. CONDUCTING THE HORSEMANSHIP PROFICIENCY EXAM

- a. All members must take each Horsemanship Proficiency Level Test and pass ALL sections in order to be awarded the Certificate of Proficiency at that level and each Level must be successfully achieved before progressing forward and testing for the next higher Level.
- b. Oral examination and/or demonstration will be used to test the candidate's skills and knowledge for all sections of the Horsemanship Proficiency Exam. Written tests are NOT allowed; however, at the examiner's discretion a candidate may use their own drawing and/or writing to supplement their answers during the discussion periods of the test.
- c. Sharing of horses is allowed. A ratio of 5 or fewer vaulters per horse is recommended for HP1 & HP2 exams. At the HP3 and higher levels both riding and lunging of the horse are evaluated so a 1 to 1 ratio is recommended and no more than 2 candidates should plan on sharing a horse.
- d. The lower level horsemanship proficiency exams (HP1 & HP 2) should be a positive experience with teaching/learning encouraged if possible without becoming a "lesson". "Failure" at these levels is counterproductive to building confidence in our young members so please ensure that the candidates have been observed achieving the minimum standards and come **over-prepared** so that they not only meet standards they exceed the standards.

- e. The HP 1 & HP 2 Level Proficiency exams may be taken at the same time in a single examination; all other Levels must be taken individually in consecutive order at separate examinations.
- f. Whenever possible, the test should be completed in one day. If it is necessary to conduct the examination over more than one day due to unforeseen circumstances such as weather or facility conditions all requirements must be completed with 30 days of the initial test date.
- g. Upon completion of the examination the candidate's performance will be evaluated and they may not meet the standards of proficiency, meet the standards of proficiency, receive commendation for exceeding the standards of proficiency in several sections, or receive honors for exceeding the standards of proficiency in numerous sections.
- h. The candidates who meet the standards of proficiency will be presented with a certificate of proficiency and a badge/patch to display their accomplishment. In addition candidates that receive honors will be recognized in the National Awards Ceremony at the AVA Annual Convention.
- i. At subsequent examinations candidates are responsible for and can be tested on requirements of any previous level achieved.
- j. Be sure that examiners, candidates, parents, and other spectators understand that the candidates will not be allowed any unauthorized assistance, misuse of equipment, carelessness while handling the horse, or unsportsmanlike behavior. Any of these actions may result in disqualification and dismissal from the examination.
- k. Unauthorized assistance includes but is not limited to any individual providing answers/coaching to candidates while they are in an oral session or assistance/coaching while performing required skills for the examiner. If in doubt whether an action is or is not unauthorized at any time during the examination consult with the Exam Organizer or Impartial Observer and they will assist in the matter by conferring with the Examiner.
- l. Plan to provide lunch and refreshments for the Examiners and other officials; and make sure there is ample water available for candidates and their horses. Inform parents of meal arrangements for candidates prior to the examination.
- m. Make sure after the test that the land owner, examiners, and anyone else involved are thanked and the property is left in the condition it was found in.

V.

ORGANIZERS RESPONSIBILITIES

A Head Coach, Regional Supervisor, and/or an Assistant Coach or Other Adult designated by the Head Coach or Regional Supervisor may act as a Horsemanship Proficiency Exam Organizer.

An Organizer's responsibilities include:

1. Facilitating administration of the exam on site ensuring each candidate is fairly and impartially tested on all sections of the test sheet as well as the proper conduct of the AVA members/candidates and of any exam observers. And for safety purposes must know of the nearest Emergency Medical Facility and have a complete list of emergency phone numbers for the testing site.
2. Determining that an instructional program and/or educational opportunities based on the AVA Horsemanship Program Standards of Proficiency are available to their members. Candidates must have had the opportunity to learn all of the elements of the Level of the Horsemanship Program they are testing for; however, instruction DOES NOT have to be limited by and solely cover materials in the Standards.
3. Evaluating a member's readiness to take the horsemanship proficiency exam of their choice. Qualified instructors, older vaulters who have helped, or other qualified adults can help determine the candidate's readiness. Remember a member who is ready to demonstrate a new Level of Horsemanship MUST be able to perform ALL of the requirements for that exam.
4. The AVA Horsemanship Programs recommends at least 2 examination opportunities open to all clubs are offered every year within each Region.

Examinations may be hosted by a Club with the approval and invitation of the Head Coach or at a regionally organized event with the approval and invitation of the Regional Supervisor (for example a testing may be offered at the Regional Championships).

5. Selecting responsible & qualified examiners. (See IV. Exam Guidelines Section 4. Selecting Examiners)

6. Although many head coaches or club instructors may be qualified to conduct the exam themselves for their club the AVA Horsemanship Program strongly recommends against this practice in order to maintain a fair and impartial testing and to avoid potential conflicts of interest.
7. It is recommended to have a ration of 1 Examiner to every 3 to 4 candidates and it is encouraged to increase the ratio to 1 to 2 candidates per examiner if they are very young.
8. Selecting & contracting a site that is appropriate for the requirements of the horsemanship proficiency level and skills being tested; i.e. an adequate space enclosed area for in hand work, lunging areas when needed, etc. Refer to the SOP's for specific requirements needed to demonstrate all skills & knowledge for a specific Level.
9. Selecting an Impartial Observer. An Impartial Observer is recommended NOT REQUIRED for each examination.
10. When selecting an Impartial Observer they MUST have NO EXISTING RELATIONSHIP with any of the candidates. If possible individuals who have experience with mediation or who are open and/or are a "good 'people' person" make excellent Impartial Observers.
11. The Impartial Observer serves as a liaison and facilitates communication between examiners, organizers, candidates, & their support team (i.e. parents, coaches, and friends). They DO NOT make any decisions with regards to the proficiency examination.
12. Be ready to provide a signed AVA Horsemanship Proficiency Certificate and Horsemanship Patch in a formal ceremony at the end of the day recognizing the member's accomplishment of their new horsemanship level.

13. Examiners signatures should be on the test sheet and certificate prior to their departure.
14. Copies of the actual exam sheets and any unused patches must be submitted to the AVA Horsemanship Program Secretary within 14 days.

VI. EXAMINERS RESPONSIBILITIES

Examiners must read and be knowledgeable of the current Standards of Horsemanship Proficiency and test sheets for the levels being examined, the content of these guidelines, and be familiar with the materials on the recommended reading list.

An Examiner's responsibilities include:

1. The examiner must be capable of knowing what meets Standards and what does not; be able to encourage improvement and know how to tell the candidate when they do not meet standards, clearly explaining why. There is a range from SATISFACTORY (meets standards) to EXCELLENT (exceeds standards) and anyone within this range should pass.
2. Attendance whenever possible to an AVA Horsemanship Standards Clinic is highly recommended for HP1 & HP2. HP3 and higher attendance is **REQUIRED**.
3. The Examiner should request details about the facility and equipment available prior to the day of the examination. The Examiner must ensure they have all the necessary equipment for the levels being tested, a copy of the AVA Horsemanship Standards of Proficiency, and the correct Test Sheets with them.
4. The Examiner should inquire if any candidates have learning or physical disabilities. If a disability exists that limits the performance of the candidate but they can safely demonstrate the skills and meet the requirements of the Standards they should pass the test.
5. Testing can be very stressful for candidates, their family and supporters.

6. Examiners should empathize with the candidates and be aware of their diverse backgrounds and personalities encouraging each candidate with a positive, educational tone during the examination.
7. Outgoing, confident candidates should not be allowed to intimidate or overpower those that are less confident or shy. Make sure to control discussions so that very shy candidates have the opportunity to share/tell what they know without the more outgoing candidate providing all of the obvious/easy answers, leaving the shyer child with no response or few alternative answers.
8. Whenever possible it is preferable to have all the candidates ride together or show their skills in a group while all 2 or 3 examiners work together testing the candidates. The Examiners should confer on each of the candidate's performance and discuss their relative success bringing their own observations and unique analysis to the discussion. This approach makes it very clear to the candidates and their families that each candidate's performance is solely being judged against the Standards.
9. Ensure the testing atmosphere does not turn into a competition between candidates instead encouraging a sense of teamwork and support.
10. The Examiner should never put the candidate into a position to have to exceed Standards in order to answer a question. A candidate is NEVER required to ever exceed the Standards. Examiners may suggest a particular exercise as an explanation or aid to help the candidate perform a skill up to the Standards level or better; but only the requirements listed on the test sheet may be tested.
11. Examiners must complete the Test Sheets and make clear written comments; especially in the sections where the candidates did not meet the Standards prior to leaving the test site and sign the completed tests as well as all certificates that have been earned that day. All comments should be positive and should be encouraging including suggestions for correcting any problems that were noted during the examination.

12. Candidates must be notified individually of the testing results in a quiet, private area in order to avoid any uncomfortable situations between candidates, parents, and examiners. In addition to continuous feedback during the exam, a complete critique with each candidate including the results of the examination should be given at the end of the day with parents invited to listen if the candidate agrees and requests their presence.
13. Examiners should dress appropriately, in clean professional riding attire or in a pair of khakis or slacks with a collared shirt with sleeves and a belt as well as APPROPRIATE FOOTWEAR to be worn around horses.

VII. CANDIDATES RESPONSIBILITIES

Candidates and their coaches need to read and be knowledgeable of the current Standards of Horsemanship Proficiency and test sheets for the levels being examined, as well as the content of these guidelines, and should utilize the materials on the recommended reading list to help them be fully prepared for their examination.

A Candidate's responsibilities include:

1. Candidates should carefully read the SOP's as well as the corresponding test sheet to determine what equipment they will need to demonstrate all the skills and knowledge i.e. their own grooming tools, wrapping supplies, lunge line, in hand whip, etc.
2. Candidates should be dressed appropriately with SAFE FOOTWEAR to be worn around horses as dictated in the Standards of Proficiency.
3. For the HP 3 Level only an ASTM/SEI approved riding helmet and tack correctly fitted and clean to be used on own mount for riding section is also required.
4. It is also highly recommended that each candidate makes sure to bring plenty of water, sunscreen, personal effects and a simple first aid kit as well as their favorite healthy snack/drink.

5. A candidate is ready to test when they have mastered every skill and have a thorough knowledge of every topic. 9 times out of 10 they can meet the standards for each section. Remember it is better to come over prepared and enjoy showing off what you know and can do rather than coming into an examination worrying whether or not you will be able to complete a section.

VIII. TEST SITE REQUIREMENTS

Test site requirements are dictated by the requirements of the Standards of Proficiency (SOP's) and the corresponding Test Sheets being used in the examination. Read the SOP's and test sheets carefully to determine what space requirements are needed as well as what equipment will be necessary.

IX. RECOMMENDED TIME FRAMES FOR TESTING

HP Level 1 Proficiency Exam: 1-2 hours oral sessions & up to 1 hour for skill demonstrations.

HP Level 2 Proficiency Exam: 1-2 hours oral sessions & up to 1 hour for skill demonstrations.

HP Level 3 Proficiency Exam: 1 ½ -2 ½ hours oral sessions & up to 2 ½ hours for skill demonstrations & riding.

X. SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TESTING

Strong horsemanship programs at a local level will give our members great opportunities and preparation so that as candidates they will not only succeed and pass their horsemanship proficiency exam but they will exceed standards and demonstrate a level of excellence.

There are numerous ways for Clubs/Regions to offer demonstrations as well as clinics, activities, and Q/A sessions on different horsemanship topics. Clubs can also get together and hold joint or regional clinics with special guest speakers/demonstrators.

It is highly recommended between 60 days prior and the date of the examination to hold a "mock examination" given by a coach or other qualified adult that knows the candidates very well and can give them advice on how to present their skills and

knowledge as well as to evaluate and provide feedback for what the candidates should spend more time on preparing.

And finally increased opportunities to test their Horsemanship Proficiency means increased possibilities for recognizing the success and growth of your clubs members. The goal of the AVA Horsemanship Program is to encourage everyone to learn more about horse care and horsemanship. *And GOOD HORSEMANSHIP is the key to HAPPY, HEALTHY, & SAFE RELATIONSHIPS between HORSES and their PEOPLE.*

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS ARISE; IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE YOU CAN ASK FOR HELP. PLEASE CONTACT THE CURRENT VP OF EDUCATION OR THE HORSEMANSHIP PROGRAM SECRETARY; THEIR CONTACT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE AVA WEBSITE www.americanvaulting.org AND THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT THIS PROGRAM AND WOULD LOVE TO HELP YOU.