



### Colorado State University 4-H Horse Advancement Level Program Policy Guidelines & Information for Agents, Raters, & Leaders

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*\*Please note that the following are recommendations and guidelines from the Colorado State 4-H Horse Advisory Committee (HAC), however, individual County rules and regulations may vary.*

*A county may elect to impose more stringent rules than the state, however a county may not have rules that are less stringent than the current state rules.*

#### **Background of the Program:**

The Advancement Levels program is a logical step-by-step guide to teach youth horsemanship and horse care. The Advancement Level chapter in the 4-H Horse Member's Manual serves as a leader's and member's guide. This chapter explains the basics of the Level's program.

Safety and proper basics are stressed throughout the Levels program. The skills learned in the beginning levels are reflected in properly mastering the more advanced levels. A solid and consistent foundation is extremely important.

It should be recognized that not every youth will want to master all levels. However, it should be realized that the first two levels teach the basics of horse safety, care and riding for general pleasure and performance. It is therefore encouraged that all members participate in at least Levels I and II. Level III is for the serious horse person and Level IV is for the youth that is interested in a career in the equine industry or is very serious about his/her riding and training.

#### **Purpose:**

The Advancement Level program is a teaching guide which combines many aspects of horsemanship and horse care.

The 4-H levels program is designed to apply to Western, Working Ranch Horse and all disciplines within the English division (Hunter Seat, Saddle Seat and Dressage Seat).

#### **Reference materials for the Advancement Level program include:**

1. 4-H Horse Project Members Manual (MA1500)
2. Colorado State 4-H Horse Rule Book (LA1500)
3. The Horse (2nd edition), by Evans, Borton, Hintz and Van Vleck
4. United States Equestrian Federation Rulebook, usef.org

## Equine Disciplines available through the Colorado 4-H Horse Program:

### 1. English:

- Level I - Novice
- Level II - Intermediate
  - Hunter Seat:
    - Level III - Performer
    - Level IV - Horsemaster
  - Dressage Seat:
    - Level III - Performer
    - Level IV - Horsemaster
  - Saddle Seat:
    - Level III - Performer
    - Level IV - Horsemaster

### 2. Western:

- Level I - Novice
- Level II - Intermediate
- Level III - Performer
- Level IV - Horsemaster

### 3. Working Ranch Horse:

- Level I - Novice
- Level II - Intermediate
- Level III - Performer
- Level IV - Horsemaster

### 4. Showmanship: Levels I, II, III & IV

Showmanship Levels were designed for the 4-H Horse member that is not able to ride for whatever reason, or for members who really enjoy Showmanship. Showmanship rating tests are available for each level and may be administered with the levels riding tests or separately from them. The showmanship levels test is available on the equine extension website.

- Levels I through IV

\*Please note Showmanship cards are not mandatory for State Fair.

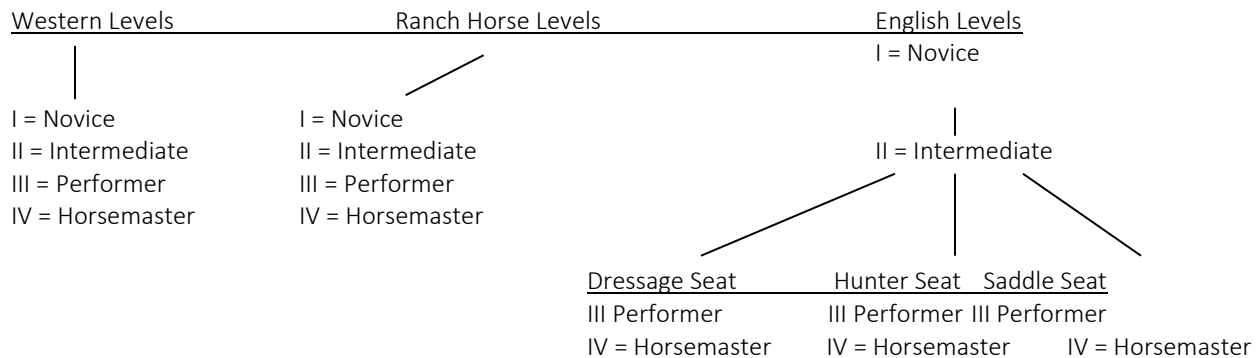
## Process for members to advance through the Levels Program:

1. Complete and pass the written test(s) in chronological order (I, II, III & IV).
2. Complete and pass the riding test(s) in chronological order.

Every member must begin with Level I in any discipline. In other words, a member cannot begin at Level III western even though they “ride really, really good”.

Members may progress through all disciplines if so desired, however, a member cannot laterally move across the levels.

For example- A member completes English I & II, Hunter Seat III, and then wants to test for Dressage Seat IV. In order to test for Dressage Seat IV, the rider must have completed English I & II, and then Dressage Seat III before they can test for Dressage Seat IV.



## Levels Testing:

Standardized written and riding tests have been developed for all Levels and copies should be on file at each Extension Office.

Members may take written and/or riding tests as many times as necessary to advance. Test administrators may wish to rotate between Test A and Test B at Levels I and II, if a member must take the written test a second or third time.

Please note that the length of time completed written and riding tests are kept on file as well as the method of storing and disposing of tests is up to the discretion of the local Extension Office.

Each Level requires the member to pass the written and riding test. A member must pass the written test with a score of 80% or better. The member must also pass the riding test with the 80% or better on each of the riding test maneuvers and requirements.

Members will use their ID'd project horse for Levels testing. See “*Hardship Definitions*” for more details.

**Written tests:**

1. Agents and/or appointed assistants (Horse Leaders) by the Extension Office administer and grade the written tests.
  - a. The Level I Written test may be administered outside of the County Extension office under the strict guidelines of the Agent/ Extension Office.
  - b. Levels II, III & IV written tests must be administered under Extension Personnel supervision. Tests are not permitted to leave the Extension Office.
2. Please note that the written tests are not discipline specific and are based on broad range, general equine knowledge.
  - a. There are four written tests; Levels I, II, III & IV, with each level progressively requiring more knowledge of the horse project.
3. The HAC recommends that written tests be taken and passed prior to the administration of the riding test, however, it is not mandatory and the riding test may be given prior to the written test, at all levels.
  - a. It should be noted that each County may have separate rules regarding this matter so be sure to inquire with your County Office.
  - b. *Some counties allow a member to re-take a failed written test as soon as the next business day while others require a 48 hour hold. The HAC recommends a 48 test holding period.*
4. Members are encouraged to review their tests after the examination, but are not permitted to retain a copy. All test records will be kept at the Extension office.
5. The written test for each Level is identical for English, Western, and Ranch Horse. Therefore, it is not necessary for the 4-H member to retake the written test once he/she has passed it for a certain Level.
6. Written Test Study guides are available online at:  
[http://www.colorado4h.org/project\\_resources/clover\\_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php](http://www.colorado4h.org/project_resources/clover_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php)

### Riding Tests:

1. Agents (preferably those with a confident working knowledge of equestrian activities) and Leaders are permitted to test members for Level I riding tests.
2. Riding tests levels II, III & IV must be administered by a HAC state certified rater.
  - a. Testing fees should not exceed \$15.00 per test & appropriate government mileage rates.
3. The HAC highly recommends that any Level II tests are administered by a Rater NOT associated with the member's club or with a rater who has no personal or professional contact with the member being rated.
4. The HAC highly recommends that any Level III & IV tests be administered by a rater from outside of the member's county.
  - a. An oral interview is part of the riding test for Level III & IV.
    - i. It is conducted before or after the riding test.
    - ii. ALL oral questions on the level III and IV tests should be administered and the member should score a minimum of 80% on each item.
    - iii. Reminder, the oral questions are available on the CSU 4-H Equine Extension website, as they are part of the riding test and may be studied ahead of the time the member is tested.
    - iv. If the member passes the riding test but not the interview, he/she will not receive a passing score and must reschedule the oral interview.
  - b. The rater will submit a copy of the riding test to the member's local Extension office, where upon the member and/or the member's club leader may request to have a copy for the records as well.
5. \*Riding tests are accessible through each Extension Office or online at:  
[http://www.colorado4h.org/project\\_resources/clover\\_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php](http://www.colorado4h.org/project_resources/clover_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php)

## Rater Certification Process:

### 1. Attend a Rater Training:

Raters need to complete a HAC sanctioned Rater Training and maintain certification every five years to administer/ rate Level II, III & IV riding tests.

- a. You must be certified in each discipline you choose to rate in.
- b. Colorado 4-H Horse Leaders are approved to administer/ rate Level I riding tests at the pleasure of the County Agent, who will evaluate the leader's qualifications to administer the test(s).
- c. Level III & IV Raters in specific disciplines may be approved on a case by case basis by the State Extension Specialist for re-certification.
- d. Certification last for 5 years. It is the Rater's responsibility to maintain current certification status.

### 2. Levels III & IV:

- a. After completion of a training and having the knowledge base to rate Levels III & IV, an individual must then shadow a veteran certified Rater. To "Shadow" means to accompany a certified Rater as they rate/ evaluate a 4-H member during a Levels test.
  - i. The "Shadower" will also critique the member as if they were performing the evaluation, completing all scoring and commenting appropriately on the riders skills.
- b. The shadowing individual's test will be compared to the certified Rater's test for evaluation of knowledge and appropriateness of comments.
- c. In order to become certified in Levels III & IV for each discipline, the Shadower must receive a positive evaluation from the Rater and submit a completed Shadow form to the HAC Levels Chairperson.
  - i. \*Shadow forms are available upon request from the HAC Levels Chairperson.
  - ii. Your name will then be listed on the state website with your current certification levels and disciplines.
- d. It will be up to the person needing to shadow to find and contact a certified rater and ask permission to shadow.

### 3. Certification cards are available upon request to all certified Raters with their current Disciplines & Levels, however, it is not mandatory to have them.

## Expectations of Raters during testing situations:

\* For Agent and Leader FYI, so you know what is expected of the member and the Rater during the testing process. (Excerpted from the "Protocols for Raters")

1. When possible, level testing should be done in a different arena than the one a member usually rides in.
2. Youth should be in appropriate attire while testing. When you are asked to rate, you may want to remind the person requesting your services of this expectation. If a child shows up without proper attire, inform them as soon as possible so they can change or make another appointment. Hat or helmet, hair secured neatly, clean long sleeved shirt, clean pants or breeches and boots suitable to the discipline being tested are expected.
3. Since we expect youth to test in appropriate attire, we also ask that raters show up to test in appropriate attire for a horse environment.
4. When testing, the rater should come prepared with copies of the tests you will be giving and any other materials you may require (tape measure, working ranch horse items, jumps etc.) If you do not have these items, be sure to inform the person requesting your services that these items will be needed. Remember, you are the expert on level testing in these situations.
5. Try to stay as positive as possible. Youth are always nervous in a testing situation, do what you can to help them feel comfortable. Only ask the rider to perform the maneuvers listed on the testing sheet. They may be asked in any order. If they are having trouble, skip the maneuver and come back to it later. Youth are typically given several chances to complete a maneuver successfully, unless it is obvious they do not know how to ask their horse for the maneuver. A member should not be given an unlimited amount of time to complete a maneuver they are having trouble with. ***A level test should last no more than an hour.***
7. Ask the oral questions that are on the level III & IV riding tests before or after the riding portion of the test. Do not ask other questions during the testing. Youth are being tested on their riding ability at this time, not on their horse knowledge.
8. Do not touch a child or their horse during testing.
9. Remember, the Rater is there to find out what the member knows, not to teach them how to ride or perform specific maneuvers. If they don't know how to do the maneuver, rank them below an eight for that maneuver and move on.
10. If a member is obviously failing a test and is becoming frustrated, the rater may want to ask the member if they would like to continue the test or not. They have paid you to test completely, so if they would like to continue, rank them accordingly. Even if they are

already failing, completion will give them a better view of everything they need to work on before trying again.

11. Numeric Scoring:
  - If any maneuver is scored below an 8, the member must retest.
  - If they cannot complete it at all, give them a 0 score, half complete a score of 5 and if perfect, a score of 10.
  - A score of 8 would be given to a member that successfully completes the maneuver, but either has to try a few times or had mild problems completing it.
12. After the test is complete, take the time to tell the member how they did on each maneuver and why they scored as they did - in private. If a parent is present, it is helpful to go over a failing test with them, so they are aware of what their child needs to work on before retesting.
13. Submit the test to the member's Extension Office, as soon as possible but certainly within one week.
14. It is highly suggested that Raters make and keep a copy of all tests administered for their own records.



## **How to find Certified Raters to test your 4-H members:**

1. The CSU Extension 4-H Youth Development website hosts the list of certified raters by discipline.
  - a. Find the current list of Raters online at:  
[http://www.colorado4h.org/project\\_resources/clover\\_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php](http://www.colorado4h.org/project_resources/clover_guide/psg-livestock/horse/horse-levels-testing.php)
2. Talk to other Horse Leaders to see who they recommend.
3. Talk to neighboring Counties to see which Raters they have used and recommend.
4. Carefully select Raters for their area of expertise. Do not expect a person to rate all disciplines and Levels.

## **State 4-H Horse Show**

All members wishing to participate at the State 4-H Horse Show must have passed the written and riding tests for Advancement Level II prior to State Show entry deadline.

Members wishing to show at State Fair should always check the current Colorado State Fair Premium Book for the current rules and requirements.

## **Awards & Recognition:**

It is recommended that incentives are given to members as they take the time and effort to advance through the Levels Program. The Levels program is a rare opportunity for the member to be successful in a non-competitive format. Not all members will win horse shows, but any member who has the desire and ambition, can reach success in the Levels program. It is the HAC's hope that youth are rewarded for their hard work and dedication. Reward systems are up to County preferences.

## Hardship Definitions for Level Testing on a non 4-H ID'd horse

The 4-H program is about youth development. With this in mind, the intent of permitting a youth to use a substitute horse, is to allow youth an opportunity to still pursue excellence, knowledge and higher horsemanship skills, even when their project horse is not useable.

Criteria that must be met for a 4-H Member to be eligible for substituting a horse for the purpose of taking an advancement level test:

- 4-H member must be 16 years or older.
- Substitution is only an option for an individual wishing to pass level IV, regardless of discipline.
- A member's horse must have had training close to being able to pass level IV, prior to the death or injury of the horse. A 4-H leader or parent must be willing to validate this.
- The 4-H member must provide a veterinarian's statement on the physical inability of the horse to perform the required maneuvers, injury acquired or death certificate for the horse.
- All aspects of the level test must be passed with the same standards as if it were the member's own horse being used. The owner of the horse may not assist the member in any manner during the level test. It is recommended that the member practice with the substitute horse on several occasions, prior to taking the level test.

## Colorado Extension Agent/Parent/Member Horse Levels FAQ's

### 1. How do I get kids tested?

It is very important that Leaders and Parents discuss any plans for Level certifications with their County Agent. Everyone needs to be on the same page.

✿ **Group testing**- Counties or Clubs can host a "Level Testing Day" where a date is set and Rater(s) are brought in to go through all the kids wanting to test.

✿ **Individual Testing**- Contact an HAC approved Rater from the list on the CSU Equine Extension website to set up a private testing time.

### 2. Agent: "In reference to Levels Exams, can I simply record the scores, levels and names in a spreadsheet and toss out the physical tests? Or do I need to keep those as reference?"

Please note- Each Extension Office may have different policies in regards to keeping records on 4-H members.

It is recommended that Extension Offices keep hardcopies of all tests while the member is still age eligible for 4-H enrollment.

Elimination of records would be advisable only after the member has graduated and/ or aged out of the program. This protects your office, in the event a member was inactive for a period of time in the middle of their 4-H career but decides to come back to 4-H later on.

OR

Another option would be to eliminate the records of members who have been "inactive" for two/three years.

### 3. What if members have changed counties? If they aren't in our system, is it okay to assume they don't need their scores, if they haven't asked for them to be sent over?

Probably not. If you know the county they have moved to, you can forward their records to that Office. If that's not the case, it is recommended that the office keeps the records on hand for 2/3 years, in the event the member asks for them later.

4. **We want to have a rater training, can you explain the steps? Cost, Locations, State trainers, needs, etc.**

✿ Visit the CSU Extension 4-H Youth Development website to download an application or directly contact the HAC Levels Chairperson to have one sent to you.

✿ The application outlines the requirements needed to host a successful Rater Training:

▪ Basic requirements:

- ✓ Arena (indoor for inclement weather seasons)
- ✓ Classroom for PowerPoint presentations
- ✓ Lodging for raters if needed
- ✓ Cattle and a cattle appropriate facility (if requesting a Working Ranch Horse training), and Poles/ Standards for Jumps in the Hunter Seat tests.
- ✓ 4-H members to ride the tests. If no current 4-H members are available to take the levels and disciplines of the tests being administered, it is permissible to bring in demonstration riders to perform the tests.

5. **What are the recommendations for members that need assistance taking the written portion of tests? Are only certain people allowed to help them? What are your/State Horse Committees' thoughts or rules?**

The Colorado State 4-H program does not discriminate against anyone.

For non-readers, a reader may be provided. That reader may not make any additional comments during the written test.

For those members with a physical disability, someone may be appointed to mark the test answers and/or write answers on the test sheet. Again, that person may not render any assistance to the member being tested.

The HAC recommends anyone assisting a youth with testing not be associated with that member or their club and should be an adult.

6. **Can our County Office/ Fair Board/ Horse Committee create rules that go 'above and beyond' the rules created by the State?**

Yes. However, rules may not be less stringent than the current state rules.

**7. Are there study guides for the Levels Exams? Riding and/or Written?**

Written tests have study guides available on the CSU Extension 4-H Youth Development website under the Horse Project information.

Riding tests are “open” knowledge tests, meaning members should have access to the actual tests prior to taking them. Riding tests are available on the website.

The HAC recommends Leaders and Parents have 4-H members practice riding the test in front of parent/leader/trainer to simulate the actual process. This will best help the member understand the testing format and help quell nervousness the day of their test.

**8. Can members look at exams after they take them? Can they take them home? How long do they need to wait to take the exam a second time?**

Written tests-

The written level tests II, III & IV must remain in the Extension Office at all times. Members are allowed to review their tests once graded. Copies are not allowed to be sent home with the member, nor notes taken during the review process.

What is the re-take policy on a failed written test?

This is up to the County’s discretion. Some counties allow a member to re-take a failed written test as soon as the next business day while others require a 48 hour hold. The HAC recommends a 48 test holding period.

Riding Tests-

Raters are to turn the completed Riding Tests to the 4-H member’s Extension Office. Once received, the member may have a copy made to take home.

**9. Am I allowed to give a Horse Leader the Written Level 1 exam key? Or do they need to be returned to me for grading?**

Level I Written Tests may be administered and graded outside of the Extension Office by an appointed person.

However, the HAC recommends that all completed tests are graded at the Extension Office and the test’s Answer Keys remain at the Extension Office.