

What is Eventing?

Eventing, best described as an equestrian triathlon, consists of three phases - dressage, show jumping, and cross-country.

It is said to test the horse and rider pair more completely than any other discipline.

Eventing shows are called Horse Trails and are held over one, two, or three days.

Scoring is based on penalty points in each phase, with the lowest score winning.

There are several levels of Eventing. USEA (United States Eventing Association) is the governing body in the United States. For all international levels, the FEI, is the governing body. All competitive levels vary in dressage requirements and jumping heights.

USEA competitive levels are:

- Starter: jump height 2'3"
- Beginner Novice: jump height 2'7"
- Novice: jump height 2'11"
- Training: jump height 3'3"
- Modified: jump height 3'5"
- Preliminary: jump height 3'7"
- Intermediate" jump height 3'9"
- Advanced: jump height 3'11"

FEI competitive levels are categorized by 'stars' - 1-star, 2-star, 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star.

There is a deep history of FEI levels and how they came to be, for more information refer to this article, [The New FEI ***** explained](#).

Dressage is always the first phase and showcases the ultimate partnership between a rider and their mount. The goal is to demonstrate balance, rhythm, suppleness, and obedience through silent communication of the rider's aids (the use of their seat, legs, and hands) to their horse.

The next two phases are built on the fundamentals of dressage, which develops strength and balance for cross-country and precision for show jumping.

Each movement of the dressage test is scored on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the best score.

The sum of the scores are combined with the overall collective marks, gaits, impulsion, submission, and rider for a total score. That score is then subtracted by the number of total possible points, multiplied by 100, and then subtracted by 100.

The resulting score are penalty points, or the points that the pair were not able to earn in the dressage phase.

Penalty points carry on to the next round.



The second phase is cross-country, however, at times show jumping will follow dressage and cross-country will be third.

This phase typically takes place on the second day of competition and is the cornerstone of eventing. It proves speed, endurance, bravery, fitness, determination, and jumping ability of the horse over varied terrain and solid obstacles. The rider's score is carried over from the dressage phase, any penalty points from cross-country will be added to their dressage score. Jumps and obstacles in cross-country are referred to as 'questions' and the goal is to complete every question on the first effort and finish the course within the prescribed time limit, known as the optimum time.



Cross-country features solid fences (15-25 for lower levels and 30-40 for upper levels) as well as natural obstacles such as water, ditches, drops, and banks. The phase is ridden at a gallop with exact speed requirements varied depending on the level of competition.

Horses and riders must be at peak physical condition to successfully complete the cross-country phase. Riders condition their equine partners for months in order to reach the fitness required for this ultimate test. Horses must be bold and brave, while riders must carefully control pace in order to not only finish the course in time, but also without expending too much of the horse's energy.

Mistakes on cross-country are costly to a rider's final score. If a horse stops at a fence, known as a refusal, or runs past a jump, known as a run-out, the pair earns 20 penalty points. A second refusal or run-out at the same obstacle is an additional 40 points, and a third results in elimination. Penalty points are also earned for every additional second over optimum time.

The third phase is show jumping and the rider/horse pair must prove their precision as they clear a series of colorful fences made of lightweight rails, which are easily knocked down. This tests stamina and recovery of the horse, especially as it follows a very tiring cross-country phase.

Show jumping consists of 12-15 jumps in an enclosed arena which requires exact riding as the slightest bump could cause a rail to fall, resulting in penalty points.

Riders carry their penalty points earned in dressage and cross-country over into this final phase. Scoring is objectively based on a horse's ability to clear each fence on course. However, the lightweight show jump rails can fall off easily if knocked. Knocking a rail or having a refusal/run-out results in four penalty points. The show jumping round also has a time limit and every second above the time accumulated more penalty points.

