NYS 4-H Horse Program
Riding and Driving Evaluations
Guidelines

“Expectations Without Skills=Failure”

These guidelines are designed to help 4-H educators, leaders, and evaluators to provide 4-Her’s with a safe and positive riding/driving evaluation. They are to be implemented in a way that best meets the needs of a respective county while upholding the safety and positive youth development techniques for members to thrive.

Purpose of Evaluations
The purpose of the riding evaluation is to provide a safe and positive educational experience for youth working with live horses. The riding/driving evaluation is an evaluation of the member’s skills and abilities, not the horse.

Who Needs To Be Evaluated-(according to NYS Horse Program form approved by PW Wood)
1. Any youth who wishes to participate in 4-H sponsored mounted or driving events other than club activities.
2. Any youth who is riding or driving in the 4-H program for the first time.
3. Any youth that has been evaluated to ride safely in the Junior or Senior levels does not need to be re-evaluated, unless there is a need to be re-evaluated.
4. A youth who wishes to move-up a level must be re-evaluated.
5. Youth do not have to be evaluated on each horse they may use as a project horse. Counties may require this but it is not part of the statewide implementation plan.

Who Should Be A Riding Evaluator
1. There should be a team of knowledgeable adults (three are ideal) to determine the riding ability of a member.

2. Evaluators should:
   a. Enjoy working with youth
   b. Be knowledgeable of safety, riding skills needed to control an equine on the ground and mounted.
   c. Have experience working with equines and youth.
   d. Be positive and organized.
   e. Examples of possible evaluators:
      Leaders with equine experience from within your own county or from other counties
      Trainers, judges, professionals, etc.
      Former knowledgeable 4-Her’s
      CCE Staff

3. Parents/Guardians may not evaluate their own child

4. If counties are struggling with securing qualified evaluators please contact the NYS 4-H Equine Specialist, they may be able to provide suggestions for evaluators.

**When Should Evaluations Happen**

1. Whenever possible and it is convenient for the evaluation team, 4-Her, and 4-H educator.

2. Evaluations can be done anytime during the year if approved in advance by the local CCE educator/staff member.

3. Evaluation can happen at a time and location established by the county or suggested by 4-H Equine volunteers and approved by the local CCE educator/staff member. In-home rings are possible but not ideally suggested.

4. Evaluations can be done in certain circumstances at open shows, but should not be done at a 4-H show. All evaluations should be done before a 4-Her arrives at a 4-H sponsored show or event. It is possible to hold evaluations prior to a non club level clinic or riding event. It must get approval in advance for the local CCE educator/staff member.

5. All evaluations should be done in a controlled environment-inside a ring is best.

6. Whenever possible a rider should be evaluated with other riders/drivers not by themselves. The evaluations should be as realistic as possible. No more than four riders/drivers should be evaluated at the same time.

7. All evaluations should be made as realistic as possible. Distractions in and outside of the ring are encouraged so that the evaluation may be more like a real horse show setting.

**What An Evaluation Team Should Look For**

1. Safe environment and safety first-on the ground and when mounted or in a cart
2. Strength and maturity of the 4-Her
3. Balance and coordination
4. General equine and care knowledge
5. Proper/safe tack and equipment

Conclusion of Evaluation
1. Team should confer and decide on level of riding/driving-discuss ability, knowledge, etc.
2. Speak with the 4-Her about the experience giving constructive feedback and highlight positive parts of the evaluation.
3. Turn signed and completed forms to the County Educator/Staff Member

A youth at any time deemed necessary by the Cornell Cooperative Extension Educator/Staff Member may request a reevaluation or an educator may excuse any horse or rider from a “CCE/4-H” sponsored program if it poses a safety issue to themselves or others at any time.

Potential Riding Levels:

**Lead Line:**
The child is mounted and led by a side walker, who is 18 years of age or older and has horse related experience. A properly fitted halter must be over the bridle and a lead line must be attached to the ring at the bottom of the halter, not on the side or to the bit. Youth must be capable of holding the reins in their hands. Youth will not be asked to back their horse. Youth at this level cannot qualify for State Fair.

**Walk/trot or Walk/jog:**
Youth can be Cloverbud or older non-Cloverbud youth. The child is mounted and can ride safely in walk/trot or walk/jog situations. Youth may or may not be expected to know their diagonals, depending upon the level ridden or class entered. The youth will not be asked to back their horse. The youth must be able to control their horse in a group setting. Separate events/classes must be held for Cloverbud youth. Youth at this level cannot qualify for State Fair.

**Walk/trot/canter or Walk/jog/lope (no leads to count - diagonals do count):**
This level is designed for youth that are not a Cloverbud, that have mastered the skills of walking, trotting or jogging, and cantering or loping the horse safely, but not the skill of asking for the correct lead at the canter. The youth may be asked to back their horse. The youth must be able to control their horse in a group setting. Youth at this level cannot qualify for State Fair.

**Walk/trot/canter or Walk/jog/lope (leads and diagonals to count) Junior or Senior:**
Youth must have mastered the skills of walking, trotting or jogging, and cantering or loping the horse safely. Youth must know their diagonals and be able to canter or lope the horse on the correct lead. The youth may be asked to back their horse. Youth at this level may need to do independent patterns or more complicated riding skills demonstrations, depending upon the classes they will enter. The youth must be able to control their horse in a group setting.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Some Potential Class Levels (these are separate from Riding Levels)
(These are some suggested potential “class levels” and may vary from county to county):
• **Cloverbud** – can only do leadline, and walk/trot or walk/jog – Exhibition or Clinic only not to be placed or receive Danish ribbons. All participants receive the same award/recognition
• **Beginner**
• **Maiden**
• **Novice**
• **Junior (non cloverbud aged - 13 years and under as of January 1st)** - youth at this level can qualify for State Fair
• **Senior (14 years and older as of January 1st)** - youth at this level can qualify for State Fair