

Working the Horse Show: Scribing for the Judge

Many people are required for horse shows to run smoothly and operate efficiently. Experienced personnel are extremely valuable, but the primary way to gain experience is through trial and error. Personnel working horse shows need educational material that provides guidance, clarifies expectations, and allows them to feel comfortable executing their assigned duties. Here are the objectives of this publication:

- Inform potential horse show personnel of the responsibilities of scribing for judges.
- Educate scribes on the details of scribing various classes.
- Guide scribes on how to collaborate with judges with different methods and preferences for scribe work.

Responsibilities of Scribing

Scribing for a judge is simple and straightforward. A scribe's responsibility is to note what the judge says throughout the show and record scores vocalized by the judge on the official score sheets. Almost all shows that track scores using sheets are now using universal score sheets, which can be found on most horse breed association websites.

Throughout the course of a show, there are various classes and categories in which horses are numerically scored by the judge. These scores are written down by the scribe on sheets supplied by the show. Typically, most classes are scored from an average of 70 points. Depending on the class pattern (provided by the judge and/or show management), the score sheet breaks up individual maneuvers. Examples of maneuvers include back, stop, and 360 degree turn. See Figure 1 for an example of the how this class is outlined on a standard score sheet.

As the horse works through the pattern, the judge calls out scores for each maneuver on the pattern. The scribe writes the judge's score as it is vocalized for each maneuver, and then adds or subtracts from 70 to determine the final score for the run. Proper tabulation is very important as the scores for each run are what determine overall placings for the class.

Common classes that are scored from a 70 average are:

- Showmanship
- Western Horsemanship
- Hunt Seat Equitation
- Trail
- Reining
- Ranch Riding
- Western Riding

Entry	Each rider is scored between 0 and infinity points and automatically begins the run with a score of 70.										F&E ⁴	Total Penalty	Score ⁵
		-3 Extremely Poor, -2 Very Poor, -1 Poor, 0 Correct, +1 Good, +2 Very Good, +3 Excellent											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Maneuver Description ¹													
Penalty Score ²		1											
Maneuver Score ³	0	-1/2	0	-1/2	-1/2	0	-1/2	0	0	0	2	1	69

Figure 1. Example score sheet.

¹ Maneuver description boxes indicate individual maneuvers within the prescribed pattern (i.e., 360° right turn). These vary depending on the pattern provided at individual shows. The judge is responsible for indicating scores for all boxes with appropriate maneuvers.

² Penalty score boxes may or may not have scores for each individual run. If the judge verbalizes a penalty, it should be recorded on this row.

³ Maneuver score boxes are where the score for each maneuver is recorded to be totaled and either added or subtracted from 70.

⁴ The form and effectiveness (F&E) score ranges from 0 to 5. The judge uses F&E at the end of the Showmanship, Horsemanship, and Equitation classes. This number should always be added to the total for the run.

⁵ The final score for the run once all maneuver, penalty, and F&E scores have been added/subtracted from 70.

Scribing Various Classes

Almost all shows will have classes that are similar in the way they are scored. These classes are usually scored from a 70-point average with each maneuver being worth +1½ to -1½ in half-point increments. However, there are some classes that are scored from -3 to +3 for each maneuver. The judge will simply call out “zero” or “plus half,” and the scribe will mark this score on the score sheet.

At the end of the run, the scribe will add up the called scores and then add or subtract from 70. For example, if the score total is -2 for the entire run, the final score would be 68 (70 minus 2 equals 68). Once all horses for the class have completed the pattern, the judge places the horses from highest to lowest cumulative score. A prepared and experienced judge will know the rules and requirements for each class. A scribe’s sole responsibility is to correctly write down how the judge scores each maneuver and then accurately tabulate from 70 to get to a final score for each run.

Additionally, some contestants will incur penalty points. Penalty points are accrued when things such as a break of gait, blatant disobedience, or two hands on the reins occur. Penalty points are called by the judge when they happen and should be written down in the penalty box.

Figure 1 illustrates what the score sheet will look like for each individual performance or run. Note that the top box is the designated penalty box, while the bottom box is designated for maneuver scores. Each box in the maneuver score row will have a score, but the penalty boxes may or may not have scores because penalties may or may not happen.

For example, a horse could break gait, incurring a penalty in maneuver 2 (and the penalty would be placed in the penalty score box of maneuver 2), but the horse may not incur another penalty throughout the remainder of the performance. Therefore, the remaining penalty boxes would be empty. To indicate a penalty, a judge will typically say, “Penalty 1,” or define the penalty for that class by name. The scribe would simply write “1” in the associated box. As penalties are always negative, the penalty would be subtracted from the total score for the run.

It is completely acceptable for the scribe to keep a running total below the maneuver scores to make tabulation quicker following the completion of the run.

Figure 1 represents an example score sheet from the run of a horse that was scored on all maneuvers and had a penalty (1) in the second maneuver.

Variations in Judges

Judges have variations in style based on their individual personality, background, and training. These differences may result in some judges being very meticulous in how they call scores. Other judges may be more relaxed in their approach to scoring. Either way, scribes should take initiative to make sure they don’t misunderstand what the score is for each maneuver.

If a scribe is unsure of or misheard a score called by a judge, they are expected to ask, “Could you repeat your score for maneuver 2?” It is very important that scribes pay complete attention to their job of writing down the judge’s scores. Scribes should avoid watching the show as a spectator or talking excessively with the judge to limit distraction of both parties. Scribes should limit commentary with judges and others and focus solely on the proper documentation of show scores.

Communication between the scribe and judge is crucial to maintaining the integrity of the show and ensuring proper rankings of exhibitors and their horses. Further, scribes should use pencils so that mistakes can easily be corrected. If the run gets confusing, the most important thing a scribe can do is write down all scores from the judge. At the end of the run, the judge can be asked to clarify scores to ensure they are in the appropriate boxes.

At the end of the day, scribing can be a very educational task. Someone who is unfamiliar with the judging process might consider scribing to better understand the judging process. This is also a fun and informative way to gain personal knowledge and insight into showing, while assisting with a key aspect of all well-run horse shows. Shows that use score sheets are also providing a service to their exhibitors. After the class is complete, score cards are usually posted for exhibitors to analyze, which provides an educational opportunity for the exhibitor, as well.

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