



EQUESTRIAN
AUSTRALIA

PARA EQUESTRIAN GUIDE AND TOOLKIT FOR EVENT ORGANISERS PART 1 GUIDE



PARA EQUESTRIAN
AUSTRALIA

CONTENTS

Introduction	1	Conditions of Entry	14
What is Para Equestrian?	2	Venue Facilities	15
What is Para Dressage?	2	Dressage Arena Setup	15
Inclusive Language	2	Judges	16
Classification	3	Stewards	16
Physical and Vision Impairment			
Intellectual Impairment			
How to be Classified			
Profiles and Grades			
Master Lists			
Exemption Cards			
Compensating Aids	9	Rules	16
Standard Compensating Aids			
Profile-Specific Compensating Aids			
Non-Standard Compensating Aids			
Para Dressage Tests	11	Familiarisation and Warm Up	17
Entry	14	Need Further Help?	18

INTRODUCTION



The object of Para Dressage events is to provide and develop competition opportunities for equestrian athletes with impairments within mainstream competition. 'Para' stands for parallel, meaning alongside Open Sport.

This Guide and Toolkit provides information and tools to support Event Organisers that hold events for Para Dressage athletes. It is based on the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) Rules and Guidelines and has been modified to suit Australian conditions.

The first part is a detailed guide providing definitions and explanations about what is required to host a para dressage event and the second part provides some handy tools to assist Event Organisers leading up to an event and on the day.

The Guide and Toolkit is to be used in conjunction with other Event Organiser Guides and requirements, available from the Equestrian Australia website (<https://www.equestrian.org.au/event-organisers>).

Integrating Para Dressage riders and tests at all levels into regular dressage events is relatively simple. Indeed, many clubs already support Para Dressage athletes, providing frequent opportunities for them to compete as part of their regular competitions.

WHAT IS PARA EQUESTRIAN?

Para Equestrian is the term used to describe targeted competitions and activities for riders who have physical or vision impairments, including Para Dressage and Para Driving.

Virtus is the term used for dressage competitions for riders with intellectual impairments.

WHAT IS PARA DRESSAGE?

Para Dressage is a dressage competition that allows riders with measurable physical and/or vision impairments to compete on an equal basis. They can use agreed compensating aids according to their specific degree of impairment, ensuring they receive suitable dressage tests for competition. The highest level of Para Dressage is the Paralympics.

The highest level of competition for those with intellectual impairments is the Virtus Global Games.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The choices people make about language have an impact on the way people with disability feel and are perceived in society. It is essential there is awareness of the meaning behind the words that are used when talking to, referring to, or working with people with disability. Inclusive language is a style of communication that is respectful, accurate, and free of bias, prejudice, or discrimination. It's used to create an environment where everyone feels valued and welcome. Disrespectful language can make people with disability feel hurt and excluded and be a barrier to full participation in society.

In general, it is advisable to use the person-first term 'person with disability' rather than the identity-first 'disabled person'. Of course, language is personal, and people with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Some people will prefer identity-first language, such as 'autistic person'.

For further information about inclusive language, please see Paralympics Australia's Universal Design Guide for Creating Inclusive Sport in Australia (<https://www.paralympic.org.au/about-us/policies-resources/>).

Throughout this document, the words disability and impairment are interchangeable.

CLASSIFICATION

For physical, vision and intellectual impairments, riders are classified according to the level of their disability/impairment to create opportunities for all people with disabilities to compete and achieve their goals in equestrian sport. People with similar functional abilities are allocated a competition grade and each grade has specifically designed dressage tests that allow riders to show their skills, while making the competition a level playing field, and, most importantly, be safe.

Physical and Vision Impairment

Riders with a physical impairment(s) are assessed on their mobility, strength, and coordination to establish their Classification Profile. Profiles are grouped into grades ranging from Grade I for the most impaired to Grade V for the least impaired.

Riders with a vision impairment have very reduced vision to total blindness and are given a Classification Profile and Grade according to their level of sight (visual acuity).

There are two levels of Classification:

National
managed by Equestrian Australia

International
managed by the FEI

Riders do not need to be FEI classified to ride FEI tests at local or state-level events.



Intellectual Impairment

Intellectual impairment is a term used for a range of cognitive and developmental conditions.

There are 3 groups of eligibility:

- II-1 - Intellectual impairment
- II-2 - Intellectual and physical or sensory impairments
- II-3 - Autism

Classification of intellectual impairments are managed by Sport Inclusion Australia. National classification allows them to compete in Australia only and Virtus classification allows riders to compete in international events (e.g. Virtus, Global Games and some other identified events).

How to be Classified

Riders with **physical impairment** apply through Equestrian Australia
<https://www.equestrian.org.au/content/para-equestrian-classification>

Vision impaired riders apply through Paralympics Australia
<https://www.paralympic.org.au>

NOTE: Riders do not need to join Equestrian Australia to be classified; once a rider is classified, they can join as a participant or competitive membership to be confirmed.

Riders with an **intellectual impairment** apply through Sport Inclusion Australia
<https://sportinclusionaustralia.org.au>

Further information on Classification is provided on the Equestrian Australia website:
<https://www.equestrian.org.au/content/para-equestrian-classification>.

Profiles and Grades

Physical and Vision Impairment

During classification, riders are assigned a profile (1-39) and a Grade (I-V). The grades range from Grade I which is for riders whose impairment has the greatest impact on their ability to ride, through to Grade V for riders whose impairment has the least impact on their ability to ride, a summary of each grade is below. In competition, riders compete within their grade.

				
<p>Grade I</p> <p>Riders with the greatest impairments usually requiring a wheelchair</p>	<p>Grade II</p> <p>Riders with impairments requiring crutches, wheelchairs, major support equipment</p>	<p>Grade III</p> <p>Riders who may use a wheelchair or walking aids</p>	<p>Grade IV</p> <p>Riders who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have more mobility • may be sight impaired 	<p>Grade V</p> <p>Riders with an impairment that measures a minimum of 17% of body function</p>
Tests				
Walk only	Walk and trot	Walk and trot	Walk, trot, canter Lateral work in trot	Walk, trot, canter Lateral work in trot and canter
Arena size				
20 m x 40 m	20 m x 40 m	20 m x 40 m	20 m x 60 m	20 m x 60 m

Intellectual Impairment

There are three eligibility group for intellectual impairments, and riders compete within their group.

<p>II-1 Riders with an intellectual disability</p>		<p>II-2 Riders with intellectual disability with significant additional impairment</p>		<p>II-3 Riders with autism</p>	
<p>Tests</p>					
<p>Walk, trot, canter Lateral work in canter</p>		<p>Walk and trot</p>		<p>Walk, trot, canter Lateral work in trot</p>	
<p>Arena size</p>					
National	20 m x 60 m	20 m x 40 m		20 m x 60 m	
International	20 m x 40 m			20 m x 40 m	

Master Lists

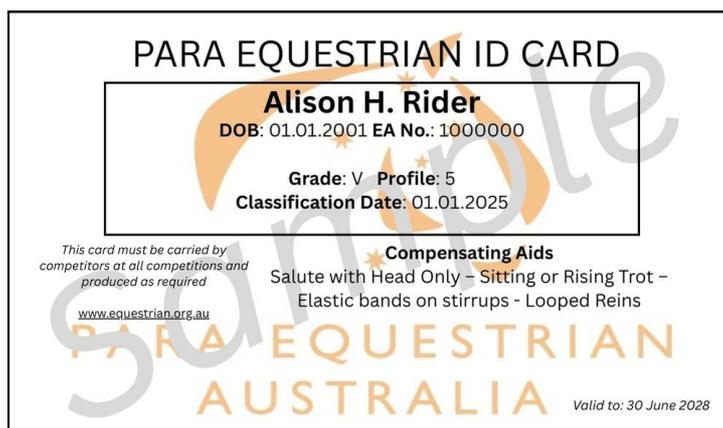
A Master List is a list of all athletes who have been classified, their classification grade and any compensating aids that they are allowed to use in competition.

For athletes with physical and/or vision impairments, the current Equestrian Australia Master List is available from the Equestrian Australia website (<https://www.equestrian.org.au/content/para-equestrian-classification>) and the FEI Para Master List is available from <https://data.fei.org/Tools/BaseData.aspx?table=PEDAthletesClassification>.

The Master List for athletes with an intellectual impairment is available from the Sport Inclusion Australia website (<https://sportinclusionaustralia.org.au/eligibility/>).

All judges and stewards at a competition should have access to the Master Lists in order to confirm that the rider's compensating aids are approved.

Riders must also carry an ID Card that lists their compensating aids (see below). An official may request to view a rider's ID card at any time.



Sample Para Equestrian ID card

Note that standard compensating aids (see page 8) are not always listed on the Master List or the rider's ID card.



Exemption Cards

To assist riders with disability to compete on equal terms, non-para dressage classified and Sport Inclusion Australia eligible riders may apply to Equestrian Australia to request exemptions to the standard dressage rules for use in dressage competitions run under Equestrian Australia National Rules (<https://www.equestrian.org.au/dressage-rules>).

Exemptions can be considered for riders who:

- are members of Equestrian Australia; and
- are classed as eligible by Sport Inclusion Australia for an intellectual impairment; or
- have a diagnosed disability supported by medical documentation, however:
 - a. are not eligible for para dressage classification; or
 - b. would be eligible for para dressage classification or Sport Inclusion Australia eligibility but do not wish to be classified for competition.

COMPENSATING AIDS

Most para dressage riders use compensating aids to enable them to ride without disadvantage. These aids may include modified saddlery, such as loops on reins, or allowances, such as salute with the head only. The aids and allowances provided to each rider depend on their impairment and grade. Para dressage riders may use their approved compensating aids in both para and able-bodied competitions.

There are three types of compensating aids:

1. Standard
2. Profile-specific
3. Non-standard

and are discussed below.

The rider is responsible for ensuring their allowed profile-specific and non-standard aids are listed on the Master List and their ID card.



Standard Compensating Aids

Standard compensating aids are aids that all classified para riders are allowed to use in competition. A list of the standard compensating aids is provided in Part 2 - Toolkit, note that these are not always listed on the Master List or ID cards.

Further information and photos are available from <https://inside.fei.org/fei/disc/para-dressage/classification>.

Profile-Specific Compensating Aids

Profile-specific compensating aids are aids or equipment that may be used by riders within their particular profile. Profile-specific aids must be listed on the Master List and the rider's ID card.



Non-Standard Compensating Aids

Non-standard compensating aids are prescribed for individual riders to enable them to ride their horse without providing an advantage over the other riders within the same Profile or Grade. These aids are specifically designed to include modifications to a Standard Compensating aids. For example, a saddle can be modified to support a rider with only one leg or no legs.

Non-standard Compensating Aids must be listed on the Master List and the rider's ID card.

PARA DRESSAGE TESTS

A club must at least be an EA Sport Affiliated Club to use EA and FEI para dressage rules and tests. Closed unrestricted classes may include para dressage tests, although they are not official events. The levels of para dressage events are:

EA Approved Para Dressage Events			
Level	Club or Regional	State	National
Athlete Classification	National or FEI		
Para Dressage Tests	EA or FEI	FEI highly recommended	FEI
Test Level			
Participation		Competitive	
Preparatory	Preliminary	Novice	Elementary
One prescribed test (no freestyle)		One prescribed test plus freestyle (optional)	

FEI Approved Para Dressage Events		
Level	National	FEI
Athlete Classification	FEI	
Para Dressage Tests	FEI	
Test Level		
Novice	Intermediate	Grand Prix
<p>Three tests to be completed e.g. Novice A, Novice B, Freestyle</p>		

The type of test is decided between the rider and the Organising Committee and depends upon the rider's grade.

Virtus Dressage Events	
-------------------------------	--

Athlete Classification	Virtus
-------------------------------	--------

Para Dressage Test	FEI
---------------------------	-----

Test Level			
-------------------	--	--	--

Eligibility Group	II-1	II-2	III-3
--------------------------	------	------	-------

	Grade IV Novice Intermediate	Grade III Novice Intermediate	Grade IV Novice Intermediate
--	---------------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------------

All tests are ridden with the initial halt omitted
--

The list of Para Dressage tests for each Grade are provided in Part 2 - Toolkit, and the tests are available from the EA Website: <https://www.equestrian.org.au/Paraequestrian-rules>.

ENTRY

Entry for all riders needs to be as simple as possible for both the rider and the Organising Committee.

As there are a large number of para dressage tests to choose from, it is recommended that para dressage tests be offered as a Test of Choice. This gives the riders the option to choose their tests without needing to write out every test option. Another option is to create a class for each grade (I to V) and test level (Preparatory to Grand Prix)

It is helpful to ask riders which two tests they plan to ride and what grade the athlete competes in.

TIP:

We suggest giving riders a *drop-down list* to select their tests as many riders do not write the test names out in full

CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

The conditions of entry for para equestrian events are provided in Part 2 - Toolkit.

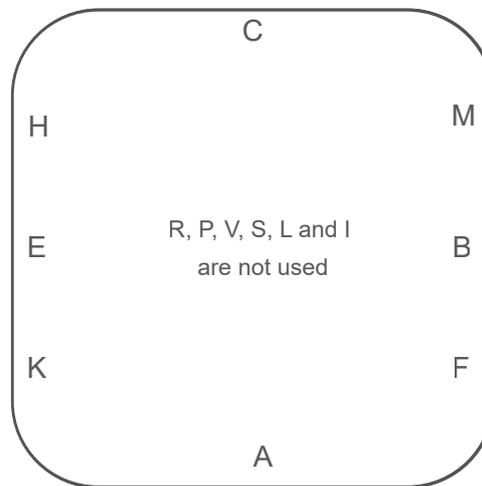
VENUE FACILITIES

It is important to ensure that the venue is safe and accessible for people of all abilities. Things to consider when assessing a venue's accessibility, safety, and overall suitability are listed in Part 2 - Toolkit.

Where possible a mounting block or ramp should be available for riders. If one is not available, organisers should inform riders in advance if they need to provide their own. For State, National Championships and FEI CPEDI events mounting blocks or ramps must be made available. More information is available from Equestrian Australia.

DRESSAGE ARENA SETUP

In official competitions (EA or FEI) Grades I, II and III use a **20 m x 40 m** arena, and Grades IV and V use a **20 m x 60 m** arena. The letters used in a 20 m x 40 m arena are:



Standard dressage letters are used for 20 m x 60 m arena. Arena layouts are shown in Part 2.

Some athletes with vision impairment require larger markers, which they have to provide themselves (this is noted on the Master List and their Para Equestrian ID card).

TIP:

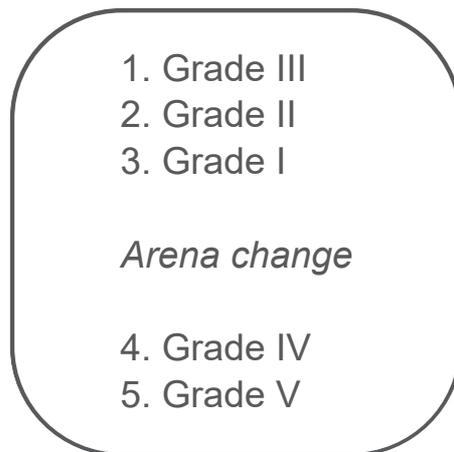
Use the 20 m x 40 m arena either at the beginning or end of the competition to avoid multiple arena changes.

Pre-marking the small arena with the places where the letters are required makes it easier to change the arenas from small to large and vice versa. e.g. with tape or clips to go over the arena surrounds.

It should not take longer than 10 minutes to change the arena.

Note it is not necessary to run the competition in grade order. It may be difficult for Grades I and II to start early as they need time for their medications to take effect and to feed their horses and prepare for their tests.

An example schedule is:



JUDGES

Para Dressage competitions should be judged by a minimum of two EA-accredited PD judges. Para Dressage judges are EA Elementary level (E Level) and above and can judge able-bodied dressage, reducing the need for multiple judges.

If two para dressage judges are not available, an exemption to use only one para dressage judge can be requested from the EA Para Dressage Committee (para@equestrian.org.au) at least seven days before the event.

The current list of accredited para dressage judges is listed on the EA website: <https://www.equestrian.org.au/members/search/official>.

STEWARDS

A minimum of one para dressage trained steward is required to be present at every official dressage event.

If no para dressage stewards are available, an exemption to use an experienced steward can be requested from the EA Para Dressage Committee (para@equestrian.org.au).

RULES

The current para equestrian rules are available on the Equestrian Australia website (<https://www.equestrian.org.au/Paraequestrian-rules>) and should be available for every event.

If the Equestrian Australia rules do not address a particular issue, consult the FEI Para Dressage Rules (<https://inside.fei.org/fei/disc/para-dressage/rules>). If you still cannot find an answer, contact Equestrian Australia for assistance (paraequestrian_pathways@equestrian.org.au).

Vision impaired riders are required to wear a coloured armband when mounted and may start the test from within the arena.



FAMILIARISATION AND WARM UP

Mounted familiarisation should be offered to riders before the start of the competition and is expected at State and National level events. If space allows, provide a separate warm up area for para riders for safety of horses and riders. Where possible, provision should be made for riders with vision impairment to train and warm up alone.

NEED FURTHER HELP?

If you have any questions or need assistance, contact your local para equestrian representative, your state Para Equestrian committee, or the EA National Para Dressage Equestrian Committee (para@equestrian.org.au). We're here to help and support your clubs.





ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Equestrian Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across Australia where we are privileged to live, work and ride. We recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's continuing connection to culture and Country. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, who are the custodians of the stories, traditions, and culture of First Nations People.

We remember always that this land was, and always will be, another's Dreaming.

© 2025 Equestrian Australia

Version 1.1 February 2026

PO Box 673
Sydney Markets NSW 2129
www.equestrian.org.au
info@equestrian.org.au

This Guide and Toolkit were produced by the Equestrian Australia Para Dressage Committee and Equestrian Australia.