

USDF Instructor Certification Report

Every winter season in Wellington, FL, the United States Dressage Federation runs a series of workshops in preparation for the Dressage Trainer/Instructor Certification exam. The first time I heard of the certification program was three years ago, when I participated in the Dressage4Kids WIT program; a few of the older WIT participants and staff got certified at Training and First level that year.

When I found out I would be returning to the WIT program in the winter of 2019, this time as Lendon's assistant, I was reminded of the certification process and decided to jump on the opportunity. The extent of my knowledge on the program was that it consisted of three workshops (riding, teaching, and lungeing, respectively) and at the end of the three months there was an exam of which passing meant you became an official USDF certified instructor. I was really excited by the thought of getting to practice each aspect of my equestrian abilities in such a structured way with the guidance of the workshop leaders. Thanks to the generosity of Dressage4Kids, I received the D4K Instructor Certification scholarship and was therefore able to enroll in the certification program.

The first workshop in the series was focused on Riding, and by the end of the initial welcome meeting and riding theory discussion I was quickly beginning to realize that I would need to raise my standard of excellence if I wanted to be successful come exam time. I became very much aware of the instructor's responsibility to have a sound and correct foundational understanding of horsemanship and classical theory in order to provide a safe and productive environment for horses and students.

Although each workshop was centered on a specific topic, the predominant through line of the program was the Training Scale. Both the workshop leaders and examiners were looking for candidates to warm up their given horse and then assess him/her verbally in terms of the training scale. The candidates then had to create a lesson plan for the body of their work, and finish the session with an explanation of how the horse and/or rider improved as a result of the lesson. Despite the fact that I had been taught the importance of the training scale when I started riding dressage, and had heard it discussed repeatedly throughout the years, it was really eye-opening to have to incorporate the six elements into my regular vocabulary and thinking pattern. If I had to pick out one single thing that I believe really benefitted my skills as a rider and trainer it would be referring to the training scale as a daily rubric for all my work.

When I signed up for my first workshop I didn't exactly know what I was getting myself into. It turned out to be pretty intense, and at times even nerve-wracking. I learned how to present myself confidently and make the best of every horse that I had to work with. When I set out on this journey, my only hope was that each workshop would further my education and develop my practical skill as a horsewoman. I'm happy to say I certainly got my wish — and a whole lot more, too!

First of all, I succeeded and I am now certified through First level! Even though I am not set on becoming a dressage instructor, nor trainer, I am really glad that I went through the certification process. It provided me with a wealth of new ideas and a refreshed outlook on training horses and riders. I met a lot of great horsepeople too, many of whom became good friends. I would recommend the Instructor certification program to anyone looking to challenge and better themselves, and would like to thank Dressage4Kids for granting me the funds to accomplish this endeavor.