

Thanks to an incredibly generous scholarship from Dressage 4 Kids, I was able to attend the USDF Training and First Level Instructor Certification. The testing was an amazing experience for me. It tested my knowledge in new ways and definitely raised the standard for what I want to do in the future.

There were seven portions to the test. We took a written exam, oral exam, taught two lessons, rode a horse, lunged a horse, and taught a seat lesson. The written and oral exams were the first portions of the testing. We took the written test online. It was a combination of many things, from correction position and terminology to horses illnesses and injuries. It really tested my knowledge in ways that the examiners wouldn't have been able to see just by watching me teach a lesson. I thought it was very cool that the program valued knowledge like that in addition to things like knowledge of the aids and how to lunge safely. On the first day that we got to the testing barn, we took the oral exam. It was very nerve wracking at first, but the set up for the test was very good. They tested us all together and allowed us to build off each other's answers. This start eased my nerves a bit because I got to meet and talk to the examiners.

The next day, we started the testing with horses. I started with the riding portion. I got the opportunity to ride a horse named Donnersohn. He is an active breeding stallion who is currently competing in the Grand Prix, so he was super fun to ride! He was a great guy who tried very hard, so he was a fantastic horse to use for the testing. This experience has made me think about using the Pyramid of Training more actively when I am riding. For example, I could feel Donnersohn wasn't pushing into the contact as much as I would have liked when he first came

out. But instead of looking at the contact, I chose to take one step back on the Pyramid of Training to suppleness. He had been standing around waiting all morning and so, once I got him more supple and loose, the connection improved. I definitely think that the fact that the certification program makes you think in that way will make me a more effective rider. I then moved on to the lunging of the horse. This section was the most difficult for me. That, however, made it even more beneficial for me to do the testing. I was able to see how many different ways there are to influence a horse on the lunge line. Seeing how much some of the horses improved after being lunged has made me think about ways I could incorporate more lunging into my training.

The next day I started off with the teaching portion. During my first lesson, the weather was not cooperating and it was pouring. My demo rider and horse were great sports and kept going for a bit, but then we decided to bring them inside to keep everything safe. The examiners then gave me the chance to explain what I would have done had I been able to continue so that I could finish my lesson. After one more ride, we ended up moving all of the horses to a covered arena to finish the testing. That required a ton of coordination and planning but everyone did a fantastic job. We owe a huge thank you to Bill McMullin, Kathy Robertson, and the McPhails for making it possible for the testing to continue. I was then able to lunge a rider and teach my last lesson in the covered arena. The lunge lesson was interesting. I haven't done those for a while so I think it is really cool that the USDF includes them in the testing. They are so important and I am looking forward to taking some sometime soon!

I then taught my last lesson. My demo rider and horse were fantastic again and it was so much fun. The more I teach the more I enjoy it, so I am really looking forward to getting to do more of that in the future.

This testing was an incredible experience and passing the test was just the icing on the cake because I learned so much from the experience! Thank you so much to Kathy Robertson, Bill McMullin, and Annie Morris for organizing the testing. Thank you so much to Lendon Gray and Dressage 4 Kids for giving me the opportunity to attend. I learned so much!