

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs): Standards of Proficiency (SOPs) Review 2009

Q. Why do we need new SOPs? What was wrong with the old ones?

A. There was nothing “wrong” with the previous standards (except the occasional misspelled word!); they just needed their periodic review. The SOPs are reviewed every three years, no matter what. A regular, periodic review is important to ensure that the SOPs are reflective of both the traditionally understood “good horsemanship and riding” as well as incorporating new knowledge and study in the field of equine sports and management. The SOP reviews should always include a holistic look from D1 through A levels to ensure proper flow of content understanding and skill achievements. In particular for this year’s review, we needed to examine the Specialty ratings and assess them after a two-year implementation period.

Q. When does my child need to know the new SOPs? Where do I find them?

A. The new SOPs are in effect as of January 1, 2009. So—if your child is going to get rated on December 31, 2008, then the new SOPs will NOT apply. However, if your child has a rating any time on January 1, 2009, then the Examiner should be using the new 2009 SOPs. (By the way, if your club is doing a rating on New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day...then you are a very dedicated club!)

You can find the previous SOPs AND the new SOPs on the USPC web site at www.ponyclub.org or call the USPC Bookstore at 859-422-5522. Look for or ask for the version that clearly indicates **2009**.

Q. My child took a rating in December 2008. Does he have to re-take the same rating again in January 2009 with the new SOPs?

A. NO! Any rating that uses the previous SOPs and happens BEFORE January 1, 2009, is still “good” for the next year. However, any rating that happens ON or AFTER January 1, 2009, must use the **2009** SOPs.

Q. Are the new SOPs harder—or easier—than the previous SOPs?

A. Hmm, well...it depends. In most cases, the SOPs are still just as hard—or easy—as they were before this year’s review. The vast majority of the SOP changes simply clarify the skills USPC Examiners have always expected to see demonstrated by a rating candidate. However, in some clubs or regions (or among selected coaches, instructors, or parents) those expectations have been either inflated (made harder) or made easier over the years, obscuring the original expectations of proficiency at each rating level. Also, the review committee re-aligned some of the skills to different rating levels (or deleted, or added certain skills) based on their own study of and experiences with the AVERAGE Pony Clubber (age and ability) that normally completes each rating level. (They also listened to input from DCs, RSs, instructor-coaches, and parents and members.)

So—if the SOPs seem easier to you, then maybe you had harder expectations than necessary! Good for you! You might have a chance for “Exceed Standards” remarks on your rating day. However, if the SOPs seem harder to you, then it may be you didn’t really understand what was always expected of you on that rating day. Make sure you check with your DC, coach, RIC, or contact instruction@ponyclub.org with your questions.

Q. How will my child’s coach or trainer or DC or Examiner find out about the SOPs? If we have questions, where can we find answers?

A. If you are reading this, you have the information to share with your child's support team. If you have questions, contact instruction@ponyclub.org. In addition, your RS, DC, and RIC will get a notice on their USPC Digests alerting them to the changes. Finally, your child's rating Examiner should be getting the new SOPs either from the USPC web site at www.ponyclub.org or from the organizer of the rating. (To be sure, take a copy of the test sheet and the SOP with you to the rating. A downloaded copy from the web is just fine.) Your Region's Standards and Ratings Clinics or Seminars will be helpful as well.

Q. I sent some SOP recommendations to National Office, but I don't see those recommendations reflected in these final SOPs. Why not?

A. The Ad Hoc SOP Review team considered EVERY input received, but paid special attention to the comments and recommendations from the parents and instructor-coaches because YOU are the closest to the most important person at any rating—the member! Many of the recommendations are included in the final SOP revision. However, some recommendations reflected a local or regional practice that was not necessarily relevant to other regions and clubs, or reflected a local demographic that was not seen nation-wide. As an example, the review team did NOT include in the final SOPs a recommendation to use a particular term because the usage of that vocabulary was unique to a region. In another example, the team decided against a recommendation to increase the skill expectations of D-level members. The recommender indicated her local demographic included several teen-age D members who found the D-level expectations "too easy." However, the review team determined that the AVERAGE D member was NOT a teen and, therefore, any recommendation to significantly increase riding or horse management expectations of D members was not necessary.

Q. Does my child have to jump the exact gymnastic grid or show jumping and/or cross-country fences as described in the SOPs in order to "meet standard" in the rating? What if the testing site doesn't have enough jumps or the variety or the weather or the terrain to evaluate the jumping and the open sections of the rating?

A. This is a very frequently asked question! Here is the short answer: Yes, each Pony Clubber must demonstrate successful mastery of the SOPs AS WRITTEN or diagramed in order to "meet standard" at that rating level.

Now, here is the longer answer:

For Club Level ratings, it is always the DC's responsibility to ensure the test site for their ratings have the appropriate facilities (rings, jumps, open space, e.g.) for each rating candidate to demonstrate their proficiency in each section of the standard. (Some DCs may use a rating Organizer, or combine ratings within a Region and use a regional rating Organizer. However it is managed, it is still ultimately the DC's responsibility.) (For Upper Level tests, it is usually a regionally-designated test Organizer that must ensure the test site is appropriate for the level of the ratings.) In addition to the DC and/or Organizer, the Examiner(s) must verify the appropriateness of the test site for the rating level(s) for safety and adequacy BEFORE beginning the rating.

In general, Club Level ratings are expected to be completed in one day. However, depending on the rating level, there is some latitude to extend a rating over several days in extreme circumstances and in coordination with the Examiner(s), the Organizer and/or DC, and the members and members' "support team." As an example, foul weather (extreme heat, cold,

thunderstorms, soggy or hard ground) may compromise a perfectly appropriate test site, making it unsafe to conduct or continue a rating as planned. The Examiner(s), ALWAYS responsible for the candidates' safety in the rating environment, may make slight modifications in order to complete the rating. However, the Examiner(s) must also be satisfied the candidates demonstrated proficiency—or not—prior to assigning a “MS” or “DNMS.” Again, under no circumstances should anyone pre-plan a rating with the intention of shortchanging the rating opportunity!

For further questions, contact the D1-C2 Committee (for Club Level SOPs and ratings) or the Testing Committee (for Upper Level SOPs and ratings) at instruction@ponyclub.org.

Q. My son rides in the Pony Hunters. He is really ready to “rate up” but his pony is not capable of jumping the height required of the next rating. Why isn’t there a “pony-track” that respects the limitations of our smaller mounts?

A. We LOVE ponies! Just look at our organizational name! OK, but ratings are about the riders, not the horses (or ponies, in this case). So—we really need to see the rider ride over the fences at the different heights given in the SOPs. Why? Because there is a difference in the bio-mechanics of the rider in the jump as the height increases; because there is an expectation that eventually that rider will move to another mount (and it just might be a horse); because if the rider continues to progress through the rating levels, he/she WILL have to ride a different mount (at C3, during switch horse section) at a solid height and we need to see that skill developing at D3, then C1, then C2...and beyond. Each rating builds on the skills demonstrated at previous ratings.

Q. My daughter really enjoys fox-hunting, but doesn’t spend much time in the dressage ring. Why does she need to demonstrate dressage riding skills in her ratings?

A. Fox-hunting skills are the traditional base of our organization—and our SOPs. So—if you look at the SOPs closely, you will notice that the expectations are to demonstrate riding skills “on the flat,” not necessarily “dressage.” However, the skills are the same. Ask your daughter just how handy it is to know how to rein-back, or leg-yield, when she is riding with the Field! Yes, by the time your daughter gets to the Upper Levels, there is an expectation that she is conversant in basic dressage theory and capable of demonstrating very simple dressage movements, depending on the rating level. However, in the Traditional track (in which your daughter is likely to chose to progress) the intent is to develop the well-rounded rider and horseman, well-grounded in all the disciplines.

Q. My daughter loves dressage and is already competing at the higher levels in her chosen discipline. Right now she is a C1. Why does she have to jump to achieve her C2? After all, just last year her brother earned his C3/Dressage without having to jump.

A. Another frequently asked question! First, congratulations to your son’s achievement of the C3/Dressage! As you already know, the Specialty ratings are designed to reflect a chosen progression of self-selected members who really want to focus on one discipline—in his case, it was Dressage. However, we still feel strongly in developing in each member the well-rounded rider and horseman, well-grounded in all the disciplines. At this point, that means every member progresses through the ratings from D to C2 in a “traditional” multi-discipline format. After the C2, members may choose to “specialize” in Dressage or Show Jumping.

Meanwhile, your daughter can “specialize” in Dressage right now, even as a C1, by choosing to compete in Dressage rallies.

Q. My student is very focused on the sport of Eventing. Why isn't there an Eventing Specialty rating? Frankly, we think the Traditional SOP is too easy!

A. Yet another frequently asked question! The short answer is: USPC is considering that proposal, but there is nothing in place yet.

The longer answer is more complicated, of course.

Why haven't we included an Eventing Specialty yet? Because there are several approaches to consider. One option suggested that the current Traditional rating be simply re-titled “Eventing” with no change to the SOPs. However, several Eventing experts pointed out that the current Traditional SOPs were not reflective of the highly-specialized eventing sport—particularly in the “Open” sections. Therefore, a simple re-title of a current SOP would not suffice as a “specialty.”

Another option suggested that with revision, an Eventing Specialty should replace the current Traditional SOPs. However, we were unable to determine during our short review period what the short- and long-term ramifications might be to our membership if we replaced the Traditional SOP with a revised (more “specialized”) Eventing SOP. Of particular concern is the expectation that an Eventing Specialty will require facilities (especially in regards to cross-country courses and obstacles) that are not readily available to the majority of our members. **IN NO WAY DID WE WANT TO REDUCE THE MEMBERS' OPPORTUNITIES TO RATE AT THE UPPER LEVELS** by creating SOPs that would limit the availability of appropriate facilities. Therefore, replacing the Traditional SOP with a revised Eventing Specialty would not suffice. Yet a third suggested option would **ADD** an Eventing Specialty to the SOP line-up, creating four (4) Upper Level rating tracks: 3 each Specialty and the Traditional.

The VP/I recommends this last option for further study in these next two years. Included for study: continued review of existing Specialties for trends and lessons learned; identification of (and coordination for) appropriate test sites for this Specialty; development of Specialty SOPs; and identification and training of Eventing Specialty National Examiners.

Q. One of the members of my club just lost her horse to lameness. We don't have many horses available for her to ride at her level and she is soon off to college and won't be riding at all. Why can't she continue her ratings through a Horse Management track, and then maybe go back to riding when she has time later?

A. Good question! We are wondering the same thing. However, we also know that there is a strong, traditional correlation to the skills acquired as a rider and the knowledge and skills development as a horseman, in regards to Horse Management. Hence the current expectations of the C3/B rating relates to the HB; and the HA relates to the A. Yet, at the same time—many of us have also suffered with the loss of a mount, or work/school commitments that preclude regular riding. So—VP/I recommends a “HM track” for Upper Level ratings for further study in the next two years.

Meanwhile, remind your member that she can remain an active member until age 25!

Q. Last year at my students' rating, they all shared the same pony. This year, we were told they cannot share a horse. Why?

A. It depends. At what level rating are your students testing? Generally—almost always—a D1 or D2 -level rating is not that difficult for most mounts to do two or even three times in a given

day. Throw one kid on; go through the paces; then give the next kid the chance to shine. However, by the time your students are rating at the C-levels, the demands on the mounts are much more intense. It is too much to expect a horse to jump and re-jump (and maybe re-jump again) the same course over and over with different rating candidates. Also, swapping riders is time-consuming and the time required to adequately conduct a C-level test is enormous, compared to a D-level test (also depending on number of candidates). However, it is not uncommon for riders to still share a horse if they are testing on different days or in different groups on the same day. Check with the DC, the Organizer and the Examiner(s). And—as always—if you still have questions, contact instruction@ponyclub.org!

Q. I looked over the new 2009 SOPs and saw that you are still asking for shipping bandages at the different rating levels! Don't you know that no one uses shipping bandages anymore? Why do you still insist on them?

A. You have an excellent point. Today, very few people use shipping bandages as we have taught over these many years. Frankly, there are some great products on the current market that can do the protection and support function that we expect of a good shipping bandage. So why do we still want to see our members learn and demonstrate the skill for a proper shipping bandage?

Actually, we have quite a few really good reasons. In no special order, let me tell you a few of them. First, those neat products on the market are rather expensive. We think it very important for our members to have the skill to provide the appropriate protection and support for their mounts without spending a great deal of money. Second, the shipping bandages are tailorable to individual horses (see the first point again!). Third, we have many shipping bandage advocates with unfortunate first-hand experiences of tragic trailer accidents where the shipping bandage (or lack of it) made the difference in the outcome of the event. Finally, we believe the skill and knowledge required for a shipping bandage are necessary to master before progressing to the specialty wraps expected of the HA. In other words, if you understand the theory and have the coordination to apply a shipping bandage well, then it is easier to grasp the theory and techniques of a hock wrap!