

Over Fences Guidelines

The Over Fences Guidelines were created to offer 4H Horse Show Committees suggestions for safe and correct ways to put together jumping obstacles and courses for horse shows. These guidelines closely adhere to the guidelines set forth in the Uniform Rules for 4H Horse Shows (10/04 revision).

When designing courses for 4H Hunter classes, care should be given to ensure youth can maintain an even, forward pace while being challenged to show their horse and their equitation to the best of their ability. The following information will give the 4H Horse Show Committees an insight on proper equipment, course layout and safety needed to ensure a fun, safe and enjoyable experience.

Glossary of Terms

Standards: A pair of upright stands with cups or fittings to support the rails or other suspended elements of the fence. There are two types of standards commonly used today, **Single** (post or schooling) standards and **Winged** standards.

Single (schooling) Standards: 4" x 4" single posts that accept cups at specific jumping heights to support rails or other suspended elements of the fence.

Winged Standards: These standards have width, no smaller than 24" in width and at least 12" higher than the suspended portion of the fence, which adds substance to the fence and encourages horses to jump more in the center of the obstacle.

Pole or Rail: A wood pole 3 to 4 inches in diameter, usually octagonal or round, and 10 to 12 feet in length. Shorter rails (10' or less) make the fence "narrow" and increase the degree of difficulty of the jump; therefore it is not recommended to utilize 8' landscaping timbers for the entire course. PVC poles are not recommended for use as a jumping element or groundline for fences. PVC is very light, making it easy to roll out of the cup, and will splinter easily if stepped on or broken in some fashion causing a safety hazard for both horse and rider. Care should also be given to insure that there are no sharp edges or points on the jumping element that can injure horse or rider if it is hit while being jumped.

Fence: Any obstacle to be jumped on a course. There are two basic types of fences/obstacles used today; **Vertical** fences and **Oxer** (spread) fences. These types of obstacles can have many different forms such as natural post and rail, brush, walls, gates, coops, panels, planks, or hedge. A groundline is recommended for all types of jumping efforts on a hunter course.

Vertical Fences: A straight, upright fence where all the elements of the fence are in the same vertical plane. These types of fences are often made of vertical rails, walls, gates, planks or panels. Fillers (brush or flower boxes, walls, coops) can be utilized to add more substance to the fence. The use of a groundline is recommended for these types of obstacles.

Oxer (Spread) Fences: An obstacle that has width as well as height. Spread fences will



contain two or more sets of standards and rails with or without filler materials such as brush or flower boxes, walls, coops. There are several types of oxers, **Parallel** oxers, **Ascending** oxers, and **Triple bar** oxers. Spread obstacles should not be further apart than the height of the individual components of the oxer. They are also designed to be jumped in only one direction and the use of a groundline is recommended.

Parallel Oxer: Is a spread fence that has both the front and back elements set at the same height. Parallel spreads typically have a higher degree of difficulty compared to ascending spread fences. A “square” oxer is an obstacle that is as wide as it is high and is considered to be the most difficult oxer to jump. *USEF SAYS THIS IS PROHIBITED IN “HUNTER DIV” AND SPREADS OVER 4’*

Ascending Oxer: An ascending oxer typically consists of two elements (two sets of standards and rails) that are set where the front element is slightly lower than the back element, thus creating a staircase-like effect. Recommended height difference between the two elements is 6” with 3” being the minimum. Ascending oxers are the least difficult oxer to jump because the upward slant of the fence which allows the horse more time to bring his front end up and out of the way of the fence.

Triple Bar Oxer: A spread fence that is made up of three ascending elements that slants upward away from the approach to the fence. The recommended height difference between the elements is the same for any ascending oxer with a 3” difference being the minimum between the three elements. *USEF SAYS THIS IS PROHIBITED IN “HUNTER DIV” AND SPREADS OVER 4’*

Crossrail Fence: A jumping element consisting of two rails, one end of each rail rests on the ground and the other is raised and set in the jump cup, forming an “X” between the two standards. This type of fence is typically used for beginning horse and riders or as elements in a gymnastic series during training. The nature of this fence invites the horse to jump in the center between the standards. Groundlines are recommended for use on the approach side of the element.

Groundline: A pole that is placed on the ground in front of the jump to help the horse judge the height of the fence and the appropriate take-off point. Groundlines can be placed directly under the fence or slightly in front of the fence on the approach to allow both horse and rider to correctly jump the fence. Never jump the fence from the wrong side (groundline on the landing side) unless the fence has been set with two groundlines to be jumped in both directions. This can be a safety hazard if the horse lands on the groundline or misjudges his approach. They should also be fixed to where they will not roll under the horse if it is hit during jumping.

Cups: A metal or plastic device that attaches to a standard at various heights to elevate a rail or other jumping element. The depth of the cup will determine the ease in which rails or other elements may be knocked down. The flatter the cup, the easier the element is to take down. The maximum depth for cups must not exceed one third of the diameter of a rail which will cause the jumping element to essentially be fixed in place. Cups should be 3 inches wide and no less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch and no more than 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. Flat cups used to suspend elements such as gates and planks should be no less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch deep. If using jump cups with pins, make sure that the pins are pointed away from the horse as it negotiates the obstacle.



Line: A line is a path taken between two fences that are associated to one another on the course and a specific distance apart. The fences can either be set in a straight line or a bending line depending on their relationship to one another.

Combination: A double, triple or multiple combination is composed of two, three or more obstacles with a maximum inner distance between them less than 40', which must be taken in two, three or more successive jumps. They may be one, two or three strides apart and must be designated as a combination by numbering them with a single number and the use of "A" and "B", "A, B, and C" or "A, B, C and D" to differentiate between the different elements of the obstacle. A combination that is set with one, two and occasionally three strides between each element is often referred to as an **In and Out**. A combination that is set where there are no strides between the jumping elements is typically termed as a **Bounce**.

Outside Line: This term refers to a line of fences along the periphery of the ring.

Diagonal Line: This term is used when describing fences situated on or nearly on the diagonal of the ring.

Single Fence: A fence that is situated by itself with no other fences in direct line with it.

Distance: Distance simply refers to the number of feet between two fences. Typically fences are set at 12' increments such as 48', 60', 72' or 90' between the base of one fence to the base of the next jumping effort. When distances between fences are 90' or less, the distance must be included on the posted course for the specific class.

Course: A diagram of where each fence will be situated inside the arena. It also will include the order and direction in which each fence will be jumped and the distances associated with each line if set at a distance of 90' or less. Once the course is approved by the judge, it should be posted a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the start of the class. Each fence must be numbered and an arrow should be used to indicate the direction in which the fence will be taken. Do not connect the fences with long lines on the diagram as this leads to confusion for the riders and the judge. Be sure to check the requirements for each class prior to designing and posting the course.

Stride: An entire sequence of steps in a particular gait, length of stride is measured from where one hoof has left the ground to where the same hoof again hits the ground. The distance between fences are often referred to by the number of "strides" between them. Courses are generally set at distances in 12 foot increments due to the fact on average a horse's stride is 12feet. In classes where both horses and ponies are jumping the same course, fences should either be reset for each "class" of horse or allowances for different stride lengths should be noted.

Brush box: A box filled with brush used to add variation and substance to a jumping element. Brush boxes may also be utilized as a groundline, but should not be set directly under the rails or more than 3 inches in front of the jump. The height of the brush box is to be measured from the bottom of the box to the top of the rail. If no rail is used over the brush box, the height of the fence is measured to the top of the solid portion of the box (not the height of the brush).



Flower box: A box filled with flowers used to add variation and substance to a fence. Flower boxes may also be used as groundlines for fences. Care should be given not to place flower boxes on the backside of a jump unless the fence is to be taken in both directions. This is a safety concern for both horse and rider if the horse should land on the box.

Types of Fences

Fences used for hunter courses should be solid in appearance and inviting for the horse to jump. There are two basic types of fences that can be used on the course: verticals and oxers. A vertical fence is a straight, upright fence where all the elements of the fence are in the same vertical plane. These types of fences are often made of vertical rails, walls, gates, planks or panels. An oxer or spread fence is an obstacle that has width as well as height. Spread fences usually contain two or more sets of standards and rails with or without filler materials such as brush or flower boxes, walls, coops. Different types of materials or fillers can be used to add variety and interest to each fence. Flower boxes, brush boxes, walls, gates and panels are not required, but add depth and eye appeal to the course when compared to a simple course. Remember that the fences should be natural and inviting in appearance while maintaining safety of both horse and rider. Some committees will have a division for beginner horses or riders that have all crossrail fences. This is fine for lower levels since it gives both horse and rider experience on a course with smaller jumping efforts, but is prohibited for State Fair qualifications. Also, NEVER make an oxer out of crossrails as it is not a safe jumping obstacle.

All fences, verticals, oxers and crossrails, should have groundlines. Groundlines may be either a single pole, flower box, brush box or pine boughs set in front of the fence to help both the horse and rider determine the height of the fence and the appropriate takeoff point on the approach to the fence. Groundlines should never be used on the back side of a fence unless the fence is designed to be jumped both ways. In that case, care should be given when placing the groundlines in order for the horse to not accidentally land on it and cause harm to himself or the rider.

Setting Fence Heights

When the types of fences to use have been decided upon, heights should be determined for each class. The Uniform Rules for 4H Horse Shows gives height ranges for each class and division, Equitation Over Fences (Novice, Intermediate and Advanced), Working Hunter (Green, Low and Regular) and Hunter Hack. Please check these specific ranges for all 4H Horse Shows and State Fair Qualifications. When measuring fences, the height should be measured in the middle of the fence with a rigid measuring stick. You may purchase a measuring stick or make one yourself from a 1"x1"x4' pole with the heights 1', 1'3", 1'6", 1'9", 2', 2'3 and so on up to 4' to make setting fences easier.

Once the height has been set, the rails of the vertical fence may be spread out evenly to give more substance to the appearance of the fence. Filler, flower boxes, brush boxes, planks, gates, panels, stone walls may be used in addition to or in place of some rails to give added depth and variation to the fences. Care should be given so that all materials used are safe for both horse and rider. When measuring the heights for oxers (spreads), the desired height will be determined off of the back element of the fence and then front element will be 3" to 6" lower. The width of the spread should be measured in the center of the fence across the rails from the front to the back. If adjustments to the width of the spread need to be made, adjust the back part of the element in order not to disturb the distance set for that line. One thing to consider is that the width of the spread should never be larger than the height of the tallest element of the



obstacle (never wider than it is tall!). Oxers should also not be used as the first fence of the course and are best situated at the end of a line or as the “out” portion of a combination.

HEIGHT				
Equitation:	Novice	Horse	2'	No In & Outs
		Pony	1'6"	No In & Outs
	Intermediate	Horse/Med& Large Pony	2'3"	No In & Outs
		Small Pony	2'	No In & Outs
	Advanced	Horse/Large Pony	2'6" to 3'	
		Medium Pony	2'3"	
		Small Pony	2'	
Hunters:	Green	Horse	2'	No In & Outs
		Pony	1'6"	No In & Outs
	Low	Horse/Med& Large Pony	2'3"	No In & Outs
		Small Pony	2'	No In & Outs
	Regular	Horse/Med& Large Pony	2'6"	
		Small Pony	2'	
These heights are listed in the current revision of the Uniform Rules for 4H Horse Shows (179)				

Designing and Setting the Course

With the types and heights of the fences determined, the next step in the process is to design and set up the course. There are several things to consider: how many entries are in the class, where are the end gates in relation to the start and finish of the course, and how large is the arena to be used. It is important to know the dimensions of the arena in order to evenly distribute the course and to easily set the fences. *When you know the length of your arena, determine the halfway point and put half your distance on each side of that point. (?)*

Generally the first fence should be situated somewhere near the in gate to speed up the class. If the entrance and exit gates are in different locations, it is helpful to have the course end near the exit so that the next person can be getting ready to start the course while the previous rider is exiting. Consideration should be given when designing the course and placing the approach to the first fence...will the rider be jumping to or away from the In gate? Jumping to or away from the entrance will affect the degree of difficulty when executing this obstacle. Don't wait until the day of the show to determine if the course will actually fit and be rideable in the arena. Using graph paper and drawing your course to scale will help alleviate any problems and make set-up on show day much easier. The following is a table of suggested strides for In and Out fences to use when designing the course.



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Striding Table for In and Out Fences					
Distances for Horses		Distances for Ponies			
(based on avg 12' stride)			Small Pony	Med Pony	Large Pony
# of Strides	# of Feet	# of Strides	# of Feet	# of Feet	# of Feet
1	24	1	20	20-22	22-24
2	36	2	30	32	34
3	48	3	39	42	45
4	60	4	48	52	56
5	72	5	57	62	67
6	84	6	66	72	78
7	96	7	75	82	89

Suggested distances for In & Outs are bolded. Uniform Rules for 4H Horse Shows (10/04)

Since most 4H shows have classes including horses and ponies, ridden by junior and senior riders, setting distances and heights for the fences can be difficult. Try to utilize the as much space as your arena will allow. If a line is set at 60' for a horse, a pony could add a stride in the line and still come out all right. In and out fences MUST be adjusted for each group of horses. To alleviate as much hassle as possible, establish an order of go and group all animals of the same height together so that adjustments in height and distance will be done less often. This is highly recommended instead of adjusting for each individual horse.

Prior to the start of the show, one person who will preferably be at the show and know the level of competitors should be designated as the "Course Designer". This person should use the course plan for each of the classes being shown that day, usually Equitation Over Fences and Working Hunter classes. Copies of each course should be given to the Judge, Announcer, Course Designer and Ring crew. Remember that the courses should be posted for the exhibitors at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the class. Make sure the course is large enough to read while mounted and put somewhere everyone has easy access to.

When it is time to set the course, the Course Designer should place a rail on the ground where each fence will be and the Ring crew will put standards at the end of each one and add cups, walls, and filler to each obstacle. The Designer should see that all distance adjustments, heights and straightness of fences are acceptable prior to the start of the class. Be sure groundlines (poles, flower boxes or brush boxes) are on the correct side of the fence and set at a safe distance in front of the fence. When measuring the distances between fences, try to use a 100' tape and measure from the "back" edge of the first fence in the line to the "front" edge of the second fence. This is especially important when the second fence is an oxer! One helpful hint when measuring diagonal lines, it is good idea to measure between the two left standards and the two right standards to ensure that the fences are parallel with each other. Once all the lines (straight and/or diagonal) are set, single fences can be situated in relation to those lines.

After the Course Designer has set the course and double checked heights and distances, it is customary to ask the judge to make a final check prior to the start of the class. Any changes or safety concerns can be addressed before the rider is on course. There are many resources available to help with course designs. Below are sample courses designed to meet the requirements for each division listed in the Uniform Rules for 4H Horse Shows (10/04 revision).



Beginner Eq Over (one change of direction, no In & Outs)

Intermediate Eq Over (one change of direction, no In & Outs)

Advanced Eq Over (one change of direction, In & Outs allowed)

Green Working Hunter (two changes of direction, no In & Outs)

Low Working Hunter (two changes of direction, no In & Outs)

Regular Working Hunter (two changes of direction, In & Outs allowed)



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