

Choosing Club Instructors

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One of the many responsibilities that DCs enjoy is the establishment of an instruction program for their Clubs. The local club instruction program is expected to focus on member-development into horsemen and women--mounted and unmounted--within the auspices of the nationally-established Standards of Proficiency, but not necessarily limited to the standards. For example, some Clubs include roping or vaulting among their club lessons, even though those particular skills are not evaluated at a rating.

There remains--deliberately--much latitude to any DC or their appointed representative or committee to determine the most appropriate instruction program for their particular club, given all the parameters of member and/or club interest, facilities, horses, time, and money. After developing the instruction program, it is up to the DC (or the designated representative) of each club to select the instructors used. These instructors need not be USPC alumni, nor currently active in USPC programming. However, the DC should expect that their Club instructors be knowledgeable of AND current in the USPC standards and familiar with Pony Club's commitment to safety and the equipping requirements of the riding discipline they teach.

Instructors from all parts of the horse world can be very useful. For example, where better to learn how to do beautiful braiding than a hunter barn? However, they may need a copy of the current standards before the lesson. There are bona fide instructor certification programs in many disciplines (such as the USEA Instructor Certification) that can be helpful to the new or inexperienced DC in determining the qualifications of a potential instructor. However, many of these programs are fairly new. Therefore, it is still very possible and probable that a DC may find an extremely competent instructor that has no additional training or certification beyond their own experience. Regardless of the instructors' backgrounds, it is very helpful to invite any interested instructors (including USPC-affiliated instructors) to attend a Regional Standards and Rating clinic as well.

Peer-to-peer, or peer-to-near peer, teaching is a very important element of the Pony Club system. Frankly, our members cannot progress through the rating levels without the opportunity to teach. Beginning at the D-3 level, teaching others is part of the standards, and members learn to develop their teaching skills first with unmounted teaching and progressing on to mounted

teaching at the upper level ratings. This system of peer-to-peer teaching benefits not only the members doing the teaching, but also the members receiving the peer instruction by providing a role model and something to aspire to themselves. Therefore, DCs should look for the opportunity in their instruction program to incorporate the Cs (as well as the Bs/HAs/As) as instructors of more junior or younger members. In fact, it can be extremely beneficial to all involved when you have a C member instructing your young Ds, with simultaneous evaluation from one of your Region's Bs or HAs. [Two important notes: 1) never leave a member to instruct other members without an adult present; and 2) be prepared to offer some compensation for your member-instructors--if only gas money, lunch, and a free lesson for themselves.]

Selecting quality instructors is integral to providing the best Pony Club experience to your members. Should you have further questions or concerns about this topic, please contact the Instruction Department at the National Office at instruction@ponyclub.org.

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