



# Horse Project Assessment Guide

May 2016

## *Definition of an Assessment*

An assessment in a 4-H Horse Project is way to evaluate the skills of a horse and rider. It should be a positive learning environment for a member to demonstrate that they can properly execute or perform the horsemanship skills required in their project. The goal of assessments is to help

## *Initial Assessment*

An assessment of a new project member or new horse in the beginning of the year to gage where the member is and what needs to be accomplished through the year. It's best to make sure that the horse is a good fit for the rider and that they can ride with the rest of the horse project members. This could be the goal setting time for a member that's been in the project. This type of assessment may take place after enrollment for the 4-H year through the early spring.

guide 4-H members in growing and progressing in their horsemanship skills. An assessment does not compare skills against other members, but is an assessment of an individual rider's skills.

## *Year End Assessment*

This can be done after fair since the member has been riding and working on their Project. Some members don't start riding till spring then it can take some time to get in shape and work on their Horsemanship skills. This way, they can start the new year in the next level they completed and work on those skills the following spring. This type of assessment may take place after the Fair through the end of the 4-H year.

## *Purpose of this Assessment Guide:*

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This Assessment Guide is designed to provide guidance for County 4-H programs and their 4-H leaders on how to assess 4-H members in 4-H horse projects. Each county tends to think of their own county as the only way 4-H is across the state. In reality, each program is unique; from the number of members and leaders to the resources available to them. More populated areas have different issues to deal with than smaller communities. Despite the differences, we are all part of Montana 4-H with the same broad goals and purpose.



## Who can do Assessments?

4-H horse project leaders approved by the local Extension Office can do 4-H Horse Project Assessments. This can be leaders who have done County Leader Assessment training or local leaders with horse knowledge. The State 4-H Horse Committee is available to help counties with assessment training if they are interested. The main goal is to have leaders that are knowledgeable on the subject matter. All leaders do not have to do assessments for all 4-H Horse projects. For example, some leaders may only assess members in Western Horsemanship while others may be comfortable doing English or Working Ranch Horse projects.

## Performing Assessments

The 4-H Horsemanship Project is 7 levels. Each member works their way up, beginning at Level 1 and may progress until they have reached Level 7. The assessment is based on how the rider rides, not on the horse. It's the member's knowledge and riding ability to get the horse to do the

maneuvers. Assessments match the youth/horse combination to the appropriate Horsemanship skill level for safety and to provide the member and horse the appropriate level of challenge. If a member gets a new horse, they work to bring that horse up to their skill level. It may take a member a couple of years in each level until they master it. The end goal is completion. Some counties give awards as each member moves through a skill level or when they complete the project.

There are 3 parts to an assessment: 1) Mounted abilities, 2) Unmounted abilities, and 3) a Workbook portion. 4-H records also need to be up to date at the time a leader signs off on an assessment. Record keeping is a vital part of 4-H and a life skill.

The basic process is the same for Working Ranch Horse, Colt to Maturity, Green Horse, and other projects with assessments.

### *Here are some tips on Assessments:*

- Make assessments and patterns positive and fun for members
- Build on previous skills and make them progressive
- Help them learn how, work on level elements and maneuvers
- Teach reading patterns
- A leader's job is to make an assessment successful and positive
- Remember fairness as members are at different levels
- Kids should be able to demonstrate the 8-10 skills they have been working on for the past 3 to 6 months
- Expect mistakes until it falls together for the kids- they are just learning
- Give kids 3 or 4 positive comments as they finish- save the negative stuff for another time or day
- Use skills outlined by the project assessments to make workable patterns
- Assess the needs and levels for your county
- Don't go above the assessment skills for the level the member is in
- Remember that education is our key purpose

## *How quickly can a member move through the Assessment process?*

The assessment process is designed so that a member may move through the assessment process as quickly or slowly as necessary. A member can be assessed through multiple levels within the same 4-H year until the appropriate level is determined. For example, an experienced rider takes the Horsemanship Project for the first time. They may be assessed through Levels 1, 2, and 3 in the same day if they are an apt rider and have the background knowledge as well. After the initial assessment process to find the appropriate level, the members typically advance more slowly through levels as more advanced riding techniques are included in the assessment list. Members quite often do one level per year after the initial assessment process.

Assessments are a process to guide 4-H members in gaining skills and moving in a forward progression through 4-H horse projects. Unless safety is an issue, there is

typically no reason for members to go back a level, though members may remain in the same level rather than advancing if they are not able to meet all the assessment requirements. Remember that the assessment is based on how the rider rides, not on the horse. It's the member's knowledge and riding ability to get the horse to do the maneuvers.

## *How do I know if they are in the right level?*

If the 4-H member can master everything on the assessment list already, it is appropriate to advance them to the next level. Once they get to a level where they cannot do everything on the list but it is reasonable for them to work on the items they have not mastered throughout the 4-H year, they are in the correct level. This is the level they will show in at the Fair and also the level they would show in at the State 4-H Horse Show. For example, if a member passes/completes an assessment for Horsemanship Level 3 before County Fair, then they will show in Level 4 at their Fair. Keep in mind that the deadline for this assessment prior to the Fair

needs to give the member enough time to work on the new level.

## *How many Assessments are "required"?*

Your local county committee will determine how many assessments will take place in your county, but it is recommended that you have at least a couple assessments per year.

Assessments can be done informally throughout the 4-H year. For example, a leader that works with kids on a regular basis at practice sessions may check items off the assessment list as they observe them and make a point to ask for the items they did not casually observe.

Assessments can also be performed formally at designated times. For example, your county may set up an initial assessment day early in the 4-H year to assess members to their proper levels by going through the items on the assessment list. Counties may have multiple assessment days. For example, counties could have assessments set at 90, 60, and 30 days before the Fair in

order to provide time for the areas needing improvement.

Your county committee can determine if the Fair counts as an assessment of mounted abilities. Keep in mind that there are other items on the assessment (unmounted abilities, workbook) that should be completed, so the county committee will need to decide how and when that information is collected and assessed.

Patterns are often used to send members through a set of skills to assess.

Assessments are part of the life skills that 4-H teaches. Setting up a portion of the assessment as a test also gives members life skills.

### *What happens when it is time to re-enroll for the next 4-H year?*

After being assessed by their 4-H leader, 4-H members who “pass” their year-end assessment at the end of the 4-H year, after Fair or during the Fair for some counties, will advance to the next level of Horsemanship. In the case where a member does not pass the year-end assessment, they do not move up and will continue to work on the assessment till they can pass it. Members will re-enroll the next year in the same level they left the prior year. If they showed in Level 3 at fair and didn’t do an assessment they would enroll in Level 3 the next 4-H year, and then meet with their 4-H leader to be assessed to the appropriate level for the new 4-H year.

It is likely that members who have enough mastery of their project to win a project level class at the State 4-H Horse Show (and even perhaps the county show) would have all the skills they need to pass and complete that level and would advance to the next level in the following 4-H year.

### *How do Assessments relate to the State 4-H Horse Show?*

Members must be assessed into the level they show in at the county Fair and then show in that same level at the State show. For example, if they showed in English Horsemanship Level 3 at their county Fair, they will also show in English Horsemanship Level 3 at the State 4-H Horse Show.

### *4-H Project Horse Ownership:*

All 4-H horse project animals must be owned by the member or in a partnership with his or her immediate family, or the member must have access to the horse. A horse carried as a 4-H project may be shown by more than one member of the immediate family in any one year at the State 4-H Horse Show providing that neither the horse nor the member compete against his or herself. Members may also lease a horse if they don’t own their own from a different family or community member.

## Assessment Examples:

**Scenario 1:** You have a beginning rider who lacks confidence around horses. It is likely that Horsemanship Level 1 will be the best fit.

**Scenario 2:** You have a first year 4-H horse project member who is an experienced rider with an older horse who is a bit set in his ways. This member may have Level 4 abilities, but the horse may only have Level 3 abilities so it is up to the leader to decide where the horse/rider combination best fits.

**Scenario 3:** A 4-H member who completed Horsemanship Level 4 last 4-H year has a new horse this 4-H year. This member has Level 4 riding skills and will continue in Level 4 bringing this horse's skills to match the rider. If it's a very green horse, the member may choose to take the Green Horse Project and then continue in the Horsemanship Project once this horse has better skills.

## Using patterns as a part of the Assessment process:

It's important to teach 4-H members to read patterns. At project meetings, leaders can have members start reading simple patterns, then try to write some to use at riding practice. You can also have kids practice pattern without horse in the meeting room just walking, trotting, etc. on foot. This helps the patterns stick in their heads so they won't be worried about doing them. Make sure to teach kids maneuvers, not a certain pattern, over and over again. Ideally, you want kids to know how to perform maneuvers and not be threatened by different patterns. You also don't want the horse to "memorize" a pattern, which gets away from the member's horsemanship skills.

Members should be able to get the maneuvers correct, smooth, fluid, and consistent. Just because they get it once, doesn't mean they can get it twice. This is why it is helpful to watch their progression at work meetings. If you don't have this capability, test them on a pattern. If there was something you're not sure about, have them repeat the maneuver to make sure they understand what they are doing and what the mechanics of the maneuver are.

You don't have to include every skill in your pattern. At work meetings (horse practice) you can ask them to do any maneuver in their skill level at any time.

## Considerations for making up patterns for Assessments



- Understand and use the requirements for the level the member is in.
- Be sensitive to the age of the riders, don't make them too long and drawn out. Older kids can have a little bit longer pattern. Remember that they don't have to keep doing the same maneuvers or pattern over and over.
- Keep patterns simple and to the point.
- Take the weather into account to keep patterns workable (make them short if it is too hot, cold, rainy, etc.)
- Make patterns fit your arena size and condition (narrow, big mud hole in corner, etc.)
- Make patterns challenging to riders-difficult enough to make them think, but not frustrating or too hard. Remember to make it fun so they want to do it again!
- Set riders up for success, not failure. For example, for younger riders, plan patterns so they don't have to stand at the end gate and try to get their horse to leave it.
- Use symbols in a key simple enough for all aged riders to understand. Make sure they are different enough to distinguish one maneuver from another. Remember color is hard to reproduce. Make sure you designate where the judge will stand.
- See if your patterns are rideable before assessment day. Try it on a horse to get out all the glitches or fix any problems.
- Maneuvers need to fit together when riding from one transition to another - Don't put a rollback at the end of a walk down.
- Make sure your pattern fits the level of assessment skills. Don't go above it.
- Use markers or cones to help them judge distance and space in the arena. This also helps them to look around corners and think about the next part of the pattern.
- Always stress Horsemanship in your patterns. The availability of patterns online now take away some of this but it is good knowledge for both leader and member. They need to be able to make patterns to help their horsemanship project and be able to work on it on their own.

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