

Rules of the Arena

Show season is coming up, and that means navigating a busy warm up arena! Riding in an arena full of horses is a bit like driving on the interstate – it takes practice! You would never send a new driver out onto an 8 lane highway without teaching them all the rules they need to know. The same holds true for riding in an arena with other horses. So many riders have their own farms, or are used to riding by themselves or with one other horse in the arena. The last thing you want to worry about as you're preparing for your test is guessing where to go in the arena, so learn the rules! Just as in driving, there are quite a few, but if we all follow them, everything goes smoothly.



The basics:

1. Look UP!

--This is the *most* important thing. Most crashes (or almost crashes) can be avoided by this rule. Going across the diagonal? Look up! Planning to ride a serpentine? Look up! Want to go straight after having been on a circle? Look up! It is also beneficial for your position, so you get that added bonus. :)

2. Keep RIGHT.

-- Maybe you've heard this as the "left shoulder to left shoulder" rule. If that makes sense to you, that's great, but I have many students who look up to see a horse coming at them and then have to take a few seconds to remember which is their left shoulder and which is the other rider's left shoulder. Too late! Just keep to the right, like driving in the US. This means that if you are tracking left, you have the track, or if you are tracking right, you yield the track.

3. Riders on a 20 m circle yield the track.

--It doesn't matter which direction you are circling (left or right.) If you are on a circle, you keep the track free for other horses. If there is no horse coming near you, feel free to touch the track for an accurate 20 m circle. Just keep your eyes up in order to plan ahead.

4. When walking, stay OFF the track

--If you are warming up at the walk, cooling down, or taking a break, leave the track free for those who are working, and walk on the second track or quarter lines. It does not matter which direction you are going.

5. If you halt to adjust something, stay off the track or come out of the arena

--Need to adjust your stirrups? Tighten your girth? Remove polos? Take off/put on your jacket? Either come out of the arena to have your groom help you or come off the track, so you are not blocking the way for those

who are working.

6. Enclose an oncoming horse

---This one can be confusing for people, but basically it means do not cut other riders off. If your horse is going to cross the path of another horse, enclose that horse rather than cutting in front. This usually happens near the center of the arena, when two riders are either circling or going across a diagonal line.

7. Never pass another horse on the inside

-- If you are traveling in the same direction as another horse and are going faster, never pass on the inside. That other horse could decide to turn and run into you! Just circle or, if there's room, pass on the outside.

8. If you are planning to ride a halt, make sure there is no one behind you!

-- In a busy arena, deciding to halt suddenly could cause a pile up. If you are planning to school a halt (or reinback, walk pirouette, etc.) make sure there is no one coming up behind you. It's often best to practice these movements on the second track or quarter line, so you're out of the way.

9. Look before entering the ring

-- I think of this as being in the on ramp lane onto the interstate. You have to look and possibly pause before entering, so that you do not disrupt the flow of traffic in the arena. Many riders will see you waiting to come in and make space, just as a courteous driver would on the highway.

10. More advanced horses/riders should give extra space to beginner riders/young horses.

-- This is just common courtesy. If you are warming up for your PSG, and you can tell that someone is on a green bean 4 year old, please give that young horse extra space. A big WB charging at you while doing 2 tempis can be a pretty scary thing. Be courteous of green horses and riders.

More advanced rules:

11. Diagonal and center line have right of way

-- If you are clearly riding the centerline or on the diagonal, other riders crossing into your path should yield. If you look up and see someone riding onto a diagonal to ride tempis, extensions, etc, leave that line free to them. Same goes with the center line. If someone is clearly practicing the center line, try not to block their line. In a very busy arena, sometimes a rider will call out "diagonal" or "centerline" to make this known.

12. Piaffe and passage have the right of way

-- This is true no matter which direction the piaffing/passaging horse is traveling. If you are riding a working trot on the left rein, and someone is coming down the track in passage on the right rein, YOU must yield the track.

13. When riding lateral work on the long sides, straighten your horse before passing another horse

-- By definition, lateral work takes up more "tracks." Shoulder in, haunches in, and renvers all require more space than simply trotting or cantering straight ahead. If you are in a shoulder in and need to pass an oncoming horse, first straighten your horse so that you are not taking up as much space.

When in doubt, state your intentions. A friendly, "outside" or "inside" is always helpful. Try to make yourself practice riding in the arena with other horses at home (if possible) so that when you get to the show, these rules feel familiar. The warm up at a horse show doesn't have to be a nightmare!!

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