

Dispensation FAQs

What is the difference between a USEF Dispensation and USEF Classification?

Both programs are available to athletes with **permanent, measurable, physical or visual challenges** for the purpose of enabling the use of compensating aids during competition in USEF recognized shows. The dispensation program also allows for hearing loss as a primary health condition.

Dispensation is allowed for most USEF FEI disciplines whereas Classification is for para dressage or para driving. Dispensations are not for national or non-breed disciplines. Those requests should go directly to the national or non-breed disciplines department directors.

Both programs are based on the FEI Classification system to establish eligibility (see below for more specifics) which is established by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Classification system. The USEF Adaptive Sports Committee reviews all applications for dispensations. USEF Classifiers complete athlete classifications to qualify for para dressage or para driving competition and determine the approval of any standard compensating aids and seek assistance from the Adaptive Sports Committee for approval of any non-standard aids.

What are compensating aids?

Allowance for the use of tack, equipment, modification of dress or modification of performance that are not already sanctioned in the USEF rules. The purpose is to compensate for a loss in function due to a permanent, measurable, physical, visual or hearing impairment. An example might be to allow the use of 2 whips to cue the horse for someone who has legs that are paralyzed, or the use of loops on the reins for someone who has fingers that are not able to bend enough to grip the reins.

What is the process for USEF Dispensation?

An athlete applies for a dispensation by submitting information about their medical diagnosis and functional challenges. The application is found at [Dispensation Certificates | US Equestrian](#). Encouraged is the inclusion of pertinent medical test results. The athlete also indicates what compensating aids they are requesting. This should be supported by information about the particular aid(s) with possible photos or videos. The Adaptive Sports Committee will review the submission, requesting additional information from the athlete as needed. Strongly encouraged is early submission of any requests so there is plenty of time to gather information and render a decision prior to any events/shows. Once aid(s) are approved, they will be listed on the athlete's USEF portal and the USEF Master List. Downloaded copies of the certificate will be submitted upon entry at a USEF recognized event.

Does the Adaptive Sports Committee grant the use of compensating aids to anyone?

No. Any aid granted must be considered reasonably safe for both the athlete and the horse. The aid must not provide an advantage to the athlete but only compensate for a limitation of function.

Aids are granted based on what is allowed by USEF/FEI and an individual's impairment status, so it is impossible to compare aids between athletes. Examples of potential aids can be found online.

How is eligibility determined for a dispensation?

There must be a primary permanent underlying health condition matching one listed by FEI. Not all health conditions are eligible. Generally, diagnoses that affect physical, hearing or visual function are eligible with an onset at any time through the lifespan. There must be recent documented testing that confirms the presence of the health condition such as lab tests, imaging, ophthalmologic testing, audiologic exams, etc . . . There must be limitations in range of motion, coordination, strength, hearing or visual function that meets a minimal eligibility criteria. The Adaptive Sports Committee, an interdisciplinary committee made up of USEF officials/classifiers and athletes, makes the determination on eligibility. They will review submitted information and ask for additional medical documentation as needed.

Disabling conditions that are not eligible include those that are unable to be quantified by objective testing or that fluctuate in presentation. These are often primary conditions caused by degenerative changes or aging, impaired system function (breathing , heart, organ function) or impairments of pain, fatigue, sensory changes or loss of balance. Intellectual or psychological disabilities are also currently not eligible when they are the primary diagnosis.

The FEI Classification Manual may be found [HERE](#)

Where is additional information found about compensating aids?

The FEI and USEF rules list allowable aids for all competitors and often indicate when aids require a dispensation. The USEF and FEI have developed resources to learn about various aids outside of the rule books. Additional sites include: United States Para Equestrian Association, USPEA.org and United States Driving for the Disabled, USDFD.org

Rules for Dressage

- [FEI Rules Found Here](#)
- [USEF Rules Found Here](#)
- The FEI Para Dressage Compensating Aids Photo Guidelines may be found [HERE](#)

Rules for Driving

- [FEI Rules found HERE](#)

- [USEF Rules Found HERE](#)
- The FEI Para Driving Compensating Aids Photo Guidelines may be found [HERE](#)
- [Adaptive Equipment](#) – US Driving for Disabled website

[FEI Manual for Classifiers 2020 update2024 update08.03.24 clean 1.pdf](#) – Section 15 and Annex IV (Dressage) and Annex V (Driving)

[Compensating Aids Guidelines Para Dressage May 2020 13.10.2022 0.pdf](#) – or <https://tack.fei.org> for FEI Guidelines with standard aids.

[annex--bits-saddlery-equipment](#) – USEF DR 120/121 Annex A – Dressage Saddlery and Equipment

[dressage-attire-equipment-booklet](#) – USEF DR 120/121 Annex A – Dressage Dress and Equipment

Are there companies that offer aids for athletes?

Yes. There are several companies that offer tack and equipment that are thought to be helpful for those with challenges in showing and training for the many USEF disciplines. It is necessary to check that these items are allowed by USEF or FEI or may require a dispensation approved by the USEF. The USEF Adaptive Sports Committee does not endorse any specific companies, brands or items. Aids are chosen with safety and the welfare of horse and human as paramount.