

Summary of the Proposed Changes to the Dressage Freestyle Degree of Difficulty (DoD)

The DoD is:

- One of the artistic marks on the scoresheet
- Worth 10% of the final score (1 DoD point = 1% overall)
- Based on a floorplan the Athlete submits in advance
- Automatically calculated assuming ideal execution, then adjusted based on the actual performance (p. 8; document found on [this page](#), under “Help”)

It evaluates Difficult Movements, Difficult Combinations, Difficult Transitions, and Repetitions.

The DoD system has contributed significantly to the sport in several ways:

- Standardised and transparent scoring: Clear rules make outcomes more predictable and accountable.
- Improved focus on execution and harmony: Since technical difficulty is pre-declared, Athletes and Judges can concentrate more on how movements are performed, reinforcing core values like harmony and correctness.
- Better storytelling and spectator experience:
 - Live trends and graphics for TV
 - More insightful commentary
 - Faster results: Typically around 45 seconds quicker, often delivered while Horse and Athlete are still in the arena.
- Higher-quality freestyles: Athletes now design more thoughtful, structured floorplans with clear strategic intent.

The FEI and stakeholder groups (IDRC, IDTC and IDOC) have proposed updates to the Dressage Freestyle DoD system to strengthen the link between harmony and difficulty, reward high-quality execution, and reduce incentives for excessive risk. Key changes include penalties for unaccepted combinations, updated movement modifiers emphasizing excellence, catalogue adjustments, and improved procedural controls. Simulations show an average DoD reduction of ~0.6 points, which has a bigger impact on lower-quality tests.

Context & Purpose

This document serves as a summary of the presentation shown here: <https://inside.fei.org/fei/disc/dressage/webinar>

The aim is to reinforce harmony, reduce excessive risk-taking, and keep the methodology aligned with overall Object of Dressage: (pp. 4, 7).

The object of Dressage is the development of the horse as a **happy** athlete **in a positive mental & physical state** through harmonious education. **Allowing** the horse to be **calm, supple, loose and flexible**, but also confident, attentive and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with the rider.

Why Changes Are Proposed

Since the introduction of DoD, benefits have included increased transparency, consistency, stronger storytelling for media, and better-designed freestyles. Continuous refinement is recommended as the sport evolves (p. 9).

The motivation:

- Simplify the system
- Align DoD more closely with harmony
- Make excessive difficulty less advantageous
- Reward excellent execution more clearly (pp. 11–12)

Summary of Proposed Changes

Penalties for Unaccepted Difficult Combinations / Transitions

If a Difficult Combination or Transition is not accepted by the Judges, the Athlete loses 50% of the potential bonus instead of losing nothing (pp. 13–15).

Implication: mistakes are more costly; harmony becomes more strongly linked to DoD.

New Modifier Logic for Difficult Movements

- Bad execution (<5.0) → double penalty
- Mid execution (7.0–8.0) → unchanged
- Excellent execution (9.0+) → significantly increased reward (pp. 16–20)

This places much greater emphasis on correct, harmonious execution and reduces the reward for merely attempting difficult movements.

To achieve a 10.0 DoD: all Difficult Movements must score 9.0 or above.

Catalogue Adjustments

Changes include (p. 22–23): ~~08~~

- Updates to piaffe pirouette modifiers
- Clearer wording for curved-line tempi changes
- Removal of the Difficult Transition Extended Canter → Halt

Athletes must review their current floorplans for affected elements.

Procedural & Governance Changes

- Mandatory Judge “Meeting Button” before finalizing deductions for omissions or errors (p. 24).
- Mandatory written Athlete confirmation of the assigned floorplan, available upon request by officials (p. 25). ~~08~~

These create higher procedural accuracy and accountability.

Simulation Results

Based on 100 randomly selected FEI World Cup™ DoD results (pp. 26–27):

- Average DoD decreases by ~0.6 points
- Impact varies by performance quality:
 - Top scores: –0.2
 - Mid-range: –0.6
 - Lower-range: –1.0

Key insight:

Harmonious, well-executed freestyles retain high DoD potential, while overambitious or flawed tests will result in substantial reductions.