



Freestyle

Discipline Rules



1. Overview

The Freestyle Division is designed to showcase the partnership, creativity, and training of eligible mustangs and/or burros through a choreographed performance set to music.

This division highlights engaging performances that demonstrate intentional composition, thoughtful timing and flow, originality of theme, and confident, willing execution. Successful entries reflect clear communication, emotional connection, and harmony between the competitor(s) and their equine partner(s), while creating a cohesive and memorable overall presentation.

The Freestyle Division at the Finals is by invitation only.



2. Eligibility

2.1 Animal Eligibility

Only mustangs and burros eligible under the General Rules may compete in this division. Outside breeds, crossbreeds, or non-eligible horses may not be incorporated into the performance in any capacity.

Multiple eligible mustangs and/or burros may perform together as part of a single entry with a maximum of 6 animal(s) total.

Non-equine animals may be included in a performance, as long as they are led to/from the arena entrance on a leash. Any uncommon species must be approved by event management.

2.2 Divisions & Ages

The Freestyle Division is offered in three categories:

- **Youth** — Open to competitors ages 8–17 at the time of competition.
- **Adult** — Open to competitors ages 18 and older at the time of competition.
- **Burro** — Open to competitors ages 8 and older at the time of competition. The competing animal must be an eligible burro.

2.3 Multi-Competitor Entries

A single entry may include up to three (3) competitors. All competitors within an entry perform together and are scored as a unit.

Mixed-age entries are permitted in the Adult and Burro Divisions. Youth competitors may be included in an Adult or Burro Division entry and compete alongside adult competitors.

Adult competitors may not enter the Youth Division. Youth Division entries are limited to youth competitors only.

3. Qualification & Invitation

3.1 Virtual Freestyle Challenge

The Virtual Freestyle Challenge serves as the primary qualification pathway for invitation to compete in the Freestyle Division at the Finals.

Virtual Challenge Entry fee: **\$10 per submission**. All entries will be judged and scored with the top 10 from each division to receive a ribbon by mail. No refunds after submission.

Virtual Freestyle Challenge entries **open April 1, 2026** and **close on August 1, 2026**. Submissions must be received by that date through the official MHF Qualifier Hub at www.mustangheritagefoundation.org/qualifiers. Late submissions will not be accepted.

3.2 Invitation Process

Invitations will be extended **by September 1, 2026** as follows:

- Top 10 scoring entries from each category (Youth, Adult, and Burro) in the Virtual Freestyle Challenge.
- Two (2) additional high-scoring entries per category will be designated as alternates.
- Select invitation spots may be reserved for top freestyle competitors from specified mustang events, as determined by event management.

If an invited entry declines or cannot attend the Finals event, invitations will be extended to alternates in order of score.

4. Virtual Freestyle Challenge Video Requirements

- Performances must be **recorded between October 1, 2025 to August 1, 2026**.
- Performance must be recorded in a single, continuous take.
- Videos must be submitted in an accepted format: .mp4, .mov, or a public link (i.e. YouTube). Editing, splicing, or performance-enhancing video effects are not permitted. Email submissions are not accepted as an entry.
- The performance area must remain clearly visible throughout the recording.
- Video production quality will not influence scoring as long as subjects can be clearly seen.
- All Freestyle rules for the Finals apply to the virtual challenge, **except**:
 - Set-up should NOT be included in the video recording
 - Music, while encouraged in virtual submissions, is not required

Submissions not meeting these standards will be rejected. In those cases, competitors can re-submit another video before the deadline as a new entry.

The performance presented at the Finals is not required to match the virtual submission. Finals performances will be evaluated by different judge(s).

5. Scoring

Freestyle is scored as a performance competition based on demonstrated skill, overall quality of execution and performance impact.

Total possible score: 100 points.

5.1 Choreography and Skill – 30 Points

- Thoughtful arrangement and sequencing of maneuvers
- Degree of difficulty and skill demonstrated by competitor(s)
- Depth of training and ability demonstrated by animal(s)

5.2 Creativity – 30 Points

- Originality and distinctiveness of performance concept
- Creative choices to enhance the animal(s)' strengths
- Strategic use of pace, energy, and maneuvers to support the theme

5.3 Communication – 30 Points

- Connection between competitor(s) and animal(s)
- Willingness, relaxation, and confidence of the animal(s)
- Clarity and subtlety of cues

5.4 Performance Impact – 10 Points

- Emotional and visual impact of the performance
- Harmony and cohesion of all performance elements
- Lasting impression of the partnership(s) presented

In the event of a tie, the higher Communication score will serve as the first tie-breaker. If still tied, the higher Choreography and Skill score will determine placing.

6. Time Limits

Each entry is allotted separate set-up and performance time. Time begins when the first element (horse, competitor, prop, music, or assistant) enters the arena.

6.1 Youth & Burro Divisions

- Set-up time: 3 minutes
- Performance time: 4 minutes

6.2 Adult Division

- Set-up time: 4 minutes
- Performance time: 5 minutes

Exceeding performance time will result in penalties.

The same performance time limits apply to the Virtual Freestyle Challenge, but set-up time does not apply as it is not included in the recording.

7. Performance Requirements

7.1 Music

Music is required for all Freestyle performances at the Finals.

For the **Virtual Freestyle Challenge**, music is encouraged but **not required**. Sound quality will not affect scoring in the virtual qualification round.

For Finals performances, music must be submitted in mp3 file format and cropped to the required performance time.

All music must be appropriate for a family audience and submitted according to published event specifications.

7.2 Permitted & Restricted Maneuvers

Horses ridden during a performance must be a minimum of 4 years of age at the time of competition. Any competitor who rides a horse under 4 years of age will be eliminated.

Controlled rearing is permitted in the **Adult Division only** and must be initiated by an adult. Any rearing must be deliberate, balanced, and clearly cued. Uncontrolled, unsafe, coercive, or reactive behavior will result in elimination if not resolved.

Mustangs or Burros are not allowed to go onto or into any vehicle, trailer, or prop that is traveling or moving through the arena. Props that move within a fixed position — such as

rocking, wobbling, or pivoting items — are permitted.

Competitors are not allowed to stand or kneel on a horse that is standing, sitting, or lying on any object (i.e. tarps, bridges, platforms, chairs, etc).

Mustangs or Burros under 4 years of age are not allowed to be ridden or directly pull any items (i.e. carts, sleds, etc.). However, the competitor may pull an item while leading the animal.

All maneuvers must reflect humane training, cohesive partnership, and appropriate preparation for a public competition environment.

7.3 Props & Supporting Elements

Props and costumes are permitted and even encouraged to enhance the performance.

Competitors are responsible for providing props and costumes that comply with the safety requirements and competition rules. All items are subject to final review by event management or judges and it is the competitors responsibility to confirm the use of any items in question prior to their performance.

Adult competitors may drive a golf cart or similar utility vehicle during their performance; no one else may operate a vehicle during a performance. Cars, trucks, and all other motor vehicles may not be driven in the arena during a performance. Any vehicle left in the arena during a performance must have its engine turned off.

Youth competitors are not permitted to drive or operate any vehicle, including any open cab vehicles (i.e. golf cart, ATV, etc.)

Competitor(s) named on the entry may participate in any capacity — mounted, in-hand, handling props, or otherwise — as suits the performance. No other individuals may enter the arena during a performance except to hand a prop to a competitor from outside the arena or to release additional animals included in the same entry at the gate.

All elements must be freestanding, nothing driven into the ground, safe, stable, and appropriate for an equine environment. Structural props may not be physically supported or held in place by anyone during the performance.

It is competitors' responsibility to make sure all props and debris are cleared from the arena immediately following the conclusion of their performance. Not completely clearing the arena can result in penalties.

Competitors are encouraged to be thoughtful and respectful in their choice of music, costumes, themes, and props. All performance elements must be appropriate for a family audience. Performances that draw on cultural traditions or identities should do so with care and genuine respect for those communities.

7.4 Prohibited Elements

The following are **prohibited**:

- Pyrotechnics or open flames
- Firearms (real or simulated)
- Hazardous materials
- Any prop or device deemed unsafe by event management

Event management reserves the right to restrict or deny any element that compromises safety, welfare, or event flow.

See also General Rules Section 9.2 regarding official authority over equipment.

7.5 Welfare & Horsemanship

All performances must reflect humane, ethical training and respectful handling.

Animals must appear physically sound, mentally prepared, and willing. Visible distress, excessive force, unsafe handling, or compromised welfare will result in elimination if not resolved.

Entertainment value does not excuse poor horsemanship.

Judges or event management may stop or excuse a performance at any time for safety or welfare concerns.

7.6 Attire

Appropriate footwear must be worn by all competitors at all times during a performance. Bare feet are **prohibited**.

Youth competitors must wear a **helmet** meeting current safety standards while mounted at all times, including during performance and warm-up.

All competitors who jump any objects exceeding 2 feet (0.6m) in height during their performance or warm-up must wear a **helmet** meeting current safety standards while jumping.

8. Penalties

Infraction	Consequence
Failure to clear arena promptly after performance	-5 points from final score
Exceeding performance time limit	-5 points from final score
Not following Helmet requirements (7.6)	Elimination
Bare feet during performance	Elimination
Virtual challenge requirements not met	Submission rejected
Riding an animal under 4 years of age	Elimination
Youth competitor operating a vehicle	Elimination
Standing or kneeling on a horse positioned on an object	Elimination
Loss of control or unsafe behavior creating danger to animal or participants	Elimination
Inhumane handling, excessive force, or visible distress	Elimination
Use of pyrotechnics, firearms, or hazardous materials	Disqualification