



How To Read Class Specifications

Learning how to decipher class/sections specifications (specs) can be confusing, but once you understand how they are usually written, they become easier to understand. The MHJA has prepared this reference guide to help you focus on the important information; how to “fill in the blanks”; and also where to look to find out the other information you might not see in a prize list. A Glossary of Definitions is also included at the end of this document. The words have specific meanings, but may also be loosely used to describe more than one thing.

SPECIFICATION (SPECS) EXAMPLE

Using this example, specifications are usually written in the following manner: “Children’s Working Hunter Pony.”

CHILDREN’S WORKING HUNTER PONY. Open to ponies shown by a junior rider. Riders may not cross-enter into USEF rated classes at the same show where the height of fences exceeds 3’3”. Riders may cross-enter into Pony Jumpers regardless of fence heights. To be judged on performance, soundness, manners, way of going, size of rider to mount and suitability as a Children’s Hunter Pony. To be offered at two fence heights: 2’ for small and medium ponies and 2’ 6” for large ponies. Ponies need not be jogged. Zone Award presented annually as one section. Zone 6 specs.

1. **First is the title of the Section/Class** – in this case it’s ***Children’s Working Hunter Pony***. Hunters are considered either “working” or “conformation.” If you don’t see conformation or working in the title, you can assume its working. Conformation has to be listed for it to be a considered factor in judging, and it will either be in the title or the specs following.
2. Following the Section/Class title defines *what horses and riders may compete* in the class. ***Open to ponies shown by a junior rider***. This means the section/class is open to juniors (riders 17 years of age and under,) and open only to ponies.
3. Next are any cross-entry restrictions. ***Riders may not cross-enter into USEF rated classes at the same show where the height of fences exceeds 3’3”.*** ***Riders may cross-enter into Pony Jumpers regardless of the height.*** This means that riders can’t cross-enter into any classes that exceed 3’3”, unless they are Pony Jumper classes.
4. Next are judging requirements. Sometimes there are no judging requirements listed, in which case they are standard: performance, soundness, way of going. ***To be judged on performance, soundness, manners, way of going, size of rider to mount and suitability as a Children’s Hunter Pony.*** In this example, extra requirements have been added specifically concerning the manners and safety of the way the pony performs. Conformation is not listed as part of the specs, so conformation does not play a part in the judging.



5. Fence heights and other restrictions are next. ***To be judged at two fence heights: 2' for small and medium ponies and 2'6" for large ponies. Ponies need not be jogged.*** As stated in the original definition, small/medium ponies jump one height and large jumps another height; and jogging is not required.
6. The final statement in this specification example belong to a higher organization, such as USEF or USHJA. ***Zone 6 specs.*** As indicated, these specifications are USHJA specs and they are the specs for the MHJA Zone, Zone 6. Other Zones may have different specifications.

Now you have the entire specification and all the information required to see if your horse and rider are eligible to enter it.

EXCEPTION

There is one twist on interpreting specs. In prize lists, the specs that will have the most information are the MHJA sections and non-rated sections. This is because USEF and USHJA allow prize lists to simply list where to find the specifications for national and zone recognized classes. For example, ***Junior Hunter 3'3". USEF Rule HU.*** Means for the full specs you will need to go to the [USEF Rule Book](#), Rule HU and look up Junior Hunter 3'3". For convenience, the MHJA website has posted the USEF Rule Book on-line in the Zone 6 tab. Another example is ***Children's Working Hunter Horse. 13 and Under. USEF Rule HU. USHJA Zone 6 specs.*** This means the general rule is in the USEF Rule Book, but USHJA Zone 6 has different specifications. The MHJA website also contains these specifications within the Zone 6 tab.

GLOSSARY

USEF – United States Equestrian Federation, the national governing body for horse sports in the United States, especially the Olympics. (In 2017, USEF rebranded the association as US Equestrian, however, there will be many references to USEF mostly regarding competition.) MHJA horse shows operate under the recognition of USEF. USEF offers National Horse of the Year Awards, referred to as HOTY's. To show at a USEF/USHJA show, an exhibitor must be a member of both organizations or pay a "Show Pass" fee.

USHJA – United States Hunter Jumper Association, the discipline affiliate to USEF for the Hunter/Jumper sport in the United States. USHJA follows USEF rules and advises USEF on rules for the Hunter/Jumper sport. USHJA divides the United States into 12 Zones of approximately 6 states, each. These Zones offer HOTY awards for certain sections and can also write specs for certain sections. That's why sometimes a section is governed by USEF rules and sometimes by USHJA/Zone rules.



MHJA – Minnesota Hunter Jumper Association, an affiliate of both USEF and USHJA. As such, the MHJA abides by USEF/USHJA rules but we also are able to make our own specs and rules. All MHJA shows are USEF rated shows.

Division – a distinct style of riding. Hunters are a division, Jumpers are a division, and Equitation is a division.

Section – a particular type of class under a division. Junior Hunter, Performance Hunter, Pony Hunter, Amateur Owner Jumper, Unrestricted 2'6" Hunter are all sections. The terms Section and Division are frequently used interchangeably and usually section is what is intended. "The Adult division was so big, they had to split it." Properly stated, the Adult SECTION was so big, it had to be split.

Class – One individual performance unit that, combined with others, make up a section. Hunter sections usually consist of 2-5 over fences classes and 1 under saddle class. In order to have a Championship and Reserve Championship awarded, a rated section must have at least two over fences with at least three entries held and one under saddle with 3 entries held.

- In the Jumper Division, all classes are over fences;
- In the Hunter Division, classes may be over fences or "under saddle." **See NOTE**
- In the Equitation Division, classes may be over fences or "on the flat." **See NOTE**
- **NOTE:** the "on the flat" or "flat" class is sometimes used as shorthand for any class with no jumping. However, in an **Equitation "flat "class the riders are judged**, whereas in a **Hunter "under saddle" the horses are judged**.

Recognized, Rated, Rating, Unrated – All MHJA horse shows are recognized by the USEF and are members' shows. This means all sections/classes held at MHJA shows are governed by the general rules of the USEF. (Drug rules, behavior, attire, etc...) All sections/classes at a USEF horse show have a rating.

- Shows are rated Premier, National, Regional 1 and 2 and Local.
- Hunter Sections are rated by a letter system AA, A, B, C and Local.
- Jumper sections are rated by numbers with 1 being the lowest.
- Rated shows may hold sections/classes that do not fall under USEF/USHJA specifications. These classes are Unrated. All sections/classes that are MHJA approved, but not USHJA/USEF rated are considered unrated sections/classes. MHJA writes the specifications for those. **ALL** entries at a Recognized show must abide by USEF/USHJA rules even if they are only showing in unrated classes.

Cross Entry - cross entry describes what other sections/classes a horse and or rider may or may not be eligible to enter. Some restrict the rider, some the horse and some the horse/rider combination.



Open, Unrestricted – An open or unrestricted class means any horse, pony, or rider may enter. There are no restrictions.

Junior – A Junior rider is one who has not reached his/her 18th birthday. A rider's horse show age is their age on December 1st, the start of each new show year. If a rider is 18 on December 1, 2017, they are no longer a Junior rider and may not participate in any classes restricted to Junior riders.

Amateur – A rider 18 years of age and over, who does not make their living by working with horses. As this definition is very complicated, refer to the specific definition found in the USEF Rule Book. If you have any questions as to whether you are an amateur, contact the USEF or talk to someone knowledgeable such as a steward at a horse show.

Opportunity classes – classes that are offered at a rated horse show where the exhibitor does not have to be a member of USEF/USHJA. Riders in Opportunity classes do have restrictions placed on their ability to show in Opportunity classes by USEF. Refer to the USEF Rule Book for further information.