



# 6 Feet on the Ground Rules & Regulations 2026

Last Updated January 1/19/2026 10:49am

*Purpose and Mission: The purpose of the 6 Feet on the Ground Program is to help enhance proper balance, suppleness, and coordination in our horses all through relaxation and ground work.*

*Our mission is to instill Classical Training Principles with our horses to create Rhythm, Suppleness, Connection, Impulsion, Straightness and eventually Collection with softness and harmony.*

## Contents:

All rule updates will be written in red and dated when the rule takes effect.

SFG1: Eligibility.....page 1	SFG5: Errors and Disqualification.....page 4
SFG2: Gaits and Maneuvers Defined.....page 1	SFG6: The Patterns.....page 5
SFG3: Tack and Equipment.....page 3	SFG7: Competition.....page 7
SFG4: Handler Attire.....page 4	General Glossary of Terms.....page 7

---

## SFG1: Eligibility

- A. Horse: Horses that are eligible to perform, compete or participate in 6 Feet on the Ground patterns and programs are any horses/equines that are sound and healthy. Horses can be any breed, any age, with any training foundation or discipline. Gaited horses are also eligible. Horses ages 0-and up are allowed to compete or participate in 6 Feet on the Ground.
- B. Handler: Handlers that are eligible to perform, compete, or participate in 6 Feet on the Ground patterns and programs are individuals that can attempt all given maneuvers listed in the 6 Feet on the Ground patterns or programs in a safe, controlled and proper manner.
- C. Divisions:
  - a. **Youth** - handlers under the age of 18 years of age as of January 1st of the current year.
  - b. **Adult Amateur** - handlers 18 years or older that have never accepted money for riding, training, schooling, or showing someone else's horse.
  - c. **Open** - handlers of the most experienced exhibitors, trainers and professional horsemen, but any amateur or youth can compete as well.

## SFG2: Gaits and Maneuvers Defined

- A. Gaits:
  - a. Walk: The walk is a 4 beat gait with equal intervals between the beats. The pattern of footfalls is as follows: left hind, left fore, right hind, right fore. The regularity of the tempo and rhythm of the walk must be maintained in all walk movements. Deviations in the pattern of footfalls or irregularity in rhythm is a serious fault of the gait. The steps should not become hurried or irregular, and the horse's body should be loose, supple, and balanced, moving freely and

without tightness. The quality of the walk is judged by the regularity of tempo and rhythm and elasticity of the steps. The horse should walk with marching and determined steps.

- b. Trot: The trot is a two beat gait on alternating diagonal limbs (left hind and right fore simultaneously, followed by the right hind and left fore) separated by a moment of suspension. The regularity of the tempo and rhythm of the trot must be maintained in all trot movements. Deviation in the pattern of footfalls or irregularity of the rhythm is a serious fault of the gait. The trot should be free, active and loose. The quality of the trot is judged by the regularity of tempo and rhythm and the elasticity of the steps. The horse should trot with balanced and determined steps.
- c. Gaited Horses: For gaited horses, acceptable gaits may replace the traditional trot so long as the gait is smooth, rhythmic, four-beat ambling gaits (for example the running walk, foxtrot, or tolt) that ideally show proper balance, and regularity, consistent tempo, and a soft topline. Horses that pace in a lateral 2 beat gait, will earn lower scores whenever “quality of the gait” is being considered. (1/17/2026)

#### B. Maneuvers:

- a. Halt: The horse should come to a halt without tension or resistance, and without forceful aids. The horse should stand motionless and quietly with the weight distributed equally over all four feet and set squarely under the horse’s body. The horse should be balanced and focused, engaged and straight, and eager to perform at the handler’s direction. The poll should be the highest point of the neck and the head on the vertical or in front of the vertical. The transition to the halt should be prompt but not abrupt, obtained by the displacement of the horse’s weight on the hindquarters. The horse’s feet should not slide against the ground before or during the transition to the halt. A complete halt needs to last a minimum of 2-3 seconds.
- b. Nod to Judge: The handler clearly nodding their head in a slight bow in the direction of the judge.
- c. Backing: The horse moves in a backwards direction in well-defined diagonal pairs, without a moment of suspension, and without dragging the feet. The direction of travel should remain straight. The steps should not be rushed or tense; and the horse’s head should remain at or slightly in front of the vertical. Anticipation of backing, resistance to or evasion of the handler’s aids, quickness, uneven tempo or rhythm, deviation of the quarters from the straight line, spreading or inactive hind legs and dragging forefeet are serious faults. Backing is executed in a prescribed number of steps, where the steps are counted as each foreleg moves backwards.
- d. 20ft Circle: The horse moves and travels in partnership with the handler around a circle with an approximate diameter of 20ft. The geometry of the circle is greatly important as well as the quality of the gait. The horse should carry proper bend and balance around the circle with a steady rhythm and tempo. The circle should always be complete and round with proper symmetry.
- e. Circle Around Handler: The horse travels in a circle around the handler with a minimum distance of 3ft between the horse and handler. The approximate diameter of the circle should be a minimum of 20 feet. The handler may either send the horse out to the circle or the handler may move to position themselves. The geometry of the circle is greatly important as well as the quality of the gait. The horse should carry proper bend and balance around the circle with a

steady rhythm and tempo. The circle should always be complete and round. There are no restrictions on the movement or lack of movement of the handler.

- f. Change of Direction (on the circle): The horse changes directions in a method where balance, bend and rhythm are maintained without breaking gait. The horse changes in a figure eight style pattern with approximately one stride of straightness as the horse changes from one direction of bend to the other. The change should be smooth, while maintaining relaxation through the body.
- g. Turn on the Forehand (TOF): The horse's hind legs make a circle or turn around the horse's front end while maintaining forwardness, energy and rhythm. The steps should be even and willing with the body of the horse remaining rather straight with a slight bend to the inside of the turn. The direction of turn is determined by the direction the head will travel to. Correct footfalls are when the inside hind steps deep under the barrel of the horse while the outside hind steps slightly out. The inside front leg should maintain forward and be the pivot point or leg that is traveled around while the outside front leg steps slightly more forward. The proper balancing legs are the inside hind and outside fore. Any bracing, tension or backwards steps are serious faults.
- h. Turn on the Haunches (TOH): The horse's front legs make a circle or turn around the horse's back end while maintaining forwardness, energy and rhythm. The steps should be even and willing with the body of the horse remaining rather straight with a slight bend to the inside of the turn. The direction of turn is determined by the direction the head will travel to. Correct footfalls are when the outside fore steps forward and crosses in front of the other front leg while the inside fore steps slightly to the side. The inside hind leg should maintain forward and be the pivot point or leg that is traveled around while the outside hind leg steps slightly more forward. The proper balancing legs are the inside hind and outside fore. Any bracing, tension or backwards steps are serious faults.
- i. Leg Yield: This is not a lateral movement. The horse crosses the inside legs in front of the outside legs, moving on both a sideways and forwards track. The horse bends slightly away from the direction of travel. His body should be nearly parallel with the rail, with his forehand slightly leading the haunches. This can be performed at a 35 degree angle to the arena wall. Any bracing, tension, over bending or over flexion are serious faults.
- j. Side Pass: The horse travels sideways crossing the inside legs in front of the outside legs without traveling forward but still maintaining forward energy. The horse should not have any or very little flexion while maintaining rhythm, willingness, and forward energy. There should be coordination of the movement of the front and hind legs as they step. Any bracing, tension, backward steps, over bending, or over flexion are serious faults.

### SFG3: Tack and Equipment

#### A. Halter and Lead: Permitted for Lead Line Class only

- a. Halters can be made of rope, nylon, cloth, leather or other similar substance. They can have rings or knots to attach the lead to but must not have any squeeze effect around the nose or poll of the horse.
- b. Leads can be made of cotton, nylon, leather or other similar substance. Length of the lead is determined by the handler as long as the proper maneuver can be executed.

- c. Leads can have snaps or may be tied/knotted to halter.
- d. Cavesons are only permitted so long as they do not contain rigid metal across the nose or anywhere else in the head piece. Flexible metal is allowed.
- e. No chains of any kind.
- B. Side reins or draw reins are not allowed in any classes.
- C. The handler may use artificial aids such as clickers, whips, crops, lariats, or training sticks of any length.
- D. The handler may touch the horse with hand or artificial aid to give the appropriate cues.
- E. Leg protection may be worn such as: polo bandages, dressage sport boots, neoprene leg boots, or any other leg protection that is designed to support the horse while working. Bell boots or hoof boots designed for riding may be used.
- F. Food rewards or treats of any kind are only permitted with the intent of training or positive reinforcement. Coaxing of any kind or excessive use of food or treats is strictly forbidden. The administering of treats or rewards may only take place at appropriate times when the horse is halted. Any abruptness of the written pattern will be considered "Off Pattern".

#### SFG4: Handler Attire

- A. Showing
  - a. Any handler under the age of 10 years old is required to wear protective headgear.
  - b. Attire:
    - i. Clean jeans, show/dress pants, breeches, or tights
    - ii. Collared shirt, short or long sleeve with shoulders covered, show coats and vests are optional
    - iii. Boots of any style or close toed shoes that tie securely
    - iv. Gloves are allowed but not required
    - v. Hats, helmets or ball caps are allowed but headgear is not required unless under the age of 10 years old.
  - c. Attire Prohibited:
    - i. Pants with large holes
    - ii. Slip on shoes
    - iii. Spurs
    - iv. Working coats or jackets

#### SFG5: Errors and Disqualification

- A. Errors: When a competitor goes off-course or omits a movement or a horse disconnects from the handler at liberty the handler will be penalized by an error. Each error given per pattern will result in a 2 point deduction and the penalty points are deducted on each judge's score sheet from the total points obtained by the competitor. If a single pattern results in 3 errors or more, then the competitor is eliminated and may be dismissed from the arena. However, the judge may continue to score and comment on the entire pattern if they choose, but the pattern and score will not be eligible for ribbons, prizes or other recognized programs.
  - a. Other Errors:
    - i. Discrepancy in handler attire
    - ii. Inaccurate turns or turns in the wrong direction
    - iii. Handler performing an inaccurate amount of circles

- iv. Including extra halts within the test when it is not called for (one error per each extra halt)
- v. Going off pattern in any other way
- vi. Handler dropping or letting go of the lead rope in Lead Line Classes unless the pattern states otherwise. This includes draping lead on the horse's neck or back.
- vii. Excessive use of aids or voice

B. Disqualifications:

- a. Receiving 3 or more errors
- b. Handler receiving instruction besides the exact written movements from the caller
- c. Improper or illegal equipment
- d. Cruelty or abuse to the horse from the handler
- e. Concern for safety of the handler or horse
- f. Use of food or treats at any point during a pattern
- g. Handler or horse going out of frame in a submitted video for 3 seconds or longer
- h. Any situation where a direct rule violation can be cited

C. Unsoundness

- a. In the case of marked unsoundness such as lameness, coughing, or if the horse appears lethargic or emaciated, the judge has the ability to eliminate the competitor. There is no appeal against the judge's decision.
- b. Horses with a clear lameness or other unsoundness are permitted to be shown in the 6 Feet on the Ground Program only if accompanied by a direct letter from the veterinarian stating the following movements and maneuvers are permissible to the horse without further harm.

## SFG6: The Patterns

A. Classes

- a. Lead Line Class: This class includes all available patterns and horses are to be shown within a halter, caveson, or other type of headgear with a lead rope or line attached to the horse's face or neck. Handler is required to hold onto the lead at all times unless the pattern states otherwise. Doing so will result in an error.
- b. Liberty Class: Horses in this class must be completely at liberty without any physical attachment between the horse and handler. Halters, cavesons, lead lines or headgear of any kind, neck ropes are prohibited.
- c. A single competitor and horse combination is permitted to compete in all available classes, but may only register within 2 consecutive levels per show. (First and Second or Second and Third) Handlers may register up to 2 horses per class per show event.
- d. Horses may be shown by no more than 2 different competitors per show. Horses may be shown in the same class with different handlers but the competitors must be registered in separate divisions (youth, adult amateur, open). (1/17/2026)

B. Level Purposes:

- a. First Level: An introduction to the foundational body control maneuvers on the ground.
- b. Second Level: Patterns begin to introduce proper bend, better straightness and a further degree of rhythm.

- c. Third Level: Patterns incorporate movements that further develop suppleness and balance with lateral movements.
- C. Obstacles Patterns:
  - a. Set Up: Arena space must be set up properly according to the pattern diagrams. Any distance specific obstacles must be measured and placed accordingly.
  - b. Obstacles can be of any color or substance and length unless specified.
  - c. The judge or camera must be placed according to the diagram.
- D. Freestyle Patterns:
  - a. Each level has two Freestyle options. Each Class (Liberty & Lead Line) has two Freestyle options  
1. Freestyle 2. Costume Freestyle.
  - b. Freestyle scores will be combined with a compulsory pattern to earn the overall total Freestyle score. The designated compulsory pattern shall be the first pattern within the level:
    - i. First Level Freestyle = Pattern 1
    - ii. Second Level Freestyle = Pattern 2
    - iii. Third Level Freestyle = Pattern 3 (1/17/2026)
  - c. Music is required for all Freestyle patterns. Costumes for horses and/or competitors are only acceptable in the Costume Freestyle Pattern. Competitors and horses must follow all competition attire and equipment rules for Freestyle Class. No prohibited equipment is allowed in either Freestyle pattern. For live shows, music must be submitted to show management in a MP3 file format at least 4 days before show date.
  - d. Time allowance for Freestyles will be 5 minutes. The time allowance for the set up and take down of any props will be an additional 2 minutes to be used at the direction of the competitor for a total of 7 minutes. Going over the time alliance will result in one error (a 2 point deduction). (1/17/2026)
  - e. Props and obstacles are allowed for both Freestyle patterns as long as they are safe, secure and used wisely. Judges and show management have the ability to deem any obstacle or prop unsafe.
  - f. The following are NOT permitted for any Freestyle Pattern: fire, fireworks, flares, guns of any kind (real or replicas), sharpened swords or knives.
  - g. Additional horses and people are permitted but the registered horse and competitor will be judged. Other animals, horses, people will be seen and referred to as props.
  - h. If any part of the Freestyle routine displays abusive behavior or any deemed dangerous content but anyone in the arena, the judge or show manager has the right to excuse anyone from the arena at any time and the competitor will receive a No Score.
  - i. Riding of any kind is not permitted in any Freestyle Pattern. Standing on the horse in any way is not allowed. Handlers may sit only on horses that are laying down in a calm, relaxed manner.
- E. Judging Scale: All movements are marked 0 to 10 (~~half points are permissible~~) 1/17/2026, 0 being the lowest mark
 

10 Excellent	4 Insufficient
9 Very Good	3 Fairly Bad
8 Good	2 Bad
7 Fairly Good	1 Very Bad
6 Satisfactory	0 Not Executed

## 5 Sufficient

### F. Callers

- a. Callers are permitted for all classes and patterns and will not reflect on the competitors scores.
- b. Callers are not allowed to repeat, change, or add additional verbiage to the maneuvers listed in the patterns.
- c. Instruction or guidance of any kind from the Caller is strictly prohibited and will result in an automatic disqualification for the competitor.

## SFG7: Competition

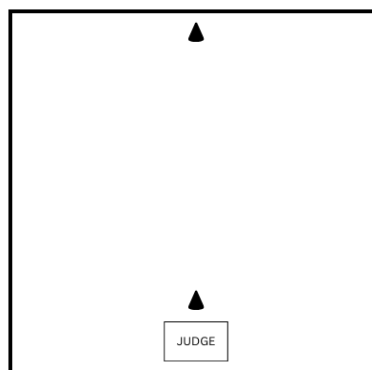
### A. Virtual Showing Requirements:

- a. The arena space must be of the proper area to completely execute the complete pattern being shown. Arena space, may be any level area, paddock, field, round pen, etc.
- b. The camera/recorder must be positioned at the designated "Judge" area at a minimum height of 4ft from the ground. Two cones or markers are required to mark centerline and must be visible within the camera frame. (See Diagram)
- c. The entire horse and handler MUST be within the frame of the camera at all times. Please use the zoom as needed to allow the judge to properly evaluate the horse and handler.
- d. If a video is out of focus or of poor quality; or the horse/handler is not shown in the frame for at least 3 seconds in a pattern, the judge then has the discretion to disqualify the pattern. The judge also has the discretion to mark a movement as 0 if the handler or horse leaves the camera frame for less than 3 seconds.
- e. Video must be recorded with sound from beginning to end without stopping or editing. If there is questionable content, then the judge has the ability to disqualify the pattern.
- f. Besides a caller, there shall be no instruction given to the handler and will result in an automatic disqualification.
- g. Videos must be filmed within the time frame for each Virtual Show stated on the show registration. Videos may not be submitted to be judged more than once.

### B. Live Show Requirements:

- a. The arena space must be of the proper area to completely execute all patterns being shown. Arena space must be level and enclosed with appropriate footing.
- b. Arena cones and the judge must be positioned in accordance with the diagram below. The judge may be positioned inside or outside of the arena fence.
- c. Besides a caller, there shall be no instruction given to the handler and will result in an automatic disqualification.

Arena Diagram:



### C. Handler Requirements:

- a. All handlers should perform to proper handler attire conditions.
- b. Proper tack and equipment must be regulated according to the rules for every horse.
- c. Handlers are permitted to talk to their horse, use voice commands/cues, and physically or verbally reward their horses as long as it is done so in a subtle manner. At the judge's discretion, loud or extensive use of voice may earn a 2 point error. This is permitted in all patterns.

### General Glossary of Terms

**Above the Bit:** A head and body position when the horse is bracing against the bit to evade contact by lifting the nose forwards and/or upwards.

**Against the Bit:** The horse is pressing into the bit and the rider's hands.

**Balance:** The distribution of the horse's weight. Balance may be lateral or longitudinal (see definitions below)

**Beat:** The footfalls of a horse's hoof or pair of hooves which determines the horse's rhythm in a stride. The walk has 4 beats, trot/jog has 2 beats, canter/lope has 3 beats, and the gallop has 4 beats.

**Behind the Bit:** When the horse retracts away from the bit, evading the pressure and shortening the frame.

**Bend:** When the horse forms an arc laterally with its body from poll to tail with the arc starting in the ribcage or barrel of the horse. The arc of the body should match the geometry of the turn or circle that is being performed.

**Bracing:** When the horse tenses its muscles and resists the rider's/handler's aids.

**Broken Neckline:** When there is excessive longitudinal flexion between the second and third cervical vertebrae in the horse's neck, creating a jagged arch in the horse's neck and lowering the poll.

**Cadence:** Accentuation of the beats in a horse's stride caused by increased power and elevation. A horse must be in rhythm to have cadence.

**Carriage:** The posture of the horse while in motion.

**Collection:** When the horse increases the bend and weight in the haunches, lifting the back, engaging the abdominal muscles, and allowing the shoulders more freedom and to lighten. The goal of collection is to help the horse develop strength and carry the rider more efficiently, with a goal of self-carriage.

**Connection:** Continuous communication with physical and mental soft aids.

**Contact:** The rider/handler maintains a steady feel of the horse through the aids.

**Cross-canter:** When the horse's hind and front legs are moving in separate leads at the canter or lope. Also known as disunited.

**Defined:** When a transition within a gait is clearly seen.



**Diagonal Dissociation:** When the hooves on diagonal legs do not hit the ground at the same moment in the jog or lope. Also known as Diagonal Advanced Placement.

**Downhill:** The horse is not lifting its withers by elevating the forehand to track upward. Also known as On the Forehand.

**Elasticity:** The stretching movement of the horse's muscles.

**Engagement:** The increased activity of the horse's hind leg joints. The horse's croup should lower as the forehand lifts which allows the back to also lift and become rounder.

**Evasion:** The horse's resistance to willingly perform the maneuver/movement.

**Extension:** The horse takes the largest stride possible at the walk, jog, or lope, while maintaining nearly the same tempo as when it was collected. There should be an increase in the suspension of the stride as well as a true lengthening of the horse's frame.

**Falling In:** When the horse travels out of balance and the body leans to the inside of a circle or turn.

**Flexibility:** The looseness of the joints.

**Flexion of the Poll:** The flexing of the atlanto-occipital joint. Lateral flexion is when the angle between the side of the horse's cheek and neck are closed. Longitudinal or direct flexion is when the chin is brought to the underside of the horse's neck. True flexion of the poll should start from the lifting of the horse's back to result in a natural and relaxed position.

**Footfall:** A hoof hitting the ground.

**Forward:** Moving toward the direction the horse is facing. Can sometimes be referred to as the horse's energy or impulsion.

**Frame:** The outline of a horse which should contract and lengthen depending on the length of the horse's stride. The frame should show the horse's withers elevated with a soft, lifted back and engaged topline.

**From Behind:** Refers to the thrust of the horse's hindquarters.

**Half-Halt:** A momentary cue from the aids that asks the horse to rebalance and allow the horse to focus.

**Harmony:** The relationship between the horse and rider. It should show confidence and trust which result in the two appearing to move and communicate as one.

**Hollow Back:** The back is concave instead of elevated.

**Hyperflexion (Rollkur):** The exaggerated flexion of the horse's neck, bringing the face far behind the vertical. This will be penalized.

**Impulsion:** The thrust of the horse's hind legs which develops good, forward energy that is not quick. Can sometimes be referred to as the horse's forward energy.

**Inside:** 1. The side of the horse that is facing the center of the arena.

2. The direction in which the horse should be bending.

Lateral: 1. To the side, as in bending or direction of movement.

2. Impurity of the gait when the horse's lateral pairs of legs move simultaneously. Opposite of Longitudinal.

Longitudinal: Lengthwise – front-to-back, back-to-front. Opposite of Lateral.

Looseness: No tension shown. Relaxation.

On the Aids: The horse is willing and prompt to correctly respond to the rider's light aids.

On the Bit: The horse reaches to and accepts the contact of the bit as well as the soft aids of the rider with a stretched topline and the nose slightly in front of the vertical. The back is soft and rounded with the hind legs pushing forward.

On the Forehand: The horse is not lifting its withers by elevating the forehand. Also known as Downhill.

Out Behind: The hind legs are stretched out too far behind the horse instead of reaching up and underneath, creating the engagement of the haunches.

Outside: 1. The side of the horse that is facing away from the center of the arena.

2. The opposite direction in which the horse should be bending.

Overbent: The overly excessive bend in the horse's neck in comparison to the rest of its body.

Over Flexed: Behind the vertical due to excessive flexion of the neck or poll.

Overstep, Overstride, Overtrack: The placement of the hindfoot in front of the print of the front foot.

Over the Back or Topline: The horse rounding or stretching its back.

Pivoting: When the horse does not lift its grounded foot as it turns the rest of its body around it.

Poll: The highest point of the horse's skull.

Purity of Gait: The correct rhythm of the horse's gait and footfalls.

Quality of Gait: The freedom, elasticity, looseness, and flexibility desired in a horse's gait.

Reach: Refers to the stretch of the horse's legs, neck/poll, muzzle, or side of the horse.

Regularity: Maintaining a pure and consistent gait.

Relaxation: Refers to the emotional and mental state of the horse and its ability being able to move its muscles and joints freely and loosely, without tension or anxiety.

Resistance: The opposition to the rider's aids. Not the same as evasion, as the horse may resist but still perform the movement. A lack of willingness.

Restrained: The rider preventing the horse from moving freely.

Rhythm: The recurring sequence and timing of footfalls in a horse's gait or steps.

Rocking: When the horse has too much up and down motion of the neck as he lopes as caused by the lack of sufficient ground coverage, lack of engagement, or interference from the rider.

Roundness: 1. The upward curve of the horse's topline.

2. The circular movements of the horse's movements in its strides.

3. The shape of a figure, such as a circle.

Scope: Magnitude range of motion. Also known as Amplitude.

Self-Carriage: When the horse remains in collection without assistance or correction from the rider.

Straightness: Correct alignment and balance of the horse from poll to tail.

Strung Out: The horse is sprawled out instead of carrying itself with proper balance.

Submission: The horse accepts the rider's aids while remaining relaxed and focused. The horse should also submit in the bit, meaning there is no tension shown.

Suspension: The moment of the stride when the horse does not have any feet on the ground.

Tempo: The rate of the repeating strides.

Tension: 1. The anxious or nervous state of the horse.

2. The lack of flexibility of the muscles.

Throughness: When the rider's aids go freely to all parts of the horse.

Topline: The profile of the horse's back from the poll to the tail.

Track: 1. The footprints on the ground as the legs move on their paths

2. The direction of travel

3. The path next to the arena wall

Tracking Up: The hind feet step in the tracks of the front feet.

Transitions: When the horse changes from one gait/pace to another. If performed at a letter, the transition should take place as the rider's leg hits the mark.

Uneven: At the walk or trot when the horse's legs do not move symmetrically, and the legs do not move in even steps.

Uphill: Correct longitudinal balance when the forehand is elevated and the croup or hindquarters lower.