

All About U.S. Figure Skating Tests

If you or your child recently started taking private lessons in figure skating, you may have heard from your coach or other skaters about the test structure, or been told to start working on “moves in the field” or “pre-preliminary” or your “first test.” The test structure can be confusing to new skaters, but it’s one of the most important parts of figure skating and will soon become an integral part of your skating language!

What is the test structure and why does it matter?

The test structure is the foundation of U.S. Figure Skating. Starting with the first test you take and through your entire career, it is the national standard that you are measured against. When you fill out applications for just about everything in figure skating, the first question will be, “what is the highest U.S. Figure Skating Test passed?”

U.S. Figure Skating tests are offered in the following tracks:

1. Moves in the Field
2. Free Skate
3. Pattern Dance or Solo Pattern Dance
4. Free Dance or Solo Free Dance
5. Pairs

The level you enter in competitions is determined by your highest test passed, sessions at rinks are often divided by the skaters’ test levels and skaters registering for a camp or clinic are divided by test level. Each U.S. Figure Skating test that you pass goes on your permanent record and is an achievement you always carry with you.

U.S. Figure Skating’s test structure can be compared to karate and the process of athletes earning belts until they achieve their black belt. Another comparison is the Boy Scout program, where boys advance through levels and ultimately strive to become Eagle Scouts. In each figure skating discipline, there are either six or eight test levels, with the highest one being either “senior” or “gold.”

When an athlete passes his or her senior or gold test, it’s a huge accomplishment, marking many years of dedication to the sport and the mastery of that discipline. The athlete earns the title, “U.S. Figure Skating Gold Medalist,” he or she receives a gold pin from U.S. Figure Skating, may purchase a Gold Medalist jacket and most importantly, he or she can put the accomplishment on a skating resume, college application or even a job application. A skater passing a senior or gold test in two disciplines becomes a “U.S. Figure Skating Double Gold Medalist.”

The amount of time it takes to achieve the senior or gold test varies, but on average, it takes around five years from when a skater passes his or her first test (pre-preliminary moves in the field) to when he or she passes the senior moves in the field test. Then, expect an additional several years to pass a second gold test. Most U.S. Figure Skating Double Gold Medalists have been skating for approximately 12 years. The most common age to earn that accomplishment is 17 years, regardless of when the athlete started, or how quickly he or she went through the earlier tests.

In a typical calendar year, approximately 30,000 U.S. Figure Skating tests are passed by members. Of those, approximately 1,000 are senior tests in moves in the field, 250 are senior tests in free skating, 80 are gold dance tests and 20 are gold pair tests.

Earning a gold test is something that every young skater can and should strive for, and it’s a wonderful goal for one’s skating career. It’s achievable and realistic, and with perseverance, dedication and many years of hard work, every figure skating athlete has the potential to become a U.S. Figure Skating Gold Medalist — or even double or triple gold medalist.

Types of Tests

Moves in the Field: Athletes typically begin their testing with the moves in the field track because the test is considered a prerequisite — or baseline — test series. This means that in order to take a discipline-specific test, like free skating or pairs, the skater must first pass the equivalent moves in the field test.

Moves in the field tests a skater's ability in skating skills. They help athletes learn skating skills and turns that are necessary to be successful in any discipline of figure skating, focusing on accuracy, posture and carriage, bilateral movement, strength, power, extension, edge quality, continuous flow, quickness and turn execution. It's impossible to become a high-level skater in any area or discipline of skating without mastering these skills. Doing so would be like attempting to read without understanding the alphabet.

Each moves in the field level consists of four to six set patterns that must be performed by the skater. Each level requires skaters to perform skills in both clockwise and counterclockwise directions, on both the right and left feet, and on both inside and outside edges.

Each level in the series builds upon the one before it. Skaters at the lowest level begin learning the stroking technique, basic consecutive edges, spirals and a "waltz eight" pattern with two easy turns. New skills are layered on with each progressive test. Skaters never stop practicing what they learned in the beginning — it just becomes more challenging and intricate as they move up. The senior test, in a way, is a summary of every turn, edge and skill learned over the years, and skaters must perform it at a superior level.

The patterns required at each level are found in the U.S. Figure Skating Tests Book. The Tests Book describes the patterns in detail, provides a diagram of what they look like on the ice, and even designates a specific focus for each pattern (for example: "power and extension" or "edge quality," etc.).

The **MOVES IN THE FIELD** tests progress through the following levels:

1. Pre-preliminary
2. Preliminary
3. Pre-juvenile
4. Juvenile
5. Intermediate
6. Novice
7. Junior
8. Senior

Athletes move at their own pace through the moves in the field tests, some preferring to spend a lot of time working their way up, and others choosing to devote a lot of their skating time to them early on, thus progressing more quickly. There is no right or wrong amount of time that it takes to advance to the next level, nor is there a perfect amount of time each week to practice them. Skaters and their parents should discuss their goals, desired time commitment and budget with their coach to develop a plan that works.

Tests are evaluated by a panel of judges, marking each of the patterns on a scale of -3 to +3. Earning a "0" on a pattern is considered the passing average with +1 to +3 awarded if the skater's performance exceeds the standard. The totals of the marks awarded for each pattern are added up, and a skater passes the test if they earn a total of "0" or higher. Skaters that earn +'s on multiple patterns have the opportunity to earn "pass with honors" or "pass with distinction."

If a skater does not pass (they receive a total of less than 0), they will be asked to retry the test. While disappointment is natural, this is absolutely nothing to be upset over. It does not in any way mean a skater is untalented or that they will be unsuccessful in the sport. It has happened to nearly every skater who has reached the top!

FREE SKATE tests are the next most common type of test to take, although it is perfectly acceptable to move directly to dance or simply focus on moves in the field.

The levels in free skate tests mirror moves in the field, and skaters may not attempt a free skate test until they have passed at least the corresponding moves in the field test. However, skaters may test as high as they want to in moves in the field without taking any other tests.

If a skater wants to compete in a free skate or short program event in a competition, the highest free skate test that he or she has passed determines the level that the skater is required to enter. For example, a skater who has passed the juvenile free skate test will enter the Juvenile Girls Free Skate event. Once that skater has passed a test, he or she may never again enter a competition at a lower level. Most competitions do, however, allow a skater to "skate

up" one level. For example, the same skater who have passed juvenile free skate test can enter the Intermediate Ladies Free Skate event.

The free skate series of tests begins with pre-preliminary. This test consists of five basic jumps (waltz jump, Salchow, toe-loop, 1/2 flip, 1/2 Lutz) and a one foot spin. The skater can either demonstrate that he or she can successfully complete these technical elements or perform a program to music.

Beginning with the preliminary test, each level consists of required jumps, spins and steps. Steps are either specific step sequences, spiral step sequences or moves that connect elements to one another. Instead of the skater simply demonstrating the elements, he or she must perform them in a program choreographed to music at a prescribed length. As the levels increase, the length of the program and the number of required elements increases. As with moves in the field, more challenging and intricate skills are layered on as the level gets higher.

Once a skater is at the juvenile level or higher, he or she has the additional option of earning credit for passing the test by "skating up" in a competition that is evaluated under the International Judging System. This system assigns points for the program skated, and if a skater earns a [minimum score](#), he or she can submit their result to receive credit for passing the test without going to a stand-alone test session.

The requirements for all free skate tests are found in the U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook, found at usfigureskating.org. It's a good idea for skaters to look ahead and understand not only what is required of them now, but what they should be reaching for in the future. Athletes choosing to take their test in a standard test session are judged on a scale of -3 to +3, like moves in the field, and can earn "pass with honors" and "pass with distinction." Athletes applying for test credit simply earn "pass," if they meet the minimum score and submit their results.

The **FREE SKATE** tests progress through the following levels:

1. Pre-preliminary
2. Preliminary
3. Pre-juvenile
4. Juvenile
5. Intermediate
6. Novice
7. Junior
8. Senior

PATTERN DANCE AND SOLO PATTERN DANCE tests are offered as a fun way to participate in ice dance, even if the skater doesn't have a partner to compete with. Approximately 3,000 pattern dance tests are passed by U.S. Figure Skating members each year.

Pattern dances consist of required steps to music, skated in a particular tempo that cover the ice surface. There are either three or four dances per level. Like moves in the field and free skate, the patterns become more challenging and intricate as the level increases.

Skaters can select to learn to skate with a partner or test in the solo track. In many cases, skaters wishing to dance with a partner will do so with a coach. Since there are many more girls than boys, it's common for male dance coaches to partner their students on dance tests. In addition, executing the steps properly on your own is extremely important, and in the standard track, once a skater reaches the silver level, they must perform the dance with a partner, and then repeat it solo during a test session.

Illustrations and detailed requirements for each pattern dance are found in the U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook, found online at usfigureskating.org.

The **PATTERN DANCE and SOLO PATTERN DANCE** tests progress through the following levels:

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| 1. Preliminary: | Dutch Waltz, Canasta Tango, Rhythm Blues |
| 2. Pre-bronze: | Swing Dance, Cha Cha, Fiesta Tango |
| 3. Bronze: | Hickory Hoedown, Willow Waltz, Ten-Fox |
| 4. Pre-silver: | Fourteensstep, European Waltz, Foxtrot |
| 5. Silver: | American Waltz, Tango, Rocker Foxtrot |

6. Pre-gold: Killian, Blues, Paso Doble, Starlight Waltz
7. Gold*: Viennese Waltz, Westminster Waltz, Quickstep, Argentine Tango
8. International*: Austrian Waltz, Cha Cha Congelado*, Finnstep, Golden Waltz, Midnight Blues, Ravensburger Waltz, Rhumba*, Silver Samba*, Tango Romantica*, Yankee Polka*

** When a skater has passed the gold test, he or she becomes a U.S. Figure Skating gold medalist. The international dances are offered as an additional challenge for those who wish to keep going after achieving the gold level. In addition, only those marked with an asterisk (*) can be skated solo.*

In addition to having an extra level beyond gold, pattern dance tests are unique in that skaters may test each dance in a level at their own pace. They may test the dances within a level in any order, and they can choose to do them all at one test session or spread them over several test sessions. They can work on one dance at a time if they like, or many. The only important note is that a skater is not considered to have passed a level until he or she has completed ALL dances in that level.

Pattern dance is self-paced, and therefore it is difficult to determine the average amount of time a skater spends at a level. This is because skaters testing in this track have very different goals. For example, an athlete that wants to focus primarily on dance, and spends most practice time on dance will progress quickly. On the other hand, many athletes appreciate the skills dance provides, and will do it as a supplement to another discipline. In this case, they may set aside a limited amount of time to practice dance, take each pattern dance test one at a time, and spend a year or more at each level.

If a skater starts in the standard pattern dance track, he or she may switch to the solo dance track at any time and begin at the next highest level completed in the standard track. However, it does not go the other way, and a skater passing only solo pattern dance tests that wants to move to the standard pattern dance track must start at the beginning.

Tests are evaluated on a scale of -3 to +3, with athletes having the ability to earn "pass," "pass with honors" or "pass with distinction" if they significantly exceed the performance expectation.

FREE DANCE AND SOLO FREE DANCE Skaters wishing to compete in competitive ice dance events that lead to the U.S. Figure Skating Championships must first pass free dance tests with a partner. Free dance tests are programs to music, much like free skate tests. Each test consists of lifts, spins, step sequences and synchronized twizzles, increasing in difficulty throughout the levels.

Solo free dance tests mimic the standard free dance test but allow dancers without a partner to participate. The required elements at each level consist of short and long edge elements (replacing the lift), spins, step sequences and twizzles (replacing the synchronized twizzle element).

The **FREE DANCE AND SOLO FREE DANCE** tests progress through the following levels:

1. Juvenile
2. Intermediate
3. Novice
4. Junior
5. Senior

Free dance is very self-paced, and in most cases the reason for taking the test is to fulfill a requirement for competition. Therefore, the average amount of time a couple spends practicing for a test is not terribly relevant, as it's a very small portion of their overall training. It depends the most on how long a couple chooses to compete at a given competitive level. For example, a couple may choose to compete at the novice level for two seasons, for their competitive development, choosing to wait on taking the junior free dance test, and leaving a gap of several years between passing tests.

If a skater starts in the standard free dance track, he or she may switch to the solo free dance track at any time and begin at the next highest level that he or she completed in the standard track. However, it does not go the other way, and a skater passing only the solo free dance tests that wants to move to the standard free dance track must start at the beginning.

Couples may earn test credit for partnered free dance tests by "skating up" in the appropriate level at a competition, and earning the [required minimum score](#), as with free skate tests at the juvenile level or higher.

PAIRS tests are taken most often by teams wishing to compete in the qualifying competition system. However, they may also be taken by any individual who wishes to learn and practice pairs skating. Skaters in the latter situation often test with their coach.

The PAIRS tests progress through the following levels:

1. Pre-juvenile
2. Juvenile
3. Intermediate
4. Novice
5. Junior
6. Senior

The pairs test structure is uniquely self-paced. In addition to skaters starting at the beginning and working their way through over many years, it is common that high-level singles skaters will make the choice to skate pairs and move through tests very quickly. For example, a singles skater at the junior or senior level who finds a partner and wants to compete at the junior level in pairs may be able to progress through all the required tests in a few months, whereas a true juvenile level skater would take several years.

Like free skate and free dance tests at the juvenile level or higher, teams may earn test credit by earning a [required minimum score](#) at a competition.

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Whether or not to offer virtual testing is at each club's discretion, but virtual testing can be used to allow skaters to test in circumstances where it may prove burdensome or impossible to hold in-person test sessions. A club can offer virtual testing across the board, or it can offer a combination of in-person and virtual testing. For example, a club may find that holding in-person test sessions for Singles and Skating Skills tests is relatively easy but may need to hold a separate virtual test session for high level dance and pair tests.

The following are guidelines to ensure the successful conduct of virtual test sessions. The guidelines are divided into sections by type of participant, but all participants are encouraged to read all guidelines.

General Guidelines

Virtual test sessions are organized and conducted by U.S. Figure Skating member clubs. No virtual tests can be submitted directly to U.S. Figure Skating.

A performance may only be used **once** for test credit. If a video has been submitted for a virtual test session, it may not be submitted again. Videos of a performance at an in-person test session, if judged at an in-person test session, are not eligible to be submitted to a virtual test session. Tests may be recorded at an in-person test session for the purpose of being judged virtually if the video is not judged while being recorded.

There may not be more than eight other skaters on the ice during a skater's test. Even if eight or fewer skaters are on the ice, the video must not be submitted if any skater disrupts the testing skater or prevents the testing skater from being the focus of the video. Judges must contact the test chair with any video concerns, and this may result in the video not being acceptable for virtual testing. If the video is questionable, it is best to not submit it.

It is the responsibility of the Test Chair to determine if the quality of the video is sufficient to submit to the judging panel. If a Test Chair deems the video to be of insufficient quality, then the video will be rejected. If a judge does not feel the video is of sufficient quality, the judge must contact the test chair with their concern and withdraw from judging the test. This applies only to the quality of the video recording, and not to the quality of the skating. Once a judge has submitted a completed test form to the test chair, the judge cannot reject the video.

Once confirming receipt of the Signed Performance Affidavit and "Release and Consent" document, test chairs should provide the following to judges:

- Correct test form with skater name and membership number
- Link to performance video
- Appropriate judging forms for each test that is being judged.

Skater Guidelines

There is a mandatory deduction of one point (-1) for not executing the correct introductory steps (Rule 5036). “Each element (in Skating Skills tests) must be commenced from a standing, stationary position with a maximum of seven introductory steps unless specified otherwise in (the) rules (U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook, 5021)”. In virtual testing, while the video must be a continuous recording, skaters do not need to be continuously skating (short breaks between elements are allowed). It is important that one element in a Skating Skills test does not run into another.

Skaters may stop briefly between elements in a Skating Skills test, but the stop must be brief (10 seconds or less). The video must continue recording the entire time. If stops between Skills become too long, a new video may be required.

There is to be no coaching of the skater during the performance of their test, except for brief breaks between elements in Skating Skills tests (but not while changing direction or feet during an element) and breaks between partnered and solo portions of a pattern dance test (Rule 4302). Violation of this rule may disqualify the video.

Because there are no reskates in virtual testing, it is in the skater’s best interest to not submit videos with missing elements or other major errors (e.g., elements out of order, fewer than the required number of patterns in a pattern dance, etc.).

Video Guidelines

Videos must be recorded in landscape mode and must be of the highest quality possible (at least 720p). It is important that the skater is framed from head to toe during the entire test. The video must be of a high enough quality that the judges can clearly make out the skater’s expression and feet while the skater is testing. The video must be as stable as possible with minimal “jittering” of the camera. Please refer to the “Virtual Testing Video Requirements” document for more details. If a judge does not feel the video is of sufficient quality to evaluate the skater, they must inform the test chair of their concern and withdraw from judging the test.

The video must be taken from the position of the judges stand (as if an in-person test session). Videos may not be taken while following the athlete around the ice during the test.

Note: As of July 1, 2023, videos from a competition, exhibition, or ice show may NOT be submitted to a virtual test session (Rule 4104).

Test Chair Guidelines

Test chairs must make sure expectations are clear when inviting judges (such as number of tests to be assigned, when the tests will be sent, due dates, etc). This will help the judges plan their time and know what to expect. **Judges should not be assigned to more than 10 virtual tests unless they have agreed to do more in advance.**

Judges who are available to judge virtual tests are identified in the Officials Directory. When doing your search for Officials, under the “Level” dropdown menu, select “Virtual.” Please be sure to also check each test judge’s appointment levels for singles, dance and skating skills to determine which tests they can judge.

Test chairs must create a schedule of virtual tests (much like a schedule at an in-person test session) with judge assignments. This schedule must be sent to all judges on the panel. This will help each judge know who the other judges are that are assigned to judge a test and ensure that the properly qualified judge is judging the appropriate test.

It is important for it to be clearly communicated to the judges, and indicated on the test schedule, what tests are contingent. Contingent tests must only be sent to the judges **AFTER** all judging is complete on the prerequisite tests and the tests have passed. Test chairs are asked to share their cell phone number with judges, so judges can reach out with any questions that may arise while videos are being viewed and judged.

Judges must return the completed test form to the test chair only and not share with anyone else. It must not be uploaded to the shared Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.

Test chairs must review the submitted videos (if only a portion) to screen for quality and other issues. Videos that do not meet the “Virtual Testing Video Requirements” should be rejected by the test chair. Test chairs must also verify that the skater’s name and test in the video match what is provided to the judges.

Once all judge sheets are received and scores have been recorded, test chairs should be sure to send electronic copies of the completed test forms to both the skater and their coach of record, so that they are aware of the outcome of the test. **Results must be returned to the athlete and coach within one week of the test date (Rule 4104).**

It is strongly suggested that clubs provide judges a gift card with a value of at least \$15 for 1-5 tests, \$20 for 6-10 tests, etc. This not only shows the judges they are

appreciated but can help offset costs incurred while judging (such as electricity, Internet service charge, paper, printing, etc.). It is advised to include this information in the invitation to judge so they know what to expect. If a judge has expenses beyond what is offset by the gift card, they should submit for reimbursement in accordance with U.S. Figure Skating rules and guidelines.

It is strongly recommended that a test session results report be sent to the virtual judges since they do not have the opportunity to debrief at the conclusion of a test session as they can at in-person test sessions. To create this report, log into Members Only. Under the Testing menu, select Skate Test Session Reports. Select the test date, then click on Print Judges Report. There is the option to Export to PDF or to Excel.

Judge Guidelines

Before accepting an invitation to judge virtually, judges should make sure expectations are clear (such as number of tests to be assigned, when the tests will be sent, due dates, etc.). Any uncertainties must be addressed with the test chair. A judge's appointment levels for singles, pairs, dance, and skating skills determine which tests they can judge for virtual tests.

Judges must behave as though they were at an in-person test session. Rule 4524 regarding use of electronic communicative devices applies to virtual tests. Judges should attempt to watch the entire test in one sitting without break. The test must be viewed at normal speed. The video may be paused between elements in Skatin Skills tests, and between partnered and solo patterns in dance, to write comments. Judges may rewatch the video to check for missing elements.

Timing of singles, free dance, and pairs tests are the responsibility of each judge. Use of time stamps on the video are not acceptable as they are not precise enough; a physical stopwatch or stopwatch on a cellular phone may be used.

For pattern dance tests, it is the responsibility of each judge to determine if the music meets the requirements listed in the rules (8223) because there is no "judge-in-charge" in a virtual testing environment.

Judges must refrain from discussing the test until the other judges have submitted their completed testing sheet to the test chair. Concerns with video quality must be addressed with the test chair and not discussed by the panel. Once a judge has submitted a completed test form to the test chair, the judge cannot reject the video.

Judges must return the completed test form to the test chair only (via email) and not share with anyone else. It must not be uploaded to the shared Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.

When judging virtual tests, the standard is the same as during in-person test sessions. The skater must not be given any special considerations. Remember that the skater and coach are responsible for the video submitted. If there is an issue with the video, or the skating within it, the skater can choose to not submit the video.

Once a judge has submitted their completed test form to the test chair, changes to comments and scores cannot be made (except for correcting sum errors in the total, circling the test result, and signing their name). The judge cannot reject the video after their completed test form has been submitted to the test chair.

Note: It is not appropriate for a judge to review or critique any aspect of a virtual test video unless they are assigned as a judge for that test.