

Look at What's Popular In Your Discipline

One of the best ways to understand what's desirable for your discipline in the show ring is to take a look at what other riders are doing. The next time that you're at a show, stand ringside and look at the turnout of the riders and their horses. Are there new trends emerging, and are certain colors more popular than others? The preferred color of the hunt coat, for example, has evolved from tan to green to blue to black, and continues to do so.

Remember to also look at the tack that the horses are wearing – with attention to detail, you can pick up on what's popular in terms of headstall design, saddle pad color, and more.

A quick note about trends: Trends are fun, and some really unique styles have been borne of trends. That said, don't feel that you have to keep up with every single trend out there, especially if you're working with a limited budget. While a new style of show helmet may be becoming popular, that doesn't mean that you have to run out and drop \$600 to keep up with the crowd. Instead, making sure that your turnout is clean, well-fitting, presentable, and in keeping with the accepted styles of your discipline may be a wiser overall approach. Never stray too far from tradition due to a trend – the judge may not agree with your choices, and you might be penalized for your efforts.

Research Your Discipline's Requirements and Rules

It's so important that you spend some time researching the items that are show-legal (and those that are not) within your discipline. You can find a great amount of guidance in your discipline's rule book, and if you don't yet own a rule book, it's a worthwhile investment that you won't regret.

Most rule books include information about expected attire, especially when you will be competing at different show levels. For instance, you won't need the same attire to compete at an open horse show as you would at a rated show. It's important that you understand the distinctions in terms of the turnout expected for the show you're attending.

Your discipline's rule book is important for another reason – it identifies tack which is not allowed in the ring. One of the fastest way to get yourself penalized or disqualified entirely is to show up in the ring with an illegal bit, training aid, or other piece of tack. Take the time to familiarize yourself with what types of tack are illegal in your discipline, and then check over your horse's tack setup to make sure that you are obeying the rules.