



EQUINE-ASSISTED SERVICES

DEFINITIONS GUIDE FOR RESEARCHERS

2024

Alm, K., Anderson, D., Benjamin, J., Kane, M., Pohl, L., Thomas, L.
(2024). *Equine-assisted Services: Definitions Guide for Researchers.*

Over the past 50 years, services that incorporate horses to benefit people have diversified and expanded. Along with this exponential growth has come the proliferation and use of unclear and imprecise terms for naming and describing these services. This ambiguous language has generated serious problems, including:

- Confusion among consumers
- Inadequate protection of consumers
- Reimbursement obstacles for legitimate therapies that incorporate horses
- Misinformed policies
- Barriers to scientific advancement through research

To mitigate this confusion, a consensus building summit was convened in July 2018. The summit brought together a consortium of experts and representatives from prominent organizations associated with the variety of equine-assisted services. The summit culminated in terminology recommendations that were further refined by a group of six members.

Recommendations for optimal terminology and for the discontinuation of problematic terminology were published in an article titled, **“Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document” (2020).**

The authors of the Consensus Document have compiled terminology here for the benefit of researchers and academics. They hope that use of Optimal Terminology will result in greater retrievability of consistent and accurate information for service providers and others vested in maximizing outcomes within all equine-assisted services in the United States.





EQUINE-ASSISTED SERVICES

Equine-assisted services (EAS) is a term used to refer to various services in which professionals incorporate horses and other equines to benefit people. **It is always used in the plural for ease in discussing multiple services, where the horse is the common thread.** This terminology aligns with that used for animal-assisted services or interventions.

Three key areas have been identified within EAS:

1. **Therapy**
2. **Learning**
3. **Horsemanship**

EAS is not intended as an overarching term to imply all three areas fall under one industry or line of work.

All recommendations for terms within these areas reflect the outcomes of the terminology consensus summit group. As equine-assisted services expand and diversify, new challenges related to terminology will likely need to be addressed.

Following is a chart showing the three areas of EAS and what types of services may be found within each area. Following the chart are descriptions of each area of EAS as defined in the peer-reviewed article.

Therapy

- Counseling
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Psychotherapy
- Recreational Therapy
- Speech-Language Pathology

Learning

Equine-Assisted Learning in:

- Education
- Organizations
- Personal Development

Horsemanship

- Adaptive Equestrian Sport
- Adaptive Riding or Therapeutic Riding
- Driving
- Interactive Vaulting

THERAPY

Therapy is provided by licensed/certified medical or behavioral health professionals working within their scope of practice in counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy, recreational therapy and speech-language pathology. The therapist determines how equine interactions, equine movement or aspects of the equine environment may enhance the client's individualized treatment plan with the goals of improving the client's sensorimotor, cognitive, behavioral, emotional or psychological function for improved health and wellness.

Best practice dictates that therapy professionals obtain specialized training focused on the safe inclusion of horses in treatment.

When discussing therapy, indicate the therapy/therapist first followed by how the horse is included. This is considered 'therapy first' language. This also clarifies the therapy service, whether medical or behavioral, rather than using an imprecise term such as equine-assisted therapy or equine therapy, which creates confusion.

Examples of 'therapy first' language are:

- Physical therapy including hippotherapy/equine movement
- Occupational therapy in the equine environment
- Counseling or psychotherapy with equine interactions
- Speech-language pathologist who incorporates horses in treatment
- Recreational therapy incorporating equines

Therapy professionals may work with a treatment team, including trained equine professionals and volunteers, to support session safety and equine handling and care.



EQUINE-ASSISTED LEARNING

This area is a non-therapy service comprised of equine-assisted learning (EAL) in education, in organizations and in personal development. Specially trained or certified professionals leverage experiential learning activities involving interactive mounted and/or unmounted activities with horses and the equine environment to benefit participants.



- **Equine-assisted Learning in Education:** Professionals with a knowledge of learning theory and teaching methodology focus on life skills, including leadership, character-building and academic skills. They may develop contracts with schools and integrate specific educational strategies, academic standards and character education within their curricula and provision of services.
- **Equine-assisted Learning in Organizations:** Professionals assist members of corporations, organizations and other work groups in building effective teams and leaders that enhance work dynamics and performance. They must have knowledge of organizational theory, team building, strategic planning or leadership development and may integrate a variety of strategies.
- **Equine-assisted Learning in Personal Development:** Professionals assist individuals and groups in handling life challenges and opportunities by developing skills in effective problem-solving, decision-making and communication. Service providers must have extensive training or certifications in facilitation, coaching or teaching, and knowledge of the distinct differences between personal development and psychotherapy.

Equine-assisted learning sessions are provided by individuals such as teachers, organizational strategists and life coaches with the inclusion of a certified equine specialist to support session safety and care for the horses.



ADAPTIVE OR THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP

An area of non-therapy services focused on various equestrian disciplines including riding, carriage driving and interactive vaulting for individuals or groups with diverse needs. Instructors are qualified equine professionals with specialty training or certification in disabilities, adaptive methods of instruction, equines, and human-equine interactions. Lesson plans may include mounted and unmounted activities and fun, creative games to develop horsemanship skills and provide the healthful benefits of interacting with horses.

Adaptive or therapeutic horsemanship sessions are conducted by a team that includes a certified instructor and the number of trained center volunteers/staff deemed necessary by the instructor for the activities in the lesson plan.

TERMS:

- Adaptive/Therapeutic Riding
- Interactive Vaulting
- Driving
- Ground Work



UNDERSTANDING OPTIMAL TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO RESEARCH

Following are suggested questions that should be asked when evaluating or proposing research related to any type of service incorporating equines.

1

Which area of service?

Which area incorporating equines to benefit humans is being investigated? *Is it clearly identified as within, or a comparison between, Therapy, Learning or Horsemanship? What is the service, intervention, approach, or tool that is being investigated? Note that research or teaching about EAS implies the inclusion of multiple services within therapy, learning or horsemanship. Use 'EAS' if the subject spans a range of services or use specific language to accurately target the service discussed.*

2

Who are the professionals?

Who are the professionals/what disciplines are applying the intervention/approach/tool being investigated? *If it is an investigation about therapy, then therapists should be carrying out the research intervention. If it is a study about interpreting horse behavior for horsemanship activities, the professionals carrying out the research intervention should be equine experts with credentials in that service.*

3

Who are the participants?

Who are the human and/or equine research participants and how were they chosen/excluded? *Is there an appropriate match between the research participants and the investigated intervention/approach/tool?*
For example, a study about the efficacy of psychotherapy with the inclusion of horses would have patients or clients identified, and not horseback riders receiving instruction in a riding discipline.

4

What is your referenced research truly studying?

Previous research papers have used a variety of inconsistent terminology which may incorrectly compare unrelated services. *Reading and interpreting the research will be the only way to establish relevance to the current topic as reliance on previous terminology may be outdated and not applicable.*

5

Is the current research paper utilizing optimal terminology?

Are the terms used in the current research paper, including keywords, consistent with current suggested optimal terminology? *If not, what is the discrepancy? Ideally use of current terminology will assist in the article being retrievable and relevant going forward.*



RESEARCH EXAMPLE

Below is an illustration demonstrating the application of the proposed questions detailed in the preceding section.

The research subject is the use of Equine-assisted Learning in Education for adults with developmental disabilities.

This would be considered in the Learning area as a non-therapy service that focuses on education based interventions with the inclusion of horses.

The practitioners providing the service should be identified as educators with associated credentials in education and additional equine related credentials, or in partnership with credentialed equine professionals.

The participants in the study are adults with developmental disabilities with specific criteria for inclusion. These would be students or clients, not riders, athletes or patients.

The literature review would most likely be made up of past research in the areas of education, equine-assisted learning, possibly horsemanship, not likely therapy. The past research should be from similar paradigms.

Optimal Terminology

Current Optimal Terminology	Examples of Proper Usage
<p>Equine-assisted services (EAS) is a term used when referring to multiple diverse areas of services, therefore is always used in the plural. Three broad categories of EAS are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapy • Learning • Horsemanship <p>These 3 broad areas contain multiple types of delivery.</p>	<p>Many equine-assisted services rely on donations to fund programming.</p> <p>A facility offering 3 distinct services (physical therapy, counseling and adaptive/therapeutic riding) could be described as offering equine-assisted services when speaking about the entire program.</p> <p>Or, if specificity is preferred, discussion could be about just one of these distinct services.</p>
<p>Use of therapy first language indicates a recognized, licensed therapy service which incorporates equines as part of the interventions.</p>	<p>The occupational therapist uses equine movement to promote core stability for fine motor function.</p> <p>The clinic provides psychotherapy services incorporating horses.</p> <p>Physical therapy utilizing equine movement.</p>
<p>Equine-assisted learning (EAL) is a non-therapy service that includes three areas: EAL in education, EAL in personal development, and EAL in organizations.</p>	<p>Leaders increase their effectiveness by participating in EAL in organizations.</p> <p>The service provider has specific training and credentialing as an educator in order to provide EAL in education.</p>
<p>Hippotherapy/equine movement is a treatment tool provided within occupational therapy, physical therapy or speech-language pathology by a licensed therapy professional.</p>	<p>A physical therapist who incorporates hippotherapy in treatment.</p> <p>A speech-language pathologist with certification in hippotherapy applications.</p>

Outdated Terminology

Discontinued Terminology	Discontinued Rationale
Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)	<p>Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies was previously used as an overarching term but was misleading. It indicates no separation between therapy and non-therapy services and was misinterpreted as a service unto itself.</p> <p>This created confusion for the end-users, funders and other stakeholders regarding the type of service they were engaged with.</p>
Equine Therapy Equine-assisted Therapy (EAT) Horseback Riding Therapy Equestrian Therapy Horse Therapy Equi-Therapy Therapy Riding	<p>None of these terms are clear about the type of service being offered or who might be served.</p> <p>None of these are licensed or recognized therapies in the US (in some states use of the word 'therapy' in a title for a non-licensed entity is considered fraudulent).</p>
Equine facilitated learning Equine guided learning	<p>Based on a national survey of providers for the Optimal Terminology paper, the term equine-assisted, rather than equine-facilitated or guided, is a more common search term, yielding greater results.</p>
Hippotherapist	<p>Hippotherapy is not a licensed treatment in the US, and hippotherapy is not a profession.</p> <p>Hippotherapy is not a service, it does not stand alone.</p>



SUGGESTED KEYWORDS

Suggested keywords to find relevant research on a specific human-equine service or various equine-assisted services.

adaptive carriage driving, adaptive riding, adaptive vaulting, equine-oriented, equine-accompanied, equine-assisted, equine-assisted counseling, equine-assisted learning, equine-assisted psychotherapy, equine-assisted services, equine environment, equine-related, hippotherapy, therapeutic carriage driving, therapeutic donkey, therapeutic driving, therapeutic equid, therapeutic equine, therapeutic horse, therapeutic interactive vaulting, therapeutic mule, therapeutic riding.

The following terms are **not recommended** terminology, but may be used in order to find international and/or older research.

equine therapy, equine-assisted activities and therapies, equine-assisted therapy, equine-based, equine-facilitated, equine-facilitated therapy, equine-facilitated learning, equine-guided, horse therapy, horse accompanied, horse-assisted, horseback riding therapy, horse-based, horse facilitated, horse-oriented, horse-related, therapy horse.

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