

Yellow Level

Horsemanship

A Study Guide for the Mounted Learning Levels Curriculum



HorseSense Learning Levels

Welcome to the Yellow Level Guide to Horsemanship!

The Yellow Level is the second introductory level, building on the basic skills and equine terminology you learned in Red Level.



This guide will take you through each of the required objectives for Yellow Level Horsemanship, explaining them in further detail, as well as offering helpful hints and activities for accelerating your progress.

Whether you have just taken your first lesson or have spent years around horses, we hope you find this guide to be informative and helpful as you journey towards becoming a well-rounded horseperson.

Please remember that this guide is meant to be a supplement to regular lessons, and not as a replacement. The activities mentioned in this guide should be practiced only under the supervision of an instructor or another knowledgeable adult!

Here's what you'll learn in Yellow Level Horsemanship:

Time for Tack	p. 1	Scoring Made Sense	p. 20
Good Habits	p. 2	Study for the Test	p. 21
Saddling Solutions	p. 3	More Test Tips	p. 22
More Tack Troubleshooting	p. 4	Trot Three Ways	p. 23
Buckle Up	p. 5	Ride Without Stirrups	p. 24
Buckle Down	p. 6	No-Stirrup Success	p. 25
Be Prepared	p. 7	Build Your Base	p. 26
Ready, Set, Bail	p. 8	Learning on the Longe	p. 27
Emergency Brakes	p. 9	Longe Line Lesson	p. 28
Think Like a Horse	p. 10	Two-Point Tuneup	p. 29
Setting the Pace	p. 11	A Good Approach	p. 30
Transition Tips	p. 12	Trot Poles	p. 31
Posting Diagonals	p. 13	Confident Coursework	p. 32
The Leg Near the Wall	p. 14	Rider Fitness	p. 33
Switching Sides	p. 15	Horse Sports	p. 34
Ring Figures	p. 16	Picture Perfect	p. 35
Ready for the Test	p. 17	Practice Arena	p. 36
From A to X	p. 18	For Further Study	p. 37
Dressage Definition	p. 19		

conditioning

dressage

flatwork skills

gaits and movement

jumping skills

mounted safety

riding disciplines

tack

A Note About the Levels Program

The Learning Levels program is our unique method of tracking progress in students as they develop into versatile, well-rounded riders and horsemen. Students work to master specific skills in each of the levels, and receive recognition for completion when they are able to consistently demonstrate each of the skills to their instructor. In many cases, achievement of one level is a prerequisite for learning more advanced skills such as jumping.

The Levels are divided into two branches to reflect the main areas of study within our riding school:

-  The *Horsemanship Levels* concentrate on the rider's ability in the saddle, culminating in a rider who is balanced, educated and confident and can ride a schooled horse with skill and tact on the flat, over fences and in the open.
-  The *HorseSense Levels* focus on the extensive body of knowledge needed to care for and work with horses successfully, testing students on horse handling, veterinary and stable management skills.

If you are not already a participant in the Levels Program and you are interested becoming one, please ask your instructor for more information.

Nikki and Dana Surrusco
HorseSense Learning Levels, LLC
Ellijay, GA


<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com>

Visit our website to learn more about the Learning Levels program.



HorseSense Learning Levels materials are intended for general informational purposes only; they do not constitute legal advice and are presented without any representation or warranty whatsoever, including as to the accuracy or completeness of the information. HorseSense Learning Levels, LLC is not responsible for any errors or omissions or for the results obtained from the use of such information.

Limitation of Liability and Indemnity. You agree and acknowledge that you are fully responsible for your own acts, and that if you, or other individuals are injured in conjunction with any information or services provided by HorseSense Learning Levels, it was your choice alone to rely on that information or service and you do so at your own risk. Use of any HorseSense materials, whether for personal or professional means, constitutes your agreement to indemnify HorseSense Learning Levels from all liability.

Legal Use of the Learning Levels Instructional Materials. Our resources are for your personal use. Instructors, trainers, and other equine professionals may photocopy the materials for use with their students, but may not sell or otherwise distribute any information contained therein for financial gain. All images, text, and materials provided through our website are copyrighted and may not be reproduced without written permission from HorseSense Learning Levels.

Special thanks to all of the HorseSense students and horses who are featured here.

Illustrations by Rhonda Hagy

Photographs by our amazing barn family volunteer photographers.

©2007 HorseSense Learning Levels, LLC –
rev. 2020
All Rights Reserved.

Yellow Horsemanship Objectives

The Yellow Level is a beginner level, designed to give you a solid foundation before you move on to more challenging skills such as cantering and jumping.

Let's take a look at the requirements of Yellow Level.
You can use this checklist to set goals and assess your progress.

- Tack and untack independently, in less than twenty minutes.
You should be able to efficiently prepare your horse for a lesson, grooming and putting on both saddle and bridle, without assistance from your instructor. All of the tack should be adjusted correctly so that you can arrive at the arena ready to begin your lesson.
- Adjust stirrups and girth while mounted.
- Perform an emergency dismount at the trot.
- Demonstrate use of disengagement and pulley rein by halting horse from trot.
- Ride smooth walk-trot transitions, maintaining balanced position.
- Demonstrate knowledge and awareness of posting diagonals.
Your goal as a rider is not just to be able to perform movements, but to perform them well. You should be able to move your horse between the gaits smoothly and trot with rhythm and balance.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers at walk and trot:
 - Large circle
 - Figure-eight
 - Serpentine
 - Half circle, half-turn and diagonal with change of posting diagonal
- Ride USDF Intro Test A or B, showing knowledge of elementary dressage terms and figures.
Riding an Intro Level dressage test demonstrates that you and your horse have mastered basic riding in the arena at the walk and trot, and that you can work as a team. The word "test" sounds scary, but it's just a chance to evaluate where you and your horse are in your training.
- Ride on the longe line at walk and trot without stirrups and reins.
- Drop stirrups and pick up again, without looking down, at the walk.
- Ride posting and sitting trot without stirrups, once around arena.
Riding without stirrups can be physically challenging, but it is one of the best things you can do to develop a secure, independent seat and to prepare for riding the canter!
- Ride in 2-point position on the flat at walk and trot, developing ability to remain balanced independent of hands.
- Ride a grid of trot poles, demonstrating secure jumping position.
- Ride a ground pole course at the trot with opening and closing circles, good approaches.
It is never too early to start practicing jumping skills. You can learn how to ride grids and courses at the trot using ground poles. Riding in two-point will help you develop a balanced, strong leg position.

Time for Tack

You have already learned to groom your horse and to put on a saddle and bridle in preparation for a ride. In Red Level, you were allowed assistance—but to earn a Yellow Horsemanship ribbon, you need to be able to **tack and untack independently, in twenty minutes or less**. This allows you to get ready to ride on your own, prior to your lesson time.

Do it yourself



Handling your horse independently means you can perform **basic** tasks, such as grooming and tacking up, without help or supervision from your instructor. Note that **at this Level, you should still have supervision while catching your horse in stall or pasture**.

Working independently means you will need to develop some **problem-solving skills**. You might need to figure out how to bridle a tall horse, or fasten a girth that mysteriously doesn't seem to reach. You will have to practice looking for **safe solutions**, and consider the horse's point of view as well as your own.

Watch the clock

Preparing your horse within a time limit helps you practice **working efficiently**. This is an extremely important skill to develop if you are going to spend much time around horses. There is **always** more to do in a barn - dragging out one task often means that another important job is left undone.

Being efficient is not the same as rushing. On the contrary, it allows you to do a job well in a short amount of time, so you are not hurried or stressed. Rushing makes us careless and can make a horse anxious, increasing the risk of an accident.

Over the next few pages, we'll take a look at some ways that you can become more efficient in your tacking and untacking skills. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- 🐾 **Review all of the Red Level information on ground handling skills**, including tying, grooming, hoof picking, and putting on a saddle and bridle.
- 🐾 **Familiarize yourself with all of the tack your lesson horse uses** on a regular basis. If you ride multiple horses, make sure you can keep track of each horse's individual equipment.
- 🐾 **Get organized.** Arrive at the barn dressed in your riding attire, including your helmet, with water bottle in hand. Assemble all of the tack and supplies you will need (including grooming kit and fly spray) before catching and tying your horse.



Your goal: for you and your horse to arrive at the arena at your lesson time, dressed and ready to ride.

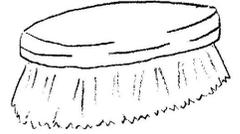
Enjoy the extra time in the saddle!

Good Habits

In order to work efficiently in the barn, you'll need to practice **prioritizing** and develop an organized **routine**. Make sure you are confident in your grooming and tacking up skills. If your horse wears specialized equipment, such as protective boots or a martingale, practice putting these on with assistance or supervision from your instructor at first.

Beauty is as beauty does

Your horse should be clean and tidy when you go out for your lesson. Not only does this keep your horse comfortable, it shows respect for both the horse and your instructor. However, if your horse comes in from the pasture filthy, and your lesson is in twenty minutes, you may need to prioritize!



Hoof picking is a must. Curry your horse all over, followed by an energetic brushing, paying particular attention to places the tack will touch: **withers, back, girth area, face**. Don't worry about getting him shiny or brushing his mane or tail unless you have extra time.

Run your hands along the horse's face, behind his ears, and under his belly where the girth sits. Your horse is clean enough when his **coat feels smooth to the touch** (no dried sweat, shavings or clumps of mud).

Make it a habit

One of the best things you can do to manage your time well is to create a routine.

If you do things the same way every time, you're much less likely to leave out an important step.

Remember that when you return to the barn and untack your horse, you will perform your routine in reverse. The bridle, for example, is the last thing we put on when tacking up, but the first thing we remove when untacking. Let's take a look at some routines you might follow before and after a ride:



Tacking up:

- 🐾 Pick **hooves**.
- 🐾 **Curry**.
- 🐾 **Brush**.
- 🐾 Apply **protective boots**, if needed.
- 🐾 Put on **saddle pad** and **half pad**, if used.
- 🐾 Put on **saddle**. Lift saddle pad into gullet, off withers.
- 🐾 Fasten **saddle pad tab** and **girth** on right side.
- 🐾 Fasten **saddle pad tab** and **girth** on left side.
- 🐾 Put on **helmet**, if you haven't already. Assemble **gloves, crop, water** - anything you might need in the arena.
- 🐾 Put **reins** over horse's head.
- 🐾 **Remove halter** and put on **bridle**.
- 🐾 Take **reins** over horse's head and **lead** to arena.

Untacking:

- 🐾 Put **reins** over horse's head.
- 🐾 Pick up **halter** and hold ready to put on, **or**, slide halter under and between reins and buckle around neck.
- 🐾 Remove **bridle** and replace with **halter**.
- 🐾 Remove **reins** from horse's neck.
- 🐾 Remove **girth** and **saddle pad tab** from left side.
- 🐾 Remove **girth** and **saddle pad tab** from right side.
- 🐾 Place **girth** upside down on saddle.
- 🐾 Lift off **saddle, girth** and **pad** together. Separate saddle pad and turn upside down to dry.
- 🐾 Remove **protective boots**, if used.
- 🐾 **Groom, sponge** or **hose down** horse, as needed.
- 🐾 Check **hooves**.

Saddling Solutions

In Red Level, you may have had some assistance in saddling your horse. Now you will need to get comfortable doing it all on your own - which sometimes means working through difficulties!

Problem #1: The girth won't reach.

Your horse's normal girth just won't seem to reach. Has he gained fifty pounds since your last ride? Probably not.

First, **check that your saddle isn't sitting too far back.** The front of the saddle should sit just behind your horse's shoulder blades, positioning the girth about a hand's width from the horse's elbow. If it sits farther back, the girth will have to wrap around the horse's barrel, which is much wider.

If you are sure that the saddle is positioned correctly, **lower the buckles on the off side** to the first hole. Try to fasten the front billets first, where the horse is narrower. If you have this problem repeatedly, talk to your instructor - your horse may need a different girth or a **girth extender**.



Problem #2: The saddle slid too far back.

This can easily happen if your horse has steep withers, or is shuddering his skin because he is irritated by flies. If you notice your saddle has shifted to the rear, you will need to **unfasten the girth and lift the saddle and pads completely off the horse's back.** Set the tack on the horse's withers and slide it back to the correct spot, so the horse's coat lies comfortably smooth under the saddle pad.

It is much easier to prevent this problem than to fix it. Apply fly spray during fly season, and make sure to place your saddle well forward when you first put it on. If this happens a lot, your horse may need to wear a special piece of tack called a breastplate, designed to keep the saddle in place.

Problem #3: My horse gets angry when I tighten the girth.



Wait to pull tight!

Many horses are **girthy** or **cinchy**. When you lift the girth, they pin their ears, shake their heads, and grind their teeth. They may even try to bite or kick you! There are many causes for this behavior, including sore muscles, improperly-fitting tack, stomach ulcers, and bad associations with the saddle.

Be careful when handling a girthy horse. Avoid turning your back, and be prepared to defend your space bubble with "chicken wing" elbows and a sharp, disapproving sound with your voice.

Remember to tighten the girth gradually. This is particularly important if your horse is girthy, or he **bloats** (holds a big breath of air when you tighten the girth). Fasten the girth loosely, raise it a hole before and/or after you put on the bridle, and tighten it a final time right before you mount.

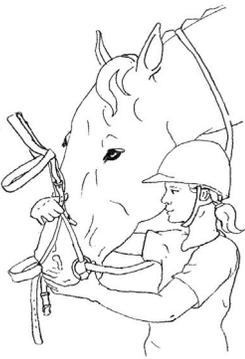
Never lose your temper, throw the saddle on or jerk on the girth roughly. That will only make your horse learn to hate saddling.

4 More Tack Troubleshooting

Putting on a horse's bridle comes with its own set of challenges. Let's take a look at some of the most common problems Yellow Level students face:

Problem #1: The horse holds his head too high.

This often happens because the horse is evading the bridle or is uncomfortable with the placement of your hands. **Check first that you are positioned correctly** next to the horse's cheek, facing forward, with your right arm reaching up between the horse's ears and the left hand under the bit. Many beginners stand in front of the horse's head or put their arm over the horse's eye. **You would move away if you had an elbow in your eye, too!**



It might be that you are just too short to reach. If this is true, or your horse makes a habit of raising his head, you can **change your grip on the bridle**. Reach under the horse's jaw with your right hand and grasp the cheekpieces above the bridge of his nose. This gives you some control over the horse's head and allows you to slip the bit between his teeth from a lower position. You can also use a **sturdy stool**.

Horses that raise their head when bridled often have memories of an unpleasant or painful experience. **Be gentle with your horse's mouth, teeth and ears**. With time and patience, a horse can be taught to relax and even lower his head on command.

Problem #2: The horse won't open his mouth for the bit.

Use the fingers of your left hand to keep the bit resting steadily against his teeth and **raise your thumb up to the corner of his mouth**. Slip your thumb into his mouth and wiggle it, or press gently on his tongue. This is safe as long as you always stay in the corner of his mouth where he doesn't have any teeth. The taste of your thumb will usually make him open up.

A horse that resists the bit might also associate it with discomfort or pain. Let your instructor know if he does it regularly - he may need his teeth checked or his tack refitted. In the winter, make sure you first **warm the bit** by rubbing it in your hands or breathing on it - freezing steel can hurt the horse's tongue!

Problem #3: The reins get trapped or tangled when you take off the bridle.

For safety's sake, **the reins should always remain over the horse's neck while you exchange your halter for bridle and vice versa**. This keeps the reins from hanging dangerously near the horse's hooves, and creates a "safety net" of control if you should accidentally drop the halter or bridle.

It can be tricky putting the halter on without removing the reins first. When you untack your horse, **pick up your halter before removing the bridle** from the horse's head. You can hold it ready to fasten **or** buckle it around the horse's neck, depending on your tie arrangement, halter type and your and instructor's preference. When you put it on, **slide it under and between the reins** so neither rein is trapped.

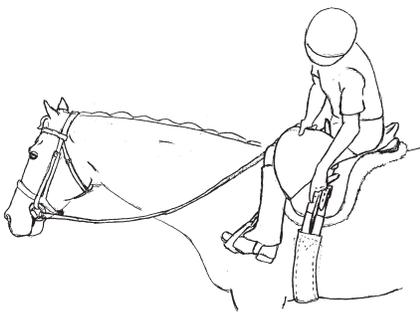


Always secure the halter on the horse's head before removing the reins and walking away!

Buckle Up

Even after you mount your horse, you may still need to make some tack adjustments. **Girths** often need to be tightened after the horse warms up, as the saddle compresses under your weight. Your **stirrups** may need to be lengthened or shortened between flatwork and jumping, or you may discover that the left and right stirrups are uneven. Although it can be awkward at first, it is important to be able to **safely adjust your tack from the saddle**.

**Imagine that you discover your girth is loose in the middle of a trail ride.
You are riding in the middle of an open field - no mounting blocks in sight!**



What do you think would happen to this rider if her horse spooked?

Whether you are adjusting your girth or your stirrups, it is important to **keep control of your reins at all times**. Put them in one hand **without** lengthening them or dropping one side. You should feel confident in your ability to halt or turn your horse if he moves forward in the middle of your adjustment.

It is also safest to **make adjustments with your feet still in the stirrups**. You may find it difficult to adjust your stirrup length this way if your hips are not flexible. In this case, you can start out by adjusting stirrups with your feet hanging close to but not in the iron. Work toward making the adjustment without dropping the stirrup.

How to tighten your girth:

At the halt, with reins in one hand and both feet in the stirrups, **lift your left leg and rest it over the knee roll of the saddle**, so that you can raise the saddle flap. Use your arm to hold the flap and the buckle guard up while you grasp the front billet strap close to the buckle, **with your index finger pointing down**.

Pull the billet strap straight up, and **use the tip of your index finger to push the tongue of the buckle into the next hole**. Repeat with the other billet strap. Make sure buckles are tight and even before lowering the buckle guard and the flap and moving your leg back into position.

With practice, you'll be able to do this without looking down at all!



Is it tight enough?

You'll know your girth is just right when you can **just slip a finger between the girth and horse's underbelly**. This is where the horse feels most of the pressure - avoid using the stretchy elastic to check your girth for tightness, as this often causes over-tightening. Yes, it is possible for a horse's girth to be too tight! If you can fit more than one finger, however, or your girth buckles roll up easily to the next hole, your girth is probably too loose and needs to be tightened before you can ride safely.

Buckle Down

In Red Level, you learned the importance of correct stirrup length - with the bottom of the **irons touching your ankle bone** - and adjusted yours with the assistance of your instructor. If you ride a school horse or borrow a saddle, you will probably have to make this adjustment every time you ride.

It is usually best to adjust your stirrups before you mount up - especially if your horse is ready to go. But every once in a while, you may need to change your stirrup length in the saddle.



1. At the halt, with reins in one hand, relax your leg and knee away from the saddle. Slide your toe out of the stirrup only if necessary. Make sure you are still sitting evenly on both seat bones.

A common beginner mistake is to push your leg forward, in front of the saddle, as though you are tightening the girth. This puts the weight of your leg on the stirrup bar, which actually makes adjusting the leathers harder. Your leg can shift **back slightly** to free the leather, but should otherwise remain close to the girth.



2. Grasp the top of the stirrup leather, just below the stitching, and pull down and away from the saddle. This should make the stirrup leather slide around the stirrup bar. Keep gently pulling until you can **see the buckle and the hole above or below it**. You may need to pull the excess leather out of its keeper first.



3. Use your thumb and your index finger to push the buckle up the leather until it falls out of the hole—be sure to keep track of its original position! Move it up or down the desired number of holes and push the tongue of the buckle in.

This is often the hardest part of adjusting the stirrup - especially if the holes are tight or the leather is stiff. **Practice moving the buckle one-handed off the horse** until you can do it with ease. If necessary, you can hold the excess leather with just the thumb and forefinger of your opposite hand - but don't let go of the reins!



4. Once the buckle is secure, pull on the bottom strap of the stirrup leather so that the buckle slides all the way back up to the stirrup bar. You may hear an audible click when the buckle connects. If the buckle is too low, it will create a pressure point against the inside of your leg.



5. Turn your knee out to tuck the excess stirrup leather back into the keeper, if necessary. Pick up your stirrup and repeat on the other side.

Don't be frustrated if you find adjusting stirrup leathers to be challenging at first. Like all of your new riding skills, it just takes practice. Eventually, you'll be able to do it with your feet in the stirrups and your eyes closed!



Be Prepared

The longer you ride, the greater the odds are that you will experience some kind of riding-related "emergency." **Even well-trained horses can have strong panic responses to something that frightens them.** Although we hope you won't have to handle such a big event at the Yellow Level, it's important to be well-prepared.

What can go wrong?

- 🐾 **Your horse might spook**, or get startled by something. If this happens, he will stop dead, leap forward or sideways, or spin around. Remember that the horse is a prey animal - when he is scared, all he can think about is getting to safety.
- 🐾 **Your horse might bolt**, or take off running. A bolting horse usually does not respond to your normal "Whoa" cue. This often happens because he is scared.
- 🐾 **Your horse might buck**, a maneuver that occurs when the horse rounds his back and lowers his head, jumping up in the air and/or kicking out. A small buck is often referred to as a "**crowhop**." This can be caused by discomfort, ill-fitting tack, imbalance or sometimes just high spirits.
- 🐾 **Your horse might stumble or fall.** Just like people, horses can trip, especially when ridden off-balance with their weight on their forehead.
- 🐾 **Your horse might rear**, or stop and stand on his hind legs. Rearing is the horse's way of saying that he does not want to go forward. It can be mild or severe, depending on how high he goes, but it always has the potential to be dangerous, as the horse can lose his balance due to your weight.



You may see trick horses rearing in exhibitions and movies. It looks cool, but keep in mind that these are experienced horses and trainers! A horse that rears is NOT an appropriate horse for Yellow Level riding. If your horse does this, get help from your instructor or another knowledgeable horse trainer immediately.

In Red Level, you learned how to sit in a **safety seat position**, with your heels braced down and forward, your shoulders back, and your core muscles engaged and strong. It is important to practice this safety seat frequently so that it becomes part of your muscle memory - particularly as you start riding at faster gaits.

The safety seat should be your first response to all of the scenarios listed above except rearing. (If your horse rears, lean forward instead!) From this position, you can safely perform a **one-rein stop**, a **pulley rein**, or drop your stirrups in preparation for an **emergency dismount**. You can ride out a buck or a brief gallop. You can even grab onto the pommel of the saddle with one hand if necessary. Leaning forward and looking down almost always leads to falling!



Your safety seat should survive a hard pull on the reins.

Ready, Set, Bail

In Red Level, you learned how to perform an **emergency dismount**, and practiced dismounting at a halt and walk. Now you can learn to perform this important skill at a **trot**. Don't worry if jumping off at the trot sounds a little scary - even small riders on tall horses can learn how to dismount quickly and safely at speed.

Why practice at a trot?



Imagine that your saddle slipped suddenly off to one side, or that you lost your reins and they fell over the horse's head toward his hooves. You wouldn't have very much time to think about the situation - you would have to **react immediately**. You might not have time to slow down the horse even if you had full control.

Jumping off a trotting horse is a bit like ripping off a Band Aid. **The slower you move, the harder it is** - and you will have to convince your instinctive brain that jumping off is a good idea! Once you learn to bail off quickly, however, you'll find that **dismounting at the trot is not that different from dismounting at the walk**.

Stick the landing

The first time you practice dismounting at the trot, it is best to have your instructor or another helper stay at the horse's head to guide him in the correct direction. **Start at a slow and steady jog**, and gradually increase the pace with each successful repetition.

Here are a few tips for dismounting at the trot:

- 🐾 **Perfect your technique at the walk** before attempting to dismount at the trot. Make sure that you can consistently kick both feet out of the stirrups, swing your leg high to clear the cantle, and land smoothly on the ground, facing **forward**.
- 🐾 **Make sure your feet are out of the stirrups before you bail**. Jumping off at the trot with a foot caught in the stirrup is **dangerous!** You can train yourself by dropping your stirrups, counting off three strides of sitting trot, and then leaning forward to dismount.
- 🐾 **It is safest to let go of the reins as you land**, so you do not accidentally pull the horse on top of you. **Your right hand, however, should remain against the saddle**. This will support you if the landing is unsteady.
- 🐾 **Land ready to jog** alongside your horse if he does not immediately slow down.
- 🐾 **If emergency dismounts scare you, practice on a pony at first**. Work up to jumping off a large horse once you are able to dismount confidently.



Remember that an emergency dismount is used in special situations, such as if your tack breaks, your horse trips and falls, or you lose control of your reins. It should NOT be used if your horse is galloping away with you. It is difficult to land properly at high speeds, and you could seriously hurt yourself. Stay on and regain control!

Emergency Brakes

Any time a horse runs away or spooks, **your first priority is to stay on, and your second is to regain control of his feet.** Unfortunately, when a horse gets scared, he can forget his training and revert back to his instincts: running to safety and leaning against pressure. This means you need a strategy for when he ignores your request to slow down.

Turn the tail

You have already learned how to do a **one-rein stop**, also called **disengaging the hindquarters**, and should be comfortable stopping your horse from a walk. Now you can practice at a trot. The technique remains the same, but your safety seat is twice as important now that the horse is moving with some speed. If you do not have your heels well down, your shoulders back and your seat pushed deep into the saddle, you may come flying off if your horse stops abruptly!



An emergency stop at the trot may be more gradual. You may, for example, have to circle once or twice before your horse comes to a full halt. This is a good thing—you don't want to turn too quickly and pull your horse off balance!

Ride strong

The safety seat is equally key to a successful **pulley rein**. It allows you to keep your balance even if the horse pulls his head down or tries to buck. It also uses leverage to make your body stronger, making the rein aid loud and clear.

After you have practiced the pulley rein several times, your horse may stop as soon as he feels you get into a safety seat, whether you lift the rein or not. He will associate the position with strong pressure.



Remember that **in a pulley rein, the horse should not turn**, but remain straight while coming to a halt. Keep your eyes up and focused on a target between his ears. Make sure the rein you use to pull and give is held against the horse's neck - if you pull out to the side, he will turn.

Pulling back with both reins is like fighting fire with fire.

It invites the horse to brace his neck and jaw and pull back against you.

As soon as you start to play tug-of-war with a horse, you have already lost!

Which kind of stop do I need?

In general, **a one-rein stop is much kinder to the horse.** Most of the time, it is all you need to bring a spooky or overeager horse back under your control.

However, there are situations where the pulley rein is a better choice. If you are riding in **muddy footing**, along a **narrow trail** or a steep **hillside**, or in a **crowded arena**, you may not be able to turn safely. Remember that while a pulley rein does not feel good to the horse, it is still a better option than letting him run wildly. A frightened horse can injure himself as well as you!

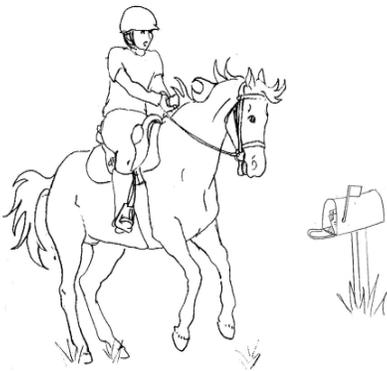
Think Like a Horse

A frightened or “spooky” horse can be challenging to deal with. To safely help your horse relax, you’ll need to remain calm, read his body language, and remember to think like a prey animal instead of a predator.

Signs of trouble

You may be able to prevent a scary situation by recognizing the signs of a horse that is about to spook. These include:

- 🐾 **Rigid posture.** The horse’s head may be raised; his back and neck muscles will feel tight.
- 🐾 **Pricked ears.** The horse will be focused entirely on something in the distance - not on you.
- 🐾 **Loud snorting.** The horse may breathe more rapidly; his heart rate will increase.
- 🐾 **Avoidance.** A horse may stop dead or sidle sideways to keep from moving toward a scary object.



If your horse does spook, immediately get into a **safety seat** and **turn him in a circle** until you can control his feet again. You may need to **dismount** if your horse remains nervous and unfocused.

If you can identify what frightened him, slowly walk him past the scary object until he is calm again. It is important to let him **see it out of both eyes**—approach from the side instead of head on. Your horse will feel safest if you **approach and retreat**, moving toward the object and then away, inching closer with each repetition.

You’ll know your horse is calming down when his head lowers, he sighs, and/or he **licks and chews** his lips.

Never shout at a horse or punish him for spooking.

This will only increase his tension and give him unpleasant associations, making him twice as likely to spook again!

Remember that if you want your horse to be calm, **you need to be calm first**. When something goes wrong, take a deep breath. It can help to speak reassuringly to your horse, but only if you can keep your voice quiet and soothing.

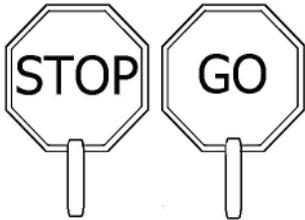
A very important thing to keep in mind is that when your horse spooks or acts up, he is not doing it to you. You will often hear riders say “My horse threw me,” “He’s being bad,” “He hates me,” etc., but your horse’s behavior is probably not personal. Remember that he can’t tell you if he is in pain, anxious, or has unpleasant memories. Try to give him the benefit of the doubt. If his behavior scares you or confuses you, make sure to ask for help.



Your horse looks to you as his leader.
If you get upset, he will, too!

Setting the Pace

In Red Level, you learned how to ask the horse to move forward and slow down, and practiced many walk/halt **transitions**. Now you can improve your communication skills by riding transitions **between the walk and the trot**.



Why practice transitions?

- 🐾 It helps your horse become more **attentive** and responsive to your cues.
- 🐾 It **rebalances** his body, helping him move forward and turn more easily.
- 🐾 It helps you practice using your **natural aids** (seat, leg, voice and rein) to communicate.
- 🐾 It prepares you for riding **patterns, games** and **dressage tests**.

Let's trot!

1. Stretch **tall** and **look** ahead. Shorten your reins if necessary.
2. Energetically **squeeze your calf muscles** against the horse's side. Squeeze just as long as it takes to say the word, "Go."
3. If he does not move off, **try following up with a firmer squeeze**, a nudge with your heels, and/or a tap with your crop. You can also **use your voice** to encourage him. Cluck, kiss, or say "Trot!"
4. Sit deep in the saddle until you feel the clear two-beat motion of the trot. **Relax your legs** and rise to the next beat, developing a smooth **posting rhythm**.



Let's walk!

1. Slow your posting rhythm and/or squeeze briefly on the reins to **steady the horse's trot**.
2. **Exhale and sit into the saddle**, letting your weight sink heavily into your thighs. Keep your shoulders back over your hips - especially if your horse stops abruptly.
3. **Squeeze the reins and/or resist slightly with your elbows** to apply brief pressure on the bit, if necessary. You can say "Whoa" or "Walk" in a quiet, soothing voice.
4. When the horse begins to walk, **relax** and **release all pressure**.



He won't go or whoa!

Frequently, trouble with transitions is caused by **rider error**. You may accidentally be giving your horse **conflicting aids** - pulling on the reins when you ask him to go, or digging in your heels when you want him to whoa. This can frustrate as well as confuse your horse.

If your horse doesn't respond to your cues, check your **position** first. If you are out of balance, the horse will be, too! Make sure you are using each **aid** clearly and consistently, starting with a light cue and increasing pressure only as needed.

Transition Tips

Whether you are riding an **upward** or **downward transition**, the key to changing gait smoothly is **preparation**. If your horse is surprised by your request, or his body is not in a state of balance, he will not be able to transition right away. You may think he is lazy or hard to stop.

When you **communicate your intention**, however, the horse can respond to a light request. It might feel like he is reading your mind!

Ready, set, go

To prepare for an upward transition to the trot, create energy in the horse's walk by lightly squeezing with your lower leg, in rhythm with his strides. Shorten your reins until you feel a light contact with the horse's mouth.

If he still feels inattentive, try riding a few transitions between the walk and the halt, or **briefly** squeeze both leg and rein while stretching tall. This is the beginning of an advanced technique called the **half-halt**. Make sure you are **sitting up straight** - a slouched body is not ready for action!



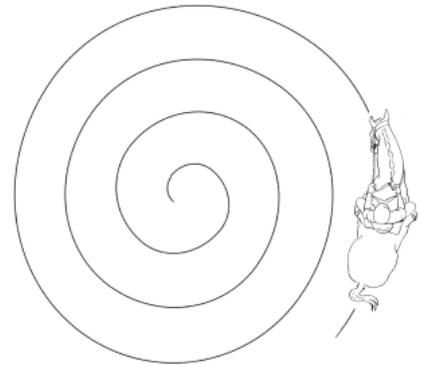
Ready to trot - or not?

Ready, set, whoa

To prepare for a downward transition to the walk or halt, steady the horse's trot by slowing your posting rhythm, sitting back, and/or squeezing your reins intermittently, like a sponge. If the horse is trotting too fast, he will find it physically difficult to make the transition, and the trot will be too bouncy for you to sit.

Sometimes horses get excited or take a long time to stop (especially if you have accidentally given him a "Go" signal with your leg or seat).

A speedy horse should be turned onto a large circle. Gradually decrease the size of the circle until he slows down - you can even turn it into a **one-rein stop** if necessary.



The smaller the circle, the harder it is for the horse to trot!

Once you can ride transitions *smoothly*, practice riding them *accurately*.

This means that you can **change gait precisely at a designated place**, such as a cone or fence post. Try to time the transition so it occurs when your body passes the landmark - after all, you are sitting over the center of the horse.

You'll need to prepare the horse for the transition **before you get to the marker**. A sensitive horse might only need a stride or two of preparation, while some horses need much longer. With practice, you'll be able to feel how much time your horse requires.

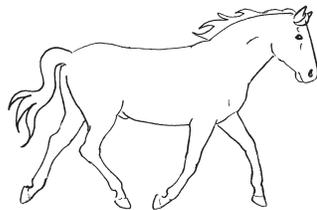


Posting Diagonals

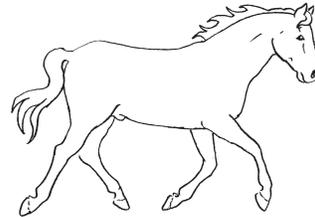
As soon as you can trot your horse around the arena independently, and maintain a steady rhythm, you are ready to learn how to **post on the correct diagonal**. Posting diagonals can be tricky at first but become simple and effortless through repeated practice - just like posting itself!

What are posting diagonals?

The trot has **two beats** - you learned to feel this rhythm when you learned to post. The horse picks up his legs and puts them down in **diagonal pairs**. This means that when the **left hind leg** moves forward, so does the **right foreleg**. There is a small moment of **suspension**, or airtime, in between each of the steps - that's why the trot can feel bouncy to ride.



BEAT ONE



BEAT TWO

When a horse is trotting in a straight line, he works both sides of his body evenly. However, **when he turns, one diagonal set of legs works harder than the other**. The inside hind leg pushes more strongly, and the outside foreleg reaches a little bit farther.

Although you only have two legs, you can get the same feeling when you jog around a circle. Your inside leg must push while your outside leg reaches, or else you will lose your balance.

Why does this matter to you?

In the posting trot, it is easiest for your horse to carry you through a turn if your rising beat happens at the same moment that he steps forward with his hard-working diagonal pair. **If you rise when his inside hind leg and outside foreleg move forward, you are on the correct diagonal.**

Sitting during this moment will not hurt your horse, but it will make it more difficult for him to balance. Your body and the horse's body will not quite align; you might feel like you are crooked or working harder to post. This is called being on the **incorrect diagonal**.

At this level, you'll use posting diagonals primarily to help the horse turn.

If you were trotting down a perfectly straight road, there would be no right or wrong diagonal. But in an arena, you are almost always turning one direction or the other, which means you'll need to learn how to **identify and change your posting diagonal** if necessary.



Our horses are generous partners.

Do everything you can to help your horse carry you with ease!

The Leg Near the Wall

In order to post on the correct diagonal, you'll need to be able to tell what diagonal you're on from the saddle. Don't be frustrated if this takes you a while to figure out - learning to identify posting diagonals can take lots of practice!

Inside, outside

You are posting on the correct diagonal if you rise **up** when your horse's inside hind leg/outside foreleg goes **forward**. If you are traveling on the **right** rein, or clockwise, the horse's **left** foreleg should go forward when you rise. If you are traveling on the **left** rein, you'll want to post in sync with the **right** foreleg.

You can remember this rule by repeating to yourself, "Rise and fall with the leg near the wall." The "wall" is the rail of the arena; the foreleg closest to it should move forward as you rise.



If this horse is turning left, should you rise with polka dots or stripes?

A great way to start learning to identify posting diagonals is by **watching other horses and riders**. It can be helpful if the horse wears different colored bandages or boots on each diagonal pair so you can see his legs moving clearly. You can also watch a slow-motion video of a rider posting to the trot.

As the horse trots around, ask yourself:

- 🐾 Which foreleg is on the **outside**?
- 🐾 Can you **see the horse's shoulder moving** when the horse steps forward?
- 🐾 Is the rider going **up at the same time**?

Take a peek

Eventually, you will be able to feel which posting diagonal you're on. In the beginning, however, you might have to "cheat" by peeking at the horse's shoulders. Make sure to **glance down with just your eyes** - tipping your whole head down throws your body off balance and might make you fall!

You can't really see what's happening with your horse's legs without losing your balanced position. But you can watch the **horse's shoulders**, which move along with his forelegs. Practice watching your horse's outside shoulder swing forward and back at the walk. If you find this hard to see, try putting a stripe of tape along his shoulder blade. You can use different-colored tape on his left and right shoulder to keep your inside and outside straight.



Once you've got it, pick up a posting trot. Peek at the horse's outside shoulder first. **Are you rising up when this shoulder swings forward?** If not, shift your glance to the inside shoulder. If this looks more synchronized, you might be on the wrong diagonal. Let's take a look at how to easily switch from one diagonal to another.

switching sides

If you find you are posting on the wrong diagonal, don't worry. You can fix this easily without interrupting your horse's trot. You'll also start **changing your posting diagonal** every time you change direction at the trot.

How do I change my posting diagonal?

Simply **sit for one extra beat** in the saddle to move your rising beat from one diagonal to the other. As you practice, you might find it helpful to chant out loud with your posting rhythm. Say "Up, down, up, down, **down**, up, down." After the extra down beat, you can resume posting normally.

Remember that the horse only has two diagonals.

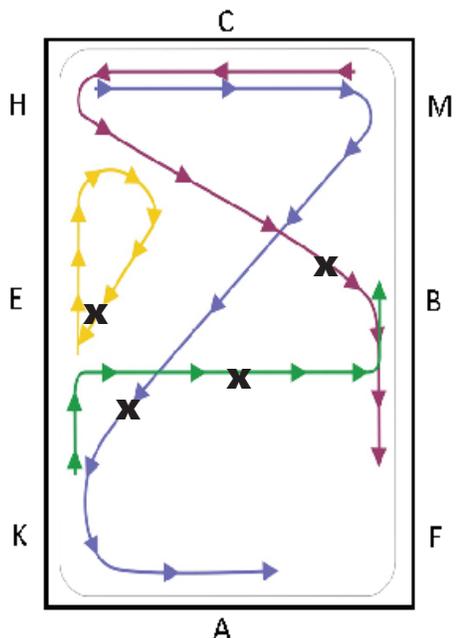
If you sit an odd number of beats when you post, you will stay on the same one.

If you sit an even number of beats, you will rise with the opposite shoulder.

It is important to be able to change diagonal smoothly, without letting your hands or heels lift up. You can practice by trotting your horse along the rail and changing diagonal every couple of strides.



The first rider is turning right. The second rider is turning left. Which one needs to sit an extra beat?



X = a good place to change diagonal

In **Red Level**, you learned several different methods of changing direction: **across the diagonal**, through a **half-turn**, and a **half-circle reverse**. Now you can ride each of these movements at the trot.

Your first goal is to ride each of the turns smoothly, without losing your rhythm or letting your horse break to the walk. **If you can't keep up a steady posting trot, you won't be able to stay on the correct diagonal!** Use your eyes and your seat to help your horse turn, looking in the direction you want him to go and moving your hands as little as possible.

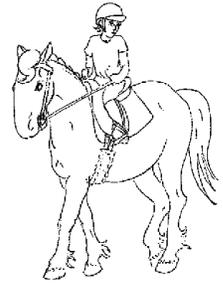
When you change direction at the trot, your diagonal will change along with it. Your horse will have a new outside shoulder by the time he finishes the turn. This means that you need to **sit an extra beat before he turns in the new direction.** Try to do this in the moment that will least disrupt your horse's balance: when he straightens his body between the two turns.

Ring Figures

Ring figures are shapes that we can ride on horseback, such as circles, half-circles and serpentines. At **Red Level**, you learned to walk your horse through a round circle and different changes of direction. Now you can try some slightly trickier ring figures, and practice riding them all at the trot.

Why practice ring figures?

- 🐾 **They test your communication** with your horse. You must use all your aids correctly in order to ride each shape accurately.
- 🐾 **They balance your horse** and **loosen his muscles** by asking him to bend and stretch in each direction.
- 🐾 **They keep arena work interesting and fresh** - for you and your horse!



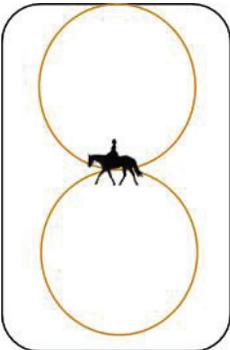
Circles



In order to maintain a steady trot on a circle, you'll need to **keep your circles large at first** - they might even fill the width of your arena. Most horses naturally slow down when they begin to turn, so use your **inside leg at the girth** to encourage your horse to trot forward with energy. The less you use your inside rein, the better - look ahead to the next quarter of the circle, and swivel your hips and shoulders in the direction of the turn.

Practice trotting circles in both directions. Remember: a good circle is **round like an orange**, and **ends in exactly the same place it begins!**

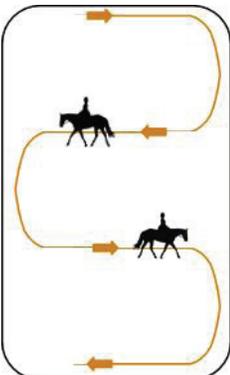
Figure-eight



A figure-eight is ridden just like it is written: in one continuous line. You can make a figure-eight two different ways: by combining two changes of direction across the diagonal, or by combining two round circles.

Practice riding **two circles exactly the same size and shape**, with a few **straight strides in the middle**. At first, you might find it helpful to place two poles or cones in the center of the arena to ensure that you change direction in the same place every time. When you ride this ring figure at the trot, you'll need to **change your posting diagonal**. Sit a beat during the straight steps between the two circles.

Serpentine



A serpentine is made of several half-circles connected by straight lines, allowing you to **change direction multiple times** as you travel from one end of the arena to the other. Each turn in a serpentine is called a "**loop**." Serpentines can have from two to six loops, depending on the speed you are riding and the size of the arena. The turn in the diagram has **three loops**, which means crossing the arena twice.

Practice riding **loops that are all the same size**, fully straightening your horse as you cross the centerline. Imagine the arena is a birthday cake you are cutting into equal pieces. At the trot, **change your posting diagonal** in between each loop.

Ready for the Test

If you can walk and trot with balance and control, you are ready to ride an **Introductory Level dressage test**. Don't let the word "test" intimidate you - a dressage test is simply a chance for you to show off the basic training skills that you and your horse have already practiced.

What is dressage?

The word dressage means "training." When you practice dressage, you improve the horse's strength, balance and flexibility as well as your own seat and communication skills.

Dressage can be practiced at home by every horse and rider. It can also be ridden as a competitive sport - **there is dressage in the Olympic games!** At its best, dressage is an elegant dance between horse and rider, with the horse performing athletic maneuvers in response to almost invisible cues. In the beginning, you'll practice dressage by riding **tests**, or patterns, made up of basic transitions and ring figures.



This pattern is designed to test and give you feedback on your riding ability.
There is no such thing as failing a dressage test.

In the United States, **Introductory Tests A and B** are ridden entirely at the walk, trot, and halt - no cantering necessary. The test takes place in a special arena, a **20 x 40 meter** rectangle marked with letters. Each **movement**, or task, takes place at a specific letter.

The movements are scored individually and combined with the judge's overall impressions. The first time you ride a dressage test, the judge will probably be your instructor!

Ready or not?

You will be able to ride your first dressage test when you can:

-  Ride **smooth and accurate transitions** between the walk, trot and halt, maintaining your balanced position.
-  Maintain a **rhythmic, energetic trot** along the rail, through **corners** and **large circles**.
-  Ride your horse **straight**, on the rail, across diagonal lines and down the **centerline** of the arena.
-  Smoothly **lengthen and shorten your reins** at the walk.
-  Keep your horse **still and attentive at the halt**, even if you put your reins in one hand to **salute**.

It is helpful to post on the **correct diagonal**, so your horse can stay balanced and forward in his turns. At this level, however, it is okay if you miss a diagonal or two. You are not **required** to memorize the test, but you will find it helpful to learn it well!

2019 USDF INTRODUCTORY LEVEL - TEST A		NO.	
1	Walk		
2	Trot		
3	Canter		
4	Halt		
5	Salute		
6	Reins		
7	Diagonal		
8	Centerline		
9	Circle		
10	Transition		
11	Overall		

You can download the actual test sheets online, for free!

Dressage Definitions

When you first read through your dressage test, you may notice a few unfamiliar terms. Don't worry - the movements that make up an Introductory Level test are simple and easy to learn!

Some important dressage terms to add to your horsey vocabulary:

🐾 All dressage tests begin with the movement **"Enter at A."** This means that you will ride outside the dressage ring, circling the edge, until the judge signals that she is ready for you to begin the test. (At horse shows, this signal is usually a whistle or bell.) Turn wide as you approach A so that you can ride straight **down the centerline** toward X and C.



🐾 For most of your test, you'll be asked to ride at a **"Working trot rising."** The term **working trot** means that your horse is moving forward with energy, maintaining a steady rhythm. Your reins should be short enough that you keep a light **contact**, or feel of the horse's mouth. **Rising means posting.** It is okay to sit for a few steps as you transition in and out of the trot.



🐾 You'll be asked to show **two different types of walk** during your dressage test: a **medium walk** and a **free walk.** In the medium walk, your horse should march energetically forward while you keep **contact** with the reins. You should feel equally ready to trot and halt.

🐾 To ride the **free walk**, gradually **lengthen your reins** so the horse can extend his head and neck and stretch through the top of his body. This walk should feel loose and swinging, with ground-covering strides. The horse is free to stretch, but not to slow down to a plod!

🐾 At least once during a dressage test, you'll be asked to **change rein.** This simply means to change direction and usually occurs on a diagonal line. The free walk is often used to change rein. If you are riding on the centerline, the test will tell you which way to turn with the phrase **"Track left"** or **"Track right."**

🐾 Whenever your horse turns or circles, he should demonstrate **bend and balance.** For now, the best way to achieve this is to ride accurate figures in a steady rhythm. You will learn more about creating the correct bend in your horse's spine in **Blue Level.**

🐾 All dressage tests end with a **halt and salute**, facing the judge. Many dressage tests begin this way as well. The halt is one of the most important movements as it demonstrates that your horse is relaxed and obedient and makes a final impression. In a great halt, the horse stands **square**, meaning that his legs are aligned like table legs and his body is straight. He should also be **immobile**, or still.

🐾 **To salute**, place your reins in your left hand. Extend your right arm and drop your chin in a brief nod. Keep your back straight, and the salute short and crisp - think military salute, not a theatrical bow! After your final salute, lengthen the reins and give your horse a rub for a job well done. **Exit at A** in a free walk.



Scoring Made Sense

Whether you plan to ride dressage tests at horse shows or just to practice in lessons, you'll need to become familiar with how the tests are **scored**. Many riders are dismayed to see a 65% written on their test before they realize that when it comes to dressage, 65% is actually quite good!

Every movement on a dressage test earns a separate score.

Notes on the test called "Directive Ideas" tell you what the judge is looking for, such as a "steady rhythm" or "round circle".

Let's take a look at a movement from the 2019 Introductory A dressage test:

	TEST	DIRECTIVE IDEAS	POIN	COEF	TOTA	REMARKS
1. A	Enter working trot rising.	Straightness on centerline and in transitions; clear trot and walk rhythm.				
X	Halt through medium walk. Salute - Proceed working trot rising.					
2. C	Track left, working trot rising.	Balance and bend in turn.				

First, the test tells you *where* in the arena the movement takes place. Then it tells you *what to do* ("Enter") and at what *gait* ("working trot rising"). The Directive Ideas explain that you will be judged on your **straightness** and the **quality of your walk and trot**. The judge can leave feedback about this movement in the box titled **Remarks**.

You can see that the entrance, halt, and transition back into the trot are all scored as one movement, while the turn at C is scored separately.

The movements are scored on a scale of 1-10.

A zero means the movement was not performed at all.

Scores are also awarded for the **collective marks**, which judge the horse's **gaits**, his **impulsion** or forward energy, his **submission** - think happy obedience! - and the **riders' position**, use of the aids, and accuracy.

A few movements may have a **coefficient**, which means that the score is multiplied by 1, 2 or 3. These are sometimes used to emphasize the most important movements or collective marks in a dressage test.

- 1 = very bad
- 2 = bad
- 3 = fairly bad
- 4 = insufficient
- 5 = sufficient
- 6 = satisfactory
- 7 = fairly good
- 8 = good
- 9 = very good
- 10 = excellent

You can use these scores to improve your riding.

If you get 6s and 7s on your trot but 5 or lower on your halts, you'll have a pretty clear idea of what skill you need to practice! If possible, **have video taken of your tests** as well so that you have a visual to go along with the judge's comments.

It can be fun to **save your dressage tests** and re-ride each one after a few months of lessons to see how much you have improved.

6	Softer?
7	Active
7	Fairly S...
5	Head up
7	Steady
7	Fairly S...
6	Work on
6	SP

Average scores fall somewhere between a 5 and an 8.

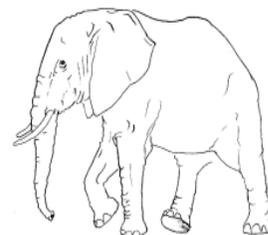
Study for the Test

Now that you know how a dressage test works, it's time to practice! The best way to prepare is NOT to practice riding the entire pattern over and over again - this will teach the horse to anticipate the movements, and can make him bored and sour. Instead, break the test up into pieces and practice each piece individually before linking them all together.

Piece #1: Learn your letters

Can you stand in the middle of the arena, close your eyes, and **list the dressage letters in order**? Can you name the letters on the centerline, or either of the diagonal lines? If you circle at E, what letter marks the halfway point?

If you find the placement of the letters difficult to remember, you can use a **mnemonic device**, or memorable phrase, to help you keep them straight. Try naming each cone after an animal or food and creating combinations, such as "**Koala Monkeys**" or "**Hamburger with Fries.**" Riding on the left rein around the arena, you might say that "**A Fat Bay Mare Can Hardly Ever Kick.**" If you are riding on the right rein, "**All King Edward's Horses Canter Many Big Fences.**"



Where in the dressage ring would you find a blue elephant?

Piece #2: Get comfy in the corners



Imagine you are riding your horse through this L-shaped chute of poles!

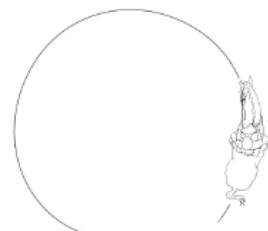
If you are used to riding in a very large arena, an oval arena, or an open space, a 20m x 40m dressage arena will feel a little tight. It is very important to **ride deep into the corners** between each movement in the dressage test. This maximizes the arena space and keeps the horse balanced, setting you up for successful transitions and circles.

To ride a smooth corner, imagine you are riding a quarter of a small circle. Squeeze your **inside leg against the girth** to keep the horse close to the rail, and swivel your upper body in the direction of the turn to help him bend through his spine. After the turn, apply light pressure with your **outside leg and rein** to straighten the horse's body.

Piece #3: Smooth out your circles

All lower level dressage tests contain at least two **20m circles**, making them an important piece to practice! In the beginning, you may want to **mark your circle with pairs of cones**, set at each quarter of the circle. Count how many times you rise in between each set of cones, and see if the number is consistent all throughout the circle. Imagine that your circle is a giant pie. Are all four slices the same size?

Another great way to practice circles is to ride on wet sand. **After each circle, look at the tracks created by your horse's hooves.** Does your circle have any bulges or flat spots? How can you prevent this from happening the second time around?



Do the tracks of your circle make a perfect letter O?

More Test Tips

You might spend weeks practicing for your first dressage test, or your instructor may decide you are ready after just a lesson or two. When the time comes to put everything together, try to relax and have fun!

Some final tips for riding a great test:

- 🐾 **Learn the test ahead of time.** Even if you aren't required to memorize the test, the more familiar you are with the pattern, the more you'll be able to concentrate on the important part: communicating with your horse! Ask your instructor for a copy of the test, or download a copy from the website listed in the *For Further Study* page of this study guide. Make sure you have a current copy - the tests are revised every four years.
- 🐾 **Watch someone else** ride the same test. If you can't see an in-person demonstration, look up videos of the test online. This helps you visualize the pattern and make sense of the test's directions.
- 🐾 Once you've watched it several times, close your eyes and **imagine that you are the one going through the movements.** How will it look through your horse's ears?
- 🐾 **Remember that the horse doesn't know the test.** It's your job to prepare him for each of the transitions and turns. Look ahead and think ahead, especially where movements occur close together.
- 🐾 **Forget mistakes and focus on what comes next.** One bad movement isn't the end of the world -- you can still have a great test in spite of it! If you have a messy transition or if you turn the wrong way, don't get flustered or give up. Just take a deep breath and concentrate on making the next movement better.
- 🐾 **Smile and breathe!** This will help you and your horse relax. Remember that nothing bad happens to you if you have a poor test - you'll simply learn what to work on before the next one.



Dressage was invented to help military horses and riders in battle. It can make your horse feel like a majestic warhorse, too!

Sometimes riders think dressage is boring or frustrating because it is “just” arena figures. There are no jumps, obstacles, or opportunities to gallop.

But flatwork is the foundation of everything we do with our horses.

Show jumpers, barrel racers, and endurance riders ALL use dressage to help their horses become balanced, responsive athletes.

Dressage can also be a lot of fun! You can design **musical freestyles** and ride a test to music, or invite your friends to dance with you in a mounted **pas de deux** or **quadrille**. After you master the basics, your horse will feel powerful, yet easy to ride. You might even learn to dance with him, too, and perform elegant maneuvers like the **half-pass** and the **pirouette**.

Watch a few **Grand Prix** dressage tests online to see what the sport looks like at the higher levels. It may seem very different at first, but if you look closely, you'll notice familiar elements from your walk/trot patterns!

Trot Three Ways

Riding figures, patterns and tests is a great way to practice your communication with your horse. Sometimes, however, your riding lessons will be all about you. Developing a **balanced, secure position** while trotting in **all three seats** makes you a safer, more effective rider - and prepares you for cantering and jumping!

Perfect your posting

By now, rising trot probably feels pretty natural - especially when you post on the correct diagonal. The secret to a smooth posting trot is to **post with the motion**. This means that you keep a *very* slight bend in your hips as you rise, so your heels remain under your body and you can sit down softly in the saddle.

Posting too far **behind the motion** can make you feel like you can't keep up with speed of your horse's trot. You may fall heavily into the saddle, closer to the cantle than the pommel. This usually happens because you are in a chair seat, with your feet ahead of your hips and shoulders.

Posting **ahead of the motion** happens when you lean too far forward, or perch. It can be dangerous - you may fall forward onto your horse's neck if he stumbles or suddenly changes speed.

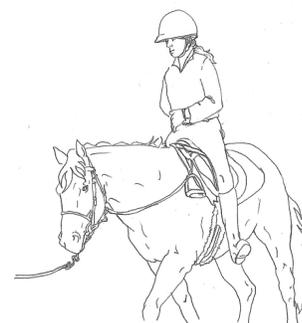


The angle of your hip helps you stay with the motion of the trot.

Sit it out

Riding the **sitting trot** is not always easy—on a bouncy horse, it may take years to truly master. You can still work towards *developing* a steady sitting trot in **Yellow Level**, even if you're only able to keep it up for short amounts of time. This will help you transition smoothly to the canter later.

In order to sit to the trot successfully, you will need to keep all of your joints relaxed. If you are stiff in your ankles, knees, hips or shoulders, you will brace against the saddle and bounce. Sit evenly on your seat bones, with your shoulders back, and let your **core muscles** (the muscles in your lower back and stomach) do most of the work of following the trot. Make sure to breathe deeply - holding your breath can make you tense and extra bouncy!



Practice sitting trot for short periods at first.

Two-point position

You learned how to walk in **two-point position** in **Red Level**, with your hips bent, hands forward, shoulders over knees, and weight in your heels. Now you can practice this position at the trot. This is great preparation for the jumping and galloping you will learn in later Levels!

As in the sitting trot, your joints must act as shock absorbers. Let your knees and heels gently bounce *down-down-down* in rhythm with the trot. Make sure to bend from your hips, not your waist, so your back stays straight and your core strong - this will keep you from falling forward, especially as your legs get tired. Like sitting trot, **two-point at the trot can be strenuous**, so keep your initial trots short, and allow your legs to build strength gradually.



Hold mane until the trot feels smooth and your two-point feels strong!

Riding Without Stirrups

There is no way around it—**riding without stirrups** will make you sweat! But when you practice correctly, it is also one of the most valuable exercises you can do, especially if you plan to move on to challenging skills such as cantering, jumping, or riding cross-country.

Five great reasons to ride without stirrups:

-  **It will make your body much stronger** and your **leg position secure**. Your horse will appreciate this—he doesn't like it when your legs flop around on his sides!
-  **It teaches your hips to follow the movement** of your horse's walk and trot—and later, the canter.
-  **It improves your balance and your confidence**. Students who take the time to become skilled without stirrups at the trot usually learn to canter with ease.
-  **You won't panic if you accidentally lose a stirrup**, because you'll know that you are capable of riding effectively without them.
-  **It prepares you for riding your horse bareback**. You'll be practicing this fun skill more in **Green Level!**



When you first start practicing without stirrups, it's best to stay at the walk. Let your legs hang low and heavy, with a gentle bend in your knee and lift to your toe. Practice all of your basic skills—stretching, turning, walk/halt transitions—until you can do them as comfortably as you can with stirrups.

You can also practice **dropping and retrieving your stirrups**. Gently slide both feet out of the irons, being careful not to kick your horse. Turn your toes up and in to find your stirrups again. Press your heel down as soon as you feel the iron touch the ball of your foot. Practice until you can do this without a single glance down.

How to cross your stirrups

When you're ready to practice for longer periods without stirrups, it's a good idea to **cross your stirrups** or remove them from the saddle entirely. Loose stirrup irons can bang your ankles and your horse's sides, and may startle him into a faster pace.



STEP ONE

Pull the excess stirrup leather out of its keeper and **slide the buckle down** six to twelve inches from the stirrup bar. This allows the leather to lie smoothly under your leg; otherwise, the buckles can rub and bruise your inner thigh. Lift the iron and **lay it gently across your horse's withers**. Make sure that your reins do not get caught underneath! Repeat on the other side.



STEP TWO

No-stirrup Success

Once you can ride your horse easily at the walk without stirrups, you can practice some **no-stirrup trot**. At first, you should keep your trots quite short - no more than one long side of the arena. Your instructor may also help you by leading or **longeing** your horse so you can focus on your position.

Stirrup-less sitting trot

You might be tempted to grip with your legs to stay with the motion of the trot, but this is the worst thing you can do when trotting without stirrups. If your horse feels your lower leg and heel dig in, his trot will get **BIG** and **FAST**! Instead, **let your legs hang long and low** around your horse's barrel, right above his girth, with your toes slightly lifted.

Remember that your core muscles should do most of the work in sitting trot. They can only do their job, however, if you **sit up tall**. Push your hips forward and your shoulders back, especially if the trot starts to feel bouncy.



Don't forget to breathe deeply!

Try inhaling for four beats of your horse's trot and exhaling for four beats.



Keep your lower leg in the same place it would be WITH stirrups.

Rise up

Posting trot can be difficult to learn, but if practiced correctly, will make you strong and secure. Keep your knees bent and your heels lowered, **in the same place they would be if you had your stirrups**. Let the thrust of your horse's trot swing your hips forward and out of the saddle. You may not rise high - just an inch or two is fine!

After a few strides, you will feel the muscles on the inside of your thighs working hard. It is tempting to let your knees grip and do all the work, but this will **not** improve your riding! You will know you are posting correctly if you can still **keep your heels lower than your toes** and your **lower leg against the girth**.

You may only be able to post a few strides without your irons at first. Return to a sitting trot or walk **before** your legs get so tired that they start flopping or digging into the horse's barrel.

With practice, you will gradually be able to lengthen the amount of time you can spend trotting without stirrups. Before you'll know it, you'll be able to keep a posting rhythm for an entire lap around the arena.



Remember that perfect practice makes perfect - always stop before you get exhausted. It is better to trot for three steps with your leg in the right place than thirty steps with a wobbly leg and seat. Bouncing on the horse's back is not good for him or you!

Build Your Base

Riding without stirrups is one of the most valuable skills you can practice before learning to canter. But there are several **exercises you can practice with your stirrups** that also help you develop your balance and **base of support**, or secure lower leg.



In **Red Level**, you may have practiced a **stirrup stand** before learning the posting trot. Can you **hold the stirrup stand with arms outstretched**? If so, can you ride in **stirrup stand at the trot**?

You can think of the stirrup stand as your built-in riding coach, as it tells you if your lower leg is in the right place. If your leg is too far forward, you will crash down into the saddle. If your leg is too far back, you will tip forward onto the horse's neck.

In addition, you'll only be able to maintain the position at the walk and trot if your knees and ankles are relaxed and springy and your heels are sinking toward the ground.

Once you can ride a posting trot, a sitting trot, and two-point position at the trot, without relying on your hands for balance, try **changing seats at the trot**.

Ask your horse for a steady working trot along the rail of the arena. **Choose a number between five and ten** and count the beats of your horse's trot until you arrive at your number. This signals you to **switch from one position to another**. If, for example, you choose the number eight, you will ride eight strides of posting trot, eight strides of two-point trot, and then eight strides of sitting trot before repeating the cycle.

Too easy? **Try it with your reins in one hand** and the other hand behind your back!



How far off your horse can you reach? Can you bend down and put your hand below your toes? If you extend both hands forward to your horse's ears, can you sit up again with ease?

In all these situations, you'll find that the trick is to keep your lower leg against the horse's girth - exactly where it needs to stay when you are cantering and jumping! Practice **toe touches** and **poll touches** at the halt, walk and trot, paying close attention the placement of your leg. You won't be able to keep it steady if your knee pinches, so turn your knees and toes out slightly.

Have some fun with this exercise by playing some mounted games!

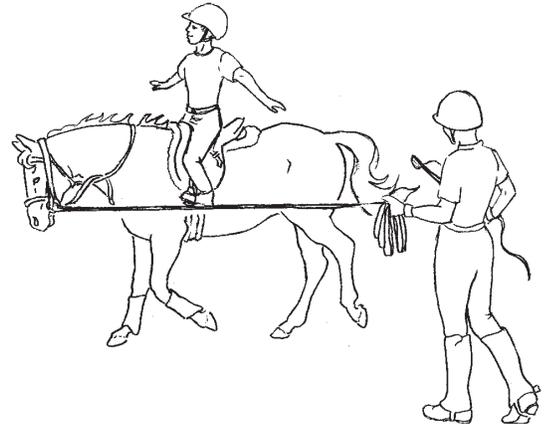
Learning on the Longe

One of the best ways to develop a deep, secure seat on a horse is to take frequent lessons on the **longe line**. Longe lessons are often taught as private lessons, so if you normally ride in a group, you may need to talk to your instructor about scheduling a longeing session.

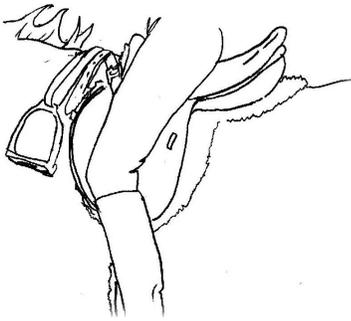
What is a longe lesson?

A **longe line** (sometimes spelled **lunge line**) is a long piece of cotton or nylon—like a dog leash—that connects to the horse's bridle or to a **longeing cavesson**. Your instructor can hold the line and work your horse on a circle, directing him and asking him to change speed, while you concentrate on your position.

Because the horse is under the control of your instructor, you can practice riding **without reins or stirrups**. This will improve your balance tremendously, especially when you practice at the trot! It also allows you to learn new gaits or skills without accidentally pulling on the horse's mouth.



Fun fact: the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, one of the oldest riding schools in existence, requires students to ride on the longe line for **six months to a year** before they are allowed to touch the horse's reins!



Stirrups should be crossed or removed from the saddle while you practice riding without

Checklist for a successful longe lesson:

- 🐾 The lesson should take place in a **quiet, flat space** at least 60 feet in diameter, away from other horses and riders.
- 🐾 If the longe line is being attached directly to the bridle, your horse should wear a **snaffle bit**. Bits with leverage, such as Kimberwickes and Pelhams, can apply too much pressure to the horse's mouth.
- 🐾 **Leg protection** such as **splint boots** or **polo wraps** can be a good idea for your horse. Working on a circle continuously puts a lot of strain on his legs, and makes him more likely to **interfere**, or knock legs together.
- 🐾 If your instructor uses **side reins** (appropriate for experienced horses only!) they should be unsnapped when you mount and dismount.



Longeing a horse is more difficult than it looks; it is a skill that must be learned and practiced as carefully as riding. You should only take longe lessons with an instructor experienced in longeing, on a quiet and trustworthy mount. If your horse is not used to longeing, he will need to be trained **before** you even think of taking a longe lesson on him!

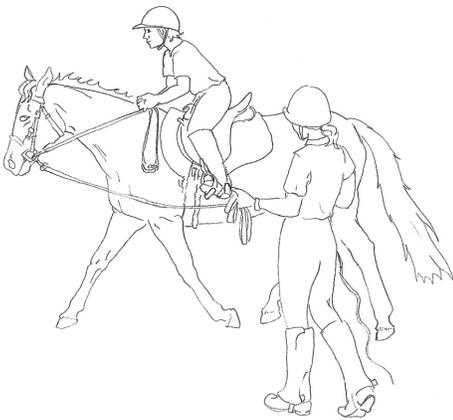
Longe Line Lesson

When you begin riding on the longe line, your instructor will probably **knot and/or twist your reins**, securing them so that they can't slip over the horse's neck while you practice no-hand riding. You can rest your hands wherever they feel comfortable - it's even okay to hold onto the pommel of the saddle to start.

It's a good idea to warm your horse up at the walk and trot before a longeing session, especially if you'll be practicing sitting trot or riding without stirrups.

Longe line lessons can be hard work for the horse, since they never leave the circle.

They are also hard work for you - so don't be surprised if your lesson is shorter than usual!



Once you are comfortable on the longe line, your instructor will give you exercises to practice to improve your balance, strength, and flexibility at the walk and trot. Expect to **change direction frequently**, and don't be afraid to ask for a breather if you need one!

Many people ride with more weight in one stirrup than the other. This crookedness can be a big problem when you learn to canter. Luckily, working on a circle - especially without stirrups - will help you identify and correct any imbalance in your body. Imagine a line dividing your saddle in half, and try to keep your hips centered directly over this line.

Some exercises you might practice on the longe line:

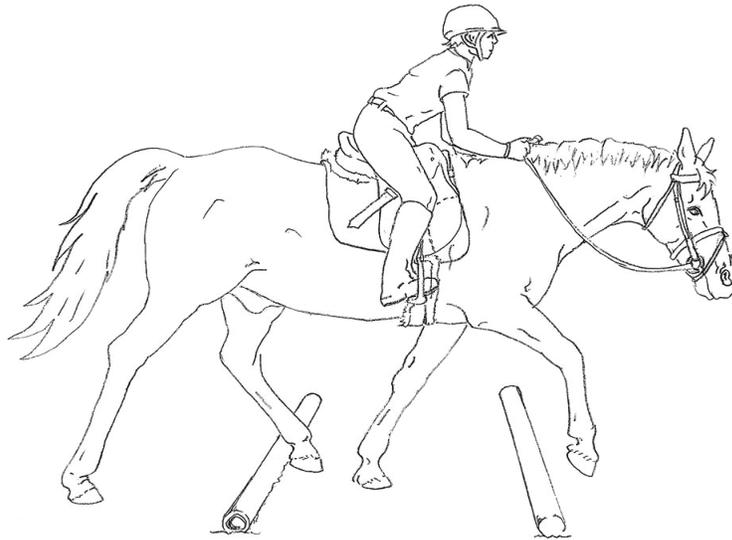
- 🐾 **Changing seats.** If you are already comfortable switching between posting trot, sitting trot, and two-point position, your instructor may ask you to practice with one arm or both arms outstretched.
- 🐾 **Stirrup stand** at the trot. The longe line allows you to work on finding your balance point without worrying about guiding the horse.
- 🐾 **Warm-up exercises** such as toe touches and reaching for the poll and croup, without your stirrups. You might also practice them at a slow trot.
- 🐾 **Trotting without stirrups.** Once your seat is secure, you can practice riding sitting and posting trot with arms outstretched. Twist your "airplane wings" from side to side, or try a few gentle dance moves.



Longe lessons can be a lot of fun - don't be afraid to use your imagination!

Two-Point Tuneup

Once your two-point position feels comfortable at the trot, you can put this skill to the test by riding over **ground poles**. When a horse trots over a pole, he lifts his feet and his back higher, creating extra spring to his step. You will need a great jumping position to ride over the poles smoothly!



Tips for two-point:

- 🐾 **Foundation comes first.** Your jumping position can only be as strong as your lower leg. Can you feel the inside of your calf muscle press against the horse's side, right at the girth?
- 🐾 **Flexible joints** absorb the shock of the horse's trot - especially when he takes a big step over a pole or jump! If your ankles are stiff or your knee pinches the saddle, you will find it difficult to balance. Can you feel your knees and ankles gently bouncing in time with the horse's trot, allowing your weight to sink down and back into your heel?
- 🐾 **Fold forward at the hips to keep your back flat** and your core strong. A common mistake in two-point is to bend at the waist instead. This makes your back round like a turtle shell, throwing your weight forward onto your hands. Can you feel your tail bone moving back toward the horse's tail bone when you fold forward? Do you feel like your bellybutton or your chest is closer to the horse? What happens if you let go of the horse's neck and ride with your arms outstretched like airplane wings?
- 🐾 **Free the horse's head by moving your hands forward in a release.** This allows him to stretch out his neck and back to negotiate the obstacle, and helps to support your upper body. There are different ways to release, but the best for beginning poles and jumping is a **long crest release**. Rest your hands one third to halfway up the horse's neck, with your knuckles pressed into the muscle of his crest. You can pinch some mane with your thumb and forefinger for extra grip.
- 🐾 **Focus on where you want the horse to go:** first at the middle of the obstacle, then, as he gets closer, on a target on the other side. Looking down unbalances your body and confuses the horse, causing him to slow down or stop.

Practice good habits now for good jumps in the future!

A Good Approach

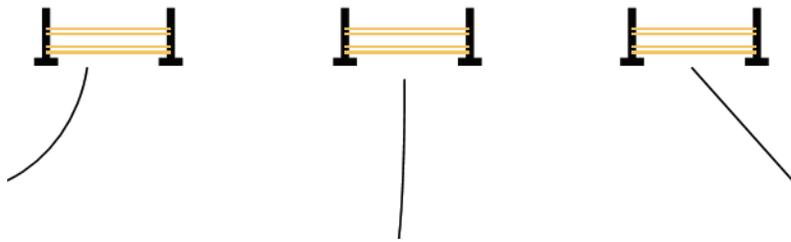
Your position isn't the only jumping skill you can practice using poles. A smooth, flowing ride over a jump depends on the **approach** and **departure**.

Take a good look

Remember that your horse's eyes are placed on the side of his head. This makes it difficult for him to see things directly in front of him - including obstacles on the ground.

Practice approaching **straight toward the middle of each pole**, lining your horse up with the center four or more strides away. This allows the horse to clearly see and understand the obstacle, and may prevent him from ducking out to the side.

After the pole, ride straight for several more strides so that the horse doesn't get in the habit of turning sharply after a fence. This is called the **departure**. A careful departure sets you up for the next jump on a course, and can keep you from falling if you land off-balance after a jump.



Here are three possible ways to approach a jump.

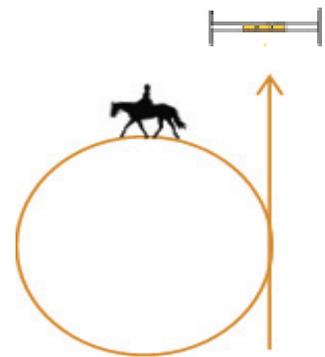
Which looks the easiest to ride? The easiest for the horse to understand?

The horse also needs to be moving at the correct **pace** to trot over poles smoothly. Approach each pole in a **steady, rhythmic working trot**. Your horse should move energetically forward, without rushing - you want power when jumping, not speed. Count your rhythm out loud ("One, two, one, two") and keep posting in that tempo, especially if your horse gets excited and wants to speed up.

Open and close

It can take a few strides to get your horse trotting at the perfect pace and lined up with your first pole. For this reason, it is a good idea to ride an **opening circle** before approaching a single pole or the first jump on a course. This allows you and the horse to get organized and in a rhythm before making your approach.

After the last jump on a course, ride another circle to gradually bring your horse back to walk. The **closing circle** allows you to finish the course in harmony with your horse, and prevents dangerous habits - like running to the gate and slamming on the brakes!



Position your opening circle where you can easily line up with the first jump.

Trot Poles

One fun way you can practice approach and departure - and improve your jumping position - is by riding over a **grid of trot poles**. This is a series of poles set close together, so that your horse only takes one step between each pole. Trot poles create a powerful, springy trot, making them a workout for horse and rider!

How do I ride over trot poles?

Begin with just one or two poles, set on the long side or the centerline of the arena. Approach the poles in a working trot, making sure to line your horse up with the center of the **last** pole in the grid. You may need to ride an opening circle first to create the right trot rhythm.

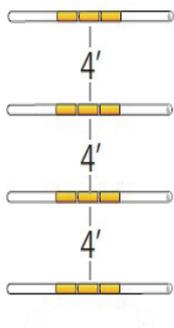
As your horse steps over the first pole, fold into two-point. It is a good idea to **grab some mane** when you release, at least for your first couple of trips over the poles. Allow your heels and knees to sink heavily as the horse steps over each pole. Once he clears the last pole, resume your posting trot and ride a straight departure.



Gradually lengthen the grid by adding one pole at a time. Remember that polework is physically demanding for your horse - four to six poles is usually a comfortable limit.

When trot poles feel easy, try riding over the grid with your **reins in one hand** and the other arm outstretched. Eventually, you will be able to perform all kinds of balance exercises over the poles - as long as you ride in straight!

Trot poles MUST be spaced correctly in order for you to ride over them safely.
At this Level, you should only set grids up with assistance from your instructor!



The amount of space set between poles depends on the **length of your horse's stride**. An average 15 to 16 hand horse can comfortably trot over with **4' to 4' 6"** set between each pole. A small pony may need the distance shortened to **3'6"**, while a very tall horse might be more comfortable with **5'**.

Your instructor should customize grids to suit your horse's individual gaits. **Riding over grids with incorrect distances can make your horse stumble or step on poles.** He will lose his trust in you, and you might even fall.

Two more tips for trot pole safety:

- 🐾 **Lightweight poles should be secured so they can't roll.** You can use blocks, the feet of jump standards, or stick the ends of the poles inside cones.
- 🐾 **Empty jump cups should always be removed from jump standards, if used.** Exposed cups can hurt your horse's legs - or you if you fall!

Confident Coursework

Have you mastered your straight approach to a single pole? Can you ride over trot poles with a secure two-point position, keeping your eyes up and focused on a straight departure? If so, you are ready to put your jumping skills to the test by negotiating a full **course of ground poles**.

Riding over ground poles is a great way to improve your course riding skills. Even Olympic show jumpers practice over poles, to save their horse's legs.

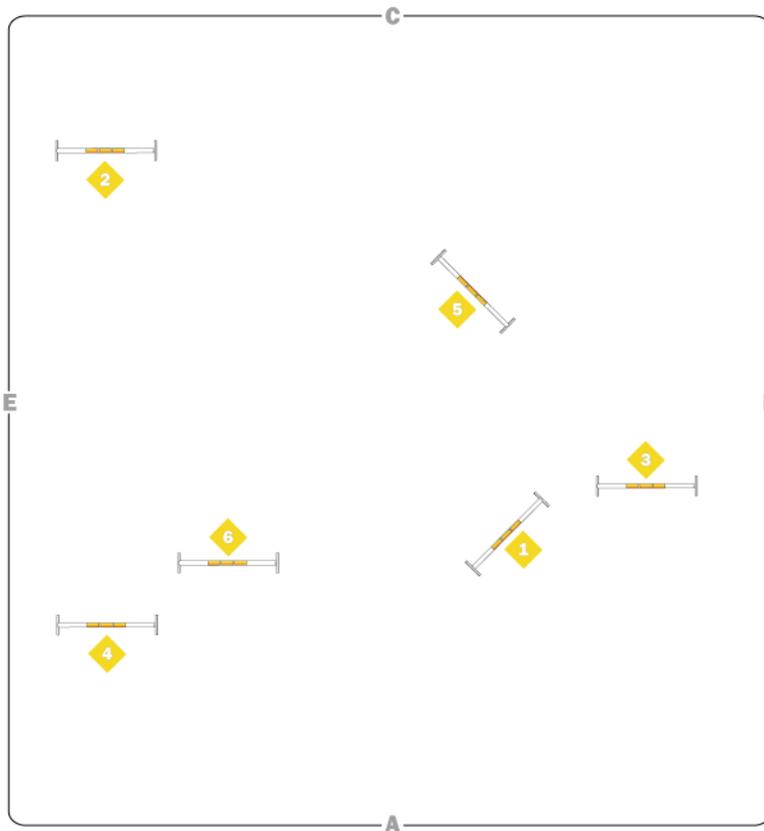
Memorize your course before you begin - you may want to walk it on foot, or recite the order of the jumps to your instructor. Ask your horse to pick up a trot and ride a large **opening circle** before heading to the first jump.

As you ride around the course, make sure you approach each pole straight and ride over the **center**, without your horse's trot changing rhythm. Fold into your **two-point** over every pole, and **look ahead** to the next jump.

When you are finished, guide your horse onto a **closing circle** and gradually return to the walk.



Let's take a look at a possible Yellow Level course:



- 🐾 **Where will you ride your opening circle?** Will you be circling to the left or the right?
- 🐾 **What will you look at** as you ride over the first jump? The second? The third?
- 🐾 **Where will you ride all the way out to the rail** to set your horse up for the next jump?
- 🐾 **How many times will you change direction?** Where might it be a good idea to check your **posting diagonal**?
- 🐾 **Where will you ride your closing circle?** Will you be circling to the left or the right?
- 🐾 **Is there any place on this course you think your horse might speed up?** Slow down? Where you will need to steer him very carefully?



At this Level, you should always practice ground poles on a quiet, well-trained horse. Horses that get nervous or leap over poles will need schooling by an experienced rider!

Rider Fitness

By now, you've discovered a surprising truth about horseback riding: it can be strenuous exercise! If you try to post for a lap around the arena without your stirrups and end up sore and out of breath, you're not alone. Learning to ride well requires a lot of physical effort.

Building up the body tone required for riding can be a slow process when you only ride once a week. If you take lessons less frequently, you may have a big challenge conditioning your body for the sport.

However, **an out-of-shape rider can be a dangerous rider** in the long run. Your balance, stability in the saddle, and reaction time all suffer from a lack of fitness, making you more likely to get injured if you fall off your horse. Therefore, the more you can work on improving your fitness at home in between lessons, the faster you will progress and the safer you will become.

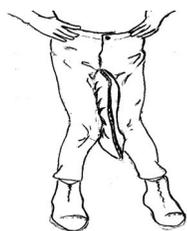


Work to become fit and flexible at the trot *before* you canter!

Try this at home

Equestrians use primarily **core muscles** (abdominal and lower back) and **legs**. Here are some exercises you can practice at home to build the strength needed to maintain two-point position and post without stirrups.

Remember that if you've never been in an exercise program, or if you have any injuries or health conditions, it's a good idea to get a doctor's approval before starting any fitness plan!



Pillow squeeze

Find a small pillow or cushion that can fit comfortably in between your thighs, just above your knees. Without moving your feet, squeeze your inner thigh muscles until they compress the cushion. Hold it for about ten seconds and then release. Let your legs rest another ten seconds and repeat. Gradually work up to 15-20 repetitions.



Wall sit

Stand with your back pressed against a solid wall, allowing your spine to arch naturally. Cross your arms, or rest your hands on your hips. Slowly walk your feet out in front of you until your legs from the heel to the knee are perpendicular to the floor (straight up and down) and your thighs are parallel to the floor (straight across). Lower yourself against the wall as you go - and don't forget to breathe!

This is a deceptively simple exercise - you may not be able to hold the position for long at first! Gradually increase the amount of time you can wall sit before standing back up.



Stretch it out

Riders need flexible hips to sit comfortably to the horse's gaits. There are a number of hip opening stretches you can do, including the **wide-legged forward fold**. Gently walk your feet out to the side, keeping your legs straight, as though moving into a split. When this feels comfortable, place your hands on your hips and fold forward, keeping your back as straight as possible.

Horse Sports

By this point in your riding journey, you are probably *really* eager to start cantering or jumping. However, **both these activities can be considered high-risk**, especially if you are still working to develop your seat at the trot, or your horse has a less-than-ideal canter.

Your instructor will likely have specific criteria for when you can canter and jump. In the meantime, don't despair - there are a LOT of fun things you can do with a horse at the walk and the trot!

If you can control your horse safely in a group setting, you can try out several different **disciplines**, or horse sports. There are many different disciplines in both English and Western riding, all of which give you a chance to set goals, interact with other riders, and have fun with your horse.



Let's take a look at a few of the sports you can participate in at Yellow Level:

- 🐾 **Dressage and mounted drillwork.** If you can ride an Intro A or B dressage test, you can make your own musical freestyle, or join a drill team to practice riding in formation. With enough practice and polish, you could even ride these tests at horse shows, in front of a real dressage judge.
- 🐾 **Obstacle courses.** Put together a course made up of transitions, ground poles, and fun steering exercises. You could even learn to negotiate challenging obstacles such as bridges with your horse - with a lot of help from your instructor!
- 🐾 **Western gymkhana games.** Learn speed event patterns such as cloverleaf barrels and Texas barrels and practice them at the walk and trot.
- 🐾 **Mounted games.** Form a team with your friends and improve your riding skills in one of the most fun ways possible. There are over forty different mounted games run in the form of relay races. Most games need to be practiced for a long time at the walk and trot before they can be played with speed - making them an ideal activity to learn in Yellow Level.
- 🐾 **Flat classes.** If your instructor says you are ready, you may be able to participate in the walk/trot division at a horse show. In a flat class, you ride your horse on the rail, sharing the arena with the other riders in the class. The judge calls out commands, such as "Trot" and "Reverse." You may also be asked to perform a pattern of ring figures or transitions before lining up for the ribbon presentation.



Of course, there is a lot more to good horsemanship than the skills you'll learn in the saddle. Horseback riding is a unique sport in that it involves complicated living creatures - who also need to be happy and healthy to perform at their best.

If you aren't already enrolled in the **HorseSense Levels**, ask your instructor how you can work to improve your unmounted knowledge in between lessons. **The more you learn about horses, the better you will be able to ride and care for your equine partner!**

Picture Perfect

One of the best ways you can work on riding outside of lessons is by regularly reviewing **photos and video of yourself in the saddle**. It can also be fun to look back at these photos months later to see your progress. Use this page to paste in your favorite action shots. **What are you doing well? What can you improve?**



riding at the trot, with stirrups

Date: _____



riding at the trot, no stirrups

Date: _____



riding at the trot, two-point position

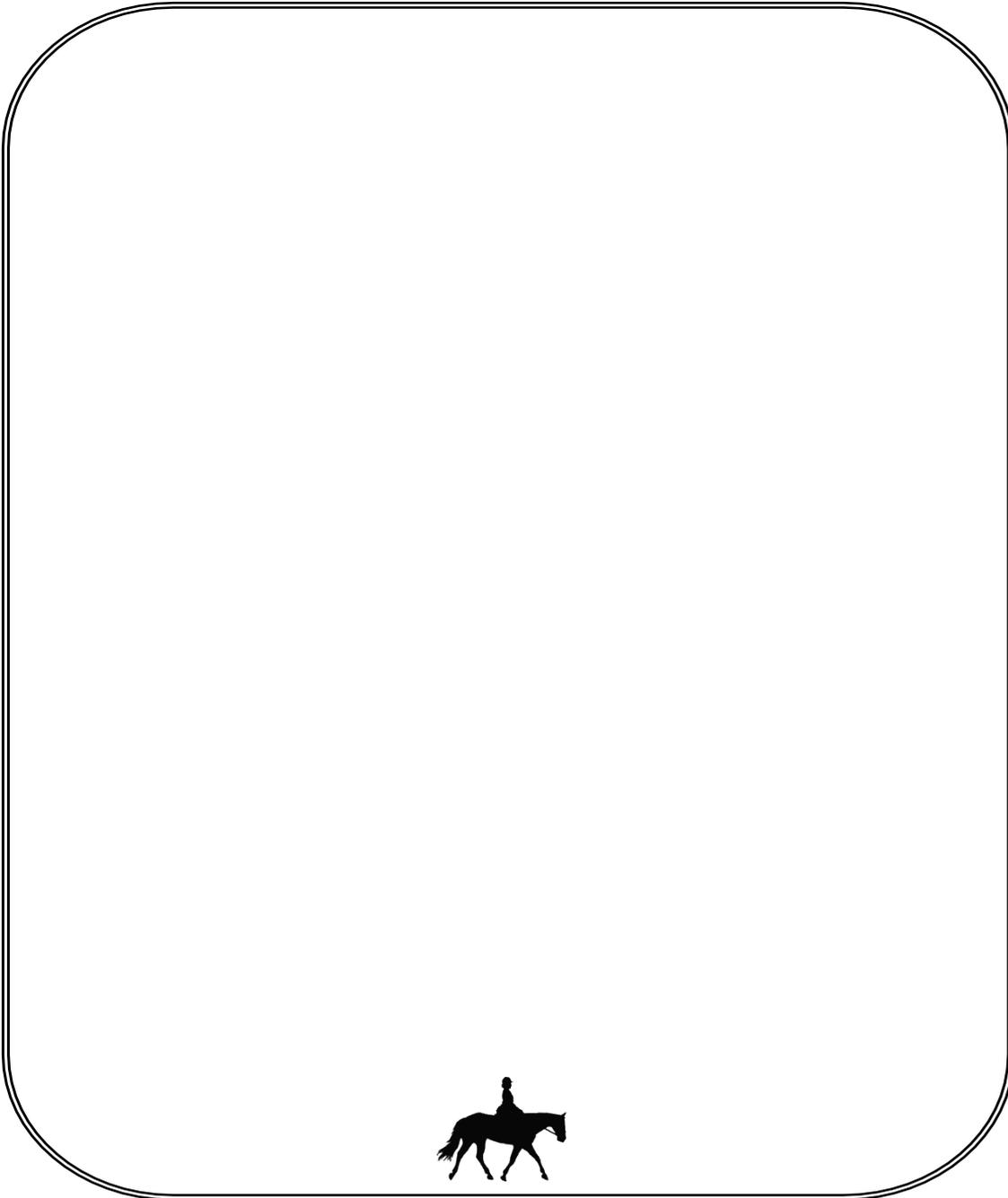
Date: _____

BALANCED POSITION CHECKLIST:

- If I'm **sitting**, can I drop a **straight line** from the **center of my head through my shoulders and hips to my heel?**
- If I'm in **two-point**, can I draw a line from my **head through my shoulders and knees to the tips of my toes?**
- Are my **heels lower than my toes?**
- Is my **stirrup leather straight up and down**, perpendicular to the ground?
- Is there a **straight line** from my **elbow** through my hands **to the horse's bit?**
- Are my **eyes and thumbs up?**

Practice Arena

Here is a **practice arena** that you can use to draw **changes of direction, circles,** and the other **patterns that you ride in your lessons.** Try drawing each figure in a different color, or taking small toy horses and letting them go for a ride.



If you want to reuse this arena, be sure to draw lightly in pencil!

For Further Study

We hope this guide has served as a helpful companion to your Yellow Level education. If you are interested in learning more, look for the following resources:



Download the **full HorseSense curriculum** and get updates on **online courses**:

<https://horsesenserridingacademy.com>

Harris, Susan, 2012. **The USPC Manual of Horsemanship - D Level - 2nd ed.** One of the best how-to books of horse care and riding ever written for beginners, with simple and clear explanations and illustrations. Strong emphasis on safety, with special sections for parents.

Henderson Pinch, Dorothy, 1998. **Happy Horsemanship.** How-to riding manual full of whimsy and great drawings.

McNeil, Hollie. 2011. **40 Fundamentals of English Riding.** A thorough overview of English riding basics, including balanced position, use of aids, and riding correct ring figures.



Introductory Level Tests are available online through the **United States Dressage Federation**:

<https://www.usdf.org/downloads/forms/>



We have a playlist of recommended videos for Yellow Horsemanship saved on the official **HorseSense YouTube channel** - with a library of Learning Levels videos coming soon! Search for "HorseSense Learning Levels" and go to the Playlist tab.



Follow HorseSense Learning Levels on Pinterest and browse Pins for every Level.

<https://pinterest.com/horsesenselevels/boards/>



Join our Quizlet classroom and test your horsey knowledge!

<https://quizlet.com/join/r2Vq9vMms>

Equine magazines:

Expand your horsey knowledge by subscribing to an equine periodical. Here are a few of our favorites:

www.practicalhorsemanmag.com

www.equusmagazine.com

www.horseillustrated.com

www.youngrider.com

Are you an **instructor** interested in **lesson plans, patterns, courses, challenges** and **incentives** that can help you teach Yellow Level? Visit:

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com>

