



HorseSense Learning Levels

LEVEL UP QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Yellow Horsemanship

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS for each page in the STUDY GUIDE

Page 1 - Tack

- What is the best way to learn how to efficiently prepare your horse and yourself for a ride?**

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.

Page 2 - Tack

- As a Yellow Level student, how long should it take you to prepare your horse, your tack, and yourself for a ride?**

At Yellow Level, you should be able to groom, tack up and prepare yourself to ride in 20 minutes or less.

- Imagine you are teaching a friend to tack up. List all of the steps you must demonstrate, in correct order.**

Pick hooves; groom; apply boots; put on saddle pad/half pad; put on saddle; lift pad into gullet; fasten saddle pad tab and girth on right side, then on left side; put on helmet; make sure you have gloves, crop, etc.; reins over horse's head; remove halter and put on bridle; reins off horse's head to lead.

- When untacking your pony, which should you remove first: the bridle, the saddle, or the protective boots?**

You should always remove the bridle first and replace it with the halter so that you can tie your horse safely to remove the rest of the tack.

Page 3 - Tack

- What is the first thing you should check if your horse's girth seems too short to fasten?**

Check saddle position to make sure it isn't too far back and that the girth is positioned about a hand's width from the horse's elbow.

- When you start to tighten his girth, your horse pins his ears and moves away from you. What could he be trying to tell you?**

There are many causes for this behavior, including sore muscles, improperly-fitting tack, stomach ulcers, and bad associations with the saddle.

- If your saddle slips too far back while you're tacking up, is it okay to just pull it forward towards his withers?**

No. You should 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.

Page 4 - Tack

- Why might a horse hold his head too high for you to easily put on his bridle? What should you do?**

The horse is evading the bridle or is uncomfortable with the placement of your hands. Position yourself 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. If you are too short to reach, change your grip on the bridle or use a sturdy stepstool. Always be gentle!

- What can you do if your 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.

- When you are untacking, should you remove the reins from the horse's neck before or after you move the halter to the horse's head? Why?**

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.

Page 5 - Mounted Safety

- Why do we need to check the tightness of the girth after we've ridden a few minutes of warm-up?**

Girths often need to be tightened after the horse warms up because the saddle compresses under your weight.

- You've finished riding your warm up, and your instructor tells you to check your girth. How can you tell if your girth is tight enough without dismounting?**

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.

- When tightening your girth from the saddle, should you move your foot forward or back? Why?**

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.

Page 6 - Mounted Safety

- You've just mounted your horse. How can you tell if the stirrups are the right length?**

The bottom of the irons should touch your ankle bone.

When adjusting your stirrup, is it okay to let go of the reins to use both hands?

Whether you are adjusting your girth or your stirrups, it is important to keep control of your reins at all times. You should feel confident in your ability to halt or turn your horse if he moves forward in the middle of your adjustment.

When adjusting your stirrups from the saddle, should you push your leg forward in front of the saddle to reach the leathers?

No, 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.

You find it difficult to adjust your stirrup length from the saddle. Is there anything you can do to make the process easier?

Yes - practice! At first, practice moving the buckle one-handed while you're dismounted, until you can do it with ease. Then practice while mounted until you can do it with your feet in the stirrups and your eyes closed.

Page 7 - Mounted Safety

Even well-trained horses can have strong panic responses to something that frightens them, so we need to be prepared to handle riding-related problems. Describe three things that your horse might do that require you to use your emergency skills.

Your horse might spook; he might bolt; he might buck or crowhop; he could stumble or fall; he might rear.

What are possible causes when a horse bucks or crowhops?

Bucking or crowhopping can be caused by discomfort, ill-fitting tack, imbalance, or sometimes just high spirits.

Is a horse that rears a suitable mount for a Red or Yellow Level rider?

No - rearing can be dangerous because your weight could cause the horse to lose his balance. If a horse rears when you ask him to go forward you should immediately get help from your instructor or another knowledgeable horse trainer.

What should your FIRST response be to all riding emergencies EXCEPT rearing? What should you do if your horse rears?

Your first response to spooking, bolting, bucking, or stumbling should always be a safety seat position. If your horse rears, you should lean forward instead.

Page 8 - Mounted Safety

What are some reasons why you might need to learn how to perform an emergency dismount at a trot?

Your saddle could slip suddenly off to one side, or you might lose your reins so that they fall 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.

- Under what circumstances should you NOT do an emergency dismount? What should you do instead?**

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!

- What can happen if you prepare for an emergency dismount without taking your feet out of the stirrups first?**

Jumping off at the trot with a foot caught in the stirrup is dangerous because you could be dragged if your horse bolts.

Page 9 - Mounted Safety

- You are practicing a one-rein stop at the trot, but your horse doesn't immediately come to a full halt. What should you do?**

You might need 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!

- Name three scenarios where you might have to use a pulley rein to stop your horse.**

Situations where the pulley rein is a better choice than a one-rein stop: 1) if you are riding in muddy footing; 2) along a narrow trail or a steep hillside; or 3) in a crowded arena where you may not be able to turn safely.

- When you perform a pulley rein, should your horse turn or remain straight while coming to a halt?**

Your horse should remain straight while coming to a halt from a pulley rein. 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.

Page 10 - Mounted Safety

- Describe four signs that your frightened horse is about to spook.**

His posture is rigid, with raised head and tight back and neck muscles; his ears are pricked as he's focused entirely on something in the distance - not you; he's snorting or breathing rapidly; he stops dead or sidles sideways to avoid a scary object.

- How can you help your horse calm down when he is frightened of a scary object?**

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.

- Why should you never punish a horse for spooking?**

Shouting or punishing a horse for spooking will only increase his tension and give him unpleasant associations, making him twice as likely to spook again.

What should you do if your horse's spooky behavior makes you nervous?

Remember that if you want your horse to be calm, you need to be calm first. A very important thing to keep in mind is that when your horse spooks or acts up, he is not doing it to you. If his behavior still scares you or confuses you, make sure to ask your instructor for help.

Page 11 - Flatwork Skills

Give four reasons why practicing transitions from the walk to the trot can improve your equine communication skills.

Walk/trot transitions help 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.

What are two common rider errors that can create problems with transitions?

Giving your horse conflicting aids; not using each aid clearly and consistently; not starting with a light aid and increasing pressure only as needed; out of balance due to incorrect rider position.

Page 12 - Flatwork Skills

What does it mean to ride an upward transition? Give an example.

To ride from a slower gait to a faster gait (eg., from walk to trot).

If your horse seems slow to respond when you ask for upward transitions, you can help prepare him for the transition by stretching tall and briefly squeezing both legs and reins. What do we call this technique?

a half-halt

If your horse is trotting very fast, how can you prepare him to transition smoothly back to the walk?

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 he still doesn't slow, turn him into a large circle and gradually decrease the size of the circle.

Page 13 - Flatwork Skills

What are posting diagonals?

During the two beats of the trot, 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.

When posting to the trot, is it better to rise when the horse's inside or outside shoulder moves forward? Why?

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.

What does it feel like when you are posting on the incorrect diagonal?

If you incorrectly rise when the horse's outside hind leg and inside foreleg move forward, it will make it more difficult for the horse 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.

Page 14 - Flatwork Skills

One way to remember how to post on the correct diagonal is this popular rule: "Rise and fall with the leg near the wall". As you rise, should the foreleg closest to the wall move forward or backward?

You should rise when the foreleg closest to the wall moves forward.

What are some things you can do to help yourself learn to identify correct posting diagonals?

Watch other horses and riders; take a quick glance down with your eyes - without tipping your head - to see which shoulder is moving forward; use strips of different colored duct tape on the horse's shoulders to help you recognize inside and outside legs.

Page 15 - Flatwork Skills

How do you change from one posting diagonal to another?

Simply sit for one extra beat in the saddle to move your rising beat from one diagonal to the other.

When trying to change diagonal, should you sit for an even number of beats or an odd number of beats?

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.

If you are riding a half-circle reverse, where is the best place to change your posting diagonal?

After your turn and just before you continue along the rail.

Page 16 - Flatwork Skills

Why should you practice riding 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.

If your horse tends to slow down when you're riding on a circle, how can you encourage him to maintain a steady trot?

Keep your circles large at first and use your inside leg at the girth.

Describe a figure-eight ring figure.

Riding two exact circles of equal size, joined at the center by one or two straight strides.

- True or False? When riding a figure of eight, it is important that you make your horse move straight for an instant before you change his direction.**

True - you should make him straight an instant before you change his direction.

- Explain or demonstrate how to ride a serpentine ring figure.**

Begin at one end of the arena, and ride a large half circle, following the rail for a few strides before turning to cross the arena and change directon. A serpentine may have anywhere from two to five loops, depending on your speed and the size of the arena. Turns should always be wide enough to allow the horse to keep moving in the same rhythm and balance.

- If you are riding a three-loop serpentine, how many times will you change direction?**

twice

Page 17 - Dressage

- What does the word "dressage" mean?**

The word dressage means "training."

- In a dressage test, describe a good transition.**

Transitions should be accurate, with a smooth change of pace, while maintaining your balanced position.

- For Introductory dressage tests, what is the standard size for a dressage arena?**

20 by 40 meters

- Every dressage test requires you to halt at the end of your test. What do you do after you halt facing the judge?**

Salute the judge.

Page 18 - Dressage

- Dressage arenas are marked with letters. Behind what letter does the judge sit?**

The judge sits at C, so he can see if you keep your horse straight on the centerline.

- At what letter do you enter a dressage arena?**

letter A

- When you enter a SMALL dressage ring at A, salute and then turn LEFT at C, what are the next three letters that will come along the rail?**

H, E, K

- Where in a dressage arena would you find the letter X?**

The invisible letter X is located on the centerline at the exact middle of the arena.

- In a dressage test, if you enter at A and ride straight down the centerline, you will be riding towards which letter?**

C

Page 19 - Dressage

- What is the difference between a free walk and a medium walk?**

In the medium walk, your horse should march energetically forward while you keep contact with the reins. In the free walk, 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.

- What does it mean when your dressage test tells you to "change rein"?**

This simply means to change direction and usually occurs on a diagonal line.

- What makes a good halt for a dressage test?**

The horse stands straight and square, waiting quietly for the signal to move forward.

- Pretend I am your judge for a dressage test. Stand and demonstrate a proper salute to me.**

Halt at the designated letter, facing the judge. Place your reins in your left hand and bring your right hand down to your side as you bow your head. The salute should be quick and crisp - think military salute, not a theatrical bow!

Page 20 - Dressage

- Would you rather get a 2 or an 8 on a movement of your dressage test?**

An 8 is a higher score.

- In dressage, a coefficient is applied to some movements. Why?**

Coefficients are applied to difficult or infrequently repeated movements, and to collective marks because they are the overall impression created by the test.

- At the bottom of the dressage test are overall scores for gaits, submission, impulsion, and the rider's position & seat. As a group, what are these called?**

collective marks

Page 21 - Dressage

- Why is it better to practice your dressage test in pieces rather than riding the entire pattern over and over again?**

Repeatedly riding the whole test will teach your horse to anticipate the movements, and can make him bored and sour.
- What are three parts of the dressage test you should practice?**

1) Learn the letters 2) ride deep into the corners 3) ride smooth, accurate circles
- How big are the trot circles you ride in an Introductory Level dressage test?**

Trot circles in an Intro dressage test are 20 meters in diameter and stretch from one side of the arena to the opposite side.

Page 22 - Dressage

- Describe four tips that will help you ride a good dressage test?**

Learn the test ahead of time; watch someone else ride the same test to help you visualize the pattern and make sense of the directives; imagine what the test will look like through your horse's ears; look and think ahead so you can prepare your horse for each transition and turn; forget mistakes and focus on what comes next; smile and breathe to help you and your horse relax.
- How can dressage help you ride in other disciplines?**

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.

Page 23 - Flatwork Skills

- What does it feel like when you are posting behind the motion? What common position fault causes this problem?**

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.
- What common position fault causes you to post ahead of the motion? What could happen when you do this?**

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.
- What does it feel like to correctly post with the motion?**

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.

Page 24 - Flatwork Skills

What are five reasons to practice riding without stirrups?

It will make your body much stronger and your leg position secure; it teaches your hips to follow the movement; it improves your balance and your confidence; you won't panic if you accidentally lose a stirrup; it prepares you for riding bareback.

What are two things you should practice when riding at the walk without stirrups?

1) Basic skills like stretching, turning, and walk/halt transitions; 2) dropping and retrieving your stirrups

Why is it a good idea to cross your stirrups when practicing no-stirrup work?

Loose stirrup irons can bang your ankles and your horse's sides, and may startle him into a faster pace.

Page 25 - Flatwork Skills

When learning to ride without stirrups, you grip with your legs to stay with the motion of the trot. Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

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.

How can you help your core muscles work properly when riding a sitting trot without stirrups?

Sit up tall and push your hips forward and your shoulders back. And don't forget to breathe!

How do you know you are correctly riding a posting trot without stirrups?

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, without gripping with your knees.

Page 26 - Flatwork Skills

What do we mean by a rider's "base of support"?

Your base of support comes from a secure lower leg. When your lower leg stays steady at the girth, your seat will stay balanced when the rest of your body turns or moves.

What are three exercises you can practice with your stirrups at the trot that will help develop your base of support?

1) Stirrup stand 2) changing seats 3) reaching exercises like toe touches and poll touches

Page 27 - Flatwork Skills

What is a longe line, and how is it used in riding lessons?

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.

What are two benefits to learning on the longe line?

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.

Is it a good idea to use your horse for a longe line lesson if your horse has not been trained to longe?

No, your horse should be well-trained on the longe line before you ride him in a longe lesson. His behavior might be unpredictable, and you or the horse could be injured.

Page 28 - Flatwork Skills

Why might your longe line lesson be a bit shorter than usual?

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

How can a longe line lesson help you identify crookedness in your riding position? What can you do to correct it?

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.

Name three exercises you might be able to practice on a longe line?

Changing seats; stirrup stand at the trot; warm-up exercises; trotting without stirrups.

Page 29 - Jumping Skills

Where should your hands be when riding over poles in your two-point position? Why?

Rest your hands one third to halfway up the horse's neck, with knuckles pressed into the muscle of his crest. You can pinch some mane with your thumb and forefinger for extra grip. This allows him to stretch his neck to negotiate the obstacle, and helps to support your upper body.

- ❑ **When riding in two-point position over ground poles, why is it important that you keep your knees and ankles flexible?**

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. You should be able to 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.

- ❑ **If you look down at your horse while riding over ground poles, what could happen?**

Looking down unbalances your body and confuses the horse, causing him to slow down or stop. 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.

Page 30 - Jumping Skills

- ❑ **Why can it difficult for a horse to see a fence on a jump course when it is directly in front of him? How can you help him?**

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.

- ❑ **Describe the correct pace for riding over ground poles at the trot.**

Approach each pole in a steady, rhythmic working trot. Your horse should move energetically forward, without rushing - you want power when jumping, not speed.

- ❑ **How does riding an opening circle help your approach when riding toward the first ground pole or jump on a course?**

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.

- ❑ **Why should you ride a closing circle after the last jump on a course?**

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!

Page 31 - Jumping Skills

- ❑ **What is a "grid of trot poles"?**

A grid of trot poles 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 many poles can safely be used in a grid of trot poles?**

Begin with just one or two poles, set on the long side or the centerline of the arena. 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.

- As a Yellow Level student, are you qualified to safely set up a trot pole grid? What might happen if you set up the grid incorrectly?**

No! Trot poles must be spaced correctly for your horse's stride, and 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.

- If your trot poles are lightweight, they could roll and cause your horse to trip. What are some good ways to secure the poles?**

You can use blocks, the feet of jump standards, or stick the ends of the poles inside cones.

Page 32 - Jumping Skills

- How will you know that you are ready to ride a full course of ground poles?**

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.

- What are two things you can do to help you memorize your jump course?**

You can walk the course on foot, or recite the order of jumps to your instructor.

- What are six questions you should ask yourself as you're studying your jump course?**

Where will you ride your opening circle? What will you look at as you ride over each jump? 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, and where should you check your diagonal? Where will you ride a closing circle? Is there anyplace where your horse might speed up or slow down?

Page 33 - Conditioning

- Why is an out-of-shape rider a dangerous rider?**

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.

- What are three exercises you can do at home to help strengthen your core muscles (abdominal and lower back) and legs? Demonstrate two of these exercises.**

Pillow squeeze; wall sit; wide-legged forward fold

Page 34 - Riding Disciplines

- What is a "riding discipline"?**

A "riding discipline" is simply an equine sport; there are many different disciplines in both English and Western riding.

- Name five riding disciplines that you could participate in with Yellow Level riding skills.**

Dressage; mounted drillwork; obstacle courses; Western gymkhana games; Mounted Games competitions; flat classes in horse shows.