Resource Guide for Horseback Riding

Horseback riding can be an enjoyable activity for anyone who likes horses and enjoys spending time outdoors in a natural setting. Riding offers an opportunity for beneficial physical activity, and you can explore many beautiful places on horseback. Novice riders can gain knowledge and experience by taking lessons. You'll need to learn how to approach and ride a horse, how to care for it, and how to maintain its living quarters in a barn.

Horse Riding for Beginners: What You Need to Know

Anyone riding a horse needs to take safety precautions. However, beginners must be especially careful to follow safety practices such as sitting squarely in the saddle and wearing the proper attire.

Riding horses is exhilarating, and will challenge you physically and mentally. Good horsemen spend a lifetime learning how to improve their riding. You've got to start somewhere.

Safety First

When starting horse riding for beginners, safety should be your first concern. No one wants to get hurt.
We’ve all heard the horror stories of friends and family members that rode a horse and had a bad experience.

Whether you are headed out for your first trail ride or signed up for your first horseback riding lesson you can learn these basics to enjoy your ride.

**In the Saddle**

**Proper Clothes and Shoes for Riding Horses**

Come with the proper horse riding gear.

You should have the minimum attire of jeans and boots that have a heel.

- If you don’t have sturdy boots, sneakers are the bare minimum.

You are best to have something with at least a 1” heel and good traction on it to help keep your foot from sliding around in the stirrup. They will protect your toes on the ground.

- No shorts or Capri’s should be worn because the skin on your legs will get rubbed raw by the saddle as the horse moves.

- Do not wear open toed shoes.

You most definitely don’t want a hoof with a metal shoe on it that transmits several hundreds of pounds of pressure on your bare foot. Ouch!

**Helmets are a Must!**

Horse riding for beginners also should include a certified helmet that is made for riding horses.

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**Horseback Riding Tips**

to Keep you Safe in the Saddle

**Horseback Riding Tips #1**

**Riding is a lot more about balance on the move than gripping with your legs.**

Try to sit squarely in the saddle, moving your body with your horse. The more tense you are, the more you will bounce. Stay in tune with how he is moving. It will be less likely that you will be to be thrown off balance.

For beginners I tend to tell them to sit near their back pockets but *without slouching the upper body.*
Having your weight set further back will help keep you secure if the horse stops suddenly. Think of driving in a car without a seat belt. If the driver suddenly hits the brakes you’ll go flying forward.

Same thing on a horse except you won’t have the seat belt to keep you in the saddle! The same is true if you are sitting too far back on the horse, if he heads off quickly, you’ll be left behind.

Don’t ever be too proud to get off.

Some accidents are unavoidable. The horse trips and you are thrown off balance enough to come off, or he departs a bit quicker into the canter than you were expecting him to. No one can predict when something like that is going to happen.

Other times when you get thrown, there were red warning flags out long before you got pitched. It’s in your gut, you know the feeling.

- The “uh-oh I am not so sure I want to keep riding this horse while it is doing that” feeling.

This is one of the best horseback riding tips that people ignore:

Go with your instincts and get off the horse. Try and regroup on the ground and if that doesn’t work, be done and start again another day. That way you will leave your confidence in tact, and possibly avoid escalating an already dangerous situation with your horse.
**Horseback Riding Tip #2**

**Don’t believe that you must always get back on right after a fall**

“Get back up on that horse so he doesn’t think he’s won” is a common phrase touted by instructors across the nation when a rider falls off when both horse and rider are seemingly unhurt enough to continue.

**This is outdated and ridiculous advice.**

If you are scared, the horse will be scared by you being scared! If **you get back on when you don’t feel like you should, no matter what your instructor or friends say, you are just setting yourself up to blow what little confidence you do have left.** By all means if you feel fine and WANT to get back on, do so if it is not going to be dangerous for you or the horse.

The horse is not going to think he’s “won” because horses don’t think like that. Horses run on instinct. For instance, when bucking there could be many reasons why. His saddle might be pinching, you may have changed tack and he doesn’t like the feel of it. He could have a back problem. He didn’t want to move forward when you asked and so started bucking instead. Especially if the behavior was unusual for that horse, try and figure out what triggered it. Then and go back and fix it through quality **ground training** and/or a veterinary diagnosis first before returning to riding.

**Horseback Riding Tip #3**

**You are the leader but not the dictator**
For a moment put yourself in your horses’ hooves. It’s 100 degrees outside, you’re hot, sweaty and itchy from a soaked saddle pad and heavy saddle and your rider is making you practice spins each direction 1000 times. If you don’t, your rider insists not so kindly with his spurs and whip that you do it again. Doesn’t sound like much fun does it?

While riders should be natural leaders for their horses and direct and ask things of them, they shouldn’t be drill sergeants or dictators. Horses learn 8 times faster than people do. They do learn by repetition, but also need variety. Keeping your horses’ feelings and limits in mind will make for a happier horse who will perform better each time for you. This is much better than one that eventually won’t come to the gate to greet you because he’s tired of your “training.”

Horseback Riding Tip #4

Keep your heels slightly down

- The ball of your foot (the widest part behind your toes) should be where your foot sits on the stirrup.

You don’t want to have your feet in any further than that or you risk getting hung up in case of a fall.

Contrary to popular riding belief you do not have to have a deep heel down posture to stay safe in the saddle. The reason instructors teach this is to keep your foot from sliding through and getting caught up in the stirrup which is dangerous. Having your heels way down is also believed to give you a firmer foundation. A firmer foundation should come from the way your behind sits in the saddle and how well you move with your horse, not how low your heel is.

Balance and the ability to flow with your horse is much more important than having your heels down. An artificially deep heel, especially in a beginner rider, will cause tension in the ankle, knee, hips, and up to the lower back. Riders will often get pain in one of these areas from straining too much to keep the heels way down. It almost always causes you to brace through your lower back as well. Keeping the heels slightly lowered will keep your foundation strong, your foot from sliding through the stirrup but not cause you any additional problems with bracing, pain and stiffness.

Hold your reins evenly and don’t have too much slack in them.
How you hold the reins will vary whether you are riding **English** or **Western**. **Western riders** hold their reins in one hand and don’t have contact with the horse’s mouth because there is a small bit of slack or loop.

Western beginners tend to hold the reins too long making it difficult to make a correction with them if needed.

English riders hold the reins in two hands and with more contact or feel on the reins. Beginner English riders can tend to use the reins to keep their own balance by hanging on them.

This ends up hurting the horse’s mouth as your hands bounce all over the place with the weight of your body too. If you are riding English, you will need to do your best to keep your body balanced with your hands level and still.

**Horseback Riding Tip #5**

**Keep your head up!**

**Always look where you are going.**

- Horses are very intuitive. They feel the slightest movements and are also great at reading our intentions. So, look up and where you want to go and it will help you guide your horse there along with your leg and rein aids.

Our heads weight something like twenty pounds! Now that probably doesn’t seem like too much in comparison to the rest of our bodies, but our horse should be following our focus whether that is over the next jump or somewhere down the trail. If you are looking nowhere (down) you are going to throw your balance too far forward, putting you at risk for falling forward should your horse stop suddenly. You could wind up on your horse’s neck! Keep your eyes and head up, and remember you should always look first to where you want to steer your horse. If you are looking nowhere, your horse should be going nowhere.

- **Don’t forget to breathe while you are riding!**
• Beginners have a tendency to hold their breath especially as the horse moves up in speed and gait. This can give you a side ache, back ache and transmit emotional tension to your horse.

**On the Ground**

• You’ll always greet your horse on the ground first, so knowing appropriate ground handling skills is essential for your safety.

Since horses are so big and sometimes can be unpredictable, you’ll want to know the following:

**Do as Horses Do**

When introduced to your horse, offer the back of your hand to him to smell.

That is called a “horseman’s handshake” and it is how horses greet each other.

• It seems like a small thing but in the horse world it is a proper introduction.

• You can compare this to visiting another country. You may be accustomed to a handshake, but another culture may greet each other in a different manner.

• Many instructors don’t teach this simple technique, but it will gain you points with the horse.

I hope you have enjoyed learning some basics about horseback riding for beginners.

Most horses are very nice and like people but it is best to know how to stay safe.

The horse you are going to ride is probably used to beginners too, that generally makes him more forgiving of your mistakes.

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**The Top 15 Benefits of Horseback Riding**

Everyone has their own reasons for wanting to learn how to ride. The benefits of horseback riding are innumerable and are shared amongst all horseback riders. If you are already a rider, you may be thinking that you don’t need this information. But I hope you will continue reading. I imagine I am not the only horse person who has met people who could not understand why I loved riding so much. If you have to, the next time this happens, please share this. And if someone is considering a new hobby, maybe the information below will help convince them to join the rider ranks.

I was first bitten by the horse bug at a young age when I saw the movies "The Black Stallion" and "The Black Stallion Returns" for the first time. I was five. From that point on, I devoured any horse book I could get my hands on. At age 10, I was able to start horseback riding lessons. My parents finally gave in to all of the begging. Horseback riding has been my main hobby throughout my life. I have experienced many of the
benefits of horseback riding firsthand. I know that being involved with horses has led me to be the person I am today.

Let’s discuss some of the benefits you can expect to have from riding horses regularly.

1. Positive Character Traits

Horseback riding teaches responsibility to those who ride and even more so to those who take care of horses. Horse caretakers must know how to care for the horse during times of health and illness. Learning all about horse health, along with tack and farm care, involves a lot of time and responsibility in order to put that knowledge into practice every single day for the benefit of the horse. In addition, horseback riding teaches patience, discipline, understanding, empathy, compassion, self-control, and dedication. Without these traits, the rider will not go far in their horsemanship studies.

2. Physical Health

Horseback riding is physically demanding and can help you stay in shape. In fact, it is now considered moderate-intensity exercise after the 2011 publication of a study commissioned by the British Horse Society (BHS) to look at the physical health, psychological, and well-being benefits of recreational riding. The study was done through the University of Brighton with help from Plumpton College.

To be considered moderate-intensity, researchers determined that riding must be done for at least half an hour or more, three times per week. This level of activity meets England’s recommendations for minimal level of activity and beyond. In addition, activities associated with riding burns energy at a moderate intensity. Horseback riding can burn hundreds of calories, as does grooming and saddling. Please note: Actual calories burned depends on body weight, workout intensity, conditioning level, and metabolism.
Riders can develop better reflexes and a sense of balance and coordination as they use their entire body to guide and propel the horse forward. Riding also offers cardio benefits. Riding, lifting saddles onto the back of a horse, mucking stalls, moving hay bales, etc., builds muscles and physical strength.

3. Problem-Solving

Riders must learn to problem solve and make quick decisions from the back of the horse. For instance, if a horse is set on going one way and the rider wants to go the other, he/she has to determine how to make a 1,000-pound animal go the direction that the rider has chosen in a humane and safe way. The unexpected can happen and riders must think quickly in the saddle to remain safe and in control.

4. Psychological Health

The study completed by the BHS concluded that horseback riding stimulated mainly positive psychological feelings. More than 80% of rider questionnaire responses claim that horseback riding made them feel "quite a lot" or "extremely cheerful, relaxed, happy, or active." Learning to ride develops confidence and self-esteem. When a rider learns how to stay on and also meet goals set by a riding instructor or themselves, those feelings of "I can do this," really make an impact. After all, riding is not easy. And not everyone can do it. Becoming a skilled rider means that you have a skill many people do not. In addition to self-confidence, riders may gain an increase in self-esteem and self-image.

5. Companionship

Horses are social creatures just like humans. Being able to communicate and interact with an animal has already been shown to have a positive effect on people, as has been experienced by those involved with therapeutic riding programs. As a past volunteer for therapeutic riding programs, I have seen children who would not talk much with people. But when they were around horses, they opened up and communication was not a problem. The children saw the therapy horse as their companion and confidante. According to the BHS study, one of the biggest motivations for going horseback riding was "interaction with horses." Horses make wonderful companion animals and many equestrians call horses their best friends.

6. Socialization

If we look at the benefits that therapeutic riding has been shown to give to riders, improved interpersonal skills and socialization skills are on the list. Equestrians know they are never alone in this hobby. Riders will socialize with their horses, each other, their riding instructors, employees at the barn, those at competitions, etc. The horse industry is a very social community full of people who will help each other and help care for other horses.
At every barn I have been, I developed friends and sometimes lifelong relationships. I have seen people help each other countless times during shows, trail rides, riding lessons, and just hanging out around the barn. In addition, those who ride are members of a variety of horse organizations...from breed registries, to sports organizations, discipline-specific organizations, local clubs, etc. Once you ride, you become part of this entire new world.

7. Competition

Those who like to compete have a number of disciplines and horse sports to choose from in order to compete with their equine partner. From hunter/jumpers to reining, to dressage, driving, eventing, vaulting, polo, trail classes, gaited competitions, to western events like reined cow and barrel racing; the options are endless.

8. Transportation

Let's not forget the main reason that people domesticated horses and began riding in the first place: for transportation. People decided that horses would be a great mode of transportation, and this greatly changed the course of history. Many cultures still use horses for this reason. And for those who weren't in to riding, eventually man learned to drive horses in front of carts, etc.

9. The World from Horseback

Horseback riding offers a way to see the world. I know that trail riding has been one of my favorite ways to spend time on horseback. Whether it was riding through the fields and woods of my home state of Virginia, or to the snowy landscape of Ohio during winter, to cantering down the beach in Florida on vacation, to riding through swamps and the lowlands of South Carolina, trail riding has allowed me to see parts of the country I never would have otherwise. It is a great way to see the world doing something you absolutely love.

10. A Return to Nature

Horseback riding brings us out into the fresh air and closer to nature. Our society spends so much time indoors these days. We should take every opportunity we can to get outside for some exercise and fresh air with one of our most beautiful animals. In fact, this is why many riders started riding according to questionnaire respondents from the BHS study. Eighty percent of respondents ranked "contact with nature" and "scenery and views" as "important," "very important," or "extremely important."

11. Relaxation

Horseback riding is relaxing. In fact, therapeutic riding has shown to reduce muscle spasticity as tight muscles are stretched due to the natural motion of the horse. We
know going for a walk can be relaxing. When a horse walks with a rider on his back, the rider's pelvis moves in the same motion as if he or she were walking. In addition, riding has been known to increase the range of motion of joints, allowing riders to move more freely.

12. Lifestyle

Being a horseback rider can lead to a certain lifestyle. But that is for the rider to determine what kind of lifestyle with horses they wish to have. For instance, some love to be rough and wild on the range with a ranch and working horses. On the opposite end of the spectrum might be the rider who travels from show to show in an effort to win ribbons and be the best rider on a circuit or in a show series. Or maybe you want to just be a weekend warrior and ride occasionally. And there are many different lifestyles and variations, and the ability to create a totally unique lifestyle.

13. Career

And since I have worked in the horse industry as a journalist, one of the benefits of my horseback riding experience has also been a means of livelihood for me. I wouldn't have wanted to begin my career in journalism any other way. And the same is true for so many people I know...the benefits of horseback riding led them to find a career with horses.

14. Love and the Human-Animal Bond

There is nothing like loving a horse, except for knowing that the same horse loves you back. The human-animal bond is one of the best reasons to learn to ride. Horses are willing to become true partners with their riders. If treated with respect, kindness, and love, then the bond that develops is truly amazing and inspiring.

15. Fun

Anyone who has sat on the back of a horse knows that it is just plain fun. There is an adventurousness to it. It offers freedom, movement, and makes amazing feats of athleticism possible. And there is a total thrill with galloping across an open field, in tune with your mount.

I don't regret a single hour I have spent with horses. Not every moment on horseback is like the scene from a movie where the star rides off into the sunset. Just like learning any new skill, learning to ride involves hard work and dedication. Add in some dirty stalls, stubborn horses, chores by the bucketload, and exhausting days and you will have the time of your life.
**A Primer for the First Time Horse Owner: What to Expect**

Being a first-time horse owner is both a thrill and a challenge! There is nothing more rewarding than becoming an owner of such a magnificent creature. Horses become a part of your heart, soul, and life. When you buy or adopt that first partner it may be the realization of a life-long dream!

**It is an exciting new journey, so get ready for the ride!**

![Image of a person with a horse]

**What is Your Perfect First Mount?**

My first taste being an equine owner was a beautiful gray Arabian. She was very small, which suited me fine. As a first-time horse owner, I was just 12 years old. All I could think about was long, flowing manes, soft brown eyes, the clip-clop of shod hooves, and of course, riding horses!

**What does YOUR first mount look like?**

Do you have a specific breed in mind? A certain discipline you want to try? What are you going to do with your first new buddy? Are you a beginner with horses? Or are you getting back into riding after a long absence?

These are all important things to think about. Be honest with yourself about not just what you WANT your partner to look like, but what you NEED in that first relationship. Often, a first horse isn't the flashiest one in the barn. More often they should be an older or experienced been there-done that kind of horse.
How Much Does It Cost To Buy?

Before becoming a first-time horse owner, you will need some horse buying tips and information. Equine ownership is a large commitment of time and money.

You may ask......

“How much does a horse cost?”

Horse purchase prices vary dramatically based on age, training, discipline, breeding, soundness, and other factors. You can expect to pay generally anywhere from $1000 and up. A solid trail partner may cost $2500, and a show jumper may cost you $10,000 or more.

Horse Upkeep

When you look at buying, the purchase price or adoption fee is just the initial cost. You can get a “free” horse sometimes, but “free” isn’t really free because of all the other costs to maintain the horse.
Let’s explore these costs so you can be informed before buying a horse for the first time. The last thing you want to have happen is to become a new owner, bring him home, and then realize you can't afford him.

**Board and Feed**

Before becoming a first-time horse owner, you will have to know where you are going to keep your horse. Not everyone has their own land or horse property. If you don’t, you will need to check out local barns to see how much board for the horse is.

Board is charged on a monthly basis and generally starts at $150/month for pasture board. Pasture board means the horse is outside only usually eating grass. Sometimes hay is fed in the winter depending on pasture conditions.

Full board is anywhere from $200- $600+/month. This generally means the animal is kept inside, fed hay and grain, his stall is cleaned and he is turned out according to the barn’s turnout schedule. Blanketing and fly masks according to season may cost extra.

If you don’t mind working with the horses mucking stalls, turning out, watering and feeding reliably, you may want to ask about working at your stable. You could reduce your board bill each month by the number of hours you work.
If you keep your mount at home you will need to calculate how much hay is, and also account for any costs for projects needed to bring your horse home. Some considerations are horse-safe fencing, a barn or shelter, seeding, and pasture management.

**Training and Lessons**

As a first time horse owner you are probably a beginner rider or returning rider. Plan on investing some money into at least a few lessons to get you the basics. Also check out my horseback riding tips (above) to get you started on the right track. If your horse needs training beyond your abilities, you will need to factor horse training prices into your budget.

**Veterinarian Costs**

As a first-time horse owner, you probably won't realize at first the amount of ongoing care your new mount will require. Horses require vaccinations twice a year. You will need to check with your veterinarian for a complete list required for your area.

In the USA, horses require a yearly (or sometimes twice yearly) Coggins test. This test checks for EIA or Equine Infectious Anemia. Without it, you will be unable to go to shows, trail rides, horse camping facilities and clinics.

In the USA, if you plan to travel across state lines or buy a horse that is out of state, you will have to have a veterinary health certificate. The certificate is issued by a licensed Veterinarian upon examination of him in person and is good for only 30 days.

Horse’s teeth also need to be floated (filed) at least once a year.

In addition to fees for the services they provide, veterinarians charge a farm call fee. This fee covers the vet’s travel to the farm where the horse is located. This fee can
generally be split with another owner if their horse is seen at the same time. You can avoid this fee if you have a trailer and can take your horse to the vet’s clinic.

**Farrier Fees**

Horse’s feet are constantly growing. In the wild they naturally wear down over the many miles they travel to find food and water. Domestic horses require a farrier to trim and/or shoe their feet every 6-8 weeks to stand the rigors of being ridden. Shoeing costs vary widely based on your region and type of shoes, but you can expect to pay anywhere from $60 to $150 for regular shoes, more if special shoeing is required.

**Gear**

A first-time owner generally doesn’t have equipment. Sometimes your first partner may come with a saddle or some other tack. That tack may or may not work for you. It won’t take long until you have accumulated a lot of horse stuff! Check out horseback riding gear to learn about the essentials!

**Demystifying Horse Training Prices**

Want to learn about horse training prices so you don’t end up broke, with a horse that isn’t broke to ride? It is a big decision to send your horse in for training (or to do this for others) and you want to make sure your hard-earned money doesn’t end up being wasted. It’s kind of like deciding what college to go to! Princeton may be an awesome school, but a state college may offer a more competitive price and you can still get a quality education.
Just like colleges, horse training prices vary greatly! Prices will vary from as little as $200/month to over several thousand dollars a month. Many people have sent their mount to the “trainer” only to get back a horse that wasn’t trained at all, or worse yet, he comes back worse than when he went there! What does it cost to train a horse? How do you determine what price is fair? There are a lot of variables that go into determining horse training prices so let’s discuss a few of them.

**Location**

In real estate there is a saying about worth when buying and selling houses. It’s all about location, location, and location! A mobile home in the middle of the desert 200 miles from the closest town is not going to sell for much. Likewise, if that same mobile home is attached to the ground on a 1/10 acre of Malibu beachfront property it could bring a million bucks!

Are you sending your partner to New York City for training where hay and boarding prices and space is at a premium? Or is he going to a small Midwest farm where hay is grown locally and space is more abundant?

A lot of the same things can be said about horse training prices. Depending on where you are looking, whether in the local area you live in or shipping your horse out to another state, prices are going to vary a lot. Because many facilities include board and/or feed in the fees, the regular cost of board for that location will play into the overall price.

**Experience**

This is one of the biggest factors in determining horse training prices. Who is doing the work and what is their skill and accomplishment level? If you have a Grand Prix dressage rider you can guarantee that it is going to cost you WAY more than if have Lucy down the street that has ridden up to 2nd level do the job.

This doesn't mean that either person can’t do the job you need done, but you will need
to assess the training and competition goals for the horse first. If you need your horse just to get through 1st level dressage you probably can use Lucy down the street. If you are looking to ride up to 4th level, you may need that Grand Prix trainer with that highly specialized experience so your horse can reach his potential.

**Credentials**

There are professional credentials in the equine world, but they vary across disciplines and are not centralized. Some natural horse training systems such as Parelli have ratings for instructors and trainers that use a quantifiable scale of experience to gain credentials. Most trainers that are outside a professional organization do not. The trainer may have ridden to a certain level in competition or have so many titles to his or her credit more than a professional credential. This will factor in when determining horse training prices.

The more professional certifications a trainer has, the more they will probably charge. That is in no way to say that a trainer without professional certifications cannot do a good job.

The horse industry has more trainers without any professional credentials than with them. Horse training is still largely learned through apprenticeship and experience. Although a person may have a horse training degree from a four year university, it would not automatically make them more qualified than someone that has trained under a skilled professional for several years and then worked with many horses.

**Horse Training Prices**

What you can expect to pay. What you may expect to make (before expenses)

General Training at Trainers' Facility - $300-500/mo (May or may not include board and feed)

Specialized Training (discipline specific)- Generally $500-700+/mo.

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**What Style Do They Train?**
There are so many styles of riding and even driving horses. From barrel racing to combined driving, to race horse training -- the sky is the limit for disciplines to choose from. When used in determining horse training prices what sector of the industry you are in or you want training for will change the cost. I am sure you can imagine that the trainers for the race horses in the Kentucky Derby command a large horse training price because they are so well known in their industry.

If you are in Hunter/Jumpers and need a horse trained for that, it’s going to cost you a whole lot more than if you need a horse started and ready for pleasure riding. This is not only because the hunter/jumper will need more time to be trained because of the level it needs to be trained to, but also because there are probably less good specialized hunter/jumper trainers out there than there are general trainers. The more specialized the style of training, the more you can expect to pay. After all it is their horse training business, and supply and demand rules! Also, if there are few trainers in the discipline you have chosen, expect longer wait times and higher prices.

**How Much Training Does my Horse Need?**

When determining prices, you should also take into consideration the duration of the training. The industry standard for getting a horse started from no riding background into being ridden or “started” is 90 days. Usually the training is done by month, so if you do 120 days you may get some kind of break, or at least you can ask for one. This would also give more time for your horse to come back a solid riding partner. Depending on the horse’s unique personality and prior training, it may take longer.

**Other Factors in Prices**

Find out whether the training price includes board and feed such as hay or grain. Some prices are quoted for training only, and some have all the hay, feed and board included in the training price quote. More may be charged by the trainer for other incidentals such as pick-up and delivery and possibly how difficult the horse is to train. If you are bringing Spirit, the wild mustang stallion be ready to pony up some cash!

**How to Determine if Prices are Fair**

Find at least 2-3 trainers in the discipline you are looking for and call them to price shop and get a feel for them. Find out what is included in the price (see above) and calculate out a total cost per month that includes all fees, transportation (if needed) board, hay, feed, and training.

Also be sure to ask how much actual training time per day and per week the horse will receive. Full training generally includes five days a week worth of training, but it is always best to ask. That way, you will be able to accurately compare price per month of training. Compare all the price quotes you received.
Quality is Best

When determining what a horse training price should be, you should know that the most important point is that it isn't all about price! Unfortunately, there are many people that aren't actually horse trainers and say they are! Just because someone has watched some horse training DVD's doesn't make them a trainer. Some of these people will make your horse worse than he already is! Others will let your horse stand in a stall 6 days a week and ride it one hour a week and call it training!

The quality of the trainer and his or her work ethic is what is most important. ALWAYS make sure you visit the training facility before making a commitment. Take a tour, find out how many horses are in training. Watch a training session or two and ask lots of questions. Also observe the horses in their stalls or paddocks. Do they look happy and interested in people? Get at least three references and check up on them!

I can tell you that once I visited a large reining barn and it was the saddest place I have ever been. To this day, I can remember the same sour attitude of every horse. It was a big name reining trainer for the area and he had lots of horses in training. Every horse in that place had its rear pointed to the people that came by. Either a butt to you or mad ears and teeth headed your direction! If the horses don’t look happy, curious and engaged, RUN don’t walk away! And DON’T send your beloved animal there. It is not worth breaking his spirit.

Guidelines

As you can see there are many factors that go into prices for your equine's education. Make sure that all the details are ironed out before your mount is on the trailer or you are committed to the trainer. That includes using written contracts for each horse that specifies the price, how many days, how many hours a day, how many days a week, and what kind of work he will receive while there.

Be specific about the goals you are looking for the horse to meet and be sure and discuss this with the trainer.

That way when he gets home it will be good for you both. You will have a happy, well trained horse, and he will have had a pleasant learning experience!
The Importance of Mental and Physical Exercise

Time Commitment

Far too many horses sit under exercised and overfed due to the owner having significant work, family, and school schedules. If you want to be a responsible first-time owner, please exercise your horse's mind and body.

Not much time? Do some quick groundwork!

It will make him much happier and will help build the bond of trust you have with him. This is especially true if he is stall boarded and/or has a small turnout available.

Daily exercise beyond turnout is not only smart it is necessary!

A large animal sitting in a stall up to 23 hours a day is the equivalent of you sitting in a normal sized (not walk-in) closet for 23 hours of your day doing nothing. Doesn’t sound fun, does it? If you don’t work or play with your stall-kept buddy enough, don’t expect him to be quiet and cooperative when you show up once a week.

Most horses are happiest on pasture board or with limited stall time. As a first-time horse owner, unless you have a heavy show schedule this a lower maintenance, kinder and more natural option. Lots of turnout is not always possible. You will need to become aware of what makes him happy.

In the wild horses travel many miles daily in search of food and water. He will be much happier if you have taken this need into consideration.

If you don’t have enough time to own, leasing is a great option!
Where to Find the Right Horse for You

So, you have a place to keep your first partner and are educated on the amount of time and money your mount will require. As a first-time horse owner, you either already have your new friend or are researching how to find a the right one so you can join the ranks of happy equine lovers everywhere.

There are tons of places to look for horses from tack shop boards to online classified services. Some of the best horses you can find will be through word of mouth.

- Check with local trainers, reputable horse breeders, and other owners. Another great option is to adopt through a local rescue.

**Remember, inexperienced riders should not buy an inexperienced mount!** Look for a first partner that is suited to your ability and your budget.

Go out and enjoy being a first-time horse owner! The thrill of their breath on the back of your neck, their soft fuzzy lips, and the warmth of their neck under the mane is the best thing ever.

**Riding Horses: An Experience Like No Other!**

Riding horses is so much fun! There is nothing better than the wind in your face as you and your horse move as one! The power they have is so much stronger than our own, taking us to places we are unable reach alone.
Crashing Pebbles - First Time Riding A Horse

I have been a rider since I was 8 years old, so almost 25 years now! I guess that gives away my age. I won’t ever forget the first of many horseback riding lessons I took. I had been begging for three years for a riding lesson while driving by the local horse stable on my way to the dance classes my mom insisted I take. I never really did like dance -- my heart wasn't in it. I dreamed of learning to ride a horse all day long!

When mom finally gave in to my request for riding lessons, I was riding for my very first time on a pony named Pebbles. Pebbles was a small POA (Pony of the Americas). She was brown with big white spots only on the top of her rump. She was probably in her 20's then and was well seasoned at teaching young riders like myself the fine art of how to ride a horse.

However, I was so worried I was going to make her crash! How funny is that? Crashing a horse! That shows you how little experience I had with horses! I remember the instructor telling me that the horse had a mind of its own. I soon found out all about that as she headed to the nearby hay stack to eat while I tried to coax her into the riding arena for my lesson instead.

A Distinct Group - Riders Are Unique

What is it that draws people to horses? I have heard a phrase that says;

“There are horse people and then there are other people.”

Riding horses certainly seems to set us apart as a distinct group. Many people are in awe that we would want to attempt to ride and control something that is so much bigger than we are. Not only that, but to try to get it to follow our wishes on a daily basis, too. When you learn to ride horses, sometimes you even laugh when you get tossed off by accident.

I love the power and majesty of the horse. They are a noble creature, raw instinct and pure. They have the power to take us away from our everyday life and cares, yet at the same time keep us grounded in the present. There are many different reasons people are drawn to horses, what is yours?

First Time Riding

When you ride a horse for the first time, you probably won’t feel much beyond the butterflies of anticipation, sometimes the fear of perceived lack of control, and the sheer joy of the experience that draws you back for more. If you are headed out for your first ride which may be a horse riding rental you can check out more about how to act around horses both on the ground and in the saddle from people around you.
Riding horses is an active process. That means riding is more than just sitting there and making the horse do all the work. Try to get a feel for the horses' movement and move your body subtly in tune with that. That is why learning to ride makes it that much more enjoyable. The second day after you ride you will feel muscles in your legs and rear that you never knew you had!

A Bad Horse Day?

Riding horses is fun in every form but bad days are bound to occur. Remember that they are horses and they do have minds and emotions of their own. Some days they may wake up on the wrong side of the corral. Sometimes your mood will get to your horse. That happens to people too, so be considerate of your horse and help him through whatever issue has come up. Remember, a bad day when you ride horses is generally better than a good day of school, work or house chores!

I wouldn’t trade being able to ride horses for anything. After 25 years, I still can’t get enough time in the saddle. Learning to master how to ride horses well is a lifetime pursuit. The little girl in me is happy to oblige always saying “more, more, more.” I hope to be riding horses until I can’t get on the horse anymore! I know my horse will take care of me even then, because that is the special bond you can have when you are in love with horses!

Horseback Riding Safety

Real World Horseback Riding Injuries

A 12-year-old girl suffered severe brain injuries after being thrown from a horse. The trail they had been riding on had become wet due to severe rains the night before and the horse lost its footing. Even though the girl was wearing a helmet at the time, the force from the throw was enough to cause severe damage to her skull and brain. It is likely that if she had not been wearing the helmet she would have been killed. Since the injury, the girl has gone through 14 surgeries and has slipped into a coma twice. She now requires constant care by her parents, but is slowly regaining the ability to speak and interact with others.
Looking for more safety information on horseback riding?

Statistics

- There are an estimated 30 million horseback riders in the United States
- In 2007, 78,000 people were seen in US emergency rooms due to horse-related injuries
- Of the 78,000 injuries, 9,600 were admitted to the hospital for further treatment
- The rate of serious injuries per riding hours is higher for horseback riders than for motorcyclists and automobile racers
- Riders under the age of 15 represent 20% of horse-related injuries
- One in three horse-related injuries happen when the rider is dismounted. These injuries typically involve the rider being kicked or stepped on by the horse.
- The most common mounted injuries involve riders being thrown or falling off the horse.

Horse Dangers

Horses are large powerful animals that are capable of tremendous speed and power. Horses often stand 6 feet tall, weigh more than 1,000 pounds, and are capable of speeds of 35 miles-per-hour. The most common types of injuries from horses are fractures, bruises, abrasions, sprains, strains, and concussions. Injuries from horses can also occur on the ground from being stepped on or kicked by the horse. The greatest danger from horses is being thrown from a horse which can result in severe neck, spine, and head injuries.

Safe Approach

Horses are easily spooked and this is when the majority of injuries occur. Making sure all staff and riders are aware of the dangers posed by frightened horses and what actions can scare them can help prevent injuries. Some examples of things that can spook a horse include:

- Sudden or unexpected movements
- Loud, sudden noises (alarms, whistles, bells, cell phones, screams, etc.)
- Large crowds
- Other animals (for example, unleashed dogs)
Wasps, and other insects
Camera flashes

Loss Prevention Techniques

Horseback riding is an exciting summer camp experience that many children look forward to and enjoy. While potential dangers exist due to the size, power, and unpredictable nature of horses, a few simple safety measures can ensure that horseback riding is a fun and safe activity.

- **Helmets**: Helmets should be worn by all riders at all times. All helmets should conform to the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).
- **Inspect riding areas**: It is important to routinely check all areas where riding occurs to make sure there is no dangerous terrain.
- **Proper saddles**: Make sure all children are fitted for proper saddles. If the saddle is the improper size, the child could be more likely to slip out of it and fall.
- **Proper attire**: It is important all riders are equipped with appropriate rider attire and that no exceptions are made.
  - Shoes should be closed toe to help protect your foot in case a horse steps on it. Shoes should also have a heel to prevent the foot from sliding through the stirrup and getting caught.
  - Pants should always be worn and jeans are perfectly acceptable.
  - Shirt should be tucked in.
  - Gloves are also recommended to prevent the reins from slipping if hands become sweaty.
- **Supervision**: Make sure all riders are watched at all times. Staff should be trained to monitor the riders to make sure they are comfortable on the horse, obeying all the rules, and safely riding. Staff should also observe horses for signs of discomfort or if they are acting strangely.
- **Training**: Another crucial aspect of horseback riding safety is staff and rider training. All staff should be comfortable and experienced around horses in order to make sure they train all riders effectively. Also, before any novice rider gets on a horse, they should be able to demonstrate their ability to safely ride.

Equine Liability Laws

Another important aspect of equine safety is to post your state’s equine laws in a visible, well-seen area. By keeping these laws posted you can make sure the riders are aware
of the inherent dangers involved with riding horses. Posting these warning signs will also help protect your organization in the event an injury does occur. Each state has differing rules and regulations concerning the language of these signs as well as the requirements for properly displaying them. Make sure you know your state’s statutes concerning equine liability.

Waivers

Make sure all riders participating in horseback riding activity have completed and signed waivers. If the participant is under the age of 18 make sure a parent/guardian signature is obtained. It is important that these releases include the warning language contained in the posted signs.

**Horse Riding for Beginners… What You Need to Know**

Horse riding for beginners should be fun and exciting! If you are new to horses hang on for some of the most fun you’ve ever had.

*How To Ride a Horse: The Essentials to Get You Started Right*

Learning how to ride a horse well is a lifelong study. Here you will learn the basics of good equitation to get your foundation correct from the start.

**Overall Alignment**

The rider (below) is riding English, but the foundations of body position are the same for western or any other style you choose to ride.

Let’s have a look at this picture that shows the proper alignment for riding.
When you ride a horse, you should be able to draw a straight line through the ear, shoulder, hip, and heel.

You can see that the heel in this picture is just a bit forward from what is ideal, but maintaining perfect alignment is not as easy as it looks!

Shoulders should be **even and straight**. If you find you have rounded shoulders, **lifting up from the sternum** and **opening space in the ribs** is more effective than trying to sit up "stock straight" with your shoulders back.
Your **back** should be held **upright** and **straight**.

You should sit on the **seat bones** (the ones that get sore after sitting on a hard chair too long) **without rounding or overarching the lower back**.

**Lower Leg and Heel**

Beginning horse riders tend to have legs that are not secure in their position. That's OK while you are learning but you don't want to make bad leg position a habit. It takes a while to learn how to develop a solid leg position. The lower leg can tend to slip too far **forward**, or too far **back**.

Either of these extremes can cause you to become unseated more easily, and will make it more difficult for you to effectively communicate with your horse.
The stirrup should be kept at the **ball of the foot**. The ball of the foot is the widest part of the foot just behind the toes.

For safety, you'll need the right set of boots that are designed for riding.

Your toes should point **towards the sky**. Keeping the **ankles flexed** and the **heels down** absorbs shock from the ride and will keep you secure by not allowing your foot to slip through the stirrup.

**Arm and Hand Position**

Look at the highlighted box in this picture. The hands should be kept about 6 inches above and in front of the pommel of the saddle like there is an imaginary box.

When learning how to ride a horse, beginners tend to hold their hands too high. Another hard thing to learn is to keep the hands **steady at all times**.
This is important because moving the hands too much can jab your horse in the mouth with the bit.

There should also be a **straight line** from the **elbow to the bit**.

To hold the reins properly, make a fist and pass them through. Then adjust and put your pinky finger on the outside of the rein as shown.

Hold your wrists up with the **thumbs on top**. You will see the reins pass through by the thumbs. If you ride western, you will hold it the same, but with both reins in your left hand instead of separated like this for riding English.

Whew! You've got it, the basics of **how to ride a horse** and proper positioning of your body.
Horseback Riding Tips

Horseback riding is fun and an adventure but it is always important to be as safe as possible when you are riding a horse, because, let’s face it, horseback riding is a very dangerous sport. Many accidents can happen and it has resulted in many critical life changing injuries and even deaths. Deaths that could have been avoided if people took the time to consider all their safety rules.

Always! Always! Always wear a helmet! It’s the same when you’re riding a bike or a motorcycle. A helmet can be the thing that separates life from death in an accident. An honestly, how easy is it to snap on a helmet? Some people don’t like to wear helmets because they don’t look cool … well, looking cool for about an hour or so a day isn’t worth a life. So, always wear that helmet.

I don’t think many people think about this, but it is also quite important to have a riding buddy. They don’t necessarily have to be riding a horse when you are, but get someone who will watch you or just sit around by you while you ride, in case you get seriously hurt. Because believe me you do not want to be alone if you fall of a horse and break your leg. A buddy could help out a lot; calling 911 on your cell phone immediately, making sure the horse doesn’t step on you, making sure you don’t hurt yourself more, etc. Don’t count on other people being around doing stuff around the stables, always invite a buddy.

Make sure the horse’s attitude is normal that day. If the horse is acting a little grumpy and fights with you on the reins or saddle more that it usually does, don’t ride that day. Just let the horse run around in an arena and blow off some steam. Chances are after he has a little free running time when he
doesn’t have to carry someone on his back, he’ll be in a lot better mood for the next day’s ride.

Make sure when you put the saddle on, it is on tight and it is on right. That’s a simple safety rule. Safe Saddle!

Make sure the weather isn’t bad. If it is really hot out you need to be extremely aware at how you’re feeling while you’re riding. If you feel dehydrated, and feel like you might faint, get off the horse! And you obviously don’t want to ride when it’s raining, the horse could accidentally slip and then you’d both be in trouble!

Things you need to know when going for a ride or being around horses:

- Make sure you have a horse that fits you.
- The tack needs to fit the horse as much as it does you; saddle, blankets, and bridle.
- Be careful when approaching a horse and never walk up behind them.
- Be familiar with your surroundings where you are riding, one little hole or something that you are unaware of can spook your horse and can cause an accident, injuring you or your horse, or even both.
- When learning to ride, start off in a small area with an experienced person to help you and as you progress and get more comfortable with your riding and the horse, you can start riding in larger and larger areas.
- Ride a suitable horse for your riding skill level.
- The safest way to learn to ride is with an experienced riding instructor or coach.
Know the proper way to saddle your horse to prevent your saddle from getting torn up or the horse injured if he gets spooked.

Always secure your front cinch first, then the back cinch, and finally your breast collar.

Wear an ASTM approved riding helmet. Numerous agencies and safety committees cite that the majority of rider fatalities are due to head injuries.

Wear sturdy boots with minimal tread and a 1” (2.5 cm) heel.

Alternatively, use safety stirrups or cages. If you fall you could be dragged if your foot slips through a stirrup.

Always ride in complete control. As with cars or bikes, the faster you go the faster things can go wrong.

Leave a map of your route when riding out on the trail and the approximate time you will return. That way the folks back home will know when to start worrying and where to look if you are overdue.

Always ride out with a buddy. As an extra precaution carry a cell phone or two-way radio.

In a group, ride the speed of the least experienced rider.

Guidelines for Staying Safe While Trail Riding

For many people riding out on the trail is the only way to ride. But even if your goal is the show ring, trail riding can provide a welcome break in
routine from working in an arena for both horse and rider. Trail riding requires a little more awareness. Situations can occur that would never happen in the more controlled environment of the riding ring. Following these suggestions may make your trail riding experience safer.

**Before You Leave the Barn:**

- Tell someone where you plan to go and how long you will be.
- Check the weather and dress accordingly.
- You’ll be more comfortable if you have snack and drink before you leave, especially if you plan to be out for more than an hour or so. Pack snacks and drinks along if you’ll be out all afternoon. (Not really a safety issue, but I get light headed if I forget to eat and that takes the fun out of a ride.) Make sure your horse has been fed and watered too.
- Wear your helmet and proper boots or safety stirrups.

**The Horse and Equipment:**

- Your horse should be calm and traffic safe. Find out before heading out on the trail. Ride in a pasture along a road. Invite a dirt bike or ATV driver to ride up and down your driveway.
- Your horse should be reasonably well schooled and obedient.
- Your tack should always be sturdy. A broken rein might be a problem in the ring, but it could be a disaster on the trail.
- If you plan to tie, take along a halter and enough rope to cross-tie between two trees. Never tie a horse by the reins.
- Take along a hoof pick, a pocket knife (some people recommend wire cutters), and a small first aid kit if you will be far from help.
- If you have the technology use it. Cell phones and GPS are handy to have in an emergency. Thick tree foliage might interfere with reception, so a hilltop or open field might have to be found. Of course, an old-fashioned map and compass might help too.
On the Trail:

- Walk the first half-mile (kilometer) or so to warm up muscles.
- Ride with awareness. Know where problems might occur such as a water crossing, passing by a kennel or an unusually painted fence or mailbox.
- Keep a distance of two horses apart to avoid kicking.
- Go the speed of the greenest horse or the most inexperienced rider.
- Walk up and down steep hills.
- Know the local wildlife. If bears, cougars are a concern, know how to prevent an encounter.
- Avoid riding along roads if possible, especially at peak traffic times or in darkness.
- Go the same speed. Don’t trot or gallop past someone going a slower pace.
- Warn riders behind you of low branches, stumps, holes or other hazards.
- Hand signals for horseback riders are the same as for cyclists. Use them to signal riders at the back of the pack and along roads.
- Ride well-known trails when the light is poor such as nightfall or very early morning.
• Walk your horse the last half-mile home. This will cool him out and prevent him from learning to rush back to the barn.

Safety and Courtesy on Multi-Use Trails

Many riders have access to the growing number of multi-use trails being established. State and provincial parks, private trails, and rail trails are ideal for horseback riding. Unfortunately, in some areas, horses are not welcome, largely due to misunderstandings between users. Courtesy and a little extra care can help leave a favorable impression of horseback riders. Here are a few ideas that can help keep all users safe and happy:

• Don’t canter, lope or gallop unless you can see well ahead of you that the trail is clear of other users.

• Walk around corners, bends and across trail junctions.

• Walk single file past other trail users.

• Be aware of how repeated horse traffic can cause erosion over time. Spread out on hills instead of making a deep single track. Be aware of how hooves may damage surfaced trails. Ride slowly or move off to the side.

• Always, whether on the trail or in the ring, wear your helmet and safe footwear or use safety stirrups.
• Ride a horse that is trail wise. Before heading out on the trail, make sure your horse is accustomed to pedestrians, bicycles, ATVs, dirt bikes and any other traffic you may encounter.

• Take the initiative to move off the trail, especially for pedestrians. Many people are intimidated by horses.

• Don’t litter.

• If your horse is startled by the sudden appearance of another trail user, politely ask them to say hello so your horse can recognize them as another human.

• Not everyone takes horse manure for granted like horse lovers do. If your horse drops manure on the trail, get off and clear it off the track. Trails in some areas have been closed to horses for fear of contamination. Once exposed to the sun, horse manure has little in it to contaminate ground water. Even if you fall face first in a fresh pile, it’s unlikely you’d pick up any harmful bacteria. However, don’t expect non-horse people to know that.

• Clean up after your horse in the parking lot if you’ve trailered in. Don’t leave manure, urine puddles, or old hay lying about. Bring a muck bucket and a manure fork to clean up with. Wash away urine with a few buckets of water.

• Dirt bikes, ATVs and other motorized vehicles may be encountered on some multi-use trails. If you are riding in an area where you will meet these users, try to stay out of their way. Better yet, try and establish an understanding between vehicle users and horseback riders so both can enjoy the trail safely. This might require a little more time on your part, but it will be worth it if unfortunate encounters or accidents can be avoided.

• Always, always be polite, even if someone is impolite to you. Do everything you can to leave other users with a favorable impression of horseback riders.

**Safety Tips – Trail Riding**

1. If you plan to ride alone, tell someone where you are going and about when you expect to return.
2. Ride a well-mannered horse.

3. Do not play practical jokes and indulge in horseplay.

4. Watch where you ride -- avoid dangerous ground. Note landmarks. Study the country and view behind you so you will know how it looks.

5. Courtesy is the best safety on the trail.

6. Think of your horse first. Watch its condition, avoid injuries, and care for it properly.

7. Carry a good pocket knife to cut ropes, etc., in case of entanglement.

8. Don’t tie the reins together.

9. Ride balanced and erect to avoid tiring the horse or creating sore backs, legs, etc.

10. Check the equipment: < Have a halter and rope. Hobbles are fine if the horse is trained to them. < Have clean saddle blankets or pads. < Be certain the equipment is in good repair and fits the horse. < Include bad-weather clothing. < A pair of wire cutters is handy in case the horse becomes entangled in wire. < A lariat is handy for many needs, but know how to use one and be certain the horse is accustomed to a rope. < Extras should include pieces of leather or rawhide for repairs; a few spare horseshoe nails; and a few matches.

11. If you unsaddle, store your gear properly and place the saddle blanket where it will dry.

12. Don’t water your horse when it is hot. Cool it first.

13. Always tie a horse in a safe place. Use the halter rope -- not the bridle reins. Tie a safe distance from other horses and from tree limbs or brush where the horse may become entangled. Never tie below the level of the horse’s withers. Be certain to tie to an object that is strong and secure to avoid danger of breaking or coming loose if the horse pulls back. Always cross-tie between two trees to
discourage your horse from eating the bark or pawing the roots.

14. Be extremely cautious of cigarettes, matches, and fires. Know they are out before discarding them or leaving.

15. Obtain current, accurate maps and information on the area. Become familiar with the terrain and climate.

16. If you ride on Federal or State lands, seek advice from the forest or park officials. Know their regulations on use of the trails and fire.

17. Be certain the horse is in good physical condition and its hooves and shoes are ready for the trail.

18. Use extreme caution at wet spots or boggy places.

19. Speed on the trail is unsafe. Ride at safe gaits.

20. Avoid overhanging limbs. Warn the rider behind you if you encounter one. Watch the rider ahead so a limb pushed aside doesn’t snap back and slap your horse in the face.

Some GREAT videos

Using the Pulley-Rein Technique:

https://youtu.be/yFt-yJhVZg8

Reading Horse Behavior:

https://youtu.be/l2p8pwIWZAM
Emergency Dismount:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhzWAPU36gk

Longeing your Horse Safely:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lP3PzRL2NY0

Danger Zones around Horses:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TudeTWXpcOo

Mounting and Dismounting Safely:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXzat56pgoM

Have you ever wanted to ride on the beach?

Here is some helpful information

Riding on the beach can be one of life’s greatest joys, but learn how to manage the risks before you head to the surf.

Follow our best beach horseback riding tips to make the most of your experience.
Find a Buddy
For your first ride, find a riding buddy on an experienced horse that’s comfortable on the beach. Plan your first visit to coincide with a receding tide and when the water is relatively calm. High, crashing waves won’t inspire calm in a horse that has never seen the ocean!
On this initial visit, don’t try to get your horse into the water or urge him close to the waves. Let him follow the other horse and stay as far from the water as he feels comfortable. If your horse wants to approach the water, let him do so gradually.

Beware of the Water

Watch where you’re riding. Both horses and humans can get dizzy and feel “seasick” watching the waves’ surging motion. If you sense yourself or your horse “feeling funny,” get out of the water and onto firm sand.

“One friend, treating her top show stallion to a beach ride, had him faint underneath her when they were belly deep,” recalls Shea. “Luckily, horses float. She held his nose above water and floated him to shore. As soon as his body hit firm ground, he got up, shook himself off, and looked quite chagrined.”

Realize that a wave can easily knock your horse off his feet, particularly if it hits him broadside. If you can’t get out of the way of a wave before it reaches you, turn your horse so his rump faces the water.

Watch the Footing
Gradually condition your horse to the beach’s deep footing. Beach footing differs depending upon sand composition and degree of moisture. Sand made up of coarse, large particles doesn't pack well, creating deep footing whether it’s wet or dry.
For your first ride, find a riding buddy on an experienced horse that's comfortable on the beach.

Fine-grained sand is usually firm close to the tide line. Be sure you’re on firmly packed sand before moving beyond a walk. At faster gaits, your horse catapults himself over his supporting leg like a pole vaulter, after which the elastic rebound of the muscle and tendon system snaps this leg forward. In deep footing, elastic rebound is lost, so your horse is forced to use muscle strength to pull his leg from the sand and advance it. You don’t have to worry about concussion so much as strain or sprain of tendons, muscles, or ligaments, especially if he isn’t well-conditioned.

Some beaches have areas where sand in certain places has a “quicksand” quality. Avoid this by riding with a local who’s familiar with the area. Beyond the sand itself, keep an eye out for anything that could pose a danger. This includes submerged rocks, driftwood, seaweed/kelp, and sand shelves, which can abruptly plunge you into deep water.

Watch the Hooves

Beach sand acts as sandpaper, which could wear hooves down to stubs if you ride your horse for hours every day in the sand.

Visit your farrier before and after a beach riding vacation. If your horse wears pads, use a silicone packing (or a combination of pine tar and oakum) between the pad and the sole to prevent sand from collecting there. Or, cut a cross or circle in the pad’s middle to allow sand to exit.
Take it Easy

Be aware that riding in beach sand can be very tiring to your horse. If he’s fit for an hour’s ride in a sand arena, he should handle an easy beach ride with no problems. But tempting as it may be to charge down the surf in an all-out gallop, don’t do it! Horses tire much more easily in beach sand, because their muscles literally have to pull each leg out of the sand with every stride.

Plan your first visit to coincide with a receding tide and when the water is relatively calm. High, crashing waves won’t inspire calm in a horse that has never seen the ocean!

Most horses are exhilarated on the beach. The unique environment, the fresh air, the crashing waves excite them. Horses will often get caught up in the adventure and want to go further and faster, so the rider needs to be the brains. You don’t want to always run when you go to the beach, because then your horse will think he’s always supposed to run there.”

It’s best to start at a steady trot, then moving into an easy canter or lope. Make control a priority, especially when loping in a group. There should always be a lead horse — one that’s easy to control. Make an agreement that if any other horse gets going so fast that he passes this lead horse, every rider in the group will pull their horse down to a walk.
Check to make sure you still have ‘brakes’ by frequently asking your horse to come back to you, slowing his pace or shortening his stride. In the beach’s wide-open spaces, your horse may want to accelerate. Keep your head, and keep him under control. Go back to a slower gait while your horse still has something left in the tank.

**Prepare for a Spook**

From waves and seaweed, to driftwood, dogs, and kites, there’s plenty to spook your horse at the shore. These beach bogey-men are best met in the company of a calm, experienced companion. Your horse will gradually acclimate to the beach environment, but he’s always going to be more alert than usual.

Wind on the beach is often strong, so make sure your helmet fits and is well-fastened. If you’re riding in a baseball cap or cowboy hat, use stampede strings so your hat doesn’t blow off and spook the horse behind you. This also applies to any scarf, shirt, or jacket tied around your waist or anything that can come loose.

**Be Courteous to Beachgoers**

Communicate with and be courteous to those you meet on the beach, especially since most of them won’t be familiar with horses. If you encounter sunbathers or people walking, don’t ride between them and the water. Instead go inland of them. This way if a wave — or anything else — startles your horse, he won’t spook toward the people.

If you’re in a group of horses, stay together as you ride past. Don’t surround the people, as this can be intimidating. Should you find yourself in a narrow section of beach where dunes or cliffs prevent you from riding inland to pass people, announce yourself, and ask to pass. Always pass people at a walk.

If you’re approaching people who have their backs to you, call out so you don’t surprise them. They may not hear your horse over the waves. If people are playing Frisbee or flying kites, and you’re afraid their activity may frighten your horse, ask them to cease the activity until you’re safely past.
Realize that a wave can easily knock your horse off his feet, particularly if it hits him broadside. If you can't get out of the way, turn him so his rump faces the water.

**Respect the Environment**

All over the United States, horse-people have lost access to beaches. Much of that is due to safety concerns for humans on the beach. But even if it's a deserted beach, horses can damage flora and fauna. It’s important for horsemen to be aware of this and to be good stewards of the environment where they ride.

If you spot any type of marine life, stay away. If you’re worried there may be a problem — say, you see a baby seal by itself — report it to beach-control personnel or a wildlife specialist. Don’t try to intervene. Don’t ride through flocks of sea birds. Go inland to skirt around them. Avoid riding near any posted areas where there may be bird or turtle nests/eggs.
Swim with Care

Swimming in the ocean with your horse may be the ultimate beach experience, but gradually introduce your horse to deep water, and choose a warm day when the surf is calm. Don’t use any type of tie-down or standing martingale, or your horse can drown. For safety, it’s best to go bareback and barefoot, as soaked saddles and boots can weigh down you and your horse.

First, keep close to the shallows in firm sand footing, letting your horse get used to waves slapping against his legs and then belly. Practice riding parallel to the beach, in both directions, to acclimate both of your horse’s eyes to the ocean-side and land-side views. Also practice riding both into and out of the surf at right angles to the beach, so your horse knows which way to head for dry land.

When your horse is in belly-deep water parallel to shore, there will come a moment when the next wave floats him. Steer him toward shore, so just a few paddles will get him back onto firm footing. If he seems to enjoy the experience, take another diagonal track back into deeper water, letting him swim for 15 to 20 seconds. Be careful not to let back-flow carry your swimming horse farther away from shore.
Stay on the top of or beside your swimming horse, floating above him holding his mane to stay connected. Don’t get in front of or under him, because a paddling hoof can quite easily break your leg. Never use the reins as a tow rope. Keep most of the slack out, and be careful not to let them wind around your wrist or any part of your body.

Be aware that in the ocean, the wave action will tire out a horse in just 2 to 10 minutes.

**Post-Ride Cleanup**

Salt is drying, and sand is gritty, so you’ll need to be extra-diligent with a post-ride cleanup after your beach outing.

Start by thoroughly rinsing your horse’s coat. If you find any scrapes or abrasions, clean and treat them with antiseptic to help prevent infection, as sand and sea water can harbor bacteria. Hose down all your tack, including protective leg boots if you use them. Apply leather conditioner to prevent drying or cracking. If you regularly ride on the beach, you may want to invest in biothane or nylon tack, since it can take the abuse better than leather equipment.

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**Safer Horseback Riding Along Roads**

You should try to avoid riding along roads if possible. But sometimes following a short section of road, or crossing a road to get to a trail is unavoidable. Here are some tips that may help you stay safe riding your horse along roadsides

- Your horse must be traffic safe before heading out on the trail or along roads. Always assume you could meet dirt bikes, ATVs and 4X4s, cars or trucks when riding out of an enclosed area.
• Plan to ride in off-peak traffic times.

• Avoid riding in poor light along roads.

• Know the traffic regulations in your area regarding horses. Most often horses must travel with the traffic.

• Try to stay well off the roadside, but watch for hazards in ditches and verges such as broken glass and holes.

• Stay together. Cross roads as a group so no one is left behind.

• Be courteous to drivers, especially those who have made a special effort to get around you safely.

• Hand signals for horseback riders are the same as for cyclists along roads.

• Stay off pavement if possible. Some road surfaces are like ice to a horse.

BEAUTY BY HORSEBACK
Trail Riding
DOS & DON’TS

Sometimes we have to make mistakes in order to learn. However, when it comes to horses, it’s far better to avoid mistakes by planning ahead and understanding capabilities and limitations—your horse’s as well as your own. The best intentions can go wrong without the right preparation. Here are some common mistakes that trail riders make and advice on how to avoid them.
Mistake #1 Overdoing It

The most common mistake trail riders make is overestimating their horse’s physical conditioning. Avoid doing this by knowing your horse’s fitness level in order to help you determine what length of trail ride he can comfortably do and what degree of difficulty he is up for. Don’t take your horse out on a four-hour trail ride if he’s never been out for more than an hour at a time. Similarly, don’t venture out over difficult terrain if your horse hasn’t been training for that type of ride. Just as with any athletic pursuit, horses need to build their fitness level and stamina slowly. Regular trail rides of several hours or five to eight miles that incorporate some trotting and/or hill riding will prepare a horse for longer distances and durations. Be conscientious of your horse’s sensitivity to heat and humidity as well. Horses that aren’t acclimated to working in hot and/or humid conditions can suffer from heat exhaustion and dehydration very quickly, which can lead to potentially life-threatening metabolic failure. While assessing your horse’s fitness capabilities, judge your own too. Ask yourself how long you can realistically spend in the saddle and how tolerant you are of heat and humidity. Because trail riding is a fun, social activity, riders often forget that it is a form of exercise that can be exhausting. For this reason, it is important to stay hydrated. Take water with you and remind yourself to drink, even if you aren’t thirsty. If you wait until you are parched, then it’s too late; you’re already dehydrated.

Mistake #2 Using Ill-Fitting Equipment

Whenever you make a tack, equipment or apparel change, always try it out on a shorter ride first. Don’t make the mistake of choosing a daylong trail ride to break in your new boots or jeans. Riding clothes that don’t fit properly or are rubbing in the wrong places can cause a lot of pain. Your tack should fit your horse comfortably, as well, and be kept in good repair. Ill-fitting or worn-out tack is a recipe for disaster. A saddle that doesn’t fit could slip, roll or pinch—any of which could result in a cranky horse or a wreck.

Mistake #3 Having an Uncooperative Horse

Nothing spoils riding plans like a horse that won’t load into the trailer. Teaching your horse to load and unload safely and calmly is a must. He should also accept being tied to the trailer and be calm and quiet in new surroundings.
**Mistake #4 Forgetting Your Map**

Inexperienced trail riders frequently make the mistake of getting lost or riding for a lot longer than they intended because they didn’t plan their route carefully in advance. Choose your route based on the length of time you would like to ride, the difficulty of the terrain you feel you can negotiate, and the climate. Ask park rangers or other trail personnel as to the conditions of the trails you plan to ride on, and if there are any hazards or closures. Also, if you are planning a long ride, choose a route that provides access to water for your horse along the way in the form of stock tanks or streams. Avoid the temptation to explore. If you encounter a new trail and want to find out where it goes, save the exploration for another day—after you have had a chance to research it. Don’t venture out on an unknown trail, especially if it looks like it hasn’t seen much use. If the trail is rutted and overgrown, there is likely a very good reason why it’s not being used.

**Mistake #5 Skipping Basic Training**

Understanding your horse’s capabilities includes not only what he can accomplish physically but also what training he’s had and how he behaves and performs in the company of other horses. Just because your horse is used for recreational riding doesn’t exempt him from needing basic training. An insufficiently trained horse is both unpredictable and unsafe to ride. If your horse is not safe and responsive at home in an arena, he won’t be out on the trail, either. He should walk, trot and canter on cue. He should halt easily and be willing to stand quietly. He should obey leg cues to side pass and backup. At any time on a trail ride, you could be expected to stop and wait. If this occurs on a stretch of narrow trail, having a horse that won’t stand quietly puts you and other trail users at risk. Be conscientious about bringing an inexperienced or unruly horse to a group trail ride. If you do, make sure everyone is aware of this. Otherwise you will quickly discover that it will make you very unpopular with your fellow trail riders.

**Mistake #6 Reinforcing Your Horse’s Fear**

One of the most valuable attributes of a good trail horse is a “bomb-proof” demeanor. Seasoned trail horses are desensitized to the many sights and obstacles that trail riding presents. This comes with time and repetition. A big mistake you can make is reprimanding him for spooking or balking at an unfamiliar object. Doing so only serves to reinforce his fear. Instead, reassure your horse that the giant tree stump isn’t a horse-eating monster. Teach him to trust that you would never steer him toward danger through practice at home with groundwork and exposure to new obstacles. If your
horse spooks and spins or bolts, get him back under control as quickly as possible and back on course. Push him forward with a reassuring tone. Don’t “negotiate” with him or try to coax him forward. Ask him with firm aids but do not be forceful.

**Mistake #7 Ruining Other Riders’ Fun**

On par with confidence are manners. Your horse should be on his best behavior when riding in a group. He must be trusted not to kick at or intimidate other horses. It’s no fun to trail ride on a horse that is behaving badly, and it’s just as unpleasant to ride in the company of one. Out on the trail, you will encounter a variety of riders—some of whom pay serious attention to the health and welfare of those around them, and others who don’t. It’s important to remember that just because some else isn’t exhibiting the best trail etiquette or is mounted on a badly behaving horse doesn’t mean that you should forget your own manners. The best way to guarantee a fun, safe trail riding adventure is to adequately train and condition your horse, and prepare yourself for the unique challenges of trail riding.

**Be a Good Citizen**

Be a Good Citizen Physical fitness, training, temperament and experience are all attributes of a good trail horse. However, it’s not just the horse that should possess certain traits to be trail-worthy; the rider should too. Like your horse, you need to be physical fit and have some riding skill to make the most of trail riding. However, etiquette is most important. This, combined with a dose of common sense, is the greatest of virtues. No one wants to ride in the company of a badly behaved horse—or rider.

**Here is the trail rider’s code of ethics:**

📍 Be courteous at all times, even when others aren’t. Horses do have the right of over mountain bikers and hikers. However, just because you are entitled to it, don’t insist on it. If you encounter less-than-thoughtful bikers or hikers, or if your horse is startled by their presence, then move off the trail a safe distance and allow them to pass. We must all share the same trails, and a negative encounter with another trail user will have a far greater impact on everyone’s enjoyment of the trails than will simply getting out of their way if they do not yield to you.

📍 When riding with a group, always go the pace that is comfortable for the least experienced rider in your posse. Never take off at a trot or lope without
first making your intentions known to everyone with you. If someone in the group objects, then save your gallop for another day.

♣ If your horse has a tendency to be ill mannered in the company of other horses, then make sure your riding friends know this so they can steer clear of him. If your horse has a tendency to kick others, then put a red ribbon in his tail. This is the universal sign of a kicker, however, be prepared to explain the reason for the red ribbon if necessary.

♣ If your horse is aggressive, then it is your responsibility to keep him a safe distance from other riders. Don’t take your kicker up to the front of the group and then expect everyone else to stay out of your way.

♣ Never rush past other horses unannounced. You will likely create an unwelcomed disruption in your wake. If you want to pass, make your intentions known in advance and then wait until it is safe to do so. Never attempt to pass on a narrow or difficult trail. When it is safe to do so, pass on the left at a safe pace. If someone asks to pass you, move safely to the right side of the trail and let them know when it is safe to pass. If your horse may become unsettled by having another horse pass, then move off the trail altogether and turn your horse’s hindquarters away from the passing rider.

♣ Don’t tailgate. When riding in a group, keep a safe distance from the horse in front, approximately the length of one horse.

♣ Don’t crowd around the water trough. Take turns so the horses don’t feel the need to kick or bite. Always wait for the last horse to finish drinking before leaving.

♣ Never leave a rider behind. If someone in your group needs to stop to make an equipment adjustment, then the entire group should stop and wait. Leaving a rider behind will likely cause his or her horse to become upset, making it difficult for the otherwise simple adjustment to be made, and potentially dangerous if the horse tries to run in order to catch up.

**Seven Tips to Help Save Horseback Riding Trails**

Don’t let another acre slip away. Be proactive and help protect equestrian trails. Public and private trails that were once open to
equestrians are disappearing every day. What can an average trail rider do about it? Plenty. Here are some tips to get started.

1. **Use it or lose it.** Here's an easy one: Get out there and use the public trails in your area that are still available to equestrians. It's easier for landowners and decision makers at your local park to close trails to equestrians if there aren't too many riders out there. Be an active, responsible user of your local trails so that the world knows equestrians still exist!

2. **Be a good steward.** Pay your dues or fees, clean up after your horse and yourself and obey the posted rules of the trail. This may seem obvious, but even experienced trail riders can get careless. Get your friends or local trail riders' group together for trail maintenance days. Volunteer to clean up trash and move fallen branches from the local equestrian trails. Be the kind of trail user that land managers want to have around.

3. **Join forces.** Become a member of your state horse council, local horsemen's group, or trail riding club. Networking with other riders will help you stay abreast of the issues are threatening riders and rural land owners in your area and provide an opportunity to work together toward positive solutions.

4. **Be courteous, even if you don't want to.** Yes, equestrians technically have right-of-way on most mixed-use trails, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be considerate. Make every trail user's interaction with an equestrian as pleasant as possible. Smile and say thank you when someone pulls off the trail to let you and your horse pass. When you encounter an oblivious trail user speeding around corners on their mountain bike or letting their dog run amok, assume that they're not malicious, they just don't know better. Saying, "Would you mind holding your dog over to the side while we pass? I don't want him to get stepped on," is a lot more effective then yelling obscenities, even if that's your first impulse.

5. **In fact, make friends with your fellow outdoor recreationalists.** We all have similar goals. We want safe, accessible parks and trails in which to enjoy our favorite sports and activities. Speak to local hiking and cycling clubs so you can share concerns and even organize trail maintenance days together. It's a lot better to work through trail conflicts together than to stay isolated from one another and point fingers when problems arise.

6. **Know the facts, and share them.** Horses often get blamed for having a negative impact on the environment, but research has shown otherwise. For example:
Research from the Delaware National Heritage Program showed that horses and riders were generally less disturbing to wildlife than joggers, hikers and even photographers.

Several studies have shown that waste left behind by horses on the trail did not have an adverse effect on water supplies.

Horses are often implicated in causing accelerated trail erosion, but studies have shown horses do not cause more erosion than human foot traffic or natural environmental processes. Get more information at ELCR.org.

7. **Call your senator.** Many riders enjoy riding in state and national parks and in national forests. Sometimes, these trails are closed or reclassified with little input from users. By knowing what's going on in your state and national government, and rallying your fellow trail riders, you can make sure your voice is heard. Believe it or not, those phone calls and letters to your senator or representative do matter. Keep up with national issues through the American Horse Council, the Equine Land Conservation Resource and Back Country Horsemen of America.

**FACTS ABOUT HORSES**

Enjoy these fun facts about horses and then read below for even more interesting facts about our equine friends:

- The average horse weighs about 1200 lbs.

- Horses eat 1.5 to 1.75lbs of hay per 100lbs of body weight per day. So that 1200 lb. horse would eat about **18-21 lbs. of hay per day**, usually divided into 2 feedings of 9-10.5lbs each.

- The earliest evolutionary horse was *Hyracotherium*, also called eohippus or the "dawn horse" was only about a foot tall and had 3 toes in front and 4 toes on the rear legs. He lived almost 55 Million years ago.

- The horse was domesticated around 2500 B.C.

- Male horses have 40 teeth and females have 36. Horses' teeth grow throughout their lifetime, making it possible to judge their age by looking at their teeth.
- A horse's stomach holds between eight and seventeen quarts. This is not very big considering their size and shows that they are meant to graze, taking in small meals and move around freely 24 hours a day.

- Horses can't throw up. Once food is swallowed, the valve between the throat and stomach is so strong it doesn't allow food to come back up.

- A horse's shedding in the spring is triggered by longer daylight hours, not the temperature outside.
• Research has shown that horses' favorite flavors are Fenugreek, banana, and cherry, in that order.

• The United States has (feral) wild horses, found mostly in the western states. They are managed by the BLM, or Bureau of Land Management and are offered to the public for adoption.

• Horses are measured from the ground to the tallest point of the withers in "hands or hh". A hand was estimated as the width of a man's hand, but is now equal to 4".

• The largest horse recorded stood at 21 hands, and was a Percheron, which is a draft breed.

• Ponies are up to 14.2hh (hands), with horses being any animal over 14.2hh.

• Horses have four gaits; walk, trot, canter, and gallop. There are gaited breeds that have additional special gaits.

• Horses are prey animals. They run to survive, and only fight if they have to.

• A mare's gestation period is 11 months, making them slow reproducers.

• When a foal is born, it stands almost immediately and can run.

• Their brain is about the size of a walnut, but they are definitely intelligent!

• The lifespan for our equine friends is about 25 years, but the oldest horse recorded was 62 years old!

• Przewalski's Horse is the only horse whose lineage can be traced back to prehistoric times. This breed is native to the Southwest Mongolia.
• You must "cool out" a horse after exercise. You can't put them right into their stall when they are all hot and sweaty or they can become sick. They must be walked until their respiration rate is normal.

• The hoof of the modern horse is his third toe. The chestnuts on his legs are remnants of another toe.

• The mane and tail are for protection from insects. Whiskers around the muzzle are for feeling things.

• Check out The American Horse Council for more current issues and facts surrounding our equine companions today.

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**How To Measure a Horse**

Here you can learn how to measure a horse and convert the measurement. Unless you have a measuring tape designed for horses, you'll use a standard tape and convert it to hands, which is the standard for measuring a horse's height.
Start by standing your partner square, taking your tape near the front legs (so it will end up at the withers) and holding your foot on the ground to hold it in place.

Measure by drawing it up to the top of the withers, where the arrow shows.
Here you can see how it looks in a full view. Keep everything straight, and have a friend hold if he has a tendency to move.

Let's use the example of my mare above. She is 60 inches from the ground to the top of her withers.

**To convert that to hands, you'll take the inches that you measured and divide it by four.**

1 hand = 4 inches  
Hand is abbreviated *hh*

- Number of inches measured divided by four = Hands  
- $60/4 = 15 hh$
- Here are some other examples of converting a measure:  
  - If she stood 61 inches it would be:  
  - $61/4 = 15.25$ -- this would be $15.1 hh$

And so on:
• 62/4=15.50 or 15.2hh
• 63/4=15.75 or 15.3hh
• 64/4= 16hh

How To Stop a Horse:

*It Isn't Done How You Think*

If you are learning how to stop a horse you may have been taught to pull back on both reins.

Yikes! This is one of the biggest errors still being taught to riding students worldwide. I learned it, too. Maybe your horse doesn't want to slow down and you are using a stronger bit. Or perhaps he tosses his head and you've put him in a martingale or tie-down to keep his head down.

These are only symptoms of a much bigger issue.

• Either your horse doesn't understand how to slow down, doesn't respect your idea enough listen to your request, or he's too scared to do so.
In the picture above you'll see the typical way riders are taught how to stop. **Pull straight back on the reins.** This only works to a degree. He can either grab the bit with his teeth or completely use his powerful hindquarters against your wish to slow down.

A more effective way to stop a horse is to teach them first to **follow the energy level** in your body, then **use your seat cues** to slow down, and then **one rein** if he doesn't stop.

It is much harder for him to run away with his neck bent. Bending the neck also moves his hindquarters away from the side that you are using the rein on, which makes him less powerful.

- **You can't just go out and haul on one rein and expect him to stop!**

- The objective is to use **preparation** and **teach him** this both on the ground and when you are mounted **before** you need it.

Here you can see that my partner willingly bends her neck at my request. This is true in any situation and is a great "emergency" stop technique.
Here you can see the placement of my hand going towards my upper leg.

- The idea is to use as little pressure as necessary, but enough to get the job done.

- Remember to release the bit only when he is doing what you ask, or in a positive step towards what you ask.

- If at any time you are out of control while mounted, go back to working on the ground.

If you are having issues stopping your horse you don't need stronger bits, you need more training and preparation and it starts with the above and a solid groundwork program.
How to Halter a Horse

Learn how to halter a horse with grace and politeness by doing the following:

First, start by getting the approach right. It's better for your horse to come find you to be haltered if possible.

- Start by standing on the horse's left side.
- Take the longest single strap of the halter and bring it under his neck with your left hand and then reach over and hold it with your right hand so it looks like the picture.
- This leaves the shorter side of the connection loop of the halter nearest you. Also, the round nose piece should be facing forward
• As you can see above, I am using the long strap to ask the horse's nose to come towards me.

Then you will gently slide the nose piece up around his nose.

• Do this by holding both sides of the halter as shown and slide it up towards his ears.
• Once you have the halter on with the nose piece over the nose like above, you will take the long connecting piece that is on the right side and gently bring it up and over the neck to the left side, just behind the ears.

• Avoid flipping the strap across the top of the neck. This "smacks" and can be frightening to the animal.

• Take the long connecting strap that you just brought over his ears and thread it straight down through the connecter loop.

• If you have the buckle type, you'll buckle it now.

• After you thread the long strap through the connecter side, you'll take the tail and make a "u", where the bottom of the "u" is towards your horse's tail like shown.

• This is done by bringing the loose end of the long connecter piece behind the loop you threaded through. (This means the end of the long strap will be coming out towards your horse's eye).

• Making your "u" around the upright connecter spot will keep the halter from sliding down as much.
The last step is to bring the long end of the strap that was coming out by the eye, turn it back towards the tail, and thread it through the "u" you just made.

Pull the piece you just threaded back towards the tail to tighten.
How to Bridle a Horse:

Getting Organized and Placing the Bit in the Mouth

Learn how to bridle a horse easily and politely by doing the following;

First you will start by unfastening the halter from the left side. Sometimes you may leave it on under the bridle for a trail ride or something similar.
- Slip the nose piece of the halter off and then tie the it around his neck.
- Notice that I have the bridle and reins hooked over my left arm.
• Here you can see I am bringing my horses nose down and towards me and I have the bridle ready and in the proper position. It is facing outward so it will go on the correct way.

• Now put the reins over his neck to keep them off the ground. Another option is to leave them draped over your arm.

• You can see that I also have the halter rope draped over my arm. I don't keep my horse tied while saddling or bridling in case he needs to move his feet.

• If your horse is good about being bridled, you may not need to leave the halter on his neck, but it gives you a way to direct his movement if needed without pulling on the bridle.
See how the horse's head is relaxed and low? If your horse is having issues with the bridle at this point, you'll need to slow down and get him relaxed using approach and retreat until he is no longer bothered and can keep his head low.

Now switch over from having it draped over your left arm like shown, to holding it by the crown piece (top) in your right hand.

If you have an english bridle, make sure the cavesson or nose band is unbuckled. This will make it much easier.

The following two steps are very important when learning how to bridle a horse.
• Your left hand will be at the bottom to guide the bit. If it is a western bridle, you'll need to separate out the curb chain from the bit.

• Put your left index fingers at the front of his mouth and feel for area between his top and bottom teeth. This will keep you from banging his teeth with the bit.

• Your right hand should be placed at the poll and holding the tack between his ears.
• Use your left hand to guide the bit into his mouth. You'll put your thumb in his mouth like shown where there are no teeth to ask him to open his mouth.

• As you do this and he opens, lift up with your right hand.

• Try and make the bit a pleasant experience.

Hint: It is important to pull up with the right hand vs. pushing the bit up with the left. This keeps things a bit taut. If you have any jointed bit and you push it in, it will just collapse inside his mouth. If it isn't jointed it will just fall out if you haven't taken the slack out of the top of the bridle.

• At this point your bridle is half on and you've been polite by allowing him to be relaxed and gently guiding the bit into his mouth.

• Now you can finish by gently putting the crown piece over the ears and buckling the throatlatch and cavesson.

Learn how to tack a horse in a western saddle by doing the following:

First, make sure your horse is well groomed. You don't want to cause any saddle sores or pain by leaving dirt and loose hair on him.
- Get your saddle pad lined up. Most western pads are rectangular. Some will have rub guards on the bottom edges. These go towards the front.

- Start by standing on the left side, facing your horse's tail with the blanket in your hands like shown above.
• Now as you swing it up, move your body to face towards his head.

• The blanket should be in front of the withers, and then slide it back until it is slightly in front of the withers.

• This will get the hair to lay flat in the right direction under the pad.

• This is about how it should look when you are ready to put the tack on.
• You can see how the rub guard is near the front (closest to his head).

![Image of rider near horse with rub guard near front]

• Position yourself so you are facing your horse's tail with the saddle rested on your right hip. In this picture I don't have it positioned quite on my hip, but if your saddle is heavy, you'll want to make sure it is.

• Hint: It can be helpful to bring the off side (right side) stirrup and cinch up over the saddle to make it easier to swing onto his back.

![Image of rider adjusting stirrup and cinch over saddle]
• Use momentum by doing a couple short swings to get it moving. Then swing your whole body around while swinging the saddle around and up onto his back.

• Avoid just coming straight at him and trying to lift it straight onto his back.

• Make any adjustments necessary to the positioning of the tack so it sits where the cinch will hang down and fasten just behind the elbow.
- Go to the front and lift up on the pad to create some space between his withers and the pad.

- Drop the cinch from the right side down so you can fasten it.

- At this point it should now be placed on the horse's back as shown, sitting just at the withers.

In this stage of tacking up, you'll flip the stirrup on the left side up and out of your way. Now you'll get started in learning how to cinch the western saddle.
• The long strap that hangs from the left side of the saddle is called the latigo.

![Image of a person adjusting a saddle](image1.jpg)

• Reach under the horse, and bring the cinch over.

• The cinch may have to be adjusted. If it has rings on it, you'll want those in the middle positioned between the two front legs.

• To do this, you may have to adjust the buckle up or down on the right or off side. Note: When tacking western, there are several ways to cinch. This is one that is well-known and easy to do on any saddle.

• Now bring the latigo back up to the top ring that it is connected to.

![Image of a person adjusting a saddle](image2.jpg)

• Take the end of the latigo and push it over and through the metal ring
• From the side closest to the horse bring the latigo through the bottom cinch ring again.

• Then come up through the top ring just like the picture before this one more time.

• Next you will bring the end of the latigo around to the right and push it up through as shown.

Hint: You'll want to put the rough side closest to you when threading through on the right, otherwise it will be twisted.
• Now you'll take the free end and run it down through the loop you just made.

• Then pull the knot tight like shown.

• When tacking up, only tighten the saddle enough to hold everything in place. Then move your horse around and then tighten it again.
• When you are done tacking up your western saddle it should look about like this.

• Now you are ready to do some groundwork and make sure your horse is ready to ride.

**Western Horseback Riding**

Western horseback riding always used to involve long hours in the saddle, open ranges, and cattle.
Western Horse Riding: Fun in the Cowboy Tradition

Times have changed and you can be a cowboy or cowgirl and never work a cow or ride a trail if you don’t want to.

This style of horseback riding is popular in competition from barrel racing to working ranch classes.

The Western style has an extremely large recreational following in the form of trail riders, too.

Want to know what to wear when riding like a cowboy? Or do you want to know what events you can work some cows in?

Western Horse riding is the style of the cowboys racing across the West in the movies. Start riding western and you might want to yell YEE-HAW! Chaps and cowboy hats abound. In the western horse show world you’ll see sparkling silver, and loud, coordinating colors for horse and rider that are meant to grab your attention.
Where Did Western Horse Riding Come From?

Western style horse riding evolved from the Spanish conquistadors ranch work and is very popular in the USA. The most popular breed in this style of riding is the American Quarter Horse. Paints and the Appaloosa are also popular in the western world.

Western Apparel—What Do Real Cowboys Wear?

Riders typically wear jeans with a flat inner thigh seam (Wranglers, anyone?), a long-sleeved button up work shirt, cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. In the show ring, you will find the same but with more bling and colors that coordinate with the horse’s tack.

Western Saddles: Designed for Working Cattle and Long Hours in the Saddle

Western tack consists of a saddle that has a horn at the front that is used to tie a lariat (rope) onto it. Why do you need a lariat tied to your saddle horn? Because this style of riding was designed for working cattle and roping cows! The well trained roping horse is strong. Once you rope the cow you can hold him tied to the horse through the saddle horn.

Not working cattle? No problem! If you are considering one of many riding vacations or trail riding, western horse riding is very beginner friendly. Most local stables offer western riding because it can be easier if you aren't experienced.
Western Bridles and Reins

A western horse bridle usually has a curb bit (the bit is the metal piece that goes in the horses’ mouth) which is a solid piece of metal that has varying degrees of an upward swell in the middle or port. The shanks are the longer part of the bit that come down on each side of the outside of horses’ mouth. The reins are connected to the bit through the shanks.

The reins that the rider holds are either split (separate) reins or a joined rein (romal) that has a quirt on the end. More often if you are on a trail ride, vacation at a ranch or taking a beginning lesson you will just have a set of split reins that has had a knot tied at the end or near the area where you should hold the reins. This keeps you from accidentally dropping one of your reins when you are first learning.

Horse Riding Western:

Why Beginner Riders May Prefer to Start Out This Way

Horse riding western style is a great way to start off because of the saddle’s larger cantle (back part), deeper seat, and horn (in front). This can help you to feel more secure.
If the animal you are riding is trained correctly for western, you should hold the reins in only one hand. That leaves one hand free, which is great to hang onto the horn of the saddle for stability.

- This is helpful when you aren’t quite as balanced in the saddle as you would like to be.

You Still Need Your Basics No Matter What Style You Ride

Whether you are horseback riding English or Western style you’ll still need to know your horse riding basics.

- Horseback riding lessons can teach you more in depth how to ride this style.

Although on the surface the two disciplines look very different, they aren’t so much except in the sports you would compete in. You have to be a balanced, centered rider to succeed in either discipline.

What is a Western Way of Going?

The horses’ way of going is different when horse riding western than in English, especially in the show ring.
His head is to be kept low, and the gaits are much slower. The western trot is called a jog, and the western canter is called a lope. Western riders are taught to always sit the jog, and not to rise (post).

**Neck Reining**

Now a bit about holding the reins cowboy style:

The reins are traditionally held in the left hand and the horse is trained to go with minimal contact (some slack in the reins) on the bit. The steed is trained to neck rein which means the rider holds both reins in one hand just above the saddle horn.

The animal moves away from the pressure of the rein on his neck. For a right turn the left rein would push slightly against the neck. Note that the seat and legs should give most of cues to the horse.

In contrast, if you ride English you always hold the reins in two hands with a steady feel on the horses’ mouth through the bit.

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**Sports**

You may love the western sports if you want to compete in fast paced, timed events. Cutting, Team Penning, Pole Bending, Cowboy Mounted Shooting along with the rodeo sports such as Steer Wresting, Calf Roping and Barrel Racing are all done while riding western. These sports all originate from the western way of life where ranch chores and working cattle was the norm.

**Team Roping**

- In team roping, a pair of riders race to catch and tie down a calf together running at full speed. One rider attempts to catch the horn or head (the Header), and the other the legs (The Heeler).

**Cutting**

- In Cutting you’ll be assigned a cow to keep from rejoining the herd. The horse does some impressive leaps back and forth in time with the cow, keeping him from rejoining the herd.
**Team Penning**

Team Penning is where three horse and rider combinations are assigned specific cows to separate from the herd and to herd those cows into a pen. This is a timed event and they can’t touch the animals.

**Barrel Racing**

In Barrel racing you run around three barrels in a specified cloverleaf pattern. The fastest time wins. You are disqualified if you knock a barrel down, run the pattern wrong or fall off your horse. This western horseback riding sport has exciting fast galloping and super tight turns at high speeds!

**Pole Bending**

Pole bending is a series of evenly spaced poles that the horse and rider weave through quickly. It is also timed.

**Cowboy Mounted Shooting**

This is one of the fastest growing western sports. It involves running a specified course, which should typically take 15-35 seconds, and shooting a special blank ammunition at balloons. It is a game of speed, but accuracy is typically more important.
Western Discipline

The western discipline includes many different sports and events. Here are some of the events that are subjectively judged instead of being timed events.

Reining

In Reining, you follow a pattern set by the judges that changes each class. Reining involves running full tilt, rollbacks, flying lead changes, spins and sliding stops. It is sometimes referred to as “western dressage.” It shows all the moves a horse working cattle should have, but in the confines of the arena with no cattle present.

Western Pleasure

In Western pleasure classes you will walk, jog, and lope your horse. Sometimes the judge may ask for a hand gallop. In this discipline, the horse is to remain in control with minimal rein contact, a low head and very slow gaits. In the show ring, you’ll find silver and lots of coordinating colors.

Trail Classes

In a western trail class, there are obstacles in the arena that are similar to what you might find out on a hack. Riders in this discipline complete the different tasks such as opening and closing a gate, backing through a pattern, and crossing a bridge while being judged.
**Competitive Trail Riding**

In this discipline the horse and rider follow a specified trail for a set distance from 6-30+ miles. Along the way there are obstacles and tasks that are judged. Competitive riding is open to both western and english riders.

**Recreational and Trail Riding—Benefits of Riding Western**

There are many fun and exciting western sports, but many who ride in western tack don't show or compete in any discipline. They are recreational riders. Many are “weekend warriors” who hold full-time jobs in other occupations during the work week.

The western trail saddle offers comfort for both your steed and rider over long hours of rough terrain. It offers security for the rider, as well as the ability to keep day essentials like food and water in a horn or cantle bag that is tied to the saddle.

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**How to Groom a Horse:**

Learning how to groom a horse is essential for anyone interested in learning how to ride. Not only does it make your equine pal look tons better, it also is good for his health and a chance for a great bonding experience, too.

In the wild, herd buddies will share this task. For our domestic equine partners, grooming is our responsibility.

- In this tutorial, you'll learn the basics: How to curry and soft brush the horse, comb the mane and tail, and pick out the hooves.

**Begin with Currying**

When you start grooming a horse, you'll want to use a currycomb first. This will help loosen up the dirt and hair, which will make it much easier to brush away.
The picture below will introduce you to what currycombs looks like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Currycombs</th>
<th>Plastic</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Rubber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If you are new to grooming horses, you may not know which one to use. There are basically three types:

1. **Plastic** - These are gentle enough to use on most of the body and summer coats.

2. **Metal** - For heavy mud and/or thick winter or shedding hair. These are generally not suitable for the more sensitive areas of the horse such as the belly, flanks, face, and legs.

3. **Rubber** - These come in a variety of styles and are suitable for all areas of the horse. The one shown above is gentle enough to use on the face.

**Currying - How and Where**

To start, if you are using a plastic or rubber variety you'll start grooming in a circular motion. A good place to start is at the top of the neck, just behind the head.

- **Put some elbow grease into it!**
Move Along the Body

Begin at the top of the neck and work your way to the barrel, back, and legs.

- Take special care to brush the area where the saddle will sit very well if you are going to ride.

When working on grooming a horse, there are a couple ways you can move along in the process. For simplicity's sake in this tutorial I am showing using only this brush first, followed by a soft brush after completing one side. Another option would be to put a soft brush in the other hand and work in small sections.

Here you can see special notice being given to the area where the girth or cinch of the saddle will be. If there is a lot of loose hair and dirt, it can cause a cinch or gall sore. They are painful and can make it so you can't saddle him for a while until it heals.
This picture shows the legs being groomed. Some horses are sensitive around their legs, bellies, and flanks, so be aware when cleaning these areas up.

- If you are using a metal currycomb, it will be too harsh for the legs, belly, face, and flank. You'll need to use a plastic or rubber curry on those areas.

Then you'll continue on working your way all the way back to the rump and back legs.

Once you've rubbed and curried with enough effort to have all the dirt loosened, it's time to move on to the next step which is soft brushing.
So, after you’ve curried, or as you are moving along in sections, you'll want to use a dandy or soft brush to remove the loosened dirt and hair.

- Dandy Brushes can have a different hardness of the bristles. I recommend using a medium hardness for this task.

- Start by placing the brush flat against the coat as in the picture above.

- You'll see here how you work your grooming with the direction that the hair grows.

- Using short, strong strokes, you'll start to angle it like in the picture.
The last step is to give continue to "flick" it, grooming as shown.

- This moves the dirt up and out of the coat

You'll continue grooming along in this way, all the way back on his body.

Above, you can see how to move it in an up and down motion the way the hair grows on the flank.
And here, grooming over the rump. It is important to put effort into flicking the brush as this removes the hair and dirt, especially where the saddle will sit.

- You can follow with a finishing brush if you'd like to really add some sheen to his coat. But for our purposes, we're going to move on to the face and taking care of the mane and tail.

**The Face, Mane, and Tail**

When learning how to groom your horse, knowing how to approach and care for his face, mane and tail is important.

**Caring for The Face**
If they are handled properly, the horse should not have an issue with having his head cared for, not all horses have had the proper training or some have been mishandled. It is up to you to use great care when you groom the horse's face.

Because they can be sensitive here, I recommended you start on the neck and work your way back, doing the rest of the body first.

- This gives more time to get to know you before you approach their head with grooming tools.

You should only use soft rubber curry combs and brushes to groom this area, as it can be sensitive. Care should be taken not to hit the eyes, and only to use the softest of brushes on the ears. Use the same strokes you learned to groom in the prior pages, but much softer.

- Move slowly around his face.
- If the horse doesn't like something, back away from it and then re-approach the area slowly, only doing what he can comfortably tolerate.

You can also use a damp rag or sponge to clean gunk up from the corners of the eyes, the insides of the nostrils, and the ears if needed.

**Groom the Mane and Tail**
To groom this hair, you will want to use a brush like the one above that is made just for the mane and tail, or a flat mane comb.

- Start at the bottom of the forelock and mane and work your way up until you reach the neck.
- This allows you to gently work out any tangles and knots without damaging the hair.
- You may want to try applying some detangling product or baby oil if they have thick or knotted hair.
- Do NOT cut the mane or forelock with scissors. This leaves it looking very unnatural.

When learning how to groom your horse, start by standing off to the side as pictured above when grooming the tail, especially if you don't know him very well.

You'll follow the same steps as for the mane:

- Start at the bottom, and work your way up slowly, gently untangling any knots.
If he has a very thick or long tail, you'll want to take small sections at a time and use the same approach.

Now you are ready to pick out the hooves.

Hooves should be cleaned daily if possible, to keep impacted material from rotting the hoof. Also, it keeps hard objects such as rocks from causing lameness.

- Start by facing your horse's tail (your toes pointing towards their tail).
- Drape the lead rope over the crook of your arm.
- Run your hand down the inside of the leg, stopping at the chestnut on the front legs (the hardened skin like structure) on the inner leg. (Please note these pictures are taken for best viewing. If you are standing on the left side of the horse, you will pick up the left hoof.)
- Gently squeeze the chestnut with your fingers adding pressure until the horse lifts his foot, at which point you immediately stop squeezing and are ready to support him.
• On the back legs, you'll gently squeeze the point of the hock. (Note that when picking up the hind foot most horses will lift their leg a bit higher than you would like at first but then will let the leg relax in order to be held.)

• Alternately, you can run your hand further down the leg and squeeze the tendons at the back of the cannon bone. This is a less effective method, but it is more widespread way of teaching this step of grooming.

Once he picks up his foot, you'll quickly need to be there to hold it up or he'll try and put it back down again. In this picture you can see I'm just beginning to get a hold of his leg at the ankle.
- Make sure your feet are off to the side so if he puts his hoof down your toes are out of the path of getting smashed!

Quickly you'll transfer your hold of the hoof by supporting it underneath. This will support his foot. You can see how much dirt is packed in there.
Now you'll take the hoof pick and point the "pick" part away from you. You'll start digging and scraping the "V" of the frog first starting near the bulbs of the heel and working towards the toe. When grooming horses, this is the easiest and most effective method for getting the feet clean.

- There is no need to worry about doing this too hard. This outer layer of the foot is like our fingernail and lacks nerves and feeling. It does not hurt horses to clean their feet.

Continue along the inside of hoof wall and shoe line if any until all remaining dirt, rocks, and debris are gone.

When you are done, gently place his foot all the way back on the ground. It's polite to do so.

- Avoid dropping the foot abruptly.
If you've followed all the steps, you should be all done grooming, and can move on to saddling and getting ready to ride.

**How to Saddle a Horse English:**

First, you need to groom your horse to make sure he is clean and ready for the saddle.

Start by taking your saddle blanket and getting it organized. You can see the strap hanging down, those go at the front (closest to the horse's head). So, get it ready to put on. The dirtier side touches horse!

Now place the saddle pad on the horse a up above his withers, and then slide it back until it is slightly in front of the withers. This picture shows the correct placement of the pad once you have slid it back.
Placing the pad like this allows you to smooth the hairs the correct direction under the pad.

Then stand facing your horse's tail and grasp your saddle as shown here. As you can see, I have the lead rope draped over the crook of my elbow.
Now swing the saddle in one smooth motion up onto his back as you move your body to be facing forward towards his ears.

At this point it should now be placed on the horse's back as shown, sitting just at the withers.

Now that the saddle is in place on your horse's back, you'll need to attach the pad.
• Run the billet straps through the keeper near the bottom of the pad. This will help keep the pad from sliding out of place.

• Then run the billet strap through the girth keeper if it has one.

Note: This is a dressage style billet system. An all-purpose or close contact english saddle will have a longer girth, and no keeper.

• When you are first learning how to saddle your horse it is common to run the leather billet strap through the wrong part of the buckle. The strap should go through the top metal section.
• It is easiest to girth up if you pull the leather up as shown.
After securing the girth on the first side, walk safely around to the other side and point your toes towards his tail. Reach under his belly with the back of your wrist and arm touching him. This will help to prepare him.
• Continue by securing the girth as shown before, by pulling up on the leather billet straps. Make sure each side is on an equal hole.

• Only tighten it enough to keep everything in place and then do some groundwork and tighten it some more. This will give him time to work into it, and helps you to be polite in girthing.

• Now you are ready to warm up your partner, and your saddle should be close to this. Depending on your horse's build, yours may need to be placed a bit more forward. I don't like to have my saddle directly behind the elbow, but this looks like it has slipped just a bit further than I would have liked during my ground training.
Learn how to approach a horse the right way in this step-by-step tutorial:

Do you ever wonder why a horse is fine being approached by one person, but not with someone else? Many times, when we are approaching, we have the intent on "catching" them to halter or ride.

- This is important because horses read our emotions and intentions - They can feel that you want to "catch" them and are designed by nature not to be caught!
As you can see from the picture, this cute guy is finishing up his breakfast. He isn't offering to approach me at all which is important.

- He's telling me at this point I don't have his permission or acknowledgement to enter his space.

Note: People normally walk straight up to horses, which for some of them can be unsettling. Try and walk in an arc instead of a straight line.

- Now you can see him with me making an approach. Notice how I am not directly in front of him.

- See my eyes? They are not looking directly at him right now. What is he doing? He's got two eyes and ears looking right at me.

- By doing this he has given me permission to approach him.
• Now I've walked up to his side, I offered the back of my hand for him to smell first, and am petting him.

• Now he is ready to be haltered or loved on.

Here are some other tips to help you:

• Don't always go in to catch him only to ride or work.

Mix it up and don't catch him at all. Sometimes and just offer a treat or scratch. Add some of that into your routine, be it some hand grazing or a good grooming session.

• Think about what he may want to do once he is caught vs. what you want to do. Try to add in more about what he likes, and soon your partner may catch you instead!
How To Lead A Horse Properly

When learning how to lead a horse, you should know that it is traditional for you to be on the horse’s left side.

- It is better horsemanship if both of you are comfortable working from either side.

Generally, unless you have done all his training, he will be more comfortable with you on his left side. As your leading skills increase you can try it from his right side.

I will show you how to safely lead a horse and what to do if he doesn't respond correctly. Before you get started here are some things you must be aware of:
Leading and Lead Rope Safety

- Never, ever wrap the slack of the lead rope (or reins if he has a bridle on) around your hand or any other part of your body.

If the horse decides to go somewhere, spooks at something or tries to run off, you don’t want to be firmly attached to a scared, running 1000 lb. horse!

Same goes for coiling the lead rope.

- If it is coiled up (looped) it can become tight quickly and take your finger off in a bad situation.

Let the slack drag out beside you (if your horse is OK with that) or fold it into half or thirds and hold the middle. That way it can’t tighten around your hand.

This tip seems logical, but you would be surprised how many experienced horse people wrap or coil a rope around their hand.

Coiling a rope or placing it around your hand is asking for an accident.

- Don't hold the rope too close to the snap.

It can make a horse panic if he is held too tightly. Allow his feet to drift some if needed.
On the Move – How to Lead a Horse:

- To lead the horse, stand at his side with his head or front of his neck in line with your body.

Your goal is to keep him there with you no matter your pace.

If he *lags behind*, you may need to use the slack of your rope (or use a training stick and/or string) to give him a few rhythmic taps as far back as you can reach. That will encourage him to move forward with you.

If he is too fast and gets ahead of you, you’ll have two choices.

1. Get his attention by turning around and heading in the totally opposite direction.

   This encourages the horse to pay attention to you. It is usually enough to get him back in line with you after a couple goes at it. If he still leans on you, consider using a rope halter to make what you are asking more clear.

2. Pull his head towards you and use your rope to push his behind away from you.

   Stay Safe! Always get his nose to point towards you so his hindquarters move AWAY from you. You don’t want to end up getting kicked!

   This will still have him facing the wrong way from what you were going, but if he was that far ahead he wasn’t paying much attention to you anyway and likely left you in an unsafe position.

   With some practice and as you gain your horse’s confidence and respect by schooling him on the ground, these leading problems will disappear.

With some practice and as you gain your horse’s confidence and respect by schooling him on the ground, your leading problems will disappear.

A well-schooled horse should match your pace at any gait and be attentive.
Talk about a horse kick with a person on the receiving end and it can strike fear into the hearts of even the most experienced horse person.

And this is for good reason.

A well-placed kick can leave you bruised, with a broken bone or possibly worse. A horse strikes out like that to defend himself. To another equine it generally doesn't do much harm. But it can cause a lot of damage if it is well placed and full force.
As a beginner, it can be even scarier because:

A) That is what most people say horses do

B) A person is nowhere near the size of his buddy in the pasture

C) You don’t know horses and fear for your safety

Good thing you have that safety radar! But don’t worry. It’s not nearly as likely to happen as some people make it out to be.

Most times they don’t kick or hurt people unless surprised, frightened, or cornered.

- I will show you how to avoid all that and become more confident moving around all areas of his body.

**The Rear End**

If you are taking lessons you’ll be moving around the back of the horse, and you will need to get confident doing so.

Sometimes you may end up approaching a him from the rear (although this is really not recommended).
• If possible, you should greet him from the front.

If you are at the front of him and need to go around his rear end make sure you have already touched him and he knows you are there.

Run your hand down his body as you go to walk around him. As you go around, keep your hand on his rump and stay as close to his back legs as possible.

• That is your first and safest option besides the following.
If you want, you can also take the L-O-N-G route and go out around his rear, WAY out, about 10-12 feet.

You are safest right next to him though it might not seem that way. A kick is most powerful when his leg is fully extended.

If you are very close to him it won’t have near as much power.

Add in that they can back up some and then lash out when tied, you can see why you would have to be SO far away if you choose to go around that way.

I hope you feel more confident now about how to avoid a horse kick.

Horses are generally very friendly and would rather run away than hurt you.

Horse vision is monocular. They have eyes set on the side of their head and mostly see two of each image.

Why do you need to know this if you are a beginner rider?

Because they have blind spots in front of their nose as well as near their tail.
- Horses have two places where they can't see you at all.

The two images they see separately come together right in front of their nose. As they get closer to an object, the image then disappears, creating a "blind spot" where they can't see you.

Seeing this way helps them locate danger because they have great peripheral (side) vision compared to humans. They can spot the lion that might want to attack them more easily. This helps them survive in the wild.

- Because horse vision lacks depth perception like we have, they can’t tell that a mud puddle is not an infinitely deep hole.

- Equines also process images in each eye separately.

- That is why they can sometimes spook at something you already showed them on one side when it is presented to them in the other eye.

- He may be more used to having people handle him from the left side, as this is the traditional side they are trained and handled from.

- He may react differently if you are on his right and he sees you out of his right eye or vice versa and it is something to be aware of.
Horses also lose vision at the rear near their tail where their peripheral vision ends.

- That means in these areas he is most likely not going to see you if you appear suddenly. While most of the time they don’t intentionally bite or kick to hurt someone, they can react when startled.

- The most common example of this is if he is napping (horses sleep standing up) and then all of a sudden you show up right in back or front of him.

- He may wake up quickly and not be able to see you in his field of vision. Because of his instinct, you could have just found yourself on the receiving end of a horse kick, bite or strike.

- To stay safe, approach the horse at about a 45° angle to the shoulder and speak to him saying his name if possible before you get close.

If he’s dozing, your talking should wake him up. Approaching at the shoulder is best because you will be out of range of his front legs and be in a less likely spot to get hurt.

I hope you enjoyed learning about horse vision and how you can enjoy your time around horses while being safe.
**Basic Horse Body Parts You Need to Know**

Knowing the basic horse body parts opens a whole new world "language." If you don't know the basics, you can quickly find yourself lost and overwhelmed in a typical barn conversation with other students, riders and equestrians.

Barn talk aside, having a grasp of these basic parts of the horse will help you to communicate more effectively with your instructor, trainer, and other equine professionals such as farriers, veterinarians, and equine massage therapists.

**Face** - The face and head are the most sensitive of horse body parts. When you first start with horses be aware that some horses can startle quickly or may not like their face touched. More explanation on the details of the face can be found below.

**Neck** - Joins the head to the trunk. He should be able to bend his neck equally well to either side. Often though just like us, they have an easier time bending to one side. They are also able to flex the neck and "arch" it.

**Chest** - The chest is the front of the horse and houses the powerful pectoral muscles.
**Shoulder**- Where the shoulder blade is found, and is connected to one of the front leg bones. Horses don't have a collar bone like humans do. That means their shoulders are attached to the body only by connective tissue, not through any bony connection.

**Elbow**- The elbow is a joint found near the top of the front leg on the toward the back side of the leg.

**Knee**- The knee is a joint on the *front* leg joining what we would consider the upper and lower part of the leg. Most everything found below the knees is tendons, not muscles. An injury below the knee will generally heal slower because of this.

**Ankle**- The ankle is also known as the *fetlock* joint. It is the next joint down from the knee on the front legs and the hocks on the back legs.

**Pastern**- This is a joint between the hoof and the ankle on both the front and back legs.

**Hoof**- The hoof is below the pastern on all four legs. The hoof is arguably one of the most important horse body parts. In structure it is somewhat comparable to our fingernails. Proper hoof care and shoeing can mean the difference between a sound and unsound (lame) horse.

**Withers**- The withers are an important part of the horse and are the tallest point of the back. Horses are measured using the withers as a guiding point.

**Back**- The top part of the body from the withers back towards the croup. The strong back is where you are seated to ride. There are many muscles found there. The saddle sits on the back near the withers.

**Loin, Croup, and Buttocks**- These areas on the back of the horse comprise the "powerhouse."

**Barrel**- The barrel is the big round area of the horse's body below the back where the ribs are located. Some horses are referred to as *wide* or *wide barred* because the circumference of the ribs and muscle on both sides of the barrel is very large. This can make saddle fitting a challenge.

**Flank**- Found on both sides of the body where the hind legs join into the body. The flanks can be very sensitive body parts and horses can be reactive when touched there.

**Stifle**- This rear leg joint is comparable to our knees in structure. Some horses get a "locking stifle." That is a condition where the joint "catches" temporarily.

**Hock**- The hocks are found on each rear leg and when seen they look to jut towards the back of the horse. The hock is prone to injury with overuse from riding as well as from trauma such as receiving a kick from his pasture buddy.
Parts of the Head and Face

Ok, now that you know the basic horse body parts, let's take a look at the face and head in more detail.

Ears - The ears are found at the top of the head and can rotate around to hear sounds in different directions. Horses have excellent hearing. They can also become "ear shy" from improper handling while haltering, clipping, and bridling.

Always handle the ears gently.

Poll - The poll is the area right between and behind the ears. It is considered the highest point of the horse body parts, as the ears are not counted. When they flex at the poll in response to the bit it is considered a good thing.

Eyes - Horses see differently than we do.
**Nostril and Nose** - The nose is the part where a horse smells and breathes. A colored or consistent discharge from the nose can signal infection.

**Muzzle** - The muzzle is the front part of the nose and includes the nostrils. Horses can "curl up" the top lip in order to get a better smell of something. They often do this "flehman" when they think something tastes or smells funny or different.

**Jaw** - The jaw or cheekbone has a circular appearance.

**Throatlatch** - The skinnier area of the neck right behind the cheekbone. Most bridles have a skinny strap that is called a "throatlatch" that fastens in this area. The horse's windpipe passes through the throat latch area.

See, that wasn't so hard was it? Learning horse body parts will have you speaking "equine" to other riders in no time.

## Common Beginner Horse Riding Mistakes

New riders often make mistakes as they get comfortable in the saddle. Work on gaining balance on the horse without using your arms and without gripping the horse too tightly with your legs.

**01 HANDS IN THE AIR**

It is instinctual for us to use our hands and arms to balance us when we start to feel insecure. Beginner riders often end up with their hands way up in the air, sometimes at shoulder height. This leaves the reins much too long, and the rider then has no control of the horse. Or, the rider allows the reins to slide through their hands and lifts their hands to make contact, rather than shortening the reins.

**The Fix:**
Work on following the movement of the horse with your seat and core. Keep a light, even tension on the reins and keep your hands at hip level. Readjust
the reins if the horse pulls them loose. As in the picture, there should be an imaginary straight line that goes from your elbows, forearm, wrist, hands, reins and to the bit in the horse's mouth if you are direct reining. If you are neck reining, you should be able to feel a very slight tension on the reins when you pull back. Keep your hands at hip level and your elbows at your side.

02 GRIPPING TIGHTLY WITH YOUR LEGS

Riding is more about balance than grip. Your muscles will be active, without being tense, and you don't want to be a clothespin on your horse's back. Clenching with your upper or lower leg or both is tiring and may be understood by your horse as a cue to move forward. Clenching and gripping will make your body tense, which can affect your horse's attitude.

The Fix:

When you sit in the saddle, let your leg hang from the hip. Allow your weight to fall down on your heel. If you're jamming your heel down, you may also be pinching with your knees or clenching with your legs. Keep your foot
under you, rather than allowing your leg to swing to the front or back. There should be an imaginary straight line from your ear, shoulder, hip to your heel.

03 STANDING TIPPY TOE

This often happens when riders first learn to post the trot. Trying to lift yourself out of the saddle by rocking up (usually hunching the shoulders and trying to 'hop' out of the saddle) and standing on your tip toes will likely have you behind the rhythm of the trot and double bouncing heavily in the saddle. Your hands may go up as you try to counterbalance yourself. This leads to a grumpy horse and an unbalanced, uncomfortable rider.

The Fix:
Work on your leg position. Keep your lower leg still, with your feet under you as if you were standing on the ground with your knees slightly bent. Learn to use your core muscles to help you post the trot and not your feet.
04 RAMMING YOUR FEET INTO THE STIRRUPS

Having your feet rammed too far into the stirrups is uncomfortable, and can be dangerous if you're not using safety stirrups or wearing proper boots.

**The Fix:**

Make sure your stirrups are the proper length. The stirrup should just hit your ankle bone when your legs are hanging free with your feet out of the stirrups. Place your foot in the stirrup so the ball (widest) part of your foot is resting on the stirrup. Work on proper leg position.
Whether we're embarrassed about our height, apprehensive about riding or trying to imitate hunched over cowboys we see in movies, slouching is a common mistake. Some nervous riders appear to want to curl into the fetal position as they ride. However, it's hard to control a horse while hunched, and your balance will be affected. Anything that affects our balance also affects our horse's ability to do its job well.

**The Fix:**

Sit up straight, but relaxed. Avoid going ramrod straight as that too can be a problem. Keep your chin up and look where you are going. Squeezing your shoulder blades back can make you feel tense, so instead, think of opening up your chest and letting your breastbone float upwards. You want to stay supple and tension free.
Many new riders look as if they're sitting in a chair when they first get in the saddle. Their knees are drawn up and their heels may be up, or they may be forced down, with their feet pushed forward. Some riders look like they are trying to imitate jockeys.

**The Fix:**

This is similar to clenching with the leg. Work on letting your leg hang downwards from the hip, and keeping the proper leg alignment. Don't pinch with your knees.
07 LETTING THE REINS SLIDE

Horses move their heads when they move, and if a rider does not accommodate this movement, they will have the reins pulled through their hands. This leaves the rider with little contact on the bit, or ability to cue the horse with the reins properly. The rider then compensates by either lifting their hands high up or attempting to pull the reins with their hands almost behind them.

The Fix:

Riding is a constant process of re-balancing and readjusting. Cagey school horses are adept at rooting, so learning to stop this behavior can help. However, even at a walk, a horse's head bobs up and down, so the rider needs to move their arms and hands so the reins don't become too long. Let your arms hang down your sides, allowing them to swing subtly as if your shoulders were hinges. If the horse pulls forward, such as when it trips, sneezes or steps over something, learn to use your arms to give the horse more rein, and not let the reins slide through your fingers. Learn how to shorten your reins as you go. Furthermore, as you increase the pace, you will need to shorten the reins, because the horse actually lifts its head up slightly as it trots and canters or lopes.
Even experienced riders do this when learning something new. However, beginner riders who are tense or are concentrating very hard, often hold their breath.

**The Fix:**

Smile, laugh, hum a tune, or try breathing in rhythm with the horse's strides.
Pulling hard on the reins can confuse and frustrate the horse as the rider's legs and seat say 'go' but their hands say 'whoa'. Doing it over a period of time will lead to the horse ignoring rein aids because their mouth becomes desensitized, or they will toss their heads to avoid the pressure and pain. If the pulling becomes too constant, some horses will become balky, or rear to evade the pressure.

**The Fix:**

Learn to feel the horse's mouth without pulling. Squeeze back with your hands in downwards transitions, rather than yanking and tugging. As with letting the reins slide and get too long, learn to readjust the rein length as the horse moves. Hold the reins firmly but lightly, as if you were securely holding a baby chick in each hand. Don't squeeze too hard and squish your chicks!
Beginner riders are often infatuated with their horse and want to look at it, or they're nervous and want to keep an eye on it. Looking down means you can't see where you are going, your head is down and neck is bent, which stiffens your spine. Any stiffness in your body makes it more difficult for your horse to carry you.

**The Fix:**

You might have heard that you should look between your horse's ears. This is only partially true. You really need to look where you are going. When turning, look at your destination, before cueing for the turn. This puts you in better balance, with your chin up, and your eyes forward.

**11 Disregard for Safety**

Before you ever get on a horse, make sure you are wearing a proper riding helmet and safe footwear. Not having regard for safety before everything else is perhaps the biggest riding mistake you can make, and one that can cause the most injury.
Essential Horseback Riding Gear

Horseback riding gear! There is so much of it available! There is a quote that says “horses are like potato chips; you can’t have just one.” If riders can’t just have one horse think of all the possibilities for gear! What a horse and rider need is all inclusive and can be done with style from head to toe.

Helmets

First, a certified and approved horseback riding helmet should be on every riders’ head when mounted for safety. There is no reason not to have this essential piece of horse-riding gear as they come in many lightweight and affordable options to fit every type of rider.

Helmets just make sense as you don’t know when and how an accident could occur. Skill level should NOT be a factor when deciding to wear a helmet as even the best horses can trip and can fall. You simply can’t predict how an accident may occur.

In many junior shows and increasingly due to legislation and insurance purposes, you will find that approved helmets are also required for horse riding lessons and/or trail rides.

Shirts

From western bling show shirts to the traditional english show shirt there are options galore in this category. Many schooling shirts and even some newer show shirts are now made from wicking, breathable performance fabrics. There is no reason to roast in the summer and freeze in the winter.

You can also buy plenty of riding jackets, horse related hoodies, and weatherproof gear
made just for your time in the saddle when the weather is less accommodating. Most of the jackets have hems in the back that are cut so they fit over your saddle.

**Pants and Breeches**

Traditionally the western rider goes for Wrangler or Carhartt jeans and English riders tend to favor breeches or if you are younger, jodhpurs. There are a whole range of styles of horse-riding pants in both categories. Good western jeans are comfortable, have seams that won’t rub when riding, and are meant to last.

Breeches fit snug on your body. They tend to be made from cotton or other materials combined with some spandex to help them fit. English breeches keep you from sliding around on a smooth leather saddle. Traditionally, they are worn at the natural waist and are fitted at the bottom (so field or tall boots can fit over them), but boot cut and low-rise breeches are now available as well as english fitted riding jeans!

**Chaps**

From fringe-laced full leather chaps to the english schooling half chaps there are many types of Chaps and Chinks to fill your needs. Full chaps are worn from the waist all the way down to the ankles, while chinks only go about to the knee. Half chaps are an english version commonly used for schooling or lessons. They connect under your shoe and zip or snap up and end at the knee.

Chaps are a great addition to your horse-riding gear. They can give you more grip in the saddle as well as keeping your legs dry from the sweat of your horse or the outside elements. Getting a pair that has the proper fit needs to be at the top of your list with this bit of horse-riding gear. Ill-fitting chaps are super uncomfortable!
**Socks, Boots and Gloves**

Do you love cowboy boots? Or are you more of a paddock boot person? Many times the style you ride dictates what the appropriate horseback riding boots are! Western riders typically wear cowboy boots, and English riders tend to like paddock (shorter) boots for schooling or field (taller) boots mainly used for showing.

There are even lightweight boots that look like sneakers or hiking boots made for the endurance rider or those who don’t like the traditional choices.

With sock choice, the height of your boot comes into play as well. You’ll notice if you go to buy English riding socks that they pretty much are all tall, but again many are made of wicking and comfortable fabrics. Take advantage of the technology, your tootsies will thank you later!

Horse riding gloves can be used for show or schooling and help with grip on the reins.

**Under Garments**

Remember those performance fabrics I have been talking about? Well, technology just got better even for your undies. Seamless performance underwear (that don’t show under breeches!) and bras made just for riding will keep you comfortable all day in the saddle both at the show and on the trail.

**Horse Riding Gear for the Horse**

The gear that people buy for their horses is extensive! There is no way I could even begin to describe it all in this article. I will do my best to cover all the basics.
**Halters and Leads**

Halters and leads are one of the most frequently used pieces of horse-riding equipment there are! Even though we don't generally use them for riding, we do use it for about everything else!

I prefer longer leads made of yachting braid. This allows the horse to have more drift if he needs to move his feet. Better quality leads have more feel to them than a cotton or poly rope. Other longer training lines test the level of the communication with your horse from farther away.

**Bits and Bridles, Oh My!**

The bridle is an important piece of horse-riding gear. It consists of a headstall which is all of the parts of the bridle that go on your horses’ head, and the reins that you hold.

The bit is the metal portion that goes in the horses’ mouth and is connected to the headstall and reins. The Headstall is made from anything from nylon to leather, in many varying styles for the different disciplines.

For instance, a noseband (the part of a headstall that goes around a horses’ nose) is commonly found on english bridles but not on western ones. While a western bridle will generally sport a curb chain, which is a small strap of leather or chain that goes under the horses’ chin and attaches to the bit on both sides, and english one will not.

Bits are generally made of metal of varying sorts. Stainless steel, copper, and sweet iron are very popular choices. They type of bit you choose depends on the style you ride and the level of training both you and the horse are at, and mostly what the horse prefers. The standard for starting out with a bit is a simple snaffle (jointed bit). Myler bits are one of the most popular and best brands.

There are also bit-less bridles of varying sorts as well! Side-pulls, mechanical hackamores, and bosals all fit into this category.

**Saddles**

One of the most important pieces of horse riding gear for both horse and rider is the saddle. Many people have never ridden bareback, so that tells you how important it is!

The saddle helps keep you balanced and secure on your horse, while for him it distributes the weight down his back more evenly, making it easier for him to carry a person comfortably for a longer time.
**It’s a Matter of Style**

Saddles come in many different styles. English, Western, Endurance, Australian, Saddle Seat, and Treeless to name a few. What type of riding and what discipline you choose will be a large factor is what style you end up riding in!

Saddles are made from a variety of materials. Leather is traditional, lasts a very long time and can be very heavy especially the western and roping varieties. It also requires regular maintenance, cleaning and care.

Saddles that are made from synthetic materials such as cordura are gaining popularity because of their ease of care, lower cost, and lighter weight.

**The Fit is the Most Important Thing**

Saddle fitting requires experience to get the best fit for both you and your horse. Using tracings of the horses’ back is a very popular method to assist with saddle fitting. In conjunction with consulting an experienced saddle maker or fitter and giving them your size and what style you plan on riding is the best way to find the right saddle!

Make sure you get the right saddle. You can’t just expect to go buy a saddle on craigslist and expect it to work unless you are experienced enough to know what to look for. Your horse might just buck you off if the saddle is pinching him!

Don’t forget the girth or cinch, either. This important piece of horse-riding gear is responsible for keeping the saddle in the upright position on your horse!

**Don’t Forget the Pad**

There are a lot of pads for saddles out there! From English gel pads to Western wool pads, even air pads. You can spend a small fortune on a good pad.

Investing in the right pad for your saddle and horse is a highly personal choice, one that will probably land you with more horse-riding gear than you need along the way!

**Everything Else**

In addition to the basics mentioned above there are tons of other kinds of horse-riding gear to consider based on your needs. If you ride a lot in hilly terrain, you may need a breast collar or breastplate to keep the saddle from sliding back off your horse.

If you can think what may happen when you ride your horse doing something specific, chances are there is a piece of horse riding gear that someone designed just for that.
Horseback Riding Boots to Fit Your Needs

Good horseback riding boots are an absolutely essential piece of horseback riding gear. You should never be without your boots or helmet when headed to the barn.

Without good quality footwear, you increase your risk of getting your foot caught in the stirrup while riding.

Having a foot caught in the stirrup is extremely dangerous if you should fall off.

A good pair of boots will also help protect your feet on the ground. Anyone that has had a foot or toe stepped on by a horse will tell you that good protection for your feet is essential!

You may be wondering; what the best boots for horseback riding are?

That depends on many factors including:

- Your riding style or discipline (english, western, trail, etc.)
- Your budget
- Your foot shape (wide, high arch)
- Your personal style
- What else you may use them for (barn chores, etc)

The good news is that no matter the reason or price range for your horseback riding boots purchase there are many options to fit your needs.
First ask yourself:

**What exactly am I going to use these boots for?**

You may be beginning to take horseback riding lessons. Do you already own a horse and are looking to replace your well worn trusty boots?

If your stay around horses will be limited to a shorter time like at a summer horseback riding camp or a horseback riding vacation, you will still need a pair of quality horseback riding boots if you are going to be spending any significant time in the saddle.

**Shopping on a Budget?**

If you are just getting started riding horses, are buying on a budget or for a child, be sure to check out your local classifieds, tack sales, and consignment areas in local tack shops. You can find great deals on quality used horseback riding boots often at a fraction of the cost of buying new. Used is also a great way to go if you plan on using them for short amount of time.

**Categories of Horseback Riding Boots**

Horseback riding boots can be divided into a few categories. You can divide them by *horseback riding style* or *discipline,* such as English or Western horseback riding boots. Within those categories, there are schooling (practice) and show versions. There are summer and winter versions of boots.

Another category are *muck boots* that are made for barn chores such as mucking stalls and turning out horses. Generally, these boots are not made for riding. Let’s take a look at the different categories of horseback riding boots.
English Horseback Riding Boots

Paddock Boots are shorter than traditional field or tall boots. They go to just above the ankle and usually tie or zip up. The paddock type is most popular for schooling (practice and lessons) and are often used for light barn chores in good weather.

When riding they are often paired with chaps or half-chaps. Field boots are the traditional choice for english showing and upper level schooling. They come to just below the knee and are made of leather.

There are also endurance riding boots. They are lightweight and resemble sneakers. They can also look like a fabric paddock boot but have more of a heel for safety while riding. This is the closest type of horse-riding shoe to resemble a street shoe.

Paddock Boots

Paddock boots can be made from synthetic materials or more commonly, leather.

This style of boot typically runs a bit narrower in width. If you have a wider foot or a higher arch you may need to find some in a wider width (recommended) or go up a half size to avoid pinching the foot. Another option is to look for boots with a round toe. A round toe has a wider toe box. This allows more room at the front.

Paddock boots also have winter versions that are waterproof and warmer. You may want to consider this option.

Most English horseback riding boots run a bit tight at first but then stretch when the leather is broken in. You won’t see stretching as much on synthetic materials so take that into account when sizing. Boots are sized like regular shoes but their fit will vary by manufacturer. For online buys look for free return shipping for wrong sizes, etc. It’s best to find a good boot store and get fitted by a knowledgeable person. A good pair of paddock boots runs about $100 - $150.
Field or Tall Boots and How To Fit Them
Field Boots are the traditional attire of English riders and are also used for English horse shows. They are black, made of leather and are tall enough to reach just below the knee.

These boots typically cost much more than paddock boots. A good pair is in the $400-800 range. They are required if you will be competing at rated horse shows.

Field boots are a bit trickier to size. You will have to get the correct foot size, height of boot, and width of the calf sizing by taking detailed measurements. Measurements are best done by a friend while you are sitting in a chair with your leg at 90-degree angle to the floor. For a calf measurement you will measure around the widest part of the calf. For the height measurement measure from the bottom of the heel to just below the back of the knee.

Field boots become much softer after being broken in. Due to the softening especially around the ankle, they will lose some of their height.

This is called the expected drop and will be from one half to two inches. Be sure to check the expected drop for the boots you like and take that into account on your measurements for height. Make sure you follow the instructions for sizing closely.

Western Horseback Riding Boots-Cowboy Boots

You are probably already familiar with what western horseback riding enthusiasts choose for boots.

Cowboy boots, of course!

They are standard in the western world. People who don’t ride and just enjoy the western riding wear look also wear cowboy boots.

Below I have assembled some frequently asked questions about western cowboy boots that should get you headed for just the right pair!
Q-What are the uses of western boots?
A-They have many different uses. The western boot is the most versatile. It can be used for riding, but a good, quality western boot should be tough enough for work as well. They also put a good western touch on outfits as well.

Q-What materials are western boots typically made of?
A-They can be made out of just about any hide. The most common are cow or goat hide, but gator, crocodile, ostrich, and snake are also popular. Hippo, elephant, and sting ray are also available.

Q-How do I find the right size? How do I know if a new pair fits right?
A-As far as sizing, a good rule of thumb is to go a a half size smaller than your regular shoe size. You want it to be snug at first, but not pinching. It should be snug across the top of your foot, and around the ball of your foot (the wide part right below the toes) at both the big and little toes. Your heel should also come up a little in the back when you walk. As the sole breaks in, that heel slipping will go away. It usually takes around two weeks of wear to break a new pair of western boots in.

Q-What are some characteristics of a good, quality western boot?
A-Feel and softness of the leather are good indicators of the quality of a good pair of western horseback riding boots. The softer they are, usually the better the quality is. Comfort and an understanding of whether that boot is made for what you want to do with it are also important considerations.

Q-What is the price range for cowboy boots? What is an average cost for a quality pair?
A-They start around $80/pair and up in price. Exotic leathers and handmade boots will be more expensive. However, a good quality basic pair of western horseback riding boots will run you between $150-200.

Q-Is there a particular brand of boot made for riding horses? What about for riding with spurs?
A-There is not a particular brand of boot made for riding, but you want to find a sole that doesn’t have much traction so it won’t catch in the stirrup.

Leather soles are best for riding, but the acid in manure can cause those soles to break down rapidly. You should not use your good riding boots to do your barn work. As far as spurs, you will see some boots’ heels are a little wider to create a small ledge for your spur to rest on.
Work and Muck Boots

A good pair of barn or muck boots are worth their weight in gold. When you are slogging around in horse manure and mud you DON'T want to be wearing your nice riding boots! You will ruin them fast!

Muck boots are usually taller rubber or PVC boots made for doing barn chores. They are generally sold in whole sizes only and come in unlined and lined versions for working in the cold.

If you are going to be doing many barn chores especially in cold, wet climates, you’ll want to invest in a quality pair of muck boots that are rated for work down to -30F. Otherwise, you could end up with really cold feet or even frostbite. These boots must be waterproof to be of any use to you.

Summer Horseback Riding Camps: What They Are and How to Find a Good One

Summer horseback riding camps are for the truly horse obsessed! Do you dream of riding horses? Want to learn everything you possibly can about horses and horseback riding? Do you love breathing in the smell of horses?

If you want to learn about horses and horseback riding all day for a week or more, summer horse camp is for you! Some are day camps, and others are sleep away horseback riding camps.
What to Expect at Summer Horseback Riding Camps

Day camps are available in half day and full day versions. The full day summer horseback riding camps would typically run from 8 or 9AM ending anywhere from 3:00 to 5:00 PM.

The typical day would include a riding lesson, learning about horse care, a craft, lunch break, and more horse time.

Quite a few camps partner with local pools to add in swimming time, too. After all, it is summer and can be hot! It can be refreshing to take a dip in a cool pool (or pond) after riding horses and taking care of them all morning! At an overnight horse camp, you’ll do all the above plus sleep in a cabin or bunkhouse at night.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Camp

-How much time will I have with the horses? How much of that will be riding and/or lesson time?

-What discipline will I be learning at camp? What ages and ability levels will the other campers in my group be?

-How many years has the camp been running? Do you have any past campers I can call to see how they liked it?

-What is the return rate for camp counselors and instructors? If it is a really high turnover ask why.

-What other activities do you offer?

-Can I come visit before I sign up? I recommend this to double check on the quality of the facility.
-You may also want to call a local large animal vet and see if he knows anything about the camp and how the horses are cared for. Healthy horses are happy camp horses!

**What Style to Ride**

Riding lessons will vary for what kind of stable or instructor is hosting the camp. Some camps offer western horseback riding lessons, while others will offer English riding lessons. Some camps may offer a trail riding focus.

With whatever focus, you are going to learn horseback riding (or driving or even vaulting)! So, ask ahead what style or discipline the trainer teaches.

**Grouping by Age and Ability**

Camps are generally grouped by ability level and usually by age.

**Riding Lessons**

How many lessons, how often and how long they are will vary from camp to camp so be sure to check out what the camp you are interested in offers. It would be great to ask how much time you will be spending with the horses per day, and how much of that is riding time. Most camps do at least a one-hour lesson a day.

**Your Own Horse for a Week**

Campers are also usually assigned a horse for the week, but ask to make sure. You may have your own horse or you could be sharing a horse with someone. Many camps will also do a small show as a wrap up for the end of the week so you can show off your new and improved riding skills!
At summer horseback riding camps if you don’t already know how, you will learn how to groom a horse. This will include brushing and cleaning out his feet before riding.

You may see a demonstration about clipping a horse. You may learn how to braid his mane and tail for a show and how to give him a bath, too. After all, a summertime cool shower can feel good to your horse too! You’ll love sudsing him up and getting him sparkling from head to hoof!

My favorite part is washing the horse’s tail! I love to dunk the tail in a sudsy bucket full of yummy smelling horse shampoo water!

Other topics of horse care may include basic equine first aid, learning normal vital signs and how to tell if your horse is sick or lame.
Other Learning Experiences

The sky is the limit with summer horseback riding camps but you may watch videos on topics from horse handling on the ground to basic equitation.

Your camp counselor could teach you the names of all the horse equipment and the parts of each piece. You may also learn all the names of the parts of the horse. It’s great to know the lingo of horses so soak it in!

Other Activities

Besides offering a taste of every horse discipline from dressage to vaulting, summer horseback riding camps generally have many other activities you can participate in.

Some of those are arts and crafts (some horse related), pottery, hiking, swimming, scavenger hunts, and archery. If you are staying overnight, you may play more games and sing camp songs around the fire.

Have fun at camp this summer!

Horseback Riding Helmets
Can Be a Lifesaver

Horseback riding helmets are the most important but UNDER-used piece of essential gear for riders. Yes, I said UNDER-used. A helmet that was never bought or one that is hanging in the tack-locker, or worse is attached to your saddle while you are out riding simply can’t save your life.
A Choice with High Stakes

Riders have a choice to wear a helmet each and every time they mount up, but...

most don’t.

They think they are a skilled enough and don’t need one. This is such a myth.

Skill has nothing to do with whether you are going to sustain a head injury while riding a horse.

Horses are unpredictable, large animals. Even the well-trained ones can still trip or do something out of the ordinary.

And you can't control the terrain. If your horse falls, you fall. And your head could hit the only rock around whether you are in an arena or on the trail.

Are you willing to bet your life on that every time you ride? Yes, your LIFE as you know it is at stake when the issue of wearing horse riding helmets comes up.
How Do Helmets Work and What Kind Do I Need?

Horseback riding helmets are made from:

- **impact resistant plastic and foam materials**

The look fairly similar to a bike helmet.

While I often see beginning horse riders taking lessons with a biking helmet this is not recommended.

- **Horseback riders are often further from the ground** and can be going at even **faster speeds** than a biker.

Riding helmets are designed to look like a traditional english hunt cap or riding hat. Some have even been styled to look like a western cowboy hat.

- You should only buy a horseback riding helmet that is ASTM/SEI certified.
- The testing required for the ASTM/SEI certification verifies that the helmet provides adequate protection for horseback riding.
- There are hunt caps, top hats and other hats that while traditional in style, do not offer any head protection whatsoever

Helmets **always have a harness that fastens under the chin** to keep it securely on your head in case of a fall or impact.

On impact the foam material **compresses** taking the bulk of the impact off your brain and that can save your life!
The good news is that a typical schooling helmet doesn’t cost much more than a biking helmet would. Your noggin is worth the investment!

A helmet that has been involved in an impact should be replaced immediately.

Find the Right Fit for You

There are many different manufacturers of horseback riding helmets and each one will have a slightly different fit and padding system. This makes it possible for you to find a helmet that is very comfortable for your head. Some have ways to adjust the fit once it is on your head making your helmet feel almost custom.

A properly fitting helmet should

- Feel snug, but not too tight.
  
  If it is too tight it will give you a headache. And that is no fun to ride with!

- NOT flop around while you ride
  
  If you can't see where you are going if you move your head around because the visor is in your eyes, your helmet is too big.

- Fasten snugly under the chin
  
  If the helmet is fastened too loosely, it can be dangerous in a fall. Too tight and it can restrict your air!

Comfort, Style and Technology

My first helmet was heavy, hot and very cumbersome.
Thankfully, helmet technology has come a long way! Helmets are now so lightweight you will barely remember you are wearing one! They can also be very low profile so you don’t feel like you are wearing a big bubble on your head!

Add in features like:

- removable sun visors
- interchangeable and custom centers on some models
- vents
- custom helmet covers to coordinate with your tack and other horse riding gear and things have definitely vastly improved for helmets whether you pleasure ride or are a serious equine competitor.

Helmets are generally required in any class that requires jumping. Many shows require junior riders to wear them anytime they are mounted. Some states such as Florida and New York have made laws requiring helmet use for all junior riders state-wide.

It is also possible that your local barn will require horseback riding helmets for all riders due to liability insurance policies. After you turn 18 your head isn’t going to magically get hard enough that you don’t need to protect it with a helmet!

If you want to protect your head from injury in case of a fall or impact when riding horses, you need a certified horseback riding helmet. They are:

- comfortable
- inexpensive and
- offer a significant reduction in risk of concussion, brain injury and death

Wearing a helmet can help keep you in the saddle for years to come.
A Horse Training Halter for Communication

A horse training halter is the most important and frequently used piece of horse training equipment available.

Think about it for a moment.

If you have spent any time at all around horses you know halters or headcollars get used almost every time we interact with a horse. Catching, leading, tying, trailering, grooming, clipping, bathing, saddling, training, groundwork, and trail riding are some of the places we use horse halters.

That makes choosing the right one for the job that much more important.

A Tool for Communication

A horse training halter should be a piece of horse riding gear that is used for communication. Training the horse is teaching him.

What are you teaching your horse when you put his halter on?

Many people use it to drag their horse from point A to point B. Meanwhile, the horse lags behind dull to the pressure on his head. It shouldn’t be that way.

Wouldn’t it be much better if the horse was light off the feel of the halter? Don’t you want your horse to move with you whether you go slow or fast with just a light suggestion? Whether you are using leather halters or rope halters try to think of horse training halters as a way to communicate with your horse, not simply a way to make him do what you want him to. Become aware of how your horse responds to the halter and your training.
Two Types of Horse Training Halters

Wide Nylon and Leather Halters still seem to be the norm in the horse world. They are traditional in style. Rope halters are catching up in popularity.

Nylon and Leather Halters

Nylon and Leather Halters are wide and tend to be heavy. They are designed for show, cross tying and the comfort of the horse. The comfort of this style comes from the width of the materials and the padding people add to them. The wide straps increase the area over which the pressure is applied.

So when the horse pulls, he doesn’t feel much discomfort.

This encourages him to lean on it more, making him feel heavy on the end of the lead line. The other downfall to this type of halter for training is that they don’t break under pressure and can be hard to get off in an emergency. An exception to this is the breakaway models.
Rope halters for horses are superior in almost every application but especially for training. This kind of horse training halter has many advantages over leather halters.

Halters made of rope have **more feel** to them. That means as you make subtle communication with your horse, **he can feel it** and have a chance to respond with lightness! These types of halters are commonly called natural horsemanship halters.

They are **very thin and lightweight**. This makes them comfortable for the horse to wear when he is doing the right thing.

When the horse is leaning on the pressure of a rope halter it encourages him to seek a release. Being thin it concentrates the pressure on the sensitive nose and poll. But when he gives to the pressure, there is an instant reward.

**The uncomfortable feeling goes away.**

Because of their design, you should not cross tie your horse in a rope halter unless there are rings on the nose knots. The cross-tie snaps can slide up the halter and hurt the horse's eyes.
The other benefit to rope halters is that if something did go very wrong you can use a pocket knife to cut the halter and your horse free.

**No halter or headcollar should EVER be kept on an unattended horse in a stall or pasture. Doing this is asking for severe injury or death. It does not make the horse easier to catch**

One more good thing about a rope horse training halter is that you can you can learn how to make one yourself if you want to! If you are interested in making rope halters, you’ll have to get the proper rope first, which is a marine quality yachting braid typically 1/4” to 5/16” diameter. Ropes vary in stiffness and quality so choose yachting rope over a cheaper poly rope that won’t have much feel. There are many resources online for learning to tie your own horse training halter with many variations of knot placement according to your preferences.

**Natural Horse Training:**
**Firm Up Your Foundation**

A typical obstacle in this type of training, the pedestal, builds confidence and trust that carries over to real world tasks such as trailer loading, standing in a wash bay, and jumping.

**Leadership, Trust, and Communication**

Natural horse training is all about the strength of bond of trust and the relationship with equine partner.

Like traditional training, it aims to test how high of a level of communication you have with your partner. In this type of communication, the animal seeing and trusting you as
his leader is paramount. These things are taught and refined in how you choose to interact with your horse in all situations, not just when you are riding.

**A Common Language**

*Begin communicating with your equine partner in a language that he will understand, the body language another horse would use.*

You will also take his very nature as an equine prey animal into account in your training on a regular basis. You earn credibility and leadership points with him and he starts to trust you and act like a partner. That is the big difference between traditional and the natural approach.

**Modern Founders of the Natural Horse Training Revolution**

Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt are two of the biggest contributors in the modern natural horse training revolution. Ray Hunt really brought the concept to the larger horse owning population.

Several of today’s big-name natural trainers have studied under one or both of these men and a few others, taking what they learned making their own programs and even schools based around these same principles.
Psychology Based Horse Training

Using psychology to train a horse when done correctly is extremely effective. You will learn to figure out what he is thinking and feeling by reading the cues in his body and observing his behavior. This training is about the rider learning to read the horse and use appropriate timing and cues to get the desired response. This process starts on the ground first, which is the safest place to learn and observe your horse.

A Solid Foundation on The Ground Leads to Success in The Saddle

When you have gotten a good foundation on the ground you then apply the same principles to riding with fabulous results!

You will be surprised how many of your common “issues” become non-issues because you fixed it on the ground using a method he easily understood.

When you gain a solid foundation, you will have a lot more fun and less headaches together in whatever discipline you choose. It can take more time than the traditional route, but isn’t a solid foundation and the relationship with your horse worth it?

Horse Show Grooming: Tips and Tricks for A Stress-Free Event

Horse show grooming doesn't have to stress you out! Follow these tips for success in the show ring!

This is true whether we are going to a schooling show, or rated weekend show. You should always try to present yourself, your horse, and your trainer/barn in the best possible light, so when your horse walks off the trailer, it should look clean and well-kept.

Being prepared in the grooming department will make it easier on you once you arrive at the showgrounds. There is always so much work to be done once you arrive at the show, so the last thing you want to be worried about is a dirty horse or dirty tack. Being prepared means that after your schooling or longeing session, your horse will only need a good brushing or quick rinse, which will save you a lot of time otherwise.
Begin preparing your horse for the show a few days before we leave. **Pulling a mane and body clipping is not something you want to wait until the day of the show to do!** So, a few days prior, make sure your horse has appropriate mane lengths and if needed, band their manes over after they are pulled. This preparation keeps the mane on the correct side, which for the Hunter world is the right side, and makes it easier to braid.

When it comes to clipping, pay attention to her ears, bridle path, face whiskers and fetlocks. **Be sure to clean and lubricate your clippers as needed to keep them in top condition.** This is also a good time to do all of the horse laundry that you will be bringing with you: standing wraps, show pads, schooling polos, stable sheets, etc.!

To maximize horse show grooming preparation, the day before the event, give your horse a bath after you ride.

Use Baby Shampoo because it is gentle and doesn't strip away the natural oils in your horse’s coat that give it that natural shine. Ivory dish soap is good for use on legs. Use lots of conditioner on your horse’s tail too, and rarely ever brush it and only if it’s completely detangled!

You can use a **color enhancer**, which really works and will make your horse’s coat brighter. Finish by spraying the entire body, including the mane and tail, with a skin conditioner. This makes your horse really soft, shiny and moisturized. No dry skin!!

**An extra horse show grooming tip: Do not apply this conditioner to the saddle area! It will be quite slippery and you don't want your saddle to slip backwards or to one side!** The day before, scrub and polish your tack. Everything should be well oiled and gorgeous.

At the in-gate, the must-haves in your grooming box are pretty simple since your horse is already spotless and ring ready! **You will only really need 3 main things up near the in-gate.**
The first is fly spray. You never want a ticked off horse before you enter the arena!

The second is baby wipes! Baby wipes are great because they wipe last minute dust and dirt off the legs, face, nose, mouth and even boots and reins.

And lastly, every grooming box at the in-gate should have hoof dressing! The dressing is the final touch to making a horse look polished and ring ready! Good luck!!

**Becoming a Horse Trainer: How to Get There**

Are you interested in becoming a horse trainer? Dream about making a career with horses at the center of it? Want to learn how to obtain horse trainer certification? You’ve come to the right place to learn about how to be a horse trainer.

**Experience is Key**

To become a horse trainer, you need lots of experience. You will need to spend a lot of time riding horses, or you won’t be able to follow your passion of being a trainer.

- Ride as many different types of horses that you can. The more you do this, the better you will become.
- You will also need to continually strive to improve your techniques and general horse knowledge.

**Certified Horse Training as a Career**

There is no centralized body of certification for becoming a horse trainer in the USA. However, there are many organizations that offer independent certification.

Many times, the best trainers were often those that had tons and tons of experience training horses. They had never set foot in a class, and didn't have an equestrian degree. It is still fairly common in the horse world today that trainers are not certified. It depends on the level the horse trainer is working at. In the good old days, anyone could call themselves a horse trainer, and you will still see that today.

**Horse Training Today and In the Future-Horse College**

Nowadays becoming a horse trainer as a career is more likely to involve higher education with a degree or certification combined with a lot of experience.
For a college degree, that means you will have to attend a school. This could be a four-year or two-year equine science program or equine management program at an accredited college.

Another option is to find a 4-year college with an intercollegiate team. You can pick a major and try out to ride on the team in college to gain more experience.

You will earn a Bachelor’s degree by studying for four years and an Associate’s degree for completing a two-year program.

Natural Horse Training Certification

Another way how to become a certified horse trainer is by attending a horsemanship school such as a natural horsemanship training course. There are a host of programs developed by natural horse trainers.

Breed or Discipline Specific Training Certifications

When becoming a horse trainer there are also certifications available that are breed or discipline specific.

For instance, if you are interested in hunters and jumpers, the United States Hunter Jumper Association or USHJA offers a trainer certification program.
If your passion is gaited horses such as Paso Finos, there is the Professional Paso Fino Trainers' Association. They offer certification in training of Paso Fino horses.

Other Certification Programs

Other programs are general horse related certifying organizations such as the Certified Horsemanship Association or CHA.

There are also college level programs based in natural principles that offer clicker training for horses as part of their curriculum.

When You Do Get the Opportunity to Train

You should already be an experienced rider before you start training a horse for riding. Start taking on easier project horses for other people to increase your experience in training. Whether that means you start out riding horses that need to be tuned up or assist an established trainer when starting a green horse, get out there and work!

Don’t be afraid to muck stalls, feed, care for horses or be a groom or exercise rider. You can learn a lot about equine behavior and becoming a horse trainer if you keep your eyes open in every situation. Every time you interact with a horse you are training it somehow!

Working Student: Still a Good Option

If you can, become an apprentice or working student for an established trainer. This is still one of the best ways to become a horse trainer. Start by figuring out what kind of training you are interested in and research established trainers that do what you are interested in.
Apprentice and working student positions are generally unpaid. You should receive lessons and knowledge in exchange for the work you provide.

- This is a position where your work ethic should shine.
- Trainers don’t have time nor the inclination to keep lazy people around!

I hope you have enjoyed learning about how to become a horse trainer. Remember, hard work, motivation and willingness to learn all you can about horses will get you a great start in training horses!

**Basic Horse Training:**
*A Natural Perspective*

For basic horse training to be most effective, you’ve got to have an understanding of **horse behavior** and his innate nature.

*Far too many trainers or riders don’t apply horse behavior in their training.*

Usually we think of basic learning as those simple things such as;

- being caught,
- groomed,
- tying,
- ready for farrier work,
- vet work,
- leading,
- being clipped,
- and loading on a trailer.
It should also include him understanding basic riding or driving aids such as;

- slow down or stop,
- go,
- back up,
- turn left and right,
- control the hindquarters, and
- control the forequarters.

If you own a horse or are going to train one, these basics are the backbone of training. Everything else is just fluff! If you can master these things, all the fancy stuff will be loads easier because of the quality of the foundation.

**Imagine This Scenario**

Someone, usually a beginner rider, goes out and does a rental. Usually it’s an hour, maybe more. The first half hour or so the rider is smacking the horse constantly (with anything from a rubber hose piece to a tree branch!) to get to leave the barn and continue moving (at the pace of a snail) while the horse grazes his way along the trail.

The last 10 minutes their supposed partner won’t slow down at all and is either on his way to running away or already is at a dead run for home. As a new rider (and even if you are experienced) this experience is both scary and frustrating, not to mention downright dangerous!

![Horse](https://lovehorsebackriding.com)

**Prey Animal Point of View**

The scenario above shows a mount lacking in basic training and response to the riders’ aids. He is also does not respect or trust his rider enough to respond, even though he may know what is being asked of him.

He has reverted to his innate nature.
Let’s look at this from his perspective for a minute. Someone that has no idea what they are doing flops up and slams down rudely on your back (ouch!). This person has been told to smack you repeatedly so that you’ll move forward, which you don’t very easily because you’ve been smacked so many times it doesn’t hurt anymore and means absolutely nothing.

By the time you get your head pointed back to the barn (with yummy hay and some rest!), you figure you’ll get there as quickly as you can! That is where all your buddies are too, and you miss them! Let’s go! So, then you get going really fast (that is what the person wanted, right?) and suddenly you have a screaming, flailing, person that is scaring you to death and yanking the heck out of your mouth that has a metal bit in it.

That person up there may or may not make it back to the barn with you and you don’t care, you RUN for it because you KNOW there is safety at the barn and all that commotion up there is freaking you out! This horse has learned over time that the aids given don’t mean anything and that the rider lacks experience to follow through on reinforcing these basic horse training aids.

You Must Be Effective When Training Horses

I am not implying that you need to be harsh or mean or anything like that when teaching a horse. I use the above example for two reasons.

First, it shows that horses are herd animals and are hardwired to find safety and comfort in every situation. The barn is their most comfortable and safe place where all their buddies are!

The second reason is to help you understand that you need to be a good enough leader for your partner and that he needs to feel safe enough to follow your direction. You need to be effective enough with your mount to be understood and have built a relationship with him that he feels he can trust you. That doesn’t mean harsh!

Effective means you got your point across to him in a way he can understand.

He needs to understand what it is you are asking of him, and you have to give him a chance to figure it out and respond appropriately.
Pressure Motivates and Release Teaches

The basic horse training principle in natural horsemanship is to release pressure when he has done the RIGHT thing. If you don’t release the pressure, he won’t learn that he got the answer right.

That may mean you reward his TRY to do something right.

Use the above scenario. The horse gets smacked and smacked repeatedly and the smacking doesn’t ever hardly stop. If he tries to move forward at all, they just keep smacking. He can’t figure it out, so he figures that is just part of his life, being smacked and just tolerating it because he has no idea how to get it to stop.

It Always Goes Back to the Basics

If you want to learn how to train a horse, get real good with your basics. Teach him to catch you, to load himself on a trailer, to stand quietly for the vet and farrier, and to stay with you leading so well you can walk, trot, and canter from the ground even without a rope.

When riding get your cues so subtle that he follows the energy in your body to change gaits.
**Groundwork and a Natural Approach**

Use basic groundwork first. I am a huge fan of natural horse training because it uses the nature of how the horse thinks to maximize results. Natural horsemanship considers his herd mentality and unique personality type.

Natural basic horse training is to use approach and retreat with the horse in all that you do to get him comfortable with new experiences and things. It also means that you apply pressure in stages and release when you get a positive response. It is simple and basic, but it isn’t always easy to follow through properly as timing is critical.

**Ways to Learn and Trainers to Try**

If you want to learn more, visit my horse training tips page. Many natural horsemanship trainers have home study courses, books, training DVD’s as well as clinics available to help you master basics.

**Horse Riding Rental: What you Need to Know Before You Saddle Up**

A horse rental can be one of the most fun and affordable ways to enjoy a horse.

There is no long-term commitment and the sky is the limit on the variety of places to ride! Horse rentals are available all over the globe to those on vacation. You can also find stables close to home for riding a horse your very first time.

**What is a Horse-Riding Rental?**

A horse ride where you pay an hourly fee is a rental. Usually the minimum rental is one hour and the cost will be between $25 to $50 per hour. The most common form of rentals are for trail rides.
A stable will offer rides ranging from one hour up to a full day of riding. Some stables also offer overnight camping trips or multi-day rides where you ride from one inn to the next.

Other outfitters may rent you a horse for a whole week or month to use on your own for a hunting or pack trip.

**Where Can I Ride?**

Horse rides can take place almost anywhere and can allow you to see places you never would have before! If you've never ridden before, start locally at a nearby stable.

Do you dream of riding a horse in one of these places?

- The beaches of Costa Rica,
- The Blue Ridge Mountains
- Bryce Canyon
- Ireland
- Kentucky Horse Park

Or a dream destination such as:

- Iceland

Many local and more exotic destinations offer a horse-riding rental option so you can enjoy the world from the back of a horse! All you have to do is start dreaming of where you want to ride.

- Where do **YOU** want to ride?
Guided or Non-Guided

Guided Rides

Most horseback rides on the trails are guided for safety reasons. That means an experienced horse person that is familiar with the horses and trails will be with you the whole ride.

First,

- **Your guide is your go-to person for any question about riding your horse or safety.**
- Your guide should be CPR/First Aid certified.

Don't forget to ask if they are certified when you call to book your ride.

If you have any problems while riding you **MUST** notify your guide immediately!

Guides generally know about the history of your destination and the scenery you will see on your ride.

Non-Guided Rides

Non-guided rides are not common anymore. This type of ride is where you rent a horse and you have a start and end time for the horse rental.

- You explore on your own during that time without any help from the staff.
- For beginner riders this is especially dangerous. I don’t recommend this type of ride unless you are very experienced with riding horses and navigating unknown territory.

There are too many things that can go wrong with inexperienced riders on horses when help is not available.

On non-guided rides horses often form bad habits and **take advantage of riders** by

- Refusing to leave the barn
- Constantly turning towards the barn
- Running full tilt towards home
- Eating grass non-stop
- Bucking on the trail
- Kicking at other horses on the ride

Any of those scenarios can be terrifying for an inexperienced rider!
Horse Riding Rental Legal Preparation

You’ll have to:

- sign a liability release, or waiver before you ride
- Call ahead if you have children that want to ride

Different stables have different policies for kids and at what age or if they are allowed to ride.

The child’s parent or legal guardian will need to sign the waiver for each minor.

- Some stables may allow “doubles” for younger kids.

A double is where the child rides on the same horse as the adult.

- Most stables will require and provide approved horseback riding helmets for minors (and sometimes all riders) because of liability issues.

Riding Experience

The guide or wrangler will ask you about your past riding experience.

- It is very important that you are HONEST in your response.

If it’s been awhile, or you’ve never ridden say so!

This will allow the guide to match you up with the perfect horsey partner.

- If you overstate your abilities, you may find yourself on a horse you shouldn’t be on or one that you won’t enjoy.

While most stables only have horses that a variety of beginner level riders can ride, some will have horses that may be quicker, more stubborn or have less experience on the trail.

Some very experienced riders will seek out this type of horse, so

- If that is not the type of horse you want, make sure you say so!
Who Is Going?

A guide usually takes a whole group on a ride. That could mean up to 10-12 riders will be on the same ride. If there are two guides (one in front and another in the back called a drag rider) then you could have up to 20 or more riders.

In most situations it won’t be just your family or friends taking a ride together. If you want your group only as a ride, call ahead and see if you can make a separate reservation. Many stables will try to accommodate your request or will do so for an additional fee.

Rides are usually done single file behind the guide with those that are least experienced or the most afraid closest to the guide. The guide will tell you how to steer, stop, and go, but a rental is not a riding lesson.

Be Prepared

If you want to be prepared for your horse riding rental check out my horse riding for beginners page for some pointers both on the ground and in the saddle. This article also covers what you should wear!

Planning a longer horse adventure or trail ride?

- Take a few horseback riding classes in an arena at a local stable to learn some basics
- Lessons will boost your confidence before venturing out into the great wide open.
- I strongly recommend some lessons if you are doing a longer ride, overnight trip, staying at a dude ranch or going on a horse-riding vacation.

Be sure to listen to and follow your guide’s instructions.

- The guide has your safety in mind with all of their directions!
Listen when they tell you to keep a certain amount of space between your horse and the tail of the horse in front of you.

You don’t want to be on the receiving end of a kick meant for your horse. Ouch!

**Here are a few other horse rental tips for you!**

1. **Always listen to and follow your guide’s instructions.**

They are trained in how to manage large groups of riders.

2. **Leave anything that can fall off you in the car.**

Sometimes the office of the stable may check things for you. This includes:

- cell phones
- wallets
- keys
- jewelry
- sunglasses

It’s no fun to get back from a ride and not have the keys to your car! You wouldn’t believe how many wallets, car keys and sunglasses I’ve found on the trails!

3. **Don’t bring backpacks, bags or big floppy things to carry with you on the ride.**

Besides throwing you off balance, these things can *spook a horse* and put you in for a ride you’re not likely to forget for all the wrong reasons. Even if the horse is used to it, I still don’t recommend them. You just don’t know what will upset a horse.

If they offer a saddlebag to put your things in that is fine.
4. **Make sure you are ready for the outdoors.**

A horse riding rental almost always means you'll be outside. That means having put on sunblock/bug spray already before you arrive. You may also need a rain jacket, but many stables offer a slicker in bad weather that is already on the saddle. If you are on a longer ride especially in the higher elevations will need to layer your clothing.

5. **Use the restroom before you mount up and head down the trail.**

You don’t want to wind up having to stop the ride and trek way out away from the group to use nature’s facilities. In addition, with all that bouncing around you can imagine how needing to go use the restroom could be quite unpleasant! Although most guides will help you get back on, it won’t be as easy unless you can find a rock or something to stand on to help you up!

Have fun! You’re going to have a blast with your horse-riding rental so go out, smile and enjoy your horse and the scenery. There are few things more satisfying than seeing the world from the back of a horse!

**Top 5 Horse Training Tips**
Horse Training Tip No. 1.

*Pick the horse that is suited best for your needs.*

Her mane flies in the wind, her coat glistens almost gold in the sun over her sleek muscles. She is young and spirited, and you can see that as she playfully trots around the field. The seller has given you warning that she hasn't had much training yet, but all you see is the two of you cantering into the sunset. She turns to you with her oh-so-sweet doe brown eyes, both ears pricked and all attention on you. You read the question in her expression, "Will you take me home?" You are so totally in love with this filly.

But she’s not for you.

“**Green on green makes black and blue**” is a common quote in the equine world that means a new rider and a green (inexperienced) horse make for lots of bruises, headache and heartache. Mismatched horses and riders are one of the biggest reasons people that come in with a passion for riding get out of horses.

Many times well intentioned parents will buy a young horse for their child so they can "grow up and learn together." Unless the young rider is a very confident and experienced already with basic horse training skills this is a bad combination. They can’t get the horse to do what they want, or it is even downright dangerous. They will lose interest and move on. Don’t be one of those people! Pick the right horse from the start!

So, take it from an experienced horse trainer; one of my very top and simplest horse training tips is simply to pick the right horse.

How can you pick the right horse? It is partially your gut instinct but more your plan and trying to remain as objective as possible through the process of seeking your next partner. Write down what you are going to use the horse for, what his current training level is vs. where you want to be, how much time you have available for training each week, and your competition level timeline and goals, if any. You should also enlist the help of a knowledgeable horse person or trainer which brings us to our next horse training tip.

Horse Training Tip No. 2.

*Have a good trainer or have an extremely knowledgeable horse person be your outside opinion.*

Yes, you can tell when your horse woke up on the wrong side of the corral, which lead he doesn’t like to take, how he shies at the shadow cast just the wrong way and his favorite treats. That familiarity is what makes you a great partnership. It is also what can turn your relationship stale and even dangerous.
People are great at making assumptions with their horse, while horses live in the moment every single day. So, here is another of my top horse training tips: When things get tough, and they most certainly will at some time, it is very helpful to have that knowledgeable and objective person you can count on to help set you and your horse straight again.

It is SO easy to just train your horse based on your emotions. “He must hate me” is a common phrase from riders when things don’t go the way they want them to. **Horses just don’t think that way.** They think in terms of comfort and discomfort. You need to understand this when learning about horses. They can hang onto past things that have hurt them. If you are having problems you haven’t been able to improve or get under control within a few training sessions you should ask for an outside opinion from a professional or trusted friend with loads of experience before things get worse.

**Horse Training Tip No. 3.**

**The relationship with your horse should ALWAYS start on the ground.**

I don’t know why a lot of people believe that if they just buy a horse, saddle it up and go ride that the horse should just blindly follow orders like some sort of robot. It’s a living, breathing animal. It’s not an ATV or motorcycle! If you want to ride something that never has an opinion then you need to get you an ATV for sure!

Horses are herd animals and that means that in the wild they have a herd leader that calls all the shots like who eats and drinks first. They have prey animal instincts to run from danger! That instinct is still in them even as they sit all pretty with their hair in braids in their barn.

If your horse doesn’t see you as a leader worthy of being followed, he is more than likely to use his own ideas and instincts. These may not be ideas that you agree with. In fact,
so many problems with horses come from him not trusting or understanding us humans.

They don’t just think we are going hurt them with the clippers, they think they are going to die because their leg is wounded when they hear and feel the buzzing on their legs! In the wild, a horse cannot survive with a damaged leg because it can’t run away! The instinct in the horse is strong to preserve themselves from perceived danger, which is a lot of the things we do to them. We have to prove to the horse we don’t want him for dinner.

When you have a language of communication established first through quality ground training, it will dramatically increase the bond you have with your horse while you are riding. He is going to be more likely to trust you and see you as his leader which will make your experience with him better all around. The majority of natural horse training programs have you start out on the ground for this reason. Another good source of information on groundwork can be found on horse training DVDs. Out of all the horse training tips, this one is more overlooked than you might think, especially for recreational riders who tend to just saddle up and ride!

**Horse Training Tip No. 4.**

**You must have a plan!**

**What are you trying to accomplish with your horse in training?** What do you want to do together and how? Do you want him to be confident on the trail with a large group of riders, or do you want him to jump, run barrels, or do dressage?

It is just like not having a destination but having a great roadmap or GPS. It means you cannot be lost because you don’t know where you are going. If you don’t have a plan with your horse, then you will never arrive where you want to be! Just riding all the time with no purpose is bound to get you both bored, and your horse sour!

Having a training plan that is **broken down into manageable chunks and has a timeline** based on your time and takes into account the horse’s current training level and his learning ability will drastically cut down on frustration for the both of you!
**Horse Training Tip No. 5.**

*Bad behavior does not mean you need harsher horse training equipment.*

You love to race barrels! The wind in your hair, the thrill of the pattern, your heart beats so fast it feels like it is going to pop out of your chest as you are running down the last stretch. You love it so much you do it over and over again to practice and every weekend at the rodeo. You can't figure out why your horse doesn't want to slow down at the end, or for that matter why he is so hot going in. So you get a bigger, harsher bit. You have to be able to stop him at the end of your run! Then he throws his head up high in the air with the new bit fighting you and adding on time to your next several runs. So you add a tie-down to physically keep him from putting his head up. That should do the trick, except it doesn't.

This is a downward spiral and will teach your horse nothing other than not to trust you and that being ridden means pain! He may eventually slow down but it won't be because of respect for you or emotional control on his part. **If his behavior is "bad" you need to look at the cause, not just the symptom.** We train a horse by allowing him to repeat behaviors over and over again. If you take him to run barrels too many times in a row, he will start anticipating way before and won't be able to wind down until way after you would like him to! It doesn't mean he needs a bigger bit or a tie-down, it means he needs better training and more attention paid to his emotions.

**An Introduction to Training Young Horses**

Oh, so you are interested in training young horses? I bet you just can’t resist the sweet fuzzy mane and long wobbly legs of a newborn foal, or the frisky antics of the 2 and 3 year old’s!

It is so easy to **fall in love** with young horses!

But beyond the cuteness of a young horse there is much they need to learn to live a safe and fulfilling life in the world of people.

**A solid foundation can greatly reduce equine behavior problems down the road.**

Young horse training requires a **high level of horsemanship.**

- There is much YOU will need to know and learn to be successful in young horse training.
- Learning how to train a young horse is not for everyone
- Young horses can be very unpredictable
A Comparison of Training Young Horses vs. Training a Dog

Imagine you just brought home a new puppy to live in your home. They are cute and cuddly and oh-so-sweet! They are fluffy, fun to play with and a puppy nip doesn’t hurt that bad. What if the puppy goes potty in the house, and he runs off out the front door and won’t come back when you call him!

It is cute and somewhat funny when the puppy is little but you wouldn’t be laughing if it was a full grown St. Bernard doing his business on your carpet.

The bite from a full-sized dog can cause serious injury.

What does this have to do with training young horses?

- A horse that is not full-sized can put you in the hospital or kill you!

This information is not to scare you but when training young horses, you must always remember and respect what a scared horse is capable of.

- Horses are prey animals and don't understand punishment
- When horses get scared, they FEAR for their LIFE. They aren't just being "difficult." They think the situation will kill them even if you know it won't.
- We are predators and often want to treat a horse like we would a puppy but this simply doesn't work and often backfires.
Groundwork will Lead to Success in the Saddle

Ground training young horses will build a language of communication that will transfer over to when you start riding him.

- Teach him to flex his head around to each side from the ground
  
  Flexing the head around to one side is preparation for a one-rein stop when mounted

- Make sure he is completely OK with the saddle, stirrups etc. flapping around at the walk, trot, and canter while you are on the ground.
- Build his confidence in you as a leader
- Build his confidence in his surroundings and prepare him for riding by exposing him to a variety of obstacles such as barrels, tarps, hula-hoops, plastic bags (flags), water and noises

Better to find out that he is bothered by something BEFORE you are up on his back!

- It is much safer for you to build his confidence and keep yours by having a strong ground training program.

Can You?

Here are some checks to use with young horse training to see how you are doing:

- Can you halter the horse easily and lead him at a walk, trot, and back up? Is he respectful of your space and does he stay with you?
- Can you flap the saddle pad around and rub it all over his body without him becoming fearful?
Can you saddle him *without* him needing to be in cross-ties, or tied at all?
Does he willingly accept the cinch or girth?

Be polite when tightening the cinch. Not too much and not too fast

Make sure it *IS* tight enough so the saddle doesn't roll. Then move him around a bit and tighten it some more.

Is the horse OK with ropes near his face, neck and legs?

These are just a few ideas to get you started.

**Basic Skills All Young Horses Should Know**

Teaching the young horse to step on and over things will build his confidence for loading in your trailer.

Start by teaching basic skills such as:

- haltering
- yielding to pressure
- Being groomed
- Preparation for farrier and vet procedures

When you are training young horses for the farrier, he needs to be able to pick up his feet, let you hold them between your legs, and tap on his feet with a hoof pick to simulate shoeing.

For the vet he needs to be OK with you handling everywhere on his body including under the tail, in the ears etc.

- bathing and clipping
- loading on a horse trailer
When the horse is older than a year, but especially when training a 2-year-old horse, you can introduce:

- wearing the saddle, saddle pad and bridle.

Use a rope hackamore when you start riding. You CAN still teach him to carry a regular bridle with a bit but don't use it until he goes well in the hackamore.

The standard training bits for young horses are a variety of snaffle bits such as eggbutt, d-ring, and full cheek varieties.

Another favorite is the *french link* or 3 jointed snaffle bit. It does not collapse like a regular snaffle and pinch the tongue and/or lips.

Make wearing the tack part of the horse's routine so he becomes confident with each piece of equipment.

**Heading Towards the First Rides**

The **round pen** or a **small fenced area** is the best place to be for the first ride when training young horses.

- You should start by hopping all around him to get him used to when you will be using the stirrup.
- Then get him confident with you putting a foot in the stirrup and lifting yourself repeatedly up and down on both sides.
- When he is good with that you can lean over him with a lead rope or the reins in one hand. Do this several times.
- Then get all the way on and off from both sides.
- Get on and just stand there and don't ask him to do anything.
- Approach and retreat is very important when training the young horse.
Do each step in order and don't move on until he is completely OK, even BORED with what you are doing.

This may take several sessions.

- When training young horses the most important advice and training tip is to **go at the horse's pace**.

**Beginning to Direct His Movement**

After enough sessions that he is confident with you up there as a passenger, you can start to direct him.

- Take it slow and try not to make him feel wrong if he makes a mistake.
- Be gentle but as firm as it takes to get the desired response.
- Remember to quit when he gives just one positive reaction and then build on that. That way he will try harder for you next time.

Enjoy your experience training young horses and remember to take things as **slow as the horse needs you to**!

It is your job to get him ready for all the experiences he is bound to have in his life. You are the key to his success in the human world by what you teach him about people and the things they do.

He is the ultimate judge of when he is ready to accept a rider but you must be in tune enough with him to know when that is!

How to Train A Horse: **The Steps To Get You Started**

So you want to learn **how to train a horse**? You have come to the right place! Let's get started.

**The first thing to look at when learning how to train a horse is your experience level when riding and handling horses**
If you don’t have any **experience** with riding horses at all, you shouldn’t attempt to start training a horse to ride right away.

- It takes confidence and knowledge about what response you need from the horse in order to teach the horse. This comes through experience.
- If you are really new to horses you won’t have enough confidence and know-how and you could wind up getting hurt.
- If you want to learn how to train your horse and you lack experience, start with groundwork.

If you do have a few years’ worth of really solid riding skills and are a confident rider, you may be able to attempt to train a horse.

- Pick an easy first project.
  
  This could be a horse with a mild issue that you feel confident about retraining.

- Don’t start with the wild mustang that has never been handled!

If you are riding or around horses the term "training" is deceiving.

*Every time you interact with your horse you are teaching him something, whether you intend to or not.*
Make sure you are teaching him POSITIVE things!

The second thing to look at when learning how to train a horse is the horse’s current training level in relation to your goals and current experience level

I want to share an example with you to illustrate this point.

My first horse had never had a rider on her back and I was just 12 years old when I bought her as my first training project. Since she was not broke, you might think I was in over my head but here are the other circumstances in relation to my experience and the horse’s experience.

- I had loads of time and desire to learn how to start training a horse to ride
- Four years of riding lessons and experience on several different types of horses.
- Experienced trainers around (including the former owner) to help me reach this goal.
- Supportive and experienced horse friends that were willing to help out.
- This horse was a formerly starved Arabian horse that had been rescued by the trainer I bought her from.
- The trainer had already put in significant time with groundwork on my new horse to get her prepared for riding.
- I knew the horse because it was boarded at my barn.
The trainer was too big to ride the horse. Her growth had been stunted from starvation.

At barely 13hh the trainer thought she would be a good first training project for me given my experience level and size, and I agreed.

My goal was to back this mare and teach her basics at the walk, trot, and canter.

So, what that **means for you** is:

- Be HONEST with yourself about your abilities and current experience level
- Confidence is easy to lose and hard to get back.

Just ask anyone that has had a fall off a horse they "didn't expect". You don't want to get in over your head when you are just learning how to train a horse. That is dangerous for you and the horse.

- Have a good support system in case you get stuck
- Pick a horse that matches your CURRENT ability level

The less experience you have the **easier** your training project should be.

**The third thing you need consider is the horse's temperament and his view of people**

Look for a horse that is pretty easy going for the first several horses you train.

- Check to see if he is curious, friendly, and interested in people.
- It will be much easier to train a horse that doesn’t already have a negative view of people.
- Undoing bad training or abuse is much harder and dangerous.

**The fourth thing you should know is what type of training method you are going to use.**
There are as many training methods as there are breeds of horses out there!

- Do a lot of research on different trainers and fall back on what you have already learned while riding and caring for horses.
- Watch different types of training DVD’s and find a method that makes sense to you and seems fair to the horse.

Once you find a method you should **stick with it** unless you find it just isn't effective for that horse.

Switching around to a bunch of different methods, especially in the beginning will only confuse you and the horse. Be consistent, and as your skills grow you can try different approaches. Later when you are more confident you can blend what you are currently using with something new.

**The fifth thing to do when you want to learn how to train a horse is to keep a good written training plan and follow it.**

Break your training goals down into manageable sections and write down the smaller milestones and time frame when you can reach them.

For instance, if the horse you are training has never worn a bridle, it would be a good smaller goal to introduce and have him be comfortable with things like

- Being able to have his tongue and lips touched without fear or aversion
- Having basic steering and commands with a rope halter or bit less bridle first

Get him used to the bridle you are going to use by setting these goals,

- Introduce it slowly. Let him smell it, sniff it.
- Make the bit a pleasant experience

Adding flavoring to the bit, or a treat when you put on his bridle may encourage him to take and enjoy the bit

- Let him carry it for a week or more before you use it
- Do some ground driving first so he understands the communication from the ground without the extra work of carrying a rider

**By tracking your progress with goals, you can see how far you have come and any gaps in your training.**

Learning how to train a horse takes a lot of time and patience on your part. It is an art form born from experience that you keep refining with each horse you work with.
Remember we are all ultimately, students of the horse. They will teach YOU much more if you are willing to listen.

**An Introduction to Clicker Training for Horses**

Clicker training for horses is a relatively new training style that is catching on fast with horse owners. First used for training dolphins starting in the late 1960's, clicker training has been successfully used with all sorts of animals from wolves to elephants.

It is possible to successfully alter undesirable behaviors that would otherwise be dangerous or just obnoxious, as well as teach new and other desirable behaviors.

This method is based on using food rewards in conjunction with a precisely timed audible cue or “click.” It is the click in equine clicker training that tells the horse what he is doing right.

**Have I Seen This Method Used Before?**

If you have ever been to Sea World or a larger aquarium you have probably seen clicker training in action. With dolphins you would recognize it as the wave of the trainer's hand through the air that cues the dolphins to jump out of the water or the use of a series of whistle blasts in conjunction with other tricks.

Today clicker training is more commonly associated to the average pet owner with dog training. Many obedience classes offer clicker training for puppies and dogs as a positive, superior and more humane training technique than the traditional “choke chain” method.

**Is it Just for Teaching Tricks?**

Most definitely not! Horses can learn some really fun tricks like taking mail out of a mailbox, dunking a basketball into a child sized hoop, or even laying down or taking a bow.
This “trick” training will be of benefit to your horse in teaching him how to think through something. He will also feel smarter when he learns something new!

Beyond that and most importantly, clicker training for horses also supplies a positive, non-aggressive solution to many common behavioral issues a horse owner may be facing.

For horse owners clicker training horses can give you solutions and tips how to cope with everyday ground and stall manners, groundwork as well as used to improve riding cues.

**How Does it Work? Clicker Training Basics**

Clicker training for horses or any animal has two phases, teaching and shaping. For a basic example let’s say you wanted your horse to pick up an orange cone off the ground and hand it to you.

First you teach the horse that you become a vending machine for his favorite treat when he does a specific behavior, and then you shape it into the behavior you want while using appropriately timed clicks and treats.

You will need a plastic clicker which can be bought at most local pet stores or online as well as your horses' favorite treat such as a commercially prepared treat, carrot pieces, a bit of grain, peppermint, or a sugar cube.

**Phase 1: Teaching the Behavior (Touch the Cone or Target)**
When using clicker training for horses to teach this behavior, start by teaching your horse to touch the cone or target with his nose. First, put your horse in a stall with a stall guard chain on so he can’t barge into you.

Stand outside the stall holding a cone out in front of your horse at nose level. Wait for your horse to touch the cone with his nose. You would click right at that moment he touches the cone with his nose (you will take the cone away each time and reintroduce it with each repetition) and then follow immediately with a treat.

If he doesn’t touch the cone right away you would reward him with a click and treat when he puts his nose towards the cone whether he meant to or not.

Get the behavior of him touching the cone consistent when the cone is right in front of him first, then move it off to the side, up higher and then down lower. You want to get him consistent with touching the cone anywhere you place it and while it is on the ground.

**Phase 2: Shaping the Behavior**

When your horse can consistently touch the cone all around and while on the ground the next part is shaping the behavior further towards your end goal of picking up the cone and handing it to you.

In this instance instead of just touching the cone, you would next reward him for putting it in his mouth which is met with a click and again an immediate food reward.

This is called setting a marker, or very specific behavior that you reward. Then you would reward him swinging it upward (a new marker) and so on until he hands you the cone and you reward that.

**Timing is Key**

By now you can see that clicker training for horses is a very positive incremental and reward-based process. You reward the desired behavior and ignore everything else.

Your timing in giving the click and rewarding the behavior at the precise moment it occurs is the most important element to success. If you are too late, you may reward the wrong behavior. Too soon and you will lose ground.

It is also very important when shaping the behavior not to jump too fast from one marker to the next. For instance, you wouldn’t expect him to go from touching the cone with his nose while you are holding it, straight to him touching it while on the ground, it is too big a gap for him to figure out.

Small increments and appropriately timed repetition using the clicks and treats will help your horse feel like a winner! Then he will try harder to learn.
This is a very simple introduction to clicker training for horses and how to start shaping behaviors. Although the example given was using a cone, clicker training horses can easily be extended to more useful purposes once you establish the basics with your horse.

Here are some other uses to think about when using clicker training for horses:

- What about having your horse bridle himself?
- Stand still for Grooming?
- Pick his feet up for you?
- Put on his own saddle pad?
- Bend on command while on the ground or being ridden?
- Find more impulsion while being ridden?
- Pick up your riding crop for you!

The possibilities of using clicker training for horses are endless! Besides being lots of fun, it will make both you and your horse feel like a winner!

A Horse Training Career: What Does It Take?  
Things to Consider

A horse training career tends to be one of the first jobs that come to mind when you think about making a living with horses. When you love riding horses and are trying to figure out what to do with your life, becoming a trainer can seem like a natural fit.

While a career as a horse trainer can be very rewarding, there is also a lot more to it than just riding a horse for someone. I’d like to explore some of the other areas you’ll need to consider before jumping into a career training horses.

Training Horses is Really About Helping People, Too

If you love serving both people and horses, a horse training career may be right for you. You may think a career in equine training is all about horses, but it has a lot to do with helping and teaching people.

Behind every animal that needs to be trained is an owner or rider that is hoping for a positive change through what you do.

Whether they want him trail broke, able to load on a trailer, or jumping three-foot courses with flying lead changes, they will have a specific goal for the horse in mind.

It will be your responsibility to do your best to reach those goals for the owner.

It is your job to communicate with the client in a positive way.
Horseback Riding Instructors and Trainers

Many trainers are also horseback riding instructors, and often the two terms are used interchangeably. At minimum, a trainer would show the owner how to implement the training they have done. On the other end of the spectrum they may also be the rider's regular instructor.

Education, Experience and Pay

Training horses as a career can be as varied as all the horse training methods available. Some only train horses for the movies and other forms of entertainment.

- **Check out all of your options and decide what program or course of study will best suit your career goals and interests.**

In most cases if you are in it for the money, you are in the wrong field. The median annual wage for a horse trainer is just $26,580. The passion and rewards of doing what you love are what draw many to this field.

Employee or Independent Contractor?

A horse training career in the USA most often means that

**You are in business for yourself**

Some very large stables may offer horse training jobs as an employee, but most horse trainers are independent contractors.

An independent contractor means that:

- you will set your own hours,
- provide your own equipment,
• are responsible for tracking all of your own income and expenses,
• filing quarterly estimates of taxes and paying them
• work at generating your own business.

Although a stable may hire you as a horse trainer and will possibly give you referrals, YOU will ultimately be responsible for building your own business.

Often these types of positions are paid on commission. That means that the stable may send you a client and you are paid a certain percentage of the horse training fee.

A Hard Business Lesson

I had one horse related job that pulled the switcharoo on me after working there for a few years. The last year I worked there, (I quit because of this) I thought I was an employee at tax time like I had been in years past.

I found out the barn owner decided to make me an independent contractor at tax time. That was a year’s worth of taxes I had to pay out of pocket and all at once when I wasn’t planning on it! Ouch!

I assumed my employer had been taking taxes out all year because
that is what she had done before and I didn't have a contract.

Whoops!

Sometimes people may try to be dishonest with you.

**A written work agreement is the first step in protecting yourself.** It will define what type of working arrangement you will have.

Before you start your horse training career, you would be wise to talk to a local CPA or accountant that specializes in small businesses. This will help you start to become educated on the business aspects of a horse training career.

**The Physical Demands of a Horse Training Career**

Besides the business aspect of a horse training career there is the physical demands to consider.

**While it is very rewarding to train horses it is a very physically demanding career.**

Long hours often outside in the elements are to be expected. Horses are unpredictable. If you have a bad fall while training it can put you out of work. Make sure you are ready for all the possibilities.

**Liability and Insurance**

Most farms will require you to have liability insurance to train horses on their property. Do your research on what the policy does and does not cover, and where. This can save you major headaches down the road just by picking the right policy for the situation.

In Summary: Know what kind of trainer you want to be. Get the education and experience you need. Be ready and plan for the business aspect of your horse training career. Then go out and get yourself started in one of the most rewarding careers with horses!

**Natural Horsemanship Trainers: Find the Right One for You**

Natural horsemanship trainers abound these days for good reason. They have a lot to offer. Find a program that works well for you and your horse.

From John Lyons who is considered “America’s Most Trusted Horseman” to Karen Rohlf who teaches Dressage, Naturally, there is something for everyone and every discipline. Find the right match for you below.
Buck Brannaman

Buck may be the most well known of trainers now for the new movie featuring his personal life and his training methods. In Buck, a winner at the Sundance Film Festival, he touts that more often than not, he is “helping horses with people problems.” Buck tours the country giving 4-day clinics ranging from the basics to cow working. He also has DVD’s such as “The Making of a Bridle Horse” and “Colt Breaking.” Buck has a quiet, gentle spirit.

John and Josh Lyons-Lyons Legacy Horsemanship

John Lyons is a pioneer in the way horse clinics have been delivered. His son Josh is following in his dad’s footsteps. John has been running clinics since 1980. His son Josh has a whole line of educational DVD’s from educating your equine in the round pen to rollbacks and sliding stops.

This father and son duo offer the Lyons Legacy Certification program. There are 3 levels of certification for natural horsemanship trainers. The Certification Course is the first level, Accredited Trainer Course, and then the highest is the Master Trainers Course.

Pat Parelli-Parelli Natural Horsemanship

Pat Parelli has been teaching clinics worldwide since 1981. Pat has learned from master natural horseman and trainers such as Ronny Willis, Ray Hunt, and Tom Dorrance.
He and his wife Linda currently study with the German classical dressage trainer Walter Zettl and are passing that information on to their students that ride in all disciplines. Parelli has also offered spectator seminars on colt-starting and gentling wild mustangs.

Parelli Natural Horsemanship has the Parelli Savvy Club for members, courses at the Parelli Center (now including horse driving training courses), training DVD’s, equipment and Parelli saddles. They have many certified instructors offering natural horsemanship courses and clinics worldwide. Certification for natural trainers using Parelli start as 1-star trainee’s (who can teach groundwork training only) and go all the way up to 6-star master instructors. Pat also wrote the Western Horseman natural horsemanship book “Natural Horse-Man-Ship.”

**Clinton Anderson-Downunder Horsemanship**

Clinton Anderson is an Australian native with a reining background who now lives in the USA. Clinton tours the country on his Walkabout Tour, and has a members’ group called the No Worries Club. He also offers certified horses trained by his apprentices as well as home study training DVD’s. He also offers certification in his method for natural horsemanship trainers.

**Chris Cox Horsemanship**

Chris Cox has a Ride the Journey Tour where he features his natural horsemanship approach. Chris is very attuned to reading the horses’ body language, especially the horses’ eyes. Unlike other trainers, he does not use a round pen but prefers a square pen to “corner” the equine and add pressure when needed. Chris has a progressive DVD course as well as offering 3 and 6-day progressive horsemanship courses.

**Monty Roberts**

Monty Roberts learned the body language of the horse by observing wild mustangs in Nevada as a boy. He later went on to call this the language of “equus.” Roberts has run Flag is Up Farms, a Thoroughbred Facility since 1966. Known as “The Man Who Listens to Horses” Monty Roberts’ “Join-Up” method was put in the limelight after the publishing of his first horse training book “The Man Who Listens to Horses” in 1996.

Who encouraged him to write this book? None other than Queen Elizabeth II of England, an avid horsewoman who was so impressed with his demonstration she formally endorsed him and urged him to publish his work. Monty offers learning opportunities at his farm, and courses such as long lining and horsemanship 101. He offers Willing Partner horses which are trained according to his principles.
Karen Rohlf-Dressage, Naturally

Karen Rohlf combines the art of dressage with natural horsemanship methods. She has studied natural horsemanship directly under Pat and Linda Parelli. Karen has 20 years’ experience training dressage studying under “O” certified trainer Anne Gribbons. She has passed her USDF “L” judge with distinction, and was accepted into the “r” program. Beyond that though, I have personally audited one of her clinics and she has a wonderful sense of humor and a thorough, effective, yet very pleasant teaching style.

I love this quote from Karen

“The physical training is not the only thing necessary to do dressage, or any sport. The partnership, the mental and emotional connection between human and horse, is absolutely necessary in order to maximize the physical potential. Of course, if we train well, we improve them physically as we improve them emotionally and vice versa.” Karen Rohlf

That about says it all about one of my favorite trainers! Karen offers clinics around the country as well as at her farm, Temenos Fields in Florida. She also has written the book "Dressage Naturally, Results in Harmony" and has a 6-part DVD set called Results in Harmony.

Craig Cameron - “Complete Horsemanship from Beginning to Winning”

Natural horsemanship trainer Craig Cameron has a long history in ranching and studied natural horsemanship principles under master horseman Ray Hunt. He is known as the “Cowboy’s Clinician.” He has written the Western Horseman Book “Ride Smart” as well as “Living Western.” His DVD’s include “Ride Smart, What Knot to Do, and Back to Basics.” He also offers a full line of equipment including his own saddles.
**Dennis Reis-Universal Horsemanship**

Dennis Reis has been teaching his Universal Horsemanship natural training method for 15 years now. He has studied under several trainers and has his own club, The “No Dust” club. He also goes on tour as the “No Dust” tour nationwide. Dennis offers clinics, official clinicians and a four-course home study package.

**Stacy Westfall- Westfall Horsemanship**

Stacy is famous for her bridle-less winning ride in 2003 at the National Reining Horse Association Freestyle Class. When I say bridle-less, I mean nothing on the horses’ head, not even a neck rope! In 2006 she turned more heads and won top honors for a bareback and bridle-less ride during the American Quarter Horse Congress. Stacy offers training DVD’s with topics ranging from “Teaching Your Horse to Bow”, a form of trick training to “Bridle-less Riding” as well as clinics. She currently does not have any certified natural horsemanship trainers available under the Westfall method but is looking to do so in the future.

**Natural Horsemanship Trainers: What to Look For**

When choosing natural horsemanship trainers your style of learning and the trainers’ style of teaching and how those gel together is important. Attending a tour stop is a great way to get exposure, but you will probably want to dig some more and learn about each trainers’ philosophy.

Look at what educational opportunities are available. Do they have horse training DVD’s and books only? Are they available to teach you one on one? Many trainers have certified instructors. That may mean you can find a certified trainer in a particular method in your local area more easily.

Many offer natural horsemanship courses where you can bring your own equine partner to learn about their method, so keep that in mind, too. There are many variations of natural horse training methods. There are official programs with certified natural horsemanship trainers, and individuals that may or may not be certified in a certain method but follow natural horse training methods.

- No matter the trainer or trainers you choose make sure they put the needs of the horse first, and that they don't do anything that compromises the dignity of the horse.
- Use your gut instinct. If something doesn't feel right, don't go there.
Horsemanship Schools: What Are They?

- Horsemanship schools are places where you can learn about a variety of horse topics from care to riding. What's more interesting that learning about horses? After all, if you're reading this page you are probably horse crazy and will do anything you can to learn more about horses!

- It's great to learn more about things you are passionate about, especially if you are considering becoming a professional horseback rider or horse trainer. If you want to learn more about every aspect of horses or are considering a career with horses that includes more than just riding then these schools could be for you!

- It's great to learn more about things you are passionate about, especially if you are considering becoming a professional horseback rider or horse trainer. If you want to learn more about every aspect of horses or are considering a career with horses that includes more than just riding, then a horsemanship school could be for you!

- Many Horsemanship courses are in depth longer programs run by natural horsemanship trainers, but the scope of a horsemanship school goes well beyond that. Any school that includes horse care, groundwork, feeding, equine behavior, psychology, farrier work as well as riding and training is considered a horsemanship school because it teaches more than just how to ride.
Youth Programs and 4-H

Many youth programs such as the 4-H horse program partner with local universities to offer courses for local youth where they bring their own horse to learn everything from feeding, riding, to safely ground training a horse.

There are also non 4-H extension programs at Agriculture based colleges available for children and adults. These programs range from two days to one week in length and are taught by college age instructors that have gone through proper training on how to effectively and safely teach riders.

Natural Horsemanship Clinics

Natural horse trainers offer shorter natural horsemanship clinics which are one day to several weeks in length where horse behavior relating to groundwork and riding is the main topic. These courses allow you to have daily natural horsemanship lessons that build on each other to help you and your horse progress dramatically in a short time. Topics that may be covered in these clinics are saddle fit, what is and is not natural horsemanship equipment, ground safety and handling, riding using natural horsemanship methods and natural horse care.

Natural Horsemanship Courses

If you want to learn natural horsemanship in-depth for a career, and the practical business aspect of owning a horse training business then one of the longer horsemanship courses would be ideal for you. In these natural horsemanship courses your stay is much longer, typically several weeks to several years. Many programs of this nature offer a certification or endorsement of a particular method of natural horsemanship training when you pass the program up to the standards the school requires. Some such as LaCense Ranch in Montana guarantee job placement in the equine industry for its two-year program graduates.

Horsemanship School Topics

You will learn equine psychology, horsemanship training, groundwork, behavior, feeding practices, basic farrier care, business management, proper equipment, improve riding skills, better timing and feel in training, what causes and how to change “bad” behaviors both on the ground and while riding. Most horsemanship schools of this type have their own brand natural horsemanship equipment or some they endorse such as particular types of rope halters or leads.
How to Learn Horsemanship on a Tight Budget

- Let's face it. Horses are an expensive passion! Attending horsemanship schools can add up! A 2-day clinic has an average cost of about $600 just for participation. That doesn’t include stabling fees, hauling, health certificates and shavings in that cost.

- I’ve attended several shorter courses with natural horsemanship trainers where I have hauled out to their location or a barn that hosts the clinic. Unless your barn can host the course, you'll have to haul out to their farm, or a host barn where the clinician is teaching. Many clinicians will give a discount to the clinic organizer or host. If you are interested in going to a horsemanship school but can’t haul out or afford to attend a longer program then you can try bringing the horsemanship school to you! It never hurts to ask, and many clinicians will reward your hard work at helping them organize, fill and staff their clinic with volunteers with a discount or even some free lessons!

- If that is out of your budget there is an even more affordable option that allows you to still take part in horsemanship schools, auditing. Many clinicians allow people to come watch, take notes and sometimes even participate in non-horse simulations along with the paying riders. Auditing can cost anywhere from as little as $25/day up to several hundred for a longer course. Auditing can be a very affordable way for you to increase your knowledge, sampling different training techniques. A bonus here is that it is often easier to see what is going on with a horse and see why the instructor is saying what they are when you are not the one handling the horse in the moment. Call around and see what trainers are coming to you and see if you can audit!
Demystifying Horse Training Prices

- Want to learn about horse training prices so you don’t end up broke, with a horse that isn’t broke to ride? It is a big decision to send your horse in for training (or to do this for others) and you want to make sure your hard-earned money doesn’t end up being wasted. It’s kind of like deciding what college to go to! Princeton may be an awesome school, but a state college may offer a more competitive price and you can still get a quality education.

- Just like colleges, horse training prices vary greatly! Prices will vary from as little as $200/month to over several thousand dollars a month. Many people have sent their mount to the “trainer” only to get back a horse that wasn’t trained at all, or worse yet he comes back worse than he went out! What does it cost to train a horse? How do you determine what price is fair? There are a lot of variables that go into determining horse training prices so let’s discuss a few of them.

Location

- In real estate there is a saying about worth when buying and selling houses. It’s all about location, location, and location! A mobile home in the middle of the desert 200 miles from the closest town is not going to sell for much. Likewise, if that same mobile home is attached to the ground on a 1/10 acre of Malibu beachfront property it could bring a million bucks!
Are you sending your partner to New York City for training where hay and boarding prices and space is at a premium? Or is he going to a small Midwest farm where hay is grown locally and space is more abundant?

A lot of the same things can be said about horse training prices. Depending on where you are looking, whether in the local area you live in or shipping your horse out to another state, prices are going to vary a lot. Because many facilities include board and/or feed in the fees, the regular cost of board for that location will play into the overall price.

**Experience**

This is one of the biggest factors in determining horse training prices. Who is doing the work and what is their skill and accomplishment level? If you have a Grand Prix dressage rider you can guarantee that it is going to cost you WAY more than if have Lucy down the street that has ridden up to 2nd level do the job.

This doesn’t mean that either person can’t do the job you need done, but you will need to assess the training and competition goals for the horse first. If you need your horse just to get through 1st level dressage you probably can use Lucy down the street. If you are looking to ride up to 4th level, you may need that Grand Prix trainer with that highly specialized experience so your horse can reach his potential.

**Credentials**

There are professional credentials in the equine world, but they vary across disciplines and are not centralized. Some natural horse training systems such as Parelli have ratings for instructors and trainers that use a quantifiable scale of experience to gain credentials. Most trainers that are outside a professional organization do not. The trainer may have ridden to a certain level in competition or have so many titles to his or her credit more than a professional credential. This will factor in when determining horse training prices.

The more professional certifications a trainer has, the more they will probably charge. That is in no way to say that a trainer without professional certifications cannot do a good job.

The horse industry has more trainers without any professional credentials that with them. Horse training is still largely learned through apprenticeship and experience. Although a person may have a horse training degree from a four year university, it would not automatically make them more qualified than someone that has trained under a skilled professional for several years and then worked with many horses.
What Style Do They Train?

- There are so many styles of riding and even driving horses. From barrel racing to combined driving, to race horse training the sky is the limit for disciplines to choose from. When used in determining horse training prices what sector of the industry you are in or you want training for will change the cost. I am sure you can imagine that the trainers for the race horses in the Kentucky Derby command a large horse training price because they are so well known in their industry.
If you are in Hunter/Jumpers and need a horse trained for that, it’s going to cost you a whole lot more than if you need a horse started and ready for pleasure riding. This is not only because the hunter/jumper will need more time to be trained because of the level it needs to be trained to, but also because there are probably less good specialized hunter/jumper trainers out there than there are general trainers. The more specialized the style of training, the more you can expect to pay. After all it is their horse training business, and supply and demand rules! Also, if there are few trainers in the discipline you have chosen training for expect longer wait times and higher prices.

*How Much Training Does my Horse Need?*

- When determining prices, you should also take into consideration the duration of the training. The industry standard for getting a horse started from no riding background into being ridden or “started” is 90 days. Usually the training is done by month, so if you do 120 days, you may get some kind of break, or at least you can ask for one. This would also give more time for your horse to come back a solid riding partner. Depending on the horse’s unique personality and prior training, training might take longer.

*Other Factors in Prices*

- Find out whether the training price includes board and feed such as hay or grain. Some prices are quoted for training only, and some have all the hay, feed and board included in the training price quote. More may be charged by the trainer for other incidentals such as pick-up and delivery and possibly how difficult the horse is to train. If you are bringing Spirit, the wild mustang stallion be ready to pony up some cash!

*How to Determine if Prices are Fair*

- Find at least 2-3 trainers in the discipline you are looking for training in and call them to price shop and get a feel for them. Find out what is included in the price (see above) and calculate out a total cost per month that includes all fees, transportation (if needed) board, hay, feed, and training.

- Also be sure to ask how much actual training time per day and per week the horse will receive. Full training generally includes five days a week worth of training, but it is always best to ask. That way you will be able to accurately compare price per month of training. Compare all the price quotes you received.

*Quality is Best*

- When determining what a horse training price should be, you should know that the most important point is that it isn’t all about price! Unfortunately, there are many people that aren’t actually horse trainers and say they are! Just because someone has watched some horse training DVD’s doesn’t make them a trainer.
Some of these people will make your horse worse than he already is! Others will let your horse stand in a stall 6 days a week and ride it one hour a week and call it training!

- The quality of the trainer and his or her work ethic is what is most important. ALWAYS make sure you visit the training facility before making a commitment. Take a tour, find out how many horses are in training. Watch a training session or two and ask lots of questions. Also observe the horses in their stalls or paddocks. Do they look happy and interested in people? Get at least three references and check up on them!

- I can tell you that once I visited a large reining barn and it was the saddest place I have ever been. To this day I can remember the same sour attitude of every horse. It was a big name reining trainer for the area and he had lots of horses in training. Every horse in that place had its rear pointed to the people that came by. Either a butt to you or mad ears and teeth headed your direction! If the horses don’t look happy, curious and engaged, RUN don’t walk away! And DON’T send your beloved animal there. It is not worth breaking his spirit.

**Guidelines**

- As you can see there are many factors that go into prices for your equine's education. Make sure that all the details are ironed out before your mount is on the trailer or you are committed to the trainer. That includes using written contracts for each horse that specifies the price, how many days, how many hours a day, how many days a week, and what kind of work he will receive while there.

- **Be specific about the goals you are looking for the horse to meet and be sure and discuss this with the trainer.**

- That way when he gets home it will be good for you both. You will have a happy, well trained horse, and he will have had a pleasant learning experience!

**Selecting a Horse Training School**

Is it your dream to attend a horse training school? Do you want to make a living riding or training horses? Do you want to increase your skills with horses? Maybe your goal is to ride professionally or obtain horse training certification.

**It can be overwhelming to choose the right equestrian school for YOUR equine goals.**

You may consider a four-year college degree in horse training or equine science. If you are a student of natural horsemanship you may want to further your education or even become certified in a certain horsemanship method.
There are SO many choices out there. There is everything from small, local trainers that offer some courses to full four-year programs at dedicated equestrian colleges. You'll need to figure out what your goals are for attending a horse training school.

*What do YOU want to achieve?*

**What Kind of School do You Need?**

When choosing a horse-training school you have to know:

- **What area you want to study?**

  If you are looking for a girls’ preparatory school that focuses on an english style of riding, you would not want to consider those schools that only had a performance based western horse training focus. If you want to do behavior-based training a classic equine college or a program that focuses on showing may not be the best fit.

- **What kind of degree or certification you are seeking?**

  Programs vary from apprenticeships with local trainers, courses for a certain specialized certification, to bachelor's degrees. With each certification, degree or specialization you'll need to consider

- **How much time and money you are willing to invest in your education?**

  You are looking for the program or horse training school that gives you the best return on your investment for both your time and money. Finding the right match is critical!
Do Your Research

Once you have narrowed down potential schools based on your preferences call them and ask or verify

- How long is their program?
- What does the curriculum include?
- Do you or can you bring your own horse?
- Many horse schools offer a way to bring and board your own horse while others keep listings of local off campus boarding facilities.
- What certification or degree is awarded upon successful completion?

Remember that experience is very important for successfully training horses.

You will want to choose a school or program that besides having classroom learning also has as much hands-on and lab work as possible. This is especially true if you have little horse training experience to begin with. Let’s look at a few of the categories of horse training schools.

Horse Crazy Girl or Boy Headed to College?

Four-year state colleges with inter-collegiate teams and private equestrian colleges are best choice for teenagers that are currently competing. Typically, a four-year school that has an equine program is going to be priced lower than a private all equestrian college.

There are increasingly more two-year programs at some junior colleges or alliances between the junior college and a horse training school. This is good because you can get
the training you are looking for at an accredited school and possibly get an Associates degree.

**Instructor Certification**

There are programs for instructor certification available all over the U.S. While there is no central instructor certification or school, there are independent organizations that have guidelines and minimum required training hours to become certified. Generally, the organizations that govern specific disciplines have some certifications available.

An example of this is United States Dressage Federation (USDF) that offers certified instructor and/or trainer designations recognized through the levels of dressage. The USDF offers a certification for training level through second level.

There are other independent certifying programs such as The American Riding Instructor Association (ARIA) and the Certified Horsemanship Association. Typically, these programs are less intensive that committing to a full 2- or 4-year program. They are also geared more towards trainers in the industry that are looking for certification to expand the services they offer clients.

**Online Horse Training Schools?**
Equine courses and school online are popping up for horse training, management and as horse training information for owners. They can be a great resource in increase your skills with horses. These courses generally consist of a series of online horse training and husbandry classes that are completed to obtain certification.

Remember to thoroughly research any program, but especially any online horse school offering degrees and certifications. Do this before sending any of your personal information. Make sure they are legitimate businesses by verifying:

- their contact information
- location
- check their rating with the Better Business Bureau
- verify what the certification is and who is the certifying organization

The last thing you want to do is give out your personal and financial information to a scammer.

**Horse Behavior and Natural Training**

Many of the bigger name natural horse trainers that base their training on horse behavior have their own horsemanship schools and stables where they teach students and/or offer certification in their specific brand of natural horsemanship.

Clinton Anderson, Pat Parelli and John Lyons are some of them. These schools are unique among the other horse training schools in the way the education is presented. Most are an apprenticeship model of education. They generally offer a certification by the organization. Some have affiliations with trade/two-year colleges. You will gain experience with an emphasis on equine behavior as it applies to horse training.

**Girls’ Preparatory School**

I can’t say that I wouldn’t have wanted to be sent to a horse related girls’ preparatory school! Heaven on earth, right? These are typically girls’ boarding school where all the other girls are just as crazy about horses as you are.

Horses become a focus in your high school education. A preparatory school will typically have strict and rigorous academic requirements.

I hope you have enjoyed learning about the different schools that are available to help you in your horse loving and learning pursuits!
Professional Horseback Riding: Do You Have What It Takes?

The professional horseback riding career is an elite one. When you think of riding horses professionally, it brings to mind world class Olympic competitors and high-level professional horse trainers.

The truth is, it is super competitive at the top.

Competition is fierce and you have to be at the top of your game every day, all the time. Going professional with horses generally means you have lots of money for superiorly bred, high quality horses, or know someone who does. Professional riders have clients with horses that they ride in competition.

Showing is expensive, and getting to this high of a level is very challenging. With determination, hard work, talent, and most importantly a great attitude, it can be done.

How to Become a Professional Horseback Rider

1. Love Horses.
2. Get your basics.
3. Pick your favorite discipline to specialize in (ie. Showjumping, Barrel Racing).
4. Learn all you can about this discipline and study the top competitors.
5. Ride, learn, take lessons, and ride some more (Pony Club & 4-H are great organizations to join).
6. Show. Work your way from schooling and local shows into rated shows.
7. Place and Win in Shows.
8. Keep moving up and get noticed. This could mean training and riding and showing horses that others may not want to. This is especially true if you are on a tight budget.
9. Find a reputable professional to study under.
10. Attend an Equine College.
Ride, Train, and Teach for Pay

Professional horseback riding involves riding, training, and teaching. When you ride professionally, others pay you to train, ride and compete their horses in high level and/or international competitions. These owners want the best riders for their horses so it can increase their odds of winning and showcasing their horses.

From professional jockeys to top level show jumpers, that means you have to be a really good rider in the discipline you choose. To go professional, you will need loads of determination and a strong backbone.

Most pros have ridden the show circuit and done everything possible with horses and then some.

It's not all riding. You must know all about the management, care and training of horses.

Show Locally, Fun then Rated Shows

If you are interested in professional horseback riding you should start showing locally as soon as possible. Ride your horse, and ride other peoples’ horses, too for experience. Doing this will get you used to the ins and outs of competition a lot of exposure to the showing environment and rules.

This will help to give you an eye for what the judges are looking for in your chosen discipline. If you have no showing experience start with fun shows, then as you become a better rider work into the rated shows. It is important to have an excellent trainer at your side.

Good Sportsmanship is Essential

Showing locally will also help you learn to deal with disappointment, unfairness, and other issues that are bound to occur when judging is subjective to a person’s opinion. This is often the case in equestrian competition unless the classes you compete in are non-subjective timed only events such as show jumping or barrel racing.

This means you won't like the results of a competition sometimes even though you did your very best. It happens, even if you felt like your horse was better than the competition. This is why a strong backbone and ability to bounce back from disappointment is important. A determined attitude to keep going no matter the obstacles will get you a long way.
**Lots of Horse Experience and How to Get It!**

You will also need lots and lots of horse and riding experience. Attending summer horseback riding camps, riding lessons, shows, and working at local stables and the like will gain you valuable miles in the saddle. Your goal is to gain quality miles. For professional horseback riding a proper foundation and education in riding and horse care is absolutely essential. Groups such as Pony Club and 4-H are excellent for teaching you the skills you need.

**A College Degree**

Many professional riders have a four-year equestrian degree. In fact, attending an equestrian school is a great way to gain an education based around horses. You may also gain a formal recognized degree that may help you open up doors for professional horseback riding. Both two-year Associates programs and four-year bachelor’s programs are available.

**Apprenticeship: AKA the Working Student Program**

A formal degree is not the only way into professional horseback riding.

Apprenticeship or working student positions where you go and study under a highly qualified professional rider or trainer for months or even years can be one of the greatest learning opportunities you may ever receive. If you are lucky enough to land an apprenticeship with an excellent trainer (who is also an excellent teacher!) you will have to work extremely hard. You will work for little or no pay. You will gain the privilege of valuable knowledge through lessons and shadowing from a working professional in the field.

**A positive mindset, a willing to be taught attitude and excellent work ethic are necessities!**

You can cultivate these qualities now in all that you do in school, work, horse and home life. When looking for working student opportunities make sure you check out the trainer beforehand. Try to shadow a current working student to see what is required, what learning opportunities are available, and the style of the trainer.

**The Top Show for Young Riders in North America**

For those already showing in rated shows a good goal if you are serious about competition and professional horseback riding is to aim for the North American Young Riders Championships (NAYRC).
Disciplines include show jumping, dressage, eventing, reining, and endurance. Showing at the NAYRC level is the highest level for junior (14-18) and young riders (16-21). NAYRC is a member of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), so holds competitions under those official rules. Competing under FEI rules at the NAYRC level is the closest you can get to being a professional rider at a young age. It can also possibly open doors for you being noticed at a young age and high level of competition.

**A Few Disciplines to Consider**

Some of the disciplines you can go professional in are:

- show jumping
- racing
- reining
- dressage
- eventing
- polo
- barrel racing

**The History of Horseback Riding: A Brief Overview**

When you look at the history of horseback riding, considering the history of domesticated animals is key.

Animals including horses were domesticated approximately **10,000 years ago**, not for horseback rides but as a **source of food for people**.

- Wild equines were hunted for meat and hides like other wild animals.
- When tame horse herds were finally kept it was for the purpose of having food, but not having to go out and hunt for it.
- Most likely horses kept for this purpose were not tame by our standards but probably were either deliberately hurt so they couldn’t run away or kept hobbled.
First Ride

The all-important first ride in the history of horseback riding came about around 4200bc.

This made it much easier to watch over the horse herds people kept as well as to herd cattle and sheep.

As you probably know if you’ve ridden before, it is much faster to get around on horseback than on foot!

Riding a horse made it much easier to keep up after bigger groups of livestock. After people started mounting up, many were able to increase the size of their livestock herds and their earnings, too! All of this was because of horseback riding!

Control and Comfort

As you can imagine those equines were still harder to control than a cow or sheep. When you add riding into the mix, people had to be able to have more control over the horses’ head than the halters used for leading and tying offered.

I bet you can tell me what all important piece of horseback riding gear in the history of horseback riding was invented next?

The Bit!

The first bits weren’t made of metal because metal working wasn’t invented yet.

The first bits were made from twisted rawhide which was the toughest material around then. Just like today, those bits rested on the gums near the back of the mouth at a gap in the teeth called “the bars.”

Other types of riders used different bridles.

- The Native Americans used a cord around the jaw, sometimes called a Cherokee bridle.

After metal working came more into the mainstream bits were made of copper, looking just like their rawhide cousins for a long time before all the variations we see today came about.

Stirrups were another great invention in the history of horseback riding as before that many miles in the saddle with your legs dangling meant sore and swollen legs.

- Before the invention of the stirrup, mounting was not easy!
- More than one warrior that carried a weapon wounded or killed himself with his own weapon trying to get on the horse.
Pulling and Packing

Although not a piece of the riding portion in the history of horseback riding, it would be a big mistake not to include the use of equine power throughout history as **pack animals and for pulling loads**.

Even before the wheel was invented, horses were used to pull a *travois*, which is two long poles that had material such as an animal skin between them behind the horse. They were loaded with supplies and that were fastened near the horses’ withers on the other end.

- The travois was originally made to be pulled by dogs but was later adapted for use with horses.

**With invention of the wheel, horses became even more important.**

- Now they could pull large loads of food, water, and supplies.
- They could also be used to pull lighter 2-wheeled carts called chariots.
- Chariots were used for wars and racing.
In Rome, chariot racing was an extremely popular spectator sport much like football, baseball, and basketball are today. I don’t know about you, but I would be much more interested in watching a chariot race than a football game any day!

In more modern history before industrialization, horses were used for cultivating crops. They were also used for transportation of everything from food and goods to passengers.

- It was not an easy life for a horse.

Throughout history, they worked hard and often died while on the job of extreme working conditions.

*The Fire Horse*

Fire horses (horses that pulled the fire truck before cars were invented) were trained to run to the fire at the sound of the fire bell where they were unhitched and tied guarded by the Dalmatian Dog.

Later, if a fire horse was retired or sold, they would not bring a very good price because every time they would hear a fire bell they would take off running towards the fire!

*Horses of War*

Throughout the history of horseback riding, probably the most famous use for horses has been in wars.

From the knights in shining armor off to conquer lands to world war II war tactics, horseback riding has been central to war and conquest.

- Mounted warriors were faster and had more of the element of surprise than those on foot
The reason we typically mount from the left side of the horse comes from these warriors. They often carried heavy swords on their left hip, so it was easier to swing the right leg over the horse.

Covering more ground as a warrior on horseback meant that you could invade an enemy 20 or more miles away, then quickly head back towards home or base and be back overnight.

Throughout horseback riding history they have pulled artillery and supplies, carried warriors and cavalry men.

- Horses were not spared the effects of war
- Many horses were wounded or died in battle
- Sometimes they were executed after the losing side was defeated

This was especially true of the Native American horses when the U.S. army waged war on them. Other breeds went extinct as their uses died out.

I hope you have enjoyed this brief glimpse into the action-packed history of horseback riding.

**Wild Horse Pictures: True Unbridled Spirit**

These wild horse pictures capture the essence of what it is to be free. With no man to call them "beast of burden" or "work horse" they roam free on ever dwindling lands

This mare and baby had their pictures taken in Canada. The wild horse can be found in regions across North America from Canada to the deserts of Utah. Bands of wild horses can be found in other countries as well.
These wild horses are in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Although American Mustangs are supposed to be protected by federal law, they often **find themselves at odds with the very organization that is supposed to protect them.**

- The BLM, or Bureau of Land Management decides how many horses the public lands can "support" and then uses helicopters to **round up** the rest for possible adoption to the public.

This is supposed to protect the horses but the round up is extremely stressful. Chased by low flying helicopters, the horses are then herded into small corrals as a large group.

Then the horses are kept in small, crowded holding pens and shipped around the country for potential adoption.

- **The problem is, there is not near enough homes for all of the animals with the public.**
In addition, the surplus animals spend the rest of their lives in holding pens or worse, could be sold or adopted to those with less than admirable intentions.

- Horses are measured from the ground to the tallest point of the withers in "hands or hh". A hand was estimated as the width of a man's hand, but is now equal to 4".
- The largest horse recorded stood at 21 hands, and was a Percheron, which is a draft breed.
- Ponies are up to 14.2hh (hands), with horses being any animal over 14.2hh.
- Horses have four gaits; walk, trot, canter, and gallop. There are gaited breeds that have additional special gaits.
- Horses are prey animals. They run to survive, and only fight if they have to.
- A mare's gestation period is 11 months, making them slow reproducers.
- When a foal is born, it stands almost immediately and can run.
- Their brain is about the size of a walnut, but they are definitely intelligent!
- The lifespan for our equine friends is about 25 years, but the oldest horse recorded was 62 years old!
- Przewalski's Horse is the only horse whose lineage can be traced back to prehistoric times. This breed is native to the Southwest Mongolia.
- You must "cool out" a horse after exercise. You can't put them right into their stall when they are all hot and sweaty or they can become sick. They must be walked until their respiration rate is normal.
- The hoof of the modern horse is his third toe. The chestnuts on his legs are remnants of another toe.
- The mane and tail are for protection from insects. Whiskers around the muzzle are for feeling things.
Understanding the basics of **equine forelimb anatomy** can improve your horseback riding and knowledge of how the horse's body works. The forelimbs are the front legs from the shoulders to the hoof.

Did you know that when a horse is standing still that **60-65% of his weight is on his forelimbs** because his head and neck are almost crane-like out in front of him?

or

that the **majority of lameness cases occur in the front limbs**?
• If you have a horse that is "downhill" in conformation (croup is higher than the withers) due to his anatomy or poor training, it increases his risk of front leg lameness.

• This is because of an increased load and concussion on the front legs. That can reduce your partner's ability to perform what it is you require of him.

**Skeletal Structure of the Equine Forelimb**

• Here is the basic skeletal structure of the lower part of the equine forelimb, not including the shoulder.

• Once you looked that over, you can see more of a description and the function of each and what it looks like on a real horse.

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**Equine Forelimb Anatomy**

1. Ulna, Olecranon
2. Radius
3. Carpals
4. 4th Metacarpal
5. 3rd Metacarpal
6. Proximal Phalanx
7. Middle Phalanx
8. Distal Phalanx
9. Humerus

Lovehorsebackriding.com
Here is an actual picture of equine front legs.

The **arm** is the region around the humerus.

The **forearm** anatomy includes the radius and ulna along with the muscles, vessels and nerves in that area.

About 1/3 of the way down the forearm on the inside (medial) is the chestnut. It is the leftovers of the first digit. It is a skin like structure that does grow and periodically needs to be trimmed down.

The **knee** is also known as the **carpus**. It is made up of rows of smaller bones the **radial, intermediate, ulnar, accessory bones** in the **upper (proximal) row** and the **first, second, third, and fourth** in the **lower (distal) row**.

It also includes the **very lowest parts of the radius and fused ulna**, and the **very top parts of the cannon and splint bones**.

Next is the **cannon bone** region. It consists of the **cannon bone**, and the **medial and lateral splint bones**.

The of **ankle** is also known as the **fetlock joint**. In equine forelimb anatomy the fetlock is supported by the **suspensory apparatus**. The suspensory apparatus is made of the interosseus muscle, some ligaments, and some tendons.
The fetlock flexes as needed in movement, extends when the foot is off the ground, and dissipates the force when the hoof hits the ground.

The corone is the very top part of the hoof and within it there is tissue that has a rich blood supply.

The hoof acts as a shock absorber and concussion from it hitting the ground forces blood out of the hoof and up the leg. It is a complex structure.

**Equine Forelimb Anatomy - Muscles**

Here you can see some of the muscles that are closest to the surface of forelimb and chest. The deltoideus is a superficial muscle that flexes the shoulder. The horse has more than one layer of muscles.

You'll notice that there aren't a lot of muscles below the knee joint. That is because this area is mainly made up of tendons and ligaments that makes an efficient recoil system.

As you can see, the equine forelimb anatomy is not a simple structure. I do hope this has shed some light on some of the basics for you.

**Horse Anatomy**

*A Look Inside the Structure and Function of the Body*

Horse Anatomy can be a fascinating subject for those who decide to take the time learn more about it. In the pages below you will find information about the structure and function of the equine body. If you enjoy horseback riding you'll find helpful information that is anatomy based to help you learn and communicate better with fellow
riders or professionals. You will also find tips that increase your understanding of horsemanship and horseback riding from a different perspective.

**Basic Anatomy of a Horse Hoof**

It is important to know the *basic anatomy of a horse hoof*. If you are going to ride horses, you’ll eventually learn to clean their feet out and you may want to know the parts.

It is helpful to have a basic understanding where the different parts are on the hoof and information about the structures above the feet.

If you pick up a horse's foot, this is what it will look like. The *toe* is the part closest to the front. This one is *barefoot*, meaning it doesn't have a horseshoe on it.

Horseshoes protect the feet from excessive wear, such as extended training and when riding on rocky terrain.

The *sole* is the natural protection for the bottom. It doesn't bear much weight as it should be slightly concave.

The *bulbs of the heel* are at the rear.

The *frog* is the v-shaped area. It adds cushioning to the structure to help protect it from concussion. That "v" shape is also where a lot of debris gets packed in that you will need to clean out to keep the foot healthy.
Here you can see a side view of the outer anatomy of the horse hoof and a couple of the joints of the lower leg.

**Fetlock Joint** is also called the ankle joint, and it produces the most movement in comparison with the **pastern** and coffin joints.

The **coronet** is the top part of the hoof anatomy where growth of the wall starts.

The **hoof wall** is the weight bearing structure of the foot.

The wall grows about .25 inches (6mm) per month.

This is the part of the anatomy that a horseshoe is attached to. It is **keratinized.** That means that it contains keratin that makes the wall hard and strong.

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**A Look into Horse Hoof Anatomy:**

*See and Identify the Layers of the Hoof*

**Horse hoof anatomy** is complex. There are many structures within the hoof including bone, cartilage, bursa, ligaments and cushioning.

All these structures work together to **absorb shock, bear weight, resist wear, provide traction,** and **assist in pumping blood.**

- There is a saying that says "No hoof, no horse." It's true. The foot is the foundation of the horse.

Without this vital structure intact, **problems** and **diseases** of all sorts can arise and wreak havoc on your riding plans. One bad foot injury can leave a horse lame for months. Other diseases can leave him permanently lame.

First you will find a picture that is the more outer layers of the hoof. If you have handled equine feet before, you'll probably recognize some things.
This is a picture of the bottom outer layers in horse hoof anatomy.

- On the left you will see the outer most or superficial part of the foot.

**Central Sulcus of the Frog** - A sulcus is a depression or natural division. In the frog anatomy it is referring to the depression between the two sides of the frog. The frog is the v-shaped structure. If you need some basic refreshers of hoof parts go here.

**Collateral Sulcus** - This is a depression to the side, or a secondary sulcus.

**Crus of the Sole** - A branch of the sole

**Apex of the Frog** - The pointed or top part of the frog

**Body of the Sole** - The main part of the sole or bottom of the foot is arched and is mainly for protection.

**Epidermal laminae** - Small ridges in the epidermal (outer most skin) layer

On the right if you look you can see that one layer of the anatomy has been peeled away, so this is a bit deeper

**Stratum Medium of the Hoof Wall** - The wall is the main part that bears weight. It grows downward from the coronary band at an average of 3/8" per month.
**White Line** - A buffer between the movements of the sole and the wall of the foot.

**Angles of the Sole and Wall** - An angle describes a point where two intersecting borders come together.

**Heel, Quarters, and Toe** - Shows the corresponding anatomy named as such. The toe is located at the front, for example.

**Medial View of the Lower Leg and Inside the Hoof**

This view of anatomy from the side of a leg cut into half is to show you the **inner structure of the foot** and a bit into the leg. You can see the **different layers of the hoof wall as well as the bones** of the leg and foot.

This is a back leg. You can see that from the naming, where it says *metatarsal*, that refers to *tarsus*, or the hock indicating a back leg.

**Note #14** - This **wedge-shaped structure** is fibro-fatty. It is very elastic but has very few nerves and blood vessels and compresses to **cushion the bones** and **absorb shock**.

1. III metatarsal (cannon bone)
2. metatarsophalangeal (fetlock) joint
3. proximal phalanx (long pastern) bone
4. wall of hoof (outer)
5. proximal interphalangeal (pastern) joint
6. middle phalanx (short pastern) bone
7. distal interphalangeal (coffin) joint
8. wall of hoof (middle)
9. wall of hoof (inner layer) lamellar
10. distal phalanx (coffin) bone
11. sole of hoof
12. junction between frog and sole
13. frog
14. digital cushion
15. distal sesamoid (navicular) bone
**Inner (sensitive) and Outer (non-sensitive) Structures**

The idea in this horse hoof anatomy picture is to illustrate the concept of **sensitive** and **non-sensitive structures** of the foot.

The **sensitive structures** and anatomy are generally located more internally (toward the center) provide **nourishment** which in turn **promotes growth**. They are rich in blood supply and nerves.

Any injury to this area is extremely painful.

The **non-sensitive structures** such as the wall are the reason that horses can wear shoes. The shoes are nailed through the non-sensitive areas. These parts are tough and don't have many nerves.

It is almost like our own fingernails. You don't feel much in them until one gets ripped too short, which then gets into the sensitive connecting structures. Same goes for the horse.
Understanding **horse leg anatomy** will improve your overall horsemanship.

Knowing the different **bones** and **joints** of the legs and the purpose they have can help you **communicate** with **confidence** to your vet, farrier, equine massage therapist, or other equine professional.

In this article I am going to explain more of the in depth structure and function of the **hind leg** anatomy.
Equine Rear Leg Bones and Function

The majority of the **power of movement** should come from the rear legs.

- The horse leg anatomy in the rear includes the bones of the pelvis (the ilium, ischium and pubic bones), femur, tibia, fibula, metatarsus and the phalanxes.
- It also includes the joints of the hip, stifle, hock, fetlock, pastern, and coffin

#19-The stifle is the largest single joint in the body.

One of its main functions is to cause the **rear leg to become stiff** when the foot is on the ground. This is controlled by the **stay apparatus**, which is similar to our own kneecap.

#12- The hock is arguably the most important joint of horse leg anatomy. Good hocks are what should transmit the propelling force to move the body forward.

They can take quite a beating in western disciplines such as reining and cutting where the horse works mainly off the hind end. This puts a lot of torque on the joint which can later turn into arthritis. That is just one example, the hocks are come under stress in many disciplines.
Properly conditioned muscles along with good conformation on the hind end will increase the longevity of your horse.

- If he uses his hind end to propel himself and is light on the forehand, it will reduce his risk of lameness.
- If he mainly travels "on the forehand" it can set him up for future lameness. You want more of his weight to be on the hind legs where the powerful loin and buttock muscles are. This is done through proper training exercises and good rider mechanics.
- Keep in mind there are layers of muscles. This picture only shows those closest to the skin, or superficial muscles.
The **parts of the horse** aren't too hard to learn. If you hang around a barn too long and don't know them, you may find yourself left in the dust! Equine enthusiasts are notorious for speaking in "horse."

"He's got a locked stifle" or "She's cut her gaskin" can sound like a foreign language if you don't know what those parts are! **Not to worry.** The chart below has all the basics labeled, and you can also print it off so you can learn at your own pace.

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**Can you Compare any Parts of the Horse with People?**
You can't compare the two because we stand on two legs and horses stand on four! You may believe that, but we are not as different as you may think!

- Our knees are comparable to the horse's stifles
- Our heels are our partner's hocks
- The foot of a person is the rear cannon bone on our equine friends. On the front legs their cannon bone is like our wrist to the first knuckle. The splint bones are remnants of the other palm bones.
- Their hoof is like our fingernail. It grows from the coronet, while our fingernails start at the cuticle. In the horse it is the primary weight bearing structure, much like our feet are to us.
- The knee on the equine is what we would call our wrist
- The ears of our equine friends hear much better than us. They also have the ability to move more, allowing him to hear things better from any direction.
- They use their buttocks for movement, as do we.
- Unlike us, their eyes have great peripheral (side) vision. Their vision is in an arc shape with a small blind spot at the front of the nose and directly behind the tail.

**Anatomy of a Horse**

**Identifying Some of the Bony Landmarks**

When you are discovering the anatomy of a horse first hand, you'll notice there are a few places on his body where you can feel bone. These areas are called bony landmarks.

A horse has many layers of tissue so there is bound to be places on his anatomy where you can't feel the underlying structure. This is because it is covered by tissues such as tendons, ligaments, fascia, fat, muscles, and skin.
This diagram is not a complete list of anatomy landmarks. It is meant to give you some of the basics.
The hard ridge along the shoulder is the spine of the scapula

1. This is the dorsal part of the scapula where the bone turns to cartilage and is noted for saddle fit
2. "Bumps" on each front leg
3. The atlas is the first of the cervical vertebrae. That is the beginning of the neck anatomy. The wing is the part out to the side of it
4. This is the "bump" on the very top of the horse's head
5. Ramus means "round". So the round part of the mandible or cheek can be felt
6. The shelf of the ribs is the anatomy along the back, lateral to the spine where it looks like it flattens out a bit, creating a "shelf"
7. It is helpful to know where the last rib is as the area between it and the pelvis is known as the flank.
8. The olecranon is the point of the elbow located on the ulna
9. These are a small pair of bones connecting by a ligament that lie to the back of the fetlock joint
10. Located on the back legs, the tarsus (hock) can be felt and seen as the "pointier" section on the back legs. (points caudally)
11. The back of the pelvis

Equine Skeletal Anatomy
Horse Bones Structure and Function

If you can understand equine skeletal anatomy, you'll have a good grasp on the framework of how the horse's body is built.

Our equine friends have about 205 bones in their body that provide structure, give rise to joints to allow for movement, and offer protection to vital organs.

Below you can see a equine skeletal picture with the major bones labeled.

Some aren't shown, such as the splint bones and others like the knee and hock are made up of many smaller bones that I have not listed.
What Does the Horse Skeleton Do?

Provides a frame work for the body - The basic form of the body is determined by the skeletal placement and structure. This is mostly determined by genetics, and is the horse's primary conformation. Poor nutrition can hinder good genetics, but good nutrition can't undo what nature already determined.

Joints for movement - The space between where one bone ends and another one starts are called joints. In the case of the equine, the bones are held together with strong ligaments. The muscles contract across the joints causing movement.
Protection for vital organs and structures - Equine skeletal anatomy, as with most anatomy provides for protection of the vital organs and structures of the body. This offers another layer of protection to those things that are essential to life.

- Some of the vertebrae house the spinal cord. The spinal cord is essential as it transmits all the electric signals from the brain to each part of the body.
- The ribs and breastbone (not shown) form a natural protection for organs such as the heart and lungs.

Other facts about Equine Skeletal Anatomy

- Horses have about 54 vertebrae. This part of the skeletal anatomy varies because there are different amounts of thoracic, lumbar, and coccygeal vertebrae depending on the breed and genetics of each horse.
- It may not seem like it, but the skeletal anatomy is very vascular. That means there is a good blood supply with special bone remodeling cells. This is what allows fractures (breaks) to heal and keeps the frame work strong.
- Bone can only grow when there is still a growth plate. Some growth plates fuse early, others last for several years. Once it fuses and the cartilaginous plate is replaced with bone, growth is no longer possible. Any injury to this plate can cause growth to stop or a deformity to occur.

Make Homemade Horse Treats!
You Can Learn How by Following These Easy Steps

Ever wanted to try making homemade horse treats? Now it’s easy because I have laid out my favorite equine approved recipe just for you in this step by step guide. Whether you want to spoil your pony or you use them for training, your mount will thank you when you bring these!
**Gather What You'll Need and Start Prep Work**

In this step you'll gather your ingredients and start the prep work.

1 Cup Dry Quick Oats
1 Cup Flour
1 Cup Shredded Carrots (about 2-3 whole medium)
1 Teaspoon Salt
3-4 Tablespoons Granulated Sugar
2 Tablespoons Corn Oil + more for oiling pan
About 1/2 - 3/4 Cup Molasses

Preheat oven to 400. Mix all ingredient well in large bowl. Drop by teaspoon into corn oil greased pan or onto cookie sheet. Bake 14 minutes. Remove from pan and cool on wire rack. When completely cool, place in sealable plastic bag or container.

Yield - 30 treats

Preheat Oven to 400 degrees F.
Large wooden or metal spoon
Large Bowl
Knife
24 slot mini muffin pan or cookie sheet
Small melon baller or spoon
Box grater or electric shredder
Wire cooling rack
Sealable plastic bag or dry cereal storage container (preferred)

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**Prepare the Carrots**

Start by washing them off. Then you are going to chop off the tops of each one. I mainly do that just so I don’t see the top in the treat later.

![Image of a carrot being chopped](Image1)

In all horse treat recipes where there are apples or carrots, they’ll need to shredded down to a manageable size.

In the picture below you can see that I am using a box grater to shred the them. This one is a medium grate. I like the finer grate better but I am too lazy to spend that much time grating.

![Image of a box grater](Image2)
I prefer to use an electric shredder such as the one below with a fine grate for these kinds of treat recipes. My old one broke and the new electric grater came with only the medium grate, so it will do. It's much faster this way, especially if you are going to double or triple the batch. You can check your measurements and add the carrots to a larger bowl for mixing if you need to.

**Measure and Add Ingredients**

Start by adding **1 teaspoon of salt** to the large mixing bowl with your carrots in it.
Next is **3-4 Tablespoons of granulated sugar.** My current mare has a real sweet tooth so I lean towards 4 tablespoons.

Now add in **1 cup dry oatmeal.** I use regular plain quick oats that are used for making oatmeal. They are pretty cheap
Next is **1 cup flour**. I prefer an *unbleached, quality* flour. I have found that the lighter weight and bleached varieties don't turn out as well, but you can use whatever you have on hand.

Now for **2 Tablespoons** of corn oil. The corn oil adds a bit of crunch to the treats when they cook.
**Time for Molasses - BUT WAIT! Don't add it ALL Yet**

- Start by adding just a little bit like in the picture. I'll explain why on the next page

Horses love molasses, so it makes sense that you'll see it in many recipes for horse treats.

Ok. It's time for the most crucial step in these horse treats. I want it to be one of your favorite recipes too, so now you'll get the secret of how to make them perfect.

This is probably the trickiest step. Molasses is sticky and if you add too much your cookies won't turn out well. Don't worry though, I will show you how to get just the right amount.
Mix In the Molasses

Now you will begin to mix all the ingredients together including the molasses with a large wooden spoon.

The recipe calls for 1/2-3/4 cup, and this is where you'll need to use your judgement as indicated by the process below.

Be ready for a workout for your arms and shoulders!

The spoon doesn't have to be wood, but it does have to be sturdy. This batter is very thick and gooey.

You can use an electric mixer but beware. If you have doubled the batch or have only a hand mixer it may be hard on the motor. You'll also want to make sure you don't run it on too high of a speed.

Here you can see the type of spoon I like to use:
Here you can see the ingredients starting to be combined.

You'll notice at this point when mixing like the picture below, that the batter is probably still pretty dry. That's OK. The point is to *underdo the thick, sticky stuff and add it gradually.*
Now repeat the process. Add a bit more, and then mix it all together again.

The trick to this horse treat recipe is getting the right amount of molasses and baking it properly. Add and mix it a little at a time.

- If you add too much, the batter will be way too gooey and stick really bad to the baking pan.
- If you don’t mix in enough, they will turn out too dry and crumble into pieces.
- The type of flour and the moisture level of the carrots will play into how much you’ll need.

Hint: You may need to add a small amount of water to get the right consistency without making the treat batter too sticky

Here is about what your treat batter should look like when it is ready for the next step in the recipe where you will drop it on the pan to be baked.

- You will have moistened the dry ingredients sufficiently enough to make a moist and thick consistency without it being too gooey.
To get your treats just right now you'll grease the pan, form the batter and get them into the oven.
**Grease the Pan**

Time to get some corn oil on a paper towel or a basting brush and coat the wells in the mini muffin pan.

You can use a cookie sheet, but your cookies won't be perfectly formed like store bought ones. Luckily, your horse doesn't care much what they look like!

**Drop Batter into Pan**

This is where your **small melon baller** or **spoon** comes in.

1. Lightly oil it so the batter doesn't stick.
2. Fill spoon with batter and scrape it flat on the side of the bowl
3. Drop batter into individual wells that you oiled like shown below
After you've dropped all the dough, take your lightly greased fingers and flatten them like shown below.

When you flatten the dough, it will bake into more of a *disc shape*. You don't have to do this if you don't mind the horse cookies being more rounded.

**Bake Them**

**Now into the oven they go!**

- Bake at 400 degrees F for 14 minutes. You may have to adjust the time slightly depending on your oven.
Now you wait for your horse cookies to bake. Be ready for your kitchen to smell like molasses! :)

As always, you can go back and review the last step if you want to. Or if you’re ready, move on. You’re almost done.

Next you will cool and learn how to store them.

**Remove From the Oven**

*Carefully* remove the pan from the oven using a hot pad.

This is what your cookies should look like.

They will **still be soft** because they are very hot. As they cool, they will become a bit more crispy.

You are looking for them to have **slightly brown edges**
After a Minute or So Take Them Out of the Pan

Use a fork and pop each horse cookie out to a wire cooling rack.

This is not the best tool for non-stick pans because it is metal. Because these types of recipes are naturally pretty sticky... I designate a mini muffin pan as "horse cookie" recipes pan. If you can't do that, you may want to try using something other than a metal fork that won't scratch the surface.

Let them Cool

Next you will let them cool. You want them at room temperature before you store them.

This allows any excess moisture to dry out so they don't mold. Recipes like this one tend to last a long time if kept in an airtight container.
Store Them Properly

After they have cooled, you'll want to keep them fresh. If you make a single batch it will make about 30 treats. They won't last long so you can put them in a zipper bag to keep them fresh.

If you decide to make them often, double the batch, or want to keep them at the barn you will want to invest in a heavy-duty cereal storage container. They are rodent and bug proof so you can store keep it at the barn.

A zipper bag won't last with critters around. I tried it and it got invaded with ants and mice.

- Horse cookie recipes can be exact but I've found if I pay attention and adjust ingredients and cook times slightly then they will turn out better.
Horse Trail Riding: Set Yourself Up To Enjoy It

Horse trail riding is one of the best ways to explore nature! Hacking, or being out in open and natural areas instead of in an enclosed area such as an arena or training pen, can be as easy or challenging as you wish.

Enjoying trails on horseback is one of the most rewarding ways to enjoy nature. ATV’s can be very noisy and scare away wildlife on the trail. Hiking is fun but you certainly can’t cover as much distance as when you are on horseback!

Horses allow you to explore more land in less time with a great overall view of the scenery. Enjoying trails while sharing a partnership with a living animal, adds another special dimension to your outdoor experience, too. You will have a bond with the horse that you trust enough to show you the best of what the outdoors has to offer.

Considerations of Experience and Location

- When trail riding there are many things to take into consideration for both safety and comfort. For instance, what style will you be riding? What is the best mount? The answer is, it depends on your situation.

- First off, if you are renting a horse for your trail ride you probably won’t have much say beyond telling the stable your riding experience level from which they will assign you a horse. In most cases you probably won’t be able to choose the
saddle or style you will ride. In the U.S.A. the majority of horse trail riding rentals are done going western. If you own your own horse, or head to Europe, many enjoy riding english.

Best Mount

- Many people wonder what is the best mount for them? This depends on a variety of factors. Some things you will want to consider are: What is my experience level? What is the horse’s experience level on the trails? Do I like to go fast or slow? What kind of terrain will we be navigating and how do I feel about that?

- If you are an inexperienced rider you should not choose an inexperienced mount, especially for hacking. The combination of you not knowing enough and not having the confidence to handle a green animal can lead to problems.

- If you are an experienced rider in the arena but haven’t ever ridden outside of one, it is best to start out on a mount that is seasoned on the trails and will build your confidence. A good trail partner is worth their weight in gold when it comes to taking care of their rider.

Gaited Horses

- Many people enjoy gaited horse trail riding. Gaited horses have special gaits (or way of moving) that is very smooth for the rider and covers a lot of ground. If you are an experienced rider and want to cover a lot of ground, a gaited horse could be a great choice for you for trail riding. Many but not all the gaited breeds tend to naturally have more go than whoa so consider this when choosing the right partner for you. If you want to amble down the trail slowly, you’ll need to find a horse that does, too!

The Terrain

- The terrain you will be riding on will also affect your confidence. If you are new to the trails, sticking to flatter, well established trails will help build your confidence. Only if you are confident in yourself and your horse should you attempt more challenging trails with hills, climbs, and water crossings. As your confidence grows you can gradually add in more challenges and riding at faster speeds.
**How Long To Ride?**

- If you are new to horse trail riding, start with a shorter ride. An hour is usually plenty for those that have never ridden before or who are not very athletic. You will be feeling it the next day! Don’t plan to ride a half or even full day your first ride out on the trails unless you can afford to be very tired and sore for the full week following the ride! Quality trail riding tack such as saddles made specifically for trail riding, can increase your comfort on the trails.

- Once you find the right partner, get the wind in your hair, the glimpse of the beautiful landscape, and trails you can explore, you won’t want to do anything else!

**Get Started With Gaited Horse Training**

If you have never done any gaited horse training you are in for some fun and learning! Some gaited horse breeds you may recognize are the Tennessee Walking Horse, Kentucky Mountain Horse, Rocky Mountain Horse, Paso Fino, and Missouri Fox Trotter.

The smooth gaited horses are very fun to ride, but are a bit different from a regular horse when it comes to training. This is because you will need to know what their special movements are and how to recognize them.

Although these special ways of going generally come naturally to the horse depending on his breeding, training history, and conformation, it is up to you to be able to train each individual animal to pick up and maintain those gaits.
What is a Non-Gaited Horse?

For a starting comparison, let's look at a non-gaited horse. Horses without the smooth movements have four gaits only.

1. Walk
2. Trot
3. Canter
4. Gallop

The *intermediate* gait is a trot, which can be bouncy because the horse's legs move in unison in diagonal pairs:

**left front/right hind and right front/left hind**

These pairs of legs move at the same time. This creates a moment of suspension when all **four legs are off the ground**

followed by concussion that unless you know how to ride well can cause bounce and make your behind sore!

Why Choose and Train a Gaited Horse and What Makes Them Different?

Many people select a gaited horse because they generally lack that jarring motion of the trot, making them ideal for people who want to travel at greater speeds in comfort or for those with back problems. Gaited horses are especially popular for trail riding.

Briefly, all gaited horses have a footfall pattern in which one **foot is always on the ground**.

Because of this, there is no jarring or bounce when a horse performs these types of gaits. They are smooth riding!
In gaited horse training you can run into an animal that will have *any combination* of the following smooth gaits. You will need to be able to identify them so you can be effective in your training. Then when training you can teach him a cue to take and maintain that specific one.

**Diagonally Based Gaits**

There are diagonally based gaits such as the:

- Fox Walk
- Fox Trot

In these gaits the legs move in **diagonal pairs**

- left front/right hind and
- right front/left hind

The **front foot lands a split second before** the opposite hind foot, giving the gait four beats.

**Square Gaits**

The *intermediate* or square gaits are where neither diagonal or lateral pairs of legs move in unison, but instead each foot moves separately. The footfall pattern is:

- left hind/left front/right hind/right front.
These gaits are divided into the

- dog walk
- working walk
- flat walk
- running walk
- rack
- speed rack

These movements have the same footfall pattern but are differentiated by their speed, animation and differences in stride length.

Lateral Gaits

Lateral gaits are when the pair of legs on the same side move in unison.

- left front/left hind
- right front/right hind

There are two lateral gaits.

1. **Stepping Pace** - In the stepping pace the legs of the same side move in unison but the hind foot lands just before the same side front foot.
2. **Pace** - In the pace the legs move in unison in same side pairs (vs diagonal pairs for the trot) which is similar to the trot in that it is jarring. This is because of the moment of suspension followed by the same side pair of legs landing at the same time. This is not a recommended movement for training riding horses, but is used in speed carriage training.
Using The Horse's Natural Talents to Train Him

Along with being able to identify the smooth movements you will also need to find out what gaits your mount can perform and what his natural tendency is.

The most essential part and one of the best tips for training gaited horses is to use the horse’s natural talents to your favor in his training plan.

His breed may partially determine what gait he does naturally, but not always. His natural smooth gait or gaits will depend on his breed, age, past training and his individual conformation.

Harsh Equipment and Methods Do Not Make for a Happy Horse

Many old school gaited trainers and training techniques involve very harsh bits used to get leverage on the horse’s head to get the gait. Twisted wire and bits with very long shanks have been “normal” for many years.

Many natural horsemanship trainers such as Parelli horse training’s David Lichman have brought gentler, better, and more effective training techniques to those who own gaited animals.

All quality gaited trainers teach the horse suppleness and to come onto the bit properly without the use of harsh equipment to force and maintain the smooth gaits.

Horse training DVD’s and horse training books from those experienced in gaited horse training are a great resource to help fill in your gaps of knowledge in understanding the world of gaited horse training.
Gaited horses and training them can be both fun and satisfying. Many people who switch to riding gaited horses wonder why they ever rode a regular horse!

Many horse trainers assume that gaited horses are the same to train. In principle gaited horse training is the same, but the more you know about their way of going the easier it will make your job.

Becoming more educated on the different breeds of smooth gaited horses and the special gaits they perform is an important first step for your success in training these special horses.

**Horseback Riding Books to Read**

There is no shortage of horseback riding books out there. From care and training, english riding basics to western riding lessons and exercises, you can find anything! Maybe you would prefer a fiction novel based all around horses?

Are you looking for information on the basics of horseback riding? Consider Horseback Riding for Dummies! Are you interested in learning about careers with horses? There is a book for that, too! Most books can be bought online and some may be carried at your local library. It can almost be overwhelming to look at all the books out there for horse owners and horseback riders. Let’s break it down into some of the most common categories of horseback riding books. That way you can find what you are looking for.
Riding

Want to improve your riding technique?

Many of the top professional horse trainers and instructors have written books to help you do just that. You can start with horse riding basics and then move on to learning about the perfect seat for dressage or how to ride a perfect reining pattern.

These books can cover very basic riding, as well as advanced topics. While these books won’t ever replace quality lessons on your horse from a qualified instructor, they can virtually be like getting a leg up with a free horseback riding lesson and tips from a top-ranked professional!

Horse Care

There are many different approaches to the care of horses. From a natural horse care program to a more traditional one, there is no shortage of opinions out there on everything from fly sprays to turnout schedules.

What about the best de-worming rotations? There is information on topics such as proper hoof and farrier care, feeding programs, what types of feed horses require for different performance levels, and equine first aid.

Reading more than one horse care book will help you broaden your knowledge of horse keeping practices and horse husbandry.
Training

One of the most popular categories for horseback riding books is training. From western style to driving, these books can help advance your training with your horse in any discipline. They can also broaden your knowledge about other disciplines you may be interested in. They add perspective from different training styles.

There are many good trainers out there that have a specific method you can follow, or have written about the principles for their training. Reading about more than one trainer will help you see common themes in different training styles. Then you can see what works best for you. This will help you be a well-rounded horse trainer and give you more options when training a horse.

First Time Horse Owners

This category of horseback riding books is geared towards those that are interested in or have just bought their first horse. Topics may include how to

- select the right horse,
- select a boarding barn or land to keep the horse,
- find a trainer,
- basic horse handling skills,
- riding,
- equine nutrition,
- basic hoof information, and
- common illnesses of the horse.

If you don’t know much about horses yet, but love them this is the right category for you. These books are great for starting out in learning more about **how to care for and ride** a horse.

**Farm and Ranch**

If you want to keep your horse on your land or you are thinking of building a barn and boarding horses, then this category of books is right for you. You can learn about different construction materials and barn types, fencing selection and installation, as well as layout and design to best use your property. These books also cover design of electricity, watering, and other land usage topics. There are books specifically for designing and running your own farm on smaller acreage!

**Pics of Horses:**

*A Gallery of Beautiful Pictures To Enjoy*

This gallery with pics of horses will give you hundreds of photos to browse and enjoy.
Appaloosa Horse Pictures:
A Versatile Breed with a Beautiful Coat

In these Appaloosa horse pictures you can see some of the defining physical characteristics of the breed. They are mostly known for their often strikingly spotted coats. Other physical traits include:

- mottled skin
- white sclera around the eye
- vertically striped hooves
- short mane and tail
**Mottled Skin**- Look at the muzzle/nose on the picture of my mare below. See how the skin has uneven spots of pink and black that almost look blotchy? That is what "mottled" means. If you look up close at pictures or at an Appaloosa in person, you will notice this.

**White Sclera** -- The sclera in the white part around the iris or colored part of the eye. You can see the sclera on any horse if they are scared, but in an Appaloosa you can see it under normal conditions. In the picture above you can see it on the inside corner of her eye.
Vertically Striped Hooves -- White and black stripes that run from the top to the bottom of the hoof. This trait is also found in horses other than Appaloosas.

Short Mane and Tail -- You can see in some of the pictures above that this type of horse doesn't generally have a very long mane and tail. This was selectively bred for by the Nez Perce Native Americans. The shorter mane and tail is much less likely to get caught in branches and brush.
The Appaloosa in the above picture must not have gotten the message about short manes and tails!

This type of Appaloosa is what is called a blanket coat pattern.

That is where the area around the hips is white, and often spotted, while the rest of the coat is a darker base color. This one looks almost more like a roaned darker base color which means there are white hairs within the darker base color.

I hope you have enjoyed these pictures!

**Arabian Horse Pictures:**
*The Beauty of An Ancient Breed*

These Arabian horse pictures show virtually the same characteristics as the ancient Arabian. It is one of the purest and most ancient breeds whose origins can be traced back to approximately 1500BC.

Coming from somewhere in what is now modern-day Syria, Iraq, Iran and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula this breed is said to have originated in the desert. So harsh were the living conditions of the Bedouin tribes and so highly valued were these steeds that they were said to reside in tents with the people.

Bred to

- be quick
- have superior stamina
- be beautiful
- bond strongly with people
- with certain physical characteristics that have remained the same over time these horses were kept under strict breeding practices to ensure their purity and characteristics.
Physical Characteristics

These Arabian horse pictures all show some of the distinguishing characteristics of its kind that have been selectively bred for since the beginning.

- A **bulging forehead** known as "Jibbah."
- A **tail held high** is thought to show pride
- An **arching neck** with a high crest known as "Mitbah" seen to signify courage
- A beautiful **dished face**

These traits are still seen today and make the breed easy to identify in pictures and in person. They have had little variance in breeding through the years.
Influence of the Arabian on Modern Breeds

The Arab is quite possibly the breed with the most influence on all other horses in history and you can see a piece of that in these and other pictures.

- Did you know that these horses, specifically the Darley Arabian, Godolphin Arab, along with the Byerly Turk created the Thoroughbred?
- The Arab went on through the Thoroughbred to influence all light breeds

Fun Facts About the Arabian Horse

- The first president of the USA, George Washington rode an Arabian
- They are widely known for their superior ability in Endurance (long distance) rides
- They were used in the U.S. Military, but their formal military background dates back to the 16th century
- They are "hot blooded" which means they have a long flight distance
Baby Horse Picture: Soak Up The Cuteness!

Nothing captures your heart as much as a baby horse picture. Seeing the foals, colts, and fillies will warm your heart.

- This young bay filly has just met this gelding for the first time in this picture. If you notice, she is moving her lips. A baby will do this when showing submission to an older herd mate or at a new introduction. She is saying "I am just a baby, don't hurt me."
- This cutie was a rescue from the Humane Society of the United States, and is being trained using natural horsemanship methods.
• All that baby learns is from his mother and his other herd mates. Without this crucial learning, a foal will not grow up to have the social skills to survive in herd life.

• I love in this picture how mom and little one seem to be sharing a special moment.

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**Bay Horse Pictures:**

* A Common But Beautiful Coat Coloring

In these bay horse pictures you will see a coat coloring that is common in the equine world. This coloring is expressed as varying shades of brown with a black mane, tail, points, and legs.

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• This sweet girl is a Quarter Horse that loves to get out on trail rides.

• The bay color is found in many breeds of horses.

• One breed, the Cleveland Bay (opens in a new window) is named after this color and the place (Cleveland, England) where it originated.
Like the other pictures, this bay gelding is yet another breed. He is an older Arabian. Notice that they can still have white facial markings and socks on the legs. The points above the leg markings are still black.

![Bay Horse](image)

This bay horse running is a wonderful sight. You can see his dark mane and tail flowing in the wind. You can also see his ebony legs.

![Bay Horse Running](image)

The colorings found in these pictures are actually the most basic dilution gene on a black base coat color. It causes the body hair to turn brown while keeping the mane, tail, points and legs black.
**Beautiful Horse Picture:**
*A Sight to Behold*

Check out this beautiful horse picture. There are few things on this earth more breathtaking than a work of art captured like this. Perhaps seeing it in person would be!

![](image1)

Who doesn't love a mane and tail that flows in the wind like that?

I think this gelding below has such a beautiful face, even for a guy! He has a kind and soulful eye as well as gorgeous markings. His red halter brings out his face even more.

![](image2)
Check out this picture with the beautiful contrasting black and white colors.

![Black Horse Picture: Different Breeds, Same Color](Image)

The black horse picture below shows the stark contrast between the color of the animal and the snowy landscape.

It is a striking winter picture with the glare of the sun behind. Horses tend to love lower temperatures and a good romp and play in the snow! As you can see this guy is kicking up some powder along the way!
This lovely dark equine in the picture below is probably one of the most famous breeds. The **Friesian** has starred in movies such as "Ladyhawk" and of course many others set in medieval times.

![Friesian horse](image)

This is a black with a white blaze, and probably closer to a **black bay** color, which is a dark, dark brown that looks black.

- True black is a recessive (not as common) coloring.
- Some (but not all) black coloring easily bleaches to red under the hot summer sun.

This mare is an adopted wild mustang that was captured off the west desert range of Utah in the early 1990's.
This cute picture is a Kentucky Mountain Horse. They are a gaited breed that is bred for an extremely smooth way of going.

Bred to take plantation owners across their vast tracts of land comfortably, these horses are popular show and trail mounts.

The most common expression of the black color gene in horses is where the horse only shows points of the color such as on the legs and the mane and tail with a brown coat color. That is called a bay horse.

**Clydesdale Horse Pictures: A Cold-Blooded Beauty**

In these Clydesdale horse pictures you can see the breed that any person who has seen the Super Bowl and its commercials would instantly recognize.

Although famous with the largest number of this breed found in the USA, the Clydesdale originated in Scotland.
Bred in present day Lanarkshire and named for the nearby River Clyde, this powerful animal is prized for a high stepping gait and its massive size.

These pictures don't do their size and beauty justice. They are not clunky, but elegant animals for their size.

The average height of this massive equine is between 16-18 hands, although 19 hands is not uncommon. Full grown they weigh between 1600-2400 pounds! A draft horse originally bred for hauling loads around town this mount can be found in show jumping, dressage and other equine sports. I don't know about you, but I find the thought of possibly falling from 18+ hands a bit intimidating!

When crossed with other lighter breeds many of these steeds go on to compete at the top of their discipline. With the newer eco-friendly world, they are again being used for work where tractors can't or shouldn't be.

As you can see in all of these pictures, the bay color with white facial and leg markings is the most recognizable color of the Clydesdale. Other colors are allowed, and roan (colored coat with white hairs blended in) is very common.
These **gentle giants** have been bred through the generations with an emphasis on quality hooves that are large enough for their proportions. It is said their average shoe is the size of a dinner plate!

The Clydesdale is truly a beautiful animal to enjoy. Hopefully these pictures have brought you a bit closer to these gentle giants of the horse world.
Cute Horse Pictures For Your Amusement

Enjoy these cute horse pictures that I hope will leave you grinning!

Here are two horses greeting each other, a chestnut (left) and a young bay mare. Did you know this is how horses get to know each other? They get close and smell each other and touch noses.
Check out this cute mare with almost a full white blaze enjoying the warmth of her winter blanket. She has a very sweet face. She used to be wild. This cutie lived for 2 years out on the range and now enjoys a life of luxury including grain, her own barn, and of course a cozy winter blanket.

As adorable pictures go, three winter wooly minis are hard to beat. They are so small but pack some seriously cute punch! Even their names are adorable. Honey, Salt, and Pepper. Can you figure out who is who?
Charlie is a cute black pony that stands about 13.1hh. He spends most of his free time eating and roaming around his five-acre pasture. When he is working as a lesson horse, he is patiently teaching beginners how to ride in the arena and out on the trails.

He has some funny antics he likes to entertain people with such as that cute lower lip hanging down and then flapping it!

This is one of my favorite pictures because I love to watch horses groom each other. I love the way they both find each other’s itchy spots and then get to it! In the front of this picture is a bay Thoroughbred, and behind him is a young Tennessee Walking Mare. Did you know that finding your equine partner’s itchy spots and rubbing them is a great way to build your relationship with him?
Draft Horse Pictures:  
The Gentle Giants

These fun draft horse pictures show them doing what they were bred to do; Pull heavy loads.

This first one below is my favorite of all the pictures. This was taken in Germany, where this team of horses takes visitors up and down from visiting the Neuschwanstein Castle.

At the bottom while waiting for visitors, the driver had old fashioned wool blankets thrown over the horse's rumps to keep them from getting chilled in the freezing February cold.
Here is a team of draft horses being taught to drive from the ground. This picture is from a natural horse conference.

Driving a horse from the ground is a great way to teach them to become confident with activity behind them. This is not easy for them because of the way they see. There is a blind spot directly behind their tail.

Here is another team of draft horses ready to pull a large wagon of visitors at a drive through wildlife park.
In almost all these pictures you will see that these draft horses have blinders or "blinders" on. This keeps them from using their peripheral (side) vision. It is thought that they are less spooky this way.

Natural trainers may leave this piece of equipment off by preparing the draft team thoroughly beforehand with the many situations they may encounter.
This is also one of my favorite pictures. It is not as often that you see more than one or two harnessed together, except on TV westerns and in parades.

These three make a great trio! They are even matching colors!
Captivating Friesian Horse Pictures: The Equine Super Model Breed

You'll love these Friesian Horse Pictures. Their name is commonly misspelled as "Fresian." No matter the spelling, you are sure to become entranced with their looks.

This breed is an equine super model.

They have show-stopping good looks, high stepping gaits, and extreme versatility.

Originating in Holland, the Friesian is highly sought after in many countries, including the USA.

Beauty and brains don't come cheap. These animals start at about $10,000USD for a foal, and tens of thousands more for one with training and a proven history.

They are fairytale horse frequently seen in movies with one title being "Lady Hawk".

In the USA you can register mounts that have at least 50% verifiable Friesian blood. These crosses can be a bit more affordable. Frequent crosses are found with Arabians, Paints, Morgans, and others.
Characteristics of the Friesian

Physical

- True jet-black coat.
- Heavy feathering on the legs (the long hairs that grow out by the fetlocks and pasterns.)
- High stepping and animated gaits
- They are judged at events called 'Keurigs', and only the finest horses become breeding stock.

Personality

- They are very versatile.
- In disciplines from competitive driving, dressage, to trail riding these horses excel
- They are extremely smart
They are truly a wonderfully talented breed that many equestrians aspire to own or ride.
Funny Horse Pictures
Put a Smile on Your Face!

Here are some funny horse pictures to brighten your day. Our equine friends may not share our sense of humor directly, but we can find laughter in many of their antics!

This is my very favorite partner, Duck. She is my personal horse. She is an Appaloosa with a nose that will get into anything! In this case she was checking out the camera. Her funny antics are never ending, but this time I caught the picture just right. It really captures her quirky personality!
This is my friend's equine buddy, Tucker. He is a Kentucky Mountain breed and he loves to play! As you can see, he really knows how to kick up his heels and have a great time! Maybe you have a partner like this? They are usually the first one to greet you at the gate saying "pick me, pick me!" He also likes to escape from his pasture and loves to get out on the trail.

This is a driving pony and her nickname is pony. She stands about 10 hands high. She may be little, but her yawn sure is big! This funny picture was taken after she had been working pretty hard and been unbridled and unhitched from her cart.
This is Lucky. She is a Rocky Mountain which is a gaited breed. Talk about a Diva! I've never seen an animal that likes to pose as much as she does! This is one of many pictures I have of Lucky, because the camera simply loves her!

**Horse Back Riding Pictures**

Perhaps only second to enjoying the ride in person, horseback riding pictures capture the essence of freedom you can experience while sharing time with your favorite equine partner.

Heading out on the trails is one of the best ways to enjoy your time on horseback. In this picture these riders are making their own trail through the very tall bushes.
This rider is hitting the trail in traditional western tack. He is a trail guide, taking those that have rented a mount for an hour out into the Kentucky hills for a one of a kind experience.

Whether it is heading to the show, lesson or trail ride together nothing beats horseback riding with friends. In these two pictures, a natural riding group is heading out on an organized group ride.
Out in the woods and enjoying some time with friends and their favorite partners!

**Horse Jumping Picture: See This Exciting Sport**

In this and the following horse jumping picture you can get an idea of what this thrilling sport looks like. By only seeing a picture it is hard to capture the true magnitude, skill needed, and difficulty of this sport.

Guiding a thousand-pound animal over a series of obstacles of varying sizes and jumping distances is not for the faint of heart.
Hunters and Jumpers are done while riding english. The size and difficulty the jumps and courses vary through levels.

Generally, riders start on small cross rails, or X’s made by placing one jump pole on each standard and the other end on the ground. A properly schooled rider will be very solid riding at the walk, trot and canter, and over ground poles first.

The rider above is tackling an oxer with a small "spread" or width (the second set of standards and pole that makes the jump wider).

In this jumping picture, this combination is tackling a tall "vertical" jump. Look how his mount has his knees snapped up tight to clear the height.

Jumps in advanced shows can easily top 5 feet high, some with "combinations" consisting of two or three obstacles tightly spaced together.

In the hunter divisions, the way the horse carries himself including his attitude, as well as how well he clears the obstacles is judged.

In jumper classes, the fastest team with the lowest number of faults wins.

Faults are accrued by knocking down rails in the jumps.
Horse Pic: Sharing Pictures for the Equine Obsessed

See a horse pic or five for the equine obsessed! Once you are bitten with the "bug" you can spend hours looking at pics of your own and everyone's horses!

This beautiful pic is of an Appendix Quarter Horse gelding. Isn't he handsome with his mane flying in the wind, the perfect blue sky and his ears pricked like that? Did you know that Appendix means that he is Quarter but has more Thoroughbred in his bloodlines?

Now check out these suburban equine sweeties. As you can see, they live in a neighborhood backyard that is zoned for horses. Not all horses are kept on large amounts of acreage. Places like this are common in the western part of the US.
This pic is of my Appaloosa mare when she lived in Illinois. I love the intent look on her face. She was watching some kids play in a nearby backyard. The red barn behind her was built a long time ago and it adds to the rustic feel that comes with this picture.

This is a paint gelding on a camping trip in South Carolina. He's such a curious sort always greeting every person and animal that comes by his stall. He is an excellent trail mount, seasoned traveler, level headed and willing to listen and respond his rider's cues.
This last pic is a stunning bay gelding. He is pretty high spirited and his "mom" says he can be a bit of a trouble maker. Hmm, I think "Bandit" is a great fit for his name. Red is definitely a good color for him.
I wanted to share a horse racing picture or two on this page and give a brief introduction to the different types of horse racing.

The three main types are:

1. Flat
2. Steeplechase
3. Harness

**Flat**

![Flat Racing](image)

**Steeplechase (no picture)**

Steeplechase is similar to the flat race except there are jumps typically covered in brush along the course.

This sport gets its name from the first participants going long distance from church steeple to church steeple, thus "chasing" the steeples.

- The course is about 2-3 miles long
- In the USA this sport takes place all along the East Coast
- The horses are trained in the country
- Steeplechase horses are generally a bit older than flat racing counterparts.
- Exclusively participated in by Thoroughbreds
Harness

In the picture above you can see harness racing.

- In North America the Standardbred breed is exclusive to this type of race.
- The Standardbred is named so because in the early days only horses or offspring that could trot or pace a mile in "standard" time were allowed into the registry.
- Races are done for trotting and pacing although in the USA they are almost entirely pacing.
- In these races the horses pull a driver in a light two wheeled cart called a "sulky."

Horse Racing Pictures: "The Sport of Kings"

Here you can see some horse racing pictures and learn a bit more about the sport.

- Horse racing is probably the most well-known equestrian sport today.
- It dates back to Egyptian times and was also very popular in Roman times.
- One of the reasons it is so popular is because of the betting or gambling associated with the sport.
These pictures are of flat horse racing.

The horses run on an oval track with dirt or turf footing, and there is no jumping.

Common breeds used in flat racing are the Thoroughbred and American Quarter Horse.

The rider or jockey rides standing up with very short stirrups to keep as much weight as possible off the horse's back.

The racing saddle is a very light scaled back version of an english saddle. There is hardly anything to it by regular horseback riding standards.
At the beginning of each race the mount and jockey enter the starting gate or starting box like you see above in this and many other similar pictures.

Mini Horse Pictures: A Small Breed That Will Steal Your Heart

You'll love these mini horse pictures!

Short for miniature horse, a mini is just that.

He is the result of hundreds of years of specialized breeding to make him identical to steeds we all know and love, except much smaller in size.
Check out all the pictures below.

When these horses were first brought to America from Europe, they had a job to do. Because of their size, they were used in ore mines to pull carts. Their small size allowed them to go through mining tunnels.

**Exactly How Small is a Mini?**

Look below to see the contrast between the two......
According to the AMHA or American Miniature Horse Association, the tallest acceptable height for registration is "34 inches measured from the last hairs of the mane." They are not eligible for registration until they are three years old and still under the required height. (Source: AMHA website)

- Just for comparison, the average riding horse is 15 hands high, or 60" tall at the withers and the mane hair is not counted at all.
- That means a mini stands at 8.5 hands and under. (Each hand is equal to 4 inches)
- One more option for registered mini horses is the American Miniature Horse Registry, or AMHR.
- This organization offers two classes of registry:

A: For those 34" and under

B: For those 34-38"

So the largest registered mini would be 38 inches tall. Anything taller than that and they are considered a small pony.
What Color Can They Be?

- Any color is acceptable for registration as a mini horse. As you can see from these pictures, they come in every coat color and pattern.
- Mini's tend to get really wooly in the winter and sometimes require clipping. This gelding has been clipped from the top of the legs up.

Popular for Children and Driving

- These horses make popular children's mounts because of their tiny size.
- They are very popular for driving
Too Cute to Resist!

These guys have the cute thing down to a fine science! Along with their pint size, they have tons of personality to match! Who can resist those cute faces in any of these pictures?
These mustang horse pictures show the versatility and hardiness of the breed. These animals live in areas of the country that can often be difficult to exist in.

This mare shows the typical poor condition of the horses on the range. She appears to be in foal. Forage can be scarce. The Bureau of Land Management, or BLM gathers horses when the land gets beyond its capacity for the number of animals.

How these horses are handled during and after round up is a current subject of great debate.
Mustangs in the wild have to travel long distances daily in search of food and water. Because of the harshness of their living conditions they have extremely strong hooves and hardy dispositions.
Since horses are gathered off the range, many of them are adopted to the public. This picture shows a formerly wild mustang that is now trained and competing in an event called the Extreme Mustang Makeover.

In this event that travels to locations throughout the USA, trainers have just under 100 days to train the animal from capture to competition.

- These mustangs are typically adopted out to new owners at the end of the event
- Events like this allow more people the chance to own a mustang as not everyone has the skills to train a wild horse.

Mustangs like those found in these pictures make extremely smart, hardy, versatile mounts. They excel in many disciplines, both English and Western.

If you can't train one yourself, there are many organizations that offer starting and training services. Natural horseman and those that follow their principles in general tend to excel with training these horses.

**Paint Horse Picture: Multi Colored Beauties**

In this paint horse picture and the others, you can see the diversity of colors and patterns found within this breed. An animal eligible for registration is one with a proven specific lineage.
Many people don’t truly know what a Paint is.

Generally, people tend to think of them as just colors or patterns.

- In fact, they have very specific bloodlines, a distinct body type, and they are a distinct breed.

According to the American Paint Horse Association or APHA, at least one parent must be a registered Paint, and the other a Registered Thoroughbred, or Quarter Horse. In addition, they must have certain percentage of white hair and have a stock-type body.

In contrast, Pintos are of many different bloodlines, body types (including minis), and backgrounds.

The mare in the first picture is a Palomino colored variation. As you can see, this guy has way more white, with just certain spots of brown.
Since a Paint has a stock body type, this breed is extremely popular in the western disciplines such as barrel racing, western pleasure, and roping.

The gelding above is yet another color combination possible in this type of equine.

This picture shows yet another variation of coloring. He is almost the inverse of the second picture, with far less white. The Association recognizes multiple colors, but only three types of patterns; overo, tovero, and tobiano.
A Picture of a Horse  
For Those Who Can't Get Enough!

A picture of a horse is the sharing of our noble friend. They aren’t just horses, they are partners. And those that love them want to lay eyes on as many as possible. Those that are truly smitten can spend hours gazing at pictures.

Check out the beautiful dun grazing in a field of yummy green grass. This is my horse. She is an Appaloosa that forgot to get some spots! She is registered though.

And here we have a black Rocky Mountain equine that is spending his hot summer day in the shade of the barn in a stall. He even has some toy noodles to keep him entertained. Most horses prefer to be outside, but in the height of summer they may appreciate a stall in the barn with a fan turned on high.
This picture is my sweet mare again. I couldn't resist. Here she is toughing out the humid Kentucky summer sun and sporting a fly mask to keep the nasty bugs off. It seems that bugs are worse in humid heat than in dry heat.

Quarter Horse Pictures: A Breed Synonymous with Western Riding

Check out these American Quarter Horse Pictures. This breed is famous for being the "cowboy's" horse. They are talented at many things such as:
• ranch work  
• rodeo sports  
• roping  
• cutting  
• reining

AND

• racing!

In the two pictures above you can see some of the physical characteristics such as:

• small ears  
• big jaw

and if you look at the second picture, you'll see the classic bootie! This equine variety is also known for being

• heavily muscled

with extremely powerful hindquarters.
How Was the Quarter Horse Named?

You would think that an animal that had so much history rooted in the western way of life would have had a name that reflected that heritage.

This type of equine is very fast in distances up to 1/4 or a quarter mile.

His heritage dates back to Colonial times, and they used to race the horses a quarter mile through town, usually down Main Street.

So, he is very fast, extremely agile and is named after the distance he is still most commonly raced today.
Colors and Breeding

If you look at all the pictures you can see that this breed comes in a variety of colors. There are 17 to be exact that are recognized by the AQHA.

The most common color is sorrel, which is a reddish brown seen in two of the pictures above. The top one and third one down from the top of the page.
Directly below is a cremello, which is not as common, but very pretty.
Appendix QH

And here is an Appendix Quarter, which one that has more Thoroughbred in its lineage.

Roping Horse Pictures: An Exciting Western Rodeo Sport

What do you think of these roping horse pictures? The speed, rope skill, accuracy, and timing as well as cooperation from your 1000lb equine partner make this a challenging western rodeo sport.
There are two types of roping:

1. **Calf Roping** which is officially called tie-down

Both of these pictures show calf roping. In this discipline you have 30 seconds or until the calf makes it past the barrier flag of the open back gate of the arena to

- rope it,
- jump off your horse,
- get the calf to the ground
- and tie its feet together with one coil of rope.

The rider who is successful with the fastest time and least amount of time penalties wins. Penalties are incurred if the calf struggles free before six seconds of being tied.

These pictures both show the cowboy headed after the calf before he has thrown the rope.

2. **Team Roping**

In team roping, two pairs of rider and mount race after a steer. First one rider called the **header** attempts to rope the cow by

1. Both Horns
2. One horn and the head
3. or around the neck

If he is successful, then the other rider will attempt to rope the back legs. This rider is called the **heeler**.

He must capture both legs. If he doesn't, the team gets a 5 second penalty. The team finishes when both ropes are taut.

The resounding favorite breed used in these western sports is the American Quarter Horse.
A Running Horse Picture is Hard to Resist!

This first running horse picture is one of my favorites. There is just something about seeing them galloping through the snow that is magical.

So these two aren’t both running, but they look good anyway! Can you tell which is trotting? The one on the left is the same gelding as in the picture above. He is an Appendix Quarter, and the one on the right is my dun Appaloosa who is lacking spots! It looks like in this pic that she is starting to pick up a canter.
Check out this pic. This girl is hoofin’ it through the dark pasture. She is a chocolate palomino color and a gaited horse. Don't you just love that flaxen mane and tail? She reminds me of a "My Little Pony" I had when I was little.

This young gelding is running the fence line of his pasture in this picture to keep up with a group of us riding on the other side. You can barely see the painted behind of his pasture mate. In this picture he is about 2 years old. Isn't he handsome?
White Horse Picture

You would think that a white horse picture should be easy to spot, right? Well it turns out that **true white** is almost non-existent in horses. Did you know that most of the pictures of those that look that pristine color are really gray?

A truly white animal will have pink skin (and would lack pigmentation in the eyes). A gray, even though it may look light, will have dark or black skin. Many horses have truly white markings, but few are true albino.

On the picture above, you can see the pink skin on the nose, but if you look closely at the chest, it appears you can see some dark skin. That fact doesn't change how stunning this steed is playing in the field.
This guy is a trusty beginner lesson horse that has taught scores of young students how to ride. If you look closely at his picture, you can see both pink and dark skin. He is most likely an Appaloosa breed or background.

This picture is of a gelding that is actually a Cremello, (opens in a new window) which is a different color caused by a double dilution of a gene. Cremello’s have blue eyes. The true absence of color would be an Albino. It doesn’t really happen in the equine world and due to genetic defects, they don’t live very long.
White Horse Pictures:
Yes, They Are Truly Gray

Here you can enjoy some white horse pictures, although they are really grays. On the last page I explained why this color is so rare in the equine world.

This is one of the best pictures because you can see three different variations on the light coloring. The animal to the far left looks pretty light although his legs are darker gray. He has a pink nose. I would guess that he is of Appaloosa background because of his vertically striped hooves, and mottling around the nose.

The horse to the right of him looks kind of light, too. See how he has a very white behind? He is a darker base with white hairs blended in which is called roan. Then in the background on the right side there is a gray that is also pretty light. He still has darker gray points which may turn lighter as he ages.
This mini looks white, but he is actually a palomino paint. If you look to your left you can see that leg and shoulder are much lighter than his chest and the other leg. He is an extremely light palomino, but still two different colors.

This is one of the best pictures, and truly a stunning animal. The heavy feathering on the legs is common in draft breeds. Many times, these animals are born dark or steel gray. As the years go on, they become lighter and lighter until they appear to be white. This is similar to what happens to us as we age, too. They look like a different animal every year until they reach their final color.
The rate and degree of this process depends on the individual genetics. Not all animals will end up as light as this beautiful steed. Many also go through a stage where they have "dappling" and that in itself is stunning in any color.

**Simple Horse Line Drawing Tutorial**

A horse line drawing is one of the simplest ways to try your hand at capturing your equine friend on paper.

It involves no traditional shading, everything is done by using lines. This makes it great for beginners to try. In this tutorial you will be guided step by step in how to line draw a running horse like this one.

Before you get started, you’ll need a few things.

- A pencil with a sharp point. The sharp point will make the lines smoother. If you have drawing pencils you can try an hb type.

- Paper

  Drawing paper does have a specific front and back. The more textured side is the front. That is the side you will draw on.

  If you don’t have drawing paper, any fine textured paper will do. It is also helpful to anchor your paper by using a clipboard or masking tape. That way it won’t move around as you try and work with it.

- Eraser

  A rubber rectangular eraser, or a putty eraser is a great way to fix mistakes.
**Step One: Use Shapes to Form the Basics**

First you will create the basic shape of the horse body by using geometric shapes and some lines.

When learning how to draw horses using geometric shapes is an easy way to get the basic shape down on paper.

Since most people are familiar with and can duplicate ellipses, triangles and other shapes, it gives you a good place to start for shaping horses on paper.

- This makes it easier because you won’t have to draw a whole body outline first.

**Step 1: Draw Four Circles and a Line**

(i) The two bigger ones on the right will be the front of the neck, barrel and the smaller of those two is the hindquarters.
- Notice the placement. The smaller circle is about 1/3 of the way from the bottom of the larger one.

(ii) The two **smaller ones to the left** will be the top of the head and nose/muzzle.
- The larger of those two is the top of the horse’s head, and the bottom part of that one will become the cheekbone
- Keep them lined up and not too far apart for the ratio of the head you want to convey.

(iii) Draw a **horizontal line** near the bottom of the paper as shown above as a guide for the lower legs.

Keep all the shapes you draw for horses in these steps light because you are going to erase most of them later.

(i) Start by drawing circles for the joints using the triangles as your starting guide for the knee and hock joints.

(ii) Then draw the fetlocks using the same shape.

(iii) Next in this line art drawing sketch the outline of the legs following the lines and circles.

- You should notice that the equality and lines you’ve drawn for triangles are important for this piece of art.

Some of the lines for the contours will follow exactly the triangle line like the front leg that is extended, but others you’ll need to draw in some of the muscle contours using a curvy line.
**Step Two: Create the Outline Using Lines**

Next you will add the line that will become the outline of the body.

**Step 3: Finalize Contour Line and Add the Details**

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Step 4: Create the Outline for and Finish Legs**

**(iv)** Finish by using pointed triangle like shapes for the hooves and connecting them to the hoof forming the pasterns.
Step 5: Darken the Outline for the Bottom Half

(i) After you are happy with his profile finalize the bottom half of the body contours.

- Start with the underside of the neck, all four legs, and the belly

This will leave you with just the main features of the lower half of body finalized, but you'll finish the top half soon.

You'll do those next in step six..

- It takes practice to get the placement and size right for horse art.

Step 6: Upper Body, Face Details, and Begin Mane and Tail
(i) Start by drawing and finishing the outline of the upper half of the body.

Notice the withers gently slope into the horse's back. This comes from the top of your biggest body circle.

(ii) Next some face details

You'll keep it simple for *starting the eye* by following the shape seen in the picture above.

The **nose or nostril** is a simple curved line using the front of the outline of the face as the border

- **The mouth** is a simple line

(iii) You'll start the outline for the mane and tail

- Draw a slightly curved line above the neck where the tresses will be.

The hair here is free flowing. A running horse's tresses will blow in the wind above their back as they move just like ours does.

- Next outline the tail.

Horses will naturally **lift their tail bone** a bit when they are **running** or **excited**. That makes the hair a look a bit narrower at the top. That along with the wind catching the hair will send it flowing out behind them.

**Step 7: Eye, Finish Mane and Tail, Muscle Definition, Erase Starting Shapes**
(i) Fill in the eye with lines to darken it

Since you are doing a side view you won't see the other eye.

(ii) A couple of facial lines to create depth

As you can see there is a thin line drawn from around the eye down to the nostril. This will make your drawing more realistic by adding dimension to the face by indicating the bone beneath.

(iii) Erase the parts of the shapes you don't need that you used to block out the body and legs

For this drawing it will include the body and face circles, some of the triangles, and the leg join shapes.

(iv) Now finish the details of the hair

Here comes the fun part! Who doesn’t love drawing a long tail held proud and flowing in the wind?

- Use a series of thin pencil strokes using your outline as a guide to finish the locks.

(v) For more definition sketch muscle detail on the neck and barrel

- Follow the indications above including on the neck, shoulder, elbow, and flank.

This helps show the horses running action and gives more detail.

(vi) It doesn't show it here, but you can now add any more landscaping you'd like such as grass

- Use your horizontal line as a guide