

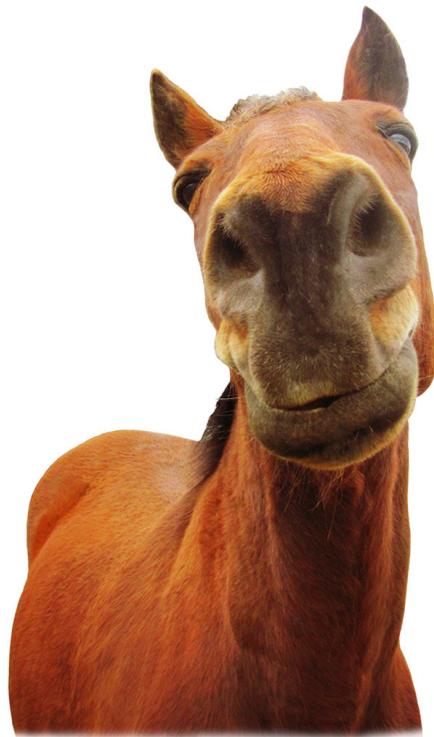
Note 0.75" inside margin
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Learning Levels Study Guides

Sample Pages

Just a few pages from different study guides
so you can test on your printer.



HorseSense Learning Levels

Start duplex printing here!

Welcome to the

Rainbow Level Guide to Horsemanship!

The Rainbow Level is an introductory level for young riders, ages 4 through 7, who are not yet able to ride and care for a pony independently.



Rainbow Level riders ride on the leadline, or with a “Ground Buddy” walking close by, to ensure their safety and control. They may require help with tasks such as leading and grooming, as well as the simple reading and writing required to complete the Level.

This guide presents each requirement in simple language with a full-sized illustration. We recommend using it as a coloring book, and reading through the material with the student.

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

Here’s what you’ll learn in Rainbow Level:

Unmounted Safety
Grooming
Ground Handling
Horse ID
Equine Behavior
Pony Parts
Tack
Mounted Safety
Flatwork Skills
Jumping Skills
Stable Management

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A Note About the Levels Program

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

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

- 🐾 The *Horsemanship Levels* concentrate on the rider's ability in the saddle, culminating in a rider who is balanced, educated and confident and can ride a schooled horse with skill and tact on the flat, over fences and in the open.
- 🐾 The *HorseSense Levels* focus on the extensive body of knowledge needed to care for and work with horses successfully, testing students on horse handling, veterinary and stable management skills.
- 🐾 The *HorseCentered Levels* introduce training and groundwork skills, allowing students to apply training techniques in a wide variety of situations while increasing communication and connection with the horse.

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

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


<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com>

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



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

Illustrations by Rhonda Hagy and Evan Surrusco.

Photographs by our amazing barn family volunteer photographers.

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Rainbow Level Objectives

The Rainbow Level is an introductory level,

designed to get you started on the journey of becoming a skilled and effective rider.

Let's take a look at the requirements of Rainbow Level and see what you will be learning. You can use this checklist to make goals for yourself and to see how far you've come!

- I take regular lessons—at least once a month with a knowledgeable instructor.
- I always wear boots and an ASTM-SEI approved helmet when I am working around horses. I can put on my helmet myself and show you how it fits correctly.
- I can tell you how to dress safely for riding.
- I can show you how to correctly approach a pony, and how to move around a pony safely—including walking around behind.
- I can tell you why you have to groom a pony and pick out his feet before every ride.
- I can help my instructor or an older, more experienced rider prepare for a ride. I help with the grooming, cleaning hooves, and putting on the saddle and bridle. When I am a little bit bigger, I will be able to tack up a pony without any help.
- I can show you the basic parts of a saddle and bridle, such as the bit, reins, stirrups and girth.
- I can lead a pony safely, both with a halter and lead rope and with the bridle reins.
- I can help do a safety check on my tack and pony before I ride. I can pull down the stirrups, put the reins over my pony's head, and help check the girth.
- I can mount and dismount correctly and safely. Even if I have to use the mounting block, or have my instructor give me a leg up, I know it is important to get on and off a pony carefully.
- I can demonstrate a basic balanced position while my pony is walking and standing still. I know that a bad position is dangerous for me and uncomfortable for my pony, so I always work hard to keep my eyes up, heels down, and "building blocks" in place.

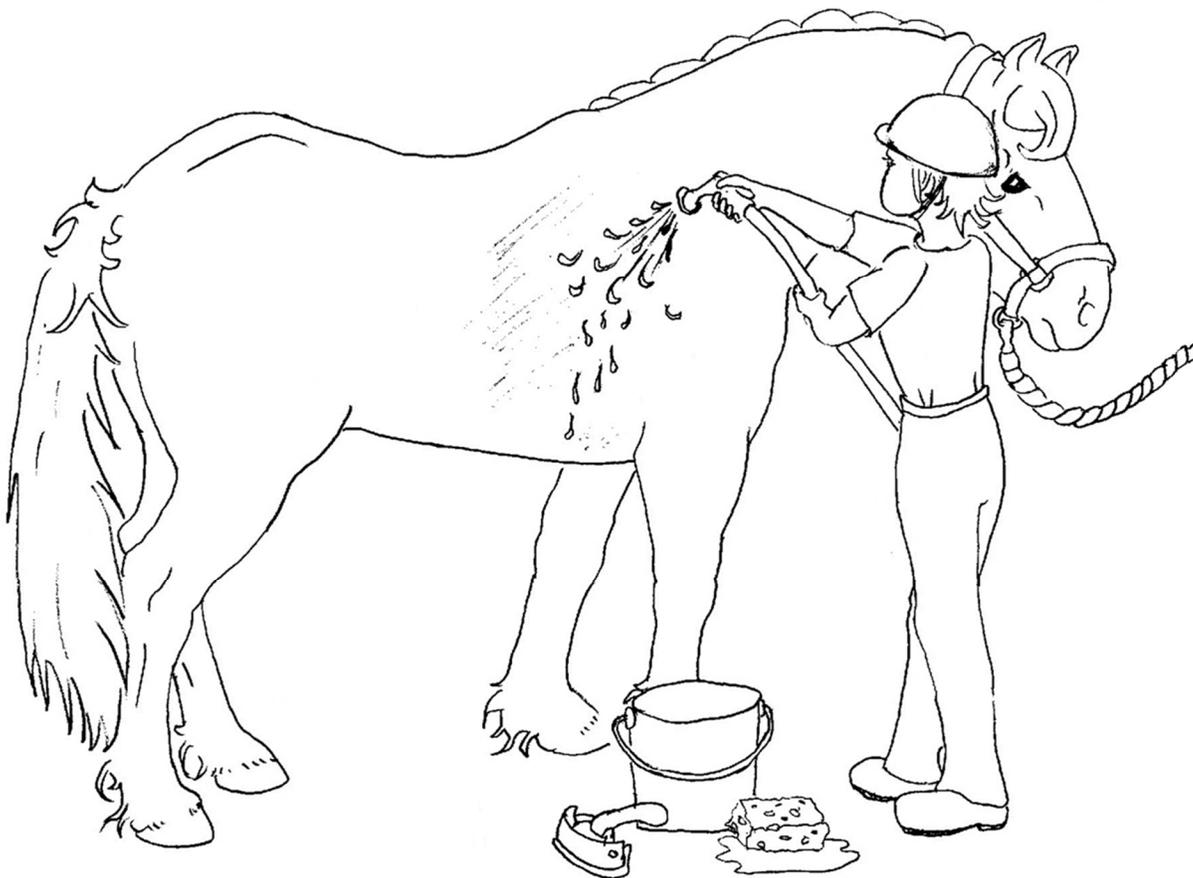
Rainbow Level Objectives, cont.

- I can pick up the reins and hold them correctly, at a suitable length.
- I can perform basic stretches and warm-up exercises at the walk, on the leadline. (This means someone is holding onto my pony to help me steer him.)
- I can go Around the World.
- I can demonstrate how I use my aids (my seat, legs, hand and voice) to ask my pony to walk, halt, and turn.
- I can walk once all the way around the arena without a leadline.
- I can ride in a balanced two-point position at the halt and the walk.
- I can walk my pony over ground poles, showing a good jumping position, keeping my eyes up and riding straight over the middle of each pole.
- I can ride the trot on the leadline. I can ride both a sitting trot and a posting trot, holding on to the saddle if necessary. I can keep up a steady rhythm at the posting trot, so it is comfortable for both me and my pony.
- I can tell you why it is important to cool out my pony after hard work, and help take care of him after a ride.
- I can name at least ten parts of the pony, and at least three grooming tools.
- I can feed a treat to a quiet pony safely. I know why it can be dangerous to feed a pony too many treats, and always ask permission.
- I have filled out the "My Pony" worksheet with the name, color, markings, height and breed of the pony I usually ride. It is okay if my instructor or another experienced horseperson helps me to find this information and write it down.
- I have helped an experienced horseperson clean out a stall. I know why it is important to clean out a pony's stall and water buckets every day.



Don't forget to HAVE FUN!

Cool Down



At the end of my ride, we always walk the pony to make sure he is cool. He can get sore or sick if his muscles don't get a chance to relax after a workout!

I help untack my pony and groom him. If he gets hot and sweaty in the summer, we might have to sponge him off, or spray off his sweaty places with a hose.

Break Away

Why is tying a horse so risky? Remember that a prey animal, if frightened, will try to run away before he stops to investigate. Put him in a situation where he **can't** run away and he may feel trapped and panic.



This horse was stung by a wasp. He pulled the entire fence out of the ground!

A panicked horse can be a dangerous horse. We can prevent this situation by using breakaway devices wherever we tie.

Horses are extremely strong. They can pull away fence boards, doors, and even unhitched horse trailers! You must choose your **tie post** carefully, even when using a breakaway.

A breakaway device breaks or releases under extreme pressure, such as when a frightened horse pulls back. It is much better to replace a halter or ring than to have to replace your horse! Occasionally, a horse will learn to release a breakaway device to avoid being tied. These horses need retraining from an experienced horse trainer.

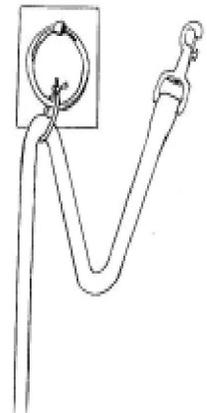
Some different breakaway devices:

You can use a **breakaway halter**, with a **leather crownpiece**, or a leather tab on the buckle. Keep a spare crownpiece handy in case it breaks!

Another option is to tie a **loop of string or twine** onto a tie ring. Run the lead rope through this loop before tying. Make sure this loop will break - modern hay twine is often made of strong plastic and will not release.



Some barns are equipped with special **breakaway tie rings**. These can be a good option if you don't have a sturdy tie post available.



How to tie a quick-release knot:



There are several different methods of tying a **quick release knot**. If you find this knot difficult, ask your instructor to show you a different variation. Practice tying the knot at home so you can do it confidently when it comes time to tie your horse.

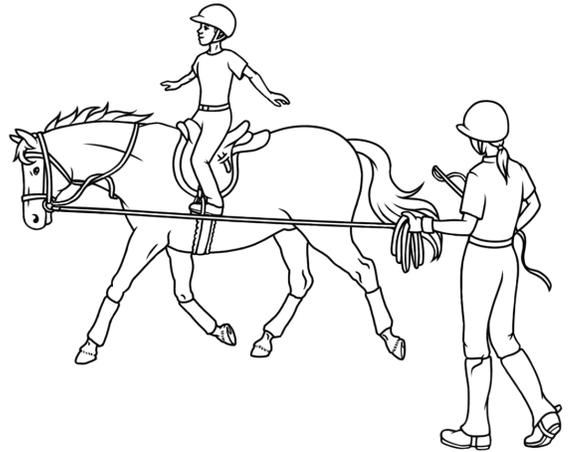
Tips for Posting Trot

If posting is difficult or awkward for you at first, don't worry - you aren't alone. Some riders find the posting rhythm natural, while others need to practice for weeks before the movement becomes smooth. The good news is, once you get it, your body will remember how to post for the rest of your life.

Hands free

Once you are comfortable with posting, if you have help from your instructor or a leader, you can try **posting with one or both arms outstretched**. When you can post smoothly without your hands, you are ready to start practicing with reins.

Holding the reins at the trot can be tricky. While you move up and down, the horse's head stays relatively still. You'll need to relax your elbows to allow your hands to stay at the withers as you post. Imagine your elbow joint is a hinge that opens as you rise and closes as you sit.



Longe line lessons are a great way to learn to trot!

More tricks to posting trot:

- 1. Keep your chin up and look straight ahead.** Looking down will throw your upper body out of balance and confuse your horse.
- 2. Every time you rise, let your heels sink down and back,** toward the horse's *hind* legs. Bracing on the stirrups and pushing your heels forward makes posting difficult as you will fall heavily into the saddle.
- 3. Match the horse's speed** with your posting rhythm. A common mistake is to hang in the air too long before sitting. This throws you and the horse out of sync and creates an extra bounce on the sitting beat.
- 4. All horses trot differently.** If you are riding a horse with a very smooth trot, you might only need to rise an inch or two out of the saddle. If you are riding a horse with a bouncy trot, he might catapult you into the air! Post just as high as the horse pushes you, so your posting is energy efficient and smooth.

On your own

Before you know it, you'll be ready to trot around the arena independently. This means you'll be riding **transitions between the walk and the trot**.

To **trot**, sit up straight and squeeze energetically with both legs. Back up your request with a kiss, cluck or firmer squeeze if necessary. Make sure your hands are low and quiet - if you pull on the reins, your horse won't want to trot! To **walk**, sit deep in the saddle and close your fingers on the reins. Sink your weight into your thighs and heels and keep your shoulders back, or you may tip forward! You will learn more about riding great walk-trot transitions in **Yellow Horsemanship**.



Taking up the Reins

In your first few lessons, your instructor may direct the horse herself while you practice staying in your balanced position. When you are ready to steer on your own, you will take control of the reins. **Handling the reins correctly can be tricky, but it is essential to develop what riders call “good hands.”** Horses quickly learn to hate riders who use the reins roughly!

The right rein hold for the job

Western riders can hold their reins in a few different ways. This depends on the training level of the horse, your ability level, and the kind of bit and bridle he wears.

Direct reining means that you ride with one rein in each hand, and use both hands to communicate. You hold each rein in a **soft fist**, with your **fingers closed** just tightly enough to keep the reins from slipping through. The rein should enter your palm under your pinky or ring finger, and the ends should lie under your thumbs.

Neck reining means that you ride with both reins in one hand, and use just that hand to cue the horse. Your other hand rests by your leg or your waist.

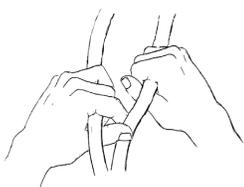
Western bridles can have different kinds of reins as well. Your horse might use **split reins** (two separate pieces), **roping/barrel reins** (reins that form a continuous loop from one bit ring to the other), or **Romel reins** (a closed loop with an extra “tail” held in one hand).



DIRECT REINING: TWO HANDS



NECK REINING: ONE HAND



Your instructor can help you determine the best way to hold your reins and the appropriate length. In general, you should ride with just a bit of slack in the reins. This allows you to apply light pressure to the bit by tightening your fingers or increasing the bend in your elbow.

Practice **lengthening** (giving the horse more rein) and **shortening** (taking the slack away) your reins until you can change the length quickly and smoothly!

Tips for terrific hands:

- 🐾 Hold the reins **just a couple of inches over the horse's withers**. If the reins are too low or too high, the bit will create uncomfortable pressure in the horse's mouth.
- 🐾 **Relax your elbows and let them hang by your ribs**. Releasing tension in your arms will help your hands to be quiet.
- 🐾 To keep the right tension in your fingers, **imagine you are holding two baby birds**. You don't want to crush them, but you don't want to drop them either.
- 🐾 **Remember that the reins are for communicating, not balancing**. If you need to hold onto something to feel secure - including the saddle horn - you aren't ready to ride on your own yet!

Vital Signs

Your horse's **vital signs** - temperature, pulse, and respiration - are important indicators of his health and condition. Vital signs are often abbreviated as "**TPR.**" Each horse's normal temperature, pulse and respiration may be slightly different, so you should take his vital signs **at rest** several times to find out what is usual for your horse.

Why take TPR?

- 🐾 You can tell if your horse is **sick** or **in pain**.
- 🐾 You can tell if your horse has a **fever** or is **overheated**.
- 🐾 You can tell if your horse has **recovered from a workout**.
- 🐾 You can **evaluate his fitness** by seeing how long it takes him to recover his normal resting rates after exercise.



You can prevent serious illness in your horse by noticing early signs of trouble.

This means learning all of your horse's "normals."

A horse's vital signs will be very different than yours! What would be a slight fever for you is a normal temperature for a horse. Their heart and lungs are big and slow. A horse's normal pulse and respiration may decrease with **conditioning** work, as a fit heart is strong and efficient and can beat less frequently.

Average TPR ranges:

Temperature: 99° to 101° Fahrenheit

Pulse: 30-48 beats per minute

Respiration: 8-20 breaths per minute

A few other indicators of horse health

Along with the horse's TPR, you should also learn to check:

- 🐾 **Gut sounds.** A healthy horse's digestive system is constantly at work. Sometimes, you might even hear some noise from his **hindgut** while you groom or tack him up. If you place your ear against his barrel, close to the flank, you should hear some continual quiet activity, and one to two big gurgles per minute.
- 🐾 **Gums.** A healthy horse's gums should be light pink, not red or white. If you press against the gum, leaving a white fingerprint, the normal color should return within two seconds. This is called the **capillary refill** and indicates that your horse is hydrated and his circulatory system is working properly. 
- 🐾 **Pinch test.** You can also evaluate a horse's hydration by pinching a fold of skin on his neck, close to his **point of shoulder**. The skin should snap back to its normal position immediately when released. If it takes 2 seconds or longer, the horse is likely dehydrated.

Your First Canter

Depending on how your horse naturally canters, the size and surface of your arena, and whether you take private or group lessons, your instructor may teach you to canter on the **longe line** first *or* by cantering short stretches **on the rail**. You might start with **sitting canter** or in a **light seat**. There are advantages and disadvantages to each method - the only right way is the one that keeps you safe and comfortable!

What should I expect when I canter for the first time?

When the horse first begins to canter, you will feel the front end of his body lift up, and his back will begin to swing up and down and front to back. This feels a little bit like riding a rocking horse, or a boat moving over waves.

The canter will probably seem big and powerful compared to the walk and the trot. Don't panic! You are not moving quite as fast as you think, and the more you **relax and breathe**, the easier the canter will be to ride.

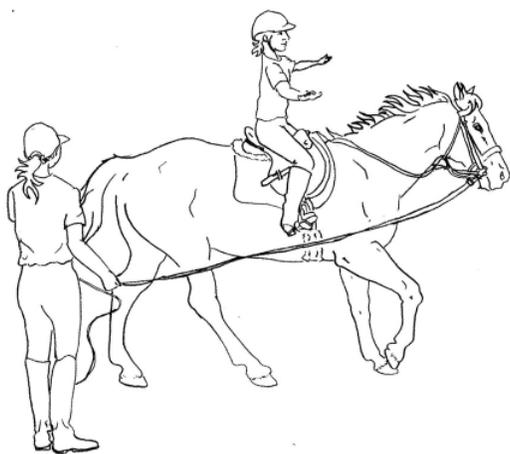


If you canter **on the rail**, you will begin by learning how to ask the horse for canter. You might cue for the **canter transition** in the sitting trot or the walk, depending on your horse's gaits and level of training.

In the beginning, your canters should be quite short - cantering down just one side of an arena is a great way to start. The canter is often easier to ride along a straightaway. You can also practice short canters safely in a group setting - as long as you keep your hands steady on the reins, and you stay calm and in control.

Keep steering, no matter what!

Most of the time, maintaining control and riding your horse in the correct direction is more important than staying in the canter.



You will be able to canter without your hands once you find your balance!

If you learn to canter on the **longe line**, you will not have to worry about controlling your horse, and will be free to focus on your own position. This is particularly helpful when you are learning to sit the canter, or if you need to hold mane or pommel to help keep your balance.

With practice, you can work up to cantering with both arms outstretched. If you can do this easily, you are ready to practice holding the reins and controlling the canter on your own.

However, **you must have a steady, fit and well-trained horse to canter safely on the longe line**. Some horses need to be warmed up on the longe line without a rider first, especially if they have not cantered in a while.

War on Worms

Deworming a horse involves administering a chemical substance that kills internal parasites, usually in the form of an oral paste or gel. To deworm a horse effectively, you'll need to learn a few strategies to prevent **parasite resistance** - and to keep your horse safe.

The poop scoop

For many years, it was considered good practice to deworm a horse every 6-8 weeks. However, the chemicals used for deworming have changed very little over the past few decades - which means that parasites have become increasingly resistant.

Now **fecal tests** are used to determine how often a horse should be dewormed. **Targeted deworming** is a schedule of administering oral dewormer designed to control specific parasites. Most horses are dewormed a minimum of twice a year; your veterinarian might advise doing it more frequently if the horse tests as a **high egg shedder**, meaning he has a heavy parasite load.



Choose your weapon

There are many different brands of dewormer available on the market. It is important to choose your dewormer based on the active ingredient.

Each active ingredient targets a different list of parasites. Praziquantel, for example, is the most effective against tapeworms. **Moxidectin** is usually used for controlling small strongyles, as it can target them in their encysted state. **Ivermectin** is a "broad spectrum" dewormer, which means it kills most - but not all! - internal parasites, including bot larvae.

Your veterinarian can help you decide which kind of dewormer is the best choice for your horse. You will likely be using a few different active ingredients throughout the year. Using only one type of dewormer increases the risk of resistance, and makes it likely that you will miss a few species of parasites.

Read dewormer packaging carefully before purchasing!
Many different brand names contain the same active ingredient.

Ideally, new horses that arrive at your farm should be dewormed well before they are turned out with other horses, to help prevent the spread of parasites from one pasture to another. However, **use caution when deworming a horse that is stressed or in otherwise delicate condition.** Purging dead parasites can be hard on their digestive system, and can even cause colic.

Don't forget, you must also administer the correct amount of dewormer for the chemical to be effective. **Review the Green HorseSense study guide** if you need a refresher on measuring your horse's weight and/or administering oral medicine.



Dewormer dosage is based on the horse's body weight

Wrap It Up

Wrapping a hoof can be a bit more challenging than applying a bandage to a stationary leg, as it requires you to keep the horse's hoof off the ground for a prolonged period of time. Make sure your horse is standing comfortably on level ground, and that he is accustomed to having his hooves handled regularly. If your horse is uncooperative, **be patient** with him. Horses often pull their hooves away because they are sore or uncomfortable, and you need your horse to be calm, not ready for a fight!

While you should be capable of wrapping a hoof alone, don't be afraid to ask for help - especially when learning, or if the horse is fidgeting and pulling the hoof away!

Before you start, do a little prep by **tearing off strips of duct tape** ahead of time. (The tape can be difficult to tear while holding up a hoof!) You will need **6 to 10 strips**, approximately **twice the length of the horse's sole**. You can leave the strips separate or make a duct tape "patch."

LOOSELY attach the tape strips to the fence, wall, or your own pants leg - **whatever you can easily reach**. Some horses are fine with having the tape attached to their arm and shoulder, but test this first, and *make sure* to remove the tape by pulling down in the direction of the hair growth, not up!



1. Stand the horse on a level, clean surface. If you are soaking the hoof, you can wrap as soon as you remove the hoof from the soaking solution.

2. Apply drawing agent, if used, to the sole of the hoof. Wear a rubber glove, and as soon as the sole is coated, remove the glove and discard.

3. Place the toe of the hoof in the crease of the diaper. Pull the adhesive tabs around the bulbs of the heel and fasten snugly.



4. Begin winding the self-adhesive bandage around the hoof wall, securing the diaper at the coronary band and heels. Be careful not to pull too tight.

5. After a few wraps, angle the bandage to cross the hoof diagonally. Wrap once around, and repeat in the opposite direction. Continue wrapping in this figure-8 until the sole is covered.

6. When the bandage is in place, lay the duct tape across the sole of the hoof, with as few wrinkles as possible. Seal the edges tightly against your bandaged "boot."

Lateral Thinking

In **Orange Level**, you learned how to combine several aids to ask your horse to move his hindquarters **laterally**, or to the side, in a **turn on the forehand**. Now you can practice lateral steps in motion by learning a maneuver called a **leg yield**.

What is a leg yield?

A leg yield is an exercise in which the horse moves **sideways and forward at the same time**, maintaining the rhythm of his gait. His body should remain fairly straight, with just a slight **flexion** to the inside. The inside legs cross in front of the outside legs, with his shoulders positioned just slightly ahead of his hindquarters as he moves to the side.

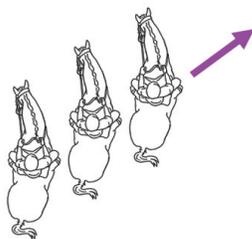
A leg yield can be ridden toward the rail, away from the rail, or along the rail with the horse positioned at a 45 degree angle to the fence. It can be ridden at all three gaits, with walk being the easiest and the canter the most advanced.



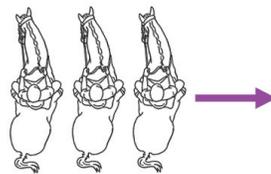
Spot the difference

The leg yield is often confused with the **half-pass**, a more advanced dressage movement seen in televised dressage, or the **sidepass**, a maneuver used primarily in Western riding.

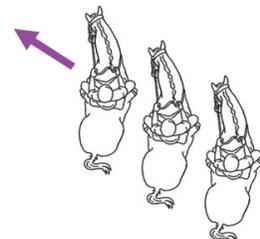
The sidepass can be useful to learn but differs from other lateral movements in that the horse moves **only** sideways, not forward. In the half-pass, the horse bends through his body and moves **toward** the direction of the bend. This is more difficult than the leg yield, where the horse remains straight and flexes slightly **away** from the direction of travel.



Leg yield



Sidepass



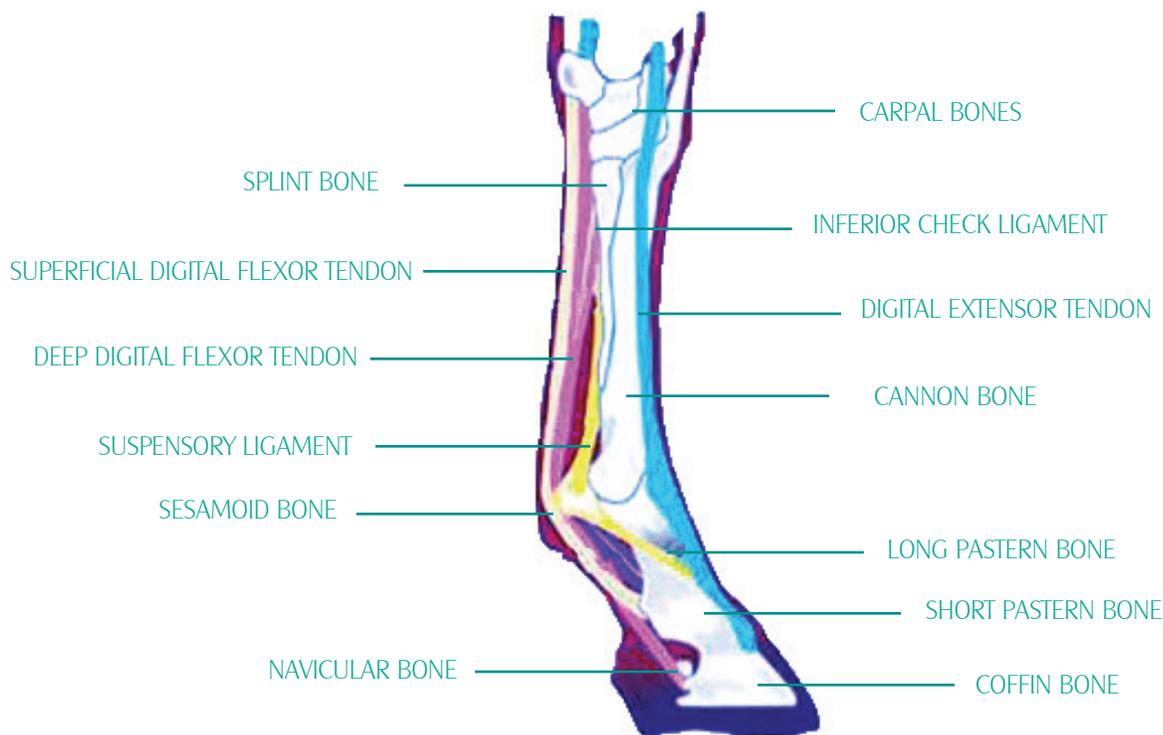
Half pass

Why learn to leg yield?

- 🐾 **It teaches you and the horse to move sideways away from leg pressure in motion**, building a foundation for future lateral exercises.
- 🐾 **It can help you straighten your horse** and move toward the rail or away from the rail in balance, without pulling on the inside rein or spoiling your horse's bend.
- 🐾 **It can strengthen and supple your horse** by encouraging him to push more strongly with his inside hind leg.
- 🐾 **It helps you practice moving your horse from your inside leg toward your outside rein**, an essential skill in advanced riding.

A Leg to Stand On

There are no muscles in the horse's lower leg, only bones, tendons and ligaments. Lower leg anatomy is crucial to learn if you intend to ride or train performance horses, as problems in this part of the horse's body can lead to career-ending injury.



Support systems

- 🐾 **Tendons are attached to muscles and therefore work in pairs.** The flexor tendons contract to lift the leg, and the extensor tendons straighten it. Tendons are protected by a fluid-filled **tendon sheath** wherever they cross a joint.
- 🐾 **Tendons have a small amount of elasticity that allows them to stretch.** If a tendon is stretched too far, it may begin to tear, creating inflammation and scarring. Scar tissue does not stretch, which means a severely sprained or "bowed" tendon may never regain its full range of motion.
- 🐾 **The suspensory apparatus supports the horse's fetlock and absorbs shock.** This system includes the suspensory ligament, the deep and superficial flexor tendons, and the sesamoid bones and ligaments. Suspensory injuries can be seriously debilitating as this apparatus is what allows the limb to bear the horse's weight.
- 🐾 **The stay apparatus consists of opposing tendons, muscles and ligaments that lock the limb into place,** allowing the horse to rest while standing upright. In the forelimb, this system is made up of the flexor and extensor tendons, the triceps and biceps muscles, and the superior check ligament. In the hind limb, support comes from higher up, in the stifle ligaments and quadriceps muscles.
- 🐾 **Arthritis and repetitive stress can cause excess calcification in joints, cartilage and ligaments,** creating unsoundnesses such as ringbone, sidebone, splints and bone spavin.

Ground Training 101

Just like there are dozens of different riding disciplines to choose from, ground training can take many different forms, depending on the techniques and equipment you use. Here are a few of the most common types of groundwork:

Natural horsemanship is a term used to refer to a popular form of groundwork based on **negative reinforcement, or the application and release of pressure.** The horse is typically worked in a rope halter and a long lead, and directed with a training stick or whip.



Round penning/“join up” also uses negative reinforcement, but in a specific location: a **round pen.** Pressure is applied to ask the horse to move around the pen, and released when the horse shows signs of submission, until the horse decides to follow the handler.

Positive reinforcement training, also referred to as **clicker training or R+.** A **reward** is offered - usually food - for desired behavior. A sound called a **bridge** or **marker** is used to help the horse understand exactly what behavior is being rewarded. The horse may be worked with or without tack, and is given opportunities to communicate preference and decline the trainer’s requests.



Liberty work refers to interacting with the horse without tack, so the horse is free to come or go as he pleases. This can be trained using positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, or a mixture of the two.

Longeing, also spelled lungeing, refers to working the horse on a circle at the end of a long line. This is usually done for exercise or to improve the horse’s balance and suppleness. Some trainers may use additional equipment to ask the horse to work in a specific posture.



Long lining is similar to longeing, but the horse wears two lines attached to either side of the bit. The handler walks behind or just to the inside of the horse holding a line in each hand, like reins. This can help prepare a horse for riding and provides the trainer flexibility as the horse can be worked in a straight line as well as a circle.

Classical in-hand work is performed with the horse in a bridle and the handler walking alongside. The horse can be asked to perform a series of progressively complex maneuvers, such as lateral work, improving their strength and balance as well as their responsiveness under saddle.



Which kind of groundwork is best for me?

The style of groundwork you practice will depend on your goals and the resources you have available - including the instructor or trainer you choose to learn from! All forms of groundwork training have pros and cons, and it can be helpful to learn multiple approaches.



HorseSense Learning Levels



Look for the following Learning Levels Study Guides
in the Resource Center:

https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource-center/?_sft_resource_type=study-guides

 Rainbow Level Coloring Book - English or Western (E/W)

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|---|--|
|  Red Level HorseSense Study Guide |  Red Level Horsemanship Study Guides - E/W |
|  Yellow Level HorseSense Study Guide |  Yellow Level Horsemanship Study Guide |
|  Green Level HorseSense Study Guide |  Green Level Horsemanship Study Guide |
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|  Orange Level HorseSense Study Guide |  Orange Level Horsemanship Study Guide |
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