



# HorseSense Learning Levels



## OBSTACLE COURSES

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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[www.HorseSenseLearningLevels.com](http://www.HorseSenseLearningLevels.com)

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

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Illustrations by Rhonda Hagy

Photographs by our amazing  
barn family volunteer  
photographers.

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# INTRODUCTION

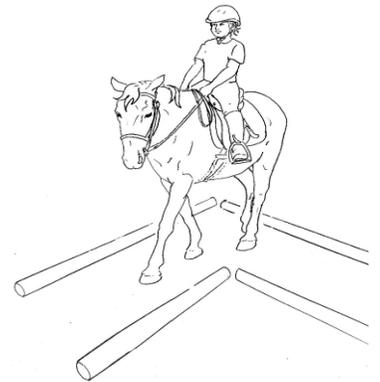
Welcome to **Patterns & Maps: Obstacle Courses!** We hope you find these courses to be a fun and useful supplement to your lessons, camps and shows.

## ABOUT THESE COURSE MAPS

Each set contains **five course maps**, with a supplementary page of information alongside each map. All of the obstacle courses shared here have been used in our riding school with students of all ages, and can be modified to suit riders at every level.

It is worth noting that **while the courses are our own creation, they contain many familiar elements** found in mounted games, western trail, extreme cowboy racing, and other disciplines. We find that practicing many different forms of horsemanship keeps our students engaged and open-minded, and helps them become versatile, well-rounded riders.

You might wish to tweak the content of each course to suit your program's chosen discipline or goal - please, feel free to adapt! **We encourage you to use these maps as a general guideline and a source of inspiration rather than a rigid formula.**



Each map contains:

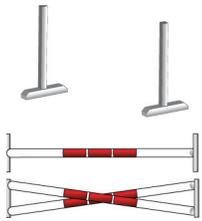
- 🐾 The course's **objective**, geared toward riders of a specific Level.
- 🐾 A list of **required equipment**, with suggestions for substitution.
- 🐾 Written **directions for each obstacle** shown on the course. Obstacles are listed in order, but you can rearrange the course to your liking.
- 🐾 Notes on **variations, specifications on setting the course**, and **additional thoughts or cautionary notes**.

We have a bunch of **suggestions** to help you get the most out of our course maps. Read through the following pages to find:

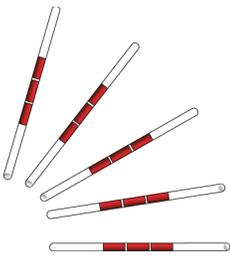
- 🐾 Tips for using the courses for **multiple Levels** and for **variations** that keep lessons fresh and fun.
- 🐾 **Specifications for equipment** and **creative ideas for making equipment** with minimal cost.

## REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

Obstacle courses are one of the most equipment-intensive activities we use in lessons, but we think the benefits outweigh the time and cost of assembling props. Keep in mind that in many cases, equipment can be substituted. You can even eliminate or replace specific obstacles as needed.



**Jump standards** are used to create **jumps** and **invisible jumps**, and to secure **ground poles**. Paired with ground poles, they create the illusion of a real “jump” for less experienced riders. We also use them to create beginner-friendly obstacles such as **baby crossrails** (crossrails set on the lowest hole, creating an obstacle 6” or lower in the center) and **pole stacks** (three poles set in a pyramid formation to create a raised pole).



**Poles.** Used to create **bridges, boxes, jumps** and **ground pole grids**. We love polework so much that we’ve designed courses entirely around our students’ favorite setups - these are **map #3** in each set.

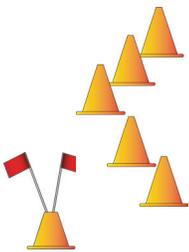
We recommend **heavy-duty poles** 3” to 4” in diameter, made of wood or thick PVC. Whenever horses are asked to step over poles, the **ends should be secured** with blocks, cones, or the feet of jump standards - this prevents poles from rolling forward dangerously if struck by the horse’s hooves. While most of our poles are 8’ to 12’ long, we’ve found it useful to keep a few skinny poles approximately 4’ in length to test accuracy. **Lighter poles** - 1-2” diameter PVC - can be used to create bridge or box edges.



**Cavaletti** work well for grids and small jumps, but are not ideal for forming boundaries.



**Barrels.** **55-gallon drums** are generally best as they can be reached by beginners and used as jumps or fillers. In a pinch, **heavy-duty trash bins** are a good substitute. If your program includes competitive mounted games, you’ll need to build or purchase regulation litter bins with wooden table tops, which can be used in place of barrels.



**Cones.** In our experience, you can never have too many cones. We like using **12” to 18”** cones for our most visible markers, with 18” cones performing additional duties as jump fillers and mounted games equipment. Small flexible **soccer cones** can also be used to lay out pathways and bending lines. The more lightweight they are, the easier they are to knock down and the greater the challenge!

**Flag cones.** These are 18” cones with the tops cut off, leaving a hole approximately 4” in diameter. We get a LOT of use out of our flag cones and recommend keeping a minimum of 2 on hand. **Flags** are easy to make from 4’ wooden dowels and 8” squares of fabric.



**Bending poles.** Poles can easily be made with PVC pipe and cones, or you can buy bases to insert wooden or PVC poles. Poles that stand 54-60” tall are ideal.

Jump standards or cones can be substituted wherever poles are used for weaving - but keep in mind that several courses (especially the mounted games courses) require equipment to be placed on or over a pole. We recommend keeping at least one full set of 5 poles for lessons and 3 sets for competitive games.

## FOR LOVE OF THE GAME

Each set of obstacle course maps includes a course inspired by **mounted games**. After many fun years of participating competitively through the International Mounted Games Association and United States Pony Club, we've found this sport to be an essential component to our lesson programs. The games are fun for all ages, promote teamwork and sportsmanship, and are great teachers of equitation. Students who play games regularly learn to use all of their natural aids to communicate with their horse, while developing secure, independent seats and a strong lower leg.



**You will need some specialized equipment to play mounted games and build the related courses. The items below follow US Pony Club specs - more or less - and are easy DIY projects.**

**The pieces we have found the most valuable include:**

-  **Buckets.** Both 5-gallon water buckets and 2-gallon wash buckets are used in the games.
-  **Mugs.** We prefer regulation enamel camping mugs, but have used kid-safe plastic mugs in the past.
-  **Tennis balls.** Also useful for creating scurry cones to test accurate steering.
-  **Bottles.** Fill 1-liter plastic drink bottles halfway with sand to keep them from blowing in the wind.
-  **Jousting lance.** Cap both ends of a 4' length of 1" PVC pipe and create a handle from (it's okay to laugh!) a rubber toilet plunger cup. Our students love "jousting" at cones.
-  **Old socks.** Tightly roll thick socks and secure the roll with sewing thread or glue.



-  **Cartons** can be made from plastic sports bottles with the top cut off. We've found all of ours inexpensively at local thrift shops.
-  **Sword.** Cross and securely tape together a 24" length of 0.5"-diameter wooden dowel with a second piece that is 12" long, leaving approximately 6" on the longer dowel for a handle.
-  **Rings.** We prefer rubber O-rings used for elderly vacuum cleaners, but have also used toy rings in several different sizes.

-  **Hi-Lo net.** Traditionally made of a steel ring and net placed on top of a 7' length of 2"-diameter wooden or PVC pole. You may be able to create a variation by attaching a toy basketball hoop to a pole or jump standard.

**Get equipment specifications for competitions and ideas for more games:**

<http://www.mounted-games.org/imga/games/rules/IMGA%20Rule%20Book%202019.pdf>

<https://www.ponyclub.org/ContentDocs/Activities/Rulebooks/2019%20Games%20rulebook%20Print.pdf>

## FUN FOR ALL: TIPS FOR USING OBSTACLE COURSES

The courses are divided by suggested Level, and frequently complement a specific Levels objective or lesson. **However, they can easily be recycled for riders of all Levels.** Walk poles can become trot or canter poles; advanced riders can enjoy a Red Level course when challenged to ride it at high speeds. Upper-level courses can be modified and ridden entirely at the walk to suit a green horse or rider.

For this reason, you'll notice that **gaits** are not mentioned in the course directions. In general, we expect that **Rainbow/Red** students will be riding the course at the walk; **Yellow/Green/Blue**, the walk and trot with minimal canter; and **Orange/Purple/Teal** will be primarily trotting and cantering. The speed will depend on the goal of the course, however, and should always remain the instructor and/or student's choice.



We know how much precious time can be lost in setting and resetting an arena - we hope that whatever course you build, you can leave it up and use it throughout the following week.

After all, obstacle courses can be fun for teenagers and adults as well as children. They also provide much-needed mental stimulation for school horses, preventing ring sourness and burnout. ***Never underestimate the importance of enjoyment in a lesson program - for both human and equine participants!***

### Options for using obstacle courses for both group and individual lessons

Timed courses can be ridden individually or in a relay. Make sure you **establish specific rules** for how each obstacle must be completed. At HorseSense, we alternate between two rules:

1. If a horse steps outside a boundary, equipment is knocked over, or an obstacle is otherwise not ridden correctly, the student must **Try, Try Again**, attempting the obstacle until completed successfully.
2. Alternatively, if time is short or equipment cannot be reset, riders can take a **time penalty** for each error on the course. This time penalty might be anywhere from 5 to 20 seconds, depending on the severity of the infraction.



**Note that all of the directions assume that all horses used are safe, sound, and have been trained to perform and/or accept the skill being taught.**

Several courses require unusual or "spooky" equipment that an untested horse may find frightening. **We recommend thoroughly desensitizing lesson horses to every piece of equipment used** before sending students through the course. While the Levels can be used to help students design goals for their project horses, we hope that all your beginners are able to practice basic skills on appropriately seasoned mounts.