

SAMPLE #1

FLATWORK SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

LEAPFROG

OBJECTIVE: Students will improve their ability to rate the horse's speed at walk and trot as they practice passing other riders to the inside.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- OPTIONAL CONE, POLE OR STANDARD TO MARK START/FINISH LINE

PREP

Ensure that rail and inside track of arena are clear and free from obstacles such as jumps or barrels. Designate a piece of arena equipment or other landmark as the start/finish line, preferably away from gate.

INTRO

As students warm up at the walk, discuss how transitions can be ridden within the gait as well as between the gaits. **ASK: Can you think of a situation where it would be useful to ride a more powerful trot, or a steadier trot, without breaking gait?**

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MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

☞ **Review:** transitions between a fast walk and slow walk ("Tortoise and Racecar" game). Transitions between walk and trot, followed by a second round of transitions within the walk. **ASK: How can we show the horse that it is a fast walk we want, and not a trot?**

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☞ **Review:** transitions between a fast trot and a slow trot ("Tortoise and Racecar" game).

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Emphasize: By the end of the exercise, the horses should be maintaining free forward movement on their own, and performing prompt transitions **without constant nagging** or the rider holding the mouth. Any student who struggles with this may need a refresher course on the sequence natural aids, and/or correct use of a crop or dressage whip.

☞ **Discuss:** Safe passing technique in crowded arena: always to inside, horse length away and horse length in front before returning to rail. If necessary, demonstrate or review **passing skills** on rail.

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☞ **PRACTICE:** Pair up students and send one pair out to rail, single file. At the walk, have them take one lap of the arena, starting and finishing at the same point and **passing each other as many times as possible** during this lap, without making significant changes to the horse's gait. Count each successful pass as one point. Repeat with remaining riders.

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☞ **PRACTICE:** One at a time, have each pair repeat the exercise, but this time, the rider being passed **slows the horse's gait**, and the one passing **asks the horse to accelerate**. No points awarded for breaking gait! Repeat in the other direction at the trot. Each pair should be able to improve on their previous tally; the winning pair is the one with the most successful passes.

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REVIEW

- ? Do you find it easier to steady your horse or send him forward? Why do you think this is?
- ? Slowing the horse without breaking gait requires you to use ALL your aids. What happens if you don't use your leg?

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MIN

SAMPLE #1

HorseSense Learning Levels

LEAPFROG

GREEN LEVEL

TEACHING FOR THE FUTURE

Teaching beginner riders often means balancing the need to give students skills they can use NOW and creating good habits for the future. This lesson is a great example. Eventually, we want our students to **lengthen and shorten stride**, using correctly-executed **half-halts** to **balance** and **collect** the horse. Does the average Green Level student possess the independent use of aids necessary to do this? No, but we can still plant the seeds!

Clearly and simply explain the future goal, but don't expect students to immediately achieve it. Say, "With lots of practice, you'll be able to help the horse lengthen stride without losing his rhythm. Today, though, your horse might just speed up when you ask for more power - and that's okay as long as you are asking correctly and can keep him from breaking gait!" Teach Green Level students that using restraining aids - seat and rein - along with leg is the foundation of an important skill called a half-halt. If you have taught many lessons on transitions, such as **Red #14 Whoa and Go Poles** or **Yellow #13 Transition Tournament**, they may already be familiar with the concept.

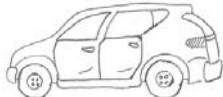
Make sure to praise every step your student takes toward the ideal, while reminding them that the journey doesn't end here. After all, that's one of the most important things we can teach new riders: **that becoming an excellent equestrian is a lifelong project**, and we never stop learning how to do things better!

GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- ☞ If you are teaching an **odd number of riders**, have students take turns forming pairs so that all riders are able to participate equally. Three students for example, might ride three rounds of the Leapfrog game in the following pairs: A/B, B/C, C/A.
- ☞ Ideally, regular **private** students should join a group for this lesson - while they can practice rating speed on their own, knowing how to pass safely is an essential skill! If scheduling logistics make this impossible, consider mounting up and teaching this lesson from the saddle.



Keep an eye out for ugly ears!



Relate the game to driving a car. This is especially useful when teaching adults, teenagers or boys (who usually love all things with wheels!). The inside track is the "passing lane" and cars that move into the passing lane must accelerate to pass safely. If the rider on the rail gets cut off and is forced to "hit the brakes," it is okay for them to honk!

FINAL NOTES

- ☞ Monitor herd dynamics carefully throughout the Leapfrog game. While generally, the rule of "one horse-length to the inside and one horse-length in front" is sufficient while passing, abnormally **hostile or claustrophobic horses might need more space**. Remember that **beginners are often slow to react** if a horse swings around or acts aggressive, and that horse length might disappear before they are fully aware of the situation! Consider personalities as well as relative speeds when forming pairs. If you have no choice but to pair two plodders for safety's sake, and you suspect the teams might be unevenly balanced, you may want to handicap the faster team, or remove the competitive element and, have teams strive only to beat their own score.

SAMPLE #2

JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

INFINITY POLE

OBJECTIVE: For students to gain confidence riding over a single ground pole, while developing awareness of diagonals and leads and ability to hold the horse on a line.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- SINGLE GROUND POLE, FIXED WITH CONES
 OR BLOCKS TO PREVENT ROLLING 4 CONES

PREP

Place ground pole on centerline, facing A and C. Secure with cones or blocks to prevent pole from rolling out of place. Set two cones at each short end of arena, close to corners but with plenty of room for rider to trot or canter behind both cones.

INTRO

As riders warm up at the walk, discuss what is meant by holding a line, and the importance of straightness on the flat and over fences. **ASK: Do you find it challenging to line your horse up straight after turning at the trot or canter? How does being on the wrong diagonal or lead make this harder?**

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MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

Review: Turning down centerline at the walk and trot, passing directly over the center of the pole. Alternate turns to the left and right.

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Emphasize: Students should **check posting diagonal** and change **before the upcoming turn** on the departure. The correct shoulder will change after each trip over the pole, so students must keep careful track of their inside and outside, especially after riding over the pole in two-point position!

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MIN

Review: Following a warm-up canter on rail in each direction, with attention to leads, ask each student to canter through the short side of the arena and across the diagonal (crossing the centerline just before the pole), performing a simple lead change before returning to the rail. **ASK: How long did you need to stay in the trot to reorganize for the new canter transition? What could you do to change leads more efficiently?**

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Discuss: Up until now, students have been instructed to always approach their "jumps" on a perfectly perpendicular line. Jumps can be ridden on **a slight angle**, however, if the horse is **straight and balanced**.

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PRACTICE: One at a time, ask students to trot to the left through short side, behind both cones, at a slight diagonal over the pole, and behind the cones on the opposite short side, this time traveling to the right. Both turns should be ridden on the correct diagonal. Once the exercise can be ridden smoothly, increase the difficulty by **a)** performing the infinity loop in single file formation, **b)** cantering just the short sides, **c)** cantering just the pole, and/or **d)** cantering the whole exercise, with simple changes before each turn.

REVIEW

- ? Should you ride the pole in full seat or light seat? What about the canter transitions?
? Where is the best place to change your diagonal or lead? Why?

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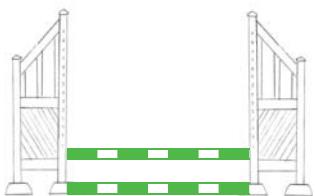
SAMPLE #2

INFINITY POLE

GREEN LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- Practice drill team technique by sending a group of three or more riders through in columns of two, traveling opposite directions to form a **Thread the Needle** maneuver. (Walk and trot this for a long, long time before attempting at the canter!) This exercise can be a great addition to drill team practices or quadrille camps where you want to improve technique, as the cones and the pole require each rider to hit all the right points and to ride symmetrical turns.



- For students who have already gained proficiency in trotting over crossrails, you can play a scaled-down version of **Chase Me Charlie**, raising the pole incrementally until it forms a small vertical no more than 18" high. Most school horses are honest over this height, but emphasize the increased need for accuracy when jumping off the slight angle, and allow plenty of time to teach students the correct way to handle a runout - particularly if they've never experienced one before.

PREREQUISITES

At the trot, this lesson can be safely taught to **any student capable of riding a more-or-less straight line over a pole**. It can actually be a great exercise for Yellow Level students working to improve their recognition of posting diagonals or ability to ride a wide, accurate turn, as long as you don't expect immediate perfection! **At the canter**, this lesson is best saved for **more experienced Green Level students** who have already learned to ride the **canter securely in both a full and light seat**, both on and off the rail; who can **perform a simple change of lead**; and who have **cantered over a single pole on a straight approach**, preferably enough that they have experienced an **awkward distance** or two.

At HorseSense, we use this as a "bridge" lesson to determine if Green Level students are ready to start working on more advanced skills. It is absolutely okay to present this lesson two or three times - the exercise is challenging enough for a new rider at the canter that they may appreciate the familiarity!



FINAL NOTES

- When working riders in a group lesson through the pattern one at a time, **station riders awaiting their turn at E or B**. This will keep them safely out of the way and also set them up to move immediately into their turn.
- This exercise **requires a bit of space to ride easily at the canter**. Even a small 20x40m dressage arena can make the turns feel tight. We recommend that in any arena shorter than 50m, you teach the lesson initially at the trot, and attempt at the canter when your student has demonstrated consistent control and accuracy in the faster gait.
- Horses that **leap over ground poles or get quick over poles** are **not a suitable choice** for this lesson! If teaching an unknown horse or rider, ask them to warm up over a simple pole on the long side first. If the horse is unable to take the pole quietly in stride, keep the student at the trot or consider an alternate mount.