

TROT IN HAND

- ☐ *Jog horse in hand, with safe technique, as though jogging for soundness.*

OBJECTIVE: One of our biggest goals for Yellow Level students is for them to become **trustworthy caretakers** as well as **safe, helpful contributors in the barn**. This means they need to **recognize signs of trouble with their horses**, such as lameness. They should know what to do when something goes wrong - especially if the first step is getting help!

Jogging a horse in hand helps students learn to look critically at how the horse moves and **identify abnormalities or signs of distress**. It also has the benefit of encouraging students to practice with their horses **in-hand**. Groundwork is a hugely important part of horsemanship - particularly for new equestrians developing their leadership skills - but it often becomes a low priority once students have mastered the fundamentals covered in Red Level.

Encourage your students to lead their horses with intention and an attention to detail. Trotting in hand is a way to assess **communication, leadership, relaxation, attentiveness** ... all qualities we want to achieve in the saddle!

CHECKING IT OFF: Jogging a horse can be practiced any time the student has a suitable horse in hand, assuming you have enough space to do so safely. Of course you wouldn't trot down the middle of a busy driveway or through a crowded arena, but keep an eye out for other potential pitfalls, such as a tasty patch of grass and a hungry pony!

Look for opportunities for students to spend just a few minutes leading their horses in mounted lessons, such as in the warm-up or cool-down, course walks or mounted games.

You'll know they've got it: if they can ask the horse to trot in hand calmly and confidently, without applying pressure on the reins, using whip tactfully *if necessary*. The horse should be jogged away from you, turned at the walk, and jogged back toward you, demonstrating that the student can maintain a straight line.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

"What should you do if your horse doesn't want to trot along with you? Are horses born knowing how to jog in hand politely?"

"What should you do if your horse gets excited and goes faster than you want?"

"Imagine you have a rock in your boot and you are asked to jog. How will it change how you move? What happens in the rest of your body when you try to take your weight off the rock?"

"Do you think it's safer to turn the horse toward or away from you? Should you take this turn at the walk or the trot?"

LET'S GO
FOR A RUN!

PLAYING HORSE

In **Red Level**, you may have introduced ground skills with **human "horses,"** allowing students to practice haltering, leading and tying in a safe environment. This can be a great way to begin jogging in hand. Some students find it difficult to coordinate running, prompting the horse for transitions, and handling the whip at the same time. Horseless simulations allow them to put everything together without worrying about the 1000lb. animal at the end of the rope.

Pair up students; volunteer to play horse yourself if you are teaching a private student or have an uneven number. Practice jogging with **both halters and bridles** (the "horses" wear the crownpiece on top of their heads) and **setting up for turns**. Teach students how to hold and use a **dressage whip** effectively to encourage forward movement. Remind them that their **body language** has a powerful influence on the horse's behavior. You may wish to assign roles to each of the "horses" to prevent spontaneous rowdy behavior. Watch out for bolting or excessive use of the whip!



On a rainy day ... teach in-hand skills in two stages: first with human "horses," then with the real thing. If you have an indoor aisle large enough, set a simple course with cones marking points where the horse must halt, jog, walk, and perform inside and outside turns. We recommend sharing one easygoing horse between students so you don't have to worry about maintaining safe spacing in such a small area.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Jogging a horse in hand is a relatively simple skill, but students will struggle if they have not already developed excellent leading habits. **Review Red Level leading skills at the walk** prior to trotting in hand. Students should be leading their horses with confidence and control, communicating effectively and managing their excess rope or rein length in a safe way. If they have a habit of coiling the excess rope around their hand, or their horse snatches grass at every opportunity, they are not ready to trot!

Establish the same **good habits** for the jog in hand by asking yourself the following questions:

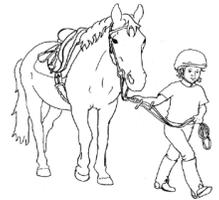
-  **Is their grip correct?** Ideally, students should hold the lead rope or reins 6" to 12" from the bit or halter, allowing the horse complete freedom to carry their head naturally. Many students unconsciously use a restrictive grip, particularly when they are worried about controlling their horse.
-  **Are they pulling?** Dragging a slow horse is a common fault at the walk and trot. Remind students that the engine of the horse is in the back, and that their horses should walk and jog *with* them, not behind!
-  **Are they looking ahead?** Students often look back at their horse, which can actually discourage the horse from moving forward.
-  **Are they using the whip correctly?** Dressage whips should be held in the student's **left** hand (if they are jogging on the near side) along with the excess rope or reins. If needed to back up a cue, the student should extend the left arm **behind their back** to tap horse's barrel or hindquarters, without looking back.



IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES

Once students are leading their horses correctly, challenge them to improve their skills by playing some **Ground Games**. A few of our favorites are familiar mounted games with an in-hand twist:

RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT. This classic riding game requires no props, just a “traffic director” calling out commands. Students must **halt** their horses and stand still every time they hear “**Red light!**”, and **trot** when they hear “**Green light!**” “**Yellow light**” means they should **walk**; you can remove this command for more challenging transitions.

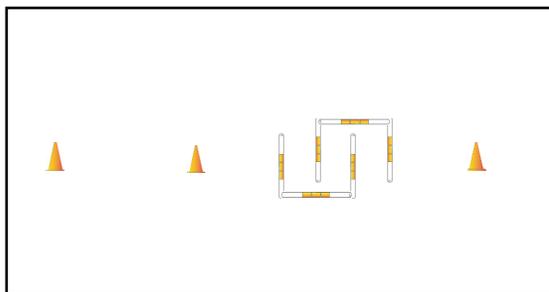


Failure to stop on red, go on green, or stand still at a red light means the student gets a **traffic ticket**. Once students have the idea, challenge them to an **elimination game**. Three tickets means they are out of the game and must come stand in the center of the arena; gradually increase the difficulty of the transitions until only one handler remains.

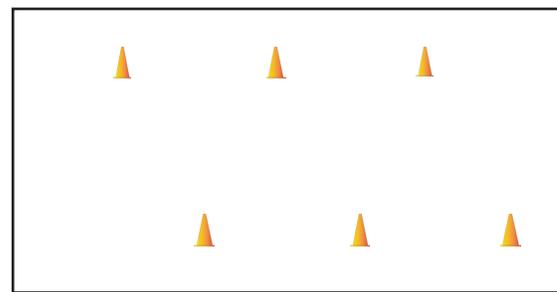
LABYRINTH. Set a “maze” of poles by laying **six poles** out as shown in the diagram below. Set two cones on the centerline before the entrance to the maze and another cone near the end of the centerline, approximately where the letter G would be in the dressage arena. Ask students to trot from the first cone to the second, return to walk, negotiate the labyrinth, and then walk or trot to the end where they perform an outside turn and repeat in the opposite direction.

ZIPPER. Set **six cones** in three **offset rows** as shown in the diagram below. Ask students to lead their horse at the walk in a zigzag pattern, turning around the outside of every cone before reaching the end of the arena. Once they complete the final turn, they should turn down the middle and trot home between the two rows, walking as they pass the final cone.

AGILITY COURSE. Use your imagination to set a **fun obstacle course** for your students. Include transition cones, poles to walk over, cones to weave through, a backing lane ... maybe even a tarp or bridge if your horses are experienced with obstacles.



LABYRINTH



ZIPPER

At HorseSense, we use the same course maps we developed for our Horsemanship lessons to test in-hand skills. Obstacle courses, ground poles and walk/trot equitation patterns can all be modified to practice groundwork, and give both horse and handler a fun way to apply their skills. You can learn more about our Patterns & Maps at:

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource-center/about-patterns-and-maps/>

SHOW IT OFF

Once your students are proficient at jogging in hand, give them a chance to show off their skills by **hosting a fun event**. Our favorite two activities are also ideal for clinics and camps.



MOCK HORSE INSPECTION. This is an annual event at HorseSense Eventing Camp. Teach a lesson on **show grooming and braiding**, or invite a groom to give a talk on preparing horses for presentation. (You can test students on **Blue** or **Purple Level** turnout at the same time.) Ask students to **dress up a little** - they don't need to be running in heels and dresses, but they can definitely tuck in their shirts! Designate experienced students to be the **panel of judges and veterinarians**. Line your "runway" with flowers and make sure horses are wearing clean and oiled bridles. **Take photos and award a prize** for the best presented horse and handler.

SHOWMANSHIP CLASS. Teach students how to **square up horses in the halt** and give them several weeks to practice a **pattern**. Organize an in-hand competition at your barn, or if a free weekend is too hard to come by, encourage students to submit videos to be judged. Award ribbons, or let them take their skills on the road.

Are you leading from the near side only? At HorseSense, we like to practice leading from the near **and** off side to ensure that horses and handlers remain comfortable in both positions. We tell students, however, that they should always **default to the near side** with a horse they don't know!

SOUND OR NOT?

We sincerely hope you don't have a barn full of lame horses to jog out. When you do have a horse come up lame, let students know and show them the evidence. Try to involve them in post-treatment soundness tests whenever possible.

In the meantime, you can give your students the basic idea by:

-  **Showing them videos of horses demonstrating varying degrees of unsoundness.** Grade 1 lameness does not look the same as Grade 3 lameness. Point out the subtle signs of a horse that is a "little off," and discuss how to determine if the horse are sound enough to work. (Lots of ethical dilemmas to unpack in that conversation!)
-  **Put a pebble in their shoe. Preferably something rounded to minimize bruising. It will still hurt**, so your students won't forget the sensation in a hurry! You don't actually need to make them run with the rock in their shoe. Simply draw attention to how the rock's presence alters their gait and posture.
-  **Invite them to a prepurchase exam.** Have a student buying a horse? Ask them **and** the veterinarian performing the prepurchase if they mind turning it into an educational event.

Emphasize that horses can't say, "This hurts!"

That's why we must learn to speak horse, and listen to what they tell us without words.