

Red Level

HorseSense

A Study Guide for the Unmounted Learning Levels Curriculum



HorseSense Learning Levels

Welcome to the

Red Level Guide to HorseSense!

The Red Level is the first unmounted level for students with little or no experience working around and with horses.



This guide will take you through each of the required objectives for Red Level HorseSense, explaining them in further detail, as well as offering helpful hints and activities for accelerating your progress.

Whether you have just taken your first lesson or have spent years around horses, we hope you find this guide to be informative and helpful as you journey towards becoming a well-rounded horseperson.

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 Red Level HorseSense:




blankets and boots
equine behavior
feeding and nutrition
grooming
ground handling
hoof care
horse ID
mounted safety
pony parts and anatomy
stable and facility management
tack
unmounted safety

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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.

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and Evan Surrusco.

Photographs by our amazing
barn family volunteer
photographers.

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Red HorseSense Objectives

It's not enough, in our view, to be able to ride a horse: truly effective horsemanship requires that riders understand and attend to their horse's basic needs. That means learning how horses are put together, what makes them behave in certain ways, and how to keep them happy and healthy.

Objectives: Student will learn basic safety practices for working around horses; simple identification of tack and grooming equipment; elementary equine anatomy; and basic needs of the horse.

- ☐ Know and discuss safety rules in barn, pasture and arena.
- ☐ Describe safe riding attire; demonstrate how to correctly fit a helmet.
- ☐ Catch horse in stall and pasture, with safe technique.
- ☐ Demonstrate safe leading from near side, both in barn and through doorways/gates.
- ☐ Tie horse safely, using an effective quick-release knot.
- ☐ Demonstrate basic grooming to prepare a horse for a ride.
- ☐ Know names and functions of basic grooming tools.
- ☐ Demonstrate picking out hooves safely, with knowledge of reasons for basic hoof care.
- ☐ Know parts of the horse, to include: withers, poll, croup, hock, fetlock, etc.
- ☐ Know parts and functions of saddle and bridle.
- ☐ Know how to store tack correctly, and give at least two reasons for cleaning tack and equipment.
- ☐ Know basic rules for feeding.
- ☐ Be able to identify good and bad hay, grain, and water.
- ☐ Demonstrate mucking and re-bedding a stall, cleaning stall thoroughly and efficiently.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR RED LEVEL STUDENTS:

There are many different paths to becoming an educated equestrian. You might take regular weekly lessons at a riding school, or attend a summer camp. Your early experiences might not include riding at all, instead providing an introduction to working with horses and caring for them on the ground.

HorseSense Learning Levels is divided into two separate tracks for this very reason. If your equine experience is primarily based around riding lessons, you will likely be studying the Horsemanship Levels, while the HorseSense curriculum covers unmounted topics. For the most part, these two courses of study cover different material. **In Red Level, however, you will notice some overlap** - both the Horsemanship and the HorseSense guides discuss horse safety and essential ground handling skills.

We feel that these topics are **important enough to discuss twice**, so if you are a student of both Horsemanship and HorseSense Levels, we encourage you to review all of this vital information. You will also notice that some information is presented with more detail in one of the guides.

Whether you are a new rider or an experienced equestrian, we hope you use this deliberate repetition to refresh your knowledge and awareness.

The more you learn, the safer and happier both you and your horse will be!

Safety First

It is very special to be able to interact with horses. They can transport us to another place and be our best friends! However, it is important to remember that they are horses, and they think and act differently than we do. You will need to understand the basics of **horse psychology** in order to work with them safely.

Eat and be eaten



Don't be this guy!

Horses are **prey animals**. That means that unlike humans, they exist at the lower end of the food chain, and have survived through the years by using their alert senses and reactivity.

Prey animals think that anything scary is a threat to their lives. They can perceive a wide variety of "normal" things as a threat: loud noises, sudden movement, and objects flapping in the breeze are top on a horse's list of things better investigated from a distance.

Humans are natural predators. That means that our normal mannerisms and behavior can make a horse uncomfortable. When working with a horse, you'll need to practice thinking like a prey animal and **not** acting like a horse-eating predator.

When we are startled, we usually try to figure out what it is that has scared us.

Horses will save themselves first and ask questions later.

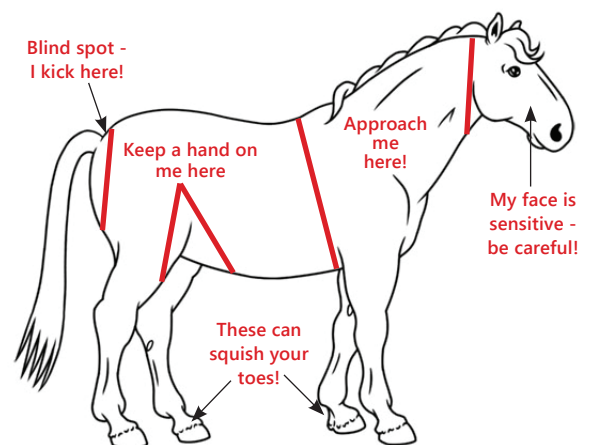
When a horse is frightened, he only thinks about one thing: staying alive. He might not remember that you are on his back, or holding his hoof.

Like most prey animals, horses usually choose **flight over fight**. But if they feel trapped, or discover that fleeing is not an option, they will defend themselves with hooves or teeth. **When people get kicked, it is usually because they have startled the horse in some way.**

In the zone

Horses have eyes placed on the sides of their head, which gives them a wide range of vision. They cannot see directly behind or in front of them, however, and are easily startled if you suddenly pop up in their **blind spots**.

When you approach a horse, you should always **walk up to his neck or shoulder** wearing a relaxed and friendly expression. Once you have made contact with the horse there, you can move your hands back toward his hindquarters or forward to his face. You can even pass close behind him. **But only if your horse gives you permission!** If he is not comfortable with you working around him, he will let you know with his **body language**.



Horse Talk

Your horse can't speak English, so you'll need to learn to speak horse. You can start by learning to recognize your horse's **body language**. Horses use their ears, eyes, and body position to communicate fear, pain, aggression, curiosity, and much more.



These pinned ears mean
"Be careful - I'm angry!"



These pricked ears mean
"I'm alert and interested!"



These droopy ears mean
"I'm bored... or not feeling well."



This swishing tail means
"I'm irritated!"



These white eyes mean
"I'm frightened!"

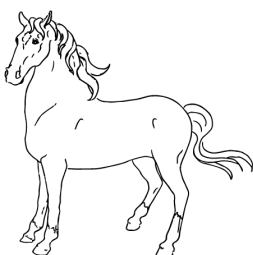


This clamped tail means
"I'm tense and might kick."

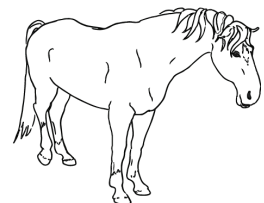
Horses are also very good at reading **our** body language - including the messages we don't mean to send. If we are tense, afraid, impatient or upset, they know. They might even react to our emotional state. When it comes to working with horses safely, **attitude is everything**.

How can you put your horse at ease using your body language?

- 🐾 **Walk the "Horse Walk"** by approaching your horse calmly and confidently. Sneaking and running is predator behavior and not okay in a barn.
- 🐾 **Leave the loud behind** and talk in a quiet and friendly voice around your horse. High-pitched or raised voices can upset him, and hissing sounds may startle him.
- 🐾 **Don't panic when things go wrong**, even if your horse frightens you. Take a deep breath and remember: If you want him to be calm, you must be calm first!



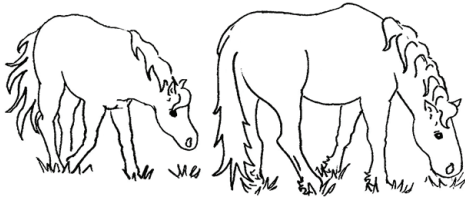
What do you notice about these two horses?
How would you approach each one?
Which one would you be willing to ride?



Personal Space

Horses are **herd animals**. They prefer to live in a group with other horses, and are unhappy on their own. Understanding how herd animals behave will keep you safe and help you become the kind of partner your horse likes and trusts.

Life in the herd



Horses will graze together, water together, play together, and may form deep bonds with each other. You may discover that your horse becomes upset if you ask him to move away from his buddy.

In the wild, the **mares** raise their offspring and often decide where the herd will graze and go for water. The **stallion** defends his herd from predators and other stallions.

Mare = adult female horse

Gelding = castrated male horse

Foal = baby horse

Stallion = adult male horse that can reproduce

Filly = female baby horse

Colt = male baby horse

Stick with me - but not too close

Although they like to stick together, horses are naturally **claustrophobic**, which means that they hate to be enclosed in tight places. Prey animals always like to have an escape route. You could accidentally trigger your horse's claustrophobic tendencies by crowding him, asking him to squeeze through narrow spaces, or restraining him in some way, such as tying him.

Horses can be defensive of their own personal **space bubble** and may kick or bite any horse that invades it. Be careful that you don't lead or ride your horse too close to another horse!

Some horses are particularly aggressive or dominant around food. This behavior is called **resource guarding**.



Don't burst the bubble!

You also have a space bubble. To keep your horse from walking all over it, you'll need to create some gentle but firm boundaries. If your horse gets too close, you can **ask him to move away by applying pressure**.

This might be **physical pressure**, such as a brief push against his shoulder or hindquarters. Motion can also be a form of pressure. If your horse puts his head in your space bubble, wiggle your elbows like chicken wings. This reminds the horse of your position and motivates him to move away.

Be respectful of your horse's personal space. But make sure you also protect your own.

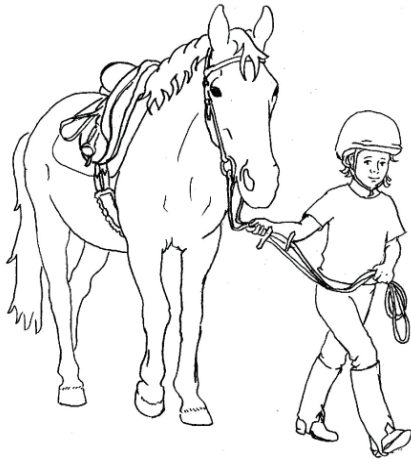
A pushy horse isn't being mean, but he can still be dangerous!



Take the Lead

When you interact with a horse, you must practice being a good leader. If you are calm and confident, he will likely agree that you are the decision-maker and follow your directions willingly.

If you are rough, impatient or unpredictable, your horse will not trust you. However, he will also feel uncomfortable if you are timid and unsure of yourself. He might decide he needs to be the leader in order to stay safe, and you might not like all of his decisions!



**It is important to be kind to your horse.
It is even more important for you both to feel safe.**

Your mission is to learn how to communicate clearly with your horse, so that he **understands you without being afraid of you.**

At the same time, practice asking, "What could possibly go wrong in this situation? **Is there a safer or better way I could do this?**"

There are many different approaches to handling and riding horses. Often there is no single "right way," only the "best way for my situation."

Many equine accidents are preventable.

Learn to think critically and ask questions about everything you do.

This gives you the HorseSense you need to make decisions that keep you and your horse safe!

What else can you do to stay safe around horses?

- 🐾 **Always wear sturdy footwear in the barn, preferably boots,** with a closed toe and plenty of ankle support.
- 🐾 **We recommend wearing an ASTM-SEI approved helmet while learning to handle horses** on the ground. This includes catching, leading, grooming and picking hooves.
- 🐾 **Look for additional opportunities** to practice working around horses and handling them from the ground. A busy instructor may not have time to supervise you herself, but can assign you to a mentor or arrange additional unmounted lessons.
- 🐾 **Spend time observing horses** interacting with their herd and with other people. Watch how they communicate, especially when frightened, angry, or hungry.
- 🐾 **Stay curious and listen to your horse.** He has a lot to teach you!



Barn Safety

There are many different methods of keeping and managing horses, all with the same goal: **to provide a safe environment for a horse to live in.** Horses are very accident-prone creatures! If there is trouble to get into, they rarely miss an opportunity.

Working with horses requires you to pay attention to detail.

Everyone gets careless if they are disorganized, rushing, or distracted.

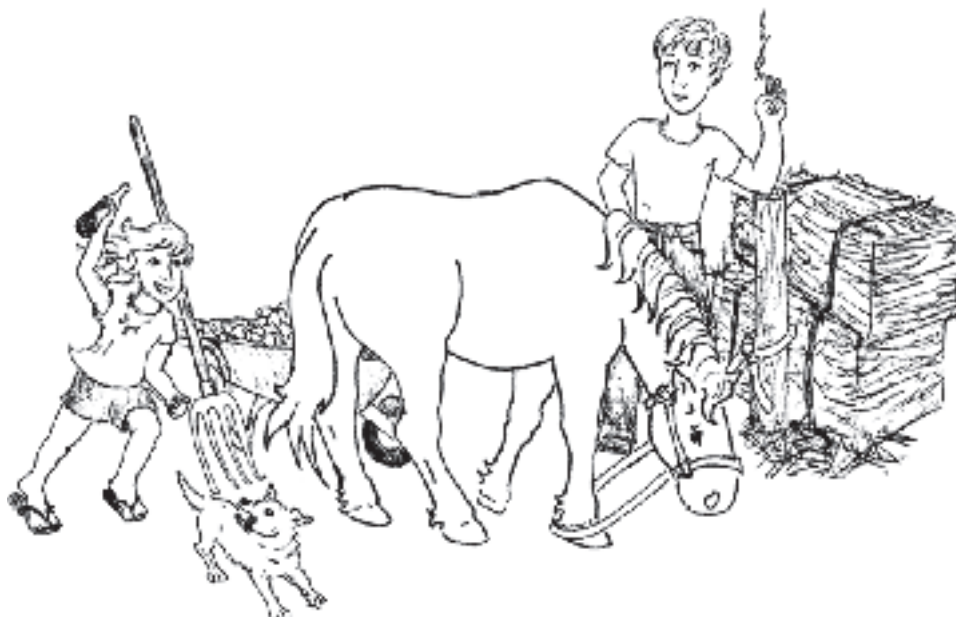
Watch yourself to make sure you don't develop sloppy habits.

Always try to do the right thing, even if it doesn't seem to be the fastest or easiest way.

You can practice horse safety by walking around a barn or stabling area and writing a list of everything you see that could be a **potential hazard**. Ask yourself: "Is there any way a horse could get frightened or hurt? Is there any way a human could get hurt?" You'll be surprised at what you can find in even a well-kept barn.

Keep an eye out for:

- 🐾 **Clutter in the barn aisle**, including manure forks, wheelbarrows, grooming kits and buckets. Is it possible for a horse to collide with any of them and get startled?
- 🐾 **Electrical cords** within reach of a horse's curious lips. Electricity also poses a **fire hazard** in a barn - check for worn or exposed wiring, and unplug appliances such as fans when not in use.
- 🐾 **Food-scented trash that horses might eat.** Peppermint wrappers are a common culprit!
- 🐾 **Sharp protrusions such as gate latches**, unused saddle racks, nails or broken boards. A single splinter of wood can cost you hundreds of dollars of veterinary care.
- 🐾 **Dangling halters, blanket straps, stall guards, hay nets** - anything with a closed loop that a horse might put a hoof through.



How many things can you find wrong with this picture?

Barn Rules

Most barns have a set of **posted rules** designed to keep you, the horses, and the other owners and riders safe. Make sure that you read and follow these rules carefully.

Play nice

Aside from safety rules, such as not running in the barn and keeping dogs on a leash, you will also be expected to learn some basic **barn etiquette**. A few guidelines to keep in mind:

- 🐾 **Ask permission** before handling or feeding *any* horse that does not belong to you.
- 🐾 **Use only designated tack and equipment.** If you can't find something or need to borrow something from another rider, ask first, and put it back exactly where you found it.
- 🐾 **Clean up after yourself.** If your horse poops in the aisle, it is your responsibility to pick it up *before* someone else steps in it.
- 🐾 **If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.** Ask questions, but don't critique other horses or riders.



Make sure that your friends and family also follow the barn rules!

Ring rules

Safety needs to follow horses wherever they go, and that includes the **riding arena**. Even if you don't take riding lessons, you still need to have an awareness of the rules that keep horses and riders safe in the ring.

- 🐾 **Absolutely no running, rough-housing, or loud noises near the arena.** Any behavior that can spook a horse can cause an accident!
- 🐾 **Keep the arena clear of clutter,** including trash such as drink bottles that can blow into a horse's path.
- 🐾 **Remove empty metal jump cups** from standards and store them in a safe place. Horses and riders can both be injured by colliding with the exposed metal edge.
- 🐾 **Watch where you are going, and respect the other riders.** This is especially true if you are on foot or working a horse from the ground: riders get the right-of-way.
- 🐾 **Keep a horse-length of space** between your horse and all other horses.
- 🐾 **If another rider falls,** loses control of their horse, or shouts "Heads up", **stop immediately!**



One of the most important barn rules is often one of the hardest to follow: Put your phone on silent, and ignore it while handling your horse.

Although carrying a cell phone while riding is a good idea in certain situations, texting or talking while interacting with a horse can be DANGEROUS.

Besides, spending time with horses is a privilege.

You will enjoy and appreciate it more if you are not distracted by your phone!

Out in the Open

Horses are designed to graze and roam continually. This means they are usually healthiest and happiest living **turned out**, or outside the barn.



Not everyone has enough land to keep a horse pastured full-time, but ideally every horse should have access to a paddock or field at least part of the day. Some barns turn horses out at night, especially during hot summer months. Others turn their horses out during the day, regardless of season.

No matter what system your barn uses, you will need to get comfortable approaching and catching your horse in an open field.

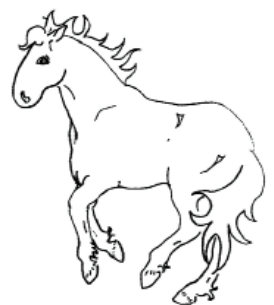
When you walk into a horse's pasture, you are entering his herd and his territory.

You need to be able to act safely and confidently around ALL the horses in his herd.

At this level, you should always go into the pasture under the supervision of your instructor!

A few rules for staying safe in the pasture:

- 🐾 **Practice constant vigilance.** While you focus on your own horse, other horses may come up behind you, pick a fight with another horse, or spook and start a stampede. Remember that your horse can still be influenced by the behavior of the herd even after you catch him.
- 🐾 **Read the room.** Watch the body language of each horse carefully. Make sure your own body language is friendly and non-threatening as you approach your horse.
- 🐾 **Defend your space bubble.** If a horse gets too close, energetically flap your "chicken wing" elbows. If you need extra emphasis, you can make a scolding sound with your voice or wave the end of your lead rope - but be careful not to strike a horse with the rope. He may hit back!
- 🐾 **If the herd starts to run or play, find a safe spot out of their reach and stand your ground.** If a horse gets too close, raise your arms and voice, or flap your arms or rope. Most horses will naturally swerve away from you. When you try to run or dodge they can't predict your movement and may run into you by accident.
- 🐾 **Avoid carrying food into the pasture.** Buckets, grain scoops, and "noisy" treats such as mints wrapped in plastic are a great way to get mugged by the entire herd.
- 🐾 **Be especially careful around gates.** Horses like to gather at gateways and sometimes try to follow their herd mates through the opening. **Always latch gates securely behind you!**



Pony-Proof Pastures

Just like barns, pastures must be kept tidy to keep horses safe. You can **check your horse's pasture for safety hazards** every time you walk out to catch him. If you see a problem, make sure to let your instructor or barn manager know!

What makes a pasture a safe place to live?

- 🐾 Pastured horses should be **checked on a daily basis** for cuts, injuries, and bot eggs or ticks. Their hooves should be picked out and examined.
- 🐾 They should **always** have unlimited access to **fresh, clean water** and **salt**.
- 🐾 Pastures should be kept **free of trash and debris**, including **hay strings**, as well as other hazards such as machinery and objects with sharp edges. Roadside pastures need to be checked often for **litter** - especially since a horse might eat a wrapper that smells like food!
- 🐾 Any **hole** big enough for a horse to put his foot in should be filled.
- 🐾 The pasture should be free of **poisonous plants**. You can ask your County Extension Agent or an experienced horseperson to help you learn which plants are toxic to horses in your area, and learn more about poisonous plants in **Purple Level**.



There are many plants that can be toxic to horses. Wilted red maple leaves can be fatal if the horse eats enough of them!

Good fences make good pastures

Many pasture-related injuries involve the horse colliding with or getting trapped in the fence. Regularly inspecting fences can prevent accidents - and keep the horses in the pasture where they belong!



- 🐾 **Pasture fencing should be at least three and a half feet tall** to prevent horses from jumping out. It should be easily **visible** and made of a strong material that can withstand a horse striking or leaning on it.
- 🐾 **Wood fences** should be checked regularly for **broken** or **rotted boards**.
- 🐾 **Mesh fences** work best when used with a wooden board along the top, to prevent sagging. The wire mesh needs to be woven together close enough that **a horse cannot put his hoof through** and get stuck. The space between wires is too large for hog wire to be safe for horses.
- 🐾 **Electric fencing** needs to be well-maintained, as grass or brush resting against the fence can drain the electricity and make it ineffective for horses. **Make sure the charger is on** - but use caution when maneuvering horses in and out of the pasture.
- 🐾 Although still seen in many rural pastures, **barbed wire is not a safe fencing for horses**. The sharp edges can tear a horse's thin skin, and a loose wire can spell disaster for delicate legs!

Use Your Head

One of the most important things you can do to stay safe around horses is to dress appropriately. Correct **attire** is important both when riding **and** working around horses.

Use your head

Safe attire starts with an **ASTM-SEI approved helmet** designed specifically for horseback riding. (Bicycle and motorcycle helmets are designed for a different impact and are not safe for riding.) You should wear a helmet **every** time you get on a horse. It can save your life if you fall!

Wearing a helmet is also a smart idea when working with horses on the ground. **A helmet can only do its job, however, if it fits you correctly.** Ask your instructor to help you check the fit of your helmet, and adjust it as necessary before every ride.



Helmet fit checklist:

- 🐾 Does your helmet **sit level** on your forehead, just a finger width or two above your eyebrows?
- 🐾 Is it evenly **snug** all the way around your head? If you wiggle the brim, does the skin of your forehead move with it? You should be able to **nod yes or no** without the helmet moving out of position.
- 🐾 Is the **chinstrap** tight enough? It should actually touch the skin of your throat. If you can slide it over the point of your chin, it is way too loose!
- 🐾 Is the **harness** adjusted evenly? Position sliding clips just under your ear, away from your throat.

Most serious equine accidents involve head trauma.

Never think you are too experienced or too cool to wear a helmet.

If Olympic riders can get a brain injury riding at the walk, it can also happen to you!

Choosing a helmet



It is a good idea to go to a tack shop and try on several different types and brands of helmets when you are ready to purchase your own. A helmet that is comfortable for one person might be uncomfortable for you, depending on the shape of your head.

When trying helmets, make sure to wear your **hair pulled back**, the same way you plan to wear it when riding. Loose hair can be dangerous in the saddle as it can catch on tack and obscure your vision. A low ponytail or bun that sits under the edge of the helmet is usually best.

Dressed for Success

Besides a helmet, there are a few other pieces of attire you'll need to work in the barn and ride safely:

Close-toed boots are essential for working around horses.

If a horse steps on your toes, you will be grateful for the protection!

For riding, boots should have a **heel of at least half an inch, cover your ankle**, and have a **smooth sole** - chunky waffle soles, often found on hiking boots, can get stuck in the stirrup. The heel will prevent your foot from sliding through the stirrup in a fall.

There are many different types of riding boots, including low boots (**paddock, jodhpur** and **roper** boots) and tall boots (**dress** or **field** boots). Your instructor can help you choose the best type for your age, experience level, and the type of riding you do.



In the saddle:

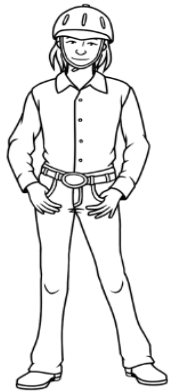
Wear a close-fitting shirt so that your instructor can see if you are sitting correctly; loose ends should be tucked in. In cooler weather, wear layers so that you can take some off as you get warm from riding.

Gloves can help you grip the reins and are essential in the cold winter months. You will need gloves made specifically for riding, with rubber or suede grips on the palm.

Stretchy, comfortable long pants protect your legs from the saddle. Riding **jodhpurs, breeches** or **tights** are the best for English riding, but leggings and stretchy, close-fitting jeans are acceptable. **Boot cut jeans** are usually preferred for Western riding.

If you ride English and use short boots, half chaps can give you extra security and protect the inside of your lower legs from the stirrup leathers on the saddle. **Some Western riders use full chaps**, which cover the whole leg and buckle around the waist like a belt.

Absolutely NO dangling jewelry, loose scarves, flapping jackets, chewing gum or candy!



Where can you get riding clothes?

You can get helmets, boots, pants, and other attire made specifically for riding at **tack stores, online, or through horse supply catalogs**. If you buy your gear on the internet or through the mail, you may want to take a trip to a tack store to try on a few different brands first. You may be able to purchase gently used items secondhand from other riders. Just make sure you **buy your helmet new**. The protective foam in a helmet can break down from old age, exposure to heat, and impact, making it unsafe to ride in.

Horse Headgear

Leading and working with the horse without riding him is called **ground handling**. For most of your ground handling, you'll be using two important pieces of equipment: the **halter** and **lead rope**.

This end up

The halter is the horse headgear that allows you to safely **lead, tie** and **control** your horse on the ground. Unlike the bridle, it does not put pressure on the horse's mouth.

Sticking your fingers under the halter to lead the horse can be dangerous, so we use a lead rope. This rope is 6' to 10' long and snaps on the halter under the horse's chin.

There are many different types of halters. Before you try to use one, you should **familiarize yourself with the parts of the halter** and learn how it is fastened.



How to put on a halter



1. Put the end of the lead rope over the horse's neck. This way, he will know he's caught and give you more time to fasten the halter.



2. Hold the buckle in your left hand and the crownpiece in your right. Slide the noseband over the horse's nose and lift the crownpiece up behind his ears.



3. Buckle the crownpiece. Make sure to pull it high enough that the noseband does not slide down to his nostrils.

How to tie a rope halter



1. Slide the end of the crownpiece through the loop and pull snug, until the noseband touches the cheekbones.



2. Pass the end of the crownpiece behind the loop, heading towards the horse's face.



3. Reverse the end of the crownpiece and pull it under itself so the end points away from the horse's eye. Pull to tighten.

Catch and Release

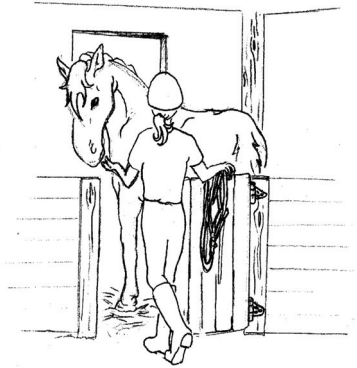
To work with a horse, first you must catch him. This means learning to **approach** a loose horse in a stall or pasture, put the **halter** on, and **lead** him through doorways and gates - without letting other horses get loose. This is how you greet your horse, so you'll want to practice until you can do it calmly and confidently.



Catching a horse can be tricky. It requires you to be able to read equine body language and react appropriately. At Red Level, you should always bring in your horse with supervision from your instructor or another knowledgeable horseperson!

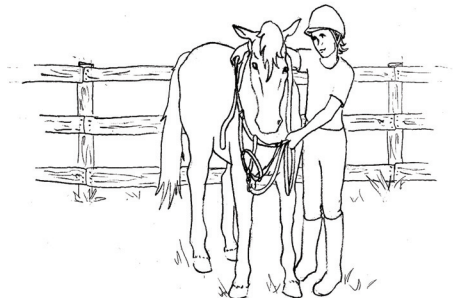
How to catch a horse in a stall

1. **Organize your halter and rope** ahead of time so you don't have to untangle it before putting it on.
2. **Talk to your horse and let him know you are coming.** Make sure he turns and at least looks at you before you approach him, as a startled horse may kick. **Never walk into an enclosed space if your horse has his hindquarters facing you, his tail clamped, or his ears pinned!** A horse that is acting aggressive needs experienced handling - ask for help.
3. **Open the stall door** just enough that you can slip through. Leave it ajar so you can escape quickly if necessary.
4. **Approach the horse at his shoulder** whenever possible. It is usually easiest to approach and halter on the left side of the horse, where the halter buckles. If your horse has his left side up against the wall, you can approach his right shoulder, slip the rope over his neck, and gently guide him toward the center of the stall before haltering.



How to catch a horse in a pasture

1. **Organize your halter and rope** ahead of time so you don't have to untangle it before putting it on. When you enter the pasture, make sure to **close the gate** behind you.
2. **Talk to your horse and let him know you are coming.** Make sure he turns and at least looks at you before you approach him.
3. **Walk up to his neck or point of shoulder** whenever possible. If you move too far back, the horse might feel pressured to move. Rub him to let him know you are friendly, but don't wait too long before putting the lead rope over his neck and buckling on the halter.
4. **If your horse turns and walks away, don't chase him!** Stop and wait for him to stop moving. Hold out your hand and talk to him as you approach again.
5. For some difficult-to-catch horses, you may want to **bring a small treat you can hide in your hand.** Show it to the horse as you approach, but don't give it to him until you are ready to put on the halter, or he may eat and run.



Lead the Way

Even if your horse is already tied for you when you arrive at the barn, you will have to lead him to and from the arena for your ride. Leading your horse and working with him **in-hand** is a great way to practice your communication skills.



Follow the leader

When you are leading your horse, you should stand with his head at your shoulder and face forward. Hold the lead rope or reins about **six inches from the halter ring or bit**, and with the remainder carefully **folded** in your other hand.

To ask your horse to walk, step forward decisively and look where you want your horse to go. If you look back at him, he will feel blocked and the two of you will have a staring contest instead! You can encourage a slow horse by **clucking** or making a kissing sound with your tongue, or telling him, "Walk on."

To ask your horse to stop, still your feet and **quietly** say, "Whoa." If necessary, apply pressure to the halter by pulling the lead rope back toward the horse's chest.

Fun fact: we usually lead horses from the left side, which is also called the near side.

(The right side of the horse is referred to as the **off side**.)

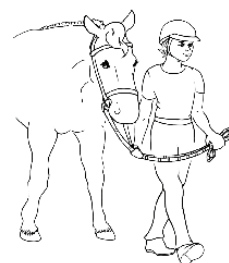
This is partly due to tradition but mainly because most riders and trainers are right-handed.

While it is useful to practice leading from both sides, **if in doubt, lead from the left!**

Leading dos and don'ts

Horses are natural followers, but they will take advantage of bad leading habits.

- 🐾 **DO hold onto the lead rope instead of the halter or bridle.** This will prevent your hand from getting caught if your horse spooks.
- 🐾 **DON'T coil the extra lead rope or reins around your hand.** This is dangerous! If your horse pulled away, the lead rope would tighten around your hand and you could get dragged.
- 🐾 **DO keep your lead rope off the ground.** Otherwise, you or your horse may trip on it.
- 🐾 **DON'T let your horse lead you.** Move with confidence and purpose. If your horse crowds you, protect your space by asking him to move away or wiggling your elbow like a chicken wing.
- 🐾 **DO look where you want to end up,** no matter where you think your horse is trying to take you.



**Look where you want your horse to go,
not where you are afraid he will go!**

Get the Gate

One of the trickiest parts of catching and leading a horse is maneuvering through doorways and gates - particularly if your horse shares a living space with other horses.

Turn the tail

If you are catching a horse on your own, you'll need to be able to open and close the gate with one hand while maintaining control of your horse with the other hand. It is helpful to know how to ask your horse to **yield his hindquarters**. This move is often used to regain control of a horse's feet on the ground or from the saddle, and makes it easier - and safer - to steer him through a gate.

To ask a horse to yield, **pivot and look intensely at his hip**. This alone might send his hindquarters away from you, but if you need to increase the pressure, bend forward. Lift the lead rope up and in to turn his nose toward you, while using your other hand to wave the excess rope at his hind legs.

You'll know you've got it when the horse swings his hindquarters away from you, crossing his back legs and turning to face you with both eyes as he comes to a halt.

Once you can get your horse to yield his hindquarters on both sides, practice **leading through a gate**. Open the gate with one hand, lead him through, and then ask him to yield so he faces the gate, allowing you to easily close and latch it. If there are other horses in the enclosure, you'll have to do this **quickly**!

Some horses get pushy and like to rush through the gate. **Insist that your horse waits politely** so you can walk through the opening first if you choose. Otherwise, you might get knocked down and hurt.



A horse can be injured by a door or gate that is not open wide enough for his hips. Make sure he has plenty of clearance before allowing him to step through!

Free at last

Some horses like to kick up their heels and run when turned loose. When putting a horse into a stall or turning him out in the pasture, it is important that you **ask him to turn and face you before you take off his halter**.

You should be standing at the gate or door, ready to move through the opening, with the horse's head close to you and his hindquarters respectfully turned away. Remove the halter and back away, keeping your eyes on the horse. This gives you time to safely exit his enclosure while he turns around.

Never turn your back on a horse that likes to buck or bolt when turned loose!



All Tied Up

In general, tying a horse makes him safer to handle. You might tie your horse to groom, pick hooves, tack him up for a ride, put on a blanket, or treat minor injuries. But you must tie carefully, or you can cause an accident instead of preventing one.

Tie or cross-tie?



The way you tie your horse will depend on how your facility is set up. Some barns are set up with **tie posts**, or solid posts equipped with tie rings. You can tie your horse to one of these using a **quick-release knot**.

If your barn tacks up in an aisle or wash rack, you might use **cross-ties** instead. Cross-ties are usually equipped with special **panic snaps** that release the horse in an emergency.



A third method, called **ground tying**, involves the horse standing next to you with his lead rope resting on the ground or over his neck. This is not recommended for beginners - if your horse can't be safely tied, ask someone to hold him for you.

Watch your step

Keep a hand on your horse at all times when grooming or handling him, so that he knows where you are. To move behind him, run your hand down to his hindquarters and maintain contact while you pass **very close** behind him. This is much safer than standing a few feet away, since he cannot extend his leg to kick. A horse's hind legs can reach almost ten feet behind him if he means business!

Passing in front of a horse that is cross-tied is reasonably safe as long as you go under **both** cross-ties. Passing in front of a horse tied to a post often means ducking under his neck - this is not recommended as the horse can step on you if he spooks.



Safety rules for tying:

- 🐾 **Always tie with a quick-release knot**, so you can free your horse quickly if you need to.
- 🐾 **Always tie with a halter and lead rope, never a bridle.** If your horse pulls back wearing a bridle, the bit may injure his mouth.
- 🐾 **Tie where you can work safely on both sides of the horse.** Remove anything from the area that the horse might paw at or get tangled in. Never tie in an area where other horses are loose!
- 🐾 **Tie your knot level with your horse's eye** whenever possible. If you tie too low, your horse may be able to get a foot over the rope.
- 🐾 **Allow your horse about 18" of rope**, just enough that he can look around and doesn't feel trapped. If you tie too long, he will be able to move around too much and might get his head caught in the rope.
- 🐾 **Tie him to a solid object, such as a heavy post, preferably with a breakaway device.** On the next page, we'll take a look at different tie setups and see why breakaway functions are important.

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.

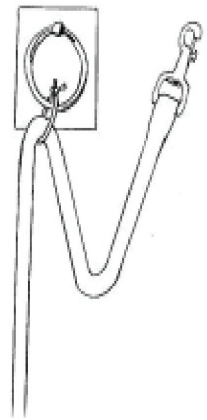
Some different breakaway devices:

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.

All Cleaned Up

Grooming is an important part of caring for horses - and a very enjoyable task. If you take riding lessons, you'll need to give your horse a quick grooming before every ride.

Good reasons to groom:



-  **It increases the horse's comfort and prevents sores while riding.** If your horse gets a girth or bridle sore, you might not be able to ride him.
-  **It gives you the opportunity to check your horse thoroughly for cuts or swelling.** These are easy to miss otherwise and might need doctoring, or make it uncomfortable for the horse to work.
-  **It keeps the horse's coat healthy** and shiny.
-  **It is a great way to get to know your horse.** Most horses enjoy being groomed, so you can think of the time you spend preparing for a ride as bonding time.

How to groom before riding:

1. **Tie your horse in a safe and quiet place**, using a quick-release knot or cross-ties. Make sure you have all your grooming tools assembled.
2. **Pick the horse's hooves** (see next section).
3. **Use a rubber or plastic currycomb** to break up mud and bring all the dirt to the surface of the horse's coat. This tool is used in small circles. Start at the horse's neck and move down to his shoulders, back and hindquarters. Avoid the flanks and other delicate areas - the currycomb is too rough for these places! If your horse is already very clean, or he objects to currying, it's okay skip this step.
4. **Use a dandy brush**, or hard brush, to whisk dirt and loose hair from the horse's coat. Start at the top of the horse's neck and brush with firm strokes in the direction of the hair growth.
5. **Exchange the dandy brush for a soft body brush.** Use this brush to carefully brush around the horse's ears and face and under his belly, paying particular attention to where the girth will fasten.
6. **It isn't necessary to brush your horse's mane or tail** before every lesson, but you may comb away big tangles or shavings. It is better not to brush the tail too often, since hair falls out of the tail easily.
7. **In the summer, finish by applying fly spray** onto your horse's chest, belly and legs.

Extra steps

Every once in a while, it's a good idea to give your horse a thorough grooming. This includes all the steps to a pre-ride grooming plus a few more. You might comb out the **mane** or brush the **tail**, being careful to stand to the side (not behind the horse!). You might clean around the horse's **ears, eyes and nostrils** with a **sponge** or **rubrag**, or clean the skin of his **dock**. You might apply **hoof dressing** or trim the horse's **bridle path**. In hot summer months, you can give the horse a **bath** to remove sweat and staining from his coat. You will learn more about deep grooming and show **turnout** in **Blue Level**.



Keep bathing to a minimum. Too much shampoo can dry out a horse's coat.

Tools of the Trade

Whether you are giving your horse a thorough grooming or just knocking off the dust before a ride, it is important to be familiar with the names and functions of the different tools used for the job. Here are some of the most common items you're likely to find in a **grooming kit**:



Currycomb

Made of rubber or plastic, the currycomb is used in a circular motion over the horse's body to loosen caked dirt and hair and improve circulation. It's the tool of choice on a muddy horse! The currycomb can also be used to scrape accumulated hair from brushes. It should not be used on the delicate areas of skin, such as the face or flanks.



Dandy brush

A heavy-duty grooming tool with stiff bristles designed to sweep away dirt. It should be used firmly in the direction of the hair growth, with a flick of the wrist to lift dirt and hair from the coat. Like the currycomb, the dandy brush is too harsh for sensitive skin, although it may be used gently on muddy legs.



Body brush

The body brush contains short, soft bristles set closely together. It is used as a finishing brush over the horse's **entire** body, including face and other delicate areas. It lifts the oils of the skin to the surface and gives the horse a shine. Use sparingly in the winter, when the horse needs oils to stay close to the skin for warmth.



Mane comb

Manes can be kept tangle-free with a plastic comb or a regular human hairbrush. A soft-bristled hairbrush is preferable for tails, where the hair is easily broken. Small aluminum combs with a sharp edge between the teeth are used for **pulling**, or thinning and shortening a mane.



Sweat scraper

Used for removing excess water from a horse's coat after bathing. The sweat scraper is sometimes used in the process of cooling off a horse. Made of plastic or metal.



Shedding blade

Shedding blades have small teeth set along the edge of a metal blade. They are handy in the springtime when horses begin to shed their winter coats by the handful, but should be used with caution and never on the face or other delicate areas.



Sponges

Small sponges used for cleaning the face or the dock should be clearly marked to avoid spreading germs! Large body sponges are used for bathing and cooling off a hot horse.

One of the most important items in a grooming kit is the hoof pick. Let's take a look at the horse's foot and discover why picking hooves is so important.

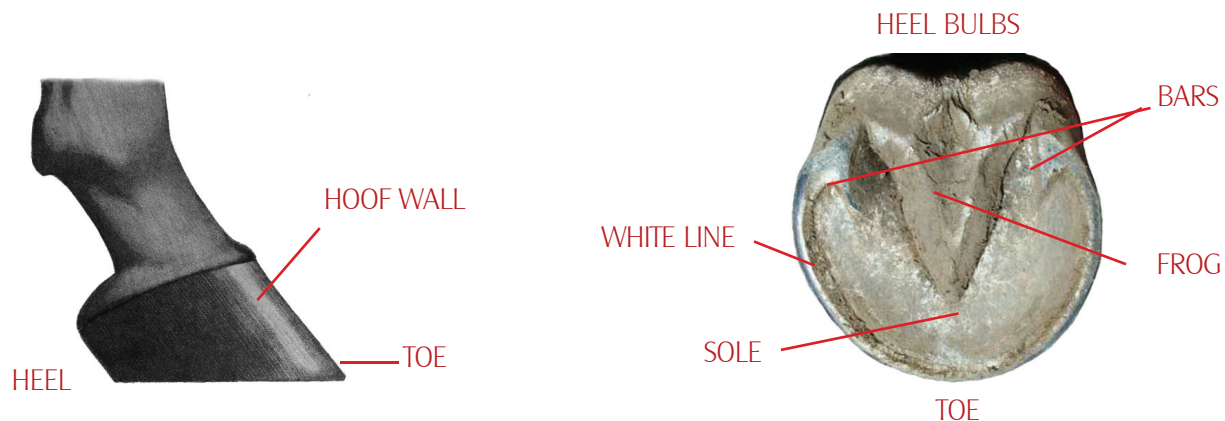


No Hoof, No Horse

Imagine you had a rock trapped in your shoe, and someone jumped on your back and asked you to run. OUCH! Regularly cleaning your horse's hooves can prevent bruising and lameness, and keeps him comfortable and healthy.

Feet first

The horse's hoof is a complicated and important structure. **If a horse's feet aren't happy, he can't work comfortably, and may live in constant pain.** Remember, an average-size horse carries a thousand pounds of bodyweight on those four small hooves!



Some horses wear **shoes** made out of metal or plastic, designed to protect their hooves from excess wear. Others do just fine barefoot. Whether or not a horse needs shoes depends on his **conformation** or build, workload, diet, and living environment. Either way, his hooves must be regularly trimmed, like your fingernails. This is usually done by an equine professional called a **trimmer** or **farrier**.

What can go wrong with hooves?

- 🐾 **A rock trapped in the hoof can cause a stone bruise.** Stones can easily become trapped in the crevices of the frog, white line, or under the shoe. This can cause **lameness**, particularly if the horse is asked to run or jump.
- 🐾 **The hoof can get an infection.** Bacteria and fungus can cause a nasty, smelly infection called **thrush**, which rots the frog of the hoof and turns it tender and black. A similar disease infects the outer edges of the sole and is called **white line disease**.
- 🐾 **The hoof can crack or break.** This usually happens when a horse is overdue for a hoof trim, or has outgrown his shoes. Some hoof cracks are harmless, but if you notice damage to a horse's hoof, you should tell his owner and/or your instructor, especially if you are planning to ride him.



This hoof has thrush and white line disease - and needs a trim!

Picking Hooves

Cleaning the horse's feet is usually referred to as **picking the hooves**. Ideally, the horse's hooves should be cleaned and checked once a day. If you are riding your horse, you will make this part of your pre-ride grooming routine.

How to pick hooves:

1. Stand with hoof pick in hand, **facing the horse's tail**. Place your hand on the horse's shoulder and run it down his leg to let him know what you're about to do.
2. **Ask your horse to lift his hoof by squeezing the chestnut on the inside of his forearm.** You will feel a knobby piece of hairless skin; this is mildly sensitive, so if you squeeze it between your fingers, the horse should lift his hoof. You can also try squeezing the back of his tendons.
3. As he lifts his hoof, **run your hand down and grasp the hoof firmly by the toe.** Use the hoof pick to dislodge packed dirt until you can clearly see around the frog and the edges of the hoof wall or shoe. It is safest to **scrape from heel to toe**.
4. When you are finished, **gently release the hoof - but watch your toes!**
5. **Proceed to the hind leg and repeat.** The chestnut is less sensitive on the hind legs, so try lightly squeezing the point of the horse's hock to encourage him to lift his hoof.
6. **Keep your legs straight and your head up** so that you will stay safe if the horse pulls his foot away.



Tips for hoof picking:



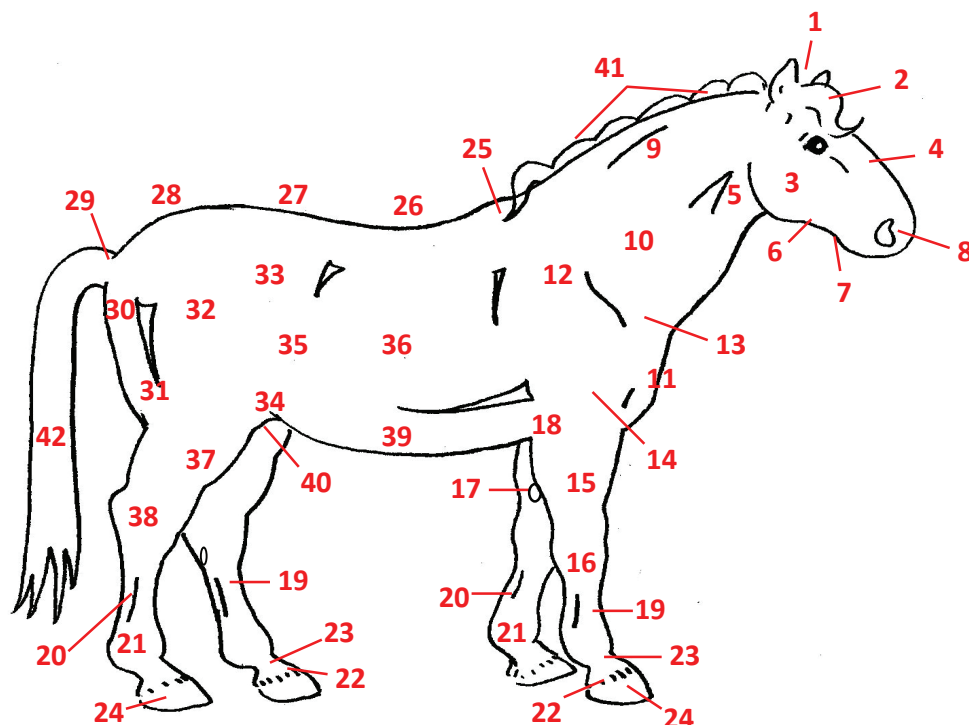
It's a good idea to wear a helmet while hoof-picking - especially during fly season!

- 🐾 **Work quickly** - those hooves are heavy!
- 🐾 A deep groove runs on either side of the frog. **If the horse is barefoot**, clean out the top of the grooves first to loosen packed dirt. **If the horse wears shoes**, start by scraping around the inside of the shoe.
- 🐾 **If your horse doesn't want to lift his hoof, he may have all his weight on that foot.** Lean against his shoulder to help him adjust his balance.
- 🐾 **If your horse tries to pull away, don't panic.** Gently try to hold onto the hoof if you are able, but if he pulls hard or kicks out, simply release the hoof and lift it again. He may be trying to tell you something: check that he is standing squarely and comfortably, and apply fly spray if necessary.
- 🐾 If his **tail swishes in your face**, make sure to fly spray before picking his back hooves. Clean efficiently, and wear your helmet to protect your eyes.

If you have trouble with hoof-picking, be sure to ask your instructor or another knowledgeable horseperson for help.

Pony Parts

Horses are big and complicated animals. **It is important for you to be familiar with how horses are built and the names of all of their body parts.** If you have to call a vet or describe an injury to someone, you need to be able to say specifically, "He has a cut on his fetlock." If you explain that his cut is "somewhere around his ankle thing," your vet will have no idea what you are talking about!



Parts of the horse:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Poll | 15. Forearm | 29. Dock |
| 2. Forelock | 16. Knee | 30. Point of Buttock |
| 3. Cheek | 17. Chestnut | 31. Buttock |
| 4. Face | 18. Elbow | 32. Hindquarters |
| 5. Throat | 19. Cannon Bone | 33. Hip |
| 6. Jaw | 20. Tendons | 34. Stifle |
| 7. Chin groove | 21. Fetlock | 35. Flank |
| 8. Muzzle | 22. Coronary Band | 36. Barrel |
| 9. Crest | 23. Pastern | 37. Gaskin |
| 10. Neck | 24. Hoof | 38. Hock |
| 11. Chest | 25. Withers | 39. Belly |
| 12. Shoulder | 26. Back | 40. Sheath/Udder |
| 13. Point of Shoulder | 27. Loin | 41. Mane |
| 14. Arm | 28. Croup | 42. Tail |

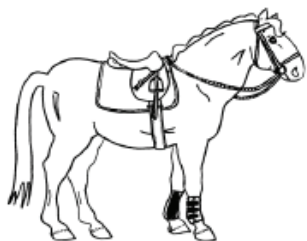
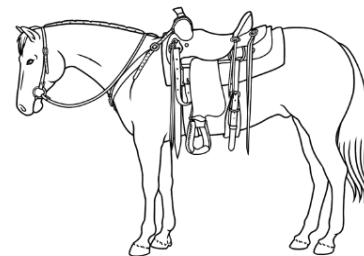
Tack Talk

Tack is the name for all of the equipment that we use on our horses when we ride. At Red Level, you should be able to recognize the items used for everyday riding and understand their purpose.

Just the basics

No matter what style of riding you do, you will likely be using a:

- 🐾 **saddle**
- 🐾 **saddle pad** or **saddle blanket**
- 🐾 **girth** or **cinch**
- 🐾 **bridle**

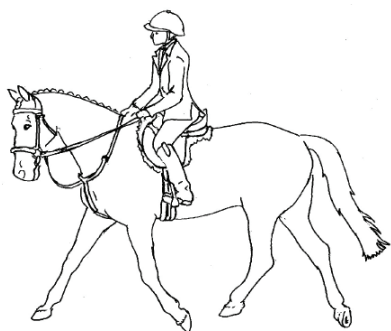


Your horse might need a **half pad** or **riser pad** under his saddle, or **protective boots**. Some horses wear special pieces of equipment such as a **martingale** or **breastplate**.

A horse can also be ridden bareback, or without a saddle - but a saddle can make you both more comfortable, especially when you are just learning to ride.

Tack must be carefully fitted to both horse and rider.
Improperly-fitted tack can cause a horse discomfort or pain.
It can make him lame, sour or cause him to act out!

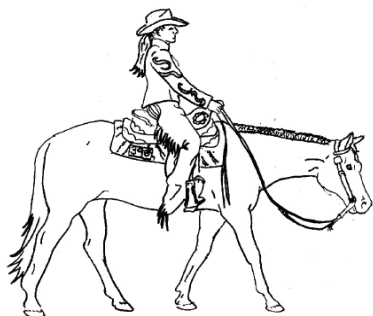
English or Western?



There are many different types of saddle and bridle. The exact tack you use will depend on what **discipline**, or style, of riding you practice.

English saddles are built for **forward-seat riding**, which helps the rider jump and gallop in balance with the horse.

There are three main variations on English tack. **Dressage saddles** help the rider maintain a classical position, with a long leg and deep seat. **Close-contact saddles** are designed for jumping, with forward-cut flaps and knee rolls. Many English riders start out in an **all-purpose saddle**, which support both a jumping and dressage position.



Western saddles are designed for all-day comfort and ranch work. The **horn** on a Western saddle is not really meant for the rider to hold onto - it provides a place to tie off a rope when working cattle.

There are many Western disciplines, including **reining**, **cutting**, **barrel racing**, **western pleasure**, and **western dressage**. Western saddles are often used for recreational trail riding.

Tack Talk: saddles

You will find it much easier to understand instructions for tacking up once you know the basic **parts of the saddle and bridle**. Let's start by learning the parts of the saddle and their functions.

English saddle



Western saddle



A job for every piece

- 🐾 The rider sits in the **seat** of the saddle. The lowest point of the seat should be right in the middle. If the saddle tips forward or backward, it may need a riser pad to sit level on the horse's back.
- 🐾 The channel that runs on the underside of the saddle from **pommel** to **cantle** is called the **gullet**. The gullet and the pommel keep the saddle off the horse's spine.
- 🐾 The rider's foot goes into the **stirrup**. There are several different types of **stirrup iron** used on English saddles, including **Fillis irons** (heavy-duty irons made of solid metal with rubber pads) and **peacock irons** (with a rubber band and leather tab designed to release your foot in a fall).
- 🐾 The **stirrup leathers** are used to adjust stirrups to the correct length for your legs. English and Western stirrup leathers adjust differently: English leathers buckle around a piece of metal called the **stirrup bar**, covered by a protective flap of leather called the **skirt**. Western leathers adjust closer to the actual stirrup with a sliding buckle covered by the **fender**.
- 🐾 The **girth** or **cinch** holds the saddle on the horse. English girths attach to the **billet straps** under the **flap**. There are usually three billet straps on an English saddle; use the first and the third unless one strap wears out. The **buckle guard** protects the flap and the rider's legs from the buckles. A Western cinch buckles to the **latigo strap** and is secured with a latigo knot. Some Western saddles have a looser **rear cinch**. This keeps the back of the saddle from lifting up if the horse stops suddenly.

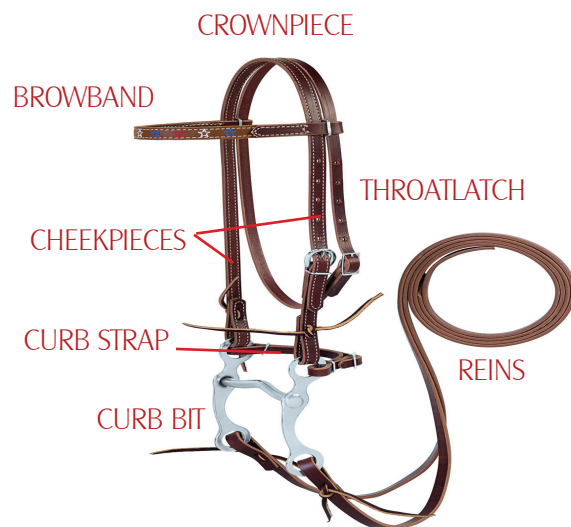
Tack Talk: Bridles

The **bridle** is used to help you **communicate and control** your horse while riding. There are many different types of **bits** and bridle - some bridles don't even use a bit at all. The type you use will depend on the style of riding you practice and the individual preference of your horse.

English bridle



Western bridle



The **bit** is the bridle's primary communication device, used to gain control of the horse by exerting pressure on the horse's mouth, lips and tongue. The two most common families of bits are **snaffles** (which operate with **direct pressure**) and **curbs** (which use **leverage** to add pressure).



Loose ring snaffle



Kimberwicke



Pelham



Curb

The **reins** attach to the bit and run to the rider's hands. Reins can be made of many different materials, but for safety's sake, should include at least one leather piece that can break if the reins get caught.

The bridle can be adjusted to fit the horse using the **cheekpieces**. It is held on by the **throatlatch** and sometimes the **noseband**.

The noseband can provide additional control by encouraging the horse to keep its mouth closed around the bit. Not all horses need a noseband. There are several different variations on a plain **cavesson** noseband, usually seen on English bridles. All of them must be used carefully to ensure the horse's breathing is not restricted.



Figure-eight noseband



Flash noseband

Talk Talk: Essential Extras

The **saddle pad** or **blanket** cushions the horse's back and absorbs sweat. Although a correctly-fitted saddle can be used without a pad, most riding disciplines use one.



English all-purpose pad



English fitted show pad



Western saddle blanket

English saddle pads often have **Velcro tabs** and/or **girth loops** designed to keep the pad from shifting or bunching up under the horse's saddle. The tabs should be fastened around the **billet straps**, above the **buckle guard**. Loose tabs trapped under the **panels** of the saddle can cause a painful pressure point!

Some horses may need extra padding due to their conformation or an imbalance in the saddle. **Corrective pads** are usually placed on top of a regular saddle pad.



Half pad



Lift-back riser pad



Lift-front riser pad

Horses often wear **leg protection** while being ridden. Properly-applied **boots** or **bandages** can provide warmth and support to the tendons, and protect the horse if he steps on himself or catches his legs on a jump. Leg protection can cause more harm than good if not used correctly, so make sure you get a lesson in applying boots or bandages before using them yourself!



Splint boots



Bell boots



Sports medicine boots



Polo wraps

Care and Keeping of Tack

Tack - especially leather tack - must be taken care of in order to maintain its condition. This care includes thoughtful storage as well as routine cleaning and inspection.

Four great reasons to take care of your tack:

1. **Tack is expensive to purchase and repair.** Good-quality leather will last a lifetime, however, if you take good care of it.
2. **Dirty tack can hurt your horse.** A build-up of sweat and dirt, particularly on the girth and bridle, can cause sores on the horse's skin.
3. **Neglected tack can break,** putting you in danger. Leather, like your skin, can dry out from exposure to sun, water and sweat, eventually rotting or cracking. You wouldn't want your stirrup leather to break as you were galloping your horse!
4. **Neglected tack is stiff,** making it uncomfortable for both you and the horse and difficult to buckle or adjust.



Your life could be riding on this little piece of leather - and this rotted stitching!



Tack should be kept in a climate-controlled room - free from rodents and other leather-chewers!

Tips for tack storage

- 🐾 **Bridles and halters should be carried and hung by the crownpiece.** Hold the buckle of the reins along with it, and make sure to keep the reins from dragging on the ground.
- 🐾 **Saddles should be placed gently on a level saddle rack.** Some saddle racks are shaped like the horse's back; in this case, place the pommel on the high side. Make sure both flaps are hanging freely!
- 🐾 If you have no choice but to place your saddle on the ground, **rest it on the pommel**, with the cantle supported by a wall or solid object.
- 🐾 **Completely remove saddle pads and girths,** especially if sweaty. Hang pads and girths upside down so they can dry.
- 🐾 The **stirrups** on an English saddle should **remain rolled up** at all times when not in use.

Ideally, **tack that is used daily should be wiped down after every ride**, and thoroughly cleaned every week or two. If your tack is used less frequently or you are very busy, you may just clean it once a week or once a month. Remember that the dirtier you let it get, the harder and more time-consuming the job will be!

Thorough tack cleaning involves taking each piece apart, removing sweat and dirt, **oiling** or conditioning the leather, and applying a protective coating such as **glycerine saddle soap**. You will learn more about this process in the **Yellow HorseSense Level**.



What's for Dinner?

Horses live to eat. They are happiest when they can spend most of every day grazing or munching on hay, and mealtimes are usually the highlight of their day. But they also have **surprisingly delicate digestive systems**, and must be fed carefully to avoid serious illness.

What do horses eat?

Horses are grazing animals. This means they are designed to eat small amounts of **high-fiber** plants, such as grass, all through the day. We call this type of food **roughage** and provide it to our horses through **pasture grass, hay**, or a combination of the two.

If a horse needs more energy or nutrients than he can get from grass and hay alone, you can feed him **concentrated** food such as **grains** and **supplements**. Riding horses are often fed grain so they have enough energy to work.



A horse can live entirely off of good-quality pasture.

Not all horses need grain, but all horses need roughage in their diet. In general, the more natural the diet, the happier and healthier the horse will be.



Working horses sweat a lot, and like people, lose salt in their sweat. To keep your horse from becoming deficient in salt, you can provide a **free-choice salt block** in his stall and pasture. He will lick it whenever he feels like he needs extra salt in his diet.

Some blocks provide extra **minerals**. It can be a good idea to have a mineral block **and** a plain salt block, so your horse can choose the nutrient he really needs.

Horses drink a LOT of water, especially in hot weather or when working hard. A single horse can drink anywhere from **5 to 12 gallons of water a day!**

If a horse lives in a stall part-time or full-time, he should have **two 5-gallon water buckets** hanging at a height level with his chest. This way if one bucket gets contaminated, the horse will still have fresh water to drink. Buckets should be refilled once or twice a day, and cleaned whenever they start to look slimy.



If a horse lives in a pasture with other horses, he will need a large **water trough** (usually 50 gallons or more). Troughs should be checked daily, cleaned weekly, and refilled whenever they start to run low.

A **clean, flowing creek** can be a safe natural water source for a horse. Make sure that nothing toxic is being dumped into the water upstream and that the water is continually moving. **Stagnant water**, such as a pond, is full of bacteria and **not** a safe water source for a horse.

Water is the most important nutrient - make sure your horse never has to go without!

Sniff Test

Before giving a horse **anything** to eat, it should be checked to make sure it is **safe to feed**. At best, feeding poor quality hay or grain is a waste of money, since the horse won't get all of the nutrition he needs from it. At worst, **spoiled hay or grain can make him dangerously sick!**



What danger do you see lurking in this hay?

Safe hay checklist:

- 🐾 Hay should smell **sweet and clean**, not musty or sour.
- 🐾 Hay should be **dry**. Damp hay is often moldy, and **mold can be deadly if the horse** eats enough of it! Sometimes mold hides inside a perfectly-normal looking bale, so check EVERY flake carefully.
- 🐾 Hay should be **fresh and green**. Older hay fades to a yellow-brown, but will still show hints of green inside when you open the bale.
- 🐾 It should be **free of weeds, dirt** and **debris**.
- 🐾 Avoid **course, stemmy** or **dusty hay**. Be sure to completely **remove hay strings** - these can cause a dangerous impaction in the horse's digestive tract if accidentally eaten.

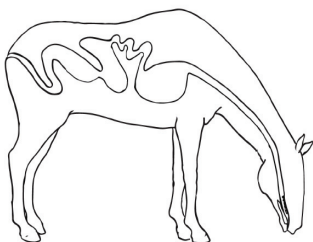
Safe grain checklist:



Sniff before you scoop!

- 🐾 Grain should smell **sweet and clean**, not musty or sour.
- 🐾 Grain should be **dry**. Heat and moisture can cause grain to spoil, so it should be kept sealed in an airtight bin.
- 🐾 **Moldy grain** can be just as dangerous as moldy hay. Remember that not all mold can be seen - if you see white or gray residue on **any** grain or pellet, assume that the rest of the batch is bad as well!
- 🐾 It should be **free of insects, dirt** and **debris**. Bugs love the sweet taste of grain!

What happens if a horse eats spoiled feed?



Horses have a **one-way digestive system**. Since they cannot throw up, the food that they eat - including the bad food - will stay in their system for a period of three to four days.

This can cause an equine bellyache called **colic**. When a horse colics, he experiences severe pain from gas or an intestinal blockage. Sadly, colic can cause serious complications and not all horses survive it. **The best cure for colic is to prevent it from happening in the first place.**

Feed Storage

One way you can keep your horse's feed from spoiling is by **storing it carefully**. Most barns have rules about keeping **bins closed** and the **feed room door shut** - for very good reasons.

Horses have poor impulse control when it comes to sugary food such as grain and treats. If they can access a bag of grain, they can literally eat themselves to death.

Of course, loose horses aren't the only creatures you'll want to keep out of your horse's feed. Rodents such as mice and rats can fill your grain bin with feces and transmit diseases. Opossums carry a special neurological disease horses can also get, called **EPM**. Insects such as weevils and blister beetles can infest grain and hay.

All these pests can chew through paper or flimsy plastic. To keep your grain safe, you'll need storage bins made out of **metal** or **heavy-duty plastic**. These bins should be strapped shut or kept in a **cool, dry room** with a door.



Hay should be kept in a dry storage area, preferably in a separate building. Sometimes, tightly-baled hay can ferment and generate heat. This can cause spontaneous combustion and a deadly barn fire!

Most horse hay comes in the form of **square bales**, which weigh anywhere from 35 to 100 pounds. To feed the hay, you must first cut and dispose of the **baling twine**, then divide the hay into portions. The bale naturally falls apart into thick, compressed slabs of hay called **flakes**.

How to deliver feed:

Every barn has its own setup for feeding hay and grain. Hay can be fed on the ground, in **hay nets**, or in special pasture feeders designed to keep hay fresh and dry. Grain is usually fed in **ground feed tubs**, heavy-duty buckets, or corner **mangers**.

Remember that horses are accident-prone, and should never be fed from containers that could potentially cause injury or a panicked spook if a horse gets tangled with them. If you help feed, be sure to **ask your instructor or barn manager** to show you exactly how to fill and use the nets, buckets or tubs they choose.



Horses can be aggressive at feeding time!

Even a well-behaved horse may lunge or kick at other horses, causing a dangerous situation.

Stay out of stalls and pastures containing hungry horses, and always feed from outside the enclosure if possible!

Feeding Rules

As a Red Level student, you may have many opportunities to help with feeding and watering, but it is important to know a few important rules first. **Breaking feeding rules can have disastrous consequences** - when in doubt, always consult a knowledgeable horseperson instead of making guesses that could endanger your horse's life.

Feed little meals often.

Horses have small stomachs that are designed to process small amounts of food constantly. An **empty stomach** can cause stress and ulcers. At the same time, if they have to eat a lot of hay or grain to keep up their weight, it should be **split into two or more smaller feedings** so they can digest the food properly.

Let it settle.

Just like you can get cramps from running after a big meal, your horse needs his meals to settle for a while before you exercise him. Allow at least **an hour after feeding grain before riding**, more if he's going to be worked hard. (Letting him eat **grass or hay beforehand is fine** and actually helps keep his stomach from getting too acidic.) After riding, make sure your horse has **cooled out completely** before letting him eat.

Make changes gradually.

Horses' stomachs get used to one particular type of food. If you suddenly change the food, they won't be able to digest it easily and may get sick. Changes in feed should be made gradually over a **period of at least ten days**.

Follow the feed chart.

Horses need to be **fed according to a variety of factors**: their size, their age, their temperament, the kind of work they do and the place they live. Each horse's diet should be written up on a chart with easy-to-follow instructions. **Always check the chart** before feeding someone else's horse!



Stick to the schedule.

Horses have delicate digestive systems that can be upset when they are nervous or stressed. Nothing stresses a horse like wondering if he's going to get to eat! Horses are creatures of habit, so try to stick to a routine and feed at the same time every day.

To treat or not to treat?



Most horse owners have very specific rules when it comes to treats. In general, a small amount of healthy treats, such as carrot pieces or packaged horse cookies, are fine **if you ask permission** and **if you have been shown how to feed that horse treats safely**. Randomly handing out goodies can turn a horse into a pushy, biting monster!

Home Sweet Home

Taking care of a horse is a big job. It involves daily feeding, watering, turnout, grooming, and exercise or training. You also have to maintain a clean and healthy environment for him. We call all this work **stable management**.



If a horse lives in a stall part-time or full-time, part of his regular daily care will include cleaning his stall.

We call this **mucking out**. Mucking out is not a popular job, but it is an important one! Dirty stalls attract flies, increase your horse's chances of getting worms, and can damage your horse's lungs and hooves. They are smelly and not a healthy or comfortable place for a horse to live.

If your horse lives outdoors, you'll still have some regular poop-scooping to do. Paddocks and **run-in sheds** should be mucked at least once a week. Mowing or dragging large pastures helps break up manure and reduce the parasite population, but you still may need to muck around gates and feeding areas.

Home sweet home

What makes a stall a safe and comfortable place for a horse to live? Plenty of **ventilation**, access to clean water and salt, hay for forage, and **bedding** he can lay down on.

There are two main types of bedding: **drainage** bedding, which allows urine to drain through into the floor, and **absorbent** bedding, which soaks up moisture. Many modern stables have hard-packed dirt or **rubber mats** for floors, which requires an absorbent bedding on top.

The thickness of the horse's bedding can range from one to six or more inches. This depends on the type of flooring used and the length of time the horse spends in the stall. Some barns leave the bedding higher against the walls of the stall. This is called **banking**, and prevents the horse from getting **cast**, or trapped against the walls of his stall when he lays down.



Some different types of horse bedding:

- 🐾 **Wood shavings or sawdust** are the most common material. They can be delivered in bulk or bought by the bag. It usually takes several bags to bed a stall.
- 🐾 **Pelleted bedding** is compressed and sold in bags. Adding water to it makes it soft and fluffy. You can water the pellets directly in the stall or prepare them in a wheelbarrow ahead of time.
- 🐾 **Straw** is an inexpensive drainage bedding. It is not commonly used these days due to the high levels of dust and the risk of horses eating the straw out of boredom.

Poop Scoop

Mucking out a stall may sound simple, but there is an art to cleaning a stall well. It will take some practice before you are able to do it thoroughly and efficiently.



It is much safer to clean your horse's stall while he turned out or tied outside.

If you do need to clean with the horse in the stall, put on his halter and lead rope and lay the rope over his neck. Leave the stall door ajar so that you can escape if necessary.

Steps to stall mucking:

1. First, **remove all of the visible manure** from the surface of the bedding and toss it into a wheelbarrow or muck bucket. You will need a special pitchfork designed for manure, with tines set close together. As you pick up the manure, **shake or rattle the tines of the pitchfork** until the clean bedding falls through. This will keep you from wasting bedding, which can be quite expensive.
2. Next, **remove any urine-soaked bedding**. The "pee spots" are usually dark yellow or brown in color and have a strong smell. Rake the clean bedding towards the walls, and shovel the wet and soiled bedding into your wheelbarrow. If your stall has dirt floors, be careful that you don't dig down too deeply and create holes in the floor. Sometimes horses will cover their urine with clean bedding, so you may have to do a little digging around.
3. **Rake the remaining bedding back across the stall** several times until smooth. You will usually uncover buried pieces of manure as you do this - **make sure that you remove all of it**, continuing to sift through the clean bedding.
4. After you **empty your wheelbarrow** (most stables have a designated area for this), **re-bed the stall with fresh, clean bedding**, replacing what you took out.
5. Finally, **rinse out your horse's water buckets and fill them** with fresh, clean water. Buckets need to be scrubbed on a regular basis - every few days - or they get dirty and slimy!



How often do stalls need to be cleaned?

Stalls should be mucked out **every single day**, even if the horse is only in for a short amount of time. Leaving manure in a stall makes the barn a smelly fly magnet!

If the horse is in for a long time and you have the opportunity, you can do a quick pick-up of manure throughout the day. This is called **picking** a stall. Picking will save you time and bedding when you are ready to do a thorough cleaning.

Every once in a while, the stall may need to be **stripped**. This means hauling all of the bedding away and letting the floor air out before rebedding. Sprinkling powdered limestone over wet spots can help neutralize strong odors.

Test Yourself

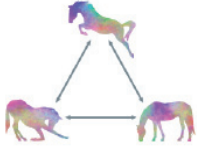
In order to earn a **Red HorseSense** ribbon, you need to be able to **discuss your knowledge** and **demonstrate hands-on skills** such as leading and grooming. Sometimes you may feel like you know the material inside out, but as soon as you open your mouth your mind goes blank! It can be helpful to **practice explaining each subject out loud** - first to an empty room, then to your parents, friends and animals. While brushing down your horse, you can name pony parts, or name as many feeding rules as you can think of.

Ready to give it a try? See if you can answer the following questions:

1. When you approach a horse, what part of his body should you touch first?
2. Name five normal human activities that might frighten a horse.
3. What might happen if you tie your horse right next to another horse?
4. What should you always wear when working in a stable?
5. Can you name six rules for keeping a barn safe for horses?
6. How should you safely walk behind a horse?
7. What hazards should you look for when inspecting a pasture for safety?
8. What should you do if you are walking through the pasture and the horses stampede?
9. You are riding in the arena and someone calls out, "Heads up!" What should you do?
10. How can you tell if a helmet fits properly?
11. Name three things you should always wear when riding.
12. You are going to go catch your horse in the pasture. What should you take with you?
13. You want to get your horse out of his stall, but he's looking out the rear window. What should you do?
14. Which side of the horse is his near side? His off side? On which side do you normally lead?
15. Why might it be a bad idea to wrap the extra lead rope around your hand?
16. What kind of knot should you use to tie your horse?
17. When tying, about how much rope should you leave between your knot and the horse's halter?
18. Name five grooming tools.
19. Which has harder bristles, a dandy brush or a body brush?
20. Name two reasons for picking out your horse's feet on a daily basis.
21. On what part of the horse would you find the gaskin and hock?
22. What do you call the straps on the saddle that attach to the girth?
23. Name two different kinds of bits.
24. Why do the cheekpieces have buckles if you don't have to unfasten them to take the bridle off?
25. Can you name three good reasons to clean your tack regularly?
26. Why is it a bad idea to change your horse's feed suddenly?
27. How long should you wait after feeding until you ride?
28. How many gallons of water will a horse drink in a day?
29. Name three signs of poor-quality hay.
30. How often should you clean your horse's stall?

For Further Study

We hope this guide has served as a helpful companion to your Red Level education. If you are interested in learning more, look for the following resources:

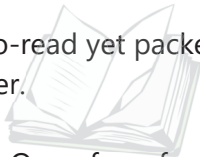


Download the **full HorseSense curriculum** and get updates on **online courses**:

<https://horsesenseridingacademy.com>

Harris, Susan, 2012. **The USPC Manual of Horsemanship - D Level, 2nd ed.** One of the best how-to books of horse care and riding ever written for beginners, with simple and clear explanations and illustrations. Strong emphasis on safety, with special sections for parents.

Hill, Cherry, 2012. **Horse Care for Kids.** Easy-to-read yet packed full of detail on selecting and caring for a horse. Lots of photographs for the visual learner.



Hill, Cherry, 2006. **How to Think Like a Horse.** One of our favorite resources! This fully illustrated book covers all aspects of equine behavior, helping you understand why horses do the things they do and how you can work with them safely.

Haas, Jessie, 2017. **The Horse-Lover's Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.** This A-Z guide to everything equine will have you speaking like a horseperson in no time.



We have a playlist of recommended videos for Red Horsemanship saved on the official **HorseSense YouTube channel** - with a library of Learning Levels videos coming soon! <https://www.youtube.com/@horsesenselevels>



Follow HorseSense Learning Levels on Pinterest and browse Pins for every Level.

<https://pinterest.com/horsesenselevels/boards/>



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Equine magazines:

Expand your horsey knowledge by subscribing to an equine periodical. Here are a few of our favorites:

www.practicalhorsemanmag.com

www.equusmagazine.com

www.horseillustrated.com

www.youngrider.com

Are you an **instructor** interested in **lesson plans, patterns, courses, challenges** and **incentives** that can help you teach Red Level? Visit:

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com>