

# Yellow Level

## HorseSense

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A Study Guide for the Unmounted Learning Levels Curriculum



HorseSense Learning Levels

# Welcome to the Yellow Level Guide to HorseSense!

The Yellow Level is the second introductory level, building on the basic skills and equine terminology you learned in Red Level.



This guide will take you through each of the required objectives for Yellow 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!*

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### Blankets and Boots

### Breeds and Breed Types

### Colors and Markings

### Feeding and Nutrition

### Ground Handling

### Horse ID

### Mounted Safety

### Tack

### Vet and Health Care

# 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 two 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.

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

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[www.HorseSenseLearningLevels.com](http://www.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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# Yellow 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 refine leading and grooming skills; will learn to care for tack; to describe and measure horses; to apply protective boots and blankets; to identify elementary feeding principles and situations requiring veterinary care.*

- ☐ Jog horse in hand, with safe technique, as though jogging for soundness.
- ☐ Blanket and remove blanket from horse safely.
- ☐ Correctly apply splint boots, bell boots, and shipping boots. Know what each is used for and which vital areas are protected.
- ☐ Clean and condition a saddle, bridle, and girth, knowing reasons for each step.
- ☐ Reassemble saddle and bridle without assistance.
- ☐ Care for a horse after a workout, to include:
  - ☐ Cooling out
  - ☐ Thorough grooming and post-ride inspection
  - ☐ Appropriate feeding and watering
- ☐ Know normal TPR range for a horse, and discuss how to take TPR.
- ☐ Know basic colors and markings.
- ☐ Know basic types and breeds of the horse.
- ☐ Know how to measure a horse for height.
- ☐ Know reasons for basic feeding principles, to include discussion of roughage and concentrates.
- ☐ Know signs of colic and action to take.
- ☐ Know which injuries can be handled with minor treatment and which need veterinary attention.



# Horse ID

Just like people, no two horses are exactly alike. They come in a wide variety of breeds and colors, with different markings and unique traits. You'll need to learn some equine vocabulary to recognize and describe horses accurately.

**Horsepeople can tell how experienced you are by how you talk about horses.  
Learning to speak the "language" is an important part of your equine education!**



**How would you describe these two horses?**

If you were told to bring in "**the brown one**," which one would you catch? You would have to guess - unless you were given more specific information. What about if you were asked to find "**the chestnut Thoroughbred gelding with the white stripe on his face**"? You would have a much better chance of picking the right horse!

**Horses can be identified by:**

- 🐾 **Color** and/or coat pattern
- 🐾 **Size** - are they a **horse** or a **pony**?
- 🐾 **Markings** on the face, legs, or back
- 🐾 **Sex** and estimated age, if not full-grown
- 🐾 **Breed** or breed type
- 🐾 **Obvious conformation traits**, such as a swayed back or dished face
- 🐾 **Scars** and blemishes

**Some important equine terms to get you started:**

**Mare** - An adult female horse.

**Gelding** - An adult male horse, castrated so that he can't reproduce. Most male riding horses are geldings.

**Stallion** - An adult male horse, still able to reproduce.

**Foal** - A baby horse. Also can be referred to as a **filly** (female) or **colt** (male).

**Pony** - A small horse. A pony can be any age!

**Miniature horse** or **mini** - A dwarf horse, too small to ride.



I'm a foal, not a pony!

# How Many Hands?

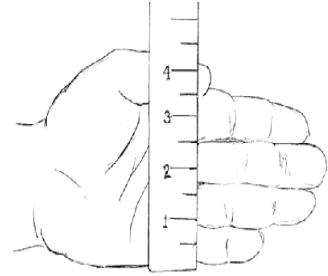
Horses are measured using a special unit of measurement called a **hand**. This is often abbreviated with a lowercase "h", so if you see that a horse is "15hh," read it as "Fifteen hands high."

## How big is a hand?

**A hand equals four inches.** This means that a 12hh pony would stand 48" tall at the withers.

If a horse's height falls in between two hands, the extra inches are included in the horse's overall height. A 13.1hh horse would stand thirteen hands, plus one inch; a 13.2hh horse, thirteen hands plus two inches, and so on.

Remember that the fourth inch is the beginning of a new hand. **There is no such thing as a horse standing 13.4 or 13.5.** This can be confusing if you are used to using the decimal system!



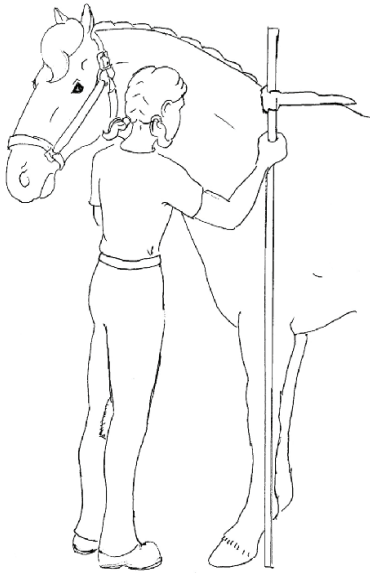
Not all hands are the same size - except when measuring horses!

## Measuring up

**Horses are measured to their withers** - the large bump at the base of their neck. This is because they may raise or lower their heads, causing an inaccurate measurement if measured at the poll. There are special measuring sticks and tapes designed for this purpose. A horse should be measured while standing squarely on level ground.

**What is the difference between a horse and a pony?** Sometimes just a fraction of an inch. A pony is any horse that stands under **14.2hh**, regardless of breed or age.

A pony may be categorized as a **small pony** (10hh to 12.2hh), **medium pony** (12.3hh to 13.2hh), or **large pony** (13.3hh to 14.1hh). Horses may stand anywhere from 14.2hh to 18hh or higher, with 15hh-16hh being the average. The word **cob** is sometimes used to describe large ponies or small horses.



## What size is best?

If you are choosing a riding horse, you'll need to make sure that you and the horse are **proportionate** to each other. The horse *must* be able to comfortably carry your weight, but should not be too big for you to control.

The size of the horse should also be suitable to the **discipline** or style of riding you prefer. Large horses can make good dressage horses and jumpers, for example, but are less suited to speed events requiring agility, such as mounted games.



This horse is a little too big for this rider!



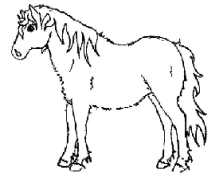
# Breed Types

Just like other animals, horses have been developed over the years into a number of different **types** and **breeds**. Each one has distinctive characteristics such as size, build and temperament.


## All in the family

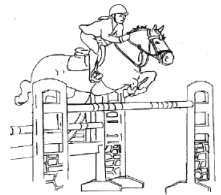
**Breed types** are broad categories which may include many breeds of horses with a common feature.


One example of a breed type is **pony breeds**. As you've already learned, a horse must stand below 14.2hh to be considered a pony. There are lots of different horses bred for this small stature, including the **Shetland pony**, **Welsh pony**, **Pony of the Americas**, **Connemara** and **Haflinger**.




## Some other basic breed types:


 **Sport horses** are bred for athleticism, and excel at Olympic events such as dressage, jumping and eventing. This type includes breeds such as the **Arabian** and the **Thoroughbred**, and **warmblood** breeds such as the **Hanoverian** and the **Dutch Warmblood**.




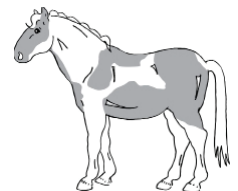
 **Draft horses** are large and powerful, capable of pulling heavy loads. Originally designed for medieval warfare and farm labor, most draft horses stand seventeen hands high or taller, and weigh close to 2000 lbs! **Clydesdales**, **Shires**, **Belgians** and **Percherons** are all common draft breeds.

 **A stock horse** is a type of horse designed for ranch work. Stock horses are usually small, strong and agile, capable of chasing down a cow at a moment's notice. **Quarter Horses**, **Paints** and **Appaloosas** are popular American stock breeds. Because they are usually smaller and level-headed, they are often used for pleasure riding.



 **A horse is said to be "gaited"** when its gaits vary from the normal walk, trot, and canter. Different breeds of gaited horses are known for their own unique way of going: **Tennessee Walkers** have a running walk, **Saddlebreds** rack, **Standardbreds** pace, **Icelandic Horses** tölt, and so on. Gaited horses are not always suitable for English or Western disciplines but make very smooth trail horses.

 **Some breeds are developed specifically for color.** To be eligible, a horse must consistently produce colored offspring. The most frequently seen color breeds in America are **Appaloosas** (with their spotted coats) and **Paints** (patterned with large splashes of white).



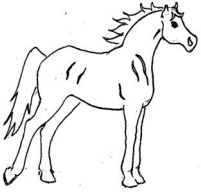
## Can a horse be more than one breed?

A **purebred** horse's parents, known as the **sire** and the **dam**, must both be the same breed - but many horses are crosses of one or more breeds. Some of these crosses evolve into popular breeds themselves, such as the **Quarab** (a Quarter Horse crossed with an Arabian) and the **Appendix** (a Quarter Horse crossed with a Thoroughbred). A horse of unknown breeding is referred to as a **grade horse**.



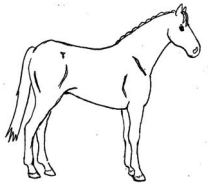
# Breeds of the World

There are hundreds of different horse breeds, originating all over the world. With practice, you can learn to recognize some of the most common breeds. In North America, these include:



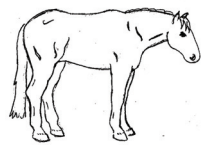
## Arabian

The Arabian is thought to be the oldest breed of horse alive. Arabians are desert horses, prized for their spirit and well-suited for **endurance riding**. They have a dished face and a unique skeletal structure, with a shorter back than all other horses.



## Thoroughbred

The Thoroughbred is an English breed developed for speed and athleticism. Many Thoroughbreds begin their life on the racetrack, where they run as two and three-year-olds. They also excel at jumping and galloping cross-country, making them a popular choice for three-day **eventing**.



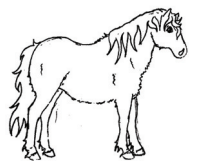
## Quarter Horse

Quarter Horses get their name for their impressive sprinting ability - they are the fastest horses in the world over a short distance, such as a quarter mile. Bred for ranch work and western events, the Quarter Horse has evolved into one of the most popular American breeds. They are usually mid-sized and stocky, with powerful hindquarters. A Quarter Horse with pinto coloring is called a **Paint Horse**.



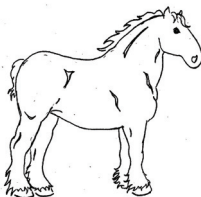
## Saddlebred

The Saddlebred (also known as the American Saddle Horse) is a gaited breed originally bred by plantation owners, who spent long days in the saddle. The Saddlebred has five gaits: walk, trot, canter, the slow-gait (also known as the amble) and the rack, which is very fast and animated. Saddlebreds are normally used for **saddleseat** riding.



## Welsh Pony

Originally from Wales, the Welsh Pony is one of the most popular pony breeds. There are four different categories of Welsh ponies, based on size: Section A ponies are 12.hh and under, Section B are medium sized; Section C ponies should also stand below 13.2hh but are built more heavily; while Section D (also known as **Welsh Cobs**) are the largest, 13.2 to 14.2hh and very sturdy.



## Clydesdale

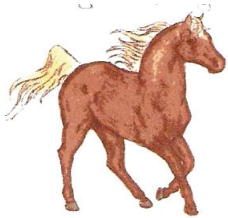
One of the largest breeds of horses in the world, the Clydesdale is a draft horse, standing 16.2-18hh tall. The breed is known for its strength and its feathering, or long hair, on its lower legs. A series of famous television commercials produced by the Budweiser brewing company features a team of bay Clydesdales.

**There are many other common breeds - which ones live in the barn where you ride?**

**A great place for learning horse breeds is an equine encyclopedia, which you can find in the reference section of your local library. You will also learn more about breeds in [Green Level](#)!**

# Common Colors

Just like human hair, horses' coats come in a wide variety of different colors. Being able to recognize specific coat colors will help you to describe or identify a horse; it can also be a clue to a horse's breeding. Let's take a look at a few of the basic colors horses come in:

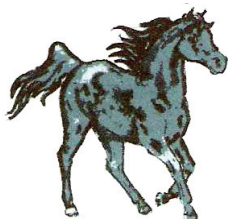


## Chestnut

Chestnuts are a solid brown color all over, ranging from a light golden brown to a deep chocolate brown called **liver chestnut**. Most chestnuts have a red or copper tint to their coat. Their manes and tails must also be brown, or a lighter blonde called **flaxen**.

## Bay

A bay is a brown horse with black **points**: mane, tail, legs and ears. There are several different shades of bay, including **sandy bay**, **blood bay**, and **dark bay**.

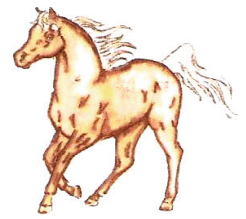


## Black/Brown

A true black horse must be black all over, excluding white markings. Some horses are so dark they look black, but have areas of lighter brown around their flanks and muzzle. This color is called **seal brown**.

## Palomino

Palominos have a golden body - lighter than a chestnut - and a **flaxen** mane and tail. Many palominos turn a pale cream color in the winter, and shed out to a darker gold in the summer.



## Gray

Grays are born black, bay or chestnut and gradually whiten with age. Most horses that look white are actually gray - a true **white** horse has pink skin instead of dark skin, and is very rare. There are several types of gray, including **dapple gray**, **iron gray**, **rose gray**, and **fleabitten gray**. A horse may be each of these colors at different stages of his life.

## Buckskin

Buckskins have a tan body color, ranging from a pale gold to a deep golden brown, and black points, similar to bays. Some buckskins have a **dorsal stripe** on their backs.



## Dun

Duns have **primitive markings**, or stripes on their legs and along their spines. There are different shades of dun: **bay dun**, which has a tan body and black/gray mane and tail, and **red dun**, which looks like a diluted chestnut, are the most common.

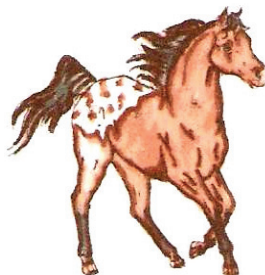
# A Horse of a Different Color

Some coat colors include distinctive patterns of different-colored hair. There are a lot of different terms used to describe patterns and colors - several of which might apply to the same horse!



## Roan

Roans have white hairs mixed in with a solid body color, making them appear a different hue from a distance. **Blue roans** are black with white hair, creating a bluish tint; **red roans** (also called **bay roan**) are bay with white hair, giving them a purplish hue; and **strawberry roans**, which appear pinkish, are chestnut with white hairs. The **points** on a roan horse (legs, ears, mane and tail) usually indicate the solid color.



## Appaloosa/Spotted

There are several different coat patterns found in Appaloosas or other spotted breeds. The two most common are **blanket**, a solid body color with a white patch over the hindquarters, and **leopard**, a white body color with large dark spots. Blanket Appaloosas can have a plain white or a spotted blanket; the white may also extend up over the shoulders in a pattern called **semi-leopard**. Other coat patterns include **snowflake** (white spots on a dark body) and **marble** (dark spots on a roan body).



## Pinto

Pintos have large splashes of white with another color. Black and white pintos are called **piebald**, while white with *any* other solid color is called **skewbald**.

The pinto markings also come in different patterns. **Tobianos** usually have large, bold splashes; their legs and backs are usually white and their chests and heads are dark. **Overos** have a scattering of white markings on a solid color. Their topline, or spine, is dark, and their legs and faces are usually completely white.

## What's the difference between a Paint and a pinto?

The two terms are often used interchangeably - and not always correctly!

**The easy way to remember is that Paint is a breed and pinto is a color.**

Paint Horses are Quarter Horses with pinto coloring or overlarge white markings, but **pinto coloring may be found in many breeds**, including several ponies and sporthorses.



**Because color genes can be combined**, horses also come in a variety of rare colors.

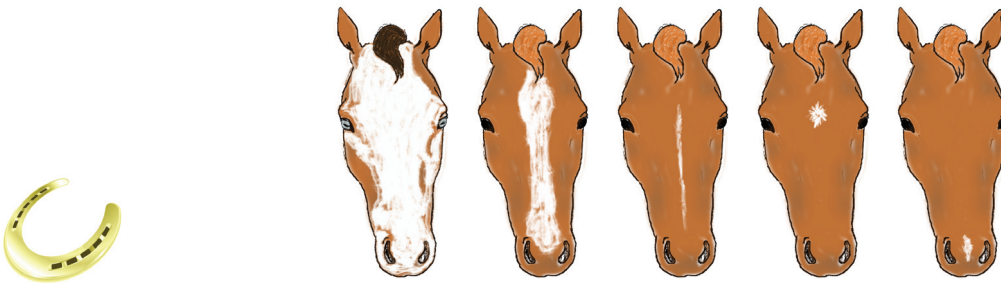
These include **grulla**, **sabino**, **cremello**, **perlino**, **silver dapple**, and **champagne**. Some of these colors change the color of the horse's skin or eyes.

And of course, any of these colors can be topped with **markings**, usually patches of pink skin and white hair. Let's take a look at the different kinds of markings a horse can have on his face, legs and body.

# Markings

Markings are areas of differently colored skin and hair. Although most markings are white, there are a few exceptions. The following markings may be found in almost every breed and color:

## Face Markings



1. **Bald Face.** The horse's entire face is white, with pink skin. The eyes are often light-colored or blue.
2. **Blaze.** A wide stripe of white running from the horse's forehead down the length of his face.
3. **Stripe.** A narrower version of a blaze. Stripes are sometimes seen in combination with a star or a snip.
4. **Star.** A patch of white in the center of the horse's forehead. Stars can come in different sizes and shapes.
5. **Snip.** A small white patch, often diamond-shaped, on the horse's muzzle. This can easily be sunburned pink in the summer. Sometimes seen in combination with a stripe and/or a star.

## Leg Markings



1. **Coronet.** A thin white stripe that runs along the horse's coronary band. Sometimes seen with **ermine spots**, or black spots along the edge of the hoof.
2. **Half-pastern.** White that extends from the coronary band to the middle of the pastern.
3. **Sock.** The white completely covers the fetlock joint, but stops below the cannon bone and tendons.
4. **Half-cannon.** White from the coronary band to the mid-point of the cannon bone, stopping well below the knee or hock.
5. **Stocking.** The white extends all the way up to the knee or hock, in some cases running over the joint and onto the upper part of the leg.

# A Marked Difference

Some markings are more rarely seen but can really make a horse stand out from a crowd. These include **primitive markings**, **tattoos**, **brands** and **scars**.

## Primitive markings

Primitive markings are usually seen in dun or grulla colored horses and are common in a few horse breeds, such as the **Norwegian Fjord**. These include **leg barring**, or dark horizontal stripes running along the back of the horse's forearm, and a **dorsal stripe**, or a dark stripe running down the horse's spine from mane to tail.



## Tattoos

Thoroughbred horses registered with the Jockey Club are usually tattooed with a serial number on their upper lip. This can be a great help in identifying a horse if he is stolen. Horses can also have an implanted **microchip**, just like a cat or a dog.

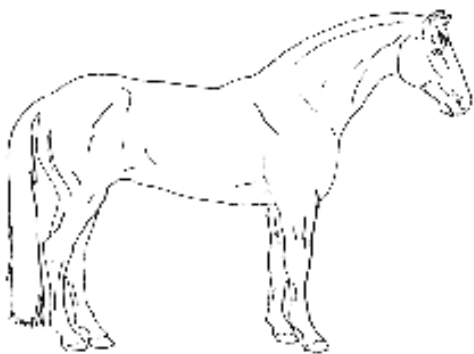
## Brands

Some horses are branded with symbols or identification numbers. A brand can be a clue to a horse's breed. **Mustangs**, for example, have a white **freeze brand** on their neck with an identification code issued by the United States Bureau of Land Management. **Hanoverians**, a type of Warmblood, are sometimes hot branded with a breed logo in the shape of the letter H.



## Scars

Just like people, horses can get lasting scars from injury. These usually appear as a patch of lumpy skin tissue where the hair does not grow. Horses can also have their hair follicles damaged from poorly-fitting tack, halters and horse blankets, leaving patches of white hair in the affected area.



**Is there a horse you normally ride or work with?**

**What markings or features do you notice on his body?**

Try to get in the habit of identifying color and marking on every horse you meet. Guess the horse's breed and height, and practice measuring horses if you are able.

If your horse is unusually marked, try to **copy his coat pattern** onto a blank drawing like the one on the left. This will come in handy if he ever goes missing and you are asked to describe him!



# Blanketing Basics

When winter rolls around and we bundle up in our sweaters and coats, our first instinct is to put a **blanket** on our horse. Most of the time, however, horses are much better equipped to handle the cold weather than humans are. Your horse may not need a blanket at all, depending on his **age, breed, body condition, and living situation.**

## Nature's winter coat

Left to its own devices, a horse's coat will grow thick and coarse as the daylight grows shorter in the autumn. This insulates the horse's skin and creates a barrier against cold and damp.

The hair of a winter coat also has a special ability to stand upright on windy days, which makes the horse's coat feel much like a thatched roof. That, along with the extra **scurf** and skin oil horses produce in the winter, will keep a healthy horse warm until the temperature dips *well* below freezing. Hardy horses that are acclimated to the cold can stay comfortable with temperatures as low as 0° Fahrenheit!



**A sheet or blanket flattens the horse's coat, so the blanket alone must provide protection from the cold and wind.**

This means that a sheet that is too light will actually make your horse **colder**. Because of this, you might be tempted to put a heavy blanket on your horse, thinking, "Better safe than sorry." But **any blanket that causes a horse to overheat and sweat can also give him chills**, and even make him sick! In general, it is better to err on the side of too little blanketing rather than too much.

## So when does a horse need a blanket?



An older horse might appreciate a blanket - especially a horse with arthritic joints that stiffen up when cold.

- 🐾 **When he is underweight or old**, or otherwise unable to metabolize enough energy to keep warm. Most horses produce body heat by chewing hay through a cold night, but a senior horse with dental problems may not be able to do this.
- 🐾 **When he does not or cannot grow a thick winter coat.** Some breeds have difficulty with this.
- 🐾 **When it is very wet and the horse lives out full-time.** Continual rain and snow can soak through a horse's coat and give him chills.
- 🐾 **When he is cool but damp, and exposed to very cold air**, such as a sweaty show horse riding home in the trailer.
- 🐾 **When his winter coat has been partially or fully clipped.** Performance horses are often clipped in the winter to allow them to cool out safely after hard work.

# Types of Blankets

There are many types of horse blankets, filling page after page in equine catalogs. You'll need to learn about the different options in order to choose the blanket that's right for your horse.

## Turnout blanket



Sometimes referred to as a "rug," a turnout blanket is made of heavy-duty material that allows it to be worn by a horse at pasture. These can vary in weight from a lightweight **rain sheet** to a layered, insulated **heavyweight** blanket for extreme cold weather.

Most turnout blankets and sheets are **waterproof**, but you should read the manufacturer's information carefully - some blankets are sold as **water resistant**, which means that they will repel *some* water but eventually soak through. Even a waterproof blanket may get damp and muddy around the edges, so if your horse lives outside full-time, it is a good idea to have a spare.

## Stable blanket



A stable blanket is designed for a horse living indoors. Because these blankets don't have to withstand the movement and rough conditions of turnout, they fit more snugly to help trap the horse's body heat. A horse that is stalled overnight can't move around to keep warm, so he may need a blanket in the stall even if he is fine without one during the day.

Like turnout blankets, stable blankets are sold in different **weights**, which refer to the amount of **insulation** that is sewn into the blanket. Choose a weight that will keep your horse warm but not leave him sweaty in his stall.

## Cooler/Anti-sweat sheet



An exercising horse can work up a sweat in winter that can leave him chilled - even if he has been clipped. A fleece cooler covers the horse's entire body and wicks moisture from his coat, keeping him warm while he walks and dries. A cooler should only be put on the horse after his body temperature has returned to normal—**never blanket a hot horse!**

**Anti-sweat sheets** are more loosely woven, with large holes that allow the horse's skin and coat to evaporate, and are thus a better choice for warmer weather.

## What's the difference between a blanket and a sheet?

A sheet is a thin blanket, usually a single layer of nylon, often used for the "in-between" days of cooler weather in the spring and fall. They are useful for **layering** (especially on a clipped horse), for **keeping a horse dry** in warm rain, and **keeping a horse clean** for shows, but are not beneficial in extreme cold.



# Blanket On

Like many other horse handling skills, putting on a blanket must be done thoughtfully and carefully to keep you and the horse safe. There are different opinions on the best way to do this. We recommend the following method:

## 1. Catch and contain your horse

You are not likely to succeed if you walk into a herd of loose horses in the pasture with blanket in hand! **It is safest to put a halter and lead rope on your horse before blanketing.** If he cannot be safely tied or held, put him in a stall, and put the lead rope over his neck so you can take hold of it quickly if needed. Remember to leave the stall door ajar in case you need to escape!



## 2. Fold blanket before placing on horse's withers

Sure, you can probably throw the blanket up over your horse like you would a bed quilt - but it will be hard to get positioned correctly, and the motion may frighten the horse. **Fold your blanket in half or in thirds**, with the tail flap on top and the layer closest to the chest buckles on the bottom. **Place it over the horse's withers**, just as carefully as you would a saddle.



## 3. Fasten the chest straps

Fasten the buckles or snaps on the horse's chest **before** unfolding the rest of the blanket. **Blankets must be fitted carefully** to keep the horse comfortable, so don't automatically pull the buckle to the top hole! You should be able to **fit a fist between the blanket and the horse's chest**, as well as each of his shoulders. Once the chest straps are fastened, carefully pull the top fold of the blanket over the horse's body, straightening as necessary.



## 4. Fasten the surcingle straps

The **surcingle straps** go around the horse's belly—most blankets have two. Cross them under the horse's belly: this X shape keeps the straps away from the horse's hind leg and reduces the risk of him getting a hoof caught when he lays down. Make sure there is only a fist of space between the strap and the horse's belly.



## 5. Fasten the leg straps

Many blankets also have straps that go around the hind legs. They connect to the underside of the blanket near the flank and fasten behind the horse's buttock, near the tail. Fasten the first strap by running it around the horse's leg and snapping it onto the ring on the same side. **Drop the second strap through the loop created by the first** before fastening. This will bring the straps slightly away from the horse's legs and prevent them from chafing his skin.



# Blanket Off

To remove a blanket safely, you'll perform the steps to blanketing in reverse - with one small exception.

## 1. Unfasten the leg straps and surcingle straps.

Unclip these straps in the **opposite order** you fastened them. Make sure that each strap hangs freely - leg straps can easily become tangled around each other or the horse's leg.

## 2. Unfasten the chest straps.

Once everything is unfastened, **slide your hand under the blanket at the withers** and lift it away from the horse's spine.

## 3. Fold the blanket in half and slide off to the rear.

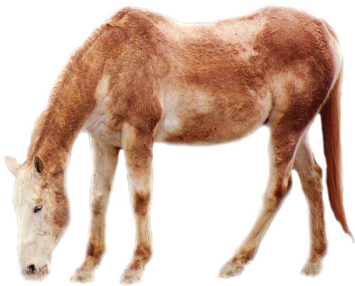
Fold the blanket in half by lifting the front of the blanket and pulling it backwards over the hindquarters of the horse. **Slide the whole thing off towards the horse's tail**, so you don't ruffle the horse's hair in the wrong direction.



## Why should you put on a blanket *front to back* and remove it *back to front*?

Does it really matter? Like most horse safety rules, this blanketing rule requires you to **think about what might happen if your horse gets frightened**. If the horse spooks, bolts or pulls away in the middle of the blanketing process, he is more likely to be scared by a blanket caught around his hind legs than he is a blanket hanging from his shoulders. A half-fastened blanket sliding over his hindquarters also might make him kick out - bad news for you if you can't get out of his way!

**A little extra caution is always better than dealing with a horsey disaster!**



A mud-crusting coat under a blanket can be itchy and give a horse sores. This horse will need grooming first!

## How should blankets be stored?

A blanket must be clean and dry to be beneficial to the horse. **Keep your blankets neatly hung off the ground**, well away from horse's hooves - dangling surcingle straps can catch on a hoof and cause an accident.

It is a good idea to reorganize and **fold your blanket before hanging it up** so it will be ready for you to put on next time. Make sure the lining is free of burrs, hay, shavings, and other potential irritants to your horse's skin.

In the spring, blankets should be washed and stored according to the manufacturer's directions.

# Types of Boots

Horses have surprisingly fragile legs for their size. Occasionally you may need to apply **protective boots** to keep your horse from injuring himself, either while working or transporting him in the trailer. This means you'll need to be familiar with the basic types of protective boots and know how to put them on.

## Splint boots

Splint boots, also called **brushing boots**, are designed to **protect the horse's lower leg from impact**. Most splint boots are made from padded neoprene with Velcro closures. They should be fastened around the horse's lower leg below the knee, with the padding protecting the inside of the horse's leg. Your horse might need splint boots if:



- 🐾 **He is prone to interfering**, or striking the inside of his opposite leg with his hoof. Interfering is often seen in horses with toes that point out or legs set too close together.
- 🐾 **He is performing an activity that makes him more likely to interfere**. Tight turns and continually working on a circle both increase the chance of injury from interference.
- 🐾 **He is performing a sport with risk of impact to his lower legs**. This might include cross-country jumping, show jumping, or speed events such as barrel racing and mounted games.

## Bell boots

Bell boots fasten around the horse's hoof, protecting the **coronary band** and the **bulbs of the heel**. Most bell boots are made of rubber with Velcro closures that fasten on the front of the hoof. **No-turn bell boots** are fitted with wedges for the heel to hold the boot in place. Your horse might need bell boots if:



- 🐾 **He is prone to overreaching**, or striking the heel or pastern of his front hoof with a hind toe. Horses that overreach in the pasture may need bell boots to prevent injury during turnout - especially if they wear metal shoes.
- 🐾 **He is performing an activity with risk of impact to his coronary band**. Coronary band injuries can bleed heavily and damage the hoof. Horses often wear bell boots during cross-country jumping and speed events.
- 🐾 **He does not have shipping boots and needs protection in the trailer**. Bell boots can be used along with **stable bandages** to protect a horse's leg from injury while being transported in a horse trailer.

## Shipping boots

Shipping boots are lightweight padded boots that cover the horse's entire lower leg, from the coronary band and heel to the knee or hock. They **protect the horse's leg from injury while trailering**. Horse trailers are surprisingly unsteady on the road and a horse can easily slip, step on himself, or hit his leg against part of the trailer - even without a vehicular accident. Your horse might need shipping boots if:



- 🐾 **You are hauling your horse for any distance** and do not have shipping bandages, or do not have the expertise to correctly apply bandages.

# Booting Up

Improperly applied protective boots can do more harm than good, so practice putting boots on under supervision!

## Safety first



- 🐾 Always bend down or squat to put boots on your horse. **Never kneel or sit on the ground**—if your horse were to spook, you wouldn't be able to jump back out of the way!
- 🐾 Your horse should be haltered and **held or tied** with a quick-release knot. Make sure there is room on both sides of him to work comfortably.
- 🐾 Both the **boots and your horse's legs should be very clean**. Caked mud or dirt can create friction under the surface of the boot and rub sores into the horse's skin. If the horse's legs are wet and muddy and you can't brush them clean, rinse them with warm water and towel dry.

## Inside, outside, left and right

Velcro closures should be **fastened on the outside of the horse's leg** whenever possible. If applying bell boots with Velcro tabs, position the Velcro in the **front** of the hoof. This places the closure out of reach of the horse's hooves, so he cannot remove the boot by interfering or stepping on himself. **Fasten boots snugly** - especially shipping boots, which can easily be pulled off in a trailer!

Splint boots and most shipping boots are designed for a specific leg. Splint boots come in pairs, with a left boot and a right boot. You'll notice that the Velcro is located on opposite sides of the boot - you'll know you have the right boot when you place it with the padding on the inside of the leg and **the Velcro must be pulled toward the horse's tail to tighten**. This applies the pressure to the horse's cannon bone instead of his delicate tendons.

**Most horses need larger boots on the hind legs than they do on the front.** You can compare lengths to tell which shipping boot goes on which leg. Some shipping boots are flared to protect the knee and the hock, so the hind and fore boots will have a different shape.



Pull Velcro straps front to back.

**Protective boots must be the correct size to be beneficial.**

**Your instructor can help you choose the best boots and sizing for your horse.**



There are other kinds of leg protection, including **polo wraps** and **exercise bandages**, **sports medicine boots**, **open-front jumping boots** and **skid boots**. If your horse needs to wear any of these, make sure you learn why and how to apply them correctly. You will learn more about bandaging a horse's legs for exercise in [Blue Level](#).



# Cool Down

If you've ever taken riding lessons, you already know that horseback riding can be a workout! Equestrian sports are demanding on both the human *and* the horse; both must be well-conditioned in order to perform at a high level.

**Horses already have a higher body temperature than humans do, and they can grow quite hot when worked - especially in warm, humid weather.**

**Horses can also get heat stroke - along with colic, laminitis and other dangerous complications from heat.**



Sometimes, a long walk at the end of a ride is all a horse needs to cool down. Other times, you may need to bring his body temperature down more quickly. Some signs that your horse needs some help cooling off:

- 🐾 He is **breathing hard**, and/or has a **strong pulse**.
- 🐾 He is covered in **sweat**, including his neck and hindquarters.
- 🐾 He feels **hot to the touch**, especially around his neck and chest.
- 🐾 There are **veins** standing out under the horse's skin.
- 🐾 He has performed **strenuous work** (cross-country, show jumping, etc.)

## How do I cool down a hot horse?

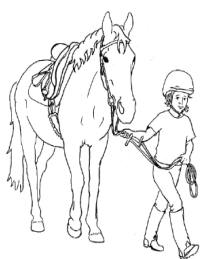
Remove the horse's tack and **hose or sponge him down with cold water**. Start at the horse's legs and work your way up, making sure to rinse all the sweat from his coat. Apply water to his major muscle groups - chest and hindquarters, between the hind legs - to help him cool down quickly.

The water in his coat will absorb his body heat and warm up quickly, so it is a good idea to remove excess water with a **sweat scraper**. You can also pour liquid **liniment** into your wash water, which helps heat evaporate and relieves sore muscles.



## What about walking?

Walking the horse at the end of a workout is just as important as the warm-up walk at the beginning of a ride. Ten minutes of active walking can reduce the build-up of lactic acid in the horse's muscles, making him less sore. It allows the blood circulation in his hooves and his **vital signs** (his body temperature, pulse and respiration) to drop back to normal.



If your horse has had a light or moderate workout, or his vital signs seem to be dropping quickly, you can walk at the end of your ride. Consider **dismounting, rolling up your stirrups and loosening the girth** - this is a kindness to your horse after a strenuous ride and increases air flow under the tack, speeding up the cooling out process.

**If he is very hot or winded, however, hose first and then walk.** You might even repeat the process - hosing, scraping, then walking for five or ten minutes before hosing and scraping again.

# Post-ride Care

Lowering a horse's body temperature isn't the only thing you'll need to do to care for your horse after a workout. A good horseperson also grooms and inspects her horse after every ride, feeding him with care and making sure he stays hydrated.

## Let him drink!



People used to believe that you could not offer water to a hot horse, but research has proven this to be a myth. Just like human athletes, sweaty horses need to rehydrate!

**The sooner you offer water to your horse after a workout, the better** - a horse's desire to drink will lessen as he starts to cool down. Let him drink his fill of cool, clean water immediately after you dismount, and offer it again after you hose and/or walk.

## Hold the feed, please



The horse's digestive system is closed for business during exercise. If you feed a horse while he is still hot and excited, he may not digest the food properly and can even **colic**. Wait until the horse's vital signs are completely back to normal and he is cool and calm before giving him hard feed such as grain, even after a light workout. If the horse has performed strenuous work, **it is best to wait an hour or two** before giving him grain.

## No harm done

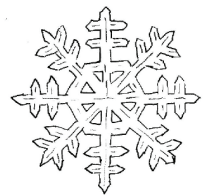


Even if you have hosed your horse off, he may still have sweat in his coat. This can make his coat dull and faded, so **curry and brush him once he dries**, leaving his coat smooth, clean and comfortable. Pick his hooves and check his shoes, if he wears them.

Once the horse is completely cool, **check all four of his legs for signs of injury**. A horse can strain a tendon and not develop symptoms for several hours. It can be particularly difficult to detect heat while your horse is still hot! Run your hand down the back of the horse's leg and feel for any **heat, swelling, or abnormal bumps**.

## Does my horse still need a cool-down in the winter?

A horse can get surprisingly hot and sweaty during a winter workout, especially if he has a heavy coat. His temperature may drop quickly, but his coat will stay damp. This can be a big problem as the sun goes down, the air gets colder, and the wet coat makes him chilled.



Some tips for cooling out a horse in winter weather:

- 🐾 Allow extra time for a cool-down walk. Ideally, **the horse should be kept moving at the walk until his coat dries**. Dismount and remove the tack to speed up the process.
- 🐾 If the horse is cool but wet, you can **cover him with a cooler**. Make sure the material wicks moisture from his coat and that he does not overheat!
- 🐾 Instead of hosing sweat away, **curry and brush** the horse's coat, repeating as necessary.

# Vital signs

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

## Why take TPR?

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



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

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

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

### Average TPR ranges:

**Temperature: 99° to 101° Fahrenheit**

**Pulse: 30-48 beats per minute**

**Respiration: 8-20 breaths per minute**

## A few other indicators of horse health

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

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





# Taking TPR

To take your horse's TPR, you need a digital or veterinary **thermometer** and a **watch** or **clock** with a **second hand**. You can use a stethoscope, but you should also practice taking your horse's pulse without one.

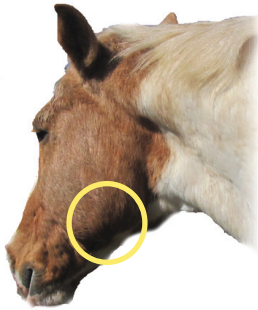
## Breathe in, breathe out

It is a good idea to **take the horse's respiration first** - horses often take quick and shallow breaths when they are excited or interested in the activity around them. Your horse should be **at rest**, cool and standing calmly without having recently exercised.

**Watch his flanks** and count the number of times they move in and out (one breath) in fifteen seconds. Multiply this number by four to get the total number of breaths per minute.



## Finger on the pulse



At first, you may want to use a stethoscope, placed **deep under your horse's left elbow**, but you should also practice locating the pulse using the **facial artery**.

Place your fingertips on the inside edge of your horse's **jawbone**. Make sure you don't use your thumb, which has a pulse of its own. The artery feels like a piece of string where it crosses the jawbone. Press the artery lightly against the bone to restrict the blood flow and make the pulse tap against your fingers.

Once you can feel the pulse, record the number of beats in fifteen seconds and multiply by four to get the total number of beats per minute.

## Taking temperature

Remove the thermometer from the case, check that it is clean, and grease it with **petroleum jelly**. If you are using a veterinary thermometer, shake it until the mercury is below 97° Fahrenheit.

Stand to the **side** of your horse's hindquarters and lift his tail, sliding the thermometer about two-thirds of the way into his **rectum**. Hold the end firmly! It is a good idea use a **string and clip** to attach the thermometer to his tail - this prevents it from falling or getting sucked into the horse's body.

Press the button on a digital thermometer and wait until it beeps. If using a mercury thermometer, wait two to three minutes before removing and reading. Wipe your thermometer down with alcohol to disinfect it when finished.



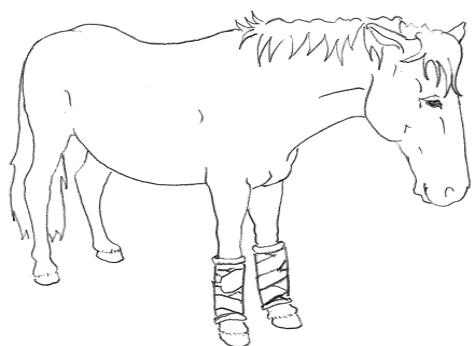
**Make sure you have an experienced horseperson help you take vital signs at first - especially the horse's temperature.**

**If a horse objects to the procedure, he will swing his hindquarters to the side or kick!**

# Judgment Calls

Imagine that you arrive at the barn one day and bring your horse in from the pasture. Your dreams of a long ride are dashed when you notice that your horse is limping. What should you do now? Is it serious enough that you should call a vet?

**No matter how careful we are to keep a horse's environment safe, they are accident-prone animals. Equine emergencies are a part of life - which means we need to be prepared to deal with them!**



Just like people, horses can have minor incidents that result in cuts, bruises, scrapes, and sprains and soreness. Sometimes the situation is serious enough that you need the professional help of a **veterinarian**. Sometimes, you can doctor the horse yourself.

**Caring for horses means that you might find yourself in the position of having to make this decision.** This can be a lot of responsibility, and requires you to learn as much as you can about equine ailments and first aid.

## To call the vet or not to call the vet?

As a general rule, you should call the vet if you have any doubt about the severity of the problem or the best way to treat it. "Let's wait and see" is not always a good policy - some equine emergencies, such as **colic** or a **bowed tendon**, must be addressed immediately in order for the treatment to work. **A few can even be life-threatening.**

At the same time, veterinary bills can be expensive, so it may not be practical for you to call the vet out for a minor problem that you can treat yourself. Your veterinarian can help you develop some guidelines for when you should give her a call.

**If the horse does not belong to you, the first person you should call should be the owner!**

**You should also have the number of the barn manager, your instructor, and/or another experienced horseperson you trust.**

If you do have to call the vet, make sure you can give him the information he needs in a calm and organized manner. **Nothing makes a horse crisis worse than a panicky human.**

Be specific and tell your vet the horse's exact symptoms, or the size and location of the injury. She may need to know the horse's vital signs, or ask you to send a photo. Ask for instructions on the best way to care for the horse until the vet arrives.

**Keep the phone numbers of both your primary vet and a backup posted in the barn AND saved as a contact in your phone!**



# Worrisome Wounds

Horses should be checked as frequently as possible for signs of injury. The sooner you find and treat a wound, the faster it will heal, and the more likely you are to avoid infection or other complications.

## You should call the vet if:

- 🐾 **The horse is bleeding heavily.** If you cannot get the flow to stop within a few minutes of applying pressure, this is a serious emergency.
- 🐾 **The horse has a laceration,** or a cut with jagged, torn edges that require stitches. Sometimes a piece of skin tears away entirely, which means the wound will need careful treatment to heal properly.
- 🐾 **The horse has a deep cut over a joint or a tendon.** Both areas can develop life-threatening infections.
- 🐾 **The horse has a deep puncture wound.** Puncture wounds often look harmless, but they may carry bacteria deep into the horse's tissues and bloodstream. A vet will thoroughly clean out the puncture and may give your horse a booster shot for tetanus.
- 🐾 **The horse has swelling or thickness as well as heat in the tendon.** If the tendon has been torn, the horse will need immediate anti-inflammatory medicine and frequent icings to keep the tendon from becoming bowed. A bowed tendon can end a horse's career.
- 🐾 **Your horse has an injury located on or very close to his eye.** A horse's eyeball can rupture or become permanently damaged, causing blindness. Major swelling around the eye area can also apply pressure close to the brain.



## You can probably handle this yourself:

- 🐾 **The horse has a minor cut with neat edges** (sometimes called an **incised wound**) that does not require stitches. Disinfect the wound with antibacterial scrub or mild soap before applying a wound dressing such as triple antibiotic ointment. If the wound is on a leg, you can bandage it; otherwise, just keep it as clean as possible until it scabs over and heals.
- 🐾 **The horse has a scrape** (also called an **abrasion**).
- 🐾 **The horse has bruising** – this most often occurs in the sole of the foot.
- 🐾 **The horse has an abscess in his hoof.** Sometimes a persistent abscess will need to be lanced by a vet, but most cases clear up with diligent soaking and wrapping of the hoof.
- 🐾 **The horse has minor irritation in his eye.** Sometimes a piece of hay or wood shaving can cause the horse's eye to weep, but the swelling will be minimal, with no broken skin. The eye can be flushed with sterile water, saline solution, or an equine eye wash.



## Do you know where to find the first aid kit in your barn?

You will learn more about equine first aid, including treating injuries, in **Green** and **Blue** Level.

# Jogging for Soundness

Sometimes a horse's limp can be caused by an obvious injury, such as a cut or blow to a joint. Other times, you will need to do some detective work to figure out why your horse is **lame**.

## Causes of lameness

- 🐾 **Tender soles** in the hoof. This can be caused by a **stone bruise**, poor trimming, or the horse eating too many sugary carbohydrates.
- 🐾 An **abscessed hoof**.
- 🐾 An **injured tendon** or **ligament**. This can range from mild **tendonitis** to a tear.
- 🐾 A **muscle sprain**, usually in the shoulder or hindquarters.
- 🐾 **Arthritis**, or calcification in a joint.
- 🐾 A **sore back**, or a back out of alignment, can also cause a horse to appear lame.

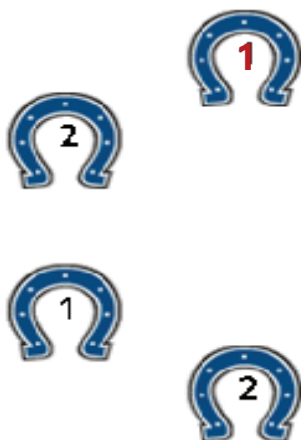


We say a horse is **sound** when he moves comfortably and evenly, with no signs of pain or deviations from his normal gait. Sometimes damage to a bone, joint, tendon or ligament can leave a horse permanently lame. This is called an **unsoundness**.

**If you get on your horse and he seems to be limping or "off," end your ride *immediately*.**

**Even minor lameness can be a symptom of something more serious. You can make it worse by asking your horse to continue working.**

## My horse seems lame. What should I do?



If the horse's right foreleg is hurt, where will his head move in the trot?

Dismount, if necessary, and give the horse's legs and hooves a thorough examination. Run your hand down the front and back of each leg and feel for **heat, swelling**, or signs of **sensitivity**, such as the horse pulling his leg away from your touch. Pick up the hoof and look carefully for stones, bruising, or damage to the hoof wall or frog.

If you think the horse is lame but you aren't sure which leg he is favoring, you may be able to figure it out by **jogging him in hand**. Lameness is often easiest to see in the trot, a gait where the horse must bear equal weight on both sides of his body. Normally, the horse's head stays in one place while he trots, but **a lame horse's head bobs up and down** as he shifts weight off the injured limb.







If the pain is in a **front limb**, the horse will raise his head **up** when the hoof strikes the ground. If the pain is in a **hind limb**, the horse's head will move **down** when he steps on the hoof.

**If your horse is lame and you don't know why, or it doesn't improve with rest, call your veterinarian.**

# Leader Lessons

Aside from giving you a valuable tool to identify lameness, jogging your horse **in hand** increases your communication skills and your ability to direct your horse from the ground. It takes some practice - a great place to start is by reviewing the leading lessons you learned in **Red Level**.

## Keep it safe

-  **Always wear sturdy, barn-safe boots or shoes.** You only need a horse to step on your foot once to appreciate them. A helmet and gloves are recommended for groundwork.
-  **Most horses are accustomed to being led from the near, or left side.** Lead from this side with an unfamiliar horse, but practice leading your own horse from both sides until it becomes comfortable.
-  **Hold the lead rope 6" to 12" from the bit or halter.** Never hook your fingers in the halter or hold metal! The rest of the rope/reins should be **folded** carefully in your free hand (not coiled), so you can let go quickly in an emergency.
-  **Resist the temptation to look back at your horse.** Instead, keep your eyes forward on your destination. The more you project confidence, the more willingly your horse will follow your lead.
-  **Remember that it is safest to turn the horse away from you,** since it makes it difficult for the horse to step on your toes.
-  **Keep the horse's head level with your shoulder,** not barging forward or dragging behind. Leading should be a partnership, not a game of Tug of War!



## How to ask a horse to jog



Practice a few turns at the walk and transitions in and out of the halt to make sure that the horse is responding to your cues. When you are ready to trot, **move your leading hand forward** (your right hand if you lead from the near side) and give your horse a **verbal cue**, such as "Trot!" Be ready to **jog yourself** the instant the horse moves forward.

**If your horse is lazy and refuses to trot,** don't just run and pull on the reins! Carry a dressage whip in your **outside** hand (the one farthest from the horse). If your horse won't trot along with you, rotate the whip behind your back to **tap the horse on his barrel or hindquarters**. You should be able to do this without looking back or pulling on the reins. Of course, make sure your horse accepts the whip before you tap him with it!

**If your horse's trot gets fast and feels out of control,** practice very short trots with frequent transitions down to the halt. Ask your horse to back up after the halt by stepping backwards and applying pressure to his nose or chest. You can **half-halt** by giving a brief tug on the lead rope or reins as he trots - but **resist the temptation to pull steadily**, which will only encourage your horse to lean into the pressure and get stronger.

Keep the reins or rope loose so you don't interfere with the motion of the horse's head.



# Signs of sickness

Just like people, horses can get sick with everything from a mild cold to a life-threatening infection. There are a few minor ailments you can handle yourself, but in most cases, a sick horse needs a visit from the vet.

## You should call the vet if:

- 🐾 **The horse has a fever, (102° F or higher), a persistent cough, and/or white or yellow discharge from his nostrils.** He may have a contagious virus or bacterial infection.
- 🐾 **He has unexplained diarrhea that lasts longer than a day.** This can happen for a number of reasons, including digestive problems, parasite infestation, or toxic plant poisoning.
- 🐾 **The horse shows signs of choking.** Horses choke differently than we do. A choking horse has a blockage in his **esophagus** and can't swallow, but is still able to breathe. Serious cases of choke may cause the horse to develop pneumonia or even go into shock. A horse with choke will have a thick mass near his throat and act distressed. He may cough repeatedly or expel feed through his nostrils.
- 🐾 **The horse seems unusually reluctant to move.** If his front feet seem hot or he leans back to shift his weight away from them, he may be suffering from a painful and potentially crippling inflammation in the hoof called **laminitis**. If his muscles seem hard or quivering, or he is sweating and breathing hard, he might be experiencing a form of severe muscle cramping referred to as **tying up**.
- 🐾 **The horse shows signs of colic.** You'll learn more about this serious digestive disorder on the next page.



## You can probably handle this yourself:

- 🐾 **The horse's lower legs are swollen but cool - particularly if the horse has recently been kept in a stall.** This is a circulation problem called **stocking up**, and frequently occurs in horses that are unused to staying still for long periods of time (such as horses stalled during a weekend show), particularly after hard work. If you can't explain why the legs are swollen, or they feel warm to the touch, it is best to notify your vet.
- 🐾 **The horse has a bacterial infection of the hoof** such as **thrush or white line disease**. These can be treated at home with antibacterial/antifungal products. Ask for your farrier for recommendations.
- 🐾 **The horse has a skin condition such as rainrot or scratches.** There are a number of skin diseases a horse can get, some seasonal. Most of the time, they can be treated with thorough cleaning and topical sprays, dressings or powders.



The swelling caused by stocking up usually goes away with lots of exercise.

## A horse cannot tell you if he's feeling unwell.

**This means we need to pay close attention and learn to listen to the small signs of sickness - starting with his posture, attitude and facial expression.**

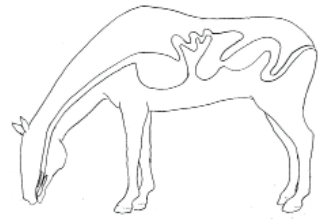
# Colic Crisis

Few words strike fear in the hearts of horse owners quite as much as **colic**. But what is colic? Why is it so dangerous, and how can you tell if a horse has it?

**In simple terms, colic is an equine bellyache.**

Unfortunately, the equine digestive system is anything but simple. The intestines contain many loops and small passages that can become blocked, and the **horse can't vomit**, which means spoiled or toxic food has no way out but through.

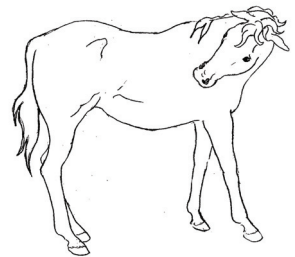
There are several different types of colic:



- 🐾 **Gas colic**, or **spasmodic colic**, is caused by a buildup of gas inside the horse's intestines. This painful condition can be caused by eating moldy or spoiled feed.
- 🐾 **Impaction colic** is a blockage of the intestines, caused by dehydration, parasites or poor digestion. Impaction colic is very dangerous, as the **gut bacteria** in the empty parts of the digestive system may begin to die off, leaving the horse unable to digest food.
- 🐾 **Torsion colic** occurs when a section of the intestine loops or twists. Sometimes this happens because the horse rolls or contorts himself to relieve the pain. Sadly, torsion colic is often fatal. **Colic surgery** can sometimes save the day, but it is an expensive option with no guarantee of success.

## Signs of colic

- 🐾 **Loss of appetite.** It is always a bad sign when a horse goes off his feed!
- 🐾 **No manure**, or less manure than usual in the stall or paddock.
- 🐾 **Abnormal gut sounds.** Many loud gut noises indicates a gas colic; if the horse's gut is making no sound at all, he may have an impaction.
- 🐾 **Lying down & getting up again is one of the most common signs of colic.**  
The horse will appear as though he cannot get comfortable.
- 🐾 **Standing outstretched as though trying to pee.** Some horses do this to relieve pressure on their belly.
- 🐾 **Looking and/or nipping at stomach.** Some horses will even kick at their belly in severe pain.
- 🐾 **Rolling is a sign of more severe colic.** This may cause intestinal torsion.
- 🐾 **Repeated yawning/lip curling** can sometimes be a sign of mild colic, but check for other symptoms before you panic!



## My horse is colicking! What should I do?

**First, assess the situation.** If you can, take the horse's pulse and respiration, listen to his gut sounds, and check his capillary refill. (See **Vital Signs**.)

**Second, call the vet.** Report all of the information above, along with a list of the horse's symptoms.

**Third, keep your horse comfortable.** If he is lying down but quiet, leave him be. If he is trying to roll, try to get him on his feet and keep him walking until the vet arrives. Never feed hay or grain to a colicky horse!





# Feeds & Feeding

When it comes to equine digestive problems, **the best cure is always prevention**. Many heartbreaking colics are caused by improper feeding - which makes it extremely important for you to learn how equine digestion works and how to feed horses safely.

## All day, every day

Horses live to eat. As **grazing animals**, they are designed to eat small amounts of high-fiber food - for 10 to 17 hours a day! A happy, healthy horse should have continual access to:

- 🐾 **Clean water**, and plenty of it. A horse will drink up to 12 gallons a day in warm weather.
- 🐾 **Forage such as grass or hay**. If the horse lives in a stall part-time or most of the time, or has to have his grazing restricted for health reasons, you may have to get creative with how you provide this - but he should not go long periods without anything to chew.
- 🐾 **Salt and/or minerals**. The amount and type may vary depending on the soil and climate where you live. If you provide free-choice blocks in the horse's pasture and/or stall, he will eat just the amount he needs - but make sure the blocks you choose are safe for equine consumption.



## Menu planning

Feeding horses can be a tricky science to learn. Just like humans, every horse **metabolizes** (converts food into energy) differently. His diet will depend on many factors, including:

- 🐾 **The horse's weight**. A small pony will have different energy requirements than a big sporthorse.
- 🐾 **The horse's body condition**. Is he fat? Thin? Does his weight fluctuate depending on the season? Your instructor and veterinarian can help you learn what the ideal weight for your horse should look like.
- 🐾 **The horse's workload**. A horse that is ridden burns more calories than a horse that isn't - and a racehorse burns *way* more calories than a beginner lesson horse!
- 🐾 **The horse's breed**. Some breed types, including ponies and some Warmbloods, are known to be easy keepers, meaning that they gain and keep weight on easily.
- 🐾 **The horse's living situation**. Horse facilities can vary widely in different parts of the country, depending on the climate and the availability of land, soil and pasture grass. A horse that lives in a dry lot or paddock will need a different diet than a horse grazing on lush pasture all day.









🐾 **The horse's age**. Young horses need extra minerals to ensure they grow healthy, strong bones. Old horses often need a special diet, especially if their aging teeth have trouble chewing hay.

🐾 **The horse's health**. Certain health conditions and diseases require the horse to have his food restricted or to avoid certain ingredients, starches or sugars.

# Reasons for the Rules

Although there are a lot of different opinions on the **best** way to feed horses, there are a few hard and fast rules that help prevent digestive trouble. Let's review some of the most important feeding rules we learned in **Red Level**:

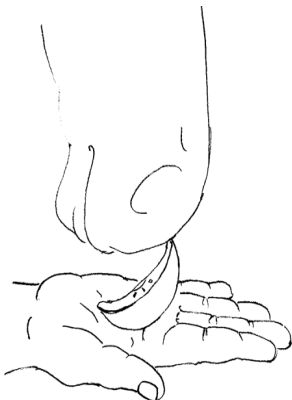
-  **Feed little and often.** This is because the horse's stomach is relatively small, and works best when it is **no more than 2/3 of the way full**. If your horse needs a lot of concentrated food, it should be broken up into two more or small feedings per day.
-  **Be consistent.** If you feed your horse at the same time every day during the week, try to stick to your routine over the weekend. Horses are creatures of habit and quickly learn when to expect meals. **A late meal will make a horse anxious**—sometimes to the point where he cannot digest his meal properly.
-  **Make changes gradually.** Keep your horse's diet consistent, too, feeding him the same amount of the same food every day. **If you have to change the type of feed he eats, do it gradually over a period of at least ten days**, so the "friendly" bacteria in his digestive tract have time to adapt to the change.
-  **Wait to ride.** Allow your horse **an hour to digest concentrates** before riding him, as exercise can upset his stomach and prevent him from digesting the food properly.
-  **Close the lid.** Store grain in an airtight bin that is **inaccessible to disease-carrying insects and rodents - and horses**, who will literally eat themselves to death on sweet grain! Make sure both your hay and grain are kept in a dry place to prevent mold, and that you sweep up any spilled feed immediately.
-  **Use good-quality feed.** Only feed fresh, clean good-quality hay and grain. Not only is feeding poor-quality feed a waste of money, since it is low in nutrition, but **dusty, moldy or spoiled feed** can make your horse seriously sick.







**Review the Red HorseSense study guide to make sure you can identify bad hay, grain and water.**

**Remember that horses can also colic from eating hay strings and candy wrappers - make sure *anything* they might accidentally ingest ends up safely in the trash!**

## What about treats?



Every horseperson has their own rules about feeding a horse treats. Using treats as a reward can be a powerful training tool, but they must be used carefully, or a horse can be taught to push and bite. Here are a few general rules to follow concerning treats:

-  Feed only **healthy treats**, such as carrots, apples, and horse cookies.
-  Fruits, vegetables, and alfalfa cubes should be **cut or broken into small pieces** so that the horse cannot choke.
-  Feed from the **flat palm of your hand** with fingers extended, or from a bucket. Never feed an aggressive horse by hand.
-  Always **ask permission** before treating someone's horse!

# What's for Dinner?

If you walk into a feed store, you may be overwhelmed by all of the choices. There are many different types of **hay**, **hay substitute**, **grain** and **supplements** available, with every brand claiming to be the best. You will learn more about different types of feed in **Orange Level**, but in the meantime, you can make sense of your horse's grocery options by learning about the three main types.



## Fiber first

A horse's diet should be made primarily of **roughage**, or fiber-rich plant material such as **pasture grass**. When a horse can't eat grass, we can provide roughage in the form of **hay**, **pelleted** or **cubed grasses** and **legumes**, and/or **beet pulp**.



## Energy boosters

If a horse needs more energy than he receives from his grass and hay, his diet can be supplemented with **concentrates**. This kind of food has a lot of energy packed into a small portion.

Concentrates are usually made from **grains**, such as **oats**, **corn**, **barley** and **wheat**. Some horses are fed **soybean meal** for extra protein, or **rice bran** for extra fat. You can buy **whole grains**—which must be carefully balanced, so the horse gets the right amount of each nutrient—or commercially blended feed, including **sweet feed**, **pelleted feed**, and **complete feed** such as **senior feed**.



## A little something extra

**Supplements** are a powder, pellet or liquid added to a horse's food to provide a specific nutrient, such as vitamins or minerals. While a healthy horse eating a balanced diet might not require a supplement - and feeding supplements without cause can be a waste of money - they can be useful for horses with special needs.

**Remember that not all horses need grain, and some are better off without it - but *all* horses need roughage in their diet.**

**So how do you know if a horse needs concentrates?** This usually depends on their workload. Let's take a look at the possible nutritional requirements of several different horses:



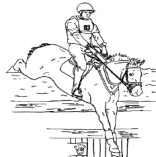
**ROLY POLY** is a pasture pet. He only does the occasional pony ride, and can live entirely off good pasture (with winter hay) and a vitamin/mineral supplement.



**JUMP FOR JOY** is in moderate work - ridden five days a week with a few shows. 70% to 80% of his diet is roughage, with two servings of grain each day.



**EASY STREET** is a beginner lesson horse in light work - mostly walk and trot. He eats a 90% roughage diet with a small amount of a ration balancer grain.



**FAST N FURIOUS** is in hard training to be an upper-level eventer. He gets a grain for performance horses and fat supplements, but 60% of his diet is still grass and hay.

# Menu Planning

Whatever your horse eats, he should have his meals written out and tracked on a **feed chart**. This is essential in a boarding barn or another situation where multiple people feed the horse. Use a dry erase board so you can make changes if necessary, and describe your feeding routine as clearly as possible. One moment of confusion can result in an equine bellyache - an expensive mistake to make!

## Information to include on a feed chart:

- 🐾 **Each horse's name** and **physical location** in the barn. You might include a **map** of your stalls and/or pastures, particularly in a large facility.
- 🐾 The **type** and **amount of hay** the horse gets. Include the **weight** of the hay, since everyone's idea of a flake can be different.
- 🐾 The **type** and **amount of grain** or concentrated food your horse gets, if he eats any at all. Include the weight - again, not all scoops are created equal.
- 🐾 The **type** and **amount of any supplements** you feed.
- 🐾 The horse's **turnout schedule**, or amount of time he spends in a paddock or pasture.



Even if you don't have your own horse, you can choose a lesson horse to practice writing out a feed chart. Ask the horse's owner or your instructor to help you find out any missing information. Be sure to write in pencil, so you can record changes to the horse's diet!

## My Horse's Feed Chart

Horse's name: \_\_\_\_\_

### AM:

Roughage: \_\_\_\_\_

Concentrates: \_\_\_\_\_

Supplements: \_\_\_\_\_

### PM:

Roughage: \_\_\_\_\_

Concentrates: \_\_\_\_\_

Supplements: \_\_\_\_\_

Salt source: \_\_\_\_\_

Turnout schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

# Taking Care of Tack

In **Red Level**, you learned the basic types of tack, or equipment used for riding and handling horses. You learned the parts of the saddle and bridle, and how to store tack correctly. Now you can practice **cleaning** and **conditioning** tack to keep it comfortable and safe for both you and your horse.

## Let's review four reasons to regularly clean 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.



**Leather tack** - including saddles, stirrup leathers, bridles, and some girths or halters - requires a **three-step care routine**. The leather must be **cleaned**, **conditioned** or oiled as needed, and then **protected** or sealed.

Metal stirrups and buckles can be polished - but never put metal polish on the mouthpiece of your horse's bit! Instead, **soak the bit in hot water** and rinse until clean. You can use a dab of toothpaste or baking soda along with an old toothbrush to help remove tough encrusted grass and saliva.

Some girths and halters are made of **synthetic materials**, such as nylon and fleece. These can be washed by hand or run through the washing machine on **gentle** cycle.

**Saddle pads** can also be machine washed and hung to dry. Check the manufactures' directions before laundering in case the materials have special requirements. **Use a very small amount of hypoallergenic detergent with your horse laundry**—any residue left over in the material may irritate your horse's skin. You can add a small amount of vinegar to the final rinse to reduce the soap residue.



## How often should tack be cleaned?



Would you want a dirty, crusty bit placed on YOUR tongue?

Ideally, **tack that is used daily should be wiped down after every ride**. You can do this by rinsing your horse's bit and running a sponge slightly dampened with saddle soap down all leather straps. Use a damp rag to remove mud from girths and protective boots, and hang your saddle pad upside down to let it dry.

Saddles, bridles and girths should be **disassembled 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!



# Completely Clean

If your leather tack is very dirty or due for a thorough cleaning, you'll want to take extra time with the first step of your process. There are a few tricks to getting leather clean, along with a few rules.

## What do I need to get my tack CLEAN?

- 🐾 Clean **rags**.
- 🐾 A pail of **clean, warm water**. If you are using a bucket, make sure it is not the same one your horse drinks out of!
- 🐾 A **mild, pH balanced leather cleaner**, if necessary.
- 🐾 A **tack sponge** for the cleaner.



**Start by taking everything apart.** Unfasten all the buckles on your bridle and set the bit aside to soak. Remove stirrup leathers from the saddle and the irons from the leathers. Pull the buckle guards off the billet straps. Set all the pieces on a newspaper or clean towel, and place your saddle on a folding saddle rack.



Can you spot the metal deposit on this rein?

**Wipe away sweat and dirt.** Dampen a rag and wring the water out *until nearly dry*. Wrap it around each piece of tack and drag it downward to lift away grime, paying particular attention to surfaces that press against the horse's skin and **stress points**, or places the leather contacts metal.

Bits, buckles and stirrup irons often leave **metal deposits** on the stress points. These appear as a shiny line of silver or black and should be gently rubbed away. Oiling over a metal deposit can create a buildup that can be almost impossible to remove and can make leather more likely to crack.

Stubborn sweat or dirt may need leather cleaner. Work the cleaner into the leather with a tack sponge until it foams, and then wipe it away with a clean damp rag. **Be meticulous** - any dirt you leave will get sealed into the leather when you apply oil or saddle soap!

**Choose your products carefully.** You should only use a mild, pH balanced cleaner on leather tack - no harsh detergents. You can use a product specifically formulated for tack, such as Leather Therapy Wash or Lexol Cleaner. In a pinch, castile soap or Murphy's Oil Soap will also do the trick.

**Note that leather cleaner is not the same thing as saddle soap.** Saddle soap is made of glycerine and creates a protective coating on the leather, which makes it appropriate for daily maintenance on leather that is already reasonably clean. Don't be misled by the term "soap" - for deep cleaning, a product clearly labeled "cleaner" is a better choice.



**Cleaning with too much water or soap can dry out and ruin the leather.**

**Clean your tack carefully if you want it to last for a lifetime!**

# soft and shiny

Leather is made of skin, which means that it needs to be cared for similarly to your own skin. Repeated exposure to sun, sweat and/or rain strips the leather of its natural oils, making it dry and stiff and more likely to crack. You can prevent this by **conditioning** and **protecting** your tack.

## What do I need to get my tack **SOFT** and **POLISHED**?



- 🐾 Two **tack sponges**.
- 🐾 **Leather conditioner** or **oil**, such as olive, mink or neatstfoot oil.
- 🐾 **Glycerine saddle soap**.
- 🐾 A clean **rag** to wipe away excess oil or soap.

**Apply conditioner to freshly cleaned leather.** The leather will absorb the oil more easily if it is still slightly damp and/or warm. Apply the oil to the underside, or rough side of the leather. Try to **stay clear of stitching**, which may rot if saturated with oil. Wipe away any oil that doesn't soak in with a rag.

If the leather is new or stiff, massage the oil in with your hands and roll the leather back and forth to help soften it. **Avoid suede knee rolls** and the seat of your saddle, unless you want to sit in a pool of oil!



Don't oil the stitching on your stirrup leathers!

## Does tack always need to be conditioned?

In general, you should only oil leather that is dry or stiff. Plan on conditioning your tack if it has been exposed to rain or harsh elements, if you have used a leather cleaner, or it has been a while since its last deep cleaning. **Too much oiling can weaken the leather.**



**Finally, apply glycerine saddle soap to seal and polish the leather.** You can use a **bar glycerine** with a dampened sponge, or a **one-step product** containing glycerine such as Leather New.

Work the soap into the leather using a circular motion, until the leather starts to take on a dull shine and you can leave a fingerprint on the surface. This seals the pores of the leather and protects it from the horse's sweat.

## My saddle soap says it cleans, conditions *and* polishes. Do I have to do all this work?

**One-step products**, such as Leather New, Horseman's One-Step, and Fiebing's Saddle Soap, are great for **daily cleaning**. They lift away small amounts of dirt and sweat, soften the leather, and coat it with a protective finish.

However, they aren't the best choice for extremely dirty tack, or tack that needs deep conditioning. The glycerine can seal in a buildup of grime and make it difficult for the leather to absorb oil. **If you are thoroughly cleaning your tack, save this product for the final polish.**





# Assembling a saddle

Once everything is clean, it's time to put your tack back together. Assembling a saddle and bridle can be one of the trickiest skills to learn at this Level - it will take **practice** and **patience**.

**Can you name all the parts of the saddle and bridle?**

**If not, review these terms in the Red HorseSense study guide before continuing!**

The **saddle** is much easier to put back together than the bridle - but it does require an **attention to detail**.

## Stirrup leathers and irons



To put the stirrups back on the saddle, run the leather **first through the stirrup iron**, then **up and under the stirrup bar** before buckling.

Some stirrup leathers, particularly new leathers, stretch from frequent mounting on the left side. You should compare the length of your leathers before putting them on the saddle, and put the longer leather on the right side, so they will stretch evenly.

## Safety stirrups



**Fillis stirrup irons** may be hung on either side, but **peacock stirrups** (safety stirrups with a breakaway rubber band) must be threaded onto the leather so that **the rubber band hangs at the front of the saddle**, as shown.

Otherwise, the rubber band will lie on the inside of the rider's foot, and the stirrups will not release correctly if the rider falls.

## Buckle guards



The buckle guards protect the underside of the flap from getting scratched by the buckles of the girth. They also make the saddle more comfortable under your leg.

Some buckle guards have one slot for the billet straps, some have two. Either way, make sure that when you thread the billet straps through, **the buckle guard ends up covering the billets where the girth will buckle**.

**Remember that thorough tack cleaning should also include a safety inspection.**

**Check every piece of tack carefully for signs of cracking, loose stitching, or powdery dry rot. If you see any of these, do *not* continue using that piece of tack - find a replacement!**

**Riding with weakened or damaged tack can cause a serious accident.**

# Assembling a Bridle

If you think your freshly-cleaned bridle looks like a confusing jumble of straps, don't worry - you are not alone. Learning to assemble a bridle correctly requires a lot of practice, but it is important to master, both for your horse's comfort and your own safety.



**1. Thread the browband onto the crownpiece.** To make sure the **throatlatch** ends up in the right place, hold the crownpiece up so that the long throatlatch strap hangs on the **right** side of an imaginary horse head. (Or your own head!) Slide the browband over the two **short** straps, over the flat crownpiece, and down to the top of the throatlatch. Now drop the two short straps through the **other** end of the browband.



**2. Fasten both cheekpieces.** These buckle onto the **top** two straps hanging from the crownpiece, below the browband. (Remember that the thinner bottom strap is for fastening the throatlatch!)

**Look for a crease in the leather** to indicate which hole each buckle was in previously. This is important because the cheekpieces control where the bit rests in the horse's mouth, and the bit **must** fit the horse correctly for the bridle to be comfortable.



**3. Add the noseband, if your horse uses one.** The noseband should have one long strap extending from one side, and a short strap with a buckle on the other. **Run the long strap through the loop of the browband and under the crownpiece.** Start on the **right** side, next to the long throatlatch strap, and finish by pulling down through the **left** loop of the browband. Buckle these two pieces together. **Make sure the noseband attaches to itself** - not to the throatlatch!



**4. Now it's time for the bit.** Hold up the bit to **determine which direction the mouthpiece curves**; the bit should wrap over the horse's tongue, instead of digging into it. Ask an experienced horseperson to help you find the curve if you are not sure.

Once you have the bit positioned correctly, **wrap the end of the cheekpieces around the rings of the bit.** If your bridle has **studs**, fasten the cheekpieces with the studs to the **inside**, so they are not visible when the bridle is on the horse. If the bridle has **buckles**, fasten the cheekpiece with the buckles to the **outside**. Make sure your cheekpieces don't get twisted in the process—a very common mistake.



**5. If your horse wears a full-cheek snaffle, don't forget the bit loops, or keepers.** Slide one end of the keeper over the top bar of the bit's cheek. If your cheekpieces fasten with studs, run the cheekpiece around the bit ring, through the keeper, and then fasten the stud. Cheekpieces with buckles should have the bit keeper slid on **before** wrapping around the bit ring, so the keeper always lies to the inside, as shown.



**6. Finally, buckle on the reins below** the cheekpieces. Stud fasteners should face the **inside**, buckles to the **outside**. Stretch out each rein to remove twists and buckle the two pieces together. **Hold your bridle up and check every strap** before putting it away!

# Test Yourself

In order to earn a **Yellow 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. How tall must a horse be to be considered a horse instead of a pony?
2. Name ten different breeds.
3. What is a gaited horse? A draft horse?
4. Your horse appears white, but has dark skin. What color is he actually?
5. What is the difference between a pinto and a Paint?
6. What is the difference between a sock and a stocking?
7. Name four face markings.
8. What is the difference between a stable blanket and a turnout rug?
9. When you are putting on a blanket, should you fasten the chest straps or the surcingles first?
10. When you are removing a blanket, which straps should you unbuckle first?
11. What should you do with the blanket straps that go around the horse's hind legs?
12. How can you tell which splint boot goes on the right leg and on the left?
13. Name two reasons why a horse might wear bell boots.
14. What critical areas of the horse's leg must be covered by shipping boots?
15. How can you tell if a horse has cooled down after a workout?
16. Why shouldn't you feed your horse one big meal a day?
17. Should a horse's diet contain more roughage or more concentrates?
18. Is hay a concentrate or a roughage? What about oats? Pellets? Beet pulp?
19. What is the horse's normal temperature?
20. Where would you find a horse's pulse? How many times should his heart beat in a minute?
21. Why should you take a horse's respiration before taking his temperature?
22. Your horse has a scrape on his shoulder. Do you need to call a vet?
23. Your horse has a laceration on his hock joint. Do you need to call a vet?
24. Your horse comes in from the field and his leg is bleeding. What do you do first?
25. How can jogging a horse in hand help you to notice if he is lame?
26. Name six signs of a horse experiencing colic pain.
27. What metal piece of tack should never be polished?
28. When cleaning tack, should you use conditioner or glycerin saddle soap first?
29. What happens if you apply oil to dirty tack?
30. When reassembling a bridle, should you attach the browband or the cheekpieces first?

# For Further Study

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

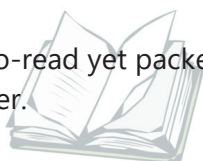


Download the **full HorseSense curriculum** and get updates on **online courses**:

<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.



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.

Sly, Debbie, 2018. **The Complete Book of Horses - revised ed.** Photographic guide includes information on horse breeds, colors and markings, horse care practices, and saddlery.



**We have a playlist of recommended videos** for Yellow HorseSense saved on the official **HorseSense YouTube channel** - with a library of Learning Levels videos coming soon! Search for "HorseSense Learning Levels" and go to the Playlist tab.



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