



# HorseSense Learning Levels



## HORSEMANSHIP LESSON PLANS

GREEN LEVEL

SET #2: Smooth and Secure

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<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com>

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

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# LESSON # 1 1

## HorseSense Learning Levels

### SEAT BUILDING

GREEN LEVEL

## FITNESS FIRST

**OBJECTIVE:** *Students will gain an appreciation for the physical fitness horseback riding requires, assessing their own strength, stamina and flexibility.*



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 4 CONES

☐ STOPWATCH OR TIMER

### PREP

Ensure that rail of arena is clear and free from obstacles such as jumps or barrels. Set a cone at the end of each long side to mark no-stirrup zones.

### INTRO

“Even if you have no plans to compete, it’s a good idea to practice thinking of yourself as an **equine athlete**. Getting fit can make riding safer, accelerate your progress, *and* make your horse more comfortable - win, win, win!”

5  
MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Discuss:** The conditioning and cross-training requirements of other sports.

5  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Horseback riders need a balanced exercise program that develops flexibility as well as stamina and strength. **ASK: How could you improve these qualities off the horse? Is there an activity you already enjoy that could help your riding fitness?**

 **Review:** Warm-up exercises for the rider at the walk, to include poll touches, croup touches and toe touches with and without stirrups as well as gentle hip openers. **ASK: What exercise do you find the most difficult? Why?**

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Move up to posting trot and trot several laps in each direction. Once smooth, comfortable working trot is established, ask students to trot down each long side and **drop stirrups** at the first cone, retrieving them just before the second cone.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** After a brief rest, send students back to rail in single file line and begin trot in two-point position. Instruct students to remain in two-point trot, following the leader, until you call them to the center or they feel too fatigued to continue, whichever happens first. **Use a stopwatch to record the time** each student is able to spend in two-point.

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Wobbly legs are not safe legs. Students should stop as soon as they feel discomfort or lose ability to hold position - even if they see other students continuing!

 **PRACTICE:** After a brief rest and stretch at the halt, ask students to cross stirrups and assign a new leader. **Repeat the timed assessment at the trot without stirrups**, allowing students to alternate between posting and sitting trot as they wish.

10  
MIN

### REVIEW

- ? Do you find it easier to ride posting or sitting trot without stirrups? What muscles do you feel working in each seat? What about in two-point position?
- ? What could you practice at home for just five minutes a day to improve your riding?

10  
MIN

# LESSON # 1 1

## HorseSense Learning Levels

### FITNESS FIRST

#### GREEN LEVEL

### PREREQUISITES

Teaching students to think of themselves as athletes is a big part of keeping them safe - and no better time than **Green Level**, as they move on to higher-risk skills such as cantering and jumping. Starting the process with no-pressure assessments helps students to set goals and measure progress - but **they'll need solid Yellow Level skills to attempt this lesson.**

In particular, make sure students have already spent plenty of time practicing:

- 🐾 **Dropping and retrieving stirrups** at the walk.
- 🐾 **Trotting without stirrups along the rail**, in both sitting and posting trot. They should be able to complete a full lap in each seat with ease.
- 🐾 **Riding without stirrups and reins** on the longe line. If you are not confident in their ability to balance without use of their hands, they don't need to be trotting for long periods of time on their own!
- 🐾 Reasonably **prompt transitions** between the trot and the canter.
- 🐾 **Confident, independent steering** with clear intention. The ability to rate the horse's speed is a plus, since no-stirrup falls often occur when the horse trots faster than the student can ride. See **Lesson #1 Tortoise and Hare.**



### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

If this lesson looks heavy on the discussion and light on action, that's by design. **Fitness assessments only work when the rider is fresh**, and if you want your students to stay motivated to practice the hard stuff, best not to send them home in a state of complete exhaustion!



Instead, use the extra-long warm-up and cool down period to get students thinking and talking about the process of becoming an athlete. We really want them to understand the importance of physical fitness, for both their own safety and the horse's comfort. Talk about **diet, hydration** and **your own healthy habits** (hopefully you have some!). **Demonstrate off-the-horse exercises** that students can do at home, and allow them to practice after dismounting.

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 You need dependable equine partners to help nudge students out of their comfort zone. **Horses that get quick, strong or tense when ridden without stirrups are not an appropriate choice for this lesson.** If you have no choice but to work with this kind of horse, you may need to omit the stirrup scoop at the trot, or add a transition to walk after dropping stirrups to establish control. Include frequent transitions in all no-stirrup work and prioritize a slow, steady sitting trot.
- 🐾 As always, **two-point and no-stirrup work is only beneficial when ridden correctly.** Keep a sharp eye for signs of fatigue, such as a slipping leg, pinching knee or rounded back. Stop students before they are too tired to ride effectively! Emphasize that however long they last - even if it's only thirty seconds - is the perfect amount of time. **The goal is to see how fit they are right now**, and to create an individual plan for improvement.

# LESSON # 1 2

## SEAT BUILDING

GREEN LEVEL

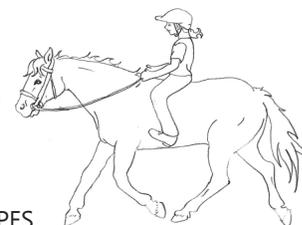
### BAREBACK FUN

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to improve confidence and balance by riding without a saddle at the walk and trot.

#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

POLES AND CONES TO CREATE OBSTACLE COURSE

STOPWATCH OR TIMER  
 OPTIONAL NECK STRAPS/ROPES



#### PREP

Set poles and/or cones to create a simple obstacle course (see next page for suggestions). Ensure that rail of arena is clear.

#### INTRO

After helping students mount (offer a leg up if necessary!), position the group around you at the halt. Discuss reasons for learning to ride bareback, including improved balance and connection with the horse. **ASK: What can you feel without a saddle?**

5  
MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Balance exercises at the *halt*, including poll touches, croup touches and toe touches. Allow students to experiment with two-point position and safety seat. Finish by practicing a **teeter-totter**, rocking back and forth and side to side to find a centered seat.

5  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Successful **bareback riding relies on balance and a secure seat, not on grip**. Students should allow lower leg to hang relaxed, and should be able to lift toes higher than heels when prompted. Make sure they are sitting back on their seat bones - perching is a common problem, especially if students are nervous!

 **Review:** Emergency dismount at a halt and walk, on near and off side. Explain that students are allowed to bail if they find themselves slipping off to one side.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Riding at walk along rail, with **transitions** between halt and walk. Once students are secure and confident in their balance and ability to steer, start adding in simple changes of direction, circles, and poles at the walk.

10  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Techniques for riding the trot bareback.

 **PRACTICE:** Line students up along rail at A or C. Allow each student **two trots**, trotting the long sides of the arena and walking the short sides, on the leadline if necessary. Finish the second by turning in and performing an emergency dismount at the trot.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Walk students single file through **obstacle course**, demonstrating each obstacle on foot. Return to A and send students through course one at a time, allowing them to negotiate obstacles at the gait of their choice. **Timed event** optional.

15  
MIN

#### REVIEW

? Riding bareback is a truth test for our balance! Did you feel your body wanting to slip to the left or the right? Tip forward? How could practicing bareback help you in the saddle?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #12

## HorseSense Learning Levels

### BAREBACK FUN

#### GREEN LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

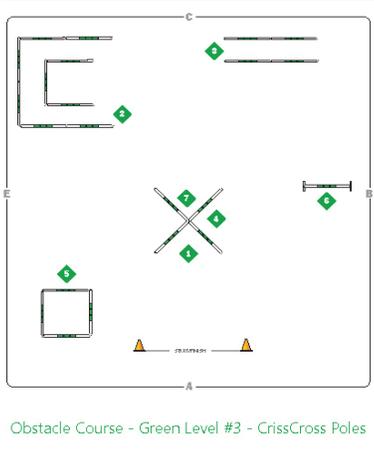
- 🐾 If your students are new to bareback riding, they will undoubtedly enjoy a round of the classic game **Ride a Buck**. Real dollar bills make for the most exciting game - winner takes all! - but if you're short on cash, you can use Monopoly money or folded bandanas with the same effect.
- 🐾 **Swap horses** once or twice during the lesson, allowing students to ride the course on each horse. This can be a particularly useful exercise with a large group of mixed ability that you'd prefer to keep at the walk.
- 🐾 **Teach students to give each other a leg up** - a useful skill that helps you out as well! Use this ability to play mount and dismount games such as the **Rescue Race** (see **Red Lesson #5 Mounts & Dismounts**).
- 🐾 If you have enough ponies to go around, **invite a local vaulter or mounted games player to teach your students how perform a standing or running vault**. This is usually much easier to learn without a saddle and once mastered, allows students to mount without a saddle even if there is no assistant or mounting block nearby.



### EXTRA EQUIPMENT

At HorseSense, we are all for **bareback pads** - anything that makes bony old pony withers more comfortable! If you use them, however, make sure you check girths attentively to prevent slips. Avoid pads with stirrups or excessively large loops that cause the rider to pull the pad off center.

**A carefully-fitted neck strap or neck rope** can protect your horse's mouth and help students transition to riding off the longe line at the trot. Keep in mind that traditional stirrup leather neck straps must be set quite long to allow a rider to hold the strap and maintain a centered position - and since there is nothing to attach the strap to, there is a real danger of loose leathers sliding down the horse's neck. **We prefer to use these only with students on the leadline** so that Ground Buddies can reposition or remove straps as needed.



Need obstacle inspiration? We like using **Green Obstacle Course #3 CrissCross Poles** for this lesson:  
<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource-center/about-patterns-and-maps/>

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Even if your students have previous experience riding bareback, take your time** with the initial warm-up exercises. Advanced riders can also benefit from a little focused attention on their position and balance.
- 🐾 **Eventually, Green Level students should be able to trot independently without a saddle**, with a balanced seat allowing them to safely use the reins. It may take several bareback rides to get there, though. **Don't rush the process** - better to walk and build confidence than trot and spoil it, especially on a quick or bouncy horse!

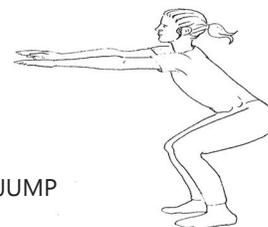
# LESSON # 13

## JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

### TWO POINT TUNE-UP

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to improve balance and stability by riding a series of exercises in two-point position.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- 2 GROUND POLES, SECURED TO PREVENT ROLLING
- 4 BENDING POLES, CONES OR JUMP STANDARDS
- 2 CONES

#### PREP

Set bending poles 20' to 30' apart along one long side of the arena. Place two cones to mark a no-stirrups zone on the opposite long side. Set ground poles approximately 12' apart on centerline.

#### INTRO

"Who enjoyed riding bareback? Riding without a saddle is great for your seat, but it's also important to be able to ride well *off* of our horse's back." **ASK: How do you think two-point helps the horse? Why does your position need to be excellent to gallop or jump?"** 5 MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

**Review:** Riding in two-point along the rail at a walk, adjusting position as needed. When all riders are secure, practice **transitions between two-point and stirrup stand** (aka "air posting") without sitting down in the saddle. 5 MIN

**PRACTICE:** Transitions between walk and halt while maintaining two-point position. 10 MIN

**Emphasize:** Reins should be short enough that students can resist with the hand if necessary - but they should initially ask for the transition by opening hips slightly, resisting with shoulder and seat and sinking into heels.

**Review:** Changing seats at the trot (see **Yellow Lesson #3 Changing Seats**). Stick with transitions between posting trot and two-point trot until horses' backs are sufficiently warmed up for sitting trot. In sitting trot, **drop and pick up stirrups** at least once. 10 MIN

**PRACTICE:** Transitions between walk and trot while maintaining two-point position. 10 MIN

**Discuss:** Common faults in two-point and how they affect jumping. (Allow students to take feet out of stirrups and stretch during discussion!) Practice airplane arms and the Bubble Test (see next page) in two-point at the halt. 5 MIN

**PRACTICE:** One at a time, send students through **course: 1)** trot over ground poles, **2)** weave through bending poles, **3)** halt next to each cone, and **4)** return over ground poles with reins in one hand. Posting is allowed between obstacles but each task must be completed in two-point position. 10 MIN

#### REVIEW

- ? Where should your hands be placed in two-point? What do you feel when they move? 5 MIN
- ? If your horse completely vanished during two-point practice, would you land on your feet? 5 MIN

# LESSON #13

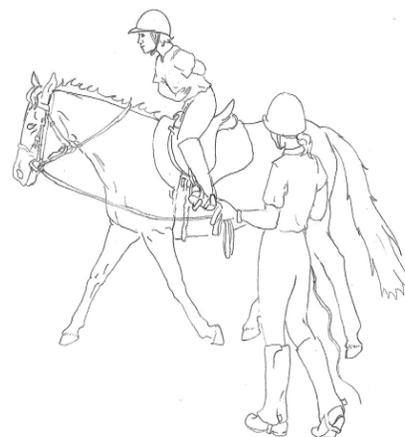
## TWO-POINT TUNE-UP

### LEVEL UP

This lesson can be customized to suit individual ability level in a number of ways. For starters, **use the timed two-point test** from **#11 Fitness First** as a gauge for how much time your students can comfortably spend in the position - and be careful not to push them over in any of the exercises!

Students who are experienced and comfortable, however, may appreciate a **little more challenge**. A few possibilities:

- 🐾 **Add the canter** into your warm-up exercises. Place a **single canter pole in place of the two trot poles** on the centerline, or ask students to **canter from Cone A to Cone B**, performing transitions in a galloping position.
- 🐾 **Get off the rail** while practicing transitions and the Changing Seats exercise, sending students through changes of direction and ring figures such as large serpentines in two-point position.
- 🐾 **Replace the ground poles with a baby crossrail**, setting cups on the first hole so the center of the crossrail stands approximately 6" high.



*You can teach the first part of the lesson on the longe line, allowing students to practice balance exercises and transitions without the responsibility of steering.  
Recommended for private students.*



*Once mastered at the halt, the Bubble Test can be practiced at all three gaits.*

### IT'S ALL ABOUT THAT BASE

**Just like riding without stirrups, time spent practicing two-point position should emphasize quality over quantity.** The goal is to help student develop a strong, secure base of support that will eventually allow them to jump and gallop safely. This means the position must be correct - it is easier to build good muscle memory from the beginning than to retrain bad habits!

We find that at this Level, the most common problems with two-point position stem from a rounded back or shoulders, braced knee or ankle, or a pinching knee. Knee pinching is particularly tricky because it can make the student feel secure, even though those knees will betray them at the first step of trouble.

We counteract this by teaching the **Bubble Test**, in which students create an "air bubble" under each knee and can slide a flat hand between their knee and the saddle. To do this, they need a relaxed ankle, sinking heels and even contact with the calf.

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Remain mindful of each student's fitness level, and keep a close watch for signs of fatigue.** Allow students to remove feet from stirrups during every walk break to relax and stretch calf muscles and Achilles tendons. Exercises can be modified with no shame to accommodate a less-fit member of the class.
- 🐾 **Recommend off-horse exercises** as homework for students who quickly fatigue or struggle to maintain a correct position. Squats and wall sits are good for building strength, while correctly-practiced forward folds can help students learn to bend at the hips.

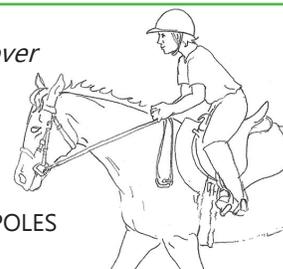
# LESSON # 14

## JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

### TROT POLES REVISITED

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to put their newly improved two-point position into practice over a grid of trot poles, developing an awareness of balance on approach and departure.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- 4 GROUND POLES OR CAVALETTI
- 6 CONES
- 2 JUMP STANDARDS, CUPS AND POLES TO BUILD "BABY CROSSRAIL"

#### PREP

Set ground poles to form trot pole grid on centerline, with pairs of cones marking approach and departure between grid and A/C. Place remaining two cones at each end of long side near K and H. On opposite long side by B, build a baby crossrail approximately 6" high.

#### INTRO

As riders warm up at the walk, discuss the skills required to jump, including a secure two-point position, rhythmic working gait, and a straight and balanced approach. **ASK: What happens if you ride into a trot pole grid too slow or fast? If you cut the corner? If you look down?**

5  
MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Changing seats at the walk and trot. At the trot, draw attention to posting diagonal immediately upon resuming rising trot. **ASK: What happens to your posting diagonal when you get into two-point position?**

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Ask students to get into **two-point position at the walk** and ride **1) down centerline and over poles, 2) track left and halt next to each cone, 3) down centerline and over poles a second time, and 4) track right and step over baby crossrail**, returning to full seat when course is complete. **ASK: Which is your outside hand when you turn toward the cones? Which is the outside when you turn toward the jump?**

10  
MIN

 **Review:** Riding over pole grid several times in trot, with attention to smooth approach and departure through cones, steady rhythm, and balanced two-point position. Students should alternate between left and right departures, returning to the rail. On the last round, students may place reins in one hand and hold the other arm outstretched.

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MIN

 **Discuss:** Importance of posting diagonals to a balanced turn. **ASK: Where do you think is the best place to check your diagonal after the trot pole grid?**

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Resume trotting over pole grid with left and right departures, but this time, students must check posting diagonal and change if necessary before reaching H or M. **Each turn ridden on the correct diagonal earns one point.** Three points allows the student to track left on their next turn and canter from cone to cone. Five points allows the student to track right on the next turn and jump the baby crossrail.

15  
MIN

#### REVIEW

- ? How did your two-point position feel over the poles today?
- ? Do you find that you rise on one diagonal more often than the other?

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MIN

# LESSON #14

## TROT POLES REVISITED

### VARIATIONS

- 🐾 **Keep a running total of points and allow students to cash them in for a prize** at the end of the lesson. The number of points required should depend partially on the skill level of your students but mostly on the size of the group - a larger class will require staggered starts through the poles, reducing the number of possible rounds.
- 🐾 **Practice the Choosing Sides exercise** (see [Lesson #9 Choosing Sides](#)), letting the posting diagonal determine whether the rider turns toward the canter cones or the crossrail.
- 🐾 Students who aren't quite ready to canter or "jump" the crossrail can instead **ride a simple mounted games task on each side of the arena**, such as weaving through poles or moving a flag from one cone to another.
- 🐾 **Alternatively, you can give each side of the arena a distinct identity**, such as the Blue Road and the Yellow Road. Pair your colors with stripes of matching duct tape on the horse's shoulders to help students notice and identify posting diagonals. Award a point each time the student correctly identifies which road they should follow, and award a matching color-themed prize based on the road their horse followed most frequently.

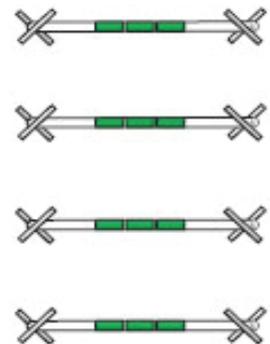


We have taught this lesson to young children using animal print duct tape and stuffed animals placed on either side of the arena. If they post with the zebra-striped shoulder, they turn left and went "on a safari." If they rise with the leopard-spotted shoulder, it's time to go weave through the jungle!

### DETERMINING DISTANCE

If you are teaching a large group of students, you may need to tweak your **trot pole distances** carefully to make the grid work for all of your horses and ponies. In general, slightly-short distances are better for beginner riders and push-ride horses. We recommend **4'** as a comfortable starting point for most large ponies and small horses. Roll the poles in an additional time for ponies, and move them out 3" to 6" for larger horses.

No matter what distance you choose, **make sure that lightweight round poles are secured** with cones, blocks or jump standard feet so they cannot roll!



### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Correct stirrup length is essential** when working in two-point position, especially over poles. Stirrups should be set with the bottom of the iron touching the top of the ankle bone, or a hole higher than the student usually rides on the flat. Remember that short stirrups provide more security and ask for a higher degree of fitness - better to err on the side of short over poles, but allow frequent rest breaks as needed.
- 🐾 **Lesson horses must be able to trot quietly through grids of poles**, without jumping or breaking to canter. If you are teaching a group of untested horses and find you have a Love to Leap horse in the mix, modify the exercise as needed to help horse and rider succeed - even if it means the student rides the majority of the lesson in the walk.

# LESSON # 15

## JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

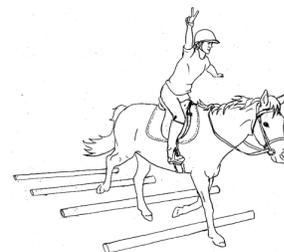
### MULTITASKING TROT POLES

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to demonstrate stability in two-point position by performing balancing exercises over trot poles with one or both arms outstretched.

#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

▣ 4 GROUND POLES OR CAVALETTI

▣ 4 CONES



#### PREP

Set ground poles to form trot pole grid on centerline, with pairs of cones marking approach and departure. Secure poles with cones, jump standards or blocks to prevent rolling.

#### INTRO

"How does your horse's gait change when he trots over a grid of poles? Why do you think this is a good conditioning exercise for the horse? How can it help improve **your** strength and balance?"

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#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Two-point position at the walk and trot, along rail and through changes of direction. Include "air posting" and the Bubble Test. (See **Lesson #13 Two-Point Tuneup**.)

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 **Review:** Transitions between walk, trot and halt while maintaining two-point position.  
**ASK: How do your springs - ankles, knees and hips - help you remain balanced as the horse changes gait?**

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 **Review:** Trotting down centerline and over grid of trot poles, tracking left and checking posting diagonal. Repeat and track right.

5  
MIN

 **Discuss:** A good jumping position, like a full seat, should allow the hands to be independent from the rider's balance.

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** At the halt, ask riders to demonstrate two-point position with one arm outstretched, then both arms. Practice exercises such as **bird wings** and **traffic stop** to test stability of position.

 **PRACTICE:** Knot reins for safety and ask students to trot over grid with reins in one hand the other arm outstretched. **Explain that this is Round #1**, and they must ride over the poles **smoothly** to advance to the next round, repeating rounds as necessary. **Each round contains an additional balance challenge** (see next page, or invent your own).

25  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Not all trots are created equal, and students in a group may advance through rounds at a different pace. There is no shame in not advancing through all five rounds - it simply points out a need for extra practice!

#### REVIEW

? Which round did you find the most challenging? Why?

? Do you fall forward or backward when you lose your position? Why do you think this is?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #15

## HorseSense Learning Levels

### MULTITASKING TROT POLES

GREEN LEVEL

#### FUN AND GAMES

-  **Award a prize** for students who successfully ride through all 5 rounds. This is most appropriate for private students or groups of evenly-matched ability, where everyone has the ability to complete each challenge.
-  Advanced students with a secure jumping position can **ride through the trot pole grid to music, recreating popular dance moves in the final round**. Make sure that all horses are tolerant of upper body movement. If the whole group performs the same movement, allow time for a tutorial and/or practice at the halt first! 
-  **Try out the Toilet Paper Challenge**, stacking two or more rolls for students to carry carefully through the grid. Take pictures your students can share as proof of accomplishment - yes, there is a hashtag for this game! Alternatively, ask riders to carry **cups of water** or **plastic eggs in spoons** (add a small amount of sand to lightweight eggs, especially on a windy day).
-  Students with a strong two-point position and experience riding the canter may enjoy **the ultimate prize: a bonus round featuring a REAL crossrail** after the final trot pole.

#### LEVEL UP

Five possible rounds for your trot pole progression:

- Round #1:** Trot over poles in two point position.
- Round #2:** Trot over poles with one arm outstretched in an airplane wing.
- Round #3:** Trot over poles with the other arm behind back.
- Round #4:** Trot over poles with both arms outstretched.
- Round #5:** Riders choose their own move.  
(Bird wings, peace signs, ballet arms - what will their two-point support?)



#### FINAL NOTES

-  **Keep a close eye on reins whenever students are performing no-hand work.** Knotting the reins just below the buckle will usually help dropped reins settle safely in front of the withers, but you may need to make adjustments for extra-long reins or horses that take the opportunity to stretch long and low.
-  **If you are teaching a group lesson with a mix of stride lengths, be ready to tweak trot pole distances between each ride**, or build horse and pony grids side by side. We find 4' to be a comfortable distance that works with the majority of our school horses, but customize as you need to - incorrectly set distances create an unfair additional challenge to the balance exercises.
-  **As in the previous lesson, your equine partners need to be able to maintain a relaxed rhythm over the trot poles.** Modify rounds for any horse and rider combination having a difficult time with the grid. You might allow the rider to complete the exercise in the walk, or practice over a single pole set off to the side.

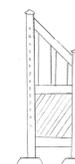
# LESSON # 16

## JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

### INVISIBLE COURSE THREE WAYS

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to review coursework technique through a course of invisible jumps, eventually riding the whole course on the correct diagonal.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 5-7 PAIRS OF JUMP STANDARDS

☐ OPTIONAL CONES TO MARK START/FINISH

#### PREP

Set simple course of outside and diagonal lines, leaving 6' to 10' between jump standards. Remove and store all jump cups.

#### INTRO

"When you ride around a course, how many strides does the horse spend actually stepping over poles? How many strides do you think he takes on the rest of the course? When your poles turn into jumps, how well you ride these in-between strides will determine your success!"

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MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Riding a smooth track around a course, including opening and closing circles and a straight approach and departure. Students should walk course in its entirety twice, once with and once without stirrups.

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Students should use whole arena, returning to the rail to ride wide, sweeping turns between fences. This will help them later at the trot!

 **Review:** Changing Seats on the rail, switching between two-point position and posting trot. Remind students that **two-point can "reset" their posting diagonal**, and challenge them to identify their diagonal within the first three strides of rising trot.

5  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Review course track, asking students to talk you through the course. Count left and right turns, including opening and closing circles, and identify where posting diagonal must be changed.

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, send students out to ride through course from beginning to end, maintaining rising trot and changing posting diagonal as needed. **ASK: Were all your diagonals correct? How can this detail improve your horse's jumping ability?**

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Cross irons and ride through invisible course a second time **without stirrups**. Students who are not fit enough to maintain posting trot may sit through all turns and post through lines only.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Take stirrups back for third and final course. Students should ride in **two-point** for a few strides as they "jump," checking diagonal before posting through turns.

10  
MIN

#### REVIEW

- ? Any place on course you found it particularly tricky to identify your diagonal?
- ? Do you think you need to check diagonal between two fences in a line? Why or why not?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #16

## INVISIBLE COURSE THREE WAYS

GREEN LEVEL

### LEFT, RIGHT, OTHER LEFT

Keeping track of posting diagonal while on course can be tricky - so don't be alarmed if students who are normally consistent with their diagonals struggle with this exercise at first.

#### A few tips for helping the diagonal challenged:

-  **Find each side.** Most jump courses change direction multiple times, which means the "leg by the wall" changes along with it. As students trot through the course the first time, ask them to **call out "Now" or "Switch" every time their outside shoulder changes side.** You can also ask them to **raise the outside hand for a few strides when prompted.**
-  **Use visual aids.** Duct tape stripes on the horse's shoulder are helpful as you can ask, "Should you ride on red or blue for this turn?" If you are teaching a group lesson, use different colored boots or bandages to mark each horse's legs so that riders awaiting their turn can clearly see the diagonal pairs. Ask the group to keep their own count of how many turns the rider on course rides on the correct diagonal.
-  **Practice with landmarks.** Set cones on the landing side of individual fences and lines, clearly marking the spot where students should check their diagonal. If you want to get fancy, use two different color cones and match with duct tape on the horse's shoulders.
-  **Start small.** Practice identifying posting diagonal after a single outside fence or line, or review Lesson #9 Choosing Sides. Verbally prompt students to change or check diagonal during the first round and/or whenever you sense a reminder is needed.



**Green Level students are still learning to do a lot of multitasking at the trot.**

**It's okay if this particular skill takes a while to master - the next few lessons will provide additional practice!**

### FUN AND GAMES



-  **Award a prize** to students who successfully identify posting diagonals in the final round.
-  **Challenge students to a Ribbon Course**, a variation on the classic rope race requiring students to negotiate the invisible course in pairs while holding each end of a breakable party streamer, 3' to 6' in length. This game can be used as a fun warm-up or cool-down exercise at the walk, and really tests students on their approaches, departures, and wide turns. As always when performing work in pairs, make sure to match equine personalities carefully!

### FINAL NOTE

-  **Emphasize that practicing posting diagonals on course is preparation for cantering over fences.** Sure, it's probably going to work out fine if you trot into a pole on the wrong diagonal. But cantering through turns on the wrong lead can cause a run-out or knockdown - and everything happens faster at the canter, which means students must develop excellent awareness and the ability to take quick action.

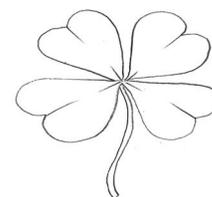
# LESSON # 17

## FLATWORK SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

### FUNKY FOUR LEAF CLOVER

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to further practice identifying posting diagonal after a jump by riding a polework pattern alternating between left and right turns.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 4 GROUND POLES

☐ 4 BARRELS OR CONES

#### PREP

Place ground poles in center of arena to form a cross, with poles pointing toward A, C, B and E. Set barrels in corners of arena, leaving generous space for students to ride behind.

#### INTRO

"Smooth turns and smooth jumps aren't just a lucky accident. They require planning, preparation, and most importantly, communication. Your horse doesn't know how to make a four-leaf clover - so how can you help him understand where to go after each pole?"

5  
MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Aids for turning and straightening at the walk while leading students through **Funky Four Leaf Clover** pattern (see next page). **ASK: Which is your inside leg as you ride this around this barrel? Which is your outside rein as you ride around this one?**

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Have students walk through pattern a second time, this time without stirrups. If time allows, ride a third and final course at the walk in two-point position.

5  
MIN

 **Review:** Transitions between walk and trot on the rail, practicing quick identification and/or change of posting diagonal. Incorporate changes of direction across a single pole, posting over pole initially, then riding pole in two-point position.

10  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Verbally review Funky Four Leaf Clover pattern and identify left and right turns. **ASK: Which shoulder should you rise with on the first barrel? Second, third, fourth?**

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, ask students to ride through pattern at the trot, posting over each pole and changing diagonal as necessary on the departure. **Award one point** for each turn ridden on the correct diagonal.

 **PRACTICE:** Repeat course at trot, but this time students must ride over pole in two-point position, quickly checking and/or changing diagonal on departure before turning around the next barrel. Award points for correct turns and combine with previous round. If time allows, students may trot a third and final course with a new order of barrels and poles.

15  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Decisions about posting diagonals must be made before turning around each barrel, to allow students to approach each pole with eyes up!

10  
MIN

#### REVIEW

- ? Do you find you rise more often on one diagonal than the other? Why do you think this is?
- ? What other patterns could you make with this pole and barrel setup?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #17

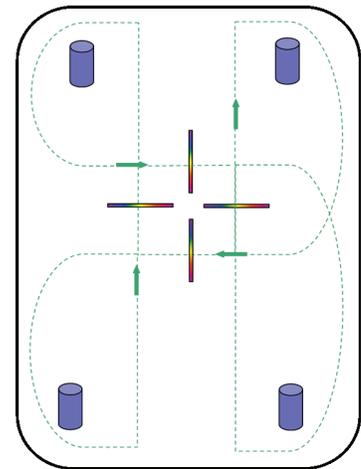
## FOUR LEAF CLOVER

GREEN LEVEL

### LEVEL UP

We love this classic polework setup for its simplicity and its versatility - there are dozens of possible variations! Set your poles and barrels at the beginning of the week and use them to challenge and entertain students of all levels. A few suggestions:

-  **Ride the clover entirely on the left rein**, reminding students to always approach the pole on the left side of the cross. Change rein on the final departure and repeat on the right rein.
-  **Ride the clover at the canter** - a difficult feat once you start adding in changes of direction. **Orange Level** students can practice quickly identifying canter leads on landing, while **Teal Level** students can use the poles to work toward a clean flying change.
-  **Walk a full circle over all four poles.** This can be used as a finale to the original clover or as a means of changing direction. Advanced students can learn to appreciate their outside rein and leg by trying this trick at the trot.
-  **Add a full circle** around each barrel, or ride **transitions between each pole.**
-  **Turn the poles into jumps.** Practice jumper-style **rollbacks** by turning inside as well as inside the barrels.
-  **Ask students to create their own pattern** using the poles, barrels, and gaits or transitions of their choice.



*This "funky clover" mixing left and right turns is just one of many ways to ride the pattern.*



**Make the most of your clover theme by teaching this lesson close to Saint Patrick's Day.** You can find all kinds of shamrock-related prizes at your local party supply or dollar store. We like to award plastic coins (like these fun four-leaf version from Oriental Trading Company) as points for correct turns, dropping coins into paper cups labeled with each rider's name. Points can be cashed in for a prize, such as a piece of candy, or for an incentive such as an extra canter or small jump.

### FINAL NOTES

-  **Different-colored barrels or poles can be extremely helpful - especially for students who are directionally challenged.** Don't rely on the commands *left*, *right*, *east* or *west* to help you out! Instead, differentiate arena equipment as much as possible. Duct tape stripes can add color to anything, but for a less permanent solution, try securing plain white poles with spray-painted cones, or placing a colored bucket on top of each barrel.
-  **As in previous lessons, use visual aids to help students determine posting diagonal.** Younger students or those who struggle with diagonals will appreciate a few duct tape stripes on the horse's shoulder, especially if you match each color with barrels or poles.
-  **Group lessons should be spaced carefully** to avoid interfering with the pattern. Position riders awaiting their turn inside each cloverleaf between the barrel and pole, or directly at A, C, B and E.

# LESSON # 18

## JUMPING SKILLS

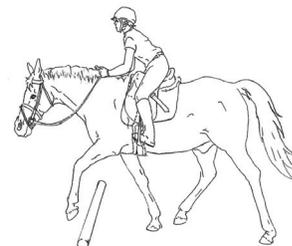
GREEN LEVEL

### BUILD A COURSE

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to determine the logical flow of a course while practicing a progressive variation on *Take Your Own Line*.

#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- MINIMUM OF 6 GROUND POLE "JUMPS"



**PREP** Set simple course of ground poles, with jump standards flanking each pole. Course should contain a number of possible options for linking fences, and include at least one line and one possible bending line. Remove empty jump cups from standards.

**INTRO** As students warm up at the walk, discuss how a jump or obstacle course must have a logic to it, allowing riders to smoothly connect fences in a way that makes sense to the horse. **5 MIN**

**LESSON AND EXERCISES**  **Review:** Two-point position at walk, directing students to occasionally ride lines over outside poles and change direction over poles on the diagonal. Students must remain in two-point position until they have stepped over every pole. Repeat without stirrups. **10 MIN**

 **Review:** After a few warm-up laps of trot on the rail, direct students over a single pole or line on the outside of the course. Students should fold into two-point position over the pole and **check diagonal** as they resume posting. Repeat on the other rein, then practice the same skill over a single pole or line on the diagonal. If time allows and riders have previous experience cantering over poles, finish with a **single canter pole** on the outside, checking lead before and after the "jumping" stride. **10 MIN**

 **Discuss:** Elements of a course, including opening and closing circle. Ask one student to choose just three fences to link together in a mini-course. **ASK: Imagine you are cantering the course. Would you still be able to ride this track easily?** **5 MIN**

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time or single file, students should trot around the course of three fences, checking posting diagonal before each major turn. **5 MIN**

 **PRACTICE:** When all riders have gone, ask another student to create a new course with four fences. Repeat the process, asking the next rider to create a five-jump course, until all jumps have been incorporated. **20 MIN**

 **Emphasize:** Each course **must be unique**, and include an opening circle as well as a closing circle (or straight-line halt). Approve each course before sending students off to ride it to ensure that the turns are fair and achievable for all horses in the group.

**REVIEW** ? What fences can *not* be ridden consecutively on this course? **5 MIN**  
? What do you think would be the fastest way to get around this course?

# LESSON #18

### BUILD A COURSE

GREEN LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Make each course plan collaborative**, so the first rider chooses the first fence, the second rider chooses the second fence, and so on, taking turns until the course reaches the desired length.
- 🐾 Instead of riding the final course as a group, **allow each student to create their own individual course**. Time rounds in a friendly **Take Your Own Line** competition - but award a five-second penalty for each jump approached on the incorrect diagonal.
- 🐾 **Vary the build of each jump** to include a mix of ground poles, cavaletti, pole stacks and/or baby crossrails. If teaching a group lesson, make sure all jumps are appropriate for the weakest horse and rider in the group. You can also increase the difficulty - and put course plans to the test - by allowing advanced **Green Level** students to try riding their **final course at the canter**.
- 🐾 Assign a point value to each jump and finish the lesson with a **Gambler's Choice** competition.

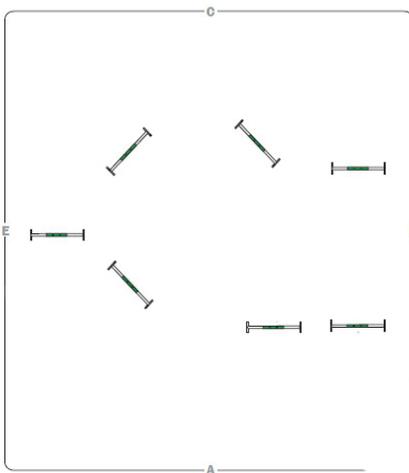


### SET UP FOR SUCCESS

When it comes to versatility, not all courses are created equal. In order for this lesson to work, you really need **a minimum of six obstacles** - seven or eight is better with a large group - that can be **approached from either direction**. If you're short on jump standards, barrels, bending poles and cones work equally well to create ground pole "jumps."

We recommend setting a hunter-style track with diagonal fences and lines placed to form possible bending line options. Challenge your **Teal Level** students to design and set a flexible course layout, or use **Course #1 Check and Change** in our Green Level course maps as a starting point:

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



### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 If you are **teaching a large group** and don't have time for everyone to have a go at designing a course, pair up students to work together on each course plan. You can also **accelerate the lesson by expanding the course more rapidly**, moving from a three-jump course to a five-jump course to the final full course using every fence.
- 🐾 This lesson adapts easily to private lessons. **Challenge your private students by requiring a different starting fence on each round**, or designate a few fences as "oxers" that can only be jumped in one direction.

# LESSON # 19

## JUMPING SKILLS

GREEN LEVEL

### POLES FOR POINTS

**OBJECTIVE:** To further test students on their ability to plan a course and their attention to detail, including rising on the correct posting diagonal between fences.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- MINIMUM OF 8 GROUND POLES
- STOPWATCH
- 2 CONES FOR START LINE

#### PREP

Set poles in various locations throughout arena - a random "scatter" works well for this lesson, but make sure you can see the potential for multiple courses. Standards, barrels, bending poles or cones can be used to flank poles, helping students differentiate them easily.

#### INTRO

As riders warm up at the walk, discuss different types of jumping disciplines, including timed show jumping events. **ASK: The fastest horse doesn't always win - why do you think this is? How else can you save time riding around a course?**

5  
MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Whoa and Go poles at the walk (see **Red Lesson #14 Whoa and Go Poles**). Once students have successfully halted over a pole, practice alternating between whoa and go poles in two-point position.

5  
MIN

 **Review:** Quickly identifying posting diagonal through multiple walk/trot transitions on the rail. After practicing this in both directions, have students trot on a long rein through a pole course of your choosing. **ASK: How does your horse feel over the poles today? Did you remember to check your posting diagonal before each turn?** Complete the warm-up with a timed trot without stirrups **or** a canter on each lead, appropriate to level of horses and riders.

15  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Explain rules for **Sixty-Second Poles**: Students create their own course of poles to ride at the trot. After crossing through start cones in either direction, they must trot over as many poles as possible within the one-minute time limit. **Each pole is worth one point - but ONLY if ridden with a straight approach and correct diagonal.**

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** After allowing students several minutes to strategize, have them ride their timed courses individually, including an appropriate opening and closing circle. Encourage students waiting their turn to watch closely. **ASK: Do you think that was a good approach? Can you see if \_\_\_\_ is on the correct diagonal?** Keep a running tally of points to announce after each round.

15  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** If time allows, announce a winner and challenge students to a second contest, this time allowing only **thirty seconds**.

10  
MIN

#### REVIEW

- ? Would you need to change your course to ride it at the canter? In what way?
- ? Did your course include multiple changes of direction? If not, how could you add some?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #19

## POLES FOR POINTS

# HorseSense Learning Levels

GREEN LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Include a whoa pole on the course.** Require students to stand for a minimum of three precious seconds before resuming their trot.
- 🐾 **Vary pole setup** to include skinny poles, trot pole grids and baby crossrails. Assign a point value to each jump to turn the exercise into a **Gambler's Choice**. Award bonus points for fences approached on the correct diagonal.
- 🐾 **Teach this lesson as a mock show jumping competition.** Encourage students to groom for the occasion, and play stadium music as each rider tackles the course. Award a prize and hold a victory lap - well-spaced out and at the trot if necessary to keep students safe.



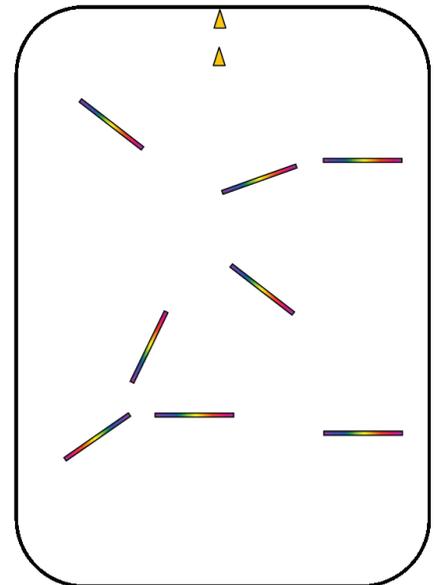
### LEVEL UP

This fun and simple game is easy to adapt for riders of all levels, and is friendly to Western riders and other non-jumpers.

**Rainbow** and **Red Level** students can play the game entirely at the walk. If you have a large arena or particularly pokey school ponies, keep poles close together, or add a few seconds to your time allowed.

**Yellow Level** students can play the game with more lenient rules about posting diagonals. If they are new to trotting around a course, substitute a few of your poles with gateway cones or invisible jumps - also useful if you are short on equipment.

**Blue** and **Orange Level** students can practice the exercise at the canter, with points awarded for approaches on the correct lead. Challenge **Purple Level** students to identify their diagonal and lead between fences without looking. The game can get quite competitive with **Teal Level** riders - give them only thirty seconds and watch them slice and dice their way around the course, jumping at creative angles!



**On a rainy day...** Teach a course design clinic and use this concept to help students learn to create their own course. Scatter "poles" on a dry erase board and ask students to use different-colored dry erase markers to create unique tracks. If you have enough space, use wooden dowels to create poles for human legs and challenge students to an on-foot contest, with a tight time limit (and a possible handicap for unfairly long legs!).

### FINAL NOTE

- 🐾 **Challenge private students to play the game against themselves by riding three successive courses:** an untimed practice round, an initial sixty-second course, and a final timed course with a goal of beating their original score.

# LESSON #20

## JUMPING SKILLS

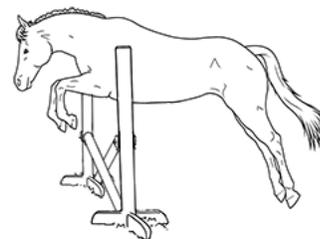
GREEN LEVEL

### READY TO JUMP

**OBJECTIVE:** For students to apply jumping skills practiced over ground poles to a gymnastic grid ending in a 18" crossrail.

#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ❑ 1 PAIR JUMP STANDARDS, CUPS AND POLES TO BUILD SIMPLE CROSSRAIL
- ❑ 4 GROUND POLES



#### PREP

Set ground poles at a comfortable distance (approximately 4') to form trot pole grid. Place empty standards 8' behind poles, with cups removed. Lay additional poles to side of grid for easy access.

#### INTRO

"You've been working hard over the past few weeks on two-point position and approaching obstacles with confidence and balance. Looks like it might be time to test these skills over an actual jump! **Does the idea of jumping make you excited? Nervous? A little bit of both?**

5  
MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Riding in two-point position on the flat at the walk and trot, through transitions and ring figures. Include a short stretch - no more than one long side of the arena - of two-point without stirrups.

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Students should be able to balance independently of hands and practice moving hands forward in a **long crest release**, allowing the horse total freedom in the head and neck.

 **Review:** Trotting up centerline and over trot poles, alternating between turning left and right on the departure. Include at least two trips over the poles with the reins in one hand, and at least one with reins knotted and both arms outstretched.

10  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Phases of the horse's jump and rider position throughout.

5  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Add a fifth pole between the standards and have students trot through grid again, **counting out "One, two, three, four, sink, jump!"** in rhythm with the horse's steps. Upon hearing "Sink," students should drop weight into heels, lightly squeeze with lower leg and grab some mane in their release.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Once students are trotting smoothly through grid, with impulsion, set cups on low hole to form **baby crossrail**. With each successful trip, raise the crossrail as if playing **Chase Me Charlie**, finishing with 18" or the height required to produce a jumping effort.

15  
MIN

**Emphasize:** The horse does the jumping, not the rider! Students should maintain a secure two-point over poles and allow the horse to close their hip angle to avoid jumping ahead.

#### REVIEW

- ? Did the pole feel different from the previous canter stride? In what way?
- ? What would you do if you got the wrong lead on your opening circle?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #20

## HorseSense Learning Levels

### READY TO JUMP

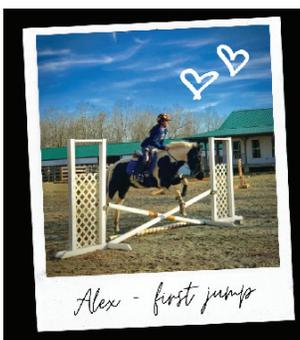
#### GREEN LEVEL

### PREREQUISITES

First "real" jump is an exciting milestone for most riders - and we believe it's extra sweet when earned! **Waiting until students are really solid on the flat and over poles makes the introduction to low fences successful and safe**, and reinforces the idea that good basics = good jumps.

There are two schools of thought about whether it is necessary to teach the canter before crossrails. It's true that a low jump can be an inviting way to introduce a few strides of the new gait, but **in general, we prefer that students have some previous experience riding the canter**, so they won't lose confidence or control if their horse canters off on the landing. Other skills we need to see before the jump cups go up:

-  **A consistently correct and secure two-point position.** If students wobble over poles or are unable to demonstrate consistent no-hand work when they practice Multitasking Trot Poles, they're not quite ready yet.
-  **Strong no-stirrup skills at the trot, including the ability to retrieve dropped stirrups** without accidentally sending the horse forward. A lost stirrup on landing should not give you gray hairs!
-  **An instinctive safety seat and quick reaction time.** If a horse gets exuberant or fast on landing, we want to see students sitting up and actively working to regain control - not hunched over the neck with reins flapping.
-  **Excellent focus.** As always, we want students looking where they want to go, not where they're afraid they'll end up. Ground-gazers may need several lessons focused on eye control and positive intention before approaching real fences.



### MAKING MEMORIES

Do you remember the first time you jumped? Or cantered, or got to ride outside the arena? After teaching dozens of students, you may take these events for granted - but for a new rider, every one of these moments is a really big deal.

**Celebrate their accomplishments by snapping a quick photo or video** and sharing in your barn newsletter or social media. At HorseSense, we maintained a physical "Wall of Fame" bulletin board in the entryway of our barn, and filled it with photos of **Green Level** students experiencing their first canters and crossrails. The collage of smiling faces is great advertising as well as a priceless memory!

### FINAL NOTES

-  **Green on green makes black and blue - especially over fences.** If your students own horses that are inexperienced or unreliable over fences, try to arrange lessons on a school horse or a veteran borrowed horse to ensure that early jumping lessons are a safe and confidence-building experience.
-  **Easy distances are essential when building introductory gymnastic grids.** Customize your trot pole and placing pole spacing to suit individual horses, and be ready to make quick adjustments when teaching a mixed group!