



HorseSense Learning Levels



HORSEMANSHIP LESSON PLANS

YELLOW LEVEL

SET #1: Basic Skills

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

Illustrations by Rhonda Hagy

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LESSON # 1

SAFETY AND HANDLING



HorseSense Learning Levels

YELLOW LEVEL

TIME FOR TACK

OBJECTIVE: *Students will learn what is meant by efficient work as they gain proficiency in tacking up and untacking, practicing safe technique and consideration for the horse.*



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- QUIET HORSE(S), SAFELY TIED OR CROSSTIED
- ALL TACK USED: SADDLE/BRIDLE/PADS/GIRTH/BOOTS ETC.
- WATCH OR TIMER
- GROOMING KITS, IF NEEDED

PREP

Catch and tie horses safely, leaving plenty of workspace around each horse. Ensure all tack is easily accessible; if needed, horses can be groomed ahead of time.

INTRO

Gather students away from horses. **ASK: What does it mean to work efficiently?** Explain that efficiency is an important skill for equestrians to learn, since there is *always* more work to do with horses. Shortcuts that endanger the horse or make the process unpleasant for him must be avoided, but if students learn to work efficiently, they will have more time to ride!

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LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Demonstrate:** choose one horse (preferably the one with the most complex tack) and review the process of tacking up and untacking. **ASK: What part of the process do you find the most difficult? What would make it easier for you?**

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Emphasize: Focus on the **small details that are often missed:** pulling saddle pad off withers into gullet of saddle, checking sweat flaps to prevent uncomfortable rolls, tightening girth gradually, ensuring reins are over head before removing halter, checking both sides of the bridle for correct placement before fastening. Remind students to **simply reverse the process to untack** (removing bridle first). **ASK: What areas on the horse must be clean before tacking up? How can you tell if they are clean enough?**

 **PRACTICE:** Assign each student a horse and tack, or form teams. Challenge students to a tacking up race - who can be the first to groom/saddle/bridle? Assign penalties for unsafe practices (running, moving around horse while communicating intent) and inconsiderate handling (throwing saddle on back, yanking on girth, etc.) **ASK: How much time would you guess has elapsed?**

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 **Discuss:** How to handle common **tacking-up challenges** such as a girth that won't seem to reach, a horse that won't take the bit, etc.

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 **PRACTICE:** As students untack remaining horses, take one horse and make deliberate mistakes to tack: Velcro on saddle pad trapped under panel, bridle straps out of keepers, saddle crooked, etc. Challenge students to perform a safety check and find everything wrong. **ASK: Would this be a safety issue? How would this feel to the horse?**

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REVIEW

- ? What should always be the last step in tacking up, and why? What should you do if you put the bridle on and then realize you forgot your crop/need the bathroom/etc.?
- ? Why is it preferable to tighten the girth in stages?

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LESSON # 1

TIME FOR TACK

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Award individual or team prizes** to the team that correctly tacks up/untacks the fastest. You can also have a group prize that can only be earned by finding everything wrong during the safety check.
- 🐾 If students are already fairly proficient at tacking up, or you have additional time, have them **swap horses** and tack up an unfamiliar mount. This can be particularly beneficial when there are numerous differences between pieces of tack, introducing students to various bits, nosebands, protective pads and boots, and martingales/breastplates.



This lesson is a great go-to on a rainy day, especially when a mounted lesson is unexpectedly rained out as it does not require any special equipment. It can be taught at any point during Yellow Level, but the earlier the better if you want your students to prepare for lessons on their own!

GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 Large **groups** must be managed carefully, especially in a small space. You may find it best to divide students into pairs or three-person teams and have them work together on a single horse, which speeds the lesson up and encourages teamwork. Remind students to remain aware of the space bubble, blind spots and body language of *all* horses used, not just their own.
- 🐾 Although a **private** lesson lacks the competitive dynamic of a group, you can still issue the timed challenge by timing your own demonstration and encouraging the student to beat it. If time allows, you can also have them tack and untack twice, with a goal of improving their time the second go-around. Just keep an eye on your time allowed if the student tends to be slow, or you may run over.



We like to use **Stuff Happens** cards to teach students the problem-solving skills they need to tack up independently.

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource-center/challenges/stuff-happens/>

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 As always, **make sure that the horses used for this lesson are quiet and tolerant.** While it is important to teach students patient methods of dealing with an uncooperative horse, the structure of the lesson means that students in a group will not all be under your direct supervision at all times. Extremely girthy or nippy horses should be avoided.
- 🐾 If you are teaching **very young or vertically-challenged students**, you may need to have some **workarounds to help them gain independence.** Teach your students how to use safe and sturdy step stools - nothing that will tip over near a horse's hooves. Have them practice lifting the saddle up onto a saddle rack or another object **before** they attempt to place it on the horse. Teach them how to reach under the horse's jaw and grasp the cheekpieces of the bridle if they can't reach through the ears. If all else fails, you can offer to lift the saddle and help students hold the bridle, but encourage them to do everything else on their own.

LESSON #2

HorseSense Learning Levels

BASIC SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

ON AGAIN, OFF AGAIN

OBJECTIVE: Students will improve mounting and dismounting technique and learn to perform the emergency dismount at the trot.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ❑ MOUNTING BLOCK
- ❑ OPTIONAL ASSISTANTS TO HELP HOLD HORSES, **OR** SEVERAL BREAKAWAY TIE STATIONS, **OR** PLASTIC HULA HOOP

PREP

If teaching the lesson without assistance, set up tie rings along one side of the arena, using natural hay twine or plastic breakaway rings spaced 2-3 horse lengths apart.

INTRO

In Red Level, we learned how to perform an emergency dismount. **ASK: Is it a good idea to bail off a runaway horse? What are some situations where an emergency dismount would be the safest solution?** We can't always slow our horse down before performing an emergency dismount, so it's a good idea to practice it at different speeds - including trot!

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LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Warm up at the walk on both reins, performing exercises such as touching toes, poll and croup without stirrups. Finish by walking horses into "parking places" in center of arena and performing an emergency dismount. Remount and repeat on off side. **ASK: If you are riding with stirrups, what is the important first step to your dismount? What could happen if you tried to jump off with a foot caught in the stirrup?**

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 **Demonstrate:** If feasible, borrow a student horse to demonstrate mounting from ground and performing an emergency dismount at the trot.

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Emphasize: Students should ask horse to trot and establish rhythm before removing feet from stirrups. Sit 1-2 beats before dismounting to ensure feet are clear! Land facing forward, right hand on saddle for support, ready to jog with horse if necessary.

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, ask students to trot down **centerline** and perform an emergency dismount between A and C. If horses have a tendency to get quick or riders are nervous, remain at the horse's head for initial attempts. Students may remount from ground, mounting block, or leg up, depending on ability and the size of the group. Once technique is mastered, repeat on off side.

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Emphasize: Dismounting at the trot is more of a mental than physical challenge. The trick is to "**rip off the Band Aid**" and perform it quickly, as though it's a true emergency. Slow, hesitant dismounts get jostled around and have trouble sticking the landing!

 **Review:** Challenge students to a **Saddle Up Race** or **Hula Hoop Game**. There are several different ways to stage this game, depending on age/skill level and the arena you have to work with; **see next page for possible variations.**

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REVIEW

- ? What are the steps to a smooth emergency dismount? What *must* always happen first?
- ? Why is it important to land facing the horse's ears instead of the saddle?

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LESSON #2

ON AGAIN, OFF AGAIN

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

Saddle Up races are a fun activity for group lessons, and review several fundamental skills: mounting/dismounting, tacking up/untacking, and leading/tying. The basic premise involves riding or leading the horse to one end of the arena, saddling up, mounting and riding back. There are a few logistics to consider in order to run one safely, however:

- 🐾 **How many students do you have participating?** Can students be paired up to form relay teams? Can they safely share a horse to cut down on arena traffic, and if so, can the spare horses be held out of the way?
- 🐾 **Is your arena enclosed?** Are there safe, accessible places you can set a saddle and/or bridle?
- 🐾 **How will horses be secured** while the tacking up takes place? Students will likely need both hands to put on the tack. Can horses be tied with a halter and lead rope? Do you have assistants available who can hold bridle reins?
- 🐾 **Can students mount independently?** Do you have multiple mounting blocks, or assistants who can give a leg up?

Here are **several variations we have used**, geared towards different levels of ability:

- 🐾 **Ride and Lead:** Divide students into pairs. Rider #1 on each team rides down to end of arena, dismounts, and removes saddle only. (Reins are held by student or Ground Buddy.) Rider #1 leads horse back and passes off to Rider #2, who leads horse to saddle, puts on pad/saddle/girth, rolls down stirrups and remounts, riding back to the finish line to complete the game. (Rider #2 must have tightness of girth approved by instructor or Ground Buddy before remounting!)
- 🐾 **Ride and Tie:** Game is played as in Ride and Lead, except students fully untack, exchanging bridle for halter/rope and tying safely before removing saddle. Rider #2 ties horse before saddling, then bridling.
- 🐾 **Come and Get It:** Saddles are placed at the far end of the arena. Riders ride bareback *at the walk* to end of arena, pass reins to Ground Buddy, saddle up and remount to return to the start/finish line, with a mandatory girth check before mounting.
- 🐾 **Hula Hoop:** An easier variation that focuses just on mounting and dismounting. Students ride to end of arena, dismount, and drop a hula hoop over their head (with reins held by assistant or instructor), remounting to return to start/finish. Desensitize horses to hula hoop first!
- 🐾 **Private students** can race to complete the task within a time limit, or try to improve on their previous time.



To mount from the ground or not to mount from the ground? At HorseSense, we are pro-mounting block at all Levels, due to the increased stability of the saddle and comfort they provide the horse. We tell students that while they need to know *how* to mount from the ground, given a choice, the mounting block is *usually* the safest and kindest option.

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Hopefully your students developed excellent dismounting technique in their Red Level work, but use your warm up at the walk to **check for and correct unsafe habits**. Two common mistakes that can be dangerous at the trot: **a)** keeping right knee bent instead of outstretched, balancing briefly on knee mid-dismount, and **b)** leaning forward/preparing to dismount with one or both feet still in the stirrups (especially during a game or race!).
- 🐾 Many students are **nervous about performing the emergency dismount at the trot**, especially if they are small or ride tall horses. Ease them into it by practicing at “fast walk” until they can confidently dismount with correct technique. Then lead the horse at a “tiny trot”, jogging as slow as possible. If feasible, allow them to practice on a shorter pony and work their way up to the taller mount.

LESSON #3

LONGE LESSONS

YELLOW LEVEL

CHANGING SEATS

OBJECTIVE: Students will develop balance and a stable lower leg position by transitioning between the rising trot, sitting trot, and two-point position on the longe line.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ LONGE LINE AND WHIP

☐ OPTIONAL POLES TO DIVIDE ARENA WORKSPACE

PREP

Ensure arena has a clear workspace 20m or more in diameter, free of jump standards, extra poles or any other hazards. If teaching a group with assistance, you can use ground poles to divide arena into zones. Longe line and whip should be neatly folded and easily accessible.

INTRO

Ask students to warm up at the walk and trot on the rail. Remind them that not that long ago, posting was a new and difficult skill - but now it is the way they ride the trot by default. **ASK: How else could you ride the trot? When do you think it might be better to sit the trot, or to ride in two-point position?**

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LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Emergency dismount at the slow trot, at conclusion of warm-up trot. Remount from ground if possible; if not, students should use mounting block or wait for a leg up.

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 **Review:** Full seat, posting, and two-point position at the halt, with arms outstretched. **ASK: Can you move smoothly between positions without using your hand? If you tip forward or fall back into the saddle, can you figure out why?**

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, longe riders for 5-10 minutes at the trot, on both the left and right rein. Ask students to practice both **sitting trot**, holding onto saddle if necessary, and **two-point at the trot**, holding onto mane if necessary.

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Emphasize: A secure, consistent lower leg position with relaxed joints makes the transition between seats possible. If students allow heels to creep up in sitting trot, they will find it challenging to achieve the two-point; if they brace against stirrups in sitting trot, they will bounce when they sit.

 **PRACTICE:** Ask each student to choose a number between five and ten. This becomes **"the magic number"** that determines how many trot steps they will remain in each seat. Repeatedly count from one as they trot around; every time they hear their number, they should **switch from posting, to sitting, to two-point, to posting again**. If time allows, repeat with arm outstretched.

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 Students waiting their turn to be longed should remain with an assistant at the other end of the arena, practicing exercises such dropping and retrieving stirrups, balancing stretches without stirrups, and/or transitions between the walk and the trot.

REVIEW

- ? What position faults can prevent you from getting into two-point? From sitting the trot?
- ? Which position do you find the most challenging? Why do you think this is?

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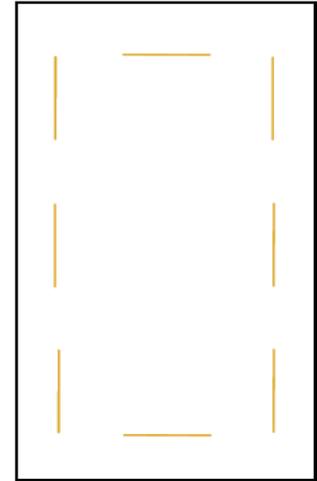
LESSON #3

CHANGING SEATS

YELLOW LEVEL

To longe or not to longe? In **Red Level Horsemanship**, we discuss at length the various pros and cons of using the longe line to introduce new skills. This lesson, along with three other Yellow Level lessons, is definitely easier to teach if you have the ability to longe. It isolates the rider's position, allowing them to experiment and find their balance in a safe environment, without the risk of losing control.

However! If longeing isn't feasible, or you suspect the student's horse will be more forgiving off the line than on it, you can absolutely adapt the exercise to suit your needs. This lesson is particularly flexible as it allows the student to maintain rein contact throughout. Just keep in mind that the student's attention will not be focused entirely on steering or keeping the horse at the right pace. You may find it helpful to create a "track" of poles to encourage the horse to stay on the rail.



GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 A fun exercise to play with a **group** as a replacement or follow-up to the longe lesson is **Follow the Leader**. Give each student a designated amount of time to spend as the leader, during which they lead the ride along the rail, through changes of direction, and through simple transitions at the walk and the trot. As they go, they must frequently change seats, with the rest of the ride following suit. Limit the number of strides they can ride without switching positions, and try to give every member of the group a turn as leader, with short walk breaks between rounds as necessary.
- 🐾 If you are teaching a **large group**, or your students are not yet adept at maintaining a trot on the rail *and* adjusting spacing, ask students to line up like train cars and halt on one side of the arena. Students trot one at a time, leaving the front of the group and rejoining the rear. (See **Sample Lesson #2 Bumper Cars**.)
- 🐾 Take advantage of the extra time you have to work with in your **private** lessons by repeating the exercise on the rail after consistency has been achieved on the longe line. This adds another element of difficulty as students must be able to multitask; they have to maintain pace and keep their horses on the rail while also remembering to switch seats and keep their balance!

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Practice makes perfect, but only if the student is practicing good habits.** There can be a big difference between doing this exercise and doing it *well* - and you really want your Yellow Level students to be doing it *well*, to create a foundation for future skills such as canter transitions and jumping. If they are leaning on hands and knees to get into two-point, or bouncing in the sitting trot, more practice will be needed before you can consider the skill mastered.
- 🐾 Once your students have learned to change seats at the trot smoothly, you can **make this a routine part of your warm-up**. Change up the number of strides from week to week to keep students from getting bored.
- 🐾 A steady rhythm in the trot makes the exercise dramatically easier. This lesson is a great way to **draw attention to the importance of rhythm**, a concept that your students will return to again and again!

LESSON #4

HorseSense Learning Levels

FLATWORK SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

THE LEG NEAR THE WALL

OBJECTIVE: To introduce students to the concept of posting diagonals, working toward the ability to recognize "correct" diagonals and to change from one to the other.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ❑ FOUR POLO WRAPS OR PROTECTIVE BOOTS (PREFERABLY PER HORSE), PAIRED IN TWO CONTRASTING COLORS
- ❑ TWO DIFFERENT COLORED ROLLS OF DUCT TAPE

PREP

Wrap horse's legs or apply protective boots as students tack up, using one color for each diagonal pair of legs. If this is too time-consuming, wrap one horse that you can ride in demonstration.

INTRO

As students warm up in the walk, discuss what is happening with the horse's legs. **ASK: How many beats are there in the walk? In what order do they place each hoof?** After students have practiced feeling the steps on both the left and right rein, move up to the trot. **ASK: How many beats in the trot? Do you know how they pair up their legs?**

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LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Discuss:** After trotting in both directions, gather students in center of arena. Briefly discuss what is meant by **posting diagonals**: the horse moves legs in diagonal pairs; rider can post "Up" with either pair; one diagonal works harder than the other when horse is turning. **ASK: Do you think it is easier for the horse to push himself around a turn when you rise or when you sit?**

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Emphasize: The word "diagonal" is used two ways in horseback riding. It is important to differentiate between posting diagonals and the diagonal lines used to change direction!

 **Demonstrate:** Ask each rider to trot a lap of the arena, directing the rest of the group's attention to the horse's legs. (If only one horse is wrapped or you are short on time, borrow the horse long enough to mount up and trot around yourself.) **ASK: Can you see the diagonal pairs moving? Which color is the inside hind leg and outside foreleg? Is the rider going UP or DOWN when this color moves forward?**

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, have each student trot from the front of the line to the rear. **ASK: Is it safe to look at the horse's hooves? How else can you tell what diagonal you are on?** As the rider posts, chant "Now" in time with the correct diagonal, to help them identify how that step looks and feels. **ASK: Are you sitting or rising on "Now"?**

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 **PRACTICE:** Apply strips of duct tape to horses' shoulders, one color on RIGHT and one color on LEFT. **ASK: If you are tracking left, which color is inside? Outside? Which shoulder should you post with?** Repeat individual trots, but this time, ask student to shout out which color they think they are rising with. Repeat on the other rein.

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REVIEW

- ? How does posting on the correct diagonal help the horse?
- ? In the next lesson we will practice changing from one diagonal to another. How do you think you could do this easily?

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LESSON #4

THE LEG NEAR THE WALL

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 If students are catching on easily, **award a prize to each rider who correctly identifies their posting diagonal** - but avoid this if you have group members that are struggling. Posting diagonals can be frustrating and confusing for some students, and emphasizing their difficulty is bad for morale!
- 🐾 As students are warming up, encourage them to **come up with a chant that matches the footfall rhythm of the horse's walk and trot**. A repetitive four-syllable word such as **"macaroni"** works well for walk; a pair of short, sharp words such as **"ice cream"** is easiest to match to trot.

GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 A **group** lesson is much easier to manage when students **trot one at a time**, allowing you to provide individual attention and eliminating the concern of steering in traffic. Make sure, however, that you **engage the whole group** by asking riders waiting their turn to watch the legs of the horse trotting. Ask them to guess what color the rider should be posting on and whether the rider is "right" or "wrong." Seeing posting diagonals from the ground often takes a lot of practice, but can really help with a student's comprehension.
- 🐾 If you are teaching a **private** lesson, plan on borrowing the student's horse for a **brief demonstration**, or ask another student to assist by wrapping their own horse and performing a posting trot. Alternatively, you *can* skip straight to the duct tape exercise and spend additional time practicing identifying the movement from the saddle, at the walk as well as the trot - but try to **provide a visual** of the horse's gait in action whenever possible.



Believe it or not, you can introduce posting diagonals on a rainy day, especially if you have energetic children and a large aisle or workspace! Teach the footfalls of all four natural gaits by having students watch slow-motion video, then asking them to imitate the movement on two legs or all fours. Ask them what they feel when they "trot" around a turn, and "canter" on each lead. They will have increased empathy for their horse when they get back in the saddle!

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Posting diagonals, like posting itself, is a skill that some students will master easily in the course of one lesson while others struggle for weeks if not months. Diagonals are often a mental challenge, so go slowly, check understanding at every step, and **encourage students who find the concept difficult** - they are not alone!
- 🐾 **Know your audience.** Adults usually need to know the theory and welcome in-depth discussion of the whys and hows of the horse's gaits. Young children need the reason for **"Rise and fall with the foreleg near the wall"** neatly summed up in a few short points, as they will be eager to get back to the action!
- 🐾 Some students find learning to change diagonal easier than recognizing which diagonal they're rising on. If you sense they are having trouble with identification, **try teaching "sit a beat"** and coming back to this lesson later.
- 🐾 Students just starting out with posting diagonals (and later, canter leads) will likely be **dependent on the "quick peek"** for a while. You can still **encourage a sense of feel** by pointing out how the correct diagonal feels smooth and energy efficient, while the wrong diagonal feels awkward and is extra work for both rider and horse.

LESSON #5

SWITCHING SIDES

HorseSense Learning Levels

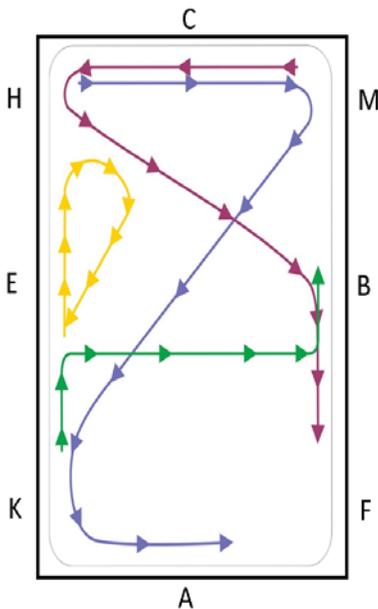
YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

To help students remember where to change diagonal, play **X Marks the Spot**. Each time they change direction at the trot, they earn one gold coin; if they manage both sides of the turn on the correct diagonal, they earn two gold coins. A minimum of five gold coins must be earned in order to earn a prize from the **"Pirate's Treasure."** The treasure chest can be filled with candy, stickers, horse charms, tiny toy horses, and other small prizes geared towards the age group of your students.



GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS



- Effective organization is critical when teaching this lesson to a **large group**. Keep a sharp eye on spacing throughout all the warm-up exercises and any trot work performed for the whole ride. If you **stagger starts**, try to station riders where they have enough room to develop a good trot rhythm. For example, if riders are changing direction across the diagonal from C - riding **M-X-K** - ask the first rider to finish by halting at B, allowing the rest of the group to fill in the space between B and F as they complete the exercise. Once all have completed, the first rider can trot on and ride **H-X-F** or **C-X-A-K**.
- When designating an order of go in **group** lessons, make sure you put your directionally challenged riders toward the rear!
- Your **private** students have no one to follow, so they may find it reassuring to **follow you on foot** through the changes of direction first, particularly if they are easily confused or have a tendency to go off course.

FINAL NOTES

- If your students have a hard time **keeping left and right or inside and outside straight**, you may want to bring out the duct tape stripes again! Make sure they know which color is which; at HorseSense, we like to use **"red on right"** as this comes in handy later when they are jumping in competition.
- This lesson asks a lot of students:** they need to be able to maintain a consistent trot while steering, remember the turns involved in changing direction, sit just one beat to change diagonal, AND remember to change it as they turn from one rein to another. While this is all very doable for older/confident students, and those who sailed through the previous introduction to posting diagonals, **not all students will master this in two lessons**. If you are teaching younger children, or children with insufficient leg who find it hard to keep their ponies in the trot while steering, or students who just can't quite make sense of posting diagonals yet... break these lessons up into several pieces and teach them over the course of four or five weeks. **It takes the time it takes**, and nothing haunts a student later like being rushed ahead before they really have a grasp of the new skill!

LESSON #6

JUMPING SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

INVISIBLE COURSE

OBJECTIVE: Students will gain further practice in negotiating turns and changing posting diagonal by riding through a "jump course" of empty standards at the trot.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 4 TO 8 PAIRS OF JUMP STANDARDS

☐ OPTIONAL CONES TO MARK START/FINISH

PREP

Set jump standards out in a simple, hunter-style course, leaving 6'-10' of empty space between each pair of standards. Remove all jump cups.

INTRO

"Last week, we learned that if we want to keep our horses in a rhythmic trot, we need to make our turns BIG and ROUND. This is very important when trotting to an obstacle!" **ASK: What do you think would happen if you cut a corner and slowed down right before a jump?**

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LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Riding changes of direction across the diagonal and through the middle of the ring at the walk and posting trot. Clever course design will allow you to use standards to mark turning points for each figure. **ASK: How can you help your horse keep trotting through each turn?**

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Emphasize: Priority at this stage of the lesson is a consistent trot. If students remember to check and/or change posting diagonal, GREAT, and praise them - but if not, no worries. Steering and pace must come first!

 **Discuss:** Technique for riding a smooth course, as practiced in Red Level at the walk. **ASK: Is it okay to take shortcuts between jumps? How can we prevent the horse from doing this?** Remind students that jumps will come up much faster at the trot than at the walk; they will need to look ahead and plan ahead.

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 **PRACTICE:** All together, have students walk an **opening circle**, the course, and a **closing circle**, pointing out landmarks to help them ride wide, accurate turns. Safely station the rest of the group between jumps while each rider performs the course a second time individually, this time at the trot. Cheer for each "clear" round!

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Emphasize: Even though the pace is slow and the standards are empty, students should ride these "invisible jumps" as carefully as they would ride Grand Prix fences!

 **Review:** If students are able to maintain a trot all the way around the course, finish with a third trip around the course, this time with attention to posting diagonals. Students should check their diagonals on the opening circle - and any time they feel a loss of rhythm - changing diagonals as they cross through the inside lines.

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REVIEW

- ? How does the opening circle help prepare you for the first jump?
- ? How could posting on the wrong diagonal make it difficult for a horse to turn and jump?

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LESSON #6

INVISIBLE COURSE

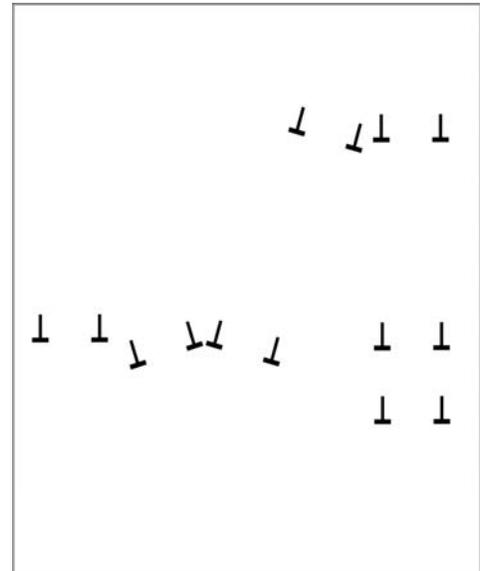
YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 Award a prize for each “clear” round, in which all jump standards are negotiated at the trot.
- 🐾 Test accuracy by playing the **Shrinking Gate** game, where each invisible jump on the course is narrower than the last. The final jump should resemble a true skinny, with just 3’ to 4’ between standards. For an additional challenge, students can ride the course multiple times, with the gap between the jumps growing smaller after each successful round. If they have a runout, they are out of the game!

CROWD CONTROL

- 🐾 **Watch spacing carefully** when working with a large **group** lesson. Riders waiting their turn need to be stationed in pockets of the arena where they cannot interfere with horses riding the course. You don’t want a large group crowding the rail while you’re asking riders to use the whole arena to negotiate the turns! If possible, divide students up and place them in different areas, discussing **order of go** and who incoming riders will replace. This prevents herd mentality from sabotaging the rider on course (whose horse may be all too eager to rejoin the group) and **encourages students to watch and listen** instead of chatting and losing focus.
- 🐾 If you are short on time, you may be able to **stagger starts**, or send students through the course **single file** (“like **train cars**”), but avoid successive changes of direction across the diagonal, which can cause a head-on collision.



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Since the “invisible jumps” are nothing more than empty standards, **make sure they have some distinguishing features to help students remember the course**. “Inside line to outside line to inside diagonal” can be bewildering to a beginner, but “Red, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple - like a rainbow” is **easy to remember and full of visual clues**. Decorate plain, unadorned standards with party streamer stripes, or name each jump after an animal and place stuffed animals around the feet of the standards. You can also use bending poles, cones and/or barrels in the place of standards, especially if you are short on equipment.
- 🐾 **Maintaining a trot on course sounds like a simple task, but it can be extremely challenging** (and, if you are not careful, frustrating) for very young and/or small riders, unfit riders on lazy horses, and riders who find it difficult to steer without the horse overpowering the leg. **Keep in mind that beginners are often unable to do the multitasking that we take for granted!** If you have a student struggling to trot through a single turn, break the course up into small chunks and build it up slowly. Even if it takes a whole lesson for the student to link two jumps together successfully, they can still gain a sense of accomplishment, whereas failing repeatedly to complete the whole course can be demoralizing - especially in a group setting where others succeed.

LESSON #7

HorseSense Learning Levels

JUMPING SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

ON COURSE

OBJECTIVE: Students will practice coursework skills learned in the previous lesson over ground poles at the trot.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ❑ 4 TO 8 PAIRS OF JUMP STANDARDS AND POLES
- ❑ 4 TO 8 CONES



PREP Set jump standards out in a simple, hunter-style course, and remove all jump cups. Place a single ground pole for each "jump," securing pole with standards (or cones) so it cannot roll.

INTRO "Horses can jump big obstacles - Olympic riders often jump five feet and higher! But even Olympians spend most of their time practicing their pace, track and position over poles on the ground." **ASK: What have you already learned about trotting around a course? What position would you use over the poles if they were actual jumps?** 5 MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES 🐾 **Review:** Walking a ground pole course, with attention to a large opening circle and wide, flowing turns. 15 MIN

🐾 **Review:** Changing seats at the walk and the trot, on the rail, shifting between full seat, two-point and posting. Designate a magic number (as in **#3 Changing Seats**) to determine how many strides students will ride before changing position.

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Riding a single ground pole at the trot. 10 MIN

Emphasize: The importance of a straight **approach** and **departure**.

🐾 **Discuss:** To ride a smooth course over the poles, students need 1) a **commitment to the track**, 2) the **perfect pace**, and 3) a **secure position** that helps rather than hinders the horse. **ASK: How does the opening circle help you achieve the first two requirements? Why do you think the closing circle is important?** 5 MIN

Emphasize: Although posting over poles can be a beneficial exercise, at this level, students should fold into two-point before each pole. This develops the jumping position helps students remain in balance if the horse makes an unexpected effort.

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Techniques for memorizing a course. Once students can recite the course from memory, have them space out so that each rider can ride the course individually, at the trot, including an opening and closing circle. Cheer for each clear round. If time allows, ride a timed **jump off** over a shorter course - no cantering allowed! 20 MIN

REVIEW ? What was your favorite "jump" on the course? Why? Which part was the most challenging? 5 MIN
? Did your horse trot the poles heading toward the barn/gate differently than the poles going away? Why do you think this is?

LESSON #7

ON COURSE

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Prizes can be awarded** for **clear round**, best **jump-off time** (with penalties for ill-advised shortcuts on course!), or **equitation** (best jumping position, remembering to check posting diagonals). Tailor your prize-giving to the competitive nature and maturity of your audience. **Carrots for good “show jumping” horses** are always a popular incentive!
- 🐾 Test understanding of approaches by playing **Poles for Points**, a shortened version of **Take Your Own Line**. Each student is given 45 to 60 seconds to ride over as many poles as possible. Each pole is worth one point, but **ONLY** if ridden on a perpendicular line! Students will quickly realize that tight, trot-killing turns and crooked approaches aren't worth riding.



GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 As in **#6 Invisible Course**, **group** lessons should be carefully spaced out to keep students attentive and to prevent herd instinct from derailing the rider on course. (Particularly very young/small riders on strong-willed ponies!) Ensure that your course has **several pockets of space where students can “park”** without interfering with the approach or departure to any fence.
- 🐾 Try to establish an **order of go** that allows the student most sure of the course to go first. This allows anyone a bit confused about the track to watch a round or two. If you are teaching a **private** student who finds the memorization difficult, make sure your warm-up course at the walk is the same as the course ridden in the trot. You can also start by linking together just the first two or three poles, adding another line in the second round, and riding the full course in the third.



PRIORITIES are **easy to forget when riding a course**, so remind your students often: first the horse must go **WHERE** the rider intends, then he must go at the **PACE** the rider intends. Only then can riders focus on **DETAILS** such as posting diagonals and polished position! If the steering falls apart, students must **SLOW DOWN** and regain control, for the safety of everyone involved.

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Not all horses trot over poles quietly!** Ideally, test each horse before attempting this lesson with beginners; don't assume that just because the horse walks over poles calmly, he will perform the same way at the trot. If the horse is privately owned and you are not able to preview his ability yourself, ask student trot over the single pole at the end of the warmup **individually**, preferably away from the barn, herd or gate. **Horses that jump or try to break into a canter will need further schooling by an experienced rider in order to perform the lesson safely.** Should you find yourself in the unfortunate situation of having to disqualify a horse from the exercise, encourage the student to ride the course at the walk, transitioning in and out of trot on the turns if she is able to do so safely. If there is another horse in the group that can be borrowed, consider allowing the student to practice riding the course at the trot on a different mount at the end of the lesson.
- 🐾 **Don't sweat the posting diagonals too much in this lesson.** They can be reviewed in the warm-up, and on the opening and closing circles. If your students are able to check and change them in the turns, you can certainly coach them through doing so. But remember that students are still learning to do a lot of multitasking, and may not be able to combined ALL of their new skills quite yet!

LESSON #8

JUMPING SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

TROT POLES

OBJECTIVE: Students will gain further balance and security in their two-point position and review posting diagonals by riding over a grid of poles at the trot.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 4 HEAVY-DUTY POLES

☐ 4 CONES

PREP

Place two trot poles on the centerline of the arena, securing ends of poles so they cannot roll. Distance between each pole will average 4' to 4'6" but depends on horses used; if teaching a group with small ponies and horses, set two grids side by side. Set extra poles next to grid for easy access. Place a pair of cones near A and C to mark turns on and off the centerline.

INTRO

"When your horse trots over a pole, he takes a bigger step than usual." **ASK: What position is the easiest to maintain over poles? How does two-point help you and the horse?** "Today we're going to ride over several poles in a row, and put your two-point to the test!"

5
MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

🐾 **Review:** Two-point position at the walk and trot, on the rail. In walk, practice riding with **reins in one hand** and other arm outstretched, switching hands repeatedly. In trot, practice two-point with inside hand behind back.

10
MIN

🐾 **Review:** Riding down **centerline** and over poles in the walk. Space between poles can be adjusted so horses can maintain walk rhythm; **return to trot distance after.**

10
MIN

Emphasize: When riding a grid down the centerline, it is best to change direction frequently to keep horses from becoming sore and one-sided. Students should **alternate turning left and right** as they return to the rail.

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Line students up near E or B. One at a time, each student trots forward, turns up centerline through the cones, trots over the poles in two-point position, and passes through the second set of cones before turning the opposite direction, stopping on the other side of the arena. Repeat as needed.

10
MIN

🐾 **Discuss:** Correct diagonals help horses maintain a balanced, rhythmic trot as they turn. **ASK: What shoulder is the outside shoulder as you turn toward the poles? As you turn away? Where is the best place to check and/or change your diagonal?**

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Riding over the grid with correct diagonals before and after the poles. If successful, add a third pole to the grid, then a fourth. If time allows and students are able to maintain a balanced, rhythmic trot, ride three final passes: one with left arm outstretched, one with right arm outstretched, and one with either arm behind back.

20
MIN

REVIEW

? What happens over the poles if you pinch with your knee, or brace on the stirrups?

? What can happen to our posting diagonal when we ride in two-point over the poles?

5
MIN

LESSON #8

TROT POLES

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 If students have a tendency to look down at the poles, station a **Traffic Conductor** (an assistant or yourself) at the end of the arena, on the departure side of the poles. The Traffic Conductor gives a **nonverbal hand signal to indicate a left or right turn**; she may also, on a whim, put one hand up in the air, at which point the student negotiating the poles must **call out how many fingers she has outstretched**. A failure to respond to the Traffic Conductor's prompts means a traffic ticket, causing the student to lose a turn or, depending on level of ability, take a turn without stirrups!
- 🐾 To **encourage regular breathing over the poles**, where many students hold their breath, ask them to choose a song they think matches the beat of their horse's trot. They then must **audibly hum or sing this song as they negotiate the poles**. Alternatively, they can count poles; this works particularly well with three poles where they can chant along with you "It's as easy as 1-2-3!" Encourage students to sink through their "springs" (hips, knees, ankles/heels) with every beat.
- 🐾 For an **additional one-handed challenge**, ask students to take their final pass over the poles with one hand on the reins and the other performing the movement of their choice. This could include placing the hand on head, hips, back or shoulder. It could also be a movement of some kind, such as a "big bird" wing, lasso, or throwing out the peace sign - limited only by your students' imagination!
- 🐾 Students with a secure position can test balance, bravery and straightness by **riding over the poles with their eyes closed**.

CROWD CONTROL

Once your **group** lessons have the pattern down (trot up centerline, over poles, change rein), **stagger starts** so that students no longer have to wait for the rider ahead to completely finish the exercise. This keeps the class flowing efficiently so you have time to add in the extra poles and the one-handed challenge. It does require an eye for spacing, however, so **discuss ahead of time how students will circle to open or close space** if they notice their gap shrinking or a rider ahead having trouble. This is a great opportunity to **discuss how the one horse length rule is not sufficient over fences**, and why!



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 As in **#7 On Course**, make sure that all horses used for this lesson are safe and steady over poles. **Horses that jump, rush or stumble over poles are not a good candidate for this lesson**. When teaching unfamiliar combinations, have a plan for how to make substitutions should a horse prove unsuitable.
- 🐾 **The rate of progression for students in this lesson will vary widely**. Some beginners may find it sufficiently challenging to maintain a trot over the poles, and will need the lesson broken into several chunks before they are able to work up to longer grids or balance exercises, to say nothing of keeping track of posting diagonals! Be prepared to modify your plan on the spot, and **ensure that students are confidently and consistently performing the first stage of the lesson before moving on to the second**. In a group setting, make sure *everyone* comes away with a sense of accomplishment!

LESSON #9

LONGE LESSONS

YELLOW LEVEL

AIRPLANES II

OBJECTIVE: Students will progress towards an independent seat and balanced position in the trot by practicing all three seats at the trot on the longe line, with arms outstretched.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ LONGE LINE AND WHIP

☐ OPTIONAL POLES TO DIVIDE ARENA WORKSPACE

PREP

Ensure arena has a clear workspace 20m or more in diameter, free of jump standards, extra poles or any other hazards. If teaching a group with assistance, you can use ground poles to divide arena into zones. Longe line and whip should be neatly folded and easily accessible.

INTRO

Ask students to warm up at the walk and trot on the rail. Remind them that before they were allowed to trot on their own, they practiced balancing independently of their hands by riding the posting trot with arms outstretched. **ASK: Why do you think this is important? Do you think you could ride a sitting or two-point trot this way, too?**

15
MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Two-point position at the trot, along the rail. Once they have achieved a consistent track and pace, ask students to place reins in one hand and stretch the other arm out to the side, reach behind back, and place on top of head. Repeat with the other hand.

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, longe riders for 5-10 minutes at the trot, on both the left and right rein. Ask students to ride first in the **posting trot with arms outstretched**, for at least one full lap of the longeing circle. After a walk break, repeat in **sitting trot**; students should hold the pommel with one hand until they are able to achieve a relaxed, slow trot with a following seat. Finally, have students trot in **two-point position**, working gradually toward being able to ride with arms outstretched. **ASK: If your arms are the wings of an airplane, would your airplane remain steady and in flight, without upsetting its passengers?**

30
MIN

Emphasize: Riding without hands, like riding without stirrups, is a **truth test**: it tells us if our alignment and balance are correct. It can also be mentally and physically tiring at first! Students should aim for **quality over quantity**, especially in two-point and sitting trot. It is better to ride three balanced strides with arms outstretched, and transition smoothly back to posting, than it is to ride thirty only to fall out of balance.

 Students waiting their turn to be longed should remain with an assistant at the other end of the arena. If space allows, you can set a **grid of poles** for students to ride **at the walk**, reviewing the previous lesson's exercises over trot poles and then practicing with both arms outstretched.

REVIEW

- ? What position do you find the most challenging to ride without hands? Why?
- ? We often use sitting trot to transition the horse to canter. How well do you think this works if you hang on the reins, or your hands bounce when you sit?

5
MIN

LESSON #9

AIRPLANES II

YELLOW LEVEL

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Even if your students are comfortable riding the posting trot without reins, they may find it challenging to sit the trot or hold their two-point with arms outstretched. They can easily lose confidence in their ability to perform the exercise, especially if they are bouncing out of their stirrups or falling onto the horse's neck! We suggest introducing the no-hand work by increments whenever possible, and reverting back to this process whenever necessary.

A possible progression in the two-point position:

1. Established a **balanced, comfortable two-point at the trot** with **both hands on the mane**
2. Stretch **inside arm out like airplane wing**
3. Place **inside hand behind back**
4. Return inside hand to the mane and **stretch outside arm to airplane wing position**
5. Perform **1-3 slow arm circles** with outside hand
6. Return outside hand to mane and **stretch inside arm to airplane wing position. Alternate between hands** in a steady rhythm, with one hand always returning to mane while the other reaches out.
7. Continue alternating arms, but **reach with new arm before the previous side returns to the mane**, so there are 1-2 beats with no hand contact between the left and right touch.
8. **Ride 3 strides with both arms outstretched** in airplane wing position and then return hands to mane. If this goes well, increase to 5 strides, 10 strides, half a circle, see how far they can go!

A fit rider may be able to do this all in a single trot, but you can incorporate as many walk breaks as needed.

Remember, a physically exhausted rider is an accident waiting to happen!

Unable to longe? This lesson can be a tricky one to teach solo for the simple reason that riding without hands, at this Level at least, usually means relinquishing control.

If you are teaching a **private** lesson, you can remain near the student yourself and offer steering support - a round pen or small arena can be particularly useful for this! If you are teaching a **group**, your best bet is to enlist capable assistants to help guide the horse and control pace at the trot. Otherwise, keep your trots short, remaining close to the horse so you can intervene if necessary. Utilize poles and cones to create a track for the horse wherever possible.



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Keep a sharp eye for position faults.** A naturally-balanced rider may be able to perform the airplane exercise by gripping with the knees or bracing against the stirrups, but these habits will come back to haunt them later!
- 🐾 **Reins should be knotted for safety** whenever performing no-hand work on the longe line, at any gait. Be particularly careful with long reins on ponies, which can create dangerous loops. The reins should always **be accessible to the rider**, but you might wish to secure the buckle end in a grab strap attached to the D-rings.
- 🐾 Yellow Level students sometimes lack the body control to effectively direct the horse without reins, but you can still lay the foundation for future no-rein riding by discussing how their **movement and position affects the horse**.

LESSON #10

FLATWORK SKILLS

YELLOW LEVEL

BARRELS OF FUN

OBJECTIVE: *Students will practice posting diagonals and improve ability to coordinate aids to negotiate turns at the trot by riding a cloverleaf barrel pattern.*



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- 3 BARRELS (55-GALLON DRUMS OR TRASH BINS)
- STOPWATCH OR WATCH/PHONE WITH STOPWATCH FUNCTION
- CONES TO MARK START/FINISH LINE

PREP

Place the three barrels in a traditional cloverleaf setup, with barrels placed near E, B and C to form a triangle. Set two cones 20 to 30 feet up the centerline from A to mark the start and finish.

INTRO

"By now, you've had a chance to practice trotting your horse through all kinds of turns and changes of direction. You know that tight turns make it difficult to stay in the trot - but if you are riding a timed pattern, such as a barrel race, the best way to save time is by riding efficient, balanced turns." **ASK: Who has seen a barrel race in action?**

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MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Aids for turning by practicing a half-circle reverse, then three-leaf clover pattern at the walk. Repeat pattern as needed until students can ride from memory.

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MIN

 **Review:** Posting trot on the correct diagonal, along the rail. Give students multiple opportunities to check and/or change the diagonal by mixing in a few strides of two-point position and sitting trot, maintaining each seat long enough to reset the diagonal.

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MIN

 **Discuss:** Although barrel racing is traditionally a Western sport, English riders at all levels can benefit from practicing gymkhana patterns. **ASK: Which direction does your horse turn more easily? What part of the cloverleaf do you think will be most challenging?**

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, send students through the cloverleaf at the trot. This first round is not timed, so turns may be generous in size. Once everyone has negotiated the pattern successfully, ride a second round against the clock. **No cantering allowed!** Establish protocol for horses that get excited or strong, such as a one-rein stop.

15
MIN

 **Discuss:** Remember that correct posting diagonals help the horse turn. **ASK: What diagonal should you be on as you trot around the first barrel? Where should you change? Do you need to sit a beat between barrels 2 and 3?**

15
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** If time allows, permit another untimed practice so students can ride the pattern with attention to detail and posting diagonals. Once successful, run a final timed round through the pattern, with a 2-second penalty for turns ridden on the incorrect diagonal.

REVIEW

- ? What is the role of your inside leg when you ride the turn? Your outside leg?
- ? How does changing posting diagonal before the second barrel help your horse?

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MIN

LESSON #10

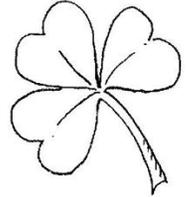
HorseSense Learning Levels

BARRELS OF FUN

YELLOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

-  **Award prizes** for **Fastest Round, Most Improved, Best Turns**, etc., depending on the age, maturity and competitive nature of your students. If you are teaching this lesson around Saint Patrick's Day, you should be able to find all kinds of shamrock/cloverleaf related prizes at your local dollar store or party supply store.
-  Add an additional challenge by asking students to **ride the entire pattern in two-point position**, or to **ride a full circle around each barrel** before turning to the next. (This is harder than it sounds, particularly for beginners at the trot!)
-  As a fun **group** exercise after the individual runs, introduce the **Three-Leaf Clover of Doom**. In this drill exercise, three riders at a time negotiate the barrels, each rider starting with a different barrel and riding a different pattern to ensure that no two riders attempt a barrel simultaneously. This requires excellent teamwork and control of both track and pace, so at this level, students should probably stick to the walk, making the challenge a great (if occasional confusing and hilarious!) cool-down.



GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

-  Space **group** lessons out so that riders waiting their turn are stationed safely on the rail, well away from the barrels. It is preferable to divide up riders and place them on both sides of the arena. A large, inattentive group loitering behind the start/finish line increases the likelihood of a collision or a horse running back to the herd.
-  Since **private** students don't have anyone to race against, they will need to compete against themselves. After the initial practice round, have your student ride **two consecutive timed rounds at the trot**, with the goal of beating their original time the second time around. You can wait until after the first timed round to explain the objective - every once in a rare while, you may encounter a student that deliberately rides slowly the first time around to ensure victory!



Watch out for competitive horses and ponies! Even a quiet school horse can be swept away in the excited energy of the "run home." Later on, you may be able to use this to your advantage to sneakily introduce a few strides of canter, but for now, students should prioritize control. Practice both one-rein stops and gentle pulley reins at the trot as needed.

FINAL NOTES

-  Correctly-ridden turns can beat a fast trot, but if your group is riding horses of widely varying speeds and stride lengths, you may wish to **handicap your faster students** by starting their time earlier or moving their barrels.
-  As in previous lessons, **be flexible about the rate of progress**, particularly when teaching a group lesson to students of mixed abilities. Some students will easily master the intricacies of the pattern and be ready to work with the posting diagonals right away; others may struggle just to keep their horses in a trot around all three barrels. Don't be afraid to **divide the lesson** into two or more and review skills, particularly when working with younger children or teaching lessons that run less than an hour.