



# HorseSense Learning Levels



## HORSEMANSHIP LESSON PLANS

RED LEVEL

### SET #1: From the Ground Up

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# INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to the Red Horsemanship Level!** Red Level is an introductory level, designed to give students a safe overview of basic mounted and unmounted skills. Whether you are teaching the Levels curriculum or just adapting a few lessons for your own system, we hope you find these lesson plans useful in your beginner riding program.

## ABOUT THESE LESSON PLANS

The lesson plans are divided into two separate sets, with ten lessons each:



-  **FROM THE GROUND UP**, covering **ground handling, safety drills** and **rider position**. This set includes four lessons teaching students to prepare a horse for a ride that can be taught individually or as the first half of a mounted lesson. **Mounting and dismounting, walk/halt transitions** and **basic steering** are introduced, with the goal of the student being able to safely ride off the leadline at the walk.
-  **READY TO TROT**, introducing elementary arena exercises including **ring figures, ground pole courses, two-point position**, and **riding at the walk without stirrups**. The emphasis of these lessons is on developing a consistent posting trot and the independence of aids necessary to ride on the rail in the trot.

These lessons can be taught consecutively, or combined and presented in **any order that works logically for your student and program**. Each plan contains a list of required equipment, a suggested presentation and breakdown of time, tips for adapting for both private students and large groups, and supplementary games or challenges. You may also wish to include the two **Sample Lessons** for Red Level, which contain a couple of our favorite exercises.

**Before you get started**, make sure you take a few minutes to **read through the following notes**, as well as the **Lesson Plan Overview** for all Horsemanship lesson plans.

**We hope that all Red Horsemanship participants come away from their initial lessons with a balanced seat, an appreciation for the horse/human relationship, an understanding of basic terminology, and most importantly, a desire to continue their equine education.**

## RESOURCES

We have a number of other materials used for teaching Red Horsemanship. You may wish to use them to supplement the lesson plans, or to design a camp curriculum geared toward this level of ability.

Available through the **HorseSense Learning Levels** website:

-  **Red Horsemanship Study Guide.** Geared for students of Red Level. Each objective is outlined in one or more fully illustrated pages. Includes a practice arena and a recommended reading list.
-  **Red Level Patterns & Maps.** Five equitation patterns, five ground pole courses, and five obstacle courses designed to test and reinforce skills in a fun way.
-  **Stuff Happens cards.** Each card presents a scenario for students to discuss (often based on true events!) We love these conversation starters as a means of encouraging students to think about *why* things go wrong with their horses, how accidents can be prevented, and how to determine the right course of action.
-  **Planners/trackers.** Download our lesson record template and achievement charts to keep track of your students' progress.
-  **Red Horsemanship Ribbons.** Want to award official Learning Levels ribbons to your hard-working students? We have them available in our **Shop**.

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/resource-center/resources-by-level/red-level-resources/>  
<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/shop/>

You can read more about Red Level, along with our big-picture thoughts on teaching horsemanship, on the **Boss Mare Blog**:

<https://horsesenselearninglevels.com/boss-mares-archives/>



There are many excellent **educational materials** available for instructors of beginner horsemanship; **we recommend our favorites in the Suggested Resources for Teaching Horsemanship.** A few books that we find particularly helpful for Red Level:

Wallace, Jane, 2002. **Teaching Children to Ride**

Dawson, Jan, 2003. **Teaching Safe Horsemanship**

Harris, Susan. 2012. **USPC Manual of Horsemanship: D Level. 2nd Ed.**



## OFF TO A GOOD START

**Red Level is a beginner level**, introducing an awareness of horse safety along with fundamental ground handling and basic riding skills. This Level is appropriate for all students age 8 and up, including returning riders who want to refresh their basics as well as those with no prior horse experience.

For very young children, we suggest starting with our Rainbow Level, which contains simple objectives and shorter, age-appropriate lessons.

Our **goals for Red Horsemanship students:**

- 🐾 They should understand **basic equine behavior** and follow all **barn safety rules**.
- 🐾 They should be able to **pick hooves, groom** and put on a **saddle and bridle with minimal assistance**. While they are just beginning to learn horsey vocabulary, they should use the **correct terminology** for grooming tools and tack.
- 🐾 They should be able to **mount, dismount** and **perform simple warm-up stretches independently**. Perfectly okay to use a mounting block – especially as most horses prefer them!
- 🐾 They should be *developing* a **secure, balanced position**. They may not be able to maintain it consistently (particularly in the trot), but they should understand **correct alignment** and the necessity of **quiet hands** and a strong **base of support**.
- 🐾 They should **maintain an appropriate rein length** (short enough to be effective but slightly longer/more forgiving than riding on a contact) and **adjust reins correctly** if needed.
- 🐾 They should be able to use **natural aids** (and a crop, if needed) to perform **transitions** and simple **ring figures**, including **large circles** and **changes of direction**.
- 🐾 They should be able to confidently perform basic **emergency drills**, including a **pulley rein, disengaging the horse's hindquarters** and an **emergency dismount**. They should understand which scenarios each method is appropriate for.
- 🐾 They should be able to hold a balanced **two-point position** and understand elementary jumping concepts, linking together **poles at the walk** with correct approaches and departures.
- 🐾 They should be comfortable in the trot and able to maintain a **steady posting rhythm**, with enough independence that they can guide their horse **along the rail**. No need to trot through more complicated turns or figures yet!

**Students should be able to demonstrate each skill consistently** in a lesson environment before earning a check mark. You may wish to recognize completion of the Level by holding a graduation ceremony, or by recognizing ribbon winners in your barn newsletter.



## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

**How quickly will a student be able to learn Red Level material? The answer is always, “It depends.”**

A motivated student with good body awareness and an attention to detail may be able to acquire all these skills within the first ten lessons. The average beginner may take a bit longer. Very small, young or timid children, who often find it difficult to post to the trot or steer the pony on their own, might need six months to a year before they can confidently demonstrate the requirements. It takes the time it takes!

**The two sets of lesson plans can be taught as a comprehensive twenty-week course.** They can also be **modified and combined to suit a student with a faster rate of progress.** Longeing sessions, for example, are easy to work into another lesson. Some lessons may need to be revisited, particularly if students find it difficult to master a specific skill.

If teaching a regular group lesson, you may wish, for logistical reasons and/or ease of lesson planning, to have all your students complete Levels at the same time. Accept that this may or may not happen! **Emphasize the need to be solid at one Level before moving onto the next,** and encourage slower-paced students to actively work to progress through further study or off-horse exercises. You may also suggest extra or private lessons as a means of helping them catch up.

Often we have group lessons that like to stay together due to in-class friendships and scheduling restraints, but one rider gets left behind. If this happens, **most lesson plans can be modified to accommodate a less-skilled rider without holding the others back** (e.g., the rider walks an exercise where others trot). If it does reach the point where the rider is preventing the others from moving forward, you may need to speak privately with the student and his/her family about moving to a different lesson slot. This is a good time for a friendly conversation with your whole group about how **everyone learns at their own pace,** and how **developing a strong foundation is more important than earning ribbons at any level.** (Parents often need to hear this, too!)



**All of the lessons presented here are written as standard one-hour lessons.**

Note that after the initial ground handling lesson, this is an hour of **mounted time,** which assumes that students begin the hour with horses tacked up and at the arena.

If your lessons are 30 to 45 minutes long, or you choose to devote part of the lesson to unmounted skills, you may need to **modify the amount of material presented in each lesson.** Lessons can be **split into two,** teaching a new skill one week and testing it with a game or pattern the next. You can also **condense** parts of the lesson or allow fewer repetitions. **(We do not, however, recommend glossing over any of these skills,** particularly if you want your students to move up to further Levels!)

## FROM THE GROUND UP

**Horseback riding lessons involve more than learning skills in the saddle.** All riders should have a basic understanding of how to handle their horses from the ground. This should eventually include **catching, leading and tying** as well as **grooming and tacking up**, unless you want to devote a large chunk of your time bringing in school horses from the pasture.

**You also need to ensure your student understands horse behavior and barn safety rules.** As experienced equestrians, we automatically know how to approach a horse and move around them, but the average beginner arrives knowing only the conventional wisdom, "Never go behind a horse!" This is true for adults as well as children.

## INCORPORATING GROUND SKILLS INTO A MOUNTED PROGRAM

Between learning safety rules, equine terminology and multi-step processes such as grooming and tacking up, **a Red Level student is absorbing a LOT of new information.** We expect that students at this level will be performing all of their ground handling **under direct supervision.**

This means that one way or another, this **unmounted instruction should fall into their paid lesson time.** If you give your student a one-hour lesson in the arena but also instruct them in grooming, tacking up and untacking, you have actually given them an additional half hour of your time. This is half an hour of unpaid work unless you choose to charge more for initial lessons. For some instructors, this may still be a reasonable investment in time, as it increases the likelihood that the student will retain interest. It is not, however, a sustainable practice for a larger lesson program, which depends on lesson slots running on time. You may have **assistants** or **working students** available to help beginners prepare their horses, but if your helpers are not covered by your insurance policy, there are liability risks, particularly if they are underage.

**Introducing ground skills as part of a lesson program can be done several different ways.**

You may choose to present them as an initial block of lessons; by dividing them into chunks and working them into your mounted sessions; or by reserving them to teach on a rainy day.



How you teach ground skills will depend on a few factors:

-  **How old are your students?** You may have to present ground lessons differently depending on maturity and attention span.
-  **How long are your lessons?** If you are teaching half-hour lessons, it can be more challenging to incorporate both unmounted and mounted instruction in a single session.
-  **Have you clearly explained to your students the importance of unmounted instruction?** Although teaching ground handling is considered standard practice for most riding schools, some clients may not be willing to pay for a lesson that does not involve riding.

## TEACHING GROUND HANDLING SKILLS, CONT.

**At HorseSense, Red Level students begin with one to four lessons devoted entirely to ground skills.**

Following lessons are divided as needed between unmounted and mounted instruction, with the student gradually spending more and more time in the saddle as they master grooming, leading and tacking up.

We also have a **rainy day policy** stating that if it is too rainy or cold to work safely outdoors, we will substitute an unmounted lesson covering ground skills in depth. (This is where the Levels program can be helpful in convincing parents to buy into unmounted instruction. **Since even the Horsemanship track includes some unmounted requirements**, we are able to explain that the skills we teach in our rainy day sessions are essential for students hoping to move up to the next Level.)

## HOW LONG WILL YOU NEED TO BE PRESENT?

Some students are quick studies when it comes to ground handling. Others will spend weeks if not months trying to make sense out of halters and bridles. You will know when **your student is ready to prepare their horse on their own when you feel like your presence is unnecessary**; when they can go through the routine of grooming and tacking up without asking you for help or needing correction.

This might include catching and tying the horse, but at this level, it also might not. **Sending an inexperienced student into a large pasture or pushy herd can be a big safety and liability issue**, especially without supervision. Very small and very young students may also struggle to put on a halter or to reach the safe height of a tie ring. For this reason, we *teach* Red Horsemanship students to catch their horses in both stall and pasture, but do not *require* it until Green Level. Once a student has demonstrated Green Level ground handling skills, they can begin arriving early and tacking up entirely on their own, meeting their instructor at the arena in time for their lesson.

We also recognize that our smallest riders may not be able to lift a saddle or bridle their horse independently. While careful use of a stool is allowed, **it is okay to help your little ones** with the lifting and carrying, as long as they are prepared to take over as soon as they are able!

**It is worth noting that in the Horsemanship Levels, most of the skills developed and tested are mounted skills, or related to riding in some way.**



While you will teach some terminology as part of these lessons (including pony parts, the names for grooming tools and parts of the saddle and bridle), students interested in pursuing a more thorough understanding of horses and horse management should pursue the **HorseSense Levels**, which **track and reward unmounted learning** separately.

## THE CARE AND KEEPING OF GROUND BUDDIES

**At HorseSense, we have been fortunate to have many of our students return as assistants, or as we call them, “Ground Buddies.”** Our Ground Buddy team is an invaluable part of summer camp programs and beginner groups, particularly when teaching Red Level skills.

**Ideally, a Ground Buddy will be an older student who genuinely enjoys helping new riders.** We ask our Ground Buddies to assist with **ground handling skills** such as catching, tying, grooming, and tacking up. They **escort young riders** to and from the arena, and **ensure that the horse is cared for** after the ride. They **assist with safety checks** and **supervise riders waiting their turn** in group lessons. While **leadlining**, Ground Buddies can do all of the steering as the student learns to find balance and rhythm, and gradually drift farther away as the rider becomes more independent. (You may need to offer your Ground Buddies high-calorie treats if you have a large beginner class learning to trot!)



**Remember that commercial liability insurance usually requires assistants to be of legal age before they are added to your policy. Minors should be permitted to help with lessons only under direct supervision - YOU are solely responsible for the student's welfare!**

**Not every experienced rider makes a good Ground Buddy.** Choose yours as carefully as you would hire an employee. Look for the following qualities:

- 🐾 Ground Buddies should be **personable and welcoming** with students of all ages. They should engage with students and establish themselves as supportive helpers.
- 🐾 They should be **positive and enthusiastic**, and generous with praise.
- 🐾 **They should thoroughly understand your teaching philosophy and be ready to enforce it.** They are **proactive, paying attention** to the lesson and their student. They must be ready to jump in and make a correction without waiting for your approval, especially if safety depends on it... and you must be able to trust their judgment!
- 🐾 They should be **consistent role models**, as younger riders WILL imitate them.

**While Ground Buddying is a technically a volunteer position, make sure yours feel appreciated.** We like to provide riding opportunities and special barn parties for Ground Buddies only.



## TO LONGE OR NOT TO LONGE

**In the right circumstances, the longe line can be one of the most powerful tools in an instructor's arsenal.** It allows your rider to focus on balance and position without the additional responsibility of guiding the horse – this is hugely important to beginners, who find it difficult to multitask and may be taken advantage of by an opportunistic horse! It is one of the best ways to help a rider develop the all-important independent seat, and a good environment to introduce new skills, such as posting the trot or changing diagonal.

**There are, however, several elements that must be in place to teach a successful longe lesson:**

-  **You must have a quiet, experienced equine partner,** preferably a horse with steady gaits who responds immediately to voice commands. A horse new to longeing or unable to remain balanced on a circle is NOT a candidate for teaching these lessons.
-  **You must have a quiet, enclosed space at least 20m in diameter,** with level footing, free from arena traffic. If you are sharing an arena with other riders, you may want to section off your longeing area with poles.
-  **You must have the ability to give your student and horse your undivided attention.** In order to utilize longeing in a group lesson setting, you will need an assistant and a careful plan for how to divide up the class so they receive an equal amount of practice.
-  **You must have excellent longeing skills yourself.** If you cannot safely and effectively handle a whip and line without looking down at them, you will need further practice yourself before you can add in the responsibility of a rider.

**If you decide against incorporating longeing as part of your beginner program, you can still teach all of the longe lessons suggested here,** with help from **competent, fit leadliners/Ground Buddies.** These assistants should remain very close or keep a hand on the horse whenever the student is asked to balance without reins or to relinquish control in some way. You may also be able to do the leading yourself, particularly if you are teaching a private lesson or have help from a qualified assistant.

**The goal is not to present the lesson exactly as written, but to help the student achieve the objective while preserving confidence and enjoyment.  
If you can do this, the lesson is a success for the student, the horse and you!**

**Wishing you and your students happiness and success,**

**Nikki and Dana Surrusco**  
**HorseSense Learning Levels, LLC.**  
**<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com>**

# LESSON # 1

## SAFETY AND HANDLING

RED LEVEL

### SAFETY FIRST

**OBJECTIVE:** Student should understand basic principles of working safely around horses, to include personal space, awareness of blind spots, and appropriate barn behavior.



#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- QUIET HORSE, SAFELY TIED OR CROSSTIED
- DUCT TAPE, PREFERABLY IN MULTIPLE COLORS
- SIDEWALK CHALK OR FLOUR

#### PREP

Tie and groom horse. Outline one side of horse with duct tape as shown on next page. Draw circle around horse two lengths in diameter, using chalk, flour or similar marker.

#### INTRO

Gather students a safe distance from horse. Discuss importance of barn safety rules, emphasizing that horses are **prey, not predators**, and that while they rarely hurt people on purpose, they will not look out for their handler if startled. **ASK: What do you think a prey animal would find frightening?**

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MIN

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 With students still positioned away from horse, introduce the concept of the **space bubble**. Have students stand uncomfortably close to each other, or move in on them yourself. **ASK: How do you feel? What if you knew you could die if you couldn't get away?** Remind students that people also have space bubbles and teach the "chicken wing," gently using elbows to move others away.

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MIN

**Emphasize:** Horses have much larger space bubbles. No rowdy behavior will be tolerated inside the circle. Students who are loud or disrespectful of the horse will be asked to leave the circle until they are calm and quiet!

 To enter the circle, we ask permission. We approach the horse towards the "friendly zone" (neck & shoulder, marked with tape). **ASK: What is the horse's body language telling you? What should you do if he pins his ears or turns away?** If we have made contact with the friendly zone and the horse accepts us, only then can we move to the "hands on" zones.

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Approaching horse and walking around, both behind and under neck. Run hands down legs and practice lifting hooves, with body in safe position (standing at hip/shoulder, bending at hips, facing rear of horse). Show correct way to rub & handle horse on face, belly. Reposition horse using pressure from hands on chest, shoulders, hips.

20  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Horses have **blind spots** behind AND in front. Never grab a horse suddenly in one of his "hands on" zones. Be careful of the flanks!

#### REVIEW

- ? How should we approach a horse, and why?
- ? How can we tell if our horse is frightened? Aggressive? How should we respond?
- ? What rules should we follow every time we enter a horse's personal space?

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MIN

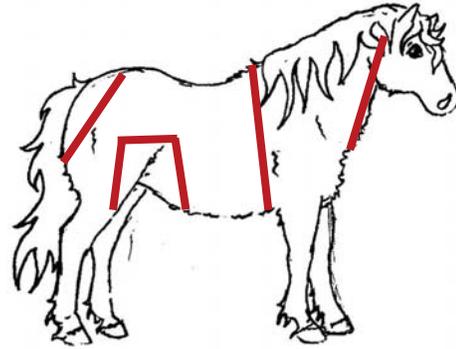
# LESSON # 1

## SAFETY FIRST

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 Students can **earn a prize or badge** for completing the following tasks correctly:
  - Approaching horse and making contact
  - Passing safely in front and behind horse
  - Lifting hooves
  - Asking horse to move hindquarters to side
- 🐾 Group lessons can play **equine charades** and **act out equine body language** (good for a rainy day AND a laugh!). You can also test this with a **Quizlet set** or similar matching game.



*Where is the friendly zone? Where are the danger zones?*

### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 In a large **group**, students must take turns approaching and moving around the horse. **Emphasize: horses are naturally claustrophobic.** Do they know what this means?
- 🐾 Divide students into pairs (any student left over pairs up with the instructor). **Designate one person as the horse and one as the handler.** Have the horse place one hand flat over the bridge of their nose to simulate binocular vision while the handler moves in a circle around them. **Where are their blind spots?** Have students take turns pretending to be the horse and handler as they practice moving around each other safely, maintaining contact.
- 🐾 Engage students who are waiting their turn by asking questions. **What are the horse's ears telling you? What can you think of that would spook a horse?**
- 🐾 A **private** lesson may allow additional time for hands-on practice. You can introduce the concept of human body language and its influence on the horse by practicing basic yielding exercises. Student can ask horse to move forehand and hindquarters and to step back using different pressure points. Teach **immediate release of pressure.**
- 🐾 For **horseless simulations**, have the student to pretend to be the horse while you act as handler. Then trade places to allow student to demonstrate their skills before moving on to the real horse.
- 🐾 Emphasize one-on-one interaction with the horse. **If horse and handler become a herd of two, who will be the leader?** How can we demonstrate confident leadership without breaking the horse's trust?

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Make sure your demonstration and practice **horse is VERY quiet and tolerant.** Some horses get tired of the game early on, especially if a large group is taking turns approaching, and may act grumpy or nip.
- 🐾 **Timid students may need you to walk with them**, especially when they first pass behind the horse. Keep an eye out for signs of genuine fear—but also watch out for an absence of fear, which can be dangerous!

# LESSON #2

SAFETY AND HANDLING

RED LEVEL

## CATCH AND RELEASE

**OBJECTIVE:** *Students will gain proficiency in approaching and haltering horse, leading horse safely from near side and tying with a quick-release knot.*



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- QUIET HORSE IN STALL OR PADDOCK
- HALTER AND LEAD ROPE
- TIE RING, PREFERABLY WITH BREAKAWAY DEVICE

### PREP

Turn horse loose in stall or paddock and securely close gate. It is best to practice in a smaller area at first, and let student work up to catching in pasture.

### INTRO

Gather students outside paddock or in barn aisle. Explain the benefits of being able to catch and prepare your own horse—including extra riding time gained by arriving early!

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MIN

### LESSON AND

### EXERCISES

 **Review:** Equine body language.  
**Emphasize:** Horses may interact differently with student when loose or in a herd.

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 **Demonstrate:** How to hold a halter and lead rope. Teach different methods of putting on a halter: by buckling crownpiece, by sliding over ears and fastening throatlatch, and/or by tying a rope halter. Teach correct grip on lead (no dangerous loops). Have student pretend to be the “pony” while you approach, halter and lead.

15  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Have students pair up and practice haltering and leading each other through simple transitions and turns. **ASK: why is it a good idea to keep the lead rope over your horse’s neck while you fasten the halter? Why shouldn’t you coil the end of your rope?**

 **Demonstrate:** How to tie a **quick-release knot**.  
**Emphasize:** Appropriate length of lead rope and what makes a safe tie post.

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MIN

 **PRACTICE:** have students pair up, or you hold the halter and act as the “pony” while they tie the knot. Repeat and assist as needed.

 **Demonstrate:** approaching, haltering, leading and tying an actual horse. Teach correct use of treat when catching. Demonstrate turning horse loose.  
**Emphasize:** Awareness of body language, safe leading through doorways and gates (watch out for human toes, horsey hips and other horses!).

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 **PRACTICE:** allow students to take turns catching, leading, tying and turning out the demonstration horse.

### REVIEW

- ? How should we safely approach a loose horse in the stall or pasture?
- ? Why should we never take a bucket or large treat into a pasture full of horses?
- ? How do you know if your horse has the right length of rope when tying?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #2

## CATCH AND RELEASE

RED LEVEL

### RABBIT HOLES

Many students find it difficult to learn a quick-release knot. While there are different methods of tying the knot, we recommend the method taught by the United States Pony Club, which is easy to untie but difficult for the horse to dislodge or jam. Plenty of hands-on practice is the best way to master the knot, but for younger students and those who need a memory device, you can try teaching the Rabbit Hole steps:

*The tail of the rope, or the part pulled through the tie ring, is the "rabbit."  
The other side, closest to the horse, is the "tree."*

The rabbit jumps up and runs in a circle around the tree.

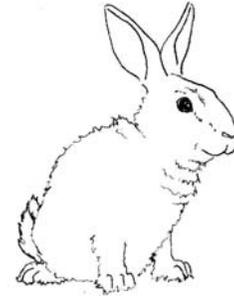
(Remember, trees can't jump!)

The rabbit sees his hole.

(Remember, rabbits have holes in the ground, not in trees!)

The rabbit goes down into his hole...

But he leaves his tail sticking out!



For more on teaching quick-release knots, see [Creative Ideas for Teaching HorseSense: Red Level](#)

### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 Divide **groups** into pairs (any student left over pairs up with the instructor). Designate one person as the horse and one as the handler. Have handlers practice approaching, "haltering" (placing the crownpiece over their partner's head), leading and tying. Reverse places before attempting on a real horse.
- 🐾 **Horseless handling** can also be a good rainy day activity, especially if combined with **#3 Follow Me, Friend**. Courses can be marked with cones, or by using chalk/flour on clear barn aisles.
- 🐾 Small groups can **take turns practicing on a single, tolerant horse**; otherwise, students should practice catching the horses they will ride in their lessons.
- 🐾 Have **private** students "**catch**" the instructor before testing out their skills on a real horse. If time allows, student may catch and release instructor and horse multiple times, developing confidence with repetition.
- 🐾 **Review concept of leadership** when private students are interacting with the horse. If student is able to halter and tie easily, use the extra time to combine this lesson with **#3 Follow Me, Friend**.
- 🐾 For group or private lessons, **prizes may be awarded** for completion of each task. Award points for each station: haltering, leading through gate, tying quick-release knot, turning horse out safely.

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Students are often thrown off by **halters that don't look exactly the same** as their practice halter. It is a good idea to **have several on hand**—breakaways, halters with and without throat clips, rope halters—and demonstrate how each works, even if you have your preferred equipment.
- 🐾 **If your students are very small or young, or timid handling the horses**, you will not want them catching horses unsupervised for quite some time. **At HorseSense, we teach catching and tying early on (often as a rainy day ground lesson) but do not require students to bring their horses in independently until Green Level.** You will need to be particularly careful if horses are out in large pastures or herds.

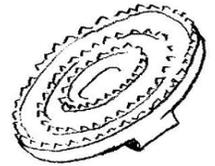
# LESSON #3

SAFETY AND HANDLING

RED LEVEL

## FOLLOW ME, FRIEND

**OBJECTIVE:** *Students will learn to identify and use grooming tools for a pre-ride grooming routine before practicing effective leadership by leading horse through a simple course in-hand.*



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- QUIET HORSE(S) IN STALL OR Paddock
- COMPLETE GROOMING KIT
- HALTER AND LEAD ROPE
- 4-6 CONES

### PREP

Set cones in arena or vacant enclosed paddock to mark turns and transition points. (See next page for sample diagram.) Assemble and inventory grooming kits for all horses used.

### INTRO

Once we can catch and tie our horses, we can groom them in preparation for our ride. **ASK:** **Why do you think the horse should be clean before we put on the saddle and bridle?** Grooming is also a good way for you and the horse to become friends. But if we really want the horse to respect and like us, we must be **confident leaders** as well.

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MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Approach, halter and tie horse(s), using a quick-release knot. Test all skills using a horseless simulation before catching horse.

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 **Demonstrate:** Pre-ride grooming routine on one side of the horse, to include **picking hooves, currycomb, dandy brush, and body brush** as needed on face/sensitive areas.

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MIN

**Emphasize:** Grooming for a ride should be focused on the horse's comfort, with special attention to areas in contact with tack. While students may enjoy brushing the mane and tail, a tangle-free tail is not essential, but mud clumps on the withers must be dealt with!

 **PRACTICE:** Have all students repeat grooming process on their own horses, or team up to groom the other side of the demonstration horse. **ASK: Are the horses enjoying their grooming? How can you tell?**

10  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Once horses are clean, they are ready to go to work. As students have already learned, good leading skills are necessary to get the horse from paddock to barn and from barn to arena—but they are also an excellent way to establish **communication and leadership** with the horse before getting in the saddle.

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time or single file, have students untie horses and practice maneuvers in hand, to include **walk/halt transitions, inside and outside turns**, and safely passing through gates. Review space bubbles: **minimum of one horse length between each horse**. If students are confident, finish with solo trip through course before turning horse out. **ASK: How can our body language encourage the horse to follow us willingly?**

20  
MIN

### REVIEW

- ? What four grooming tools do we use in a pre-ride grooming? In what order?
- ? What should we do if our horse won't stop? Invades our space? Dives for grass?
- ? What are some qualities of effective leadership? How can we practice this with our horse?

5  
MIN

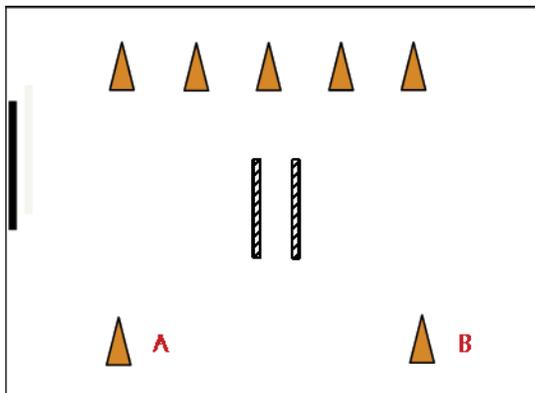
# LESSON #3

## FOLLOW ME, FRIEND

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Award a prize** to each student who completes the in-hand course successfully. You can also judge the pattern like a **showmanship class**, but know your audience; this can be too much pressure for young, timid or easily overwhelmed beginners!
- 🐾 If splitting into two lessons or teaching grooming on a rainy day, you can **teach the difference between a pre-ride grooming routine and a thorough grooming** (including manes and tails, eyes and nostrils, and other finishing touches). Take before and after photos of the horses, and award ribbons or prizes for transformative makeovers. (These cute ribbons are available from **Hodges Badge Company**.)



A SAMPLE IN-HAND COURSE:

1. **Slalom:** weave through cones
2. **Bridge:** change direction through chute of poles
3. **Stop and Go:** halt and stand for 5 seconds at cones A and B
4. **Over and Out:** turn down centerline, step over poles, proceed to gate

### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 Students in **groups** may each practice with their own horse, or take turns with a single horse. If a single horse is used, assign each student a role so that all can participate in the grooming. (One can pick hooves, another curries, and so forth.)
- 🐾 **Group** lessons must be carefully managed once horses are untied to **avoid spacing conflicts**. Techniques such as circling and passing to the inside (covered in **#10 Ring Rules**) can be introduced here, but if you are teaching a large group, you still may want an assistant (or three!) to help keep students and horses out of harm's way during the leading practice.
- 🐾 **Private students** can be involved in the grooming process from the beginning, as you can demonstrate and have them practice with each tool individually.

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 This lesson introduces two major skills: **grooming** and **effective leadership**. While we often combine them in Horsemanship lessons, because new students are by now eager to get in the saddle, they can also be taught and reviewed separately, especially in camp settings or when teaching in shorter blocks of time. Dividing the lesson in two sessions or parts can also be a good idea for young children or students who have encountered challenges with the previous work on the ground. **Use your best judgment and rearrange the material** as needed!
- 🐾 While you should generally **try not to overwhelm beginners with too much new terminology** in one lesson, grooming is an excellent time to begin introducing **parts of the horse**. Students are more likely to remember the location of the withers, shoulders, hindquarters, frogs etc. if they have cleaned them!
- 🐾 Although you have likely covered **safe leading technique** while teaching **#2 Catch and Release**, be prepared to review it thoroughly here, particularly the correct grip of the rope (with excess rope folded, not coiled!) and the position of the student relative to the horse's head and neck.

# LESSON #4

## SAFETY AND HANDLING

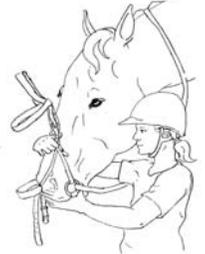
RED LEVEL

### SADDLE UP

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will gain proficiency in tacking up, to include pre-ride grooming, saddling, bridling, and applying any extra tack their horse may need (such as protective boots).

#### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- QUIET HORSE(S), SAFELY TIED OR CROSSTIED
- ALL TACK NEEDED: SADDLE, BRIDLE, PAD(S), GIRTH
- COMPLETE GROOMING KIT



#### PREP

Catch and tie horse(s). Assemble all tack; students may help with this if they are not yet familiar with location of equipment in the tack room.

#### INTRO

Gather students a safe distance from horse. Briefly discuss process of tacking up; make sure they know that **"tack" = all equipment used in riding.**

5  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Tacking up can initially be a confusing process, but with repetition and a consistent routine, they will soon be able to keep all of the straps and buckles straight!

#### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Grooming tools and basic grooming process. Pick hooves, curry and brush all horses. **ASK: Why is it important to groom before tacking up?**

10  
MIN

 **Demonstrate:** Putting on protective boots (if needed), saddle, and bridle, in that order. (Include martingale and/or breastplate only if lesson horses require them.) Introduce basic parts of the saddle and bridle as you go. **Reverse process to take off tack.** Reins should remain over the horse's head until bridle is off and halter is securely fastened.

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Horses should not stand unattended with bridles on, particularly if the reins are not secured. The bridle should be the last piece to go on, after the rider has applied all other tack, put on helmet, gathered crop/water bottle/etc. **For safety's sake, reins should go over the horse's head before removing halter,** and remain over the neck until rider is ready to leave barn.

 **PRACTICE:** Tacking up and untacking. If time allows, students may do this twice, or swap horses for the second go (particularly helpful if there are differences in tack). Assist only as necessary. If students are very young or small, you may need to lift the saddle or hold the crownpiece of the bridle.

30  
MIN

**Emphasize:** If horses are resistant to being tacked up, there is usually a cause! Students should **practice kind horsemanship** by setting the saddle down gently, tightening the girth gradually, and handling the bit with care.

#### REVIEW

- ? In what order should we put on the tack when tacking up? What about untacking?
- ? Why can it be dangerous to let the reins dangle near a horse's legs?
- ? What are three ways in which we can help make our horse comfortable with the tacking up process?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #4

# HorseSense Learning Levels

## SADDLE UP

## RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 To review grooming tools, open the lesson with a **Grab Bag** activity: students must reach inside pillowcase or similar sack and identify grooming tools by feel before pulling them out and arranging them in order of use.
- 🐾 If time allows, end lesson with a **safety scavenger hunt**. Tack up with **deliberate mistakes** (girth loose/uneven, saddle pad tight over withers, boots on upside down, straps out of keepers, etc.) and have students work together to identify your mistakes. You can also have them watch you tack up and give a “CODE RED” alert every time you do something wrong, such as putting girth on backwards, dropping reins on the ground, etc.
- 🐾 At this stage, it is **better to emphasize a job well done rather than a job done quickly**, so save the races for later—but you can award prizes to students for mastering small tasks such as putting on the bridle.



### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 **Group** lessons may practice on their own horses or work together on one horse (choose the most tolerant candidate!).
- 🐾 **Horse swaps** can be helpful if there are differences in tack: one horse has a different noseband, one wears protective boots, etc. If you are short on time, you can have them tack up one horse and then trade for the untacking.
- 🐾 **To keep groups sharing a horse engaged**, call one student at a time up to assist with demonstration. They can fasten saddle pad tabs, put on second boot, buckle noseband and/or throatlatch, etc.
- 🐾 **Private** students should work with the horse they will ride in lessons, if possible. If the horse wears very simple tack, you can introduce other pieces at the end of the lesson.
- 🐾 **Student can do their own catching and tying** as part of the lesson; especially helpful if they have found previous lessons challenging.
- 🐾 **Tack up and untack twice**: once with assistance, and then once without if student feels confident. Don't leave student entirely unattended while they practice, though—that will inevitably be the moment they drop the halter and set their horse loose!

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Encourage students from the very beginning to **think about the tacking up process from the horse's point of view**. Many behavioral problems such as nipping and “girthingness” can be avoided simply by practicing kindness and patience. Often this is the lesson where you will hear students first try out the phrase “My horse won't...” Sometimes the best response is to ask: **Why? What could you do differently to help your horse understand?**  
**As an example:** new students often hold the bridle incorrectly, with elbow in front of horse's eye instead of behind ears or under jaw. Wouldn't you raise your head if YOU had an elbow stuck in your eye?
- 🐾 You may choose to have students remove halters entirely or buckle them around the horse's neck (untied) while bridling, depending on your location, equipment and tie arrangement. There are valid arguments for and against each method, so **explain your reasoning behind your choice**. No matter what, **watch those reins like a hawk**—loose reins hanging around horse or human feet are an accident waiting to happen.

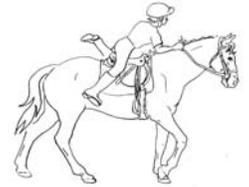
# LESSON #5

BASIC SKILLS

RED LEVEL

## MOUNTS AND DISMOUNTS

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will gain proficiency in correct mounting and dismounting technique, including pre-flight check, mounting from near side, and emergency dismount at halt and walk.



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- STURDY MOUNTING BLOCK
- ASSISTANTS OR "GROUND BUDDIES" TO HELP LEAD HORSES, IF NECESSARY
- ROLLED SOCKS, LETTERS OR RIBBONS FOR GAME

### PREP

Horses should be groomed and fully tacked up to ride. Alternatively, a portion of the lesson time may be devoted to reviewing ground skills such as leading, saddling and bridling.

### INTRO

"Before we ask the horse to go and whoa, we need to master getting on and off. **While some of the "rules" for mounting are tradition, most are designed to keep you safe.** No one wants to be dragged along by one foot in the stirrup!"

5  
MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Demonstrate:** Pre-flight check including **checking girth**, pulling down and adjusting **stirrups**, with **reins over the horse's head** (check for twists!). Demonstrate **mounting** from both the ground and mounting block, if applicable. **Dismount** with both feet out of stirrups and eyes forward, in correct position for an emergency dismount. **ASK: Can you think of a situation where you might have to bail off your horse quickly?**

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Reins need to be organized in the left hand, and short enough that they can actually be used to stop the horse if he tries to walk off mid-mount. We call this "**Holding your horses.**" Riders should hold mane and reins in the left hand and place the right hand on the **pommel** of the saddle. Pulling on the cantle rocks the saddle sideways and puts stress on the horse's spine!

 **PRACTICE:** Mounting, first from mounting block and then from ground **IF** rider is able to reach stirrup. Sometimes students need to improve flexibility in the hips first, especially if horse is tall. **Keep horse's comfort in mind!** Dismount at the halt and then at the walk if comfortable, with instructor leading the horse forward by bridle.

20  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Rider should pause with weight in left stirrup, checking the horse's body language, before gently easing weight into saddle. Mounting is essentially a first impression—landing heavily on the horse's back does not get them off to a good start!

 **PRACTICE:** Play game, such as **Old Sock**, **Musical Cones**, or **Rescue Race**, suitable for size of group. (See next page.) At this stage, **riders should remain on the leadline.**

20  
MIN

### REVIEW

- ? What should you always check before mounting your horse?
- ? On what side of the horse do we traditionally mount and dismount?
- ? Why is it important to take both feet out of the stirrups before dismounting?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #5

## MOUNTS AND DISMOUNTS

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

Here are some games that can be used to **practice mounts and dismounts**, even if the rider is still on the leadline:

**Old Sock/Pony Express:** Scatter four “**old socks**” (thick pairs rolled up and sewed shut) **or sealed envelopes** (weighted with cardboard) on ground near mounting block. Place an empty laundry basket on a 55-gallon barrel, or set a plastic mailbox on barrel or fence. Students must ride to each sock or envelope (with assistance as necessary), dismount, and hold horse with one hand as they retrieve the dropped item. Socks/envelopes can be placed in the basket/mailbox mounted or dismounted, but riders should remount before riding to their next target. (Note that while these games are **based on traditional IMGA mounted games**, they are modified here for a beginner audience.)

**Musical Cones:** Set a **line of cones** down the centerline of the arena, several horse lengths apart, with one less cone than riders in group. Have students walk around on the rail, with assistance if necessary. At the sound of a whistle, riders must dismount and lead their horse to claim a cone, standing with one foot on cone as in musical chairs.

**Rescue Race:** A camp favorite, this game works best with three riders, but can be modified to accommodate two or four. **All riders share one horse.** Begin with one bending pole and one dismounted student at the far end of the arena. Rider #1, the **Princess/Prince**, rides down the arena to the pole and dismounts. Rider #2, the **Bandit**, “steals” the pony, mounts and rides back to the other end. (Optionally, the Bandit can tie the princess to the pole with a breakable ribbon or party streamer.) They dismount and relinquish the pony to Rider #3, the **Hero**, who mounts, rides down to the bending pole, dismounts, and allows the Prince/Princess to mount and return to the start line. Mounting can involve assistance from a leg up or mounting block.



### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 If teaching mounts and dismounts to a **group** of new riders, without previous experience guiding the horse independently, you will need capable assistants to hold and lead horses for safety’s sake. Make sure your helpers are skilled at giving a leg up!
- 🐾 Emergency dismounts can take place at the sound of a code word or whistle. **Who can get their feet safely to the ground first?** You can also use a stopwatch to time emergency dismounts, encouraging students to shave off time on each successive try.
- 🐾 **Private** students often have the luxury of a few extra minutes to work within their lesson. If time allows, you may wish to practice mounting from both near and off sides.
- 🐾 Games such as Old Sock and Pony Express can be played with the **emphasis on achieving the goal** (retrieving the props and moving them to the correct location) rather than on competition. You can award a prize, or an **incentive** such as a leadline trot, for successful completion.

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 If you haven’t already introduced the concept of “**near**” and “**off**” side, this is the time to do it. Explain the historic cavalry origin of the left-side rule. If time allows and horses are desensitized to the prop, it can be fun to have them wear a plastic “sword” on left side to experience the reasoning for themselves. Emphasize that it is useful to practice mounting and dismounting on both sides, but not ALL horses are used to being mounted on the right.
- 🐾 For safety’s sake, **reins should remain over the horse’s head** during all exercises and games.

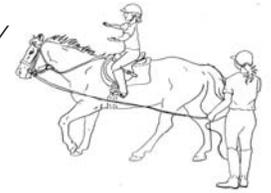
# LESSON #6

## LONGE LESSONS

RED LEVEL

## AIRPLANES

**OBJECTIVE:** *Students will learn to sit in a basic balanced position, with head/shoulder/hip/heel in alignment, developing the ability to balance without help from their hands.*



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ LONGE LINE OR WHIP

☐ OPTIONALLY, 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

"Our **position**, or the way we sit in the saddle, determines whether or not we will stay in balance with the horse's movement. A good position keeps us comfortable and keeps us safe—and it makes our horses much happier!"

5  
MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

🐾 **Review:** Mounting and dismounting technique by asking all riders to mount, dismount, mount, and perform an emergency dismount at the walk before mounting a final time.

5  
MIN

🐾 **Demonstrate:** Correct alignment in the saddle by standing on ground with knees bent and feet apart. Show what happens with feet in front of body (you fall backwards) or with weight perched forward (you topple over). Move from student to student, correcting position as necessary.

10  
MIN

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Test security of position by pulling downward on the reins ("**Tug Test**").

**Emphasize:** It is safer to be a little behind the balance point than it is in front. Introduce the concept of the **safety seat**, showing students how to sink into heels and bring shoulders back without bracing against stirrups and losing their deep seat.

🐾 **PRACTICE:** With all horses safely held or under close supervision, ask students to stretch arms out like airplane wings. At the halt, practice **touching poll/croup, toe touches, and stirrup stand**. Can they balance without relying on their hands?

10  
MIN

🐾 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, longe riders for 5-10 minutes at the walk, evaluating position and performing balancing exercises with arms outstretched. Riders may repeat all of the above as well as practice arm circles, twists, and raising one arm above head. Finish with a fun exercise such as swim strokes, disco hands, YMCA, etc. or a slow sitting trot.

25  
MIN

🐾 **Students waiting their turn to be longed** should be stationed with an assistant at the halt, practicing exercises such as the safety seat, Around the World, toe touches with and without stirrups, etc.

### REVIEW

? How can you tell if you are sitting in a basic balanced position?

? Why is important to keep your heels down and centered under your body?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #6

## AIRPLANES

RED LEVEL

**ASK:** can they keep their airplane wings smooth and steady, so the plane stays in the air and gives a safe ride to all its passengers?

**Emphasize:** hands are for communication, not for holding on. It is okay to grab mane or the pommel of the saddle to regain stability, but the goal is to ride independently in balance!



### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 The larger the **group**, the more efficient you'll have to be with each of your longeing sessions. Try to limit each rider to 2-3 minutes on each side, dividing your exercises up evenly. If your horses longe well in them, use a longeing cavesson or a snap-on attachment to prevent you from having to change equipment every time you change direction.
- 🐾 Make sure your **assistant** can hear you and is aware of the pace of the rotation. He/she should be comfortable working students in and out of their group, reviewing exercises and information smoothly as necessary.
- 🐾 This lesson is easily taught to **private** students, who will benefit from the additional time on the longe line. It is still best to wait to snap on the line until after working on position at the halt; this way you can move freely without being encumbered by the longeing equipment.



**If you have a shortage of space or suitable longeing horses**, this lesson can be taught with a single horse. Have students **practice maintaining alignment on the ground**, teaching them to root down through their heels while keeping knees bent. They will easily feel the effects of perching and the chair seat; use a pair of reins to test their stability, or ask them to sit into a chair and then get up without moving their feet. Set up a rotation and give each student 5-10 minutes in the saddle while the others continue to practice balance and body awareness exercises on the ground with an assistant. **You can also teach this without a horse on a rainy day!**

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Remember that **a longe lesson is only as good as the horse**, particularly when teaching beginners. If students are using their own horses or another mount unfamiliar to you, make sure they have been tested on the longe line **prior** to the lesson. Students may need to ride a different mount than their usual assignment, or share horses with another member of the group. This is not the time or place to be schooling a horse that won't stay out on the circle or jigs every time you start to talk.
- 🐾 Likewise, **your own longeing skills must be sharp** in order for you to teach a safe, productive lesson. If you don't think you are ready to conduct a longe lesson successfully, consider recruiting assistants to help you lead horses while students practice no-hand exercises. Refer to the **Red Horsemanship Introduction** for more on determining whether or not longeing is a reasonable option for you.

# LESSON #7

BASIC SKILLS

RED LEVEL

## STOPLIGHT

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will develop ability to ride correct, balanced transitions between the walk and the halt, using the classic game Red Light Green Light.



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ CONES TO MARK START/FINISH LINE

☐ OPTIONALLY, POLES TO DIVIDE LANES

### PREP

Set out cones to mark start/finish lines at opposite ends of the arena, leaving room for all riders to safely ride abreast from A to C. Poles may be used to divide lanes and prevent drifting ponies. If students are riding on leadline, make sure assistants understand their role in the lesson.

### INTRO

"When riding a horse independently, we communicate using what we call **aids**: our **seat** in the saddle, our **legs** against the horse, our **voice**, and our **hands** on the reins. We use all of our aids to ride **transitions**, or changes between the horse's gaits."

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MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

🐾 **Review:** Mounting and dismounting technique by asking all riders to mount, walk forward a few steps, dismount, and remount, with assistance if necessary.

10  
MIN

🐾 **Review:** Alignment of head, shoulder, hip, heel by practicing stirrup stand at the halt, without support from hands. **ASK: How can we tell if we are in a balanced position?**

🐾 **Demonstrate:** Correct grip on reins and placement of hands. If you have enough Ground Buddies to go around, allow students to walk a full lap of the arena while they practice keeping their hands quietly in position.

5  
MIN

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Using natural aids to ask the horse to move forward, walk to rail, and halt.

**Emphasize:** There should be a consistent order of operations used for every transition. Teach "**whisper, ask, shout**," or a similar system of applying phases of pressure. Rein aids should be applied last, so a progression for the halt might be **1) sit tall, 2) exhale/"whoa," 3) hips to hands, 4) hands resist, 5) release.**

10  
MIN

🐾 **PRACTICE:** Once students can transition between walk and halt with minimal assistance, begin calling out halts as traffic signals: "**Red light!**" means "**Halt**" and "**Green light!**" means "**Walk**." Allow three generous seconds for each transition, but remind students that **moving on a red light = a traffic ticket.**

15  
MIN

🐾 **PRACTICE:** After three consecutive "ticket-free" rounds, line students up at A end of arena, behind start line. Challenge them to a **walking race** to finish line at C—but you will be walking ahead, calling out traffic signals. If you turn around and catch them moving on a red light, they must take three steps back!

10  
MIN

### REVIEW

- ? What are the four natural aids? Which one should we always try to use last?
- ? What should we do if the horse doesn't halt right away?

5  
MIN

# LESSON #7

STOPLIGHT

RED LEVEL

## GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 Monitor spacing carefully when working with **group** lessons, particularly if you are teaching without assistance. If this is the first time your students have worked on the rail independently, you may want to teach **#8 Mountain Trail** and/or **#10 Ring Rules** first. You'll probably still have to coach them through maintaining their space, as students who are concentrating hard on their steering and transitions are likely not to pay attention to spacing until they have none!
- 🐾 **Private** students can still enjoy the final round of the game without other students to race. Explain that to win, they have to make it from A to C without a traffic ticket; you can allow a redo or two if necessary.

## GROUND BUDDIES

As your students begin to ride independently, competent assistants are worth their weight in gold. They function as a safety net, walking close enough to the horse that they can step in and assist with transitions, steering, correcting spacing, etc. while still giving the rider a chance to do it on their own first. This puts students at ease since it allows them to concentrate on learning skills one at a time. It also permits you to remain in the middle of the arena where you can observe the whole group, and keeps the class from getting derailed entirely if just one student has an issue with steering.

Of course, you'll need to choose and train your helpers wisely. See the **Red Horsemanship Introduction** for more on creating a team of excellent **Ground Buddies**.



**This lesson functions as a very specific introduction to a single skill: walk/halt transitions.** Without assistance, you will have a lot of material to cover just to get students walking on the rail safely: turning left and right, keeping horse on the rail, spacing, etc. In this case, we suggest teaching it after **#8 Mountain Trail** and **#10 Ring Rules**.

## FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 If you intend your beginners to carry **crops**, you will have to **determine the best moment to introduce the concept of using artificial aids** as a backup. The advantage is that carrying a stick can prevent students from developing nagging kicking habits, which are common with short-legged riders on quiet horses and can be hard to break. You will, however, need to allow plenty of time to familiarize students with the crop and to practice using it **correctly**. At HorseSense, we teach this lesson without the crop, focusing entirely on use of natural aids and using Ground Buddies if assistance is absolutely needed. The crop is added several lessons later, if needed, after students are consistently using natural aids and before beginning independent trot work.
- 🐾 **Watch carefully for any signs of rough riding** as you begin the game—this is another reason why students should practice on the rail before you line them up to race. Many students would never *intentionally* hurt the horse's mouth but thoughtlessly pull hard on the reins as competitive adrenaline kicks in. They may also skip quiet leg aids and go straight to the kick when they hear the words "Green light!" **Set ground rules** for this, such as issuing a traffic ticket to anyone who is caught applying leg or rein unfairly.

# LESSON #8

BASIC SKILLS

RED LEVEL

## MOUNTAIN TRAIL

**OBJECTIVE:** *Students will gain competence and confidence steering the horse at the walk, using natural aids correctly as they navigate a winding path with left and right turns.*

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ 5 TO 12 PAIRS OF CONES, ANY SIZE

☐ BARREL OR FOUR GROUND POLES



### PREP

Set cones out in pairs to create a narrow path on the centerline (3' to 6' wide) that zigzags to both left and right. Path should be easy to see and contain turns suitable to size of horses and ability of students. Set a barrel, or 4 poles laid out to create an inverted V, 20'-30' beyond the "trail."

### INTRO

"We've already learned to use our natural aids to ask a horse to stop and go. Now we can use them to master turning to the left and the right. **ASK: What are the four natural aids?** We'll be using our seat, leg and reins together to achieve power steering at the walk, along with a powerful extra tool: **focus.**"

5  
MIN

### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Practice transitions between the walk and the halt by playing a round of **Red Light Green Light** on the rail. Correct position and/or use of aids as necessary.

10  
MIN

 **Discuss:** Sequence of aids used to turn both to left and right. Students should always begin with **focus:** look where you want to go! This should be followed by **seat** (inside shoulder back/swivel at belly button), **leg** (inside leg at girth, outside leg helps "push"), and **rein** (for most beginners, an opening rein is better than a direct rein, which can have a braking effect.)

10  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Focused intention is hugely important and should be practiced early and often. **Students must look where they want to go, not where the horse wants to go or where they are afraid they will end up!**

 **PRACTICE:** Simple turns to left and right by riding single file through **changes of direction** through the middle of the arena, working up to a three-loop serpentine. At this point, Ground Buddies (if used) should gradually move away from the horse.

10  
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Gather students at the end of the arena farthest from barrel (the "top of the mountain"). Explain that the cones represent a perilous mountain trail. Each rider must ride their horse up the mountain, over the top and down the mountain—but if they step off the path or knock over a cone, they have fallen over the cliff! Have students navigate the trail one at a time, with applause after completion, allowing retries as necessary.

20  
MIN

**Emphasize:** Looking down at the cones never helps! Students should keep their eyes up and on the trail even if they feel something going wrong.

### REVIEW

- ? What happens if we use just our inside rein to turn? Why might this not work?
- ? Why is it so important to look ahead, and not down, when riding?

5  
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# LESSON #8

## MOUNTAIN TRAIL

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- Once students have demonstrated the ability to turn the horse on their own, using their aids consistently and fairly, you can turn the exercise into a **timed event**. Clock each rider with a stopwatch or smartphone, with time penalties for missed or upset cones and a prize for the fastest round. Remind students that **accuracy beats speed**, and they should only ride as fast as they can steer!
- If you have a large enough arena and enough cones, you can also have riders **race head to head** by creating two separate trails on either side of the arena, as well as two clearly marked “lanes” going over the top of the mountain. Start riders on opposite sides with instructions to travel up one trail and back down another. If they meet at the top of the mountain, they must **pass left shoulder to left shoulder**. (Position the horse and rider you think will be slower on the inside to prevent an unfair advantage!)



### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- Careful **organization of the arena** is important when teaching this lesson to large **groups**. As horses will naturally gravitate towards a herd, it is best to split up your waiting riders. If possible, divide them evenly and station them on either side of the mountain trail, facing it, so they can see all the action and cheer each other on. Emphasize that while waiting, they must maintain control of their reins and a horse-length space bubble around them at all times. Discuss what their response should be if their horse tries to walk off or socialize. This **establishes a protocol** you'll use for all group lessons in which riders practice an exercise individually.
- Private** students have the luxury of taking multiple trips up and down the mountain, since they don't have to wait on other riders to take their turn. Because of this, you may wish to start with a simple mountain trail, with shallow curves and generous spacing between cones, and tighten it after your student completes each trip successfully. You may also be able to set a **more challenging trail** than you would in a group setting, since you can help your student work through difficulties without other riders waiting. The satisfaction of navigating a tight, windy path is a good high note for your student to end on, and offsets the lack of competition.

### FINAL NOTES

- If you have been using **Ground Buddies** to lead and assist your beginner students, this is the lesson to begin weaning them away from the horse's head. They should be instructed to walk **outside** the mountain trail, gradually moving away until they are no longer directly influencing the horse. (Most patient old school horses will follow an unmounted leader in a Zen-like trance, regardless of the rider's cues!) They can step in and help only as necessary, if the horse spooks, grass dives, tunes out small legs, or overpowers the rider and pulls them back toward the herd. If you let students race, **watch out** for competitive Ground Buddies—sometimes their desire to help their charge win will tempt them into providing all the go and turning!

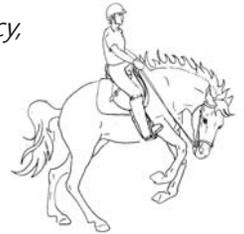
# LESSON #9

BASIC SKILLS

RED LEVEL

## SURVIVAL SKILLS

**OBJECTIVE:** Students should develop a strong, defensive position to be used in an emergency, demonstrating understanding of both how and why to apply a one-rein stop or a pulley rein.



### EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ❑ 2 TO 4 POLES, SET IN A CHUTE OR "BRIDGE"
- ❑ OPTIONAL WHISTLE

### PREP

Lay poles out to create a chute 2' to 3' wide. Make sure arena has a few clear pockets of space to safely spiral in; move jumps or arena equipment to create more room if necessary.

### INTRO

As students warm up at the walk, discuss the reality of working with horses: that although their mounts may seem quiet now, even the calmest horse can react suddenly if frightened.

**ASK: What do you think you should do if your horse takes off galloping? What do you think you should not do?**

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### LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** At the halt and walk, practice the **emergency dismount**. Ensure that technique is safe: both feet out of stirrups before initiating dismount, leg swings clear (no balancing on knees!) and student lands facing forward. **ASK: What are appropriate situations to use an emergency dismount? Why would this be a bad idea on a galloping horse?**

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 **Review:** At the halt and walk, practice the **safety seat**. Test the stability of each student's position with the **Tug Test**, holding the reins between the rider's hand and the bit and pulling sharply down. For contrast, repeat the test while students perch with tight knees and/or toes down, so they can feel the full effect of their position.

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 **Discuss:** Once you know you are going to stay aboard, the next priority is to regain control. But **a horse in flight mode may not respond to the usual aids**. Riders can slow the horse's feet by circling or disengaging the hindquarters—a **one-rein stop**—or by applying strong, intermittent pressure—a **pulley rein**. **ASK: How would you choose which technique to use?**

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 **PRACTICE:** Both stopping techniques, first at a halt, then at a walk. Once the basic technique for the pulley rein is mastered, students can practice maintaining a straight line by riding the horse onto the "bridge" (chute of poles) and using a gentle pulley to stop. If the horse turns off the bridge, they have fallen into the rushing river!

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**Emphasize:** In a controlled situation, apply minimal rein pressure to keep horses from becoming uncomfortable or fearful. Students should be **mindful of mouths** and save their intensity for a real emergency!

### REVIEW

- ? What is the very first thing you should do if your horse gets frightened?
- ? You are riding on a muddy, steep hill. Which emergency stop would you use? Why?
- ? When we are scared, we often scream or yell. Is this ever a good idea when riding?

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# LESSON #9

## SURVIVAL SKILLS

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

🐾 Create **survival stations** where students must demonstrate specific skills before they are allowed to move on. Students must complete all stations in order to earn a **badge or prize**. These stations might include:

- Safety seat—will it pass the **tug test**?
- Drop stirrups and pick up without looking down
- One-rein stop
- Pulley rein on bridge
- Emergency dismount



🐾 Group lessons can practice their emergency stops with a **whistle drill**, in which all riders track the same direction and stop immediately at the sound of your whistle. Make this an elimination game if you wish, but be careful to avoid rough riding, especially when practicing the pulley rein. You can also use music in place of the whistle—when the music stops, so must the horses. (A good choice of song might be the Bee Gee's "**Staying Alive!**")

### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

🐾 While this lesson works well with a large **group**—and should be part of beginner classes and summer camp programs—you will need to watch your **crowd control**. Students may wander and drift (particularly during the one-rein stop), putting them at risk for a collision as they concentrate on their new skills. Organize your arena into zones and make sure everyone understands where they are supposed to be during each exercise. Observant Ground Buddies can be a valuable asset here.

🐾 **Private** students have time for additional repetition, but to **avoid souring the horse**, change things up frequently. Once your student has the basic technique, intersperse emergency stops with ring figures or other flatwork.



**On a rainy day...** practice survival skills on the ground. Play horse ("buck" or pull on the reins as you see fit!) or pair up students. This allows them to practice motor skills without impacting the horse's mouth or back. If horses had their way, all students would learn these techniques on the ground first.

### FINAL NOTES

🐾 Practicing emergency drills is critical for the rider, as they need these skills in their muscle memory before something goes wrong. However, this can be a frustrating lesson for school horses. Continually **remind your students that the horses are not actually doing anything wrong** and traveling at slower speeds than they would in a true runaway situation; therefore, pressure can be applied more gently than it would in a real emergency. Take breaks as needed, and stop if you sense the horses are growing resentful—this lesson is supposed to be an introduction, and these are techniques you will review regularly for many weeks to come.

🐾 Know your audience. While timid riders arguably are the ones that need this lesson the most (as they are most likely to freeze in a crisis), you'll need to be careful not to scare them off entirely with the what-ifs. **Keep your tone light and playful**, and emphasize that **learning these skills will give students power and safety**.

# LESSON # 10

BASIC SKILLS

RED LEVEL

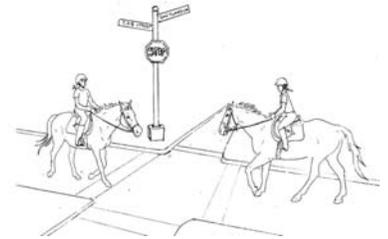
## RING RULES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will learn and practice basic traffic safety skills when riding in a group, such as passing and maintaining correct space between horses.

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:**

COLORED DUCT TAPE

OPTIONAL CONES



**PREP**

The less equipment in the arena, the better, but you may wish to create “lanes” at either end of the arena using cones. If left/right direction is an issue with your class, mark left shoulders (of horse, rider, or both!) with a strip of tape.

**INTRO**

“When you learn to drive a car, it isn’t enough to know how to operate the machine. You also need to know the rules of the road, since they keep both you and other drivers safe.” **ASK: What are some traffic rules that prevent cars from crashing? What could happen if our horses collide or get too close to each other?**

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**LESSON  
AND  
EXERCISES**

**Review:** One-rein stop on both sides, pulley rein, and emergency dismount at the halt and walk. **ASK: Do you think jumping off a runaway horse would be a good idea? When is bailing off the safest plan?**

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**Discuss: Who remembers the space bubble concept from their horse safety lessons?** This concept is particularly important when riding in a group. No rider wants to be caught in the crossfire when a horse defends his bubble.

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**Demonstrate:** With the group assembled at the halt, walk a circle around a stationary horse to show just how far away “one horse length” is. Safely pass, circle and cut across the arena on foot (or “invisible horse”).

**PRACTICE:** Send riders to rail with instructions to evaluate space between horses, positioning the slowest horse in front. One at a time, ask each student to pass the rider in front of them at the walk. The slowest can do this by cutting a corner if necessary.

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**Emphasize:** Passing should always be done to the inside, or riders may be trapped against the rail. **ASK: What do the words outside and inside mean when riding in an arena? How can you keep them straight?**

**Discuss:** Method of passing **left shoulder to left shoulder.**

**PRACTICE:** Divide group into two columns and pass head on at the walk, with left-handed, air-only high-fives, emphasizing clear communication between riders. If time and skills allow, finish with simple **two-column drill** or game of **Leapfrog.**

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**REVIEW**

- ? Which side is the inside when riding left? Should you pass on the inside or outside?
- ? Another rider trots straight toward you. What should you do?

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# LESSON #10

## RING RULES

RED LEVEL

### FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Leapfrog** is a popular passing game, revisited in Green Level and many HorseSense group lessons. (See **Green Horsemanship Sample #1**.) Divide riders into pairs and mark a designated spot on the rail as the start and finish line. Each pair takes one lap of the arena, with one rider going out to the rail and halting, and the other passing safely to the inside, leaving a horse length to the side as well as in front before returning to the rail. Riders alternate positions all the way around, with each correctly executed pass counting for one point. You can review halt/walk transitions by having each rider halt when they return to the rail, making the passing easier.
- 🐾 If your horses are tolerant, and riders are able to maintain a relatively straight line with the reins in one hand, you can play **Ribbon Relay**, where riders exchange a length (3'-4') of thick ribbon or soft rope as they pass head on, using a left-handed toss to give the end of the rope to the next rider. If you stagger your columns, this game can go on until the rope reaches the very end of the line.
- 🐾 If you choose to finish with a drill, **music can be a fun addition**. Choose something with a walk tempo and lyrics appropriate to the exercise (our beginner classes ride to "**Ants Go Marching**").

### A SAMPLE BEGINNER DRILL:

1. All riders track single file up centerline, from A to C.
2. At C, "odds" turn left on rail, "evens" turn right.
3. At A, columns meet and pass left shoulder to left shoulder.
4. Before H/M, all riders reverse using a half-circle, so leaders take rear position.
5. At A, columns meet and both turn down centerline, forming wide pairs.
6. At X, leaders halt. Remaining pairs fan out so all riders halt abreast.



### GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

**Even if your students pay for private lessons, you really need them to take this lesson with other riders in the arena.** Horseback riding, after all, rarely takes place in a vacuum; as soon as your students leave the leadline, they need to know how to navigate with other riders (including owners/boarders) working in the same space. Some possibilities:

- 🐾 You can **arrange for your private student to join a group lesson** (preferably another beginner class, or one where the primary pace is the walk), either as an addition or substitution to their regular scheduling.
- 🐾 You can **expand this into a mini-clinic**, practicing off the horse before mounting up. Consider making participation a prerequisite for in-house events such as barn parties, further clinics and schooling shows.
- 🐾 You can **recruit other riders** to join the arena, or provide horses for a few of your regular Ground Buddies.

Whatever you choose, make sure you discuss the need for group practice with private students up front!

### FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Remain mindful of the equine personalities present in this lesson**, and be ready to intervene if riders get too close and you see an altercation brewing. If you have a potential kicker, tie a red ribbon in its tail, as this lesson is a great opportunity to explain the meaning.