

HORSE HANDLING GUIDELINES

This is an outline for many of the skills necessary for horse handling. This outline uses methods that are considered to be safe and should be used when practicing horse handling.

APPROACHING THE HORSE

Approach the horse diagonally toward the head neck and shoulder with the halter opened in the far hand and the lead rope in the near hand. The halter and rope should be held in a manner that will insure that they will not become entangled or wrapped around the hands or arms of the handler.

Be certain that the horse knows you are approaching. Be cautious but not hesitant. Speak in a firm, positive voice. Ears will usually give away the horse's attitude. We recommend that a nylon halter with at least a good 3/8 inch rope lead and a heavy-duty bull snap be used.

HALTERING THE HORSE

Slip the lead rope over the neck, so that the horse can be restrained if needed. Facing the same direction as the horse, with open halter held in the left hand by the base of the crown piece, reach over the neck of the horse and grasp the end of the crown piece in the right hand. Move the left hand to hold the buckle side of the halter, now slip halter over the horse's nose without dragging it over the nose.

If the crown piece is thrown over from the far side and startles the horse, you are apt to be hit in the face by the horse's head. This continued method creates a very bad habit and a bruised body.

ADJUSTING THE HALTER

The halter should be brought up sufficiently on the horse's nose so that it won't slip off or rest low on horse's nose. It should be buckled in order to get the best possible fit with the halter being used.

LEADING THE HORSE

Right hand is placed 10-12 inches from the snap with the remainder of the lead rope in the left hand-held always in the same manner so that you will not become entangled.

The handler should walk in the mid-neck area. The handler has a 2-foot by 2-foot square of personal space that the horse is not to enter, this is the handler's safety zone. To move horse forward you should look ahead and not at horse. Step off in a positive manner with a slight forward tug on the lead rope. Never attempt to drag or continually pull, as this will only serve to make your horse resist.

Use your heavy snap on the lead rope as a useful weight in teaching your horse to rate himself to his handler's speed. To stop your horse, keep your hand in the same position on the rope and pull the lead rope toward the middle of your horse's chest. Say "whoa" calmly and firmly.

When turning, always push and turn the horse away from you, this means you will be turning to the right.

BACKING UP THE HORSE

Face your horse, making sure you are in the safety zone. Hold the lead rope with the right hand close to the horse's head and the excess rope gathered safely in the left hand.

Release the pressure to give slack in the rope, and then tug it with your right hand toward the horse's chest. The halter should press down against the horse's nose and make him want to move away.

Move toward your horse in a firm but positive manner. If he does not want to move you can take your left hand holding the excess rope and push on his chest to make sure he gets the message. It is acceptable to switch hand when backing up if your horse refuses to back up.

SADDLING THE HORSE-WESTERN

Blankets should be sufficient to cushion the horses back from the saddle stress. Blankets should be of a material that will breathe and not gall a horse's back. The blanket should be of an absorbent but washable material.

The blanket should be placed gently forward of the withers on the back and moved back into place, smoothing the hair underneath as this is done. Be sure that you have an even amount of blanket on each side. Blankets that slip out behind or slip under the saddle are the result of poor saddle blanket placement.

Now the saddle-the off stirrup may be hooked over the horn, the cinches should be laid over the top of the saddle, now place the saddle gently over the blankets on the horse's back. Move safely to the off side (never under the neck when the horse is tied, move close behind or at a sufficient distance) and take down the cinches and the stirrup. Releasing these from the near side to drop might cause the horse to jump toward you stepping on a foot or knocking you down. You are also on the off side to be sure the cinches are straight and will not interfere with the stirrup or fender when pulled under the horse. Check blankets and pads on off side, also saddle strings.

Return correctly to the near side and if your cinches look as though they are in the proper area and the pads are properly positioned-then settle the saddle. This is done immediately before cinching by grasping the saddle horn or pommel area with the right hand and gently moving the saddle slightly from side to side and it will settle into place with the pads. At the same time, use the left hand on the blanket and pads at the immediate wither area and pull up slightly on them. (Tenting the pad) This allows for better air circulation but most importantly it stops the blanket from pulling down severely in a pressure strip across the front causing eventual bruising of the withers.

Reach under and bring the front cinch to the latigo. The horse should be cinched snugly to avoid the saddle moving but not tight while still tied to the hitch rail. Next, secure the flank cinch only snugly. A hand should fit under it easily. If the horse takes a deep breath, it should not be binding. Be sure that the back cinch is attached properly to the front cinch. A flank cinch that rides back too far can cause a horse to buck. A tight flank cinch can also cause a horse to buck if he is not used to it being tightened. The flank cinch is correctly used to keep the saddle from pulling down on the withers when roping. The flank cinch should never hang so loose that a hoof could become caught in it.

This is the time that a breast collar would be attached if one is being used. Attach off side first, then near side, then fasten to front cinch. Remember that breast collars have a purpose, to keep the saddle from slipping back on some horses.

SADDLING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Place the pad on the back forward of the withers and move it back into place, smoothing the hair as you do so. Run the stirrup irons up on the stirrup leathers to keep them out of the way. Your girth may be attached on the off side, if so, place it up and over the saddle seat. Place the saddle in correct position on the pad. On the near side, slip the billet, closest to the front of the horse through the blanket keeper strap, then pass safely to the off side, and secure the pad to the closest front billet. Take down the girth from over the saddle and attach it to the two outside billets. Be sure that if your girth has elastic ends, that these ends are used on the near side. Moving back safely to the near side, reach under and bring the girth to be buckled, making sure that the position of the saddle is correct. Only snug the girth; do not tighten when the horse is tied to the hitch rail.

BRIDLING THE HORSE-WESTERN

Place the bridle over left arm. Untie the horse and place lead around neck, then unbuckle the halter and slip it off the head and move it back securing it around the horse's neck. These are at easy access if the horse tries to move away.

Facing the same general direction as the horse, take the crown piece of the bridle in the right hand and bit in left hand. Cradle the bit in center fingers with thumb and little finger being used to hold back the curb strap or chain. Hold bridle crown piece at forehead with right hand and left hand with bit just at horse's mouth, thumb and little finger holding the curb strap back behind the lower lip. DO NOT bump the horse in the teeth with the bit- this can cause a horse to resist bridling. If necessary, now that the curb chain is behind the lip, use the thumb to insert on the left side of the mouth in toward the intradental space, using pressure of the lip on the gum and the horse will generally open its mouth so that the bit can be inserted by pulling up on the crown piece with the right hand.

Put right ear under the crown piece first and then the left ear. Adjust the bridle properly-the bit should rest well up in the corners of the mouth with a little wrinkle at the corners, the curb strap should pull tight only when the shanks of the bit are pulled back a couple of inches. The throat latch should be buckled so that the horse can flex at the poll and not be restricted in his breathing.

BRIDLING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Unbuckle the cavesson on the bridle. Place the bridle over the left arm. Untie the horse and place lead around neck, then unbuckle the halter and lift it off the head then moving it back securing it around the horse's neck. Place lead rope over horse's neck. These are at easy access if the horse tries to move away. Facing the same general direction as the horse, put the reins over the head onto the neck, then take the crown piece of bridle in right hand and bit in left hand. Cradle the bit in center fingers. Hold bridle crown piece at forehead with right hand and left hand with bit just at horse's mouth. DO NOT bump the horse in the teeth with the bit-this can cause a horse to resist bridling. If necessary, use the thumb to insert on the left side of the mouth in toward the intradental space, using pressure of the lip on the gum and the horse will generally open its mouth so the bit can be inserted by pulling up on the crown piece with the right hand.

Put right ear under the crown piece first and then the left ear. Adjust the bridle properly-the bit should rest well up in the corners of the mouth with a little wrinkle at the corners. If a bit with a curb chain is being used, this should now be twisted so that the curb chain is properly flat and then secured. Two fingers under a curb chain are considered a good rule of thumb measurement. Next the cavesson should be buckled, snugly only, not restrictively tight. Then the throat latch should be buckled so that the horse can flex at the poll and not be restricted in his breathing.

PREPARING TO MOUNT-WESTERN or ENGLISH

Now that the horse is saddled and bridled properly, unbuckle the halter and hang it up until your return.

Now the horse should be led a short distance and preferably turned then the cinch/girth should be properly tightened prior to mounting. English riders should move to the far side, pull down right iron, then back to the near side, and pull down the left iron-this is done immediately before mounting.

MOUNTING THE HORSE-WESTERN

Facing the rear or general neck or wither area, grasp the reins in the left hand, adjusted evenly and at a length that will allow you to control the horse if it attempts to move. With the left hand holding the reins, grasp the mane or neck. Use the right hand to turn the stirrup if necessary and place the left foot in this stirrup. Placing the right hand on the horn or pommel, bounce one, two or three times swinging up gracefully, pivoting on your left knee. DO NOT jab the horse in the side with the toe of your boot and DO NOT hit the hind quarters with the right leg and foot. Secure your right foot in the stirrup and settle into the saddle easily and quietly. DO NOT "PLOP" INTO THE SADDLE. Moving your right hand from the saddle horn and releasing the neck or mane with the left, you should have the reins held so they can be easily adjusted to begin riding.

MOUNTING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Facing the rear, grasp the reins properly in the left hand, adjusted evenly at a length that will allow you to control the horse if it attempts to move. With the left hand holding the reins grasp the neck. Use the right hand to hold stirrup leather and turn the stirrup so that the left foot can be inserted to the ball of the foot. Grasp the pommel with the right hand and bounce two or three times and swing up gracefully. The left knee is used as a pivot and your position while mounting is always one that can maintain control of the horse. DO NOT jab the horse in the side with the toe of your boot and DO NOT hit his hindquarters with the right leg or foot. Settle into the saddle easily and quietly and practice securing your right foot in the stirrup with ease. DO NOT "PLOP" INTO THE SADDLE. Moving both hands to a riding position, adjust the reins properly and you are ready to ride.

RIDING AT THE WALK, JOG/TROT, LOPE/CANTER AND BACKING

These should all be done with the proper use of aids. Proper riding position allows for the quiet use of legs, feet, and hands. Developing good hands that can have proper light contact with your horse's mouth, strong legs that can squeeze and signal your horse properly, staying quiet and close to you horse, not swinging about or pumping as you ride. Riding in the proper position puts you in the proper point of balance with your horse. Four basic aids to cue your horse are; voice, hands, legs and shifting of your weight.

DISMOUNTING THE HORSE-WESTERN

Adjust the reins as you did in mounting and place the left hand with the reins on the horse's neck. With the right hand on the horn, remove the right foot from the stirrup again bringing it across the hindquarters without hitting the horse and swing quietly to the ground.

DISMOUNTING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Adjust the reins in the left hand as you did in mounting and place the left hand with the reins on the horse's neck. Slip right foot from the stirrup and swing right leg over, again being sure not to hit the hindquarters with the foot or leg. As your body is swinging to the left side, place the right hand on the pommel of the saddle and using left and right hands and arms equally, support your body totally on your arms and remove the left foot from the stirrup also. With both feet free, do not kick, push away or lie over, but drop gently and quietly straight to the ground. Slip left arm through the left rein and immediately put iron up on stirrup leather and run leather down through iron. Pass correctly to the off side, hold the right rein and do the same with the right iron and stirrup leather. Returning to the near side, you can either take the reins over the horse's head or lead by grasping both reins eight to ten inches behind the bit.

UNBRIDLING THE HORSE-WESTERN

Leading the horse to the hitch rail, place the halter around the horse's neck with the lead rope over the neck. Unbuckle the throat latch and with the right hand remove the crown piece over the right and then the left ear and drop it slowly down, allowing the horse to drop bit out of mouth. NEVER try to pull the bit out of horse's mouth. If necessary, use your thumb again to ask the horse to open his mouth, thus releasing the bit. Halter the horse as previously explained and tie securely with a quick release knot.

UNBRIDLING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Leading the horse to the hitch rail, slide the reins forward to the area behind the crown piece of bridle. Buckle the halter around the horse's neck with the lead rope over the neck. Unbuckle the throat latch, next unbuckle the cavesson and finally unhook the curb chain if the bit uses one. With the right hand take the reins and crown piece and slip first over the right ear and then the left ear and drop it slowly down, allowing the horse to drop the bit. It will take some horses several seconds to release the bit from their mouth-NEVER try to pull it out. If necessary, use your thumb again to ask the horse to open its mouth, thus releasing the bit. Buckle the cavesson before hanging the bridle up-this will help it to maintain a better shape. Halter the horse as previously explained and tie securely with a quick release knot.

UNSADDLING THE HORSE-WESTERN

If used, a breast collar should be removed first. If equipped with a flank cinch, this should be undone before the front cinch. The latigo should be placed through the "D" ring in a flat manner in order not to drag and store properly. Moving safely to the off side of the horse the cinches should be placed over the saddle in a flat, unwrinkled manner so that they will dry properly. Wrinkled cinches of any type make cinch sores in the future.

Remove the saddle and pads together, holding the pads under the gullet of the saddle with the left hand and the saddle skirt with the right hand. This will allow you to slip the saddle cantle first, onto a saddle rack and then place the blanket and pads over the saddle. This will help to keep the dust off your saddle, but more importantly will keep your pads in good contoured, unwrinkled condition. If the top pads are placed over the middle in the same position that they were under the saddle and the bottom sweat pad is reversed and laid over the top, it can dry well and you will be reminded each time you saddle if your pad needs washing.

Without a saddle rack available, place the saddle on the ground, fork first and place the pads in the same manner over the back skirts and the cantle as the saddle stands up.

UNSADDLING THE HORSE-ENGLISH

Unbuckle the girth on the near side and slip the pad holder off the billet. Move to the far side and unbuckle the girth and slip the pad holder off the billet here also. Place the girth inside up across the saddle, slipping it down through the slipped up irons on each side. Return to the near side and remove the saddle and pad. When the saddle is placed on the saddle rack, place the pad bottom side up over the saddle. This is some protection from dust but most importantly it allows the pad to dry thoroughly and serves to remind you when your pad needs washing.

Without a saddle rack available, place the saddle on the ground first and place the pad in the same manner over the back cantle as the saddle stands up.

TURNING THE HORSE LOOSE

Always remember that after a ride and you unsaddle, your horse may want to roll, eat, or quickly move away. Always turn your back to the gate or door before removing the halter. Bad habits are acquired quickly. A horse that is allowed to run off when unhaltered may quickly learn to kick as he moves away. Unhalter your horse to turn him loose-it is equally important to remember to be safe and quiet so that your horse moves off quietly and you are between your horse and the gate or door.