

Appendix

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Riding Disciplines and Breeds

The United States Equestrian Federation www.usef.org is an excellent place to start. It has references to many of the best known disciplines, including dressage, driving, eventing, jumping, reining, and vaulting, to name just a few. You can look at photos and read about the rules and regulations governing each discipline in competition, both in the United States and internationally.

There is also a section on recognized breeds, including Morgans, Friesians, Saddlebreds, Arabians, and Shetlands. There are photos and descriptions of each breed, and an address to e-mail if you have further questions.

In addition to the USEF website, simply entering the name of the breed or discipline in a search engine will bring you a fund of information, including local breeders and dealers. I entered the names of several of the more obscure breeds and found plenty of material on all of them.

Naturally, not everyone you find online is knowledgeable, dependable, and honest, so if you are seriously looking for a horse, work with a professional whom you trust.

Dismounting Games

Dismounting can be one of the moves in Follow the Leader or Simon Says. The only difference in those two games is that a student makes the decisions in Follow the Leader, whereas the instructor makes the decisions in Simon Says. So Follow the Leader would be used in a more advanced lesson.

Scrambles is a game that is devoted entirely to dismounting and mounting. It is usually played bareback (with or without a pad) but can also be played in saddles. Each horse is shared by two riders, one mounted and the other leading. Each pair of riders should be about the same size. If you have riders of different levels, you would want to pair one of each level. It's best played with about four teams, so it is good for gymkhanas. If you have a program where several different lessons are going on, you can combine forces at the end of the lesson.

The horses are led left hand around in a circle about 60 feet (18.3 m) in diameter, marked out with 4 cones to maintain the size (people like to cheat), and one more cone in the center. The instructor directs the play either by starting and stopping music (the best way) or blowing a

whistle or some other command. At the signal, the rider on the horse dismounts, goes as fast as possible to the center cone and touches it, and then must *walk* back to his horse. (Many horses would be frightened if the rider ran at them, which could be dangerous.) Meanwhile, the person who was leading places herself on the horse's left side in a position suitable for getting a leg on. The former rider now gives the former leader a leg on. When she is safely on she raises both arms in the air.

The team with the last rider to do so is the loser, but continues to play for the practice and receives some penalty such as reduced points or the first letter of a word which when completed eliminates them. The final winner can be the team with the fewest negative points at the end of a specified time or the last team to be eliminated.

The game continues with the new rider executing the dismount. By reversing direction, the riders can begin to learn to dismount from both sides. They should reverse direction every *other* time (so that each rider has to dismount from both sides). However, unless they are very experienced the mount should always be done from the left. During the remount, the person on the ground *must* put her arm through the rein so that she has some control if the horse moves. If she doesn't, the rider must dismount and remount, thus effectively making that team the loser.

A variation on Scrambles can be played with one or two beginning riders and experienced leaders. If the ring is marked with letters you can use them, or you can put markers such as towels in a couple of different places. When the signal is given, the riders dismount and race to their nearest marker, then walk back to the horse where the leader assists them to mount. You can start them with the horses standing still if they are just learning the dismount.

The Grounding Strap

Until recently grounding straps could not be purchased at a tack store, but we have decided to remedy this. Grounding straps will be available through my website <http://whatyourhorsewants.com>. Bareback pads designed for this method of learning to ride will also be on the site.

If you like, you may create your own. There are a number of different solutions, depending on the materials you have available and your needs. Whichever solution you choose for making a grounding strap, you must first consider the horse's comfort. If the grounding strap interferes with his functioning, it will cause problems for both of you.

Making Your Own Grounding Strap

You can make a simple grounding strap using a fairly thick, soft cotton lead rope—not so thick that it is awkward to hold, but as thick as possible. You can make a non-slip knot by tying one overhand knot in the end of the rope and another one along the rope as far as you need to get the length you want. Leave the second knot loose and put the first one through it, then tighten. To adjust the length, move the second knot. Tie off the loose (snap) end around the neck rope or, if it is long enough, snap it to the cavesson so it doesn't dangle around the horse's legs. You can also use an ordinary horse leg bandage instead of a lead rope, but the knots are more likely to jam.

You can use a long English stirrup leather, or two buckled together if the horse's neck is heavy. This is much easier to adjust if different people use the horse or if you frequently go from riding bareback to riding in the saddle. A fuzzy placed around the bottom half of it will make it more comfortable for the horse.

Whichever type of device you use, you have to be careful that the loop doesn't slide down the horse's neck if he drops his head—especially if he drops it to graze and could put his foot through the loop. A cord that fastens the grounding strap to the saddle or surcingle is a good safety precaution.

If you ride with a martingale, the yoke (the loop that goes around the horse's neck) can be used as a grounding strap for short periods, but it is too narrow to use constantly because it would cut into the horse's neck.

The problem with using a simple loop device is that all the pressure is on the horse's neck and shoulders. I prefer to use a grounding strap that also attaches to the girth so that some of the pull is concentrated there and doesn't interfere with the horse at all.

Adapting a Breastplate for Use as a Grounding Strap

If you ride with a hunting breastplate you can turn it into a grounding strap by adding an extra strap across the withers. You can adapt the breastplate to bareback by making extenders to the straps that fasten to the D-rings of the saddle so that they will reach around the bareback surcingle. You will also need to put nice thick fuzzies around the long straps that run down the horse's shoulder so that the straps don't cut into him.

The chest strap that runs down to the girth must be adjusted so that it takes the pull. For some reason this strap is nearly always very long, so it may need extra holes added or to be professionally shortened.

The difficulty with using a hunting breastplate is that even with padding it is rather narrow on the horse's shoulders. More important, the part that goes across the top of the horse's neck usually sits quite close to his withers, which means that it tends to be under your hands when you are in half seat, rather than out in front of them, which defeats the purpose. More about half-seat neck straps later.

My personal preference, which I used in my school for many years, is a grounding strap made with a padded nylon Western breastplate. A Western breastplate is Y-shaped, with a short branch going to each side of the shoulders and one to the girth. It needs some adapting in order to be usable with either an English saddle or a bareback pad. You can either do the adapting yourself or have a tack shop do it for you. Each branch of the Y consists of a thick padded piece with an adjustable piece at the end for attaching to the saddle. All the adjustable pieces are too short for English or bareback tack and need to be replaced with longer ones. In addition you need two pieces to go over the top of the horse's neck: one to hold the breastplate in place so it doesn't slip down over the horse's shoulder points, and one to function as the actual grounding strap to hold on to.

If you like making your own equipment you can buy long braided nylon reins and Conway buckles and use them to make a very serviceable grounding strap out of a Western breastplate, as described above. It will not win any beauty contests, but it will be comfortable for the horse and a great comfort to you as you learn.

You can also use an English jumping breastplate, adding a chest strap made of nylon and Conway buckles, and over-neck and grounding straps as above.

Fitting the Grounding Strap

Whatever the type of grounding strap you choose, correct fit and adjustment to both horse and rider are essential if it is to do its job. You must be careful that it doesn't fall so low that it gets in the way of the horse's shoulder points, nor so high that it digs into his windpipe. If you notice a change in his way of going when you're using the grounding strap check the fit first.

From the rider's point of view, the grounding strap should be adjusted so that whether you are sitting or standing with your hands pulling lightly on the grounding strap, your elbows hang just slightly in front of your shoulders. For bareback work this means the hand part of the strap will come about to the center of the withers; if you are standing in the stirrups it will be forward of the withers. For most people this means that you need a different attachment for half-seat work. A specially designed half-seat grounding strap, which can be used with or without the regular grounding strap, is available at <http://whatyourhorsewants.com>. Alternatively, you can use a rope grounding strap as described previously, adjusting it higher on the horse's neck so that it supports you when you are standing in the stirrups.

Saddle Fit and Stirrup Position

Although this information is useful for all disciplines, especially for those having trouble finding balance during posting or half-seat work, some of it is primarily about English hunt seat or dressage saddles, as Western and saddle seat saddles usually have stirrup adjustment devices. Search the internet for information about these saddles.

Ideally, you should not even consider the saddle until you have developed a correct position on the bareback pad. This is because the bareback pad does not force your position in any way, but allows your body to find it naturally, assuming good instruction and sufficient time.

It is virtually impossible to learn to ride correctly in a saddle that doesn't fit. This is primarily because the saddle is a device to hold stirrups, and if the saddle doesn't fit, the stirrups won't hang in the right place relative to the rider's center.

Even if the saddle fits, it is also necessary that the saddle be level on the horse's back. If the saddle is tipped back so that the lowest part is behind the center, the rider's center will also be forced back, again making it more difficult for her to center over her stirrups.

Finally, it must be correctly placed relative to the horse's center; that is, the deepest part of the seat, which should be in the center of the saddle and directly under the rider's center, must be well behind the horse's center, which is generally located on a line a few inches behind his elbow. Ideally, the center of the saddle should also sit over the lowest point on the horse's back, at the base of the withers, because that is the strongest part of the back.

When you sit in correct position in the saddle, with your feet out of the stirrups, your seat bones will naturally rest on the deepest point. If the saddle is too short there will be pressure under your crotch bone, which is not intended or constructed to bear weight. Generally there should be about half a hands-breadth behind your buttocks, allowing room for you to lean forward and still keep your center in the proper place.

An English saddle is constructed so that your seat bones rest on a hammock of canvas webbing *between* the side arms of the tree. If the tree is too wide for you there will be uncomfortable pressure on your gracilis tendons, which run down the upper inside of your thigh. If it is too narrow, your seat bones will rest on the tree, which will feel hard and uncomfortable.

Most people have little or no difficulty finding a saddle that is comfortable to sit in, because the selection is so great. The difficulty comes in finding a saddle that places the stirrups in the correct position for your proportions. The rule of thumb for an English all-purpose saddle is that if the back of your heel is directly below the side seam of your trousers at the waistline, *with the stirrup leather vertical*, and the stirrup in riding position, the back bar of the stirrup will be directly under your bubbling spring point. Thus when you close your hip angle and take up a half-seat position your stirrup will not move, and your center will stay slightly behind the horse's center. For dressage, the line from your side seam should come just behind your ankle bone.

Tall people with torsos proportional to their size, people with long or heavy bodies and short legs, and people whose calves are measurably shorter than their thighs all have trouble finding saddles with the stirrup placed far enough back. In order for the stirrup to hang vertically further back, the point of suspension—the stirrup bar—must be far enough back.

The cue to knowing something is wrong is that the rider will find it very difficult to find and to maintain a comfortable and correct half seat position, and especially difficult to post without a lot of effort. The first step is to perform the test described previously to see where the stirrup hangs relative to the bubbling spring. If it is indeed too far forward and the saddle fits in all other aspects, then we need to try placing the stirrups further back.

What we will do is take advantage of the fact that most stirrup leathers and billet (girth) straps are approximately the same width and thickness, and that while the front billet strap is directly under the stirrup leather, the two back billet straps hang behind it. So if we can temporarily hang the stirrups from the billet straps we can find out if moving the stirrup back will work. (*Note that this method is used only to answer the question of whether moving the stirrups back will solve the problem. It is not a safe way to hang the stirrups on a regular basis.*)

Begin by measuring the length of your stirrup below the saddle flap. Because the stirrup will hang much lower from the billet strap than it does from the bar, you'll have to shorten it quite a

bit. If you have access to either short (children's) stirrup leathers or some leathers that have holes over much of their length, it will make this experiment easier, but if not, you can wrap the stirrups using your regular leathers. To wrap the stirrup, unbuckle the buckle from the strap, and wrap the buckle end of the strap around the *outside* post of each stirrup. Experiment a bit to find the number of wraps to get the correct length, and when you have it about right, rebuckle the strap.

Now you're going to fasten the stirrups to the billet straps. Depending on how much too far forward the stirrup was when it was on the bar, you can use either the middle or the back billet. The girth should be adjusted so it is approximately even on both sides and there should be at least three holes on the straps below the girth buckles. Insert the billet strap through the stirrup buckle along with the stirrup strap. It's a little crowded, but this should work unless all the leather is very new and hence very thick. Be sure to place the stirrups so that the wraps are toward the front so they will hang correctly when you have your feet in them. Adjust them so they are as close as possible to the length you were using before. If you have to make a choice between having them a little shorter or a little longer, make them longer.

Now get on and try them out. If you are lucky, you will have a "Eureka" moment, when you suddenly realize that you can actually stand in your stirrups and feel secure. My experience with many, many students is that moving the stirrup so that it is closer to the rider's center virtually always works in these situations and makes a world of difference. Try trotting both in half seat and posting.

But, as we said, you cannot continue to buckle your stirrups to the billet straps, because they are not intended for this kind of stress and would soon break, which could be very dangerous. So what's next?

The best solution, if you like your saddle and plan to keep it, is to have adjustable stirrup bars retrofitted to your saddle. This is not possible with all saddles, but should be looked into first if you have an experienced saddler in your area. You should measure carefully to see how far the stirrup was moved back, because the adjustable bars come in different lengths. If possible, you should try to get a type that is easily adjustable while mounted, as I have found that different disciplines and even different horses sometimes call for a different stirrup position for optimum centering.

A less expensive solution, which I had done on all my school saddles, was suggested and executed by my saddler. It involves using the billet straps as a guide, but not a support. An extra piece of girth webbing is inserted across the tree underneath the other webbing, between the second and third billets, and hangs down between the outer and inner flaps, underneath the billets. A buckle with the tongue removed is securely attached to this webbing, fairly close to the top of the billets. Then one or other of the billets, depending on how far back you want the stirrups, is passed through the upper section of the buckle, from outside to inside.

The stirrup leather will then be passed through the lower section of the buckle and fastened up normally at whatever length you want. The stirrup and leather will hang under the flap, but outside the girth, so there is no interference. It looks a little odd when you are not mounted, but when you are mounted the difference is virtually undetectable. Many of my riders showed in quite prestigious shows with their stirrups mounted in this way, and no one ever seemed to notice.

Alternatively, you can look for a new saddle with adjustable bars. Your local saddler may carry them, and there are a number of websites that do. In any case, having a saddle that helps you to ride at your best is worth whatever it costs.

Furthering Your Education

Now that almost everyone has access to the internet, there are many ways to find more material for improving your knowledge. What follows is the result of research on my part, but also to a great extent the actual experiences of members of my yahoo e-group, Riding With Confidence. Magazines can be sampled on the web, as can most books, so you can choose what you need and like.

Clinics are a little trickier, especially those which are associated with a large organization, because individual clinicians vary enormously, not only in experience, but in teaching skills and their approach to horse handling. Unless a particular clinician is recommended to you by someone you know and trust, it's best to go and audit a clinic before taking yourself and your horse into a possibly difficult situation.

It has been my experience that, for the most part, as horsemen get older they move more and more toward the positive, kind treatment of horses rather than the opposite. I'd like to think that they learn that positive reinforcement is virtually always successful, while negative treatment often results in people getting thrown or otherwise hurt, and as we age getting hurt stops being fun.

Gincy on the Web

<http://whatyourhorsewants.com> Blog, essays, instructor resources, equipment, and much more.

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/ridingwithconfidence/> Great people from all disciplines and levels of experience, with great attitudes.

Multidiscipline Organizations

Centered Riding www.centeredriding.org

American Riding Instructors Association (ARIA) www.riding-instructor.com/

United States equestrian Federation www.usef.org

Publications

Equus <http://equus.com-sub.biz/>

Practical Horseman <http://practical-horseman.com-sub.biz>

Eclectic Horseman www.eclectic-horseman.com/

The Chronicle of the Horse www.chronofhorse.com/

Authors, Clinicians, and Training Systems

Their methods are all slightly different, but all horse friendly. I recommend taking a quick look at all the websites. You may want to take something from each. The order is alphabetical, not rating.

www.artofnaturaldressage.com/forum/index.php

Vanessa Bee www.positivehorsemanship.com/

Dr. Deb Bennett: www.equinestudies.org/

Buck Brannaman <http://brannaman.com/>

Leslie Desmond www.lesliedesmond.com/

Bill Dorrance. www.billdorrance.com/

Tom Dorrance www.tomdorrance.com/

Jonathan Field www.jonathanfield.net/

J.P.Giacomini www.jpgiacomini.com

Brent Graef www.brentgraef.com/

Susan Harris www.anatomyinmotion.com/

Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling www.hempfling.com/

Chris Irwin. www.chrisirwin.com/

Jessica Jahiel www.jessicajahiel.com/

Paris Kern <http://pariskern.home.comcast.net/~pariskern/riding.html>
Shannon Knapp <http://horsesenseotc.com/meet-the-staff>
Alexandra Kurland www.theclickercenter.com
John Lyons www.johnlyons.com/
Kelly Marks www.intelligenthorsemanship.co.uk/
Richard Maxwell <http://www.richard-maxwell.com>
Dr. Andrew McLean www.animalbehaviourclinic.ie/
Heather Moffett www.enlightenedequitation.com/heather.htm
Pat and Linda Parelli www.parellinaturalhorsetraining.com/
Sam Powell www.alpinepub.com/almost_a_whisper.html
Karen Pryor <http://store.clickertraining.com/dontshootdog.html>
Mark Rashid www.markrashid.com
Monty Roberts www.montyroberts.com/
Karen Rohlf www.dressagenaturally.net/
Mark Russell www.naturaldressage.com/
Jane Savoie www.janesavoie.com/
Mike Schaffer www.mikeschaffer.com/
Imke Spilker www.kommunikativepferde.de/start-en-2.html
Mitzi Summers www.mitzisummers.com/articles.htm
Linda Tellington-Jones www.ttouch.com
Larry Whitesell www.whitesellgaitedhorsemanship.com/
Harry Whitney www.harrywhitney.com
Lee Ziegler <http://iceryder.net/lee>