

A POCKET GUIDE TO FUNDAMENTALS



GROUNDWORK

BY RYAN ROSE HORSEMANSHIP



“I’D RATHER
BE PREPARED
THAN LUCKY.”

— Ryan Rose

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MEET RYAN ROSE

Ryan Rose launched his professional career as a horse trainer and clinician back in 2005. Early on, he recognized that true success in this field required more than just technical skills—it demanded a deep understanding of horsemanship. This realization led him to study with some of the world's top horsemen including Doug Jordan, Craig Johnson and Pat Parelli.

Today, Ryan is focused on sharing his philosophies and principles on a broader stage via social media and on various video & educational platforms.

What sets Ryan apart are his exceptional skills in both horse development and in instruction. In addition to his teaching and training, he is also passionate about competing in and training horses for ranch versatility.





CORE PRINCIPLES

“Whenever I work with a horse, regardless of their age, breed, or experience level, I always adhere to three fundamental core principles: *Work With The Horse Where They’re At*, *Connection Before Position*, and *Do Less First*. I believe each of these are essential for setting the horse up for success, respecting their true nature, and building a clear, understandable rapport. Each principle is powerful on its own, but together, they form the foundational habits of a true horseman.”

— RYAN ROSE

1. “Work with the horse *where they’re at.*”



Understanding your horse's current state is crucial for building a connection. We need to factor in where the horse is *mentally, physically, and emotionally* in order to create the best lesson plan and sequence. This also means we need to not show up with a list. Goals are great, but the *horse* needs to set the timeline.

2. “Connection *before* position.”



Prioritizing *understanding* over *control* lays the groundwork for more effective communication. Horses are fairly easy to manipulate into making their bodies do what we want, but without mental understanding, there won't be true confidence and relaxation in the movements we desire.

3. “Do *less* first.”



This mentality is a key element for giving the horse freedom to *choose* the answer, and take responsibility. It leads to stronger connections and a better overall partnership.



KEY PHILOSOPHIES

Understanding these eight philosophies is key to knowing how to form a meaningful partnership with a horse.

1. *Energy vs. Intention*
2. *Exercises vs. Maneuvers*
3. *Taming vs. Training*
4. *Rhythm & Relaxation*
5. *It's the Release That Teaches*
6. *Create Many Roads to the Same Place*
7. *Giving "Soak" Time*
8. *Stages of Learning*

1. Energy vs. Intention



I want my horse to be able to understand the difference between my *intention* and the *energy* of things in our environment. I also want them to confidently follow my intention and *not* follow

the energy. This is a critical part of their training process as it educates the horse beyond their innate prey-animal/flight instincts. When they can differentiate that a change in energy *doesn't* always mean a change of intention, it builds their ability to focus during times of adversity (including unexpected instances and/or when in new environments).

2. Exercises vs. Maneuvers

Exercises and maneuvers are distinctly different. **Exercises** are a series of yields that are combined into consistent patterns (*i.e. circles, serpentines, relaxed rein, 3-circle game, etc.*).

Maneuvers are individual tasks/movements that the horse has to learn to accept or perform upon request (*i.e. saddling, bridling, transitions, stopping, cutting a cow, and so on*). We utilize various *exercises* to prepare horses both mentally and physically to learn and/or perform different *maneuvers*.

3. Taming vs. Training



Horses don't automatically know how to get along with humans. In fact, as a prey-animal species, they are very *skeptical* naturally and sometimes even *fearful*

of humans. For horses born in the wild, this creates a challenge, but even those horses born in domestic environments need some taming in order to help prepare them for training. **Taming** consists of teaching the horse to allow us to touch them *all over* their bodies, allowing us to put on a halter, and learning to follow a feel *off* the halter. **Training** is the subsequent process of teaching all the *other* skills a horse will need to get along in a human world.

4. Rhythm & Relaxation



Whenever we ask a horse to do a task, we must pay attention to *how* they are doing it. This allows us to read the horse & respond appropriately. Whether it is stepping into a new gait, encountering an obstacle,

or performing a maneuver, I want to see consistent rhythm and relaxation throughout. When I see any loss of relaxation or a discord in rhythm, I know it's time to reset and re-approach until the horse can respond in a calm and coordinated manner.

5. It's the *Release* That Teaches

Timing is absolutely critical when you're handling horses. If there were a language that horses and humans shared, that language would revolve around varying degrees & directions of pressure.

The moment we take pressure *off* is the equivalent of saying “yes” to the horse—It's the moment where they feel they did something correctly and found the *right* answer. If we release at the *wrong* time, we may unintentionally reward an *undesirable* behavior.

“Bringing pressure on *slowly* and releasing it *quickly* is the best formula for teaching a horse.”

6. Create Many Roads to the Same Place

Whatever you want your horse to be good at, you'll find it'll be more successful if you develop several *different* ways to ask for it. For example, if you want your horse to be good at stopping, you can develop a verbal cue (“*whoa*”), a seat cue (*tucking your pelvis*), and a repeatable pattern (*stopping in same place*)—all of which are effective on their own, and even *more* powerful when combined.

7. Giving “Soak” Time

When a horse makes a significant change or does something correctly, we want to let that “soak in.” Generally, when we train horses, we apply pressure or stimulus until we get a desired response. Then we take all that pressure or stimulus away. When the pressure is *on*, our horses naturally operate in a *Sympathetic* nervous system state. When the pressure is *released*, they’ll naturally return to a *Parasympathetic* nervous system state. This transition can take several seconds (or longer) to resolve, so it’s an important reward to allow your horse that necessary time to completely decompress.



Signs that can happen *before/during* “Soak” time:

- *Stoic expression, not blinking, remaining still, lip being tight/tense, jaw going in and out of tension, etc.*

Signs that can happen *right after* “Soak” time:

- *Licking/chewing, yawning, head shaking, rubbing their face on their knee, rolling, heavy sighing, etc.*

8. Stages of Learning

Teaching Stage: Exploring a new stimulus or form of pressure and helping the horse learn what the rewarded response is. In this stage, it’s critical we set the horse up for success and make the task achievable for them.

Reinforcing Stage: Reinforcing what the horse has already learned through the Teaching Stage. The Reinforcing Stage is when we build *lightness* and a *quality response* to a yield when we ask.

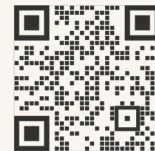
Refining Stage: In this stage, we are more particular about the horse being in the *correct* position. We are refining the *movement* of their body and becoming more precise about *where* and *how* they are traveling.



GROUNDWORK FUNDAMENTALS

These nine foundation exercises are the tools that every horse needs to become successful.

1. *Owning Space*
2. *Steady Pressure*
3. *Forequarter Yield*
4. *Hindquarter Yield*
5. *Energy vs. Intention*
6. *3-Circle Game*
7. *Sideways*
8. *Obstacles*
9. *Turn-Face-Follow*



1. Owning Space



This exercise will give your horse an important responsibility to respect your personal space—a baseline for safety & connection as you move forward with their development.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Begin to identify your space or “personal bubble” with your tool of choice. The size can vary, but we often use the stick as the radius, as shown above.
2. If your horse enters that space, stay facing forward and swing your stick around/behind you in order to block them from coming into that defined space.
3. Try this exercise first from a stand-still, and once successful, advance to doing it at a walk (See the *Advancing the Exercise* section).

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

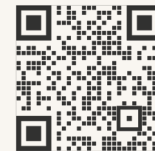
- They respect the boundary you’ve identified, without you needing to reinforce it.
- They find it easier to stand still just outside of your boundary, and their ability to relax there increases.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If they begin to scurry/worry:** You may be moving too fast. Try *slowing down* your movements.
- **If your horse is ignoring you as they enter your space:** It is likely you are not making contact in order to block them more effectively.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- While leading your horse at a walk with them behind you, stop and take a few steps backward. Your horse should back up & maintain the space.
- Find a focal point behind your horse, and begin walking a straight line to that point (without looking at the horse), protecting your space with the stick-and-string as you walk. The horse should respectfully move off of your line. (If they don’t, slow your walk but continue with the stick-and-string.) Once they move, keep walking towards the focal point—this will help reinforce to them that it was about your space and not directed “at” them.



2. Steady Pressure



Instinctively, steady pressure is one of the most difficult things for horses to accept. These can help build both confidence and understanding.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Select a type of steady pressure application to apply; (*i.e. head down, lateral flexion, back-up, etc.*)
2. Once you softly apply the steady pressure, be “like a post”—maintaining a steady, unyielding feel like a post would.
3. Be patient. Wait until the horse chooses to release themselves off of the pressure—*Don't add more!*
4. Be mindful of the stage of learning the horse is at; See *Related Stages of Learning*.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- The response improves with each repetition, getting softer and eventually getting more prompt.
- They begin to *maintain* rhythm and relaxation throughout the exercise.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- Set it up thoughtfully; position yourself safely.
- Make sure the horse is only moving while you're applying a feel, not just off of anticipation.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Increase the duration.
- Increase your expectation of lightness.
- Offer a more challenging environment.
- Ask them to respond to the pressure while in motion.
- Use equipment that offers a more subtle feel.

RELATED STAGES OF LEARNING

- **Teaching Stage:** Reward by releasing on the slightest try or give that your horse offers you.
- **Reinforcing Stage:** Increase the range or length of time you are holding the yield for.
- **Refining Stage:** Be more particular about position and/or the expectation of lightness.

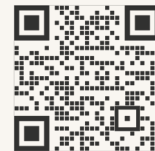
3. Forequarter Yield



This yield is a crucial element of groundwork that translates to key yields under saddle. It is particularly helpful for pushier horses, and/or those exhibiting dominant behaviors.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Start by standing slightly in front of the horse's shoulder, facing their neck.
2. Using either your finger tips with steady pressure, or your stick with rhythmic pressure, ask the horse to yield *away* from you without stepping forward.
3. Release the horse when they yield appropriately.
Tip: See "Advancing the Exercise" for additional ideas and goals for this exercise.



WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- The horse can turn a 360-degree turn on their haunches with minimal pressure.
- The horse crosses its nearest front foot (the one closest to you) underneath itself as it yields.
- The horse does not walk forward or escape back.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If the horse walks forward:** Prepare to block their front end (with your stick or with the rope) and ask the horse to back up a few steps before beginning the yield again.
- **If the horse steps too far backward:** Try positioning yourself further back by your horse's shoulder, and/or try slowing your movements.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Ask the horse to trot next to you in a straight line, then stop and execute a 360-degree turn off of your intention (instead of using steady pressure or rhythmic pressure).
- Advance your expectations by seeing how little it takes for the horse to move lightly and freely off of your intention, and/or releasing on more rhythm and relaxation. *Tip: Try doing this without tools.*



4. Hindquarter Yield



An essential yield for building connection and promoting relaxation and decompression by asking them to *think* about where their feet are.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Stand behind your horse's shoulder (making sure you are staying out of the "kick zone").
2. Move your intention to the hindquarters, looking at them in a focused manner.
3. Begin driving the hindquarters with your stick—applying a tapping pressure at the top of their hip if needed—until they yield their hindquarters *away* from you and face you with both eyes.
4. *Alt:* Practice this using Steady Pressure (*See notes*).

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- The horse will yield their hindquarters and face you with both eyes (by turning on the forehand).

TROUBLESHOOTING

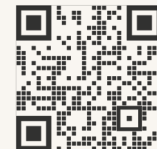
- **If your horse ignores your intention or cue towards their hindquarters:** Shorten the rope (getting closer to them) and ask again. This will allow you to add a guiding feel to the halter.
- **If they walk forward instead of yielding away:** Lift up on the lead rope as much as necessary to stop forward movement, and release when forward movement stops, or when their hind end yields away from you.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Attempt to yield the hindquarters with just your body language and intention until the horse faces you with both eyes.

USE STEADY PRESSURE

- **Off of the Halter:** By lifting upward on lead rope (and slightly backward towards their hip) in order to connect to their feet & disengage their hind end.
- **Off of Fingertips:** By pressing on their rib cage (where "Position 3" would be applied under saddle).



5. Energy vs. Intention



You may have heard, “If you are calm, your horse will be calm.” The reality is that we need to *teach* our horses to *clue-in* to our intention, and to *ignore* irrelevant energy or stimuli.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Take a deep breath and make sure your body remains in a state of “neutral” (with no intent).
2. Create motion using a flag or stick-and-string, keeping a consistent rhythm. (*Note: This rhythm helps the horse realize it’s irrelevant stimuli, as opposed to phases of increasing/decreasing pressure*).
3. Maintain this motion *until* your horse’s feet settle, until they lower their head, and/or until they offer another positive change towards relaxation.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

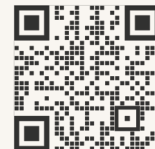
- They begin to associate that when *they* get quiet, the *energy* gets quiet.
- They gradually become less reactive when you turn the physical energy “on” (while staying internally “neutral”, without any intention).
- They can eventually handle this energy (or this “rhythmic motion”) of the tools/objects while they are in motion, *without* increasing their speed.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **For Reactive Horses:** Try walking *away* from the horse while waving the flag. Retreating will help the horse build confidence.
- **For Reactive Horses:** *Slow down* the motion of the tool to a more achievable degree of difficulty.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Gradually test this exercise with increasing levels of speed, building up to more difficult gaits.
- Use different/scarier objects (*i.e. bouncing ball, larger flags, empty grain sack, fan with streamers, etc.*)
- Move their feet using *only* intention in order to test their level of responsiveness and connection.



6. 3-Circle Game



Horses innately travel in a defensive *counter-bend*—curving away from us. By encouraging an *inside* bend around us instead, we can help them relax and build more connection to us.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Have a relatively short rope securing it **at your hip**.
Tip: “Be a post” with the rope so the release will be clear.
2. Put your stick out laterally to ask your horse to move forward, sending energy behind their tail. If they don't move forward, gradually move the stick/energy towards their tail (touch if necessary).
3. Once they are moving around you, switch the stick to a “ski pole” hold, “pushing” the stick towards them, tapping their ribs to encourage inside bend.

4. Use the halter-and-lead to keep their nose to the inside while they move around you.
5. Wait for them to put *and maintain* slack in the rope, and release on a quality circle—Bring your energy down & yield the hindquarters to a stop until they face you. (*Note: If they don't stop, reel in the rope first*).

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- Look for the hind feet to be on a slightly larger circle than the front feet, with the inside hind leg stepping actively under their belly.
- The horse's body takes a soft inside bend around you and maintains it all the way around the circle.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If the horse *doesn't* bend at the ribs with tapping:** Take a large step towards their rib cage while tapping once, then do a hindquarter yield, ending with the horse stopping and facing you.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Move this into a trot, expecting them to maintain both forward motion and bend—all while keeping slack in the lead rope. Aim for one complete circle.



7. Sideways



It's like the saying, "The better you get a horse to go backwards and sideways, the better they can do everything else." It also helps to foster left-brained thinking, and is a good challenge.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Put your back to a fence, and position your horse out in front of you. (*The fence simplifies the puzzle by helping to prevent forward.*)
2. Send your horse around towards the fence, helping to create some momentum for the sideways.
3. Turn with them and begin to step forward towards them as they approach the fence, with *intent* to move them, supporting your intent by moving your stick like a windshield wiper if needed.

For this, their nose can bend slightly.

Note: The stick motion should create an alternating pressure between moving the nose away, then hind end.

4. Release when the horse is making a progressive effort to coordinate their forehand and hind end.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- As rhythm/relaxation/understanding grows, their feet will begin to synchronize into diagonal pairs.
- Their head will begin to lower while they move.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If the horse does not move:** Add pressure by either tapping their hip/shoulder with the stick/string, adding a voice cue, or exaggerating your intention.
- Regardless of what position the horse takes, try to maintain your position as consistently as possible, keeping pressure on until a sideways step is taken.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Add distance between yourself and the horse.
- Perform the exercise without wall support.
- Increase the duration or the horse's speed.
- Try moving them off of just *intent*, with no tools.

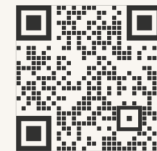
8. Obstacles



Obstacles help horses use the “thinking” side of their brain—creating better puzzle-solvers, more responsibility for their feet, *and more*.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Build curiosity by taking your horse “shopping” observing if they acknowledge or interact with it on their own. (*Note: Don't use pressure or have intent.*)
2. From a distance of 6-12 feet, use your stick-and-string to send them towards the obstacle, looking for a “try”. (*Note: This can be subtle, like a lean/look.*)
 - See *Teaching Stage / Reinforcing Stage* for details.
3. When/if they “complete” it, yield their hindquarters and ask them to face it, and settle. (*Note: This helps to “release” them back to the obstacle.*)



WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- **Teaching Stage:** Build on interest in the obstacle (*i.e. touching it with their nose, pawing at it, etc.*) until they finally put their feet onto/over it.
- **Reinforcing Stage:** They should approach and continue over the obstacle with minimal change in rhythm, gait, headset, and level of relaxation.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If they *stop & refuse* to go toward or over it, either:**
 - Make note of where they stopped, back them up 3-5 steps, and then ask them to try again, or...
 - Redirect them by sending them the other way (if the situation allows) and re-send towards it.
- **If they *rushed* over the obstacle:** Apply pressure after the obstacle by asking for a hindquarter yield to a stand-still, ending with them facing it.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Increase the distance between yourself and the obstacle so that you’re “sending” them over it versus leading them up to/through it.
- Make the obstacle bigger (harder to go over), or smaller/narrower (easier to avoid).
- Increase the speed—up to a trot or canter.
- Advance to gymnastic exercises—like ground poles, raised poles, or jumps.

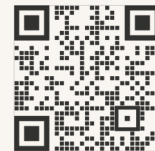
9. Turn-Face-Follow



This challenging exercise creates a physical *and* mental “bind” that helps your horse learn how to follow a feel & “think” through puzzles.

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Without letting go, swing the lead rope over their head to the far side, so it's draping over their back. Hold just below the halter (to prevent them from turning prematurely) and adjust the lead rope until that it rests behind their hindquarters.
2. Position their head in a slight counter-flexion (away from you) before placing any tension on the rope.
3. Step back until there is tension on the rope. Hold/ wait until they turn around to face you. Then take a few steps back and allow them to “follow” you.



WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- They figure out how to rotate their body and release themselves from the bind. After a few repetitions, they turn, face, and follow softly—with a relaxed rhythm and coordination in their feet.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **If they're *nervous* about the rope by their legs:** Use approach and retreat to build confidence.
- **If they *get stuck* and begin to *panic*:** Move *with* them while maintaining a *consistent* feel on the lead rope. Make sure you're *not increasing* the pressure on the rope as you wait for them to solve the puzzle.
- **If they turn around *quickly*:** Make sure to double-check the prep-steps of getting their head & neck bent away from you before making the rope taut.

ADVANCING THE EXERCISE

- Instead of placing the rope behind the hind legs or around their rump, try from over their withers, from behind the saddle's cantle, or around the saddle horn. (*Note: Be careful to not let the rope get hung up on other parts of the saddle.*)
- Ask for more hustle during the last “follow” phase to encourage and increase their draw towards you.

Learning happens *outside* of your comfort zone.

You must be prepared to go through an uncomfortable phase when learning a new exercise and working with new tools. This can be frustrating, but if you stick with it, you'll come through on the other side—better than you were before.

Experience is what we get *after* the mistake.

The more mistakes you make, the more you will learn. Be prepared to fail; Fail often and fail *forward*.

Take the time it takes, and it will *take less time*.

Just the act of spending time with your horse is an underrated part of the development process. Nothing can replace experience, and you'll soon find your hard work will pay off when your horse learns how to learn, and things take less time.

There's nothing *easy* or *safe* about training horses.

And while this is true, it's through doing hard things that we develop more resilience and strengthen our horsemanship skills.



For more guidance with
your horse training journey,
connect with Ryan Rose
Horsemanship online.

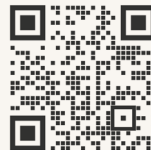
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