

ALIGNMENT

Alignment refers to both the vertical and horizontal alignment in maneuvers and or transitions. Lines must always be straight whether abreast or in a column.

Vertical Alignment:

To practice vertical alignment or something we call “tracking” in columns, line up in a single file line, have the lead person jog, or lope, in a random pattern around the arena. The drillmaster should position themselves at the end of the line and correct members that are out of alignment. Riders should try to just follow in the lead rider’s footsteps. Try some column circles, with everyone concentrating on following the tracking line. Let’s talk about turns for a second. When you pick up a lope and make a right or left turn people behind naturally seem to start the turn where the lead rider’s line ends up, which results in going past the desired line and having to pull back in. We call this overshooting the turn. Riders must start their turn earlier depending on the flexibility of their horse, and end up their furthest point out straight into the tracking line of the lead rider. Whenever maneuvers are practiced the drillmaster should constantly be aware and correct alignment problems. You can also make this a fun follow the leader type game where the leader tries to throw the team off alignment.

Horizontal Alignment:

For horizontal alignment, start in pairs, two riders side-by-side, knee-to-knee. With both riders sitting up straight a person at the side should just see the body of one rider. Practice at the walk, jog and lope in pairs making turns and changing gaits. Progress by increasing the number of riders in the unit and repeat the exercises. Riders should look to the right and left to make sure the line is straight. We use a build, circle, build, circle drill where we build to two’s, do a 360-degree circle then build to 4’s and repeat until up to a full team. When circling units should not only be aligned within the unit but also aligned with the other units. All of the units should make their circles the same size and at the same pace to finish together at the fence at the same exact time. When you make it into larger units you may choose to try a technique we call arm bar. We will do 2 full team circles to demonstrate this technique. Every rider except the rider on the far right of the unit raises their right arm and places it on the shoulder of the rider next to them. The objective is to form a human bar shoulder-to-shoulder and to keep that bar straight. Then try a second circle without the arm bar, hopefully riders keep the bar in their mind’s eye and the circle will remain straight. Next start over in pairs, separate the riders with 2 to 3 feet between riders, like we did for the horizontal spacing drill and repeat the exercises of turns and gait changes, circles.