



HorseSense Learning Levels

Progression of Western HorseSense Skills

It's not enough, in our view, to be able to ride a horse: truly effective horsemanship requires that riders understand and attend to their horse's basic needs. This means learning how horses are put together, what makes them behave in certain ways, and how to keep them happy and healthy. Horses are too often victims of "benign abuse" from well-meaning owners and riders. That's why we think it's important to offer unmounted HorseSense instruction to both adults and children – even those that don't plan to own a horse. We designed our progressive system of Learning Levels to give practical knowledge and hands-on experience – we want you ALL to be competent caretakers of happy, healthy horses!

LEVEL ONE - RED

Objectives: Student will learn basic safety practices for working around horses; simple identification of tack and grooming equipment; elementary equine anatomy; and basic needs of the horse.

- Know and discuss safety rules in barn, pasture and arena.
- Describe safe riding attire; demonstrate how to correctly fit a helmet.
- Catch horse in stall and pasture, with safe technique.
- Demonstrate safe leading from near side, both in barn and through doorways/gates.
- Tie horse safely, using an effective quick-release knot.
- Demonstrate basic grooming to prepare a horse for a ride.
- Know names and functions of basic grooming tools.
- Demonstrate picking out hooves safely, with knowledge of reasons for basic hoof care.
- Know parts of the horse, to include: withers, poll, croup, hock, fetlock, etc.
- Know parts and functions of saddle and bridle.
- Know how to store tack correctly, and give at least two reasons for cleaning tack and equipment.
- Know basic rules for feeding.
- Be able to identify good and bad hay, grain, and water.
- Demonstrate mucking and re-bedding a stall, cleaning stall thoroughly and efficiently.

LEVEL TWO - YELLOW

Objectives: Student will refine leading and grooming skills; will learn to care for tack; to describe and measure horses; to apply protective boots and blankets; to identify elementary feeding principles and situations requiring veterinary care.

- Jog horse in hand, with safe technique, as though jogging for soundness.
- Blanket and remove blanket from horse safely.
- Correctly apply splint boots, bell boots, and shipping boots. Know what each is used for and which vital areas are protected.
- Clean and condition a saddle, bridle, and cinch, knowing reasons for each step.
- Reassemble bridle without assistance.
- Care for a horse after a workout, to include:
 - Cooling out
 - Thorough grooming and post-ride inspection
 - Appropriate feeding and watering
- Know normal TPR range for a horse, and discuss how to take TPR.
- Know basic colors and markings.



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YELLOW, CONT.

- Know basic types and breeds of the horse.
- Know how to measure a horse for height.
- Know reasons for basic feeding principles, to include discussion of roughage and concentrates.
- Know signs of colic and action to take.
- Know which injuries can be handled with minor treatment and which need veterinary attention.

LEVEL THREE - GREEN

Objectives: Student will be able to assess fit of tack; to identify basic first aid equipment; to understand concepts of conditioning for horse and rider; to apply simple bandages; to understand elementary stable management principles and routine horse care; to identify common breeds and riding disciplines.

- Fit a saddle, bridle (including bit), cinch and halter to a horse.
- Identify items in equine first aid kit, giving reasons for each item's use.
- Take and record TPR.
- Measure a horse for weight and height.
- Administer a paste or gel dewormer safely.
- Apply a stable bandage.
- Describe ten riding disciplines (Western or English).
- Name five breeds in each of the following categories: sporthorse, draft, gaited, pony, color breeds.
- Discuss safe trail riding practices, including appropriate tack and equipment.
- Discuss basic conditioning for horse *and* rider.
- Know signs of a hoof needing trimming or shoeing.
- Know basic stall and pasture management practices to keep horse safe and happy, to include:
 - Provision for water, forage
 - Shelter and living arrangements
 - Fly and manure management
 - Seasonal considerations
- Create a simple calendar showing routine care needed for horse, to include: immunizations, shoeing or trimming, deworming, dental care and Coggins test.

LEVEL FOUR - BLUE

Objectives: Student will be able to perform thorough grooming; to understand action of bits and specialty tack; to identify farrier tools; to understand principles of horse gaits and movement, basic first aid and parasite control, and safe longeing and trailering practices.

- Groom a horse to turnout inspection quality (no braiding necessary).
- Perform a safety check on a younger rider under supervision.
- Know how to adjust different types of tack, including:
 - Martingales
 - Auxiliary nosebands
 - Breastplates
 - Curb chain
 - English saddle and girth



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BLUE, CONT.

- Identify different types of bits, to include both snaffle and leverage bits.
- Apply a polo wrap and discuss its purpose.
- Know how the following injuries are treated: stone bruise, laceration, puncture wound, abscess, swollen tendon, injured eye.
- Discuss life cycle and prevention of internal and external parasites.
- Know names and functions of farrier tools used in trimming and shoeing.
- Know basic horse movement, to include number of beats in each gait, footfall pattern, faulty movement, and methods of detecting unsoundness.
- Discuss what conformation is and why it is important, to include basic faults of the forelegs and hind legs, back, shoulder, neck and head.
- Name and locate five unsoundnesses.
- Perform a pre-trip safety check on a truck or trailer.
- Safely load and unload a quiet horse, with assistance.
- Discuss reasons for longeing, safe longeing practices and equipment. Demonstrate how to hold and give aids with a line and whip.

LEVEL FIVE - ORANGE

Objectives: Student will be able to demonstrate safe longeing and an understanding of gaits and distances; to evaluate basic conformation points; to plan conditioning schedules and relate horse's work and condition to feed rations; to continue expanding knowledge of stable management and veterinary care; to begin relating equine behavior to human management practices.

- Know elementary concepts of equine behavior theory and relate them to 1) riding and training practices, and 2) stable management practices.
- Longe a quiet horse for exercise, showing safe technique and consideration of the horse.
- Set walk, trot, and canter poles for a selection of three different-sized horses.
- Design a polework exercise and discuss its training and conditioning benefits.
- Discuss different types and reasons for clipping.
- Evaluate a horse's conformation, listing both good and bad points.
- Know basic conformation traits specific to the following breeds: Arabian, Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse, Andalusian. Relate to suitability for specific disciplines.
- Know stable vices, causes and possible remedies.
- Discuss equine dental structure and the need for routine dental care.
- Know specific immunizations needed for local area and at what frequency.
- Wrap a hoof.
- Discuss correct measurement of feed and suitable feed rations for horses in light, moderate, and hard work; including considerations such as conditioning, injury and/or illness.
- Identify parts of the horse's digestive system.
- Identify different types of grains, hays, and supplements.
- Create an eight-week conditioning schedule to prepare a horse and rider for a strenuous activity (i.e., long trail ride, hunter pace, reining competition, etc.).



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Most well-rounded equestrians should, in the course of regular lessons and time spent in the barn, be able to acquire a minimum of Blue or Orange Level knowledge. This allows them to work comfortably in most barns and as a novice horse owner or lessee with experienced mentorship. They will also be able to relate the horsemanship principles they practice in lessons to their understanding of equine behavior and physiology.

The Purple and Teal Levels are designed for dedicated equestrians eager to move past the basics and broaden their knowledge. These students may be interested in keeping horses independently, developing advanced riding or training skills, or pursuing a career in the equine industry. Above all, they should possess a genuine desire to become informed in all aspects of horse management, putting the horse's welfare first and foremost.

Not all recreational students will achieve Purple and Teal ribbons. *These levels (particularly Teal) require hours of study, critical thinking, and hands-on practice. To pass each requirement, students should be able to discuss and or demonstrate their knowledge **confidently**, showing a depth of understanding that would allow them to teach a subject or put it into practice. Students interested in pursuing these Levels should be prepared to actively learn through repeated practice, discussion, and outside study from books, videos and credible online sources.*

LEVEL SIX - PURPLE

Objectives: Student will be able to understand and demonstrate show-quality grooming; to apply more advanced bandaging techniques; to evaluate longeing performance; to understand more advanced concepts of equine farrier and veterinary care; to identify daily horse management practices and safety issues related to trailering; to understand the economic realities of horse ownership.

- Groom a horse to turnout inspection quality, to include appropriate braiding or banding of mane.
- Thoroughly clean an udder and a sheath.
- Longe a quiet horse and evaluate performance and movement.
- Discuss use of side reins and similar training devices.
- Pull a mane.
- Apply a shipping bandage.
- Wrap a tail for travel.
- Know how to select and maintain a trailer and tow vehicle.
- Identify different types of shoes and their uses, to include traction devices such as borium and studs.
- Identify a minimum of five toxic plants native to this area.
- Know location, appearance and treatment of unsoundnesses: navicular, splints, strained or bowed tendon, ringbone, sidebone, curb, bone spavin, capped hock. Discuss blemishes such as windpuffs and bog spavin.
- Describe causes, signs, and treatment of laminitis/founder, tying up, choking, ulcers, thrush, skin conditions.
- Name five diseases of the horse and describe symptoms and preventative measures.
- Discuss stable and pasture management, to include:
 - Turnout schedules
 - Parasite management
 - Grass management
 - Different options for fencing and bedding
 - Routine facility maintenance
 - Daily care of horses
- Create a budget for keeping a horse for a year, to include: feed and board, routine health care, emergency care, tack and equipment, and showing and training expenses.



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LEVEL SEVEN - TEAL

Objectives: Student will be able to teach basic HorseSense skills; to evaluate a horse's performance and level of training; to demonstrate advanced health care skills; to evaluate more complex concepts of conformation and movement; to understand functional equine anatomy and relate equine systems to feeding, diseases and their control; to incorporate stable management principles in facility design.

- Judge an Intro or Basic Level Western dressage test, demonstrating knowledge of basic dressage principles.
- Design an arena trail course, demonstrating knowledge of obstacles and training requirements.
- Discuss methods of starting a young horse from the ground up, including ground exercises, longeing, backing, and progressive training.
- Discuss methods of conditioning for different activities, such as trail, speed events, endurance riding, etc.
- Evaluate conformation of a selection of horses, discussing relationship to soundness, movement, and athletic ability.
- Know basic equine anatomy, to include: musculoskeletal, circulatory, respiratory, and reproductive systems; know what diseases or health conditions affect each system.
- Draw a diagram showing the major bones, ligaments, and tendons in the lower leg.
- Estimate the age of a horse using teeth as a guide; discuss number of teeth, growth, and dental care.
- Discuss different approaches to veterinary medicine, to include:
 - Basic disease prevention practices, including management of infectious diseases
 - Uses and dangers of common equine medications and sedatives
 - Other treatment methods such as physical therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, etc.
- Give an intramuscular injection.
- Wrap a knee and a hock.
- Discuss nutrients needed for a balanced diet, with consideration for different stages of a horse's life.
- Using a tag from a commercially prepared feed mixture, analyze nutritional value of a feeding program (to include hay and/or pasture).
- Discuss equine disaster planning, to include: fire and storm emergency plans, supplies, and evacuation procedures.
- Draw a diagram of a stable and pasture setup for 1) private 2-horse farm on 5 acres; and 2) commercial boarding and training facility on 20 acres.
- Teach a new student Red Level HorseSense skills.