



# Horse Leader Volunteer Manual

## Mission:

To provide children, youth, and adults the opportunity to grow and develop through therapeutic, educational, and recreational activities with horses.

**Position Overview:** Horse Leaders serve as the primary communicator with the horse, guiding it before, during, and after lessons. This includes maintaining appropriate spacing, speed, direction, and responsiveness to directions given by the instructor. They ensure safe equine-human interactions, manage equine behavior using best practices, and support the instructor's goals.

**Minimum Age:** 14

**Requirements:** Complete all paperwork (application, waivers, background check, compliance agreements); attend all orientation and horse leader trainings and pass all skills checklist(s); follow verbal and visual instructions and communicate effectively with staff and fellow volunteers

## Required Knowledge & Skills

- Safety
  - Approaching and Moving Around Horses (Tied, Stalled, Free)
- Horse Behavior
  - Body Language
- Emergency Procedures
  - Releasing Quick Release Knot
  - Loose Horse
  - Emergency Dismount
  - Fallen Rider
  - Injury
  - Fire
  - Weather Conditions
- Grooming
  - Identify grooming tools
  - Understand purpose
  - Demonstrate correct use of tools
  - Examine horse for concerns
- Haltering a Horse
- Leading/Moving a Horse
- Tacking Horse
- Mounting & Dismounting
- Arena Common Lines, Patterns & Etiquette
- Horse Warm-up & Desensitization.



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## ***Benefits of being a Horse Leader***

- **Boosts Confidence & Self Esteem:** Successfully managing a large animal provides a sense of accomplishment.
- **Reduces Stress & Promotes Calm:** The rhythmic action of leading helps lower cortisol levels and creates a calming, safe environment.
- **Enhances Emotional Regulation & Communication:** Horses mirror human emotions, encouraging awareness of feelings & improving non-verbal communication skills.
- **Builds Trust & Leadership Skills:** Leaders are calm and confident, fostering a partnership based on trust, which is crucial for the horse.
- **Cognitive Stimulation:** Requires decision-making, spatial awareness and problem-solving in real-time, benefiting mental agility.
- **Improves Physical Health and Coordination:** Encourages walking and mindfulness.

### **Time Commitment**

- Arrive up to 20 minutes prior to scheduled lesson.
- Commit to a minimum of one (1) lesson and maximum of four (4) lessons per day
  - Commit to a consistent schedule (minimum of one day a week for 1 session [4 weeks]; maximum of 4 days a week for 6 sessions [24 weeks])
  - Schedule with Director of Equine Wellness and Volunteer Operations

### **Physical Requirements**

- Walking & Mobility
  - Able to walk beside horse for the duration of a lesson (up to 45 minutes) on uneven surface.
  - Comfortable walking at a steady pace with horse at walk and trot without lagging or losing balance.
- Reaction & Safety
  - Capable of performing emergency procedures (e.g., emergency dismount assist) safely
    - Maintain focus and physical control throughout the session (refrain from talking when required, maintain lead rope/lead positions, etc.)
- General Fitness
- Weather
  - Able to work in varying weather conditions
- Strength & Handling
  - Ability to lift, stoop, bend, and assist with horse equipment (e.g., saddles, girths, etc.)

### **Training & Supervision**

- Complete all orientation and leader trainings
- Report to Directors or Lesson Assistant

### **Additional Notes**

- See Appendix for Related Training Materials

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## **Initial Training, Skill Development (with and without Equine), and Evaluation/Quiz**

This training manual outlines the required content, activities, and evaluation methods for the role of Horse Leader participating in Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) at Bluff and Ridge. The purpose of this training is to ensure that Horse Leaders understand and can demonstrate the skills and judgment necessary to safely support participants, horses, instructors, and fellow volunteers.

### **What is Horse Leading?**

Horse leading is a vital role in equine-assisted activities where a volunteer is responsible for the safe handling, guidance, and movement of the horse before, during and after a lesson. Horse leaders oversee every aspect concerning their assigned horse.

This may involve: haltering-the horse in its stall, leading it into the arena, lunging if needed, and/or walking the horse in the arena to familiarize it with the set-up and props used for the lesson. Once the student is escorted into the arena to-begin their lesson, Horse Leaders may also oversee/instruct grooming and assist the student in tacking up “their” horse. They also show the student how to safely lead the horse.

The horse leader’s primary focus is the horse during the lesson. You will learn where to stand when leading, how to safely hold the lead rope, what to do in an emergency, how to keep the student safe while unmounted and so much more. Hopefully you can see not only how critical this role is, but also how rewarding. Every part of the volunteer team works together to ensure a safe and enjoyable lesson.

### **Building Trust through Horse Leading**

Horse leading is not just about guiding the horse - it is about building trust with both the horse and the rider. Riders often gain confidence knowing the horse is being led calmly and consistently by a familiar volunteer. Horses in turn rely on their leader for clear communication, reassurance, and steady guidance. This trust is fundamental to the success of therapeutic riding, allowing the rider to focus on posture, balance, communication, and skill development without concern for the horse’s movement or behavior.

### **Upon arrival at Bluff and Ridge you will**

- Sign in
- Put your name tag on
- Check the schedule to determine who you are volunteering with during the lesson, what horse you will be leading and who your student rider will be.

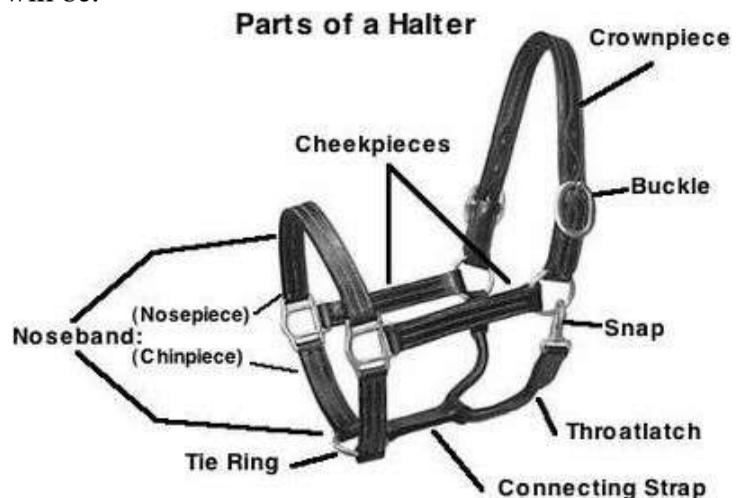
### **The Stable**

As horse leader it is your responsibility to bring the assigned horse from the stable to the arena 10 minutes before lesson start time. Volunteer groomers will have the horse groomed and ready for the lesson.

### **Entering the Stall**

Safety is the top priority for our volunteers, and our horses.

### **How to Safely Approach a Horse and Put on a Halter**



## 1. Prepare Before You Approach

- Before entering a stall, make sure you have the correct halter and lead rope. Halters and their lead ropes are on the stall doors and labeled for the correct horse.
- **Check your equipment:** Halter unbuckled at crown and open, lead rope attached to halter
- **Stay calm and confident:** Horses read body language – slow, relaxed movements matter.
- Check the stall surroundings. Is there more than one horse in the stall? Keep in mind that while our horses have good ground manners and respect, they are horses. If things appear safe, enter with your halter and lead rope. Ask for help if you're not certain.

## 2. Get the Horse's Attention

- **Speak softly** using the horse's name
- Make sure the horse **sees you before you touch them**-never approach from directly behind (blind spot). Hold your hand out towards the horse and offer him the chance to smell it and acknowledge your presence.
- Watch the horse's body language:
  - Relaxed ears, soft eyes = okay to proceed to pet the horse's neck.

### **Some signs that the horse is not comfortable with you approaching:**

- Pinned ears (held flat against the head) = fear or aggression;
- Raised tail = discomfort or tension;
- Swishing tail = something is bothering them (pain, fear, discomfort)
- Turning rump towards you = go away;
- Wide eyes (whites showing) and high head = anxiety or fear
- Tense body posture = fear (ready to bolt or flee)
- Wide nostrils or blowing = excitement, curiosity, or a state of alertness. It can also indicate stress or fear.

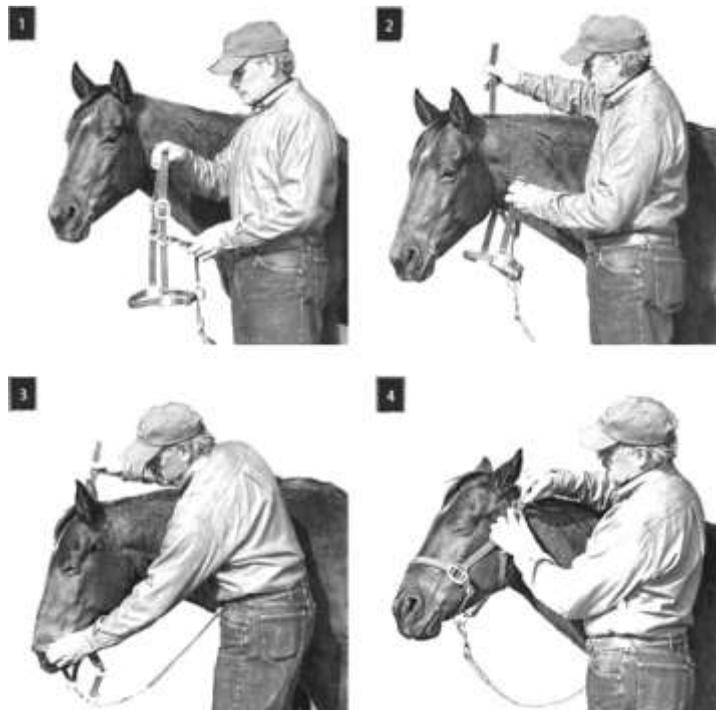
If you notice any of these signs, **STOP**, and give the horse time and space. Talk to the horse and reassure them. Hold out your hand to greet them and let them reach out to you. Allow the horse to process. Observe and if you think the horse has accepted you, try the approach again. If you are unsure or need assistance, ask for help.

## 3. Approach Correctly

- Walk toward the horse's **shoulder**, not straight at the face or hindquarters.
- **Always stay within the horse's field of vision.**
- **Avoid** standing directly in front of the horse.

## 4. Put the Halter on (see Illustration)

- Stand on the horse's **onside** (left) with your body at the neck facing forward and turned towards the horse. Gently place the lead rope over horse's neck, this gives you control if the horse moves.
- Hold the halter in your left hand, crownpiece in your right.
- Guide the noseband over the horse's nose smoothly (the nose is very sensitive area). Bring the crownpiece up behind the ears and



buckle the loose end (onside). Be aware that some horse's ears are very sensitive so move slowly. The noseband should be two to three fingers below the cheekbone. A noseband lower than recommended may lead to impaired breathing (horses can only breathe through their nostrils – not their mouths). The throatlatch should rest comfortably where the jawl meets the neck. A good rule of thumb is three to four fingers of space between the throatlatch and the horse's throat. This ensures the horse can breathe and swallow freely.

- Praise the horse with a soft voice or gentle scratch on neck.

#### 5. Leaving the Stall

- If you are taking a horse that is the buddy of another horse, make sure the horse's buddy does not try to follow you out of the stall. This can create a dangerous situation. If another horse is trying to follow you out, you can gently use your voice to ask them to "back" or swing the end of the lead rope towards the horse to encourage the horse to leave the stall (never hit the horse with the lead rope). **If needed, ask for assistance!**
- **Make sure the stall door is completely open.**
- **Have the horse wait until you exit the stall.** Ask the horse to "walk on" out of the stall after you and then turn and face the stall door bringing the horse around to face the door as well.
- **Immediately close and latch the stall door behind you!**

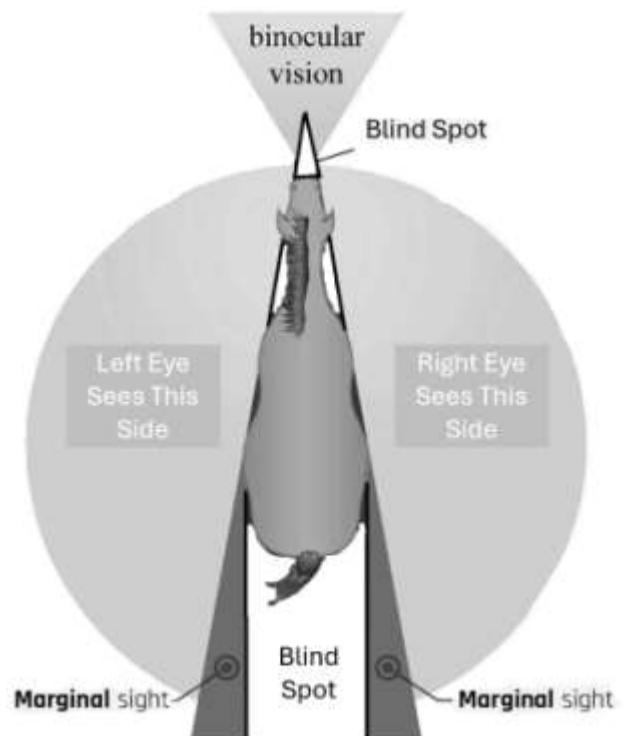
#### Important Safety Rules

- X **Never** wrap lead rope or any rope around your hand or body.
- X **Never** kneel or sit near the horse.
- X **Do not** rush – every horse deserves a calm approach.
- ✓ Always stay aware of ears, feet, and space.
- ✓ As you walk to arena, **DO NOT** walk directly in front of the horse. If the horse spooked forward, they could injure themselves or you. Walk with your body between throat latch and shoulder.
- ✓ Ask for help if the horse seems anxious or uncooperative.

#### Vision in the Horse

Horses use vision to orientate themselves, detect motion and distance, and evaluate the consistency of the environment. The equine eye is eight times larger than human eye. The position of the eyes on the horse's face accounts for differences in how horses see, dictate visual range, peripheral motion detection and depth perception. A horse's ability to see depth is limited because their eyes are set so far apart. From most angles, horses cannot get a left-eye and right-eye view of the same object in one glance. Unlike humans, the horse can see images to the left and right at the same time due to the eyes being at the side of the head.

Horses use two forms of vision, monocular and binocular. Monocular vision allows the horse to see on both sides of his head, meaning the left eye and the right eye work independently and see different views. The monocular fields overlap in front of the horse's face resulting in a binocular field. The binocular field is responsible for depth perception.



There is a blind area directly behind the animal's head and body. The front blind spot is directly under the head, immediately in front of the forehead and below the body in front of the horse's face. A horse can't see what they eat (grass they graze or grain in the bucket), fingers that stroke their muzzle or even the bit they accept in their mouths. If a person raises a hand suddenly, they appear to the horse to come out of nowhere. Standing directly behind a horse, the animal can't see you. For safety reasons, it is always best to make sure the horse knows you are there.

### **Approaching and Moving around the Horse**

Horses are prey animals and have a strong flight response. A tied or restrained horse, if startled, can't run away. Therefore he may feel trapped and panic. This can quickly become a dangerous situation. It is very important that you approach and move around a horse slowly and confidently, paying attention to your surroundings, especially when a student or others are present.

- Before approaching the horse do a quick check-in with yourself. What space are you in? Did you have an argument earlier in the day? A bad day at work? Wondering what you are going to make for dinner? Horses are perceptive to our emotions. It's best to leave those thoughts for later. Center yourself, take a deep breath, and be present in the moment.
- Be aware of your surroundings: Where are other volunteers and horses? Is there anything the horse could get caught on such as saddle rack, lead rope, etc.? A general sweep with your eyes ensures a safe experience.
- Make sure the horse knows you are coming towards him – don't be so quiet that you surprise the horse. Use a calm, confident stride and greet them.
- When possible, approach the horse from the front of his body near the shoulder. Talk to the horse in a calm voice. As you approach and before you put your hand on the horse's shoulder area, take a moment to assess the horse's behavior.

### **Be aware of how you move around the horse.**

To go from one side of the horse to the other, you can either:

- Keep your hand on the croup and stay close to the hindquarters as you move to the opposite side (so a kick might just push you, not connect with full force) or
- Walk far away from the kick zone (at least 6 feet away) in a half circle and then approach the horse the same way you did in the beginning, approach from the front, angled towards the shoulder.
- Never duck under a lead rope.
- Remember the horses' blind spots.

### **Leading a Horse Safely**

You might think leading a horse is as easy as walking a dog. Not true! In the first-place horses are huge animals that can cause great bodily harm even if they do not mean to. It could be a case of wrong place, wrong time. That is why we stress the importance of safety.

Leading a 1,000 plus pound animal can put a person in a vulnerable position. People often get too far out in front of a horse while leading. This creates a dangerous situation; if the horse spooked from behind and jumped forward you would have no time to react. No matter how much we trust our equine partners they are still prey animals and can be unpredictable. The trainer, Clinton Anderson, used to say, accidents happen when we are complacent or not paying attention.

### **Steps for Safely Leading a Horse**

#### **1. Prepare Before You Lead**

- Wear **closed-toe boots or shoes** (no sandals).
- Make sure the area is **clear of obstacles**, loose animals, and loud distractions.
- Observe the ground you will be leading on. Is it icy, slippery from rain?
- Check that the horse is **properly haltered**.

## 2. Attach the Lead Rope Correctly

- Use **lead rope with a snap**
- Attach the snap to the **bottom ring** of the halter under the noseband
- Hold the lead rope **6–12 inches below the snap** (form a “smile” in the lead rope)
  - Each horse has their own comfort zone while being led and length of the rope will vary with the situation, depending on the amount of control needed. The less you pull on the lead rope and interfere with the horse’s head – the better.
- Fold a figure 8 in the lead rope from the free end and hold in left hand. **Never** wrap the lead rope or any rope around your hand or body.
- Do not let the lead rope drag on the ground. You or the horse could step on it.

Always remain calm and confident when handling the lead rope. Horses are sensitive to your emotions and body language. If the horse becomes nervous or tries to pull away, gently but firmly maintain your hold and speak in a soothing tone to reassure them. If the horse is pulling back hard, don’t try to pull against them. Follow them until they stop moving backwards. Don’t be afraid to let go of the lead rope if necessary. Consistent, gentle handling helps build trust between you and the horse while ensuring safety for both.

## 3. Position Yourself Properly

- Stand at the horse’s **left shoulder** (onside).
- Your body should be **even with the horse’s throatlatch/shoulder**, not in front.
- Face forward in the **direction you are going**. Look where you are going – not back at the horse.
- Maintain **personal space** – don’t lean into the horse or let him push into your space.

## 4. Ask the Horse to Walk On

- Look ahead and calmly but firmly say: **“Walk on” while stepping forward confidently.**
- Use **gentle forward pressure** on the lead rope if needed.
- Reward compliance with a **soft voice or release of pressure.**
- Keep a “Smile” in your lead rope.



“Smile” in lead rope.

## 5. Walk Safely Together

- Walk at a **steady, controlled pace.**
- Always use two hands on the lead rope. This is important for safety.
- Stay alert to:
  - Ear position
  - Tension in the neck
  - Changes in stride
  - Other horses or people in the area

\*Always maintain awareness of your surroundings.

## 6. Stopping the Horse

- Slow your pace (lower your energy), breath out and say **“Whoa.”**

- Stop your body first—horses read body language.
- Apply gentle pressure on the lead rope if needed.
- Make sure the horse **stops completely and calmly**.

## 7. Managing Spooks or Distractions

Spooking is a natural response to being startled or afraid of something. In the wild, spooking is an innate mechanism that helps horses flee from danger very quickly. Here are a few things that you can do if your horse spooks or becomes distracted:

- Try to get his focus on you. When he gets distracted, offer him something to do. Ask him to yield sideways (lateral yield) or walk in a circle. By providing focus and an opportunity to do something, you take his attention off whatever he's afraid of.
- Once he is settled, let him look at whatever spooked him. Let him smell it, explore and walk around it to get over his fear.

Horses are highly responsive to body language, tone, and changes in breathing and muscle tension. A fearful or panicked leader might unintentionally signal that danger is present and cause a spook.

Here are some techniques to help project a calm, controlled demeanor:

- **Mindful breathing:** Slow, steady breaths help lower your heart rate while showing your horse you are calm and in control.
- **Relaxed posture:** Avoid gripping tightly or freezing up; keep shoulders soft, jaw unclenched, and legs relaxed to prevent conflicting cues.
- **Gentle voice:** A familiar voice can be reassuring; speak softly to help de-escalate the situation.
- **Soft hands:** Sudden, sharp pulls on the reins or lead rope can escalate fear.

## The Arena

Once the horse is safely haltered, you are ready to go to the arena to begin preparations for the lesson.

### Entering the Arena or Stable

Anytime you are entering the stable or arena, if all doors are closed you want to announce yourself by loudly saying “**DOOR**”. If you are leading a horse, loudly say “**Horse Coming!**” This way if a horse is loose, or someone is riding in the arena, or working with a horse in the stable aisle you will not spook the horse. It's a common safety courtesy that everyone should adopt. Wait for a possible response before entering.

Before tying the horse to the wall tie-ring, take time to walk the horse around the arena. Allow the horse to see/smell any props, poles, or anything else they may encounter during the lesson. Go in both directions. Horses don't process things the way we do. Seeing something on the left side doesn't translate to the right side. Once you turn and go in the opposite direction, it's as though they are seeing it for the first time.

Walking in the arena also gives you a chance to check the horse's movement and demeanor. There may be times you will be required to lunge a horse to warm muscles and get ready to work. If you have any concerns about the horse, please discuss this immediately with the instructor or barn manager.

### Tying your Horse

Tie-rings are located along two sides of the arena. There are also hooks and removable wooden-block saddle racks at each tie-ring. Another volunteer may have already brought grooming buckets and tack into the

arena and set it up at the tie-rings. If that is the case, find the equipment for the horse (buckets are labeled with their name), and use that tying area.

### 1. Leader Position while Tying

- Stand beside the horse's neck at a forty-five degree angle, facing the tie ring. Do not stand with your back to the horse as you tie.
- Never stand directly in front of the horse (between the wall and the horse). Keep your body out of the "pull-back" or "lunge forward" zone.

### 2. Correct Tie Height & Position

- Tie at or slightly above the horse's eye level or above the withers.
- Leave 12 – 18 inches of rope between the tie ring and the halter clip. If a horse needs to be tied shorter or longer, the instructor will let you know.
  - Too much slack = risk of stepping over the rope
  - Too little slack = panic if the horse pulls back
  - The horse should have enough space to move their head comfortably.
- **Watch** the horse for any signs of fear, anxiety, or discomfort. If you observe any of these, walk the horse around the arena then try approaching the tie-ring again. Ask Instructor for help if needed.

### 3. Always use a Quick-Release Knot

- Use a quick-release knot so the horse can be freed immediately in an emergency.
  - Knot can be released with one pull
  - Tail of lead rope should be 8-10 inches long, not touching the ground but hanging freely
- The Quick Release Knot will be demonstrated** and you will have the opportunity to practice this knot.

While the horse is tied the instructor will go over the pattern for the lesson and any games that might be used to reinforce the lesson. Keep in mind that sometimes things shift or change in a lesson.

As a Horse Leader, you should remain in the arena with your horse. If you do need to excuse yourself, please let the instructor know and make sure a team member can watch your horse for you.

Check to make sure you have all necessary tack for your assigned horse.

If tack assigned to the horse includes a side pull, change out the halter for the side pull prior to the student entering the arena.

### How to put on a Side Pull

1. Release crownpiece from metal hook.
2. Standing on left (on) side, hold the crownpiece in your right hand and metal hook in your left.
3. Gently place noseband over horse's nose making sure that the rope with the rings is underneath the chin.



4. Bring the crown piece over the horse's head and behind the ears.
5. Attach crown piece to the metal hook. Check that side pull is not too tight and the noseband is not too low.
6. Before the lesson, attach the rainbow reins to the lower two rings.

### **Meeting Your Rider**

The sidewalker will be responsible for meeting the rider in the observation area and making sure the rider has a properly fitted helmet. They will then escort him or her into the arena and to their horse (and you!).

### **Moving the Horse's Hindquarters**

If your horse moves too close to the wall sideways, you may need to move him to be able to groom or tack. You are going to ask the horse to move his hindquarters away from the wall (**yield the hindquarters**) so that he is standing facing the wall. You do this **without pulling or pushing your horse**.

#### **1. Position Yourself**

- Position yourself near the horse's **ribcage**, slightly toward the shoulder on the side you want the horse to move away from.
- Face the direction you want the horse to move.

#### **2. Control the Head**

- Hold the lead rope about **12–18 inches from the halter**.
- Gently **turn the horse's nose slightly toward you**. This helps prevent the horse from walking forward and gets them ready to move their hindquarters away from you.

#### **3. Ask With Your Body**

- Step **toward the horse's ribcage**
- Apply **light steady pressure** behind the girth line on the barrel with your fingertips
- Remember: Horses move away from pressure.

#### **4. Release at the First Step**

- The moment the horse steps **away**, even with one hind foot:
  - **Stop pressure.** Release of pressure = reward
  - Soften your body
  - Praise the horse

#### **5. Repeat until horse is where you need him**

Check your surroundings any time you are moving a horse. Keep in mind that some horses are not sensitive or willing to move, others can be very sensitive and move fast.

### **Grooming**

Horses are pre-groomed, and hooves picked out before the lesson. We do this to make sure our horses are free of any irritant that may cause discomfort after tacking because students may miss spots while learning to groom. Each horse in the arena will have a labeled grooming bucket. Students generally take approximately 10 minutes to groom. It's important to keep them on task!

### **Tacking the horse**

The saddle, pad, halter and reins will be staged in the arena. Students generally take approximately 10 minutes to groom and tack. It's important to keep them on task! Bluff and Ridge uses Western Saddles, English Saddles, Specialty Saddles and Bareback Pads for riding. You will be teaching the student to saddle.

### **How to Put on a Western Saddle**

**Make sure to** check the underside of the saddle pad for any dirt or debris that could irritate the horses back

before placing it.

### 1. Position the Western Saddle Pad

- Approach the horse with the saddle pad and let him look at it and smell it.
- Move to the horse's left shoulder.
- Lift the pad high enough to **clear the withers** and gently place it slightly **forward** of the withers on the horse's back.
- Slide the pad **back over the withers** so the hair lies flat.
- Ensure the pad is centered and even on both sides.

### 2. Lift and Place the Saddle

(Note: An offside sidewalker may help you place and position the saddle.)

- If possible, hook the offside stirrup over the horn to avoid hitting the horse's offside with the stirrup or getting the stirrup under the saddle.
- Keep the saddle close to your body and lift the saddle using **your legs**, not your back.
- Gently place the saddle **slightly forward** on the pad.
- Release the offside stirrup from the horn.
- Slide the saddle back so it sits just behind the shoulder blades.
- The pad should extend slightly beyond the saddle front and back and sit level.

### 3. Check Pad and Saddle Position

- Make sure:
  - The saddle is centered and level.
  - The pad is smooth underneath (no wrinkles).
  - The pad is lifted (tented) into the gullet of the saddle to relieve pressure on the withers.

### 4. Attach Cinch to Offside Billet

- Buckle the cinch to the billet. The chart in the tack room will tell you which hole to pin the buckle in the billet.
- Move back to the onside and reach under the horse for the cinch and pull it gentle towards you.
- Check that the cinch is centered on horse (center of cinch should be in center of horse's sternum aligned between the front legs).

### 5. Release the Latigo from the Saddle Ring

- Hook the left stirrup over the saddle horn if possible so that the rigging is easy to see and access. Locate the latigo under the saddle's fender, release it from the ring.
- Thread the end of the latigo through the cinch ring towards yourself. Pull it through until slightly taut.



### 4. Loop the Latigo between the Cinch and Saddle Rings

Thread the latigo through the saddle ring towards the horse. Pull it through completely and then back down to the cinch ring, creating a complete loop between the rings.

### 5. Repeat to Take up the Excess

- You might need to loop the strap two or three times between the cinch and saddle rigging, depending on the strap's length. At least two loops provide strength.



- Most saddles have pins and roller buckles. In this case, tighten the latigo enough to hold the saddle in place and secure it using the pin and roller buckle.
- If your saddle doesn't have a pin or holes, or you need to tighten the latigo past the last hole, you will need to secure the saddle with the following knot.



## 6. The Knot

- Begin the knot by looping the cinch strap through the saddle ring, over itself, and back through the ring, much like tying a necktie.
- Insert the latigo's end down through the formed loop. You will notice its similarity to a necktie though here the straps overlap instead of laying flat.
- Ensure the strap has no twists and lies flat against the horse before tightening to prevent chafing.



## 7. Tighten the Cinch

- Once the knot is tied or buckle secured, eliminate slack from the cinch strap, starting with the first (innermost) loop to ensure tightness and saddle security. Depending on how much strap is left, loop it through the keeper behind the saddle strap. Do not leave the latigo strap dangling.
- Retighten the cinch after walking the horse around the arena to ensure it is snug enough to prevent the saddle from shifting or slipping, yet not so tight as to cause pinching. Your fingers should fit flat under the cinch and the horse should move freely.
- Don't over tighten!

## 8. Safety Check

- Saddle is straight and centered.
- Pad is even on both sides.
- Cinch is secure but not pinching.
- No straps are twisted or hanging loose.

## 9. Final Tack Check before Mounting

- A final tack check will be done by the instructor before mounting.

### How to Put On an English Saddle:

**Make sure to** check the underside of the saddle pad for any dirt or debris that could irritate the horses back before placing it.

#### 1. Position the English Saddle Pad.

- An English saddle pad may be shaped like the saddle or be rectangular (both are pictured here). The pad may have ties or velcro fastener tabs attached to a D-ring on the saddle. It helps keep it in place while riding. These tabs or ties go on the top side, not against the horse.



- Place the saddle pad on the horse's back, positioning it forward over the withers and sliding it back into place. This ensures that the hair on the horse's back lies flat beneath the pad. Make sure the pad is even on both sides. Check both sides to ensure that the pad is not folded, wrinkled, or curling.

## 2. Lift the Saddle On

(Note: An offside sidewalker may help you place and position the saddle.)



- The stirrups on an English saddle should be run up the leathers. This prevents the stirrup from hitting you or the horse as you lift the saddle.
  - Lift the saddle high enough, so it doesn't hit the horse or knock the pad out of position. The saddle should be placed slightly forward and settled back. Place the saddle gently on the horse's back just behind the shoulder (scapula).
  - Tent the saddle pad away from the withers into the pommel area.

## 3. Connect the Girth Buckles

- Take the girth and move to the offside (right) of the horse.



- **Buckle the girth loosely.**
- **Return to the onside of the horse. Reach under the belly and gently pull the girth towards the side you are standing on. Attach the girth to the saddle making sure it is centered on the horse.**
  - **Tighten the girth gently in small increments. The girth should sit one hand width behind the horse's elbow.**
  - The horse leader can now walk the horse around the arena to allow the horse to relax their muscles. If the student is able, have him/her lead the horse under your supervision.
  - Only tighten the girth enough to hold the saddle firmly

in place. Over tightening the girth can lead to injury and may compromise your horse's breathing. You should be able to slide your fingers between the girth and the horse's body.

Leave the stirrup irons run up on their leathers!

## Mounting

Leaders and their students line horses up along the rail between letters M and F facing the ramp to prepare for mounting (watch spacing between horses).

The instructor or another qualified staff will do a final tack check and run down stirrups if an English saddle is being used.

The onside sidewalker will then escort the student to the instructor on the mounting ramp and does a final helmet check while you wait in position. Additional participants remain in line with their team until it is their turn to mount.

The student is responsible for asking the horse to “walk on.” Once hearing this, the leader walks the horse towards the ramp. **As a horse leader** – your job is to safely guide the horse into the mounting area. Please be sure to give the horse plenty of space to walk into the mounting area straight. Immediately before getting to the mounting area, you can begin to walk backward facing your horse’s head. It is preferable for the horse to be close to the ramp and centered in the middle of the mounting area **between the barrel and ramp**. If your spacing is off, please do not push or pull your horse into the correct position – simply walk out of the mounting area and come through a second (or third) time. Once your horse is in the proper position and standing balanced on all four feet, please head them off by standing directly in front of them and slightly to the side about 1-2 feet away. Your lead line should be loose and it is okay for your horse to move their head – you should not hold them still by grabbing their halter or side pull. Please avoid fussing over them while they work- they have a very important job to focus on and minimizing distractions helps them be successful.

A sidewalker will be positioned on the offside of the horse (right). The sidewalker will steady the offside stirrup to prevent the saddle from slipping during mounting, and gently assist the rider as needed. A second sidewalker, if present, should wait at letter K.

Once the student is safely in the saddle and has taken up the reins, the student will ask the horse to “walk on.” The leader slowly walks the horse forward to letter K.

At letter K the team halts for the instructor to check stirrup lengths, rider position and girths.

Some of our riders have difficulty mounting. It is essential that everyone involved in the mounting procedure pays full attention to their individual responsibilities. The leader needs to be especially alert and calm so that the horse remains standing quietly at the mounting area. Please ask your instructor if you are unsure of your responsibility at any stage of the mounting procedure.

As other students are mounting horses, you can lead your student around the arena going counterclockwise. Avoid the mounting area until all students are mounted and keep a two-horse-length spacing between horses.

Once riders are mounted, lessons generally begin with some mounted stretching exercises. This is a time for the rider to warm up their muscles and start to focus. On occasion we may do exercises before mounting.

After stretching, the instructor will review the pattern for the lesson. As leader you will be responsible for the horse throughout the lesson. Wait for the rider to initiate a turn, halt, or trot before prompting the horse. Whenever possible, the rider should give signals to the horse, by voice, reins or legs. Always allow the rider to be as independent as possible but ready to guide the horse in the correct direction.

Avoid giving verbal directions to the rider. This can be especially confusing to a rider when the instructor and the sidewalker are also giving directions. The leader needs to pay attention to the instructor and the horse. As the leader you should do your best to look forward, not back at the horse and rider.

Lessons generally last 45 minutes from the time the student enters the arena until they dismount.

Notes:

- Anytime a horse is halted during a lesson (e.g., equipment adjustments, during instructions prior to class or games), the leader should stand in front of the horse at an angle, face to face, to discourage forward movement.
- To avoid horse interaction, remember to keep at least two horse lengths between horses.
- If there are sidewalkers with your rider, be mindful of their position in relation to the rail or any obstacles so that the sidewalker has a comfortable space in which to walk.
- During periods of trotting, keep the horse in a slow jog rather than a brisk trot unless notified otherwise by the instructor. Be ready to return to a walk or halt immediately if necessary.
- With riders who can steer independently, you may be asked by the instructor to unhook the lead rope. You may need to stay in position by the horse or be asked to move into the center of the arena away from the horse. Remain alert and able to quickly take control of the horse if needed.
- At any time during class, if a leader feels a situation is unsafe, stop your team and ask the instructor for direction. Likewise, if a sidewalker feels a situation is unsafe and asks to stop, stop immediately.

### **Emergency Situations**

During emergency situations (i.e.: fallen rider, storms, loose horse), leaders should stop while the instructor assesses the situation and provides instructions.

Refer to the Emergency Procedure Manual for details.

### **Lesson completed**

- The instructor will ask all leaders to “park” their horses in the center of the arena when the lesson is over.
- Leaders should bring the horse to the middle of the arena facing the instructor. Move to the front of the horse during dismount.
- The instructor and sidewalkers will assist in the dismount.
- Once the student has dismounted, they will thank their team and the horse. The instructor will dismiss the student and the sidewalker will escort them out of the arena. Remain in the center of the arena until all students have exited.

The leader will then take the horse back to their tie ring.

- If the horse has a side-pull, remove it and replace it with the horse’s halter. Tie the horse with a quick release knot. Replace saddle rack on wall.
- Remove tack in the reverse order (last thing on is the first thing off) and place on saddle rack. A sidewalker or aid will return equipment to the tack room, unless it is being used again in the next lesson.
- If the horse you are leading is NOT in the next lesson, you are ready to lead the horse back to the stable. Wait for all horses that are leaving the arena so that they can leave together. Communicate with other leaders!

### **Returning Horse to Stall**

- Locate the horse’s shared paddock space. Return horse to an empty stall within the shared paddock space. If possible, return them to their own stall.  
DO NOT ENTER a stall with multiple horses in it.
- Before opening the stall door, halt the horse and make sure he is calm.

- The leader will enter the stall first. DO NOT let the horse rush into the stall. This is a dangerous habit that we do not tolerate. If that happens, and you are able, take the horse back out of the stall and redo the process until the horse enters calmly. Once the horse is in the stall turn them to face you. Ask for assistance if needed.
- Once you and the horse are in the stall, close the stall door behind you. Step to the onside (left). Unbuckle the crown piece of the halter and gently remove it. You can now thank the horse (do not pet on the face).
- Check surroundings, and if safe, exit the stall.
- Close and latch the stall door.
- Return the halter to the correct hook on the outside of the stall door and hang it by the nosepiece with the lead rope attached. Remember to keep everything off the ground.

If you are done for the day, make sure to return your nametag and sign out!

Thank you for fulfilling this important role and for being part of the Bluff & Ridge Team!

## **PROGRAM INFORMATION**

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