

## A Progression of Western Horsemanship Skills

*All riding requirements must be met with the student demonstrating a safe, basic balanced position: heels down, eyes up, quiet hands, and a line running from the head through the shoulder and hip to the heel.*

### RISING RIDER LEVEL – RAINBOW

*The Rainbow Level is an introductory level for young riders aged 4 through 7, who are not yet able to ride and care for a pony independently. Rainbow Level riders should always practice their skills with the supervision and assistance of an instructor!*

- I take regular lessons - at least once a month - with a knowledgeable instructor.
- I always wear boots and an ASTM-SEI approved helmet when I am working around horses. I can put on my helmet myself and show you how it fits correctly.
- I can tell you how to dress safely for riding.
- I can show you how to correctly approach a pony, and how to move around a pony safely - including walking around behind.
- I can tell you why you have to groom a pony and pick out his feet before every ride.
- I can help my instructor or an older, more experienced rider prepare for a ride. I help with the grooming, cleaning hooves, and putting on the saddle and bridle. When I am a little bit bigger, I will be able to tack up a pony without any help.
- I can show you the basic parts of a saddle and bridle, such as the bit, reins, stirrups and cinch.
- I can lead a pony safely, both with a halter and lead rope and with the bridle reins.
- I can help to do a safety check on my tack and pony before I ride. I can put the reins over my pony's head, and help check the cinch.
- I can mount and dismount correctly and safely. Even if I have to use the mounting block, or have my instructor give me a leg up, I know it is important to get on and off a pony carefully.
- I can demonstrate a basic balanced position while my pony is walking and standing still. I know that a bad position is dangerous for me and uncomfortable for my pony, so I always work hard to keep my eyes up, heels down, and "building blocks" in place!
- I can pick up the reins with both hands and hold them correctly, at a suitable length.
- I can show you how to hold the reins in one hand.
- I can perform basic stretches and warm-up exercises at the walk, on the leadline. (This means someone is holding onto my pony to help me steer him.)
- I can demonstrate how I use my aids (my seat, legs, hands and voice) to ask my pony to walk, halt, and turn.
- I can walk once all the way around the arena without a leadline.
- I can stand up in my stirrups at the halt and the walk, without using my hands to balance.
- I can walk my pony over ground poles, keeping my eyes up and riding straight over the middle of each pole.
- I can ride the jog on the leadline, holding onto the saddle if necessary.
- I can tell you why it is important to cool out my pony after hard work, and help take care of him after a ride.
- I can name at least ten parts of the pony, and at least three grooming tools.
- I can feed a treat to a quiet pony safely. I know why it can be dangerous to feed a pony too many treats, and always ask permission.
- I have filled out the "My Pony" worksheet with the name, color, markings, height, and breed of the pony I usually ride. It is okay if my instructor or another experienced horseperson helps me to find this information and write it down.
- I have helped an experienced horseperson clean out a stall. I know why it is important to clean out a pony's stall and water buckets every day.

## LEVEL ONE – RED

- Brush, pick hooves, saddle and bridle, with assistance only if necessary, demonstrating awareness of basic horse safety.
- Mount and dismount independently (with mounting block if needed).
- Perform warm-up stretches independently.
- Perform an emergency dismount at the halt and walk.
- Halt by disengaging horse's hindquarters ("one-rein stop"), once on each rein.
- Demonstrate a pulley rein and a safety seat.
- Shorten and lengthen reins correctly.
- Perform walk-halt transitions, maintaining balanced position.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers at walk:
  - Change of direction across diagonal
  - Half-circle reverse
  - Half-turn
  - Large circle
- Drop stirrups and pick up again, without looking down, at the halt.
- Stand up in stirrups at the halt and walk, maintaining balance without using hands.
- Ride simple ground pole course (3-5 fences) at walk, demonstrating smooth turns and approaches.
- Ride on the rail at a jog, once around in each direction.

## LEVEL TWO – YELLOW

- Tack and untack independently, in twenty minutes or less.
- Demonstrate how to adjust stirrups and cinch.
- Perform an emergency dismount at the jog.
- Demonstrate use of disengagement and pulley rein by halting horse from jog.
- Ride smooth transitions between the walk, jog, and halt, maintaining balanced position.
- Demonstrate consistent posting rhythm at the jog.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers at walk and jog:
  - Large circle
  - Figure-8
  - Serpentine
  - Half circle, half-turn and change of direction across diagonal
- Ride WDAA Intro Test 1, showing knowledge of elementary dressage terms and figures.
- Ride on the longe at walk and jog without stirrups and reins.
- Drop stirrups and pick up again, without looking down, at the walk.
- Ride at the jog without stirrups, once around arena.
- Stand in stirrups at the jog, developing ability to remain balanced independent of hands.
- Ride grid of three or more poles, demonstrating ability to stay with the horse's motion at walk and jog.
- Ride a ground pole course at the jog with opening and closing circles, good approaches.

### LEVEL THREE – GREEN

- Demonstrate ability to safely catch horse in both stall and field.
- Prepare for a lesson independently in fifteen minutes or less.
- Discuss procedure for warm up, cool down; with consideration of weather, footing, fitness level of horse.
- Ride the lope on the rail, in both directions.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers:
  - Reinback
  - Rating speed at walk and jog
  - Large circle at lope
  - Change of direction at the lope with simple change of lead
- Demonstrate awareness of posting diagonals, including change of diagonal when changing rein.
- Demonstrate awareness of leads.
- Ride the jog for a minimum of five minutes without stirrups.
- Drop stirrups and pick up again, without looking down, at the jog.
- Lope over a single ground pole.
- Jog over a grid of poles with reins knotted and arms outstretched.
- Ride barrel pattern at the jog, both sitting and posting.
- Ride bareback confidently at the walk and jog, balancing independently of hands.

### LEVEL FOUR – BLUE

- Know and demonstrate a minimum of four exercises that can be used to improve the seat.
- Ride ring figures at the jog, sitting and posting with correct diagonals.
- Demonstrate knowledge of aids used for asking horse to correctly bend.
- Ride accurate transitions between the jog and lope.
- Ride a 20m circle at the walk, jog, and lope, with correct diagonals and leads.
- Ride WDAA Basic Test 1 with accurate transitions and ring figures.
- Ride at the walk, jog, and lope without stirrups.
- Lope over grid of two or more poles, maintaining rhythm.
- Lope over a related distance of ground poles.
- Ride barrel pattern at the lope, with simple change of lead.
- Ride a trail course of 6 or more obstacles.
- Demonstrate an effective use of disengagement and pulley rein by stopping horse from lope.
- Ride in the open, up and down hills and over fences and natural obstacles at the walk and jog.

### LEVEL FIVE – ORANGE

- Demonstrate self-directed, progressive warm-up routine.
- Maintain appropriate light contact, demonstrating long rein and loose rein when asked.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers:
  - Turn on the forehand
  - Turn on the haunches
  - Figure-8 at lope
  - Serpentine at lope

## ORANGE LEVEL, CONT.

- Demonstrate ring figures at all three gaits, with awareness of bend and balance.
- Ride ring figures at the walk, jog and lope without stirrups.
- Be able to drop and pick up stirrups at all gaits without looking down.
- Ride the hand gallop.
- Demonstrate balanced light seat appropriate for galloping, at the walk, jog, and lope.
- Lope over grid of 3 or more poles, with and without reins and/or stirrups.
- Jump a course of ground poles at the lope, with smooth turns, good approaches and correct leads.
- Jump a single 18" crossrail.
- Ride in the open in a group, maintaining control.
- Complete a trail ride of one hour or more.

*Most students who pursue riding for a few years are able to achieve an Orange Level ribbon. They should emerge from this level with confidence and competence in basic riding skills, including a secure base of support on the flat and over simple poles and obstacles, working toward the ability to ride with a soft connection achieved through an independent seat. This allows them to ride happily on a trained horse, and participate in lower-level shows and events.*

*The Purple and Teal Levels are designed for dedicated equestrians eager to move past the basics and develop intermediate skills. These riders may be your eager competitors or future horse trainers; they may learn to effectively ride and bring along green horses; they should acquire a strong foundation that will allow them to pursue any equestrian discipline they choose.*

**Not all recreational students will achieve Purple and Teal ribbons.** *These levels (particularly Teal) require hours of practice and, for the average rider, an increased commitment to fitness. To pass each requirement, students should be able to demonstrate these skills consistently, not just one time on a push button horse! It is as important for students to be honest about their goals as it is for instructors to clearly outline the requirements of the work.*

## LEVEL SIX - PURPLE

- Ride on the longe line at all three gaits, without stirrups/ reins, performing balancing and suppling exercises.
- Identify posting diagonals and leads through feel.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers:
  - 20m, 15m and 10m circles at walk and jog
  - Simple change of lead on a straight line
  - Leg yield, from quarter line to rail, at walk and jog
  - Sidepass
- Ride direct transitions between the jog, halt and reinback.
- Demonstrate a walk to lope transition, returning to walk with three or fewer steps of jog.
- Ride lope to halt in three or fewer steps.
- Ride WDAA Basic Test 3, demonstrating accuracy, forward rhythm, light contact, correct bend on circles and through corners.
- Set poles for walk, jog and lope, demonstrating knowledge of stride length and distances.
- Jump a small fence, 18" maximum, with and without stirrups and/or reins.
- Lope a course of 6 or more ground poles without stirrups.
- Maintain a galloping position at the walk, jog and lope, for a minimum of five minutes.
- Ride at the gallop in the open with control and a secure position.
- Negotiate trail obstacles, to include:
  - Opening and closing gate
  - Water crossing
  - Ditch
  - Bridge

## LEVEL SEVEN - TEAL

- Discuss basic dressage theory, showing knowledge of the training pyramid and use of natural aids.
- Discuss appropriate use of artificial aids and training devices.
- Demonstrate a self-directed, progressive schooling session, with consideration of mount's strengths and weaknesses.
- Ride various ring figures at walk, jog and lope, demonstrating rhythm, relaxation, bend and connection. Horse should work through the back with acceptance of light aids.
- Ride accurate, balanced transitions, including halts and transitions between the walk and lope.
- Demonstrate the following maneuvers:
  - Turn on the haunches
  - Leg yield
  - Shoulder-in
  - Haunches-in
  - Countercanter
- Ride a simple change of lead through the walk or a flying change of lead, appropriate to the horse.
- Demonstrate lengthening and shortening stride, developing medium and collected gaits.
- Ride and evaluate an unfamiliar horse, to include work at all three gaits and through basic ring figures.
- Demonstrate proficiency riding with one hand, to include:
  - Horsemanship pattern
  - Trail course of 8 or more obstacles, including sidepass
  - Speed event pattern with changes of lead as required
- Design a polework exercise and discuss conditioning benefits.
- Ride across varying terrain at all three gaits, demonstrating balance of horse and rider while negotiating hills and banks.
- Participate in at least one of the following activities:
  - Working cattle
  - Introductory reining pattern
  - Trail ride of four or more hours, on a horse demonstrating appropriate conditioning



# 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.

## 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

## 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.).





# HorseSense Learning Levels

*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.

## 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.