



4-H

Horse and Pony Project



Introduction to Horses Handbook



*Developed by
Sara Gronski, 4-H Youth Development Agent
Clark County / February 2010*

The first step to getting involved with your county's 4-H Horse and Pony Project is to join a 4-H Community Club. To find a community club near you contact your local Extension Office at:

yourcountyextensionoffice.org
(click on your county)

Once you have joined a club your leader will have you fill out 4-H enrollment forms (this is where you get to pick what you want to work on and learn more about). To exhibit a horse or pony at your county fair you will want to enroll in the Horse and Pony Project. Your club or county may have additional requirements you may want to look into. The following are the rules for exhibiting at the **Clark County Fair**. Please see the current year's fairbook for additional information.

1. To exhibit a horse/pony at the Clark County Fair 4-H / FFA members must **receive and document five educational credits**, some of these may be earned at horse project meetings which are posted in the 4-H newsletter.
2. All project animals must be identified by **MAY 30** (current year) on the "ID form—Member and Horse" provided by the Horse Committee and available at the UW-Extension Office or <http://clark.uwex.edu/4-h-youth-development/project-area-information>. A picture of the project animal and ID form must be on file with the UW-Extension Office by **MAY 30**.
3. It is mandatory that a helmet be worn by members at all times when mounted on their animal at all 4-H and FFA related horse functions.

The Clark County 4-H Horse and Pony project leaders offer many opportunities throughout the year for members to learn about horses. Topics include: horse judging, showmanship, equitation, trail, what to wear and industry professionals such as vets and farriers. There is always more to learn about horses, which makes this project area fun!

Horse Project Meeting

For more information on Horse Project meetings please contact:

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4-H Cloverleaf Newsletter

Working With Horses On the Grounds

Working with horses can be an enjoyable learning experience. Horses are large animals that require both the handlers and spectators to be careful in their presence.

Since horses are flight animals that are often preyed upon they react differently than our cats and dogs that many people are familiar with. When a horse is scared their first instinct is to turn tail and run—not to turn and face the offender.

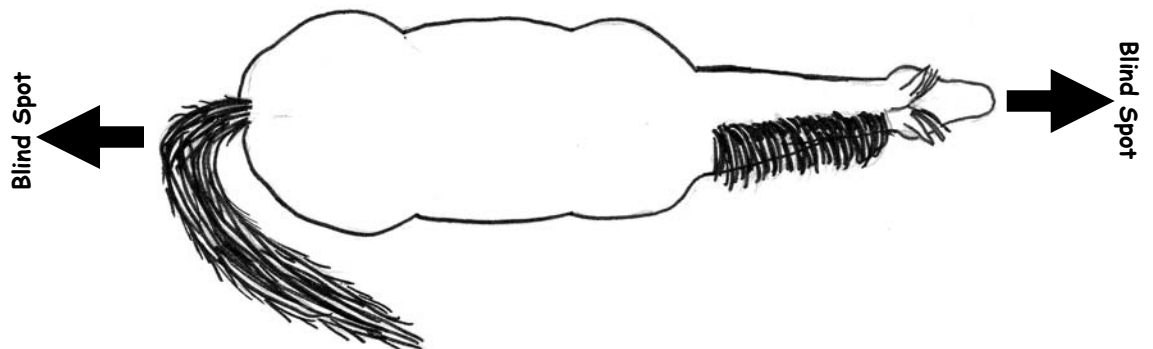
Therefore it is important that horses are approached from the side or at an angle and not from directly in front or behind and that they hear and see the person prior to their arrival. This can be done quite simply with just a “hey pony” or a whistle to alert your presence.

Blind Spot

Horses have two blind spots—one directly in front and one directly behind them. Horses therefore need to raise and lower their head to focus their eyesight when objects are coming directly at them.

If you go out and look at your horse or pony now you will see that their eyes are not located on the front of their faces like yours or mine would be but instead are located on the sides of their faces. This is what causes the blind spots directly in front and behind of your horse.

So always remember quick movements in front or behind your horse or pony can startled them.



Once you walk up to your horse you want to fit him with a halter. Halters come in different shapes and sizes and it is important to have one that fits your horse properly so that it isn't too tight or hanging too loose.

A hand fitting between the halter and your horse's head is a good guide to use. This is a great question to ask a horse project leader if you think your horse's halter isn't fitting right.



Loose Fitting Halter



Tight Fitting Halter



Properly Fitted Halter

Catching and Leading

Now that you have caught your horse and put the halter on it is important to lead your horse safely.

Always lead your horse on the horse's left side or your right side. Your right hand should be on the lead rope below the halter but not on the halter, lead rope snap or chain.



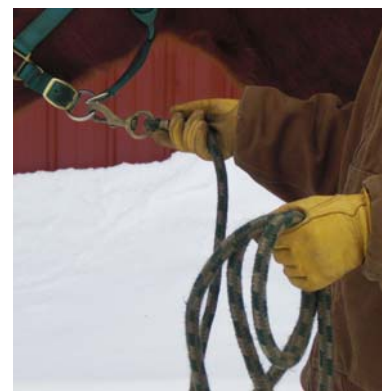
Correct position for leading

It is very easy to accidentally unhook the snap or get your finger stuck in the halter or chain if your horse were to stop suddenly or pull away. The excess rope should be placed in your left hand. The rope should be folded back and forth not wrapped like a lariat rope.

The rope should not be tied to your body in anyway or be left hanging so that you could get tangled or trip.



Correct way to hold lead



In-Correct way to hold lead

Catching and Leading

It is important to never get hung-up or stuck to your horse in the event that something startles them, it doesn't take much to get pulled off balance by an animal much bigger than a person. Now that you have your hands situated on the lead rope you should walk straight forward looking where towards where you are going. The horse should be within arms reach but not bumping into you, dragging you forward or you having to drag them forward. Your body should be even with their throatlatch; which is where their head and neck comes together.



Horse dragging behind



Horse pulling ahead



Correct leading position

It is important that you are in control and that your horse respects you before you starting riding your horse. This can be achieved by practicing showmanship. Showmanship is a class commonly held a horse shows and the county fair. The exhibitor is judged in this class on how well they show their animal to the judge during a pattern and the line-up. Showmanship is good to practice even if you never plan to exhibit your horse in a showmanship class. The basics of leading and working with your horse apply here.

The horse should maintain a respectable distance—walk forward when their handler walks forward and stop when the handler stops. The next step is to add a back. When you turn positioning yourself even with their nose and walk towards them your horse should walk backwards with little or no pressure on the lead rope. A horse that does this is respectful of their handler's space.



Correct backing position

Another skill to work on is turning. It is important to never turn your horse towards you because they may accidentally step on your feet, ouch!

Instead the handler should turn their horse away from them. In the art of showmanship this becomes a very precise move and the horse is asked to plant or not move one of their hind feet and to move their front legs around the back. The left front leg should step over the right front leg; this is called a pivot.

Pivots are performed in numerous increments in the show arena and are measured by degrees. Most often the pattern will call for 90, 180 or 360 degree turns. It is best to start asking your horse for just a step and then praise them and work towards increasing the number of steps they can do at a time.

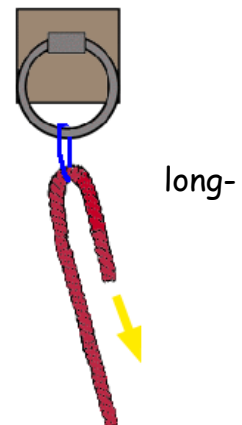


Correct Pivot Position

There are many reasons a horse may be tied. No matter what the reason it is important that the horse is tied safely. A safely tied horse has enough rope to look side to side but not so much rope that if they put their head down to sneak a snack that their rope could get over their head. When a horse feels pressure on top of their head they tend to panic and will pull back until they get free which can result in injury to the horse or the handler.

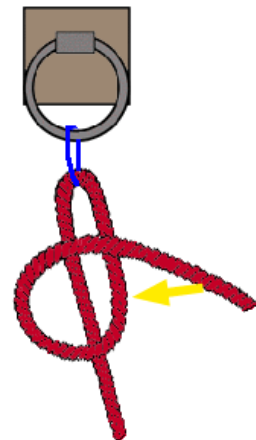
Whenever you tie a horse you should use a quick release knot. A quick release knot can be quickly pulled loose so that the pressure is released and the horse can relax and more closely exam whatever has scared them. It is hard to think about the scary object when they perceive that the scary object has them caught. The steps to tying a quick release knot are:

1. Loop the rope around a sturdy object such as a post (fence boards are not a good choice if there is any possibility that they could be pulled loose). One end of the rope should be longer than the other.

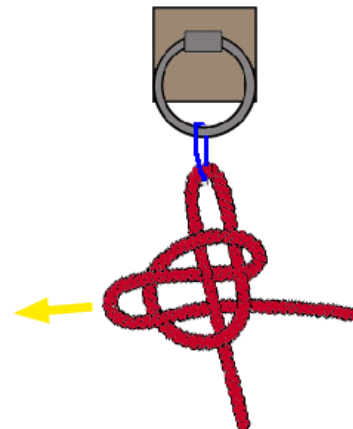


2. Loop the shorter end under the long end.

3. Cross the short end back over the long end and pull a loop up through the circle that is made.



4. Pull the rope tight on its self. When the loose end is pulled the rope will untie.



Images Obtained From:
NewRider.Com; February 2, 2010
http://www.newrider.com/Starting_Out/Getting_Ready/quick_release_knot.html

Another option for tying a horse is to use cross-ties.

When using cross-ties it is also important that the ties hang with a drape that is not too tight but not so long that the horse can get their head under either side of the ties. One side of the tie, either the horse side or the tie side should be easily released either with a quick-release-snap or quick release knot.



Correct cross-tie

Horses often enjoy their groom time and do it socially with their pasture mates at times. Grooming is a great opportunity to get to know your horse's likes and dislikes as well as to check them over prior to working with them. The first thing to start with is cleaning their hooves out. Horses sometimes pick up stones or mud and it is a good idea to clean this out. A stone can cause a bruise which will be painful to the horse just like it is to us.



Correct position to pick hooves



In-Correct position to pick hooves

The next step is to curry your horse. There are a few different types of curry combs—it is best to get one that you and your horse both like. Some are stiffer than others and horses with more sensitive skin don't prefer these. Use the curry comb in a circular motion over the horse's neck and body; avoid more sensitive areas and joints. The curry comb will loosen dead hair, dirt, and other objects. After currying you should use a bristled brush. These also come in varying stages of stiffness. Use the bristle brush on the horse's neck, body and legs to flick the dirt loosened by the curry comb off. It is important to remove this dirt because otherwise it can create saddle sores which are like blisters on the horse's back underneath your riding equipment. Most horses prefer a softer brush on their face and sometimes on their legs too. Be sure to get to know your horse and what their like's and dislikes are.

Grooming

Most horses and ponies have manes and tails. Be sure to comb these out carefully and remove any hay, grass or burs that may have gotten stuck. There are lots of products out there which can help detangle difficult manes and tails. Always stand to the side and not directly behind your horse or pony to avoid being kicked or startling your horse.

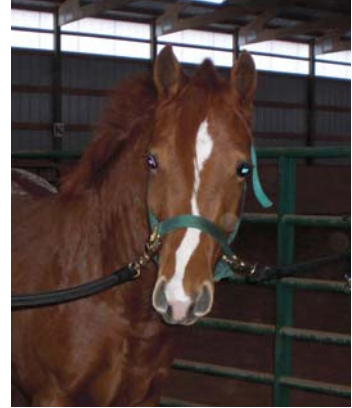


Correct position for combing tail

Body Signals

Horses communicate through body signals. We can better understand horses if we learn some of their signals.

- Ears Pricked Forward means the horse is interested, watching and listening for what is going on around them



- Ears Cocked or Flicking Around means the horse is trying to hear, often times an ear will be cocked towards their handler

- Ears Pinned Back means the horse is angry. This could be a warning to another horse or to you and is often accompanied by pain (the girth is too tight) or wanting to steal food from a pasture mate.



- Ears Relaxed Back the horse is listening to what is behind them, their rider, or are relaxed and content.

Body Signals

- Tail Swishing can mean that the horse is sore, agitated or that there is a fly bothering them.



- Head Bobbing is often accompanied by soreness on one or more feet. If your horse is bobbing his head while walking, trotting, or cantering he is trying to take weight off of a sore leg, be sure to solicit help from a knowledgeable adult.

These are just a few of the common body signals you will encounter when working with your horse.

After spending more time with your horse you will learn to recognize your horse's own unique language which is essential to keeping yourself safe and knowing if your horse is having an off day or not feeling well. It is always best to catch a potential problem early before it manifests and causes more pain.

Saddling

When saddling your horse for the first time it is best to have a knowledgeable project leader or adult help you. The first thing is to place the saddle pad on the horses back—it should be over the top of the wither bone and slightly forward. Always place the saddle pad more forward than you want it so it can be slid back into place. Never pull the saddle pad forward; it will pull your horse's hair and maybe even make them uncomfortable once you add the saddle (kind of like having a wrinkle in your sock). A saddle pad should be thick enough to protect your horse's back but not so thick that it interferes with their movement. The saddle pad shouldn't be so thin either than the horse gets sore from the saddle. There are many different types and sizes of saddle pads; be sure to find one that fits your horse and saddle.



Saddle pad in correction position



Saddle pad forward to far



Saddle pad back to far

Saddling

Once the pad is even on both sides it is time to swing or lift the saddle into place - make sure you don't drop the saddle on to your horse's back, instead lower it gently. Be sure to lift the saddle pad up into the front of the saddle so that it doesn't pinch down on your horse's back.



Pull the saddle pad into the gullet at the saddle

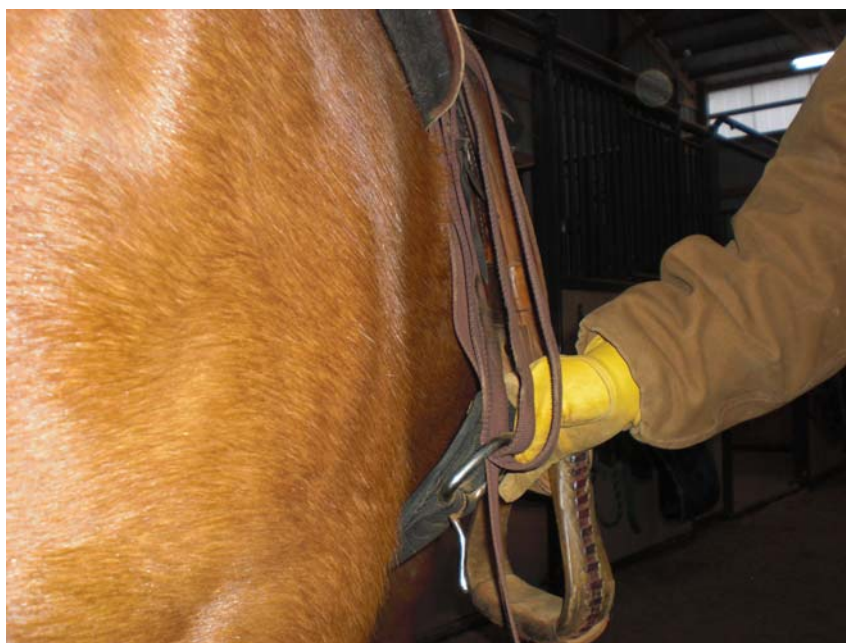


Saddle in correct position

It is now time to connect the girth or cinch. Start on the horse's right side and attach the cinch. This can vary by saddle and type of saddle so be sure to ask your project leader if you have any questions. After attaching the cinch on the right side go to the left side of the horse (walk carefully behind or in front, don't duck underneath) and hook the cinch to the left side. The center point of the cinch should be in the middle of the horse's girth behind the horse's front legs. If this is done too far forward the horse's skin will be pinched; if too far back the saddle will move forward, the cinch will loosen and the saddle may slip sideways.

Saddling

It is important to have a correct fitting saddle and cinch. Equipment that doesn't fit the horse correctly can cause pain or slip and cause a rider to fall. Be sure to check with your project leader or another knowledgeable adult. It is okay not to cinch your horse all the way tight when you first saddle them. Many horses will hold their breath until after you get in the saddle so they have a nice loose cinch once you mount. It is always a good idea to walk your horse around for a few minutes and then retighten the cinch. A tight cinch allows the rider to still slip two fingers between the cinch and the horse. Too tight of cinch will cause pain; it is always a good idea to have an adult check your cinch before you mount up.



Cinch too loose

Bridling

After saddling it is time to bridle your horse. If it is cold out be sure to warm the bit up in your hand before asking your horse to open his mouth. Place the top of the headstall or bridle in your right hand; the bit in your left hand. You will use your right hand to pull the bridle over the horse's head and the left hand to guide the bit into his mouth.



Step 1
Hold bit flat in your hand



Step 2
Guide bit into horse's mouth and the crown piece over their ears



Step 3
Adjust any extra hair or their ears for a comfortable fit; buckle any buckles

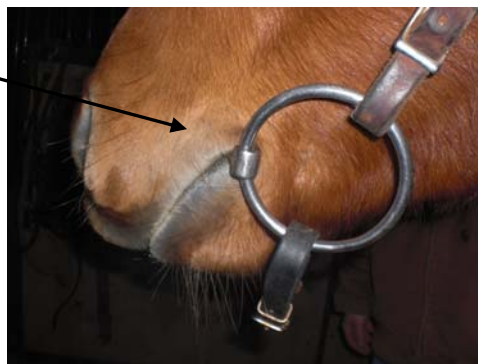
Some horses require more prodding than others to take the bit. Always gently slide the bit in the horse's mouth so that their teeth are not banged. A well fitting bridle will allow the bit to sit comfortably in the horse's mouth. The bit will hang so that there is just one "wrinkle" or "smile" in the side of a horse's mouth. Too many wrinkles or no wrinkles indicate that the bit is not in the correct spot and should be adjusted before starting to ride.

It is a good idea to have your bridle checked as well before starting to ride to make sure that all of the buckles are done correctly and that it fits your horse well.



Correct fitting bit

one wrinkle



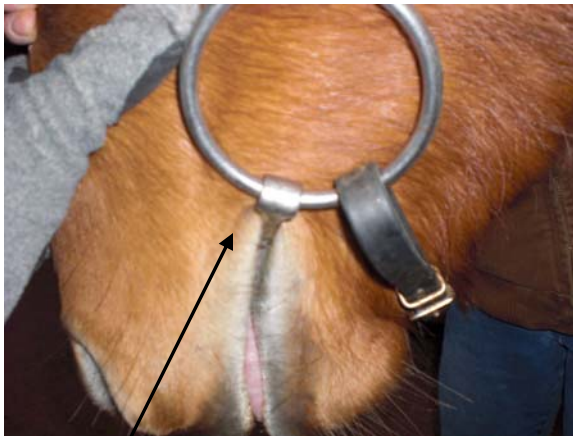
Correct fitting bit (close up)

Bridling

no wrinkle



Loose fitting bit



Bit is too tight

2 wrinkles

The rider's equipment and apparel is just as important as the horse's equipment. For everyday riding the rider should wear long pants, sleeved shirt, boots with a cutout heel and an approved helmet. The boots and especially the helmet can save a rider's life and prevent further injury in the case of a fall from horse or rider.

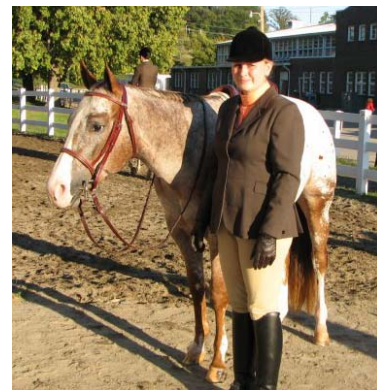
Horse show clothing is a bit different but still requires cutout heeled boots and an approved helmet. When showing in halter or showmanship the exhibitor will be dressed in either English or Western apparel based on the type of horse being shown.

Western apparel will consist of pants, belt, long-sleeved, collared shirt, boots and a western hat or helmet.

English or hunt apparel will be the same as the riding apparel for English—breeches, tall boots, shirt, hunt coat and helmet. When exhibiting your horse under saddle or riding them in the show arena for western the exhibitor can add chaps to their outfit but this is not required. Coordinating gloves are also optional for both western and English.



Western Show Clothing



English Show Clothing

Whatever is worn while handling, riding, or showing your horse be sure that it is safe so that it cannot get hung up on the horse, saddle or fence post. No riding outfit is ever complete without a helmet; and be sure it fits well.

When riding in groups it is always important to keep spacing between the horses. When following another horse it is a good idea to have two to three horse lengths between your horse and the horse in front of you. If you are going to pass the horse always pass wide; two to three horse widths between your horse and the one next to you. This will protect you or your horse from being kicked at or your horse from kicking at another horse it may not like.

Some horses kick; if you have a horse that kicks you need to alert the other riders to your horse's fault. This can easily be done by tying a red ribbon in your horse's tail. If you ever see a horse with a red ribbon increase the passing or following distance to keep yourself safe.



Alert other riders of your kicking horse by tying a red ribbon on your horse's tail

When riding in an arena with others go the same way as the rest of the group. If you and the rest of the group choose to have some people going different directions always stay to the center of the arena and have the horses pass right should to right should so that a collision does not occur.

Riding and working with horses can be a fun and enjoyable activity. Remember it can also be a dangerous activity—even for the best of riders and safest horses.

Always have a competent adult, 4-H project leaders, or parent close by when working with your horse.

This handbook provides basic information for 4-H Horse project members but in no way should it be considered conclusive and therefore the following sources are recommended:

www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/onlinepro/horses.cfm

"If I Were to Train a Horse"

By Jack Brinard

"Getting Your First Horse"

By Judith Dutson

"How to Think Like a Horse: The Essential Handbook for Understanding Why Horses Do What They Do"

By Cherry Hill

"My First Horse and Pony Care Book"

By Judith Draper, Elwyn Hartley Edwards, and
Matthew Roberts

"The United States Pony Club Manual of Horsemanship"

By Susan E. Harris and Ruth Ring Harvie

"Think Harmony with Horses"

By Ray Hunt

"Western Horsemanship: The Complete Guide to Riding The Western Horse"

By Richard Shrake

"101 Arena Exercises" A Ringside Guide for Horse and Rider"

By Cherry Hill

A special thanks to
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for providing the ponies and facility for pictures

*Your county
extension office*



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Clark County

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