

# Online HorseCollege



## **Student Workbook**

### **2.R.04 Using Aids**

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## **Contents**

Introduction	Pg. 4
Leg Aids	Pg. 5
Weight Aids	Pg. 6
Rein Aids	Pg. 7 & 8
Feel	Pg. 9
Whips & Crops	Pg. 10
Spurs	Pg. 11
Extension Lesson	Pg. 12
Recommended Reading	Pg. 13
References	Pg. 14

## **Using Aids Introduction**

How you use your aids and how effective you are with them will depend upon your abilities and level as a rider. The more you progress and refine your skills the better you will be able to influence the horse. Natural aids are those which you give using your body i.e. legs, reins, weight and voice. Artificial aids are those which you use to re-enforce the natural aids i.e. whips, crops and spurs.

In further workbooks specific aids for different paces and transitions will be covered, this workbook provides a basic overview on the types of different aids and how they are applied.

## Leg Aids

These aids are a signal to the horse to begin movement or to maintain movement. The rider's lower leg should be kept in a soft contact with the horse's body however not constantly squeezing or gripping.

This contact kept with the horses sides means that the horse will be able to feel the action of the riders leg quickly, the rider will always have the leg in a position where it can be useful and effective and the leg aids will become smaller because the rider isn't shifting the position of the leg every time they need to give an aid.

The responsiveness of the horse to this aid will depend upon the level training and ability of the rider.

Leg aids may be used in the following ways:-

- forwards and sideways pushing aid
- forward driving aid
- regulating or guarding aid

Forward driving aids are given just behind the girth so that the heel remains underneath the hip of the rider. The leg never remains clamped onto the horse's side instead by tightening the calf muscles the rider gives the signal to move off forward. If the horse does not respond to a short, light aid then the rider needs to use a stronger aid.

Forwards and sideways pushing aids ask the horse to step away from the leg aid in a sideways direction. The rider's leg will move further back behind the girth, approximately 10cm, and should remain with the heel down.

The rider's leg position will remain the same as mentioned above for using a regulating or guarding aid. The purpose of a regulating/guarding leg is to minimise or prevent the horse from moving sideways. It can be used in conjunction with a forwards driving aid. This type of leg aid can also be used to encourage the horse to keep moving forward.



## Weight Aids

A rider's weight can be used by:-

- easing the weight on the seat bones
- increasing the weight on one seat bone
- increasing the weight on both seat bones

The response the horse will have to these aids will depend upon the experience and balance of the rider and the experience and training of the horse. Predominately weight aids are used to push the horse forward, but when refined and coordinated they can also back up the leg and reins.

To use weight aids effectively the horse and rider must be aligned. A rider who is out of balance will not be able to move with the horse and as a result will disturb the horse's way of going.

When increasing the weight on one or both seat bones the upper body should remain tall and upright. The back should become stronger and the rider will need to contract and release the back muscles to allow the rider to keep following movement whilst momentarily exaggerating the tightening of the abdominal and lower back muscles.

When easing the weight on the seat bone the rider places more weight onto their thighs and stirrups. The seat will remain in the saddle while the upper body may come slightly forward. This will be used to ease the weight on the horse's back or when riding young horses.





## Rein Aids

Rein aids should only be given in conjunction with leg and weight aids and can have the following actions:-

- non-yielding
- yielding
- regulating or guarding
- asking
- sideways or opening rein

Only if the horse is submissive to the aids can the riders' directions be effective. The rein must be held in a hand which is positioned correctly with a supple wrist so that aids can be given with sensitivity and fine tuning.

Yielding and asking reins are considered together and can be used:-

- when halting
- when asking for flexion or bend
- performing a rein-back
- for improving the horse's contact with the bit
- for improving self carriage
- in half-halts
- in preparation to begin an exercise

An asking rein can entail closing the fingers momentarily or turning the hand slightly inwards depending upon how strong the effect needs to be. The hand shouldn't remain in a fixed position and shouldn't become a 'pulling' action. If a horse doesn't respond, the hand should yield then repeat the aid, with every asking aid being followed by a yielding aid (This action should **not** become a backwards and forwards sawing on the horses' mouth).

Yielding the rein involves returning the hand to its basic position or slightly opening the fingers or taking the hand forward a little. A yielding rein can also be performed without using an asking aid. The rein contact should remain elastic and yielded smoothly without the rein becoming loose. At times yielding from the wrist will not be sufficient and it may be necessary to yield from the elbow or shoulder.



Correct hand positioning. The thumbs are on top of the hand and the rein passes from the horses' mouth between the third and fourth finger and comes out again over the first finger and under the thumb.

## Rein Aids (cont.)

A non-yielding rein is for when the horse comes against the hand or above the contact, giving this aid involves keeping the fingers closed tightly and maintaining the hands position until the horse yields to the bit (i.e. becomes soft). The hand should not come backwards and it should become light again once the horse has yielded.



The use behind a regulating or guarding rein is to support the neck or shoulder. It is used to complement the action of the inside rein as the rider will be required to yield the regulating rein just enough to allow the required action of the inside rein.

As with all other rein uses, hand position should be kept low.

An opening or sideways acting rein is used especially in turns to indicate the direction by taking the rein slightly away from the horses' neck. It is particularly useful on young horses to indicate the direction of travel.





## Feel

'Feel' is one of the most important things for a rider to develop. This is because it will allow the rider to refine the aids and improve the timing and co-ordination in applying the aids.

'Feel' is important to apply aids because it will allow the rider to:-

- apply the aids at the right moment
- apply them in the correct manner
- apply them with correct ratios of rein, weight and leg
- be applied at the right intensity

The response a horse gives to an aid can be used to determine if it was applied correctly which enables the rider to reflect upon the execution and effectiveness of their aids.

A rider with feel will be able to:-

- tell the difference between a horse which is feeling good with high spirits to that of one which is disobedient
- determine when to revert to an easier exercise if a horse shows signs of rebellion
- distinguish a tired horse from an over faced horse (a horse presented with an exercise it is not physically or mentally ready for) or a horse which has been pushed too hard
- immediately feel and react accordingly to a horse which has yielded or resisted
- detect faults early on in training and advert them

Some riders will have a natural talent or quality which will make learning to 'feel' easier, for example people with adaptability, quick reactions, already possessing an aptitude for rhythm and movement, sensitivity, agility and the ability to concentrate. 'Feel' can be developed through riding educated school-masters, explanations from instructors and practice.



## Whips and Crops

The role of a whip or crop is to re-enforce the riders' aid, never as punishment. Where you apply this re-enforcing aid on the horse will depend on which you are using.

Dressage whips, which vary in length, but for example are approximately 1.2m, are used just behind the riders' leg. They are useful not only for asking the horse for more energy or forwards motion but also helping to re-enforce a sideways asking leg aid.

Crops are shorter, about 60cm in length and are applied to the shoulder of the horse, in front of the riders' knee. These are used for re-enforcing the forward asking leg aid.



## Spurs

Are worn on a riders' heel and are used to re-enforce a leg aid. The spur should never be used as punishment and only be used by experienced riders.

The shank of the spur (the part which extends behind the riders boot) can vary in length with some being blunt at the end and others with a rowel.

A rowel is like a circular wheel positioned at the end of the shank. Rowels can have fine blunt bumps on the wheel, similar to a pizza cutter or large spikes, which should also be blunt.

Some competitions, disciplines and sports have rules and regulations on the type of rowel and the length of shank that is permitted. It is considered unacceptable to sharpen spurs.

Spurs without a rowel are often referred to as 'dummy spurs'. Some people prefer not to use these as they speculate that because they have no rowel they bruise the horse. However any spur which is used incorrectly, rowel or no rowel will cause damage to the horse in that it may sustain injury or become 'dead' to the spur (which is like a horse becoming 'dead' to the leg where the horse begins to ignore the leg aids of the rider through over or incorrect use of the leg aid).

To use a spur the rider first gives the horse the desired leg aid, then if the horse fails to respond the rider uses the spur to re-enforce the aid by bringing the spur into contact with the horses' belly. It should be given in a manner like a leg aid is:- applied then released.



'Dummy spur'



Spur with a small shank and rowel



A western style spur

## Extension Lesson

Identify which type of aid you are more skilled at giving and give reason as to why you think this is so?

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To find your seat bones balance on the edge of a chair or simular (barrels, drums or pilates balls are ideal) and see if you can tilt or rock the object you are sitting on forward and back.

Sitting on an object locate your seat bones and make sure you have your weight distributed evenly on them (they should have even pressure on the object you're sitting on). Then see if you can do the following exercises without the weight on your seat bones changing:-

- turn your head left, right, up and down
- turn your shoulders left and right
- lift your left shoulder up and down
- lift your right shoulder up and down

## Recommended Reading

Publication:-

The Principles of Riding

Author:-

German National Equestrian Federation

## References

Publication:-

The Principles of Riding

Author:-

German National Equestrian Federation

Images:-

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