

How to Break a Horse to Ride

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Step One: Understand Horse Behavior

As gentle as they are, horses are prey animals. They have a natural “fight or flight” instinct, and so one should be experienced on more broke horses. Before even touching a young, or green, horse, make sure you are 100% confident, as a horse’s stress will feed directly off of your fear.

Understand that each horse has their own personality, and that there is no true step-by-step training process. Some horses develop slower than others, and require more aggressive or softer handling. It is important to have a background in horse behavior in order to secure yours and the animal’s safety.

Materials needed:

- Background experience with horses
- Understanding of basic horse behavior

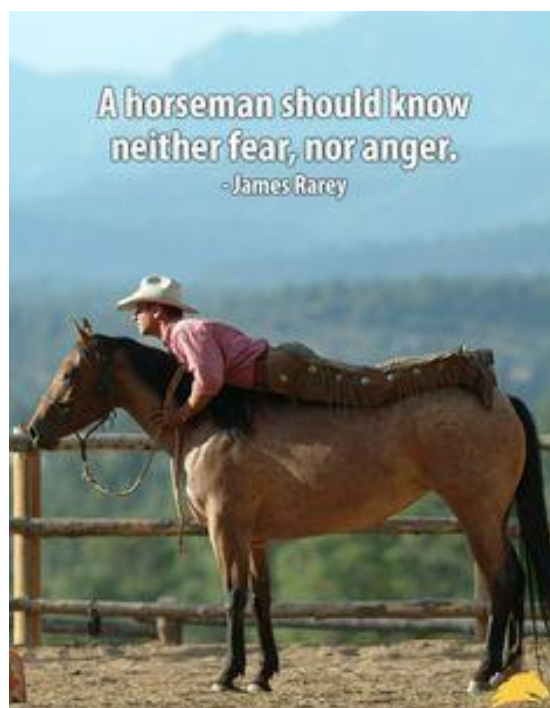


Figure 1

Step Two: Choose your horse

When choosing your horse, you want to make sure they are both physically and mentally mature enough to begin training. For example, if you want to ensure a good quality reining horse, you can choose your horse based on their breeding lines, and choose offspring of well-known reining horses.

However, grade horses can be just as, if not more successful. If you are going to choose a grade horse, you want to make sure they are structurally developed enough to begin hard and involved work. Horses will be fully developed around the ages of two to three, so it is safe to choose a horse around this age.

As you will see in step five, the first few rides are crucial to a horse's training. It is extremely important that if you intend to train a horse from the ground up and not have to fix another rider's errors that you choose a horse that has not yet been saddled and ridden to any extent.

Most importantly, choose an animal that you connect with. Just like human to human interaction, some horses and riders can simply not get along. Spend some time with the animal of interest and use your intuition to know if this is the right animal for you.

No required materials

Step Three: Halter Breaking

You've chosen your perfect partner, and it is now time to halter break them. In this step, you will learn that patience is key in training a horse. Here you will want to begin by earning your horses' trust.

Some horses may take a matter of hours, while others may take days. You want your horse to be in a safe, and sturdy enclosure as you work with them. When halter breaking, you want the horse to approach you. You can do this a couple of ways. You can, either, enter the pen and wait for the horse's curiosity to take over and have them approach you. On a more fearful animal, you may be able to use bribes such as treats and grains. Once the horse has approached you and is showing signs of understanding, such as sniffing you and licking their lips, you may slowly and cautiously use the leadrope and wrap it around their necks, and slide the halter over their nose.



Figure 2

This step may be repeated multiple times on multiple days, until the horse is trusting and comfortable with the halter. Once the halter is on the horse, you can begin leading him or her. You want to begin with using pressure and teaching the horse to move away from the pressure. This includes using the pressure of the halter to move the horse to the side, as well as backwards. A horse will learn to move forward once they understand that a halter will release pressure at the point of forward motion.

Required Materials:

- Safe area to work with your horse (i.e. paddock, round pen)
 - Halter and leadrope
 - Treats

Step Four: Desensitizing and ground work

You have your horse trusting you and working in the halter, it is now time to desensitize your animal. In order to do this, you will begin by using potentially “scary” objects. Most common objects used are plastic bags and tarps.

At this step the most crucial concept is to remember that your horse is naturally a prey animal, and will choose to run at any point it is afraid of an object following him. With this, every new and “scary” object you subject your horse to, you want to introduce it as though it is moving AWAY from your horse, and not towards. This is a very common mistake of even the most experienced horsemen and women. Allow your horse to feel as though they are in control of the situation, and that the object of fear is not in fact a threat.

As you desensitize your animal, you may move onto saddling and bridling the horse. Make sure to slowly introducing your horse to the blanket, the saddle, and the bridle so they do not have a bad experience is the most important part of this step. A horse who is harmed or has a negative experience with any of these objects will remember it, and it will set your training back as you will have to regain trust and retrain instinct, whereas it will be much easier and timely to go slow, and allow a horse to trust these objects at their own pace.



Figure 3

Amongst earning the horse's trust, you must balance this with letting the horse know that you are in charge. Allowing an animal of this size to walk over you and take advantage can be extremely dangerous, and will only end in either you or the horse getting harmed. You must make sure your horse respects your position, and that they know that you are stronger than them. In order to do this you must be confident in your abilities and teach your horse to be constantly aware of your position, and to move his body away from you in any case.



Figure 3

Step Five: The first three rides

At this point, your horse had been exposed to dozens of “scary” objects, and is now an old pro at being saddled and cinched. It is time that you yourself get on the horse to start the real training. It will initially be terrifying for the horse to see you above him, so begin by allowing your body to be above the horse’s head, without being on his back. You can do this in many ways such as standing on a bench by the horse or by sitting on top of a fence, where the horse is aware you are there.

As you begin to get on the horse, you want there to be no surprise. Constantly let the horse know you are there by patting him in any way you can. Touch his neck, shoulders, and hindquarters. Use the saddle and the stirrups as movement before you get on. As you shift your weight into the saddle, be aware of the horse’s emotions; what are his ears doing? His eyes? Is his body relaxed? The first three rides are crucial to how your horse responds – as it can make or break his trust in humans and having them on his back. You want to make this a quiet and safe response.

Once you are on the horse and you and your horse are both relaxed, you can begin asking for forward motion but slowly squeezing with your calves, and making clicking and kissing noises. You’ll begin with just a few steps at a time, and you want to praise the animal for even the slightest forward movement. By the third ride, your horse should be comfortable with your weight on his back, and understand the simple cues in which will allow you to be successful in your next steps of training.

Step Six: Riding your Horse

This step of training becomes variable as to what discipline you are planning to use your horse for. However, no matter what discipline, it is important to remember that patience is key. Understanding that a single bad experience can set your training back days, or even weeks. Having a horse's trust is something you have to work for every day, so it is important to make sure you are keeping yourself and your new horse in safe, and quiet situations.



Figure 5

Glossary

Discipline: category of riding, typically split up into English riding and Western riding.

Grade: An unregistered horse

Green: A domesticated horse who is still untrained, requiring an advanced rider

Lines: Family tree of a horse's breed registry

Soft: Being responsive and reactive to the bit