



Groundwork Games

Five fun exercises to keep you and your horse sharp and engaged over the cold months

BY LINDSEY PARTRIDGE

In the winter, it can be hard to motivate myself to go out and train my horses. However, it's the time of year when I tend to spruce up my ground training to make it easier all year round. Over the warm summer months, it's easy to get caught up in fun, and I find some of the little, but important, training pieces get less attention.

Winter is the perfect time to practice these things, since groundwork sessions are easier and less time consuming to prepare for. If you don't have an indoor ring, you can still do many of these things outdoors in the snow or in the barn aisle. Here are some exercises to try with your horse this winter so you can be superstars when spring comes.

1. GROUND TYING

This is an exercise to teach your horse to stand still and wait. It can be handy to have your horse know this, and also in some competitions you may be asked to do it.

⏻ Before you start: Get excess energy out. It will be much easier if your horse is feeling calm and relaxed. Lead your horse around or practice other exercises until your horse seems to be in a frame of mind willing to stand. Your horse will learn best if it's not a fight, but rather something he is willing to do.

🐾 Safety first: Try this in an enclosed space with no hazards your horse can get caught on if he leaves. Also make sure your horse is wearing a halter/rope that will break if he got caught on something.

📍 Helpful hint: Use an object as a target. Ask your horse to stand still with his nose pointed at an object. This can be a jump standard, fence, barrel or gate. The object will be a marker for your horse to help him know where he is supposed to stand. You could also make a box out of poles to provide a visual barrier for your horse or use a stall mat.

🐾 The exercise: Think of a cue that will ask your horse to ground tie. I tell my horses to 'stay' and then bring my hand up like a stop sign. If your horse leaves, calmly approach him and take him back to the target object. It may take several corrections, but be patient because he is learning.

🍌 Reward: Wait a few seconds (if this is easy for your horse you may wait longer; even up to a minute) and then reward him. I tell my horses 'yes' and then usually offer a treat for a behaviour I want to encourage. I use a roughage cube as a treat, which is low in sugar and easy to feed. You can also give your horse scratches if he likes that.

➡ The next steps: If he understands the concept, advance by walking from your horse's head to his hip, waiting a few seconds and then rewarding. It is important when you walk to your horse's hip that your lead rope is not pulling him. It works easier if you keep one hand on your horse. If you can do this on both sides, then you can try putting the rope on the ground and walking all the way around your horse (always rewarding him afterward). Once this is really easy for him, you can do it with no object as a target, try going further away from your horse, and try moving at different speeds around your horse (run around your horse instead of walk), adding each level of difficulty once he has mastered the previous one.



With a target in place, such as a barrel, use a visual cue, like holding your hands up, and a verbal cue, like saying 'stay', as you slowly back away from your horse (top). As he gets the idea to stay put, you can increase the challenge by walking in a circle around him.





2. AUTO LINE UP

This exercise teaches your horse to line himself up to the mounting block so he is in the perfect position for you to mount, and wait patiently for you to do so.

⏻ Before you start: Get excess energy out. Similar to when teaching ground tying, this exercise involves standing still a lot, which means it will be easier to teach if your horse has been allowed to move around for a bit first. Different horses have different energy levels, so look for when your horse seems willing to stand still to teach this.

If your horse isn't in the ideal position, use your lead rope or rein to move him forward, or in a circle around the mounting block if necessary (top/left). When he is standing still, where you want him to be, reward him with rest and a treat or scratch.

⚠️ Safety first: Use a mounting block that your horse is able to safely walk a circle around while you remain standing on it.

ℹ️ Helpful hint: If your horse is wearing a bridle, it's easiest to do this exercise by holding only the rein that is closest to you (don't hold both reins), or by using a halter and lead rope instead.

🐾 The exercise: Go get onto your mounting block; do not position your horse first, just lead him over with you. Encourage your horse to come parallel to you. He does not have to be in the perfect position, just generally near you and pointing the way you want. If he is confused, simply lead him forward while you stay on the mounting block. This means your horse may walk a full circle around the mounting block to get lined up.

🍌 Reward: Once your horse is somewhat in the right spot, offer a reward. You can say 'yes' and then offer a treat or give your horse scratches. Then get off the mounting block and lead your horse around to allow him to think and move for a minute or so before coming back to the mounting block again.

➡️ The next steps: Each time you try, you can start to get your horse into a more ideal position for you to mount. Eventually, be particular so that your horse is lining exactly where you would want him to be for getting on. Reward each repetition. If your horse is being good with lining up at the block exactly as you want, the next step is to mount him. But when you get on, remember to breathe first for a moment, rather than just picking up your stirrups and going. You can reward your horse after getting on and this will encourage him to line up really easily at the mounting block and wait for you to get on.

hoofjack®

+1.208.278.5283 ❄️ www.hoofjack.com



A ball can be a particularly 'scary' object since it moves once touched.

3. TOUCH IT

This is a helpful exercise to help build confidence and curiosity in your horse.

Before you start: Set up an area with a bunch of different things for your horse to explore and touch. Some ideas include: empty buckets, jump standards, dressage letters, tarp, log, empty garbage can, chair, stuffed toy, saddle pad, saddle, umbrella, blanket, jacket or grooming box.

Safety first: Make sure the objects are safe and not something your horse could get hurt or caught on.

Helpful hint: Try having objects of different sizes, shapes, and colours. As well, have objects of different heights (some on the ground, some that are taller or hanging on the fence or on a chair).

The exercise: Lead your horse to the object and as you approach, try to keep his nose lined up to it. Point at the object and say 'touch.' Allow your horse time to get curious and be patient until they touch the object.

Reward: Once your horse touches it, say 'yes' and then offer a treat or give him scratches. Then move on to a different object.

The next steps: If your horse is doing really well, try putting different objects side by side to see if he can understand which one you want him to touch. You can also try putting out 'scariest' objects. You can add speed and see if you can trot, in-hand, from one object to the next. Also try switching sides so you send your horse to objects on both the left and right side of his body.



HENRY EQUESTRIAN
HEP[®] INSURANCE BROKERS LTD.

Official Insurance of Equestrian Canada

Build your horse insurance policy to suit your needs. Get everything you need and nothing you don't.

- > Full mortality
- > Medical & Surgical
- > Waiver of Depreciation
- > Loss of Use
- > Agreed Value
- > Guaranteed Renewal
- > Competition Withdrawal
- > Extra Boarding Expense
- > Automatic Extension
- > World Wide Coverage
- > Air Trip Transit
- > Physical damage for horse trailers
- > Tack
- > Liability
- > Lease Fee Protection Plan



The Henry Equestrian Insurance Plan is offered throughout Canada.

To obtain a quote contact the office nearest to your location.

HEAD OFFICE - ONTARIO - NEWMARKET **Henry Equestrian Insurance Brokers Ltd.**
1-800-565-4321 • www.hep.ca

ALBERTA AgPro Insurance Brokers
780-452-5561 • www.agproinsurance.com

BRITISH COLUMBIA Westland Insurance
1-800-899-3093 ext. 138

MANITOBA Oldfield Kirby Esau Inc
1-877-653-4357 ext. 326 • www.oldfieldkirby.com

MARITIME PROVINCES Brooklyn Insurance Agency
1-800-735-4614 • www.huestis.ca

ONTARIO - BELLEVILLE McDougall Insurance & Financial
1-800-361-0941 ext. 1246 • www.mcdougallinsurance.com

QUEBEC - DRUMMONDVILLE Leclerc Assurances et services Financiers
1-800-567-0927 • www.leclercassurances.com

SASKATCHEWAN Chaben McPherson Agencies Ltd.
306-244-3020 • www.chabencmcpersonag.saskbrokers.com

UNDERWRITTEN BY AVIVA ELITE INSURANCE COMPANY



HEAD DOWN



BENDING



TUMMY TUCK



BUM LIFT

4. STRETCHES

These are great to do with horses to help them relax and become more supple and giving in their bodies.

Before you start: You may want to teach your horse to ground tie first so that he is more patient with these exercises.

Safety first: Be careful to stay within your horse's limits, never forcing a stretch. If you have any concerns or are unsure about his limits, consult your equine vet, massage therapist or chiropractor. When asking your horse to lower his head, make sure you are at his side so that if he quickly raises his head you are out of the way.

Helpful hint: It's easiest to do some of these exercises using baby carrots as a reward that your horse can reach for.

The exercise: You will ask your horse to do some different postures with his head/neck, as well with other parts of his body. Give your cue, and if your horse starts to move forward or back, just ask him to stand still and try again.

Head Down: Stand at the side of your horse and gently pull down on the halter to ask him to lower his head. As he does so, release pressure on the halter, and then if you want him to go lower, apply gentle pressure to ask for lower. Try to see if you can get his head all the way to the ground. Hold the position for a few seconds.

Bending: Ask your horse to lower his head slightly and then bend to the side. You stand on the left and ask the horse to bend left, or stand on the right side to ask the horse to bend to the right. Check that your horse bends the same to each side.

Tummy Tuck: Run your fingers back and forth with gentle pressure (from head to tail) along your horse's midline (near where the belly button is) to ask him to lift his back. Hold for a few seconds and then relax.

Bum Lift: Rub firmly at the top of each hip joint to ask your horse to tuck his hindquarters and will flatten his back. Hold for a few seconds and then relax.

Reward: At first, you can offer a reward after each stretch, but as you progress, you might reward less because the stretches become easy and pleasurable for your horse.

The next steps: You can repeat each stretch a few times and increase how long you ask your horse to hold each one. In the beginning, you hold each stretch for a few seconds, but after a month or so, you may be able to hold them for 30 seconds.

5. BOOMERANG

This is one of my Harmony Horsemanship™ Calm Connection exercises. It helps to develop a strong liberty connection.

Before you start: Set up a few objects that you can send your horse around. Ideas include a barrel, dressage letter, short jump standard, pylon or empty feed tub.

Safety first: Make sure the objects are safe and not something your horse could get hurt or caught on.

Helpful hint: Try having a variety of objects spread throughout the space you are training in.

The exercise: Either lead or send your horse around the object (the horse goes around the object, not you). Then, as he is coming around the object, start to back up your feet, which draws your horse toward you. When he looks at you, offer your hand for him to touch. The hand touch will act like a target to help your horse to know where to go. I find that horses pick up the hand touch easily. It comes pretty naturally to them because it is similar to how they greet horses in the pasture.

Reward: After your horse has come to you and completed the hand touch, offer a reward such as a treat or scratches. Don't have the treat already in your hand the horse is touching, because the idea is to teach the horse to come find you, not the treat.

The next steps: If your horse is doing really well, try sending him from a further distance to go around the object. You can also try asking for faster speeds (for example, ask the horse to trot).

Only repeat each exercise until your horse seems to be understanding and relaxed about it. It is better to try it for a short amount of time (less than 10 minutes), with a little bit of progress than try something for an hour and both of you become frustrated. Always finish with the horse willing to do more so he bring enthusiasm to the next session.

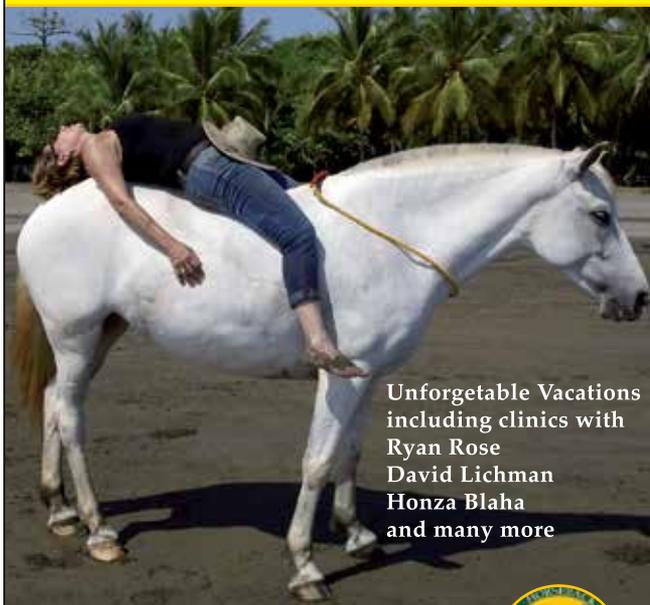
Have fun and give it a try. 🐾

Lindsey Partridge is the 2015 & 2016 Thoroughbred Makeover Champion of Trail, and 2016 Freestyle Champion and a busy clinician. Visit harmonyhorsemanship.ca to learn more.



Send your horse around an object, like a jump standard, while remaining stationary yourself (top). As he comes around the object, use your hand as a target, and step back to draw him toward you.

PACIFIC COAST - COSTA RICA NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP VACATIONS



Unforgettable Vacations including clinics with Ryan Rose, David Lichman, Honza Blaha and many more

www.horseridecostarica.com

