

NTRC Horse Leader Manual

General

- If you have questions, ASK! This is rule number ONE!
- Your horse will mirror whatever energy you bring into the arena. If you feel agitated or anxious, your horse will feel it and you may have a more difficult time communicating with them. When you come into horse lead, keep your outlook positive and your demeanor calm. If you do your horse will feel the same. Relax and breathe!
- You may hold your lead rope palm down or palm up, depending on your comfort and the effectiveness for your horse. Please try both with a new horse to find which method allows for better communication between you and your horse.
- Hold your lead rope NO LESS than 6" from the clasp. Your horse will respond better to a gentle hand and a relaxed lead than if you choke up on the rope aggressively.
- Keep your focus forward. That's not to say you can't look at your horse, but especially when asking them to walk-on, make turns, etc., make sure to keep your eyes forward. Every time you look to your horse during those transitions you are asking their permission, and we want you to be the team leader, not them.
- Before you bring your horse into the arena, make sure that your horse had the correct reins and stirrups for their rider. Do not assume that what the horse is wearing is right, always double check. If the instructor has to adjust every rider it can cut into class time significantly, especially if reins or stirrups need to be swapped out.
- Familiarize yourself with the dressage letters in the arena. These are the letters around the edge of the arena that mark the corners and midpoints. The instructors will use them frequently for landmarks during class.
- Listen to the instructor, especially when they are giving instructions to the rider. The rider will do their best, but unless they are totally independent you will need to know what's going on in class so you can help your horse follow the instructor's directions.
- Whether you are moving or stopped, make sure to maintain safe spacing between horses at all time. There should be a full horse length between all horses. While our horses are very well behaved within their herd, if they get too close, they may feel crowded and react unpredictably or dangerously. If your rider is off-lead and they start to get too close to other horses in the arena, please step in right away. Don't wait for an accident to happen!
- If your rider has side walker(s), try not to overwhelm the rider with too much input. The side walker(s) should do the majority of the work with the rider while you focus on the horse. However, if you rider has no side walkers don't hesitate to jump in! In fact, your rider may need minimal support from you in addition to your leading their horse.
- If your rider is off-lead, stay in horse leader position by your horse's neck unless the instructor asks you to do otherwise. As the rider progresses the instructor may ask you to move farther away, but unless specified stay close.

- Don't use harsh corrections without consulting with your instructor first. Our horses have dozens of different leaders. They may be used to a slightly different cue than the one you are giving, they may need a different approach, they may have had difficulty in a previous class that day, you just never know! Never use harsh corrections before speaking to your instructor about other options, and it will only ever be a last resort.

Halted

- When you are stopped, turn and face your horse on an angle towards their eye. That way your horse can see you, you can see them, and they know that they'll be stopped for a while. This does not apply to brief pauses, but it does for every full stop.
- Every time you stop and face your horse, bring your lead rope hand gently to the horse's chest and use a kissing sound to square your horse's hooves. That means your horse should be standing with their front feet together and their back feet together, with their hips level. Your horse should stand square every time they stop. This will help your rider keep centered in the saddle and is better for the horse's back. Always square your horse's feet moving backwards, never forwards.
- If you need to back up your horse, bring your lead rope hand gently to the horse's chest and use a kissing or clucking sound. It should take very little effort; you should never have to physically shove the horse.

Mounting

- Two minutes before class is due to start, line up along the left wall facing the mounting block. That way your instructor can come check your horse's girth and gear before rider's mount.
- Approach the mounting block as straight as possible, this will make it easier to get your horse close enough to the block for even the smallest riders to mount.
- When you reach the steps up to the block, stop your horse. Turn and face the horse and lead them into the block by walking backwards in front of the horse. Walk into the block one step at a time, with a full stop between each step. This will make it easier to move your horse as close to the block as possible and will reduce the chance of the horse moving too far forward in the block.
- Once your horse is positioned appropriately for the rider to mount, square your horse's feet. This is especially important in the mounting block, as our riders do not always have the smoothest mounts and we don't want to stress the horse's back.
- Once your horse is stopped and squared, stand facing your horse slightly to left of the horse's head. That way your body is a barrier out of the block and will prevent your horse from exiting the block early.
- Once the instructor has given you the go ahead, you may return to regular leading position and lead your horse out of the block. Be sure to move one step at a time as slow as possible out of the block since the instructor and/or side walkers will be coming down the steps and we want to keep them safe as well. Stop in the corner for the instructor to complete gear and safety checks.

At the Walk

- When taking off into a walk, cue your horse verbally with 'walk-on' and/or a cluck. After your verbal cue use a 'showmanship lead' with your body: lean your upper body ever so slightly forward as you take off into your walk. This will give your horse a visual cue to follow before they actually have to start moving and help with smoother transitions.
- While leading your horse, you should always be between the horse's ear and shoulder. You should not be out front dragging your horse, or behind letting them drag you.
- Use your body to communicate with your horse. They will mirror your energy. If your horse is sluggish use more energy in your walk, and if they are restless walk calmly. Use your body to tell your horse where you intend to go by looking and turning your body.
- Take your time! If your rider doesn't get something right away, give them a chance before stepping in. Always allow the rider to do as much as possible independently. Similarly, be patient with your horse. Our horses have dozens of different leaders, it may take them a moment to realize what you're asking. Don't expect responses instantly and don't use harsh corrections.
- When reversing on the half circle, be sure to turn your horse towards the inside of the arena. That way there is no chance of your circle bumping into the wall. When changing direction on the diagonal, walk around the short end of the arena and cross from the corner to corner, then continue across the other short end.
- If you have side walkers with your rider, remember which side they are on and make sure you leave appropriate space for them between walls and obstacles. If you get too close you may 'scrape them off' on the wall and leave your rider unassisted.

At the Trot

- If you are unable to trot at least two lengths of the arena, please tell your instructor before class! We will sub you out if necessary.
- You should never be dragging your horse. Even at the trot you should be between the horse's ear and shoulder. Use the energy in your body to motivate your horse.
- NEVER slap your horse. A shock may cause them to behave unpredictably which is dangerous for the rider. Even if you have a crop, it is to be used as a visual motivator or with a light touch, NEVER as a whip.
- Start slowly and don't be afraid to hold your horse back. We would rather your horse have a slow trot than a too-quick uncontrolled one. You should start cuing your horse from a quick walk rather than a run, and if you need to speed up you can incrementally. Don't start in a dead run assuming it will be needed.
- Stay calm, breathe, and relax. If you start to get agitated your horse will feel it and it will be more difficult for both of you. If you start to feel tense or frustrated take a moment to breathe and center yourself before you continue.

Horse Warm-Ups

- 5-10min before class begins, bring your horse into the arena to warm them up. Even if the horse has already had class that day, it will help you communicate with your horse in class if you take a couple moments to acquaint yourselves before the rider mounts. Make sure you cover:
 - Will you lead this horse palm up or palm down? Which does the horse respond better to?
 - Showmanship leads
 - Transitions: halt-walk-trot-walk-halt
 - Trotting, even if it's not part of the lesson plan. It will help get the horse's energy up for class
 - Backing, to help stretch your horse's back before the rider mounts
 - Double check: do you have your reins and stirrups?
 - Any specific skills that the horse will need for that particular class. Ask the instructor what you will need for the day
 - Introduce your horse to the arena set up for the day and any equipment or activities that will be used
- If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the horse you are leading, ask the instructor before class!

Emergencies

- If you find yourself in an emergency in which you are unable to control your horse, inform your team IMMEDIATELY so the rider can be dismounted. The instructor can step in to deal with a horse problem, but only after the rider is safe.
- In case of any emergency that requires the rider to dismount, once the rider is on the ground lead the horse away immediately. The side walker will stay with the rider and the instructor will deal with the rider first and the horse second.
- If another team in the arena is having an emergency and the rider is being dismounted, lead your horse to the farthest possible area of the arena and stand by. You may calm and reassure your horse and rider, but unless your situation also becomes unsafe the rider will remain mounted and class will continue once the situation has been addressed.
- In case of environmental emergencies such as a fire, extreme weather, etc., the arena will be evacuated. If the situation allows, lead horses back to the barn to be untacked and put to pasture. If the barn is inaccessible or unsafe, immediately lead the horse out of the arena with the rest of the class. If the situation allows, horses can still be untacked and put to pasture.
- If the situation is such that there is no time to care for the horses, do your best to remove reins and stirrups and turn your horse loose outside the arena.
- Once your horse is out of your hands, join the rest of the class at the swing set by the parking lot.