



Evaluate your Horse's Ground Manners!
ESTABLISH HARMONY AND TRUST





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Ground manners are extremely important to keep you safe and set the tone for your ride. Your horse must pay attention to you the moment you catch them. Each second that you spend with your horse on the ground defines your relationship and impacts your riding. Ground manners are essential so that when your horse startles, they remember you, stay controllable, and look out for you. Additionally, a successful ride starts with your interactions on the ground. As soon as you catch your horse pay attention: Are they responding to your aids? When you ask them to move or lower their head, are they respectful, quick and in tune with you? Inside this PDF, you will learn five simple exercises to test and improve your horse's ground manners!



I'm Amelia Newcomb and ground manners are a huge part of my program - even with my Grand Prix horses. The majority of the time we spend with our horses is on the ground. I love spending time with my horses and when they are paying attention and responsive, I get to enjoy them and develop deep connection and trust. Spending time teaching your horse simple ground manners goes a long way to keeping both of you safe. And, believe it or not, groundwork encourages your horse to listen to your aids when you ride setting you up for success.



I hear so many stories about people getting bitten, stepped on, kicked, or frustrated about trailer loading. The truth is, many of these incidents are avoidable with simple groundwork exercises! The key is to practice and control every step your horse takes - before you have a “problem”. Spending a little time every day teaching your horse to respond on the ground will establish a relationship of trust and harmony. It keeps your horse and you happy.

Plus, the relationship you have with your horse on the ground carries over to your riding. Feeling more confident you will increase your horse’s obedience on the ground! Proper ground manners set the tone, getting your horse focused on you so that you can have a nice ride together!

By now I should have you convinced – ground manners are important! Watch this video on [ground manners](#) and print out this worksheet (or fill it out on your phone or computer). Use these five exercises to test and assess your horse’s ground manners. It should take less than five minutes. Give your horse a score on each test, add up your scores and then read what it all means.





THE TEST

Give your horse a score of 1-3 on each of these five tests:

- 1** = Non-Responsive/Wrong Answer – your horse will not react and ignores you
- 2** = Some Response – eventually your horse responds but it takes a lot of pressure and or time
- 3** = Great Response – your horse responds immediately to a very light pressure

Score your horse

☐

1. The Poll Release: Will your horse drop their head?

Put the halter on your horse. Apply a light pressure on the poll. Will your horse lower their head to the ground?

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2. STOP! Do they stop when you stop?

Start by leading your horse forward. Then stop abruptly. Does your horse stop?

☐

3. Get your horse out of your space

Ask your horse to back away from you without touching them. Send energy towards your horse to see if they will get out of your space.

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4. Move sideways: Will your horse move over when you're tacking up?

Set your horse up in the cross ties, hold them or tie them. When you step to the side of your horse apply pressure with your hand where your leg aid goes. Will your horse move over?

☐

5. Feet: Will your horse pick up their feet?

Pick up your horse's feet. Does your horse give to pressure?

Total Score:

☐



Exercise Explanation

You might be wondering why these exercises are important! They are all essential to practice and perfect to develop trust and harmony. I do these exercises every single day with my horses and every response matters!

1. The Poll Release

This simple poll release is an important test of relaxation, submission, and trust. It teaches your horse to give to pressure. In order to safely and efficiently halter and bridle your horse, they must lower their head. Your horse eats from the ground and there is absolutely no reason you should stand on your tippie toes to bridle or halter them! Furthermore, teaching this, will help you get your horse to lower their head when you are riding them! For the poll release, put one hand on the noseband of the halter and the other on the poll. Apply downward pressure and release the instant your horse lowers their head – even if it's just an inch!



2. Stop! Do they stop when you stop?

When you stop moving, your horse should instantly stop to avoid running on top of you and getting in your space! Your horse must follow your body language and respect you. It is important that your horse respects your space so that when they get scared they move around you instead of on top of you. When you're leading your horse, practice stopping. Imagine a two foot space bubble around you. If your horse invades your bubble or goes past you ask them to back up immediately and then repeat the stopping exercise.





3. Get your horse out of your space

Getting your horse to back up out of your space is a clear sign that your horse trusts and listens to you. For safety, your horse must stay out of your space bubble so they don't accidentally bump into you! Teaching your horse to back up on the ground also helps teach them to back up under saddle. Plus, this great exercise engages your horse's hind end and strengthens their topline.



4. Move sideways: Will your horse move over when you're tacking up?

This test is important because as you're tacking up, you need to access both sides of your horse for grooming and saddling. Your horse should respectfully move over and allow you to access each side. This also starts to teach your horse the lateral leg aids. When you're riding and you want to do a leg-yield, your horse must understand to move sideways, not just forward, from the pressure of your leg. This is the aid for a leg yield.



5. Feet: Will your horse pick up their feet?

Picking up the feet, requires that your horse is trusting you and focused because they're giving up their ability to move away quickly. Often when horses are tense, distracted, or not paying attention to their handler, picking up the feet can be nearly impossible! Start by sliding your hand down your horse's leg. Your horse should lift their leg from a light squeeze just above the fetlock. You should not need to shove and pinch.





Great! Thanks for testing those five exercises and scoring your horse. Add up your scores and see where you fit in based on the descriptions below.

Here's a breakdown of what each score means:

5-8 Warning Zone

If you scored in this zone, your horse could use some work on their ground manners. Since your horse is not really paying attention, you don't have much control or influence. When something spooks your horse or you go away from home, you will have even less control! You might get stepped on and chances are that you (or someone else!) will get in some sort of difficult situation. You **NEED** to spend 5-10 minutes every day working on ground manners. It will pay off and you will feel more confident both on the ground and riding your horse.

8-10 Comfort Zone

Your ground manners could be better. You have some influence over your horse on the ground. Nevertheless, you should probably practice and get your horse more responsive and paying attention to your aids. Especially if you want to go to a horse show or if your horse gets excited and spooks, the better manners your horse has in a controlled situation, the more control you will maintain during a difficult situation!

10-12 Good Horse Zone

Your ground manners are acceptable, but they could be better. Getting your horse even more responsive to lighter and lighter pressure will make your life easier. Repeat these exercises until your horse will respond to the lightest aid possible.

12-15 Unicorn Zone

Great work on your ground manners! It is wonderful that your horse is so responsive and respectful. It is nice to work with a horse that is paying attention giving you and your horse a lot of confidence! You can either stay here or you can advance incorporating more exercises to improve your riding. Did you know you can and should teach leg-yield, halt, half pass and piaffe all from the ground?

Thank you for completing this worksheet! The better your ground manners, the more confident and responsive your horse will be when you ride them. Groundwork is a huge passion of mine. As a kid, I spent several years working with natural horsemanship trainers where I started hundreds of youngsters and trained "problem horses." Groundwork and ground manners are what kept me safe and gave me the skills and the foundation to train any horse and fix any problem. If you're struggling with your horse, pay attention to them on the ground. Be particular about the way that they respond to you all the time. Horses are incredibly sensitive and honest creatures. Set clear boundaries and intentions when interacting with your horse to help them relax and trust you. Knowing what to expect every time develops trust and harmony.



What's next?

If you want to learn more about groundwork and how to improve your relationship with your horse, check out my Groundwork Essentials Masterclass. This is the ultimate resource to establish harmony and trust with your horse. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Here are some additional resources to help you:

Our mission at Amelia Newcomb Dressage is to help you **LEARN, TO *love* YOUR RIDE**
We have a ton of FREE resources, click below to be directed to the links.

[3 Quick Groundwork Exercises
for Relaxation and Suppleness](#)

[What to do When You can't Ride](#)

[Dressage Groundwork](#)

[Teach your Horse to Piaffe in Hand](#)

[Amelia's Dressage Club
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[Free PDF: Canter with Confidence](#)

