



CHAPTER 14: BASICS: WESTERN HORSEMANSHIP

Horsemanship, or equitation, is the art of riding in a balanced and graceful manner. This takes time and patience and can only be achieved if you and your horse work together as a team.

The following suggestions will help you become a better rider. This basic information can be applied to every type of riding with slight modification.

Mounting

There are two positions considered proper for mounting. In the first position, as shown in figure 63, the rider stands by the horse's left shoulder with his body facing a quarter turn to the rear of the horse. The rider's head is turned so both ends of the horse can be watched. This is the safest position to use when you mount.

It is easier to place your left foot into the stirrup from this position, but be careful not to rake the toe of your boot along the horse's side as you swing up. Brace your knee against the horse for support to keep your foot away from its side. When you use this position, take one hop on the right leg and go into the second position briefly as you swing into the saddle.

The second position, shown in figure 64, is used when you are tall enough to stand and place your left foot in the stirrup without moving back to the rear of the horse. You should face squarely across the seat of the saddle. Turn your left foot so the toe of your boot is pointed forward or into the cinch.

In both positions, hold the reins in your left hand with the left rein slightly shorter to give enough tension to steady your horse. Place your left hand on the horse's neck just in front of his withers.

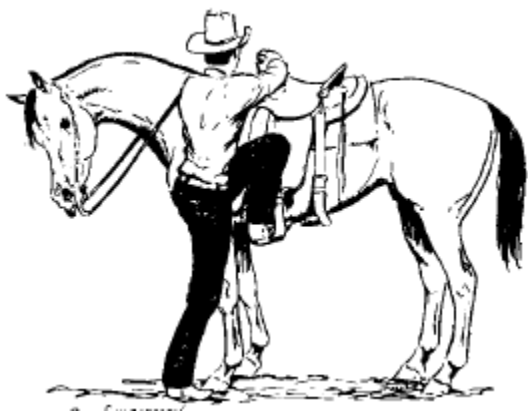


Figure 63. First position. Use this method to mount green-broke horses, or horses unfamiliar to you.



Figure 64. Second position. Use this method when you are tall enough to place your left foot in the stirrup without moving back to the rear of the horse.



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Steady the stirrup with your right hand until your left foot is in the stirrup. Then place your right hand on the saddle horn and your left knee against the horse. Swing up and into the saddle with a spring by pushing with your right leg. Your body will be balanced by the triangular base of support formed by your hands and knee.

Spring hard enough with your right leg to carry you up and over the saddle with a minimum of weight on the left stirrup. Lower yourself smoothly and lightly into the seat of the saddle. Do not swing too high and plop into the saddle.

If you consistently pull the saddle to the side, you are not springing up hard enough. With practice, you will mount in a smooth, easy motion.

Dismounting

When you dismount, use the same hand position. Take the slack out of the reins to steady the horse. While holding the reins, place your left hand on the neck of the horse, grasp the saddle horn with your right hand, shift your body weight slightly to your left leg and keep your left knee in close to the horse. Your right foot should be free of the stirrup.

Swing out of the saddle and keep your right leg as close to the horse as possible without hitting the cantle of the saddle or the horse's rump. Do not swing your right leg in a wide arc. Keep it close to the near side of the horse so you will face slightly forward when your right foot touches the ground.

Push down on your left heel to allow your foot to slip out of the stirrup. Do not roll your left foot on its side to slip it out of the stirrup. If you are not tall enough to reach the ground with your right foot, slide both feet out of the stirrups. Swing your right leg over the rear of the saddle while rolling your belly to the saddle seat, and land with both feet on the ground.

Seat position

Your position in the saddle is important to maintain balance and rhythm for ease of riding, and to carefully use aids.

Sit tall in the saddle in a balanced, relaxed manner. Keep your back erect and flex with the horse. Do not slump in the saddle and never sit back on the cantle with your feet shoved forward. You will find it necessary to change your seat slightly for different types of riding, but the basic principles remain the same. You should sit where the horse can be controlled with aids in a comfortable riding position. Keep your body weight where it will help rather than hinder your horse's movements.



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Note how the rider in figure 65 sits erect and squarely in the center of the saddle. The rider sits deep in the seat of the saddle and not on the cantle. The rider should not be tipped forward or backward on the his or her pelvis. The ball of his or her feet should be the contact point with the stirrup. The rider should push down on the heels and pull up with the toes.

Train the stirrup leathers on your saddle to turn at right angles to the horse's body to prevent pressure on your feet and help you hold your stirrups more securely. When you store your saddle, twist the stirrups one and one-half turns inward and insert a broomstick in both stirrups.

In any style of riding, when the rider sits in the saddle his legs form a straight, vertical line through his ear, center of shoulder, center of hip and back of heel (see figure 66). Stirrups should be long enough to allow the rider's heels to be lower than his toes, with his knees bent slightly and his toes directly under them. The body should always appear comfortable, relaxed and flexible. The back should be nearly flat. The rider's body should be supple, poised and balanced in rhythm with the horse's motion.



Figure 65. Correct seat position is necessary for control and comfortable riding.



Figure 66. Correct hunt seat position.

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The skills required for English riding are similar to those used for western riding. The rider must sit in a balanced position that does not interfere with the horse's own balance or ability to perform.

Mounting

Mounting and dismounting for English equitation is very similar to western style. Place the reins over the horse's head. Hold the reins in your left hand against the horse's neck, make contact with horse's mouth slightly to prevent the horse from moving. The rider should stand on the left side of the horse facing the horse's quarters. The rider's head is turned so both the horse's head and quarters can be observed. From this position, place your left foot in the stirrup, being careful not to push the toe into the side of the horse. Put your right hand on the center of the saddle. Then take one hop, and push up from your right leg and gently swing into the saddle, being careful not to brush the horse's side or quarters with the right leg. Then sit gently into the saddle.

Dismount

To dismount, place both reins in the left hand and place it on the neck of the horse. Take both feet out of the stirrups and place your right hand on the pommel. Lean slightly forward and swing your right leg over the back of the horse, being careful not to brush the horse's quarters, and land on both feet on the left side of the horse. Take the reins over the horse's head and run up the stirrup irons.

General position

The position in the saddle for English riding is basically sitting in the center of the saddle on the seatbones, sitting deep and tall with your head set squarely on the shoulders and eyes looking forward. Shoulders should be directly over the hips, keeping weight evenly distributed over the seatbones. Legs should be underneath with the inside of the calves on the horse's side and feet should be directly under the knees with the stirrup on the ball of the foot. Heels should be down with toes facing forward at a slight angle. A general rule to measure correct stirrup length is that when the leg hangs loosely (out of the stirrup), the bottom of the stirrup should line up to the bottom of the ankle bone. Relax shoulders, elbows at the side of the rider's body and the hands just over the horse's withers.



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Saddleseat

Basic position. Sit comfortably in the saddle. Find the horse's center of gravity by sitting with a slight bend at the knees without the use of the stirrup irons. While in this position, adjust the leathers to fit. Place irons under the ball of the foot and the foot should be natural. The body should follow a vertical straight line from the shoulder through the hip to the heel.

Hands. The distance of the hands from the withers is a matter of how and where the horse carries its head. There should be a straight line from the rider's elbow, hands and reins to the horse's mouth. Hold reins according to the equipment used, but use both hands to hold all reins at the same time. The bite of the reins (excess rein) should be on the right side of the horse.



Figure 67. Saddleseat.

Dressage seat

Basic position. The rider sits deep, erect and supple in the saddle. The rider's calves should be in contact with the horse at the girth. The stirrups should be carried on the ball of the foot with a straight line from the shoulder through the hip to the heel.

Hands. There should be a straight line from the rider's elbow, hands and reins, carried just above the withers, to the horse's mouth.



Figure 68. Dressage seat.

Hunt seat

Basic position. The rider's eyes should look forward and shoulders should be back. His head should be square on his shoulders, and his weight should be distributed evenly over the seat bones. The rider's toes should be at an angle best suited to his conformation and his heels should be down and his calves should be in contact with the horse slightly behind the girth. The ball of the foot should rest on the stirrup iron, and a straight line from the shoulder through the hip to the heel should be formed.



Figure 69. Hunt seat.

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Hands. Hands should be over and in front of the horse's withers with his knuckles 30 degrees inside the vertical and hands slightly apart. Reins may be held in various positions. Excess rein may fall on either side of the horse. However, all reins must be picked up at the same time. A straight line from the elbow through the hands and reins to the horse's mouth should be formed.

Position and motion

The rider's body should be vertical when the horse is at the walk and sitting trot, but inclined slightly forward when the horse is at posting trot, canter and gallop, with no more than 20 degrees in front of the vertical.

Jumping position

The purpose of the two-point/jumping position is to adjust the rider's balance to match the horse during jumping and galloping. This allows the horse freedom of movement through his back. The rider should remember to shorten the stirrup one to two holes from the flat length. When the horse is jumping, a straight line from the rider's shoulder, knee and toes should be formed. The rider's shoulders are slightly forward and his hips are moved slightly back, hovering over the saddle. The rider's angle closes at the hip. The rider's weight is pushed down into the lower leg and heel, with the ankle acting as a shock absorber. His eyes look forward, and his hands follow the horse's mouth while it jumps.



Figure 70. Jumping position.