

## **Follow-Through: Progressing Your Riders Through Exercises and Games**

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### **GAMES**

Games are highly motivating for riders and can include challenges that affect all domains of learning (physical, social/emotional, and cognitive) while also reinforcing the riding skills learned during the lesson. While games/activities may intrinsically provide benefits to the riders, the instructor's ability to provide feedback and follow-through can make a huge difference in the riders' progress. The following is a list of some games/activities and some possible scenarios that require specific feedback/follow-through. Every rider, horse and situation will require different feedback, so there is no magic "recipe". A good instructor will be able to see the rider having difficulty, and will then provide effective instruction and follow-through until the rider is successful.

#### **ACTIVITY 1: Silly Sentence Game (or Nonsensical Sentences):**

Use dressage letters or other letters placed around arena to make 'sentences' that the riders have to ride in sequence. Each letter is the first letter of a word in a sentence that the instructor creates beforehand (or riders can make up their own as part of the lesson). For example: F, C, B, E, M is "Frogs Catch Bananas Every Month". The rider then rides to each letter and says the word (or place letters on cones/barrels so rider circles object to practice steering as he/she 'rides' sentence). If proper sentence structure is important as a goal for riders with speech/learning challenges, additional letters can be added.

**PURPOSE:** To work on verbalization, creative thought, steering, transitions, following directions, sequencing.

**SCENARIO:** Rider has difficulty getting horse to halt at the letter. She is leaning forward and gripping with heels while pulling back on reins.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH:** Instructor tells her to shorten reins, put pockets down on saddle, put heels down, say "whoa" and then pull back on reins if horse does not stop. Each of these instructions could require more follow-through, for example the rider may need to be taught How to shorten reins.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: Cones Course**

The object of a cones course is to execute a set pattern of "gates" (made by pairs of cones) in a specific sequence with the fastest time and the lowest errors. The sequence can be numbers, letters, shapes, colors, etc. The pattern can be set up in any configuration desired. An added challenge is to number the gates with a red number on the right and a white on the left. The rider must ride through the gate with the red "number" on his/her right side; this is ideal for riders working on distinguishing left from right. The more advanced the rider, the more complicated the pattern can be designed (more gates, or backwards and/or hidden gates, tight turns, etc.). The course can be set to do at a walk or the trot. One nice aspect of this game is the horses are not "programed" to follow a set path as sometimes happens

with an obstacle course. It can be made even more challenging by setting the cones closer together (making the gate narrower) and/or putting tennis balls on top of the cones (the object is to not knock any off).

**PURPOSE:** Coordinating aids/cues to control horse through pattern; sequencing; isolation of hand movement (if steering with two hands), left/right differentiation, balance, visual processing, and spatial awareness.

**SCENARIO:** Rider is having difficulty getting horse through narrow "gate". He is looking down at horse and trying to steer only with reins.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH:** Instructor reminds rider to look ahead and through turns for next gate. Teaches him how to widen hands and squeeze with both legs to get horse straight through cones, or to use one leg to move horse laterally if he is off to one side. More follow-through such as How to use leg aids ("squeeze", "tap", "press-release", etc.) may be needed.

### **ACTIVITY 3: POTATO HEAD RACE**

Using several sets of Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head® games, the instructor describes two or three faces for riders to create. Place facial parts on barrels around arena. Separate items into two to four sets for each rider to find and bring back. Have riders count off one through whatever number is in class. Read aloud to each rider his or her list of parts to find (they have to remember them). Send riders out to find parts. As riders find parts they come back to instructor who has the potato head. Rider number one has to put their parts on first, rider two, second, and so on. If rider three is first back to the instructor they have to wait (patience practice). When the last part is in place, the instructor stops the timer. Have the class do it again with another potato head and facial list. See if they can improve their time. Have them renumber themselves so someone else is first.

**PURPOSE:** Encourages team playing, patience, and taking turns. Improves sequencing skills (order of whose turn it is and order of objects to find). Increases fine motor skills, memory, listening skills while reinforcing riding skills of steering, transitions, rein management .

**SCENARIO:** Rider has difficulty remembering the order and waiting for his turn.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH:** Instructor assigns volunteer to help remind rider he is "number 3" and to help with patience activity such as breathing or petting horse while waiting. Volunteers are an invaluable part of the Follow-through in a group lesson.

### **ACTIVITY 4: GOING SHORT-GOING LONG**

This is a challenging and fun activity to demonstrate lengthening and shortening the horse's stride. Use this activity after teaching the basics of lengthening and shortening. Place 2 ground poles approximately 20-25 feet apart. The further apart the poles the easier the activity. Have riders walk their horses over the ground poles at their normally paced walk and count how many strides they get in between the poles. Ask riders and their volunteer, if they have one, to remember this number. Next, have riders

lengthen, or extend, their horse's walk and count strides again - there should be one or two less strides. Lastly, riders will shorten, or collect, their horse's stride - adding as many strides as possible between the poles. Riders must keep their horses straight between the poles crossing over the middle of each pole.

**PURPOSE:** To demonstrate a concrete example of how a rider can change number of strides within a given space; work on spatial awareness; awareness of rhythm of horse's stride.

**SCENARIO:** Rider gets horse to go faster, but still gets the same number of strides.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH:** Instructor provides higher-level Hows for use of aids to get true lengthening, rather than just speeding up horse's tempo. Teaches rider to maintain contact with reins while adding leg and seat aids in rhythm with horse's strides.

### **ACTIVITY 5: OREO COOKIE RACE**

This is a team relay event. Riders are split into 2 teams. Oreos are set in circle on tops of 2 barrels. When time starts, the first rider on each team goes to barrel and stacks one oreo on top of another, then returns to start. When that rider returns, the second one goes to barrel and places another oreo on the stack, etc. The first team to have all oreos stacked wins.

**PURPOSE:** Riding skills-transitions, steering, rein management; Team playing – cheering on and supporting team members; Balance, fine and gross motor skills; Being a good winner/loser

**SCENARIO:** Horse wants to eat cookies so rider can't get close enough to barrel to reach them.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH:** Instructor teaches rider how to bridge reins in one hand to control horse better and how to coordinate leg and seat aids to sidepass to barrel with horse's head away from cookies. And instructor may choose to assign a volunteer at each barrel to help while riders focus on reaching for and stacking cookies. If instructors go to step 2 first, they miss the opportunity to teach higher level skills. When thinking about How to Follow-Through, imagine all riders as independent first, then think about adding volunteers as support when needed.

### **EXERCISES**

Exercises are often used as warm-up for riders at the beginning of lessons, but they can also be used throughout the lesson as effective Follow-Through for posture and position corrections.

#### **Problem: Collapsing to inside on turns**

**Solution:** Hold reins in outside hand (add leader if necessary); Lift inside arm straight up and close to ear; Rotate through the turn with eyes looking through turn, "flashlight beam" from belly button pointing the way.

#### **Problem: "Chair seat" position (feet too far forward of hip-heel line)**

Solution 1: Two point position - Find true balanced 2 point, then sit by tucking bottom (putting back pockets in contact with saddle) while maintaining leg position achieved in 2 point.

Solution 2: Ride without stirrups - Drop stirrups, but maintain correct leg position with bend in knee and toes up; Use rings on toes as a challenge/game.

Solution 3: Leg swings – Drop stirrups; swing legs forward and back slowly from hips. Can do one leg at a time or both legs in “scissoring” motion with one leg forward, one leg back.

**Problem: Rounded shoulders/Posterior pelvic tilt**

Solution 1: Ride without stirrups/Leg swings (see above)

Solution 2: “Butterfly Wings” - Drop reins (add leader); Both arms straight out to side, palms facing forward; Move arms backwards , pulling shoulder blades together. This movement is small and controlled and arms/hands should not go in front of body.

Solution 3: Do “Butterfly Wings” with feet out of stirrups.

**Problem: Arched back/Anterior pelvic tilt**

Solution 1: At halt, lean back until stomach muscles “grab”, then hold position there. Make sure shoulders are square (not rounded). Some riders may need to put hand on belly to feel the muscles work. Progress towards finding this position at walk-trot-canter.

Solution 2: Leg Lifts – Drop stirrups, lift one leg at a time up with knee bent (focus on engaging core muscles- try to do without hands on saddle). Progress to both legs at the same time, focusing on lowering legs slowly.

Solution 3: Lean too far forward, find center, then too far back, find center. Focus on feeling core muscles work as in solution 1.

**Problem: Weighting one side more than the other/Off balance**

Solution 1: At halt, lean too far to right, find center, then too far to left, find center; Focus on feeling weight even on both seat bones when centered

Solution 2: Drop stirrup on “strong” side; Do 2 point or standing up while weighting the stirrup on the “weak” side. Begin at halt, progress to walk/trot/posting trot.