

# Ideas For Beginning Training With Your Horse

By: Jennifer Blosser

There are many methods of training horses, young or older, some move at a slow pace and some move more quickly. All methods have their positive points and some work better with certain horses than others. It is good to have a wide variety of techniques available, as some horses do not respond particularly well with one method but will do extremely well with another.

Over the years, I have attended or watched a number of demonstrations by different trainers. Each has his or her own interesting way of doing things, but my preferred method is natural horsemanship. Natural horsemanship is a pathway to establishing an understanding between your horse and yourself based upon building mutual trust and respect.



By using these methods I am able to gain a clear and direct result for each step of the work. I would like to share some of the practices that I have found to achieve very positive results for beginning training with the horses, perhaps you will also find them to be useful.

When I'm first getting to know a horse, I find that a round pen is essential. I free lunge the horse

using only a lead rope which I throw out towards him, making little to no contact. This is only used as a means of encouraging him to move forward. I then rely upon body language to increase or decrease his speed, or get him to change his direction.

Here are some examples of non-verbal language which I find to be effective. I look straight into his eyes as a sign of quiet aggression. As I do this, I am looking for three signs to help me know if he has accepted me as the alpha or dominant partner. At first, the horse will keep his inside ear on you at all times. He will also lick and chew every now and then. Finally, he will drop his head in submission. Once this occurs, I will slowly turn at a 90 degree angle away from him, sliding my eyes away from his, and slowly looking back toward his neck and his hindquarters. This tells him that I am not being aggressive, and that I am inviting him to slow down and move towards me. I then turn my back to him, a signal that I want him to come to me. Once he takes a couple of steps toward me, I turn and pat him on the head. At this point he should follow me as I move away. Some may do this immediately and some may need to be pushed away again before the connection is made. When this occurs, and I have gained some trust, we become partners.

The next thing I do is teach the horse to drop his head on command. I put slight pressure behind the ears and either use a down pressure on the lead rope or on the bridge of the nose. As soon as he drops his head

slightly, I release the pressure. I continue to do this until he has learned it well. I will teach him to do this to the reins when the time comes.



I then am able to put a saddle on with little to no resistance. After the saddle is secure I will then free lunge the horse again. Once I receive his attention and see all the signs of submission, I will turn away and invite him to come to me. Once I get to this point, I can either put reins onto the halter or use a bitted bridle. When using a bitted bridle I can actually send the horse into a free lunge again for a short time, so he can get used to the bit, but then turn his attention back to me. I then will slowly put directions onto the reins with simple pressure and release. I also teach the horse to back at this point, teaching him to stop when applied to forward motion.

Last but not least, I will use the reins to drop the head. Dropping the head is a submissive act, permitting me to have more control of the horse's speed and reaction to stimulus. If he is startled the head will usually go up, but if his head can be controlled to go down at this point,

He will be more willing to stay focused on your commands rather than jumping and bolting.

When we have trust, control, a stop command, and direction, I will start to put some weight into the stirrups with my hands. I can tell while I am doing this if the horse is going to get scared or if they are calm. Depending on the signals I get, I can either free lunge the horse again or put a leg in the stirrup. If he is calm, which most are, I will pull myself up and lean over the saddle. When he gets his balance I can either stop there or throw a leg over.

If you try this, once you start to move him forward you will find out how important free lunging with voice commands really is. The horse will not know what pressure from your legs or feet indicates. However, this is something else you can work on while on the ground. When you are up, you can move the

horse forward with the same sounds you make while issuing these command during lunging, but with the addition of a slight leg pressure. If this does not move the horse forward, put pressure on the reins to move him from side to side and back him up. Then try to move him forward again. Most horses usually pick this up very quickly, but when having difficulty, a helper can be very useful. Try this: while up, have your helper move the horse forward a couple steps while you use a slight leg pressure on the horse's sides, releasing when the horse walks forward. Make certain that you do this every time the helper moves forward with the lead rope. Using this method along with voice commands should result in the horse picking it up within a reasonable short amount of time. Most of the time this can be accomplished in one session. In succeeding sessions I will always start with the

free lunging, as this is the key to progressing with other gaits as well. At the free lunge you can use voice commands, along with your body language, to move the horse into a faster gait. This same procedure is applied in each riding session as the horse is moved into various gates under saddle.

After a couple of sessions in the round pen, if we are doing rather well and we have bonded, I will take the horse on a short trail ride for fun. This gives him a change of scenery and exposes him to new obstacles and stimuli. Our Arabians are very smart and willing to learn, so the beginning sessions seem to move forward at a rapid pace. They also do well with an elevated level of training --- making training them a pleasure! I hope you find some of these tips to be helpful to you when beginning to train your own horses at home. Enjoy!

*Jennifer Blosser*