

October 2007 Essex Rider  
(communication exercises )

**Opening Reminders:**

The best solution to solving the self-doubt and fear issues that we and our horses hold is to clarify communications and understanding from the ground as well as from the saddle. The ground work foundation exercises that I recommended previously and which are repeated below help immensely with this. Another effective method is for us to learn and practice non-intimidation / non-confrontive methods of redirecting our horse's energy instead of trying to block or prevent them from various actions such as pulling on their bits.

**Regarding Knots:**

Following up on the knots article I wrote recently -- visit my site ([www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com)) and click on the "***Animated Knots***" *Link* to see the knots that I pointed out and many more knots, "Tie Themselves". My site has also been continuously updated with more action shots and other additions so is worth a visit.

**Riding Advice:**

When requesting our horse to execute correct canter lead departures or changes as well as efficient stops, etc. - it is important to ask when the horse is physically able to execute our requests successfully and timely. Be certain to specifically ask when the horse's feet are in the correct position to make a quick and fluid decision such as asking when the appropriate foot or feet are in the air to execute our request for a lead or stop.

When giving an aid/cue, don't forget to allow for a sufficient time gap between when asking and when the horse replies/acts. It is a good idea to give a preemptive aid/cue prior to the full aid/cue, such as lifting the reins, shifting our weight appropriately or saying whoa, etc. an instant before giving the full aid/cue.

**Training Advice:**

***Communications Exercises from the ground:***

***One prime objective is for the horse to recognize "when we recognize" their compliance to our requests***

**Head & Neck Work** (15 exercises)

*a. All exercises are accomplished by using the basic 3 levels of pressure & quick release with a release of pressure at the slightest attempt by the horse to comply initially. The pressure release application is in the form of what is known as a half halt effort.*

*b. With all of these basic exercises, don't overly worry (initially) about the precision of movements. Be more concerned with recognizing and releasing pressure in response to any general movement "away from pressure" (i.e. yielding to our instruction). The intent is to cause the horse not to reaction in opposition by Natural Instinct (aka Opposition Reflex). Directional accuracy can be dealt with after the horse clearly understands how to correctly give to the pressure/release.*

*c. Once the exercises have become familiar to the horse, try to vary the exercise routine from time to time and abbreviate them as well. Don't always use full regimes of work every time or you are likely to drive your horse to distraction.*

October 2007 Essex Rider  
(communication exercises )

*From a position of standing to the side near the neck  
(apply all exercises from both sides)*

- a. **straight down** from halter loop (with the lead rope), stand facing forwards and beside the horses eye, then facing backwards toward hind quarters again beside the eye, then facing directly toward the side of the face, asking for **downward movement**.
- b. **straight back** from halter loop (with the lead rope), stand facing forwards and beside the eye, then facing backwards toward hind quarters again beside the eye, then facing directly toward the side of the horses face and eye, asking for a **backward movement**.
- c. **straight down on poll** (with your hand), stand facing forward next to the horses eye (from both sides) then stand directly in front of the horse facing the forehead and ask for a **downward movement**.

**Body Work** (12 exercises)

*(use finger tips or edge of knuckles for all except for the ribs, where flat of fist works best)*

***when desired result is attempted or succeeded then release pressure and rub to a stop***

- a. from side of the face, request movement away to from pressure (mid jaw)
- b. from side of the neck, request movement away from pressure (midway on neck)
- c. from middle of shoulder, request movement away from pressure (crossing feet in due course)
- d. from ribs or barrel, request movement away from pressure (crossing feet in due course) **initially allow turning on the fore then correct in due course**
- e. from middle of hip, request movement away from pressure (crossing feet in due course)
- f. from neck, shoulder, ribs and hip simultaneously (side pass), request movement away from pressure (crossing feet in due course)  
**initially allow forward movement then correct in due course**

*When using contact pressure / release methods on the body, be sure to lightly rub the spot you just applied pressure to when releasing pressure in order to teach them to “stop to the rub” as another aid/cue. This is very handy when tacking up or moving small distances for specific tasks from the ground and is handy for dressage assurance of holding static position.*

**Closing Reminder:**

The result a horse can achieve when we are teaching them can be no better than how well they understood us. That result also can be no better than how well they accepted it – and they can't accept anything until they are calm and feeling safe.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

*Lewis Blackburn*, [www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com), [blackieb@btconnect.com](mailto:blackieb@btconnect.com),  
01799-543711, 0771-8317654