



FIRST PRINCIPLES

OF HORSE TRAINING

International Society for Equitation Science

These principles are essential for optimal welfare and training efficiency. They apply to all horses regardless of age, breed, training level and equestrian discipline. Does your training system demonstrate each principle?

Take into account the horse's ethology and cognition

Horses have evolved to live and process information about the world in a certain way.

- ✓ They need the company of other horses, locomotion and access to roughage.
- ✗ Do not blame the horse for undesired behaviour. Horses do not perceive nor recall events like humans do.

Train easy-to-discriminate cues

- ✓ Cues for each response should be clearly different.
- ✓ This particularly relates to all rein and leg pressures, and cues derived from them.

Elicit responses one-at-a-time

- ✓ Ask for one response at a time.
- ✓ Cues can be closer as responses are consolidated.
- ✗ Simultaneous or clashing cues inhibit each other and the horse will gradually cease responding.

Form consistent habits

When training new responses:

- ✓ Maintain the same cue locations / context / environment (the context and environment can be gradually altered once responses are consolidated).
- ✓ Shape transitions so they are the same structure and the same duration each and every time.

Use learning theory appropriately

Learning theory describes the processes by which horses learn.

Your learning theory toolkit includes:

Habituation

- ✓ Use habituation techniques such as systematic desensitisation to diminish the horse's fear reactions to environmental stimuli.

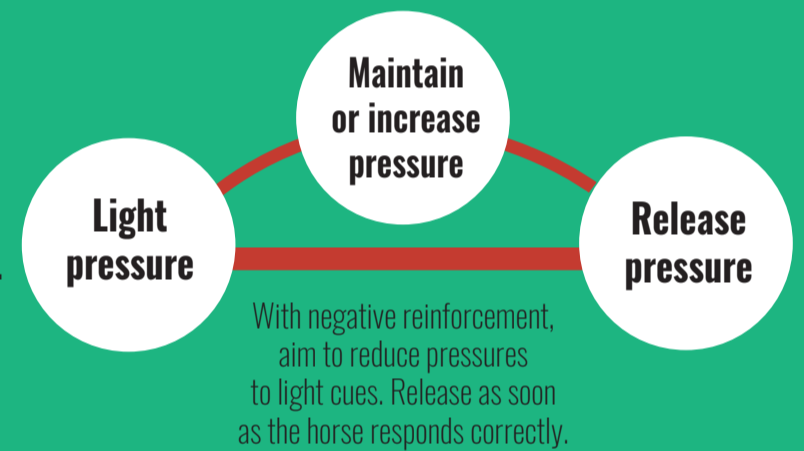
Classical conditioning

- ✓ The use of a neutral stimulus (e.g. a voice command or a light touch) to elicit responses by associating it with an already learned stimulus (e.g. leg pressure, to which the horse has learned to move forward). Classically conditioned cues include seat, voice, posture and gestures.

Operant conditioning

The use of rewards and punishment.

- ✓ Use both, positive and negative reinforcement.
- ✓ Timing is essential. Aim to quickly reduce any pressure-based cues to light forms of pressure.
- ✗ For optimal welfare you should avoid punishment.



Shape responses and movements

- ✓ First reinforce a basic attempt at the target behaviour.
- ✓ Then aim to improve the behaviour in a step-by-step way.

Demonstrate minimum levels of arousal sufficient for training

- ✓ The horse should be as calm as possible during training.
- ✗ When certain levels of arousal are exceeded learning and welfare suffer.

This is a brief overview of the horse training principles. It has been simplified for ease of use. It may be printed in its exact form for public display. You can find a more complete description of each principle on the ISES website. Visit:

www.equitationsscience.com

Train persistence of responses (self-carriage)

- ✓ Shape the horse's speed, line and posture without the need for constant cueing.
- ✗ Constant cueing or pressure can lead to diminished responses and stress.

Train only one response per signal

- ✓ Each cue should elicit a single response.
- ✓ When a cue elicits multiple responses, confusion and stress may set in.
- ✗ Horses can't differentiate leg and rein cues which are used for a multitude of responses.

Avoid and dissociate flight responses

- ✓ Avoid flight response behaviours at all costs.

Did you know? Flight responses are difficult or impossible to extinguish and may reappear spontaneously. Flight responses can be related to other physical and behaviour problems.