



Handling

Teaching Notes for Slides

SLIDE #3 APPROACHING A HORSE

When you first approach a horse, take the time to evaluate him. He'll be talking to you with his body – ears, eyes, tail.

If you walk directly and deliberately at a horse, staring at him, you will look like you are stalking him. Walk slowly, casually and relaxed, gradually getting closer to the horse's general area. Try not to walk in a straight line to him.

Watch him out of the corners of your eyes rather than directly watching him. Talk to him and praise him. Horses like that.

Try to approach at his shoulder, if possible. This is safe for you and visible to the horse. Also, he is most likely used to being approached this way.

Talk calmly to him. He needs to recognize you as a friend rather than a new type of predator.

When you can stand next to him, don't slap him; stroke him gently. Slapping is stimulating and also may frighten him if he's already anxious.

If you need to approach from the rear, make sure you talk to him so he knows you're coming.

If possible, approach the animal from where you DON'T want him to go. For instance, if you want to catch him in a field, circle around behind him and approach from that direction, any pressure he feels will push him toward the gate.

If there is grass available, approach the horse offering a handful.

Be sure the horse can see your approach. Carry a halter and lead rope (description coming up), or even just a rope. The horse may be happy to see it. On the other hand, if he doesn't want to be caught, the sight of the halter might cause him to move away from you.

If the horse moves away from you do not pursue him. Step back from him. Sometimes this will convince him to move toward you. You may be able to contain him rather than catch him.

MOVE SLOWLY

Reduce the horse's fear by moving slowly. Be sure he knows where you are at all times so he isn't frightened by someone suddenly popping into his field of vision. Any behavior that looks predatory to the horse will usually jump-start the "fight or flight" response.

TALK TO THE HORSE

Most horses can understand some human words, so talk to your horse. Words like "walk" and "whoa", "easy" and "quit" are often known; and the tone of your voice is usually recognized by horses. Use a calm, soothing, confident tone of voice when approaching a horse. Growling may stop him from doing something unacceptable. Any novel, especially intermittent, high-pitched sounds will cause animals to balk, because they activate the part of the animal's brain that responds to distress calls. Therefore, do not use a "sing-song" voice, but rather a low pitched monotone.

Horses are herd animals. They can be very dangerous in a group as they may exhibit herd behavior with hooves and teeth.

Your position of authority won't last long in a herd, so stay out of the middle. Horses will actually calm down if left in a herd. Horses who were in a trailer together most likely already know each other and will not be fighting for power. The exception is large transports from auctions where many horses are crammed together with no respect for their behavioral instincts.

DON'T ACT LIKE A PREDATOR

Humans are predators. There's no getting away from it. When we're intent on something our body language reflects this fact. Prey animals see this body behavior to mean that they are tonight's dinner. When approaching a horse, or any other prey animal, relax your body. Do not approach in a direct line and, above all, do not stare at him.

HOW TO APPROACH AND CATCH A HORSE

When you first approach a horse, take the time to evaluate him. He'll be talking to you with his body – ears, eyes, tail. Evaluate the area as well. If you can approach the horse from a direction that makes use of natural boundaries such as a wall or fence you could cut your walking time considerably! Successfully catching a loose horse requires you to gain some acceptance from the horse. Never “drive” a horse at the person who will be handling the horse. In a herd, when the alpha or dominant horse moves with aggression, the rest of the herd tries to stay out of the way!

If you walk directly and deliberately at a horse, you will look like you are stalking him. Walk slowly, as if you were casually out for a stroll, gradually getting closer to the horse's general area. Watch him out of the corners of your eyes rather than directly watching him. Keep any halter or rope behind your back. Talk to him and praise him. Horses like that. Offering food may work, but usually only if the horse is familiar with you and sees you as his food source.

Try to approach at his left shoulder at an angle from the front, if possible. Talk calmly to him. He needs to recognize you as a human rather than a new type of predator. If the horse makes any move away from you, stop approaching and wait. Do not automatically start walking when the horse moves.

Sometimes if you stay motionless the horse will take just a few steps then stop. Remember, any indication of tension and urgency will just convince the horse to move faster. If you time your stride to match the horse's hind feet he may slow down to match your decreasing pace, then may stop when you do.

Once he lets you close, he may face you. This is a sign of trust and his overall appearance will be more relaxed. Take advantage of this trust and back up a step or two. While this seems to be exactly the opposite of your goal of capturing the horse, it

removes the pressure of pursuit from the horse. Remember, horses are herd animals and they are vulnerable when they are alone. If the horse moves toward you a few steps, back up a few more steps and wait. He may, then, approach you and nuzzle you, allowing you to stroke his neck. Don't slap him; stroke him gently. Consciously relax your body.

At this point you may be able to calmly put a lead rope around his neck and apply a halter. Don't be afraid to try this technique over and over, or get discouraged if it does not work the first or second time. Depending on the level of panic in the horse, and the chaos of the surroundings, it may take a few tries until the horse feels comfortable with you and you gain his trust.

SLIDE #4 **PECKING ORDER**

Because the horse is a herd animal his rules of social structure (pecking order) are very strict. People must take their place in that social structure, as well.

If you are standing in the midst of a herd or group of horses, you are vulnerable to their pecking order. Horse "A" on one side of you may decide that horse "B" on the other side of you is not showing proper respect. If you aren't "big" enough, horse "A" may go through you to get to "B". Also, horse "C" on the other side of "B" may frighten "B" into running over top of you to get away.

If you are going to spend any time amongst the herd you can establish your own dominance by moving the "A" horse around and showing aggressive behavior with body language. If you're not going to get involved, just be aware and stay out of trouble.

SLIDE #5 **CHARGING**

You may WANT to be aggressive with a horse, either to deflect him from charging you or just to get his attention. To deflect his charge, stand your ground, drawing yourself up as tall as possible. Throw your arms out wide, lean forward and yell. This will scare all but the most determinedly aggressive horses. To get a horse's attention, a loud sound or one aggressive step will startle him into looking at you. Remember to gauge your movement to the situation. Overreacting can undo hours of patient approach. If you are being charged by a horse or horses, make yourself bigger by standing tall, waving your arms around and yelling. If you're wearing a coat, put it up and out behind your head to make yourself look taller. You can deflect them from running over you.

SLIDE #8 **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

If you are holding the horse by a “lead rope” (rope attached to the horse’s halter) and there is another person working around the horse, stand on the same side of the horse as that person. This allows you to protect her and gives the horse an avenue to move away. If you turn the horse’s head to one side, his back end will move to the other side. Pull his head toward you to move his back end away. Push his head away from you to swing his back end toward you.

SLIDE #9 **TALK TO THE HORSE**

A soft soothing tone will help to calm an anxious horse. A growl will often stop him in his tracks! Slapping a horse is not soothing! Rub his shoulder with a circular motion and watch his stress level decrease! A “sing song” voice mimics a distress call of a young animal. This may upset a horse unless he has been accustomed to hearing it from a human.

SLIDE #10 **HALTER VS BRIDLE**

Another type of bridle is a Hackamore. Hackamores can be made of leather, rawhide, rope, cable or various plastics, sometimes in conjunction with metal parts. There are three main types: the bosal, the sidepull, and the mechanical hackamore.

Hackamores do not have bits. Instead, they work on pressure points on the horse's face, nose, and chin. The bosal is a very sophisticated and versatile style of hackamore. It consists of a fairly stiff rawhide noseband with reins attached to a large knot or button at the base--the bosal.

SLIDE #11 **HALTERING A HORSE**

To halter a horse, approach from the left side.

Hold the halter in your left hand. Reach your right arm over the horse’s neck and slowly move your left arm under his head.

Grab the top piece of the halter with your right hand and move it up to the top of his neck behind his ears.

Once this is done, open the halter toward you and slip over the horse's nose. Buckle the halter so that there is some slack at the chin and throat. You should be able to slide two fingers in under the band around his lower face or nose. Too tight and you will restrict his breathing; too loose and he may slip his head out of the halter.

A rope halter will probably not have a buckle, but the top piece may slide through a loop in the corresponding piece, and can be tied.

SLIDE #12 **SLIDE OVER HIS NOSE**

Halters come in a variety of materials. Most have at least one buckle on the left side, plus a ring under the noseband for attaching a length of rope or a lead rope (rope with snap at one end).

SLIDE #13 **EMERGENCY HALTER**

If the horse is not wearing a halter, and you can't find one, you can make your own emergency halter and rope setup.

Almost any flexible substance can be used to lead a horse if it's strong and long enough to go around the horse's neck – a belt, length of rope or lightweight hose, shirt, pantyhose, or a sack. Drape the article around the horse's neck behind his ears. Bring the ends down under his chin.

You can lead a horse this way but only, of course, with the horse's cooperation. If the material is strong enough, you can cut a hole at the end and feed a rope through it. Tie off the rope and, joining the two ends together, secure with a double half hitch. Or tie a knot in the material and tie a rope to it using a quick release knot. Remember, this will only work as a last resort on a horse that's willing to be led.

SLIDE #14 **BE GENTLE!**

Using a soft, long rope, make a loop at one end.

Put the loop end over the horse's head, up behind his ears (at the poll, which is the name of the area at the top of the neck right behind the ears). The loop should hang down far enough that it will end up centered under the horse's face.

Taking the standing section of the rope, push it through the loop to form another loop.

Put this loop over the horse's nose and GENTLY tighten so that the first loop is centered under the face and the second loop is below the cheekbones.

This emergency halter can be severe and damaging if used improperly. Please be very gentle when using it. NEVER tie a horse using this halter.

Chief was over 30 years old when he modeled this halter. He was bored by the last picture and decided to take a nap.

SLIDE #15 CATCHING A HORSE

IF THE HORSE IS WEARING A HALTER you can attach a rope to the ring under the chin. There may be "lead ropes" around. These are sturdy ropes, about ten feet long, with a metal snap at one end.

Consider these points:

- The weakest point in a halter/rope setup is the snap.
- A halter, particularly one made of rope, can pull too tightly on the horse, causing damaging pressure on the horse's head, right behind his ears.
- If you use a nylon (non-breaking) halter and attach a rope with a "permanent" knot, and then tie this horse to an object, the horse can break his neck or back struggling against the restraint.
- Never use a chain over the horse's nose. This is a tool to be used by experts only! You can break the horse's nose.

DO NOT USE A BRIDLE WHEN ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL THE HORSE. This can cause severe damage to the horse's mouth or face. There is also a security issue; the straps of a bridle are easily broken.

SLIDE #16 CREATIVE CATCHING

If there is another calm horse around, lead him near your horse. Horses are herd animals and the presence of another horse standing with you makes you more acceptable.

You can use fencing, ropes, boards or hose to form a barrier. Have several people surround the horse on three sides and herd him to a safe area. Move as quietly as possible.

You can also make a barrier using just people. Space yourselves as closely as possible with your arms out so you appear to be a fence. Hold hands if you have enough people. Move toward your horse.

If the horse is calm enough you may be able to bribe him with food. Offer a hunk of grass or crinkle a bag to get his attention. Curiosity may cause him to investigate.

SLIDE #17 LEADING A HORSE

If you need to lead a horse, stay close to his shoulder and walk together toward your goal. A horse will usually resist a person who is facing him and pulling on the rope. Try to lead and handle the horse from the left side. Most horses are trained to respond to humans on this side.

Stand next to his left shoulder. This is the usual leading position and the horse will probably lead easily from this position. Handling him from the left may make him more comfortable.

Hold the rope with your right hand just under the horse's chin and keep that arm straight between you and the horse. Hold the rope in both hands, one on either side of your body. Fold up any dangling rope in your "second" (left) hand so you don't trip over it. Do not loop the rope around your hands, and do not stick your fingers through the halter or any rings or latches.

Ask the horse to "walk", and move forward. Sometimes just using the word "Walk" or "clucking" your tongue will cue the horse to move. If he refuses to move it may either be because he can't or what is ahead of him is too scary.

SLIDE #18 USE CAUTION!

NEVER loop the rope around your hand. If the horse takes off, your hand may be trapped and you will be dragged or could lose your hand. Even a 250 lb. Miniature horse can drag an adult.

SLIDE #19 **SPOOKING HORSE**

If he feels he needs to escape, allow the horse to move around you in a circle, at the end of the rope. This allows him to feel he is running away from danger while you are still in control.

It is easier to control a horse by a quick sideways pull than holding onto the rope as he runs away from you. Use the principles of leverage to hold him in a circle.

If the horse is circling you, you should be facing him by turning your whole body toward him rather than by passing the rope behind your body. You can continue toward your goal while he is circling if you are coordinated.

SLIDE #20 **TYING A HORSE**

Tie the rope at about his eye-level and with enough slack for the horse to move his head but not long enough for him to step over the rope --- 2 or 3 feet is about right for a horse; less for ponies or miniature horses.

Make sure you do NOT use a permanent knot; use a quick-release one.

Someone should stay near the horse at all times in case he panics and escapes or hurts himself pulling on the rope. With company, he feels more secure.

Practice tying quick release knots.